


The Role of the United States in the Future of Iran-Russia Relations

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Abstract

Considering their geographical proximity, Iran and Russia have common issues and similar perspectives on various political and security issues at both regional and global levels. And by using their capacities, they can demonstrate a model of complementary and cooperative partnership. However, regional and international political-security considerations often influence their collaboration, particularly in light of the United States' policies toward both countries. The trend of Russo-Iranian relations over the past four decades shows that the United States has significantly shaped the relationship between Tehran and Moscow. However, this analysis of the impact of the United States on the fluctuations in Iran-Russia relations indicates that it has contributed to fostering a common understanding between Iran and Russia. The existing assumptions show that regional and international dynamics have led to a strategic logic in the development of Iran-Russia relations, aimed at counterbalancing the threat from the United States, potentially leading to the realization of a strategic alliance between Iran and Russia. This study seeks to identify the role of the United States in shaping Iran-Russia relations using trend effect analysis and to explore new potential dimensions of the Tehran-Moscow relationship in light of the American factor.

Keywords: Iran, Russia, the United States, scenario, Strategic Alliance.

Introduction

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States has consistently played a crucial and influential role in the relations between Iran and Russia. Consequently, the nature of Russia's relationship with Western nations, particularly the United States, has remained a key consideration for decision-makers and public opinion in Iran. For Iranian leaders and policymakers, Russia's position on the West is a critical factor shaping Iran's global maneuvering. Similarly, in the United States and the West, the dynamics of Iran's relationship with Russia, and in Russia, Iran's relations with the West are subject to careful analysis and evaluation.

There are differing perspectives on the dynamics between Russia, Iran, and the West. Some argue that Russia is leveraging Iran's influence against the West, while others posit that Iran is using Russia's support for the same purpose. It is worth noting that Russia, historically as the Soviet Union, has had a nearly ninety-year history of confrontation with the United States and the West, while Iran has been a regional power opposing the United States for the past forty-five years. Both countries face ongoing threats from the West, particularly under the leadership of the United States, with the expansion of NATO's North Atlantic Treaty into neighboring regions being a significant concern. Despite their differences, there is potential for Iran and Russia to set aside their disagreements and pursue collaborative efforts to bolster each other and counter the perceived threat from the United States.

In this analytical viewpoint, we explore a central question and several sub-questions. The central question focuses on the influence of the United States on the bilateral relations and regional collaboration between Iran and Russia. As we delve into the impact of the United States on the fluctuations in Iran-Russia relations, we also examine the key developments that have fostered a shared understanding between Iran and Russia. Moreover, existing assumptions indicate that regional and global dynamics have engendered a cybernetic logic in Iran-Russia relations, potentially mitigating fluctuations and fostering a mutual understanding in Tehran and Moscow to drive relationship development and balance threats posed by the United States. This research employs the trend-effect analysis method to discern the role of the United States in the evolution of Iran-Russia relations and subsequently identifies new and potential dimensions in Tehran-Moscow relations influenced by the American factor.

1. The International Nature of Iran-Russia Relations

The relationship between Iran and Russia is marked by a history of both enmities and alliances, significantly shaped by macro-trends in the international landscape. In this context, the influence of the West, particularly the United States, cannot be overlooked; it serves both as a negative-reductive force and a positive-additive one. The role of the USA in Russo-Iranian relations extends beyond merely being an external factor; it is also closely tied to the underlying contexts and foundations that guide foreign policy in both Iran and Russia. Consequently, some experts contend that the relationship between Russia and Iran is more influenced by international dynamics than by bilateral considerations (Athari & Fayyaz, 2013, p. 34).

Understanding the USA's role in Tehran-Moscow relations requires attention to multiple dimensions of a complex relationship. On one hand, the USA viewed the relationship between Iran and the Soviet Union as a threat to its interests even before the Islamic Revolution, and this perspective persisted following the revolution of 1979. Regarding the Guadeloupe conference negotiations, it is said that the proposal for Mohammad Reza Pahlavi to leave Iran was in favor of the revolutionaries due to concerns about the potential escalation of civil war and possible Soviet intervention. However, some experts in Iran attribute the USA's indifference to the Islamic revolution in Iran to Mohammad Reza Pahlavi's attempts to strengthen ties with Moscow after the de-escalation of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Despite this thaw in tensions with its international rival, the United States was not in favor of an improved relationship between Iran and the Soviet Union (Montazeri, 2014, p. 201).

Following the Islamic Revolution, the collapse of the Soviet Union significantly enhanced the USA's influence in the dynamics between Iran and Russia. Both Washington and Moscow have sought to leverage Iran as a strategic card in their bilateral relations and their respective policies toward each other. The involvement of the US in Tehran-Moscow relations has been marked by both positive and negative aspects (Athari & Fayyaz, 2013, p. 30).

An early result of Washington's diplomatic efforts emerged in 1995 with the signing of the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement in Washington, establishing commitments between Russia and the United States. Under this agreement, Russia agreed to terminate its existing military contracts with Iran by the end of 1999 and refrain from signing any new arms deals with the country. While this decision resulted in substantial financial losses for Russia, it failed

to yield the expected reciprocal commitment from the United States regarding technical and military cooperation. However, in March 1999, Yevgeny Adamov, Russia's Minister of Atomic Energy, stated in an interview with the New York Times that if sanctions against Russian companies were lifted, Russia would reconsider its nuclear cooperation with Iran (Dehghani Firouzabadi & Moradi, 2015, pp. 74-76). After Vladimir Putin assumed power in 2000 and the Eurasianists rose to prominence in Moscow, relations between Iran and Russia began to improve (Hatami & Zargar, 2018, p. 46). However, the United States continued to raise concerns about restricting Russia's cooperation with Iran on nuclear and missile technology during negotiations between Moscow and Washington. The mutual interests of Russia and the United States regarding Iran prompted Moscow to disregard certain obligations related to arms deals with Iran and collaborate with the U.S. over Security Council resolutions, particularly the stringent resolutions of 1887 (2009) and 1929 (2010). As a result, the completion of the Bushehr nuclear power plant was delayed until 2011, and the delivery of the S-300 defense system to Iran was postponed until 2015. Even fulfillment of Russia's commitments to Iran was also influenced by its relationship with the United States. However, following the West's apparent support for the February 22, 2014, assault on the Ukrainian presidential palace by Western sympathizers, which led to the overthrow of President Viktor Yanukovich—who opposed Ukraine's NATO membership—Russia began annexing the Crimean Peninsula, resulting in a significant cooling of relations with the USA. Following the Iran nuclear deal in July 2015, President Vladimir Putin's visit to Iran and his meeting with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei in November 2015 marked the beginning of a political alignment that fostered various arrangements in political, legal, military, and economic relations between the two nations.

The growing mistrust between Russia and the United States, particularly in regional and international contexts following the September 11, 2001, attacks, can be seen as a significant factor driving Russia's increased interest in Iran. The U.S. invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003, respectively, along with the designation of Iran, Russia, and North Korea as the "axis of evil" in 2002 heightened tensions. Events such as the color revolutions in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, and the South Caucasus with Western support and the war in Georgia in 2008 further complicated relations. The establishment of American

missile batteries in Eastern Europe, the portrayal of Russia and Iran as common threats during NATO summits, and the growing threat posed by Iran's nuclear program played crucial roles in fostering a sense of geopolitical insecurity for Russia. The onset of the Syrian civil war in 2011, Putin's return to the presidency in 2012, the crisis in Ukraine, and the rise of Western-backed elements in Kyiv in 2014 all contributed to this dynamic. The 2015 Iran nuclear deal marked the beginning of strategic cooperation between Iran and Russia in their support for the Syrian government. Additionally, the inauguration of Donald Trump in the United States and the subsequent withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 significantly weakened the discourse surrounding a nuclear agreement in Iran. Ultimately, these developments, culminating in Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, have led to a closer relationship between Iran and Russia.

Throughout history, the USA has sought to categorize Iran, Russia, and China as a unified threat to the West, encompassing both the United States and Europe. This approach aims to restrict military and defense cooperation, limit economic interactions, and enhance the effectiveness of American and Western economic sanctions against these nations. Additionally, Washington's efforts to politically isolate Iran and Russia stem from their anti-American rhetoric, further justifying this classification of these countries.

While assessing the trends, various factors in the international relations between Iran and Russia can be identified as follows:

1- Geopolitical Link: Throughout history, geographical determinism has significantly influenced the nature of relations between Iran and Russia, oscillating between hostility and friendship. Iran's strategic location in West Asia and the Persian Gulf positions it as a pivotal player in both regional and international power dynamics. Conversely, Central Asia and the Caucasus function as a bridge connecting Iran and Russia, intricately linking their regional policies. Additionally, the activities of external actors, particularly from the West, and the extension of NATO into Central Asia and the Caucasus pose serious threats to both Iran and Russia. Consequently, any engagement by the West with either Iran or Russia is perceived as a security threat by the other. This crucial geographical factor has thus elevated the bilateral relationship between Iran and Russia to an international level.

2- Perception of Leaders: The perceptions of the leaders in Iran and Russia play a crucial role in the internationalization of relations between the two nations. The concurrent rise of leaders with an

internationalist and pessimistic view of the United States in both Iran and Russia is a significant factor in shaping their interactions and increasing their stance toward the U.S. Since the 1980 American embassy hostage crisis in Tehran, the Islamic Republic of Iran has harbored deep distrust of Washington's policies. This event effectively marked the end of formal relations between the two countries. Furthermore, U.S. involvement in various internal matters, such as Operation Eagle's Claw conducted by Delta Forces in Tabas on April 24-25, 1980, further exacerbated this mistrust. Conversely, Iran's trust in Moscow was bolstered by the cooperation of the Soviet intelligence agency, the KGB, in thwarting the Nojeh coup plot on July 9, 1980. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Atlanticists in Russia hindered the development of Tehran-Moscow relations. However, Vladimir Putin's rise to power, aimed at restoring Russia's strength, positively influenced the improvement of these ties. The presence of varied foreign policy discourses in Iran—characterized by revolutionary fundamentals and reformist Westernism—alongside a reformist government also played a significant role in the fluctuations of the Tehran-Moscow relationship. The United States' inclusion of Iran in its "axis of evil" list, despite Iran's cooperation in the Afghanistan war and the transition of power from the Taliban to the new Afghan political system, dealt a considerable blow to the Westernism discourse in Iran. Subsequently, the U.S. focus on Iran's nuclear program, the adoption of multiple resolutions against Iran, an increase in economic sanctions, the nuclear agreement in 2015, and the U.S. withdrawal from this agreement in 2018 further undermined the Westernization narrative in Iran. From the perspective of the Iranian Supreme Leader, the relationship between Iran and Russia holds significant importance amid the fundamental shifts occurring in global politics. He asserts that the world has moved beyond the bipolar dynamics of the Cold War and the unsuccessful attempts to establish a unified order. We are now witnessing a transition toward a new, multi-faceted model for organizing international relations. During this period of change, the United States and the West are increasingly neglecting their responsibilities in addressing emerging global issues. In this context, nations such as Iran and Russia are poised to play a crucial role in shaping a new regional order, even as many other powers, primarily Western nations, choose to overlook their influence (<https://farsi.khamenei.ir/>, July 19, 2022).

Conversely, the pragmatic foreign policy adopted by Russian presidents from 2000 until the Ukrainian crisis in 2014 significantly

shaped the dynamics of the Tehran-Moscow relationship. As a pragmatic leader, Putin sought to restore Russia's influence, and while he publicly criticized the USA's expansionist policies, he viewed the development of relations with Washington as essential for Russia's economic growth. This approach inadvertently opened the door for the U.S. to exert influence over Iran-Russia relations, aligning with Washington's preference to persuade Moscow to cooperate against Iran's nuclear ambitions. Simultaneously, the United States continued its subtle strategy to undermine Russia and hinder its resurgence.

3- The USA as a Common Threat: The animosity between the USA and both Iran and Russia has deep historical roots. However, the U.S. policy toward these nations since the early 2000s marks a significant turning point, transforming the USA into a common adversary for both Tehran and Moscow. Since Vladimir Putin assumed power in Russia, the United States has expressed concern over the subtle formation of a strategic alliance between Russia and North Korea, making efforts to prevent the emergence of a Russo-Iranian axis that could disrupt the balance in both West and East Asia to the USA's detriment.

In light of the costs associated with direct military interventions in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), the United States has adopted what some analysts term a "behind the scenes leadership strategy," often referred to as offshore balancing. This strategy allows the USA to continue its policy of limited direct involvement in Asia while reducing support for its allies, encouraging them to take greater responsibility for their security. Thus, the hegemony of the USA's allied axis plays a crucial role in West Asia.

However, the recent crisis in West Asia following the Al-Qsa storm on October 7, 2023, has compelled Washington to reassess its approach and engage more directly in the region.

Within the context of this strategic policy, the regions of East Asia and the Persian Gulf hold significant value for the security of the United States and its allies, to the extent that the U.S. may engage in military action to defend them. Iran is recognized as the USA's foremost regional rival in West Asia, while Russia poses a critical threat to Europe, and China is viewed as a major threat in East Asia and globally. The U.S. perceives the potential convergence of these powers as a significant danger to itself and its Western allies. American strategists have advised Washington to defer direct conflict with China, leaving the door open for negotiations. They suggest forming special alliances and employing

other strategies to prevent the establishment of a formidable alliance among Iran, Russia, and potentially China. In contrast, both Iran and Russia firmly believe in the necessity of counterbalancing the perceived threat from the United States.

2. Strategies Commonly Used by the U.S. against Iran and Russia

In the USA's strategies toward Iran and Russia, three interrelated concepts help assess the United States' role in Russo-Iranian relations. These include the USA's efforts to securitize the situations involving both countries, the imposition of various economic sanctions and the use of power dynamics within the international system against them, and the promotion of human rights narratives that aim to politically isolate Iran and Russia through Iranophobia and Russophobia. As a result, this has strengthened the shared motivations of Iran and Russia to effectively counter Western-oriented international institutions and work toward transforming the international order into a multipolar system.

2-1. Common hostility and security

The foundation of securitization theory involves elevating an issue from ordinary circumstances into the realm of security and emergency considerations by framing it as an immediate existential threat. Securitization theorists identify various issues-economic, social, military, political, and environmental-that can be treated in this manner (Buzan, Wæver, & Wilde, 1998). A key strategy employed by the United States against its adversaries is to undergo a specific process of securitization that moves from declaration to understanding and explanation, ultimately fostering a consensus among its allies. A prominent example of securitization can be seen in U.S. policy toward Iran over the last four decades. This trend has also intensified in Russia in the past two decades. Notably, the deterioration of Moscow-Washington relations and the security challenges that emerged for Russia following the 2014 Ukraine crisis have been significant factors in the evolution of Tehran-Moscow relations, culminating in Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Until recently, it could be argued that Iran and Russia, despite sharing a similar perspective on the polarization of power in the international system, had differing strategies for addressing it. Russia, maintaining its negotiation-based relations with the United States, was engaged in an intra-system game. In contrast, Iran was compelled to operate in an extra-system game due to U.S. pressures. As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council,

Russia upheld the effectiveness of this institution, while Iran sought to reform it, viewing it as unjust.

The war in Ukraine, coupled with the complete severance of relations between Russia and the United States, has fundamentally altered Russia's approach to the international arena, intensifying its efforts to undermine American-oriented legal, political, and economic frameworks. Now, Iran, as a regional power, and Russia, as a trans-regional power, stand united against American unipolarization. They contend that a unipolar system fails to address global challenges and advocate for a shift toward a multipolar system. Both nations share a common stance on opposing NATO's eastward expansion and resist the security model currently being devised and implemented by the West.

Iran has consistently been viewed as a significant existential threat in West Asia within strategic U.S. national security documents. Since the early 21st century, the United States has sought to forge a consensus against Iran's missile and nuclear developments, framing these issues as potential threats to Europe as well. The 2022 U.S. national security document accuses Iran of interfering in the internal affairs of neighboring countries and of proliferating missiles and drones. According to this document, Iran is conspiring to undermine American interests and is advancing its nuclear program beyond what is necessary for civilian purposes (The National Security Strategy of the United States, 2022, p. 11; Johnston, 2023).

American threats against Iran persist, characterized by several key measures:

- Imposing international economic, scientific, political, and military sanctions on Iran.
- Establishing military and intelligence bases in the vicinity of Iran.
- Increasing troop deployments and sending additional warships to the Persian Gulf, coupled with heightened psychological warfare against Iran.
- Seeking to disrupt Iran's relations with its neighbors to isolate the country.
- Encouraging Iran's neighbors to form coalitions and enhance their military capabilities with advanced weaponry aimed at Iran.
- Hindering Iran's cooperation with international institutions.
- Conducting a hybrid war to undermine Iran's internal cohesion, thereby weakening its geo-economic and geopolitical standing, among other actions.

The key point for the Islamic Republic of Iran lies in the fact that

the United States is tightening the spatial constraints on Iran across both physical and psychological dimensions. When a nation's security environment contracts at the national, regional, and international levels, it becomes increasingly challenging to implement a deterrence strategy, often resulting in a display of aggressive behavior.

Simultaneously, according to U.S. national security strategy documents, Russia is viewed as an adversary of the transatlantic alliance and a primary competitor of the United States in Europe, particularly in Eastern Europe. The U.S. is actively employing subversive tactics to undermine its credibility in Europe, thereby straining relationships between European governments and the USA. The rationale provided by the U.S. to its European allies for fostering Russophobia is rooted in the perception of Russia as a geopolitical threat to the West, primarily due to its nuclear capabilities and its assertive policies toward Europe. Furthermore, Russia's involvement in other regions, such as Central Asia, West Asia, Latin America, and Africa, as well as its ties with China, is also deemed a threat.

Following the 2014 Ukrainian revolution and the subsequent annexation of Crimea, relations between Russia and the United States have devolved into a zero-sum game. Americans perceive Russia as an immediate and significant threat to the liberal international order, making any potential agreement-or even mutual understanding-between Russia and the West on critical security issues, such as the future of NATO, unlikely, particularly as long as Putin remains in power.

Nevertheless, Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 highlighted the United States' reluctance to engage in direct conflict with Russia. The ongoing war and Russia's occupation of eastern Ukraine have emerged as a substantial strategic challenge. Restoring military balance has intensified the political and hybrid conflict between the U.S. and Russia.

In response to the war in Ukraine, U.S. countermeasures have focused on equipping Ukraine's military, thus transforming the conflict into a war of attrition, alongside implementing stringent economic sanctions and other aggressive political measures. To deter Russia's more aggressive actions, the U.S. aims to demonstrate that the West possesses both the capability and the resolve to impose increasingly severe costs on Russia, emphasizing that Moscow risks escalating tensions further (Aleksashenko & et al., 2018).

The USA strategically leverages the global media landscape to amplify pessimism in Iran-Russia relations and foster a rift between Tehran and Moscow. Historical precedents, along with a prevailing sense of pessimism in their bilateral relations, serve as a backdrop for the USA's influence on public opinion in both countries. Over the last three decades, the United States has notably impacted Iran-Russia agreements, utilizing these instances to sow discontent between the two nations. Key examples include the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement in 1995, which contributed to the obstruction of Russian research reactor deliveries to Iran in 1998, along with highlighting the perceived threats of Shiite ideology—particularly its potential spread to the North Caucasus and other post-Soviet states. Additionally, the U.S. has incurred costs for Russia when it sought closer ties with Iran, exemplified by sanctions against Russian companies associated with Iran, such as Rosoboronexport, which is Russia's largest state-owned defense technology exporter, sanctioned in 2006. The U.S. has also persuaded Russia to endorse Security Council resolutions against Iran, including the Comprehensive Sanctions Resolution 1929 in 2010, and has pressured Russia to cancel the delivery of S-300 systems to Iran.

Following the onset of the Ukrainian crisis and the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement, Russia's commitment to bolstering relations with Iran intensified. The conflict in Ukraine underscored the significance of the geopolitical partnership between the two nations, aligning their strategic interests more closely. Historically, geography has served as the most stable determinant in the relationship between Iran and Russia, yet current events have shifted this dynamic.

The structural power of the West in scientific, technological, political, and economic domains has been a pivotal tool against Iran and Russia. Structural power refers to the ability to set the international agenda and shape the framework within which governments, companies, and individuals interact. This power can be analyzed in four key areas concerning Iran and Russia:

- 1- Institution of Knowledge: This involves selective treatment in disseminating knowledge, restricting access for Iran and Russia as emerging challengers to the West's knowledge-based advancements through various sanctions.
- 2- Financial Structure: Strategic economic sanctions are applied using the dominance of international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. These

measures aim to gradually weaken and destabilize the economies and societies of Iran and Russia, leading to significant political and security repercussions.

- 3- Security Structure: This includes the establishment of military bases surrounding Iran and Russia, the enhancement of NATO relations with their neighboring countries, and the imposition of further political restrictions via the Security Council and other international bodies.
- 4- Political and media frameworks play a crucial role in shaping international political and security institutions. One of the USA's key strategies for promoting Iranophobia and Russophobia involves leveraging its dominance over the World Wide Web to influence global public opinion, ultimately aiming to achieve political and international isolation for these nations.

2-2. Sanctions and hybrid war

Over four decades of continuous sanctions against Iran, encompassing both unilateral and multilateral measures, demonstrate that these pressures on crucial sectors of Iran's economy have evolved through a systematic process. The initial U.S. embargo was instituted in November 1979, with a notable refinement of sanctions beginning in August 1996. This period marked the start of a cycle involving identification, monitoring, evaluation, and adjustment.

Since then, the United States has focused intensively on hindering the production, export, and acquisition of oil-derived currency, which serves as the lifeblood of Iran's predominantly single-product economy. A coherent series of laws and directives has been implemented to complicate avenues for generating these revenues. Consequently, it can be argued that the evolution of U.S. smart sanctions against countries like China and Russia is also underway.

The utilization of monitoring and evaluation tools to identify shortcomings in the enforcement of sanctions is a vital aspect of the U.S. strategy to refine these measures. This approach extends to Europe and aims to create a broad, coordinated network of domestic and international regulatory bodies to counter competitors effectively.

In the context of sanctions imposed on Iran and Russia, it's important to recognize that economic sanctions can be categorized into two main types: the first aims to change behavior while the second seeks to induce instability. These two categories differ in three significant ways: their goals, their targets, and their methods of action. Currently, however, the American sanctions framework

against Iran and Russia appears to prioritize social, political, and security instability and collapse over behavioral change, a strategy often referred to as hybrid warfare. From the perspective of Iranian analysts, this situation aligns the political systems of Iran and Russia more closely and encourages collaboration to counteract sanctions and address the economic challenges posed by the West, ultimately fostering a united front. (Hosseini, Hadian Rasanani, & Sajjadpour, 2022, p. 125)

Russia's backing of Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, and the Eurasian Economic Union, along with its initiatives to establish bilateral economic mechanisms for banking relations and exchanges in national currencies, fits well within this framework. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Eurasian Economic Union, and BRICS represent Russia's strategy to diminish the influence of Western-oriented financial and political institutions in the surrounding regions and globally.

3. New Dynamics in Iran-Russia Relations

The historical relationship between Iran and Russia is marked by conflict, occupation, and agreements that have often irritated the Iranian populace, fostering a general pessimism toward Russia. However, contemporary evaluations indicate that their shared animosity toward the United States has emerged as a significant driving force in their ties. The importance of Tehran and Moscow to one another is on the rise, as both countries work to persuade their citizens of the necessity to deepen their relations. The U.S. efforts to undermine both nations have enhanced Tehran's and Moscow's recognition of their common geopolitical and geoeconomic interests, particularly in strengthening defense-security collaborations and expanding bilateral, multilateral, and institutional economic ties. Consequently, the strategic significance of Iran and Russia to each other has intensified in their respective regions.

In official documents following its involvement with the Commonwealth of Nations, Russia prioritizes Europe as a regional priority. Since 2015, following its military engagement in West Asia, this area has garnered significant attention from Moscow. Russia pursues various strategic political and economic objectives simultaneously in West Asia. It aims to maintain balanced relations with all regional players, including the traditional allies of the United States, while working to prevent U.S. dominance from transforming West Asia into a point of contention that could increase Russia's costs

in the region (Dyner, 2021). However, with Russia's involvement in the Ukraine conflict in 2022 and the subsequent deterioration of relations with Washington, its international strategy is shifting toward seeking a greater share of global geopolitics and mitigating American pressure. In this context, Russia has found it necessary to align itself with strategic partners, exemplified by its recent pact with North Korea, among other considerations.

Conversely, in light of the escalating American military presence in West Asia, Iran is seeking to develop a network of strategies to enhance its standing in the region. One key component of this approach is to strengthen the axis of resistance across political, military, and economic dimensions. Additionally, convincing Russia and China to recognize Iran's significance in the region serves as a complementary strategy. Iran contends that with the Greater Middle East strategy pursued by the United States and Israel over the past two decades, some of the current regional trends can be analyzed in line with this strategy.

The initiative to foster and amplify internal protests in countries within the region, particularly in Syria and Iran, aims to normalize the division of these nations along ethnic lines. It also seeks to support the normalization of relations between Israel and the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council while completely undermining Iran's ties with regional countries. Even the plan to escalate tensions between Iran and Israel can be analyzed in this context. Consequently, Iran perceives American policy in West Asia as fundamentally at odds with its significant interests in the region.

The growing relationship between Iran and Russia is prominent on the foreign policy agendas of both nations for two primary reasons: first, geopolitical considerations in countering the United States, and second, economic motivations in light of sanctions imposed by the U.S. and the West. Overall, both countries are increasingly inclined to enhance their defense and security cooperation as a means of balancing the threats posed by the United States.

Given their geographical proximity, Iran and Russia share common geopolitical security interests against the U.S. and West. Furthermore, both nations largely align in their perspectives on regional and global political issues, enabling them to leverage their capabilities for a model of complementary cooperation. Iran values its close relationship with Russia because of geographical proximity, Russia's veto power, a mutual anti-American stance, the potential for military and arms collaboration, interlinked regional policies, and the aim to bolster the axis of resistance in West Asia.

3-1. Cooperation in military, defense, and security sectors

The advent of a new international era has opened up fresh opportunities for Iran and Russia in managing and regulating their political, military, and security relations. By cooperating and harnessing their strategic capacities, Iran and Russia can effectively address expansionist interventions in peripheral regions. However, these collaborations have consistently been influenced by both regional and international political and security considerations.

Before the onset of the Ukraine war, the United States posed significant barriers to military relations between Iran and Russia through various means, including 1) Russia's interest in utilizing Western technology, 2) Israel and the military modernization aspirations of Russia, and 3) Russia's status as a major arms exporter and security concerns regarding Iran. As Russia has concluded that the United States is unwilling to compromise, Moscow's motivation to strengthen its cooperation with Iran has increased.

A strategic document outlining relations between Iran and Russia is currently in development, with one key component focusing on technical and military collaboration. Russia's military industry is a crucial segment of its economy, ranking as the third largest source of foreign exchange earnings after oil and gas. For Iran, the primary objective of engaging with Russia in the military sector is to enhance defense capabilities and deterrence, with the long-term goal of achieving economic benefits from its military industry.

Iran's strategic geopolitical position, with its extensive coastlines along the Oman Sea and the Persian Gulf, has consistently made it a focal point in Russia's maritime policy. Since 2015, Russia has proposed various forms of cooperation with Iran, including joint naval exercises, presence at the southern coastlines of Iran, and contracts on naval equipment. In recent years, Iran and Russia have conducted annual joint military exercises in the Indian Ocean, Oman Sea, and Caspian Sea.

3-2. Political cooperations

Russia plays a crucial role in shaping Iran's foreign policy, both internationally-through collaborations in organizations such as the UN Security Council, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and the BRICS group-and regionally, involving the Middle East, South Caucasus, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. This perspective has been mutually reinforced by both nations, particularly through Russia's support for Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS.

Iran and Russia typically maintain either a silent or supportive stance toward each other's political positions. In response to Russia's attack on Ukraine, Iran's supreme leader asserted that NATO's provocative actions were the primary cause of the conflict. On May 18, 2023, Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed appreciation to Iran's supreme leader for his consistent focus on fostering cooperation between the two nations. Despite increasing pressure from the United States on both Iran and Russia, there has been a notable enhancement in political trust between Tehran and Moscow, emphasizing the importance of developing bilateral relations and presenting mutually supportive political positions.

Although Russia is engaged in the Ukraine war, Iran seeks to encourage Russia to take a more significant role in the geopolitical dynamics of the Persian Gulf and West Asia, aligning with Iran's interests and bilateral relations. This has resulted in enhanced political-security diplomacy between the two countries.

3-3. Economic cooperation

Since the conclusion of the Iran nuclear agreement in 2015, a political resolve has emerged to strengthen and enhance economic relations between Iran and Russia. This momentum has resulted in increased economic exchanges and the establishment of certain legal frameworks to facilitate these interactions. Statistics indicate that significant projects-such as the development of the North-South Corridor, the completion of nuclear and thermal power plants, and various energy agreements-serve as key indicators of the economic relationship between the two nations. However, there remains a notable disparity in smaller trade exchanges, which offers a more tangible metric for assessing the current state of economic ties. In light of this, efforts to foster provincial and regional cooperation between Iran and Russia are being pursued steadily, and an agreement to expedite these relations could pave the way for deeper economic connections between the two countries.

The economic landscape of both Iran and Russia is marked by features such as excessive regulations, a sluggish administrative bureaucracy, and numerous other administrative hurdles. While some of these obstacles have been addressed, implementation issues regarding the reached agreements persist. Given the semi-liberal economic systems of both nations and their development aspirations, it is crucial to enhance commercial and economic relationships between Iran and Russia at both public and private levels. Strengthening these ties will better secure long-term relations

between the two countries. During the visit of the previous Iranian president to Russia, 14 agreements were signed across various economic and legal sectors, which could serve as a foundation for further collaboration. (<http://www.president.ir/fa/98435>)

However, one of the primary topics of negotiation between Iranian and Russian officials in recent years, which continues to face significant challenges, is the diversification of Iran's export products to Russia. Despite considerable investments by Iranian entrepreneurs, the existing Russian barriers have resulted in substantial losses for them, particularly in the agricultural export sector.

Meanwhile, the significance of large-scale cooperation projects between the two countries cannot be overlooked. As part of the ongoing work on the "Iran-Russia Cooperation Projects Implementation Roadmap in Commercial and Industrial Fields," which was appropriated for the years 2016-2020, fulfillment of the obligations by the Russian company regarding the construction of phases 2 and 3 of the Bushehr power plant stands out as a key initiative and topic for discussion between the leaders of the two nations. Additionally, bilateral military and security cooperation-encompassing arms deals as well as technical and training collaborations-represents another vital area for negotiation.

The Caspian Sea presents both opportunities and challenges in Iran-Russia relations. Despite the political and security-related challenges that exist, this shared body of water fosters mutual interests that enhance economic relations. These include initiatives aimed at facilitating and developing international corridors for the transit of both national and international goods along the north-south route, as well as the exploitation of regional natural resources. The Russian strategy for developing the Caspian Sea by 2030 identifies the potential for cooperation between Iran and the Russian Federation as a significant geo-economic opportunity. (Antonov, 2024)

Despite the challenges posed by Western sanctions, Iran and Russia are actively pursuing bilateral, multilateral, and institutional initiatives aimed at establishing an economic framework that is independent of Western payment systems and facilitates trade using national currencies. The financial payment system initiative spearheaded by Russia has received a positive response from Iran, and this effort is also being extended to include India and China.

Iran and Russia enjoy significant cooperation across various sectors. Some key areas of collaboration include:

- 1- Oil and Gas Industry: There is a strong partnership in oil and gas extraction, production, and exportation.

- 2- Aerospace Industry: Both countries work together on building and launching satellites, as well as human spaceflight initiatives.
- 3- Nuclear Industry: Their cooperation encompasses the development of peaceful nuclear technologies and the production of nuclear fuel.
- 4- Military Equipment Industry: They collaborate on the production and sale of military equipment, along with sharing expertise in military training and education.
- 5- Railway Industry: Joint efforts focus on the construction, development, and enhancement of railway networks and the associated infrastructure.

These are just a few examples of areas of cooperation between Iran and Russia. Also, over the years, these two countries have cooperated in cultural, scientific, commercial, and other fields.

Conclusion

The United States can be considered one of the significant variables influencing the relationship between Iran and Russia. Experts on Iran-Russia relations highlight that the factor of a common adversary has been pivotal in transforming their interactions. The nature of this relationship can be characterized as one of cooperation mixed with competition. While within the triangular dynamics of Iran, Russia, and the United States, these relations can be assessed through the lens of a balance of threats. Both Tehran and Moscow aim to enhance their geopolitical and geoeconomic cooperation while collaborating in areas such as peaceful nuclear technology, military equipment, and the exchange of military expertise. Consequently, through their bilateral interactions and various forms of cooperation, Russia and Iran can be seen as close allies or strategic partners in certain domains. However, an official alliance between the two countries has not yet been established.

The shared perception of a threat from the US has diminished the uncertainties surrounding their relationship, which revolves around three key factors-historical pessimism, asymmetry in power levels, and a lack of economic overlap. As a result, both countries feel an increasing need for stronger strategic partnerships, leading to a clearer understanding of each other's long-term foreign policy objectives.

Iran and Russia have agreed to enhance their cooperation and lessen the sensitivity level in their political-security considerations in response to the USA's irreversible enmity with Tehran and Moscow. One of the most plausible scenarios concerning the

relationship between Iran and Russia, particularly under pressure from American influence, is the formalization of an alliance agreement. This document would outline the political, economic, and security commitments that each country has toward the other.

This alliance can enhance cooperation between Iran and Russia within the dynamics of the surrounding regions, including West Asia, the Persian Gulf, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia. In all three areas of West Asia, the relationship between Iran and Russia holds significant potential for expansion in various dimensions. This includes bilateral ties as well as engagement across all three regional contexts-West Asia, Central Asia, and the South Caucasus-and on an international scale. However, challenges remain within this partnership. Both countries are actively pursuing new initiatives and looking to leverage their international and regional relations. A significant aspect of the current dynamics in Iran-Russia relations is the role of the United States, which serves as both a catalyst for various scenarios and a source of uncertainty.

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