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Notes on Future Relations between Iran and Russia

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During recent years, some sort of confidence building has started in relations between Iran and Russia, which has no precedent. Construction of eight new nuclear power plants, bolstering Iran's defense capability, an agreement between the two countries for daily swap of 500,000 barrels of crude oil, cooperation between the two countries for putting an end to the chaos that resulted from intervention of foreign forces in Syria, regional cooperation in Central Asia and Caucasus, convergence between the two countries' positions on issues related to Afghanistan and Iraq, and the two countries' common views on the need to rectify the new world order are major instances of new cooperation between Iran and Russia.



Now, the question is what will happen in the future? I personally believe that relations between Iran and Russia will continue to expand. Under the present circumstances, common grounds between the two countries are more than differences. Here, I add a few points in this regard.

Firstly, sanctions imposed on Iran during the past 10 years, including those imposed through the United Nations Security Council's resolutions, by US houses of parliament and administration, and by the European Union, as well as additional and voluntary sanctions imposed by countries like Japan, South Korea, the United Arab Emirates and Canada, clearly showed that when a country is going to be assaulted for any reason, propaganda, political, security and military attacks against it increase incessantly at the speed of a roller coaster. Once, West, led by the United States and Israel, was trying to disintegrate an entity called Iran through propaganda hype, economic sanctions and showing military teeth. At that time, it was really difficult to cope with such an all-out invasion.

Let's not forget that even Russia, China and India voted positive for sanctions resolutions against Iran. Iran, however, weathered those dire straits. In order to prevent repetition of that situation, Iran, in addition to other measures, must expand its relations with countries that follow an independent foreign policy. In my opinion, Russian President Vladimir Putin is a leader whose foreign policy attitude can be considered balanced and based on a long-term approach. Although the question that still bothers my mind is why Russia attacked the Crimean Peninsula? At the same time, we must not forget that compatibility or lack of compatibility between foreign policy goals and the general atmosphere governing the international environment does not necessarily stem from conflicting goals. Sometimes, weak, conservative and pessimistic diplomacy followed by decision-makers or executive officials causes many analogous and even compatible goals of political actors not to be realized on the ground. There are still people in Russia who believe that Russia's interests will be best met in the Atlantic sphere, that is, through interaction with the United States and Europe.

Secondly, since the operational and executive environment of foreign policy is much broader than the environment in which decisions are made, it is quite natural if part of the foreign policy goals are aborted and not realized in international operational arena. I mean it would be suitable for us when designing our strategies to give priority to looking at Asia again. In practice, we may not achieve all our goals, but "treading the correct path" is better than "walking correctly." It seems that Iran and Russia share viewpoints on the strategy of looking to the East.

Thirdly, convergence between Iran and Asian countries within framework of such treaties and organizations as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is indicative of the fact that this is a win-win game. However, the only point that remains to be made clear is whether Iran's accession to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will boost the Islamic Republic's security status? The answer is that without a doubt any kind of cooperative activity with independent countries will put Iran in a better position. However, Iran's security concerns are fewer than those points that are covered by SCO. Apart from the threat of Islamist extremism, examples of which include Daesh in Afghanistan, Taliban, al-Qaeda and the activities of such organizations as Hizb ut-Tahrir (Freedom Party) in Central Asia, which SCO can play a role in controlling or restricting them, Iran's major concerns are about other regions. The future outlook of Iraq, the issue of the civil war and possible disintegration of this country, presence of foreign forces, especially the high number as well as sophisticated military and communication equipment used by Americans in the Persian Gulf and all Arab countries that neighbor Iran, intensification of differences between Shias and Sunnis, and mounting pressure on the oil producing countries to increase production and reduce oil prices are all of a different sort and target Iran in other regions where SCO would not be possibly of much help to Iran. Russia, however, can share some of these concerns with Iran.

Fourthly, let's not forget that countries are not permanent friends or permanent enemies for one another, but they only have permanent interests. At the same time, it must be noted that in financial terms, Russia is in need of West's investment. In terms of technology, although Russia has made advances in certain fields, generally speaking, it is not a country that would be able to meet all technological needs of Iran. It seems that when Russian technological parks and concerns open their doors to Iranian universities, research centers, and knowledge-based companies, it will be a great opportunity for Iranian researchers and scientists to gain new experiences.

Fifthly, when it comes to the Caspian Sea, I think it is better for Iran to continue insisting on common use of this sea. In addition to environmental, fishing and transportation advantages of this kind of legal regime, and the role it plays in facilitating the use of the seabed, it will also make it possible for Iran and Russia to be neighbors as they were in the past; in the past, they were neighbors through land and sea borders and now through the waters of the Caspian Sea.

Key Words: Iran, Russia, Future Relations, Common Grounds, Sanctions, United Nations Security Council, Resolutions, US, European Union, Vladimir Putin, Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Islamist Extremism, Permanent Interests, Maleki

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