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Strategic Cooperation between Iran and Russia; Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

The relations between Iran and Russia in recent years has turned the concluding a strategic and long-term agreement into a dominant debate among experts. This attempt can be considered as an important step into strengthening strategic relations Iran-Russia, which is based on the mutual interests of the parties and extending their interaction in a long-term period. Despite the diversity and multiplicity of issues contained in this agreement, relations between the two countries during the past twenty years have proved that this agreement in practice and especially in terms of economic goals has not been able to affect the totality of the relations between the two countries and it is a solid basis for change in the relations between the two countries. Basically, the relations between the two countries during these years has been less based on the attention and reliance on this agreement, and the strategic transformation that has taken place in the cooperation of the two countries in the field of regional issues such as the Syrian crisis is the product of the understanding of the military and political elites of the two countries on the time requirements and developments and therefore, strategic cooperation between them in the region was inevitable. For this reason, the agreement cannot be considered as a substitute for the comprehensive strategic cooperation document. The document of strategic cooperation Iran-Russia should be a starting point and a great departure for new, all-round and multifaceted relations with Russia and become the basis for turning Moscow into a long-term strategic partner of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In order to achieve such a document, it is very important to accurately assess the potential and actual capacities and resources that advance the relations between the two countries and to identify the opportunities and obstacles for it. In the present article, while trying to explain the conceptualization of the nature of strategic relations, the most important factors promoting this type of relations between Iran and Russia are pointed out, and in addition to explaining some of the challenges and limitations of this process, also the requirements of it will be explained.

Keywords: Iran, Russia, Strategic Agreement, Strategic Cooperation.

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Introduction

In recent years, relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation have experienced a growing trend. Regarding a number of strategic issues, especially in the field of regional issues, the two countries have arranged close interactions based on a constructive convergence model, which has been a potential stimulus for the development of a strategic and multifaceted relationship. The strengthening of the relations between the two countries in recent years can be proven and confirmed based on various indicators and evidence, among which the most important ones are the high level of diplomatic contacts at the highest levels between the parties and frequent visits between the officials and high-ranking officials of the two countries. This level of contacts and interactions is both a result of the strategic understanding of the decision-making elites of the two countries regarding the desirability of developing bilateral and multilateral relations and the product of matching the declarative and practical positions of the two sides regarding the macro trends governing the international system and their common narrative regarding the requirements and The requirements are to change the current world order to a non-western and just order.

In this way, relations with Russia have gained importance and a respectable position in the foreign policy system of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The importance of these relations is better understood by considering the set of measures and efforts by rival and opposition actors who focus on determining Iran's cross-border operational environment and imposing a geopolitical restriction on our country. Russia is one of the countries criticizing the American sanctions against Iran and has even tried to define its relations with Iran without being affected by the scope of these sanctions. This has had a direct effect on the will of the Iranian side to strengthen interactions with its northern neighbor.

Considering the growing trend of relations between the two countries in recent years, the possibility of concluding a strategic and long-term agreement in the context of the recent relations with China has become a dominant debate among experts in the field of Iran-Russia relations. The recent strategic agreement between Iran and China, which was signed by the two countries during the visit

of the Chinese Foreign Minister to Tehran and after a relatively long diplomatic process, has raised the question of whether it is possible to draw up and sign a similar agreement with Russia also planned. Naturally, moving in this direction can be considered an important step in the direction of strengthening strategic relations with Russia, which is based on the mutual interests of the parties, and implies their close interaction in a long-term time span.

Before entering into the discussion, it is important to mention one point, that Iran and Russia recently reached an agreement regarding the extension of an agreement that was signed about twenty years ago. This treaty was signed in Russia under the title "Treaty Law on the Basis of Mutual Relations and Principles of Cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation" and by the then presidents of the two countries. The duration of this treaty was originally 10 years, which was extended in 5-year periods, and considering that the second 5-year period had ended, during the recent visit of the Russian Foreign Minister to Tehran, it was extended and signed by the two foreign ministers. The country arrived.

This agreement consists of an introduction and 21 articles, and some of its most important provisions and axes include things such as respect for the principle of sovereignty, avoiding the use of force, preventing military assistance to a third country in case of an attack on the two countries of Iran and Russia. Peaceful settlement of disputes; Efforts are being made to create suitable conditions in the legal, economic, etc. fields, to expand long-term relations in the field of energy and other technologies, to conclude separate agreements to direct exchanges and regional cooperation in the field of transportation and cooperation in the fight against terrorism.

Despite the diversity and multiplicity of issues contained in this agreement, the trend governing the relations between the two countries during the past twenty years proves that this agreement in practice and especially in terms of economic considerations and goals has not been able to affect the totality of the relations between the two countries and is a solid basis for Change in the relations between the two countries. Basically, during these years, the regulation of the relations between the two countries has been done less based on the consideration and reliance on this

agreement, and the strategic development that has taken place in the cooperation between the two countries in the field of regional issues such as the Syrian crisis is more than based on the considerations and requirements of this agreement. The understanding of the military and political elites of the two countries has been one of the time requirements and developments in the field and their understanding regarding the necessity of inevitable strategic cooperation in the region.

For this reason, the aforementioned agreement cannot be considered as an alternative and substitute for a comprehensive document of strategic cooperation - as intended in this article. The document of strategic cooperation with Russia should be a starting point and a great intention for building new, all-round and multifaceted relations with Russia, like a document of the type that was recently signed with China, and become a factor for Moscow to become a long-term strategic partner of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In fact, this document will be the most important driving force for a deep transformation in the relations between the two countries. Of course, in order to achieve such a document, it is very important to accurately evaluate the potential and actual capacities and resources that advance the relations between the two countries and to identify the opportunities and obstacles to overcome it. This document also cannot be realized without passing a time-consuming diplomatic process that enables the consensus of the two countries on its contents. As with the agreement with China, the diplomatic process leading to the signing of the document began in 2015 and lasted until 2021. In this article, while trying to explain the conceptualization of the strategic relationship, the most important factors promoting this type of relationship between Iran and Russia are pointed out, and while explaining some of the challenges and limitations of this process, the requirements and requirements of it will be explained.

1 .Theoretical foundations

In order to discuss and examine the issue of concluding a strategic document between Iran and Russia, which will logically be the basis for the formation of a strategic partnership between the two countries, it is necessary to draw a conceptually correct picture

of such a partnership. Therefore, in the first part of the report, some information is provided about the strategic partnership or strategic cooperation in the relations between the two governments.

In general, relations between governments follow different patterns according to the qualitative and quantitative components of their interaction. Patterns such as coalition, alliance, cooperation, partnership and conflict are used to describe the state of relations between countries in the international system. In such conditions, the frequently used word "strategic" or "strategic", which indicates the increasing benefits and simple time frame of relations, is used to emphasize the rich content and functionality of the relationship model. Today, of course, the wider dimensions and more complex nature of relations between states have changed the older patterns of relations in favor of newer types. Meanwhile, the model of strategic cooperation has been noticed since the beginning of the new century. Some sources emphasize that this phrase was rarely used in international relations before the 90s. In recent decades, however, the model of strategic partnership has increasingly entered foreign policy doctrines, bilateral legal documents, words used by politicians, and scientific texts of experts in the field of international relations. Today, the European Union has signed more than 10 strategic partnership documents. This number reaches more than 20 documents for India and more than 50 for China. The variety of cooperation issues and the wide time span of these relations is the first thing that is taken into consideration in strategic partnership documents (Mirfakhraei, 2017:27-28).

Strategic participation and cooperation, despite its popularity in modern diplomacy and mass media, still does not have a reliable theoretical detail (Czechowska, 2013: 46). For this reason, no consensus has been formed regarding what exactly should be the term -partnership or cooperation- regarding this type of relations. Despite the many definitions and functions that are applied to relationships aimed at strategic partnership or cooperation, this type of relationship has a number of principles and components that are minimal and maximally different. According to Mansingh, strategic partnership is formed when two governments agree to increase the level of their interactions, to improve their relations from the lowest level to the highest level, and to deal with many issues and issues that affect the two sides in some way. Jame interested in

pursuing cooperation and understanding and form long-term commitments for mutual cooperation and advancement of their desired goals.

According to another definition, seven basic features are mentioned for the beginning of strategic cooperation between governments, which are: 1. Partnership nature of relations, 2. Convergence of strategic goals of different parties, 3. Mutual belief in this through a series of efforts. It increased the chance of implementing coherent strategic goals, 4. Reliable and long-term cooperation for the implementation of common goals, 5. Priority and density of contacts that exceed the normal level of relations with other partners, 6. Highly developed infrastructure of relations, and 7. The existence of a positive atmosphere regarding bilateral relations (Mirfakhraei, 2017:29).

From another point of view, among the different definitions related to strategic partnership and different aspects of this term that experts have proposed, four basic features are distinguished:

The first characteristic is related to the nature of a broad range of long-term shared interests, interests that are independent of existing political conditions or the actions of third parties. Having a common enemy or suffering from a severe regional crisis is not necessarily a guarantee for the formation of a strategic partnership. It is possible that a joint regional or global crisis will end one day, but this does not mean the end of the strategic cooperation of two independent countries. Of course, it is natural that the issue of threat or common enemy is an effective and motivating factor for turning to bilateral strategic relations.

The second feature is the desire of the parties to determine the basic strategic goals that can only be achieved through sustained joint efforts. This feature shows how a strategic partnership differs from a tactical alliance.

The third feature is related to the existence of a developed legal and law-based framework for cooperation as well as effective mechanisms for cooperation in different fields. From this point of view, merely issuing declarations and holding political meetings is not enough for the relations between the two countries to be called a full-fledged strategic partnership.

The fourth characteristic is the high level of trust between the political leaders of the countries involved in the strategic partnership, and more than that, the high level of interest, understanding and mutual trust between the people of the two countries. Without widespread public support, even the warmest friendships between the leaders of the countries and the stable interaction between the bureaucracies of the two countries are not enough to ensure stable relations (Kortunov, 2018).

Now, with a brief explanation about the coordinates of a strategic relationship between the two governments, the generalizability of this model for the relations between Iran and Russia will be discussed in the rest of the report, and in this direction, in order to measure the possibility of forming such relations between Tehran and Moscow, the drivers and limitations Supervisors explain this process.

2 .Drivers of strategic cooperationbetween Iran and Russia

One of the main assumptions of this article is that if the Islamic Republic of Iran is trying to establish strategic relations with a number of governments in the international system and organize a clear statement of its priorities for such relations, Russia will certainly be among the first countries to form such relations. Was. There are various stimuli and drivers that pave the way for the implementation of the strategic agreement with Russia. These motivations include a set of variables and historical, political, normative, etc., and focusing on them can lead to strengthening the will of the two governments to reach such an agreement. Here, a set of these variables is pointed out and it is emphasized that their existence provides a suitable and suitable environment for changing the nature of the relations between Iran and Russia into a strategic relationship by signing a strategic agreement.

2.1 .A successful background and experience in the field of case-by-case strategic cooperation

Strategic collaborations in specific issues can be the driving force for establishing long-term and multilateral strategic agreements. Basically, the history of forming strategic collaborations in cases that record the successful experience of joint collaborations between two independent actors can be

considered as a necessary prerequisite for their entry into the stage of permanent strategic partnership.

Iran and Russia have registered two specific cooperation records in the 1990s. Both cases are related to the efforts of Moscow and Tehran to deal with instability and insecurity in the region. The cooperation and efforts of the two countries in response to the crisis in Tajikistan, which ended the internal conflicts in this newly independent country from the Soviet Union, is a clear example of the success of Tehran and Moscow in the field of regional cooperation and at a strategic level. Russia, especially after a number of its forces were killed in the middle of the Tajik civil war, became more aware of the need to end this war. In the meantime, considering the influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Tajikistan, Russia doubled the necessity of Iran's entry into the diplomatic process of ending the war. Based on this, in the spring of 1994, Tehran and Moscow managed the negotiations between the opposing parties in Tajikistan. Finally, with the efforts of both sides, an agreement was signed between the government and the opposition forces in February 1997. After that, Iran and Russia continued close contacts with each other in order to maintain the peace agreement between the parties (Freedman, 2000). There is no doubt that the close cooperation between Iran and Russia played the most important role in ending the civil war in Tajikistan, and thus the possibility of spreading insecurity in Tajikistan to the entire Central Asia region was eliminated.

Iran and Russia also increased regional contacts and cooperation between them in the second half of the 1990s at the same time as the Taliban gained power in Afghanistan. The presence of Russia in the Tehran conference, which was held with the aim of examining the situation in Afghanistan, provided a basis for increasing the interactions between the two countries in Afghanistan. Russia, which was worried about the influence of the Taliban in Central Asia and even parts of Russia itself, had important interests in containing the Taliban. For this reason, during Primakov's visit to Tehran in December 1996, the issue of Afghanistan was one of the most important issues that the officials of the two countries discussed and exchanged views on. In addition, the transformation of Afghanistan under the rule of the

Taliban into a paradise for international drug traffickers caused the common concern of Iran and Russia, and for this reason they signed an agreement to combat drug trade in 1999 (Freedman, 2000). Also, the cooperation between Iran and Russia in supporting the coalition of northern Afghanistan against Taliban attacks during the years 1996 to 2001 depicts another aspect of the strategic cooperation of the two countries regarding the issues of Afghanistan (Karami, 2017). In addition, after the fall of the Taliban and the establishment of the government of Hamid Karzai, Iran and Russia supported the central government of Afghanistan and demanded that the government of this country be able to maintain the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Afghanistan and have control over the entire affairs of the country (Lukyanov, 2018).

Therefore, it can be confirmed that the strategic cooperation between Iran and Russia in the two critical environments of Tajikistan and Afghanistan in the previous decades and the successful experience of the two countries in this field is an effective stimulus for expanding the cooperation between the two countries on a strategic, long-term and diversified level on different issues.

2.2 .Common interests in Syria

The strategic cooperation between Iran and Russia in the Syrian crisis and their support for the central and legal government of this country and standing against the actions of terrorists and their regional and international supporters can be considered as one of the most important drivers of strategic cooperation between Tehran and Moscow. There is a verifiable consensus among political and international experts and experts that if Tehran and Moscow did not cooperate in the Syrian crisis, the conditions of this crisis today would have had a different arrangement and fate. In the meantime, it is important to pay attention to this important point that the different and distinctive features of the Syrian crisis compared to the two crises of Afghanistan and Tajikistan that were mentioned earlier have been in a context that seem Iran and Russia's cooperation is the more important strategically.

First of all, it should be kept in mind that the Syrian crisis, in comparison with the crises of the two aforementioned countries, has a much deeper and more complex operational and offensive

environment, which makes it more difficult for any actor to enter it. Second, the level of involvement and the powers involved in the Syrian crisis is far more and higher than the two crises of Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and Tehran and Moscow have had to face and confront a more powerful and diverse range of regional and international actors in the Syrian crisis. And thirdly, while the scope of the two crises in Tajikistan and Afghanistan mainly had clear boundaries and was limited and confined to the borders of these two countries, in the Syrian crisis, the plans were beyond the borders of this country, and the causes of instability and unrest in Syria were plans beyond the borders of this country. The country and the entire West Asia region have been considered.

Therefore, the cooperation between Iran and Russia in such a serious crisis has a much higher strategic importance than the cooperation between the two countries in the 90s. This is why the cooperation between the two countries in Syria is considered a turning point in the relations between Tehran and Moscow and is interpreted as the most significant symbol of the strategic cooperation between the two countries.

Russia's intervention in the Syrian crisis was after the important consultations that the Islamic Republic of Iran and especially the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, General Qassem Soleimani, presented to the Russian side, so that Moscow, with the understanding of the destructive consequences of achieving the goals of the terrorists in Syria, compared to the active entry into this Crisis action. Through military intervention in favor of the legal government of Syria, Russia practically became a de facto ally of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Syrian war (Rodkiewicz, 2020: 3). For this reason, some experts consider the Syrian crisis as a "game changer" in the relations between Iran and Russia (Kozhanov a, 2020: 140). As mentioned, it means that this crisis has become a turning point in the history of interactions and relations between Iran and Russia. On this basis and after the close and extensive cooperation in the Syrian crisis, which was accompanied by the success of the two countries in confronting the terrorists and their international supporters and establishing the rule of the legal government of Syria, there is a time and background for concluding a large and

long-term strategic agreement between Iran and Russia is provided more than before.

3.2 .The different strategic areas

In addition to cooperation at the regional level, Iran and Russia have a history of cooperation at the strategic level and continue to do so at the level of bilateral relations. Here, we can specifically mention the peaceful nuclear cooperation between Iran and Russia, as well as the cooperation between the two countries in the fields of defense and armaments. The importance of undertaking these collaborations is due to the fact that in both areas there has been extensive organized pressure from the western countries to prevent these collaborations. In the nuclear field, which has significant strategic importance, Russia has been the only country in the world that, despite the extensive pressures of the western countries, put the policy of cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran on the agenda in this field. The main symbol of this cooperation is related to the construction and commissioning of the Bushehr nuclear power plant, the contract of which was signed between the two countries in the 1990s. This is while "Rosatom", the Russian state-owned company that operates in the field of nuclear energy, is implementing the second stage of Bushehr nuclear power plant construction (units 2 and 3) with a total capacity of 2,100 megawatts (FarsNews Agency, 1400). It should be mentioned that in November 2014, Russia and Iran signed a contract for the construction of the second and third units of Bushehr power plant.

In the field of armaments, which is considered as another symbol of strategic cooperation between governments in the international system, Iran and Russia have had close interactions with each other, and this is despite the fact that in this field, there are various pressures and sanctions from the western governments against the republic. Islamic Iran has been applied. Delivery of the Russian S-300 missile system to Iran, despite intense pressure on Russia not to hand over this system to Iran, especially from the Zionist regime, can be considered the high point of defense and armament cooperation between Tehran and Moscow. The sensitivity of the West towards the transfer of this missile system to other countries is so great that Turkey's purchase of the S-400 from Russia has created serious discussions within the Pentagon and within the NATO organization regarding the review of military relations with

Ankara. . It is natural that this sensitivity is double in the case of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the pressure on Moscow to not hand it over to Iran has been manifold. Despite such increasing pressures, the strategic importance of transferring this system to Iran is better explained and understood. The strategic aspect of Iran and Russia's military relations takes on a clearer picture when we consider Russia's effective role in the failure of America's efforts last year to extend the United Nations arms sanctions against Iran, which were canceled.

4.2 .Normative affinity towards the international order

The existence of a kind of harmony and harmony regarding global trends, procedures, principles and norms and having a common position against them can be one of the effective incentives for the formation of strategic partnerships between two or more actors and perhaps one of the necessary conditions for establishing such a partnership be considered. Understanding on the principles and values of liberal-democracy in its global scope has formed the cornerstone of the strategic partnership of Western governments with each other.

The common position of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation against what the western liberal democratic order has imposed on the world and the meaningful similarity of their prescriptive approaches regarding what constitutes the necessary requirements for achieving the desired global order are among the foundational components for establishing long-term strategic relations between Iran and Russia.

Two countries are the main supporters of multilateralism in the international system. Moscow's approach to multilateralism is not new and it goes back to the Primakov doctrine and actually refers to the positions of the former prime minister of this country in the late 1990s (Stronski, Sokolsky, 2020: 3). The Islamic Republic of Iran has also supported the development of multilateralism in the world by adopting a critical stance towards the current international order. Iran and Russia also have a similar position regarding the development of interaction and cooperation in the international system, the establishment of a multipolar system, respect for the independence and the right of national sovereignty of countries, and they emphasize the necessity of establishing a new world order

in accordance with these principles and values. This participation in the supported discourse and values is self-based and a strong incentive to reach a strategic and long-term agreement in the international system.

5.2 .Common threat

Iran and Russia have a common understanding of a number of destructive trends ruling international politics and consider them a threat to both global stability and the position of independent states in the world. Trends such as unilateralism, violation of international law, hegemony of the United States, application of double standards in the foreign policy of Western powers, and similar cases are considered threatening procedures in the international system from the point of view of both countries, which must be dealt with them. The Islamic Republic of Iran considers such policies a serious threat to the security of the whole world. From Russia's point of view, the United States will not hesitate to implement unilateralism when it needs it, and it is precisely this double standard that has caused the erosion of global rules (Gabuev, Chernenko, 2019). The pursuit of such trends by the western governments, especially the United States of America, has been the source for the formation of hostile policies against independent governments such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and Russia. The ruling spirit of destructive trends such as unilateralism and disregard for international law produces a product such as sanctions, which both Iran and Russia are currently suffering from in different ways. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been facing the American economic sanctions since the beginning of the victory of the revolution and has experienced the most severe sanctions in the history during the administration of Trump and in the form of maximum pressure campaign. Russia has also been the target of Western countries' sanctions for many years, and especially after the height of the Ukraine crisis, it has witnessed an unprecedented amount of sanctions from Western countries. Apart from the issue of sanctions, both countries have been the target of software designs by America and its allies for many years with the aim of changing the political systems ruling over them. From the beginning of the victory of the revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran has been a clear target of America's subversive actions, which is the product of the bipartisan consensus in the American

government structure, and the Russian government has also carried out the political campaigns such as planning color revolutions in the countries surrounding Russia and trying to spread this model into the territory of Russia also interprets in the framework. The totality of these institutions and common perceptions of national, regional and international threat sources have created powerful drivers for the movement of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation Government towards concluding a long-term strategic agreement. Whether convergence to eliminate or mitigate common threats is considered one of the motivations of strategic cooperation between governments.

6.2 .Political stability within the government

In order to reach a strategic and long-term agreement between two independent governments in the international system, the existence of a clear vision of governance and internal system stability in each of the two governments is of fundamental importance. It is natural that shaky and declining political systems that are exposed to many chaotic and destabilizing threats do not have a high and reliable possibility to participate in long-term and stable arrangements that require governance stability. Naturally, the more stable the political systems are and the more established they are, the better conditions they will have for entering into such arrangements.

At present, both the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Federal Republic of Russia have overcome a variety of challenges and threats in recent decades and have reached established conditions in the international system in such a way that in addition to improving the coefficient of stability of governance inside, high capacity And they have undeniably studied in the field of cross-border power projection. Since the beginning of the victory of the revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran has faced all kinds of political, economic and military measures and tricks of its enemies, which were pursuing the ultimate goal of regime change. Resilience against all these measures has created a verifiable consensus about the institutionalization of the political system and stability within the Islamic Republic of Iran, which has been an effective basis for expanding the influence and regional power of the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the other hand, after going through the

turbulent developments of the 1990s and overcoming a series of hostile actions that were organized with the aim of weakening the political system of this country, Russia has been strengthening the position of the ruling elite led by Putin for several years in the path of expanding international power. He has taken his own steps and participates more in the process of determining global arrangements and developments. The proof of this claim is that Russia, by actively and effectively entering the Syrian crisis, for the first time after the collapse of the Soviet Union, expanded its international influence beyond the boundaries of the near foreign sphere. At the same time, due to Vladimir Putin's considerable popularity in Russia and the provision of legal grounds for the continuation of his presidency until 2036, there is a clear consensus regarding the continuation of the existing political stability in Russia. Such a clear picture of the stability and stability of the political systems ruling over Iran and Russia is a powerful driving force for their movement towards a long-term strategic agreement. Both countries will be able to reach a strategic agreement with each other with greater capacity by ensuring the continuation of this stability, which is a necessary condition for making long-term investments in the field of foreign relations.

3 .Limitations and challenges for a strategic agreement

Despite the strong drivers and motivations for concluding a strategic agreement between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Russia, it is natural that there are some obstacles and challenges to this process. These obstacles may delay the process of reaching long-term strategic cooperation between the two countries, or in some cases even eliminate the possibility of such cooperation. These obstacles can be divided into two categories. The first category is related to the obstacles that are caused by the intervention or role-playing of third parties, and the second category is related to the bilateral nature of the relations between Iran and Russia. Therefore, there is a need for the decision-makers in both countries to overcome both obstacles in order to reach a strategic agreement.

1.3 .The destructive role of third parties

A number of enemies of the Islamic Republic of Iran who are trying to determine Iran's operational environment at the regional

and international levels and impose geopolitical isolation on our country, are continuously trying to stop the growing relations between Tehran and Moscow and force the Russian side to reconsider make their relations with Iran convincing. Such a trend is desired by hostile governments such as the United States of America and some regional actors such as Saudi Arabia, but the most active in this field is carried out by the Zionist regime. Although Washington has made an obvious effort to prevent the development of relations between Tehran and Moscow in the past years, but the structural limitations governing its relations with Russia, which indicate deep contradictions and clashes in these relations, have caused the United States to mainly use the threat strategy. And the pressure will force Moscow to accept this demand and make it less possible to use diplomacy in its interactive form in this regard. In the meantime, the Zionist regime is trying to dissuade Moscow from developing its relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, especially in strategic dimensions, through its non-tense relations with Russia, mainly in the form of diplomacy and political consultations. This issue has always been one of the main agendas of Zionist leaders in the contacts of various officials of the Zionist regime with Russian politicians and their frequent visits to Moscow in recent years. Tel Aviv has also tried to limit Moscow's relations with Tehran, within the framework of diplomatic moves, to provide the basis for Russia's closeness to America in this particular case. Accordingly, in June 2019, the Zionist regime hosted a meeting between its national security advisor and its Russian and American counterparts in Jerusalem to convince Moscow to cooperate with Washington and Tel Aviv to contain the Islamic Republic of Iran and reconsider its relations with Iran. (Grove, 2019). Although the efforts of the Zionist authorities to convince Russia to stop its cooperation with Iran have not been successful, but with the whispers of concluding a strategic cooperation agreement between Russia and Iran, the regime's moves to prevent this agreement through diplomatic pressure on Moscow will increase dramatically, and naturally, Russian authorities will consider this issue as a challenge in the development of their strategic cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

2.3 .Imbalance between geopolitics and geoeconomics

In recent years, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Russia have taken steps to improve the level of their relations. This has caused the level of contacts and interactions between the two countries to increase significantly in these years. The frequent visits of high-ranking officials of the two countries as well as the level of joint consultations indicate the will of the parties to advance and improve the level of bilateral relations. The issue of effort and desire to improve the level of relations has been continuously reflected and emphasized in the statements and positions of Iranian and Russian authorities. As mentioned, the strategic cooperation of the two countries in the Syrian crisis and their effective participation in the process of fighting terrorism in the region are important examples that confirm the existence of converging and progressing relations between Iran and Russia in recent years. Actions such as holding a joint military exercise in the strategic region of the Persian Gulf are also considered as other significant signs of the strategic development of the relations between the two countries.

However, what can be clearly stated about the growing trend of Tehran-Moscow relations is that the development of relations between the two countries was not balanced and comprehensive in terms of nature and dimensions and did not include all its elements. The serious weakness in this field is due to the stoppage and even decrease in the level of economic cooperation between Iran and Russia, which is absolutely not proportional to the capacity of the two neighboring countries. A look at the volume of trade and exchanges between the two countries in the last few years confirms this statement. The trade between Iran and Russia in 2017 was only equal to one billion and seven million dollars. This figure did not grow in 2018 and remained constant. This is while the commercial exchanges of the two countries in 2019 even experienced a downward trend and dropped to one billion and six hundred million dollars. According to customs statistics, in 2019, the volume of Russian exports to Iran remained constant, while the country's imports from Iran decreased by 27% (Kozhanov b, 2020: 16). The collection of economic statistics confirms that Iran and Russia have weak and strategic relations with each other in the field of trade and commerce. For example, Iran and Russia are not in the

list of each other's most important trading partners. The non-priority of economic relations in the set of interactions between Tehran and Moscow has caused the cooperation between the two countries to decrease in recent years even compared to earlier years. For example, while Iran's share of Russia's foreign trade in 2013 was about 0.5%, in 2019 it was estimated to be only 0.3% (Rodkiewicz, 2020).

Therefore, a gross disproportion can be seen between the dimensions and elements of the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Russia. While the two countries have established close and strategic relations in the field of geopolitical issues of West Asia, especially on the Syrian crisis, and have become important and effective actors in the region, they in the field of economic and geo-economic interactions have not experienced strategic and effective interactions. This disproportion can be explained by the geopolitical and geoeconomic imbalance in the relations between Iran and Russia, which causes the relations between the two countries to lack completeness and comprehensiveness. Such a situation can weaken the incentives to reach a sustainable agreement in the field of strategic cooperation between Iran and Russia. Both Russia and the Islamic Republic of Iran have a high need to develop strategic relations with countries that have the necessary power and capacity to help their economy and reduce the damage caused by the sanctions, due to facing the sanctions of the western countries. It is precisely for this reason that both countries have put the policy of developing strategic cooperation with the Chinese government on the agenda. Also, confronting Western sanctions and neutralizing these sanctions has been one of the main arguments of our country's officials in confirming the necessity of signing a strategic agreement with China. In such conditions, the weakness of geo-economics in the overall relations and interactions between Iran and Russia may strengthen this mindset among the authorities of the two countries that the conclusion of a comprehensive strategic agreement between Tehran and Moscow will not bring significant economic benefits for the two countries and as a result Incentives to reach such an agreement should be reduced.

3.3 .The low level of informal interactions

One of the effective stimuli in strengthening the convergence between countries and making them develop strong, stable and long-term relations is the existence of close and extensive people-to-people connections between them. These connections are a solid support for the durability and consistency of official relations between governments, especially in strategic dimensions. As mentioned in the initial part of the report, some experts consider the existence of a high level of interest, understanding and mutual trust between the people of the two countries as a necessary condition for establishing strategic relations between the governments. If these two countries are in a state of proximity and neighborhood, the expectation for the development of people's relations between them will be higher.

Regarding the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Russia, the existing facts indicate the low level of informal relations between the two countries. In fact, most of the communications and interactions between the two countries have a governmental nature and are less based on people-to-people interactions. Relations among the private sector in the two countries are not very noticeable, and the people's interactions between the citizens of the two countries, including in the form of the tourism industry, are at a low level. Both Russia and Iran have not taken adequate measures to develop people's communication and have paid less attention to this issue. Of course, in recent years, facilities have been created by both countries in areas such as student exchange or tourism development, which can be a basis for strengthening people-to-people relations, but it is natural that more fundamental steps need to be taken to achieve the desired situation. The low level of public interaction between Iran and Russia has greatly reduced the level of mutual understanding between the people of the two countries. This can be a challenge for the comprehensive and strategic relations between Iran and Russia. Although reaching a strategic agreement is within the authority and responsibility of the governments, but what leads to the deepening and strengthening these relationships is the close and widespread interaction between the people, which itself plays an effective role in encouraging the governments to strengthen strategic bilateral relations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In order to conclude a strategic and long-term agreement with the Russian government, the Islamic Republic of Iran should take into account a set of considerations and political requirements in order to provide a better opportunity to facilitate the conditions for concluding the agreement and to maximize the benefits derived from it. Paying attention to these requirements can be effective in encouraging the Russian side to conclude a strategic agreement with the Islamic Republic of Iran, and during the implementation of the agreement, it will bring more advantages to our country. In fact, the required requirements include both the pre-agreement period and the post-agreement period: based on this, some of the most important political requirements aimed at the strategic agreement with the Russian government can be mentioned as follows:

A) To change perception of Russian decision-makers on Iran's seriousness for comprehensive strategic cooperation

In recent years, the Islamic Republic of Iran has taken important steps in the field of foreign policy in order to strengthen the approach of looking to the East, and has tried to improve the level of relations with emerging powers at the same time as the process of global power transfer from the West to the East is gaining strength. The conclusion of a strategic agreement with the Chinese government can be analyzed and evaluated in this regard. The experience of the western parties not adhering to their commitments in the JCPOA, including the silence and even the cooperation of the Europeans in the face of the cruel American sanctions that intensified after the withdrawal of the Trump administration from the JCPOA, has played an important role in strengthening Iran's efforts to strengthen its relations with non-western powers. Is. However, according to some experiences and common trends in the past years, there is this mindset among some non-western actors, including Russia, that the establishment of the government in Iran is only in emergency situations and when the pressures and sanctions of the western countries reach their maximum, the issue of developing and strengthening relations with countries such as China and It puts Russia on the agenda. This issue has sometimes been transferred to the Iranian side by Russian

diplomats on the sidelines of bilateral meetings and negotiations. The prevailing opinion among some Russian circles and assemblies is that if Iran's relations with the West improve, we cannot expect much from Tehran to pursue the policy of strengthening cooperation with Moscow and other non-Western actors. According to the Russians, in the past years, Iran's government had announced its desire to make a significant leap in relations with Russia, especially in economic terms, but in the end, especially after the JCPOA agreement, it focused more of its capacities on the development of economic relations with European countries. For example, in 2007, Iran made big plans with Russia to increase bilateral trade to 200 billion dollars in 10 years with cooperation in the fields of energy, transportation, medicine, biotechnology, metal extraction, space exploration, etc. (Kortunov, 2018), but the necessary grounds for the operationalization of these plans were never provided. Such precedents have had a decisive effect on strengthening the mentioned mentality among the Russians regarding Iran's lack of seriousness for long-term cooperation. Naturally, in case of continuation of such perception and mentality among the Russian elites, the possibility of concluding or advancing a strategic agreement with Russia will face more limitations. Therefore, the action to change this perception and reflect Iran's determination and seriousness in the field of developing relations with emerging powers is of fundamental importance. The last message of the Supreme Leader to the President of Russia, which was presented to the Russian side during the visit of the Honorable Speaker of the Islamic Council to Moscow, was an effective measure to change this mindset of the Russians. The practical adherence of the Iranian government to the strategy of developing cooperation with non-western powers, including Russia, can be very effective in completely changing this mentality. In this case, regardless of the type of developments in the relations between Iran and Europe or the change of governments in Iran, the Russians will act with more confidence than the aging of long-term strategic relations with our country.

B) The necessity of planning and managing public opinion

The recent experience regarding the conclusion of a strategic agreement with the Chinese government, which took place at the beginning of April this year, indicates the high level of public

sensitivities inside the country relative to the field of foreign relations. At the same time, this sensitivity has provided a platform for the exploitation and abuse of the anti-revolutionary currents to create doubts about the nature of the regime's decisions in the field of foreign policy in the context of psychological operations and the use of media techniques. The ultimate goal of launching this campaign is to reduce social capital and create a gap between the nation and the government by creating an emotional and emotional atmosphere. The heavy attack that took place during the signing of the strategic agreement with China can be explained and described in this regard. There is no doubt that as soon as the probability of concluding a similar agreement with Russia rises, a wide media and psychological atmosphere will be created by the anti-revolutionary circles to make public opinion pessimistic about this agreement and the system's performance towards it. Considering the ups and downs history of Iran and Russia and the developments in the relations between the two countries in recent years and the general sensitivities that exist regarding the relations with Russia, there is no doubt that the volume of the enemy's psychological operations in relation to the strategic agreement with this country is far more than The agreement will be with China. Therefore, it is necessary that if the process of signing a strategic agreement between Iran and Russia is finalized, necessary measures should be taken in advance to manage public opinion and inform the society about this agreement, especially in terms of the requirements for its signing and its benefits for the country.

C) Promoting the strategic agreement with Russia on strengthen the axis of resistance

The Islamic Republic of Iran is considered a powerful and game-changing pole in the West Asian region, and by leading the axis of resistance, it has been able to create new equations in the region in opposition to the goals and intentions of the western players. Among the aspects of Iran's active role in regional equations, we can mention its effective role in the Syrian crisis, which brought about the failure of the Hebrew-Western-Arab axis in this campaign. The set of designs and roles played by the Islamic Republic of Iran in this crisis had an effective and decisive role in stabilizing the position and influence of the resistance front in the

region and became a turning point in the process of gaining power of this axis. Among the effective designs of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding this crisis, we can mention the initiative of involving Russia in Syria in line with the interests of the region and the axis of resistance. The effective actions of the martyr General Qassem Soleimani in consulting with the Russians and convincing the president of this country of the necessity of presence in the Syrian crisis, including by explaining the nature of the terrorist forces stationed in this country, is the most important factor in the active presence of Russia in Syria in order to support the central government of this country. This development showed the high capacity of the Islamic Republic of Iran to strengthen the axis of resistance in the region. Now, taking advantage of the experience of the Syrian crisis, taking into account all necessary and logical considerations, it is possible to generalize this experience to other areas that are related to the interests of the resistance. Specifically, regarding the crisis in Yemen, considering the positions of the Russians regarding this crisis and the strategic action of this country in vetoing one of the resolutions of the Security Council regarding Yemen, which was prepared against the resistance front, it can be said that Moscow is more involved in the conflict. This country took action. Especially that the political and military alignments in the Yemen crisis are not similar to the ruling alignments in the Syrian crisis. In such circumstances, the Islamic Republic of Iran, in the process of pursuing a strategic agreement with Russia, which will definitely include their regional interactions, can take measures to expand strategic links between Russia and the axis of resistance and use political and military capabilities. This country should act in line with the interests of this axis.

D) Extending the relations with Russian-based transnational institutional structures

In the period after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has tried to maintain the political, economic and security coherence and integrity of the surrounding environment by establishing and strengthening transnational institutional mechanisms. These institutions have also been a measure to prevent western influence in the surrounding areas of Russia. Among these institutions, the Collective Security Treaty Organization can be mentioned.

Considering the importance of these institutions in Russia's cross-border macro policies, participation in them is considered a bed for the member countries to develop strategic interactions with Moscow. Meanwhile, there is a possibility of participation in some of these institutions and membership in them for the Islamic Republic of Iran, which can be considered as a mechanism for developing strategic interactions with Russia and also strengthening Iran's presence in the strategic area of Eurasia. One of the most important of these institutions is the Eurasian Economic Union. Although the initial idea of such an institution was proposed by Nursultan Nazarbayev, the President of Kazakhstan in the 1990s, Russia played a prominent role in the realization of this idea and the formation of the related institution. During the meeting of the Supreme Economic Council of Eurasia on May 29, 2014, the Presidents of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan signed the Treaty establishing the Eurasian Economic Union. Kyrgyzstan and Armenia also joined this union later. This union, of course, regulates the economic interactions of the member countries based on its specific frameworks and rules, however, it should be kept in mind that like other Eurasian unions that were formed based on geopolitical interests, Vladimir Putin personally considers this union as a key goal of his foreign policy. Consider a little. He considers the Eurasian Economic Union not only a new stage of reunification of the post-Soviet area, but also wishes to turn it into a privileged bloc of influence such as the European Union, NAFTA and OPEC (Yilmaz, 2017: 4).

Considering the importance of this union in Russia's foreign policy, it is expected that the development of cooperation with this institution will have a direct effect on the stabilization of strategic cooperation between Iran and Russia. At the same time, considering the significant limitations that exist on Iran's economic relations with western countries, many experts evaluate the issue of membership in this union from the point of view of considerations and economic benefits for the benefit of the country. Based on this, in the past years, various measures were proposed in the direction of cooperation between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union, and finally, in 2018, during the meeting of the Eurasian Economic Union, an agreement on the establishment of a free trade zone was

signed between this union and Iran. Naturally, the development of links or similar institutions that Moscow has a strategic approach to can facilitate the development of strategic relations between Iran and Russia. Apart from the Eurasian Economic Union, strengthening the cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in which Iran currently has an observer membership, can also be a stronger guarantee for the stability of a long-term strategic relationship with Russia and even China. Of course, Iran's convergence with the Eurasian architecture of Russia and China is complicated as much as it has consequences for the economic and security relations of the whole of Eurasia (Tanchum, 2020) and there is no doubt that the first condition for strengthening cooperation with such institutions is to provide the highest interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

E) Focus on the software aspects of strategic relations

Earlier and in the classical era of international relations, strategic relations between countries were mostly formed based on relying on the hard foundations of power, and the soft aspects of power were usually neglected. Today, however, with the remarkable development of communication technologies and the expansion of international social relations, paying attention to the non-hard aspects of power has become more important than ever. The development of cultural relations and people-to-people relations is an effective element in strengthening strategic relations. Recalling what was mentioned earlier about the weakness of informal relations between Iran and Russia as one of the challenges of establishing strategic relations between the two countries, it is emphasized that one of the requirements for the establishment of strategic relations between the two countries is the effort to develop people-to-people relations. This will be possible especially through the attention of the parties to the field of soft power. Relying on this strategy does not mean ignoring the level of cultural differences between the two countries, however, and despite these differences, it is possible to reach areas of interaction in the field of soft power. The important point that should be noted here is that the Russian government, which is usually presented with a hard face in the international system, has paid special attention to the category of soft power in the last decade and has followed this aspect of power in the upper documents. He has emphasized

himself. What can provide grounds for strengthening the communication between the two countries in cultural issues is that Russia is trying to show a higher level of attention to religious affairs and soft power and to emphasize on the social and cultural forgotten values in the West. For this reason, in the amended version of the Russian constitution, which was approved after the referendum on constitutional change last year, the name of God was mentioned for the first time in this law, and social values such as supporting the family and opposing homosexuality were mentioned.

It seems that such cultural developments in Russia, which are in conflict with Western principles and norms, can be a basis for joint interactions and cooperation between the two countries in the field of soft power. In addition, the two countries can provide close cooperation in the field of strengthening cultural relations, such as promoting the Persian language in Russia and the Russian language in Iran. It is important to mention this point that in the process of paying attention to the category of soft power by Russian statesmen, the issue of promoting the Russian language has been specially taken into consideration. The final point is that in order to strengthen its soft power, Moscow has created a number of institutions and organizations that engage in cross-border activities on a large scale. "Rasky Mir" foundation and also "Rosotradnichestvo" agency are among the most important ones, the establishment of cooperation between these institutions and the corresponding institutions in the Islamic Republic of Iran can greatly help to strengthen the relations between the two countries in the field of soft power. This will have a great effect on encouraging the two countries to enter into a strategic agreement and confirm such an agreement in the long-term future.

F) Time management of strategic agreement signing

If the intention of the Islamic Republic of Iran to sign a strategic agreement with Russia is definite and the Russian side is also willing to sign this agreement, it is necessary to consider the sensitivity of public opinion in Iran towards the field of foreign relations on the one hand and the abuse of this sensitivity by the opposing media for Launching a psychological operation against

this agreement, on the other hand, it is necessary to anticipate the management of the strategic agreement with Russia.

In this regard, it is necessary to emphasize this point that during the last two decades, the issue of determining the assignment of the legal regime of The Caspian Sea and Iran's share of this sea have been particularly the focus of Iranian public opinion. During these years, whenever there was a change in the legal status of Caspian, it was monitored with high sensitivity inside the country. Among them, the main concern was the lack of fulfillment of Iran's historical rights in the Caspian Sea and the lack of allocation of a sufficient share to Iran as a result of the drafting of a new legal regime for this sea. Meanwhile, some domestic and foreign circles and media have tried to question any Caspian legal system that determines a share of less than 50% for Iran by following a special strategy and to fuel maximum demands regarding Iran's share. In this regard, the opponents of Iran-Russia relations have also tried to use the Caspian Sea issue in order to destroy the relations between the two countries and mobilize public opinion in Iran against the development of relations with Russia. Based on this, efforts are being made to introduce Iran's failure to reach a 50% share in the Caspian due to Russia's policies in the Caspian, so that public opinion based on nationalistic sentiments will adopt an anti-Russian position and become an obstacle to the development of relations with this country.

Regardless of how far the historical and legal facts are compatible with the issue of Iran's 50% share, and taking into account the fact that the opponents of Iran-Russia relations aim to maximize public demands, based on a distorted interpretation of the legal nature of the 1921 and 1940 agreements between Iran and the Soviet Union. on the application of the division regime in these contracts, it must be accepted that the high sensitivity of the public opinion in Iran towards the Caspian issue will cause the finalization of the legal regime of this sea to lead to widespread critical controversies inside the country, and in the meantime, with Criticism of Moscow's policy in the Caspian should also take positions against the relations between Iran and Russia. Certainly, in such a situation, the date of signing the strategic agreement with the Russian government shouldn't synchronized with the process of internal approval of the legal convention of the Caspian Sea, which

was signed by the presidents of the five coastal countries in 2018 and during the fifth meeting of the heads of the countries bordering the Caspian Sea. This agreement should be submitted to the Islamic Council for approval in the form of a bill, and it will certainly provoke many debates within the council (which will also attract the attention of public opinion). If these two issues are pursued simultaneously, the atmosphere related to the strategic agreement between Iran and Russia will definitely be affected by the controversial disputes related to the legal regime of the Caspian Sea and Iran's share of this sea, and it will have a negative effect on the relations between the two countries. Therefore, the time management of these two serious issues is of great importance in the process of concluding a strategic agreement with Russia.

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