

Iran – Russia Relations under Ahmadinejad Era

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Abstract:

This study aims to contribute an evaluation of Russian-Iran relations under Ahmadinejad administration in recent years. Therefore, the cases of nuclear, technologic, gas and oil cooperation, military and arms factor as well as international contexts are criticized during this study. In fact, in Russia's international economic strategy, the state plays a central role in managing the domestic economy and society as well as in interacting with the outside world. Energy has become the single most important issue in Russian foreign policy, occupying the place of importance and emphasis that military relations used to have in Soviet foreign policy and creating speculation about Russia as an energy superpower. Thus, energy dominates Russia's relations with almost every important country or region, namely its post-Soviet neighbors such as Europe, China, and Iran. So, Iran is an important neighbor in terms of Russian foreign policy. And it is obvious that the institutional context played an important role in the manner in which Russia engaged Iran. In the Iranian case, in contrast with the other cases examined, there was strong division between various segments of the government about the extent to which Russia should cooperate. This both stymied and encouraged cooperation at various times. In large part, economic actors were the first to engage in relations with this state. Both ministries and their 'clients' had much to gain in the Iranian market. Within all these aspects, the main objective of this article is to have a comprehensive understanding of Russian-Iran relations with Ahmadinejad administration in Iran.

Keywords: Ahmadinejad's Foreign Policy, Russia Foreign Policy, Energy Cooperation's, U.S. Foreign Policy, Nuclear Program

1. Introduction

The initial phase of the relations between Iran and Russia coincided with the rule of revolutionary leader Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, who considered the United States as the *Great Satan* and the Soviet Union as the *Lesser Satan*. So the relation of Iran and Russia was based on hostility. Khomeini often believed that Iran should be aligned with neither East nor West. He saw communism as anathema to the Islamic revolutionaries. Moscow feared Tehran's Islamic ideology might spread to its own Muslim republics, including the countries that bordered Iran. The Soviet Union had one of the world's largest Muslim populations¹.

Ayatollah Khomeini told: "we are fighting with international communism and West powers who is commander of America and Zionism." The Russian authorities were worried of influence of Islamic Revolution of Iran into the Muslims republics of Central Asia, therefore they were forced to act gently against Islamic believes subjects, so that in the 26th congress of Soviet Communist Party in 1981 "Borgenov" declared: "relieving movements could be done under the banner of Islam." following this position, The Russian authorities began to have contact with Islamic Republic of Iran but when Afghanistan was occupied by Russians and its domination on Muslims of Central Asia and war of aggression of Iraq against Iran by using Russian weapons prevented them to have good relationship with Iran.

Appointment of Gorbachev in March 1985 influenced all the external and internal policies of Russia. The Russian forces were left Afghanistan and resolution 598 was accepted by Iran. After that, the

¹ Mark N. Katz, *Iran and Russia*, <http://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/iran-and-russia> (Accessed on 2 June 2012)

way for communications and relations of two countries were prepared. When Mr. Rafsanjani traveled to Moscow the relationship between two countries was totally changed. Disintegrating of Union of Soviet started different types of relations between Iran and Russia².

By the mid-2000s, Russian economic and geopolitical aspirations were once again intertwined. Russia sought to take advantage of a bellicose Iranian leadership to obtain economic gains. Furthermore, as a result of its relationship with Iran, Russia was able to play an important intermediary role in the crisis around Iran's nuclear aspirations which broke out in 2006, thereby maintaining its self-perception as a great power. The Iranian case is particularly useful in demonstrating the evolution of Russian uses of alignments to balance the United States.³

This partnership presents the strongest example of American involvement in any of the relationships addressed in this study. The Iran issue was consistently on the Russian–American agenda ensuring that increasingly Russia could use its alignment with Iran to achieve its objectives towards the United States. While the Russian–American relationship was strong, Russian policy towards Iran was driven by the economic interests of a number of public and private actors.

2. Recent Russian-Iranian Relations

2.1. Factors in Russian policy towards Iran

Russian economic ministries and commercial lobbies drove relations in the initial period by responding to numerous economic proposals. These ministries, including the Ministries of Atomic Energy, Fuel and Energy, and Defence, and their 'clients' set the tone for relations which the government then had to reconcile with Russia's broader strategic goals.

The Russian government, however, remained sensitive to American concerns. Russia's early unambiguously pro-Western inclination allowed the United States to constrain Russian engagement with Iran. Thus, the United States was able to induce Russia to cancel a major submarine sale in 1992. The United States Senate also introduced an amendment linking foreign aid to Russia limiting its military cooperation with Iran. The economic ministries and lobbies, however, continued to press for partnership.⁴

By 1994, economic engagement provided the basis for increased cooperation in other fields. Notwithstanding these efforts, increasing pressure by Washington on Russian–Iranian cooperation resulted in the signing of the secret Gore–Chernomyrdin agreement. This was the high tide mark of Russian acceptance of American constraints on its relations.⁵ All in all, as more serious strains in Russian–American relations developed, the Russian government not only weakened American constraints but increasingly became proactive in using alignment with Iran to actively balance the United States. By the mid-2000s, Russia's global interests were at the forefront of Russian relations with Iran. As the international crises erupted in response to the Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's bellicose approach to Israel and to the nuclear question, Russia sought to maintain its role as key intermediary between Iran and the Western nations.

2.2. Russian Foreign Policy towards US Impact

By the end of President Putin's second term in May 2008; the question was how much of the content of US-Russia relations reflected a Cold War agenda. The focus was on the balance of forces in Europe: NATO expansion, US bases in Bulgaria and Romania, planned US missile defense systems in Eastern Europe, the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, the Balkans (Kosovo), and European energy

²Samady Alsadat Mahin , *The history of Iran and Russia relations*, <http://www.iras.ir/en/pages/?cid=1006>

(Accessed on 1 June 2012)

³ Celeste A. WALLENDER: (2007) "Russian Transimperialism and Its Implications", *The Washington Quarterly*, 30:12, p.110

⁴ Helen BELOPOLSKY (2009) *Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran, and Iraq in the Unipolar Era*, CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne.

⁵ Ibid.

dependence on Russia.⁶ Barack Obama's rise to power released the atmosphere surrounding US-Russian relations which by the fall of 2008 had reached their lowest point in the last 25 years. The beginning of negotiations on a new agreement to limit strategic offensive weapons, on understanding on Afghanistan, and Washington's decision not to locate missile sites in Central Europe, as well as the convergence on Iran, provide a basis for optimism.⁷ Russia is important for US foreign policy in many ways. The US needs a more constructive relationship with Russia to address many core global security issues including nuclear security and non-proliferation, terrorism, energy, and climate change.⁸

2.3. Russian Players in the Iranian Context

In a manner consistent with Yeltsin's general foreign policy approach, he took decisions with regard to Russia's policy towards Iran with little consideration for the ramifications for particular ministries and economic groups. This was especially true at times of crisis in the Russian-American relationship when threats of sanctions and political consequences for Russian-Iranian cooperation were at their peak. Given that Yeltsin saw Russian relations with Iran and Iraq as part of Russia's broader relations with the United States, at times of tension Yeltsin was willing to cede ties with Iran in favour of closer relations with the United States.

Russian policy reflected the pursuit of disparate positions and interests within the Russian political and economic elite. Though economic interests drove Russia's initial policy towards Iran, eventually the Russian government had to deal with the consequences of Russian-Iranian cooperation for Russia's broader strategic objectives. The case of Bushehr is particularly enlightening in this regard. In the light of the international crisis around Iran's nuclear programme in 2006, Russia continued to seek out resolutions at the political level while simultaneously seeking to resolve disputes over Iranian payments for Bushehr. Despite ministerial interests which spearheaded relations with Iran, at times of crisis in the Russian-American relationship, the Presidential administration took control of these relations.⁹

2.4. Iran and International Context

This dimension of Russian alignment policy towards Iran sheds light on three aspects of Russia's balancing policy towards the United States. First, it demonstrates Russian rhetorical uses for Iran in the pursuit of Russia's global agenda. As Russian-American relations declined, Russia vocally used its relations with Iran to actively challenge the United States' right to hegemony. Second, it demonstrates how Russia's approach to Iran parallels European political stances thereby challenging the American approach of isolating Iran. Third, the international context of Russian relations with Iran exhibits the interaction between Russian alignment policy and the US/Israeli relationship.

In January 2006, Iran decided to restart its nuclear programme after a two-year suspension while it conducted talks with European countries. The United States, Britain, France, and Germany called for Iran to be referred to the United Nations Security Council and called for an emergency IAEA meeting. It should be noted that whereas France and Germany held a common position with Russia on the issue of Iraq, they had grave concerns with regard to Iran's potential development of nuclear capabilities. In order to defuse the crisis, Russia proposed to set up a joint venture on Russian territory to enrich uranium. However, Russia was unable to reach agreement with Iran on uranium enrichment. European Union negotiators also sought some sort of peaceful resolution of the conflict.

During the crisis, Russia's traditional confluence of opinion with Europe continued with both groups attempting to ensure that the resolution to the conflict was diplomatic and left no room for military intervention. In March 2006, Russia's Foreign Minister firmly rejected a draft United Nations Security

⁶ Thomas GRAHAM: (2008) "*US-Russia Relations – Facing Reality Pragmatically*", CSIS/IFRI, p.5 Available on site http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/080717_graham_u.s.russia.pdf (Accessed on May 2012)

⁷ Feodor LUKYANOV: (2009) "*What Next After Warheads and Ideologies?*", Russian Analytical Digest, "US-Russian Relations", No.66, 20 October p.2

⁸ Anders ASLUND and Andrew KUCHINS: (2009) "*Pressing the 'Reset Button' on US-Russia Relations*", CSIS, Russia Balance Sheet, No.PB09-6, March, p.2

⁹ Helen BELOPOLSKY (2009) *Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran, and Iraq in the Unipolar Era*, CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne.

Council statement aimed at pressuring Iran to stop enriching uranium, despite a new offer of amendments by Western powers. By the end of March, the United Nations Security Council was able to issue a much watered down and not legally binding statement demanding that Iran suspend uranium enrichment. Notwithstanding the inability to reach agreement with Iran, Russian pressure did seem to have an impact on Iranian behaviour. In June 2006, Iranian President Ahmadinejad called a package of international incentives aimed at persuading Tehran to abandon nuclear activities ‘a step forward’. The comments came one day after Ahmadinejad met with Russian and Chinese presidents on the sidelines of a Eurasian summit in Shanghai. Though no final resolution was reached with regard to Iran’s nuclear programme, Russia continued to occupy a central role given its relationship with the Iranian government.¹⁰ The international context is extremely useful in elucidating the manner in which Russia came to use its relations with Iran in order to challenge the United States’ leadership of the international system. It also demonstrates the way in which the Russia–Iran–United States triangle interacted with Russia’s aspirations.

2.5. Russian Foreign Policy Concept of 2008

On 12 July 2008 President Medvedev signed a new edition of Foreign Policy concept. The new document described Russia as a great power with a full-fledged role in global affairs. Regarding to Euro-Atlantic security, document says Moscow’s desire to create a different regional collective security and cooperation system than the West has. Moreover, document rejects further expansion of NATO. And finally it emphasized the Moscow’s opposition to the planned US missile shield in Europe. Kosyrev believes that the old concept covered a very limited range of challenges, whereas the new one spotlights the current task of forming a new world order.¹¹

“The need for the international community to develop a common vision of our era is becoming ever more urgent, which could only be achieved through open and honest substantive discussions of the problems confronting the mankind. What is needed is to provide favorable conditions for scientists to carry out their professional work with a view to establishing the historical truth and preventing historical issues from becoming an instrument of practical policy.”¹²

“Russia will continue to seek the strengthening of principles of multilateralism in international affairs, development of architecture of international relations that would be based on the recognition by the international community of the principles of security indivisibility in the modern world and would reflect its diversity.”¹³

3. Issue in Russian-Iranian Relations with Ahmadinejad

3.1. Nuclear Technology Sales and Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant

According to the report made by IRNA on 26 August 2003, Iran had received feasibility studies from Russia for second reactor at Bushehr. Russian specialists believed that it would be more reasonable to build two completely new reactors rather than better to work on the reactor that had been abandoned by Siemens in the 1970s.

Following the April 2006 announcement by President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad that Iran had successfully enriched uranium, Russia sought to counteract US demands for a severe international response. In September 2006, Russia agreed to provide Iran with low-enriched uranium fuel for the Bushehr reactor by March 2007. At the same time, a number of significant delays plagued the Bushehr project. Though Russian officials characterised these delays as resulting from technical problems, officials from other nations have

¹⁰ Helen BELOPOLSKY (2009) *Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran, and Iraq in the Unipolar Era*, CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne.

¹¹ Dmitry KOSYREV: (2008) Foreign Policy: Medvedev Taking Inventory”, RIA Novosti, 15 June <http://en.rian.ru/analysis/20080715/114049494.html> (Accessed on 20 May 2012).

¹² The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation (2008) Available on site <http://www.mid.ru/ns-osndoc.nsf/0e9272bafa34209743256c630042d1aa/cef95560654d4ca5c32574960036cddb?OpenDocument> (Accessed on 20 May 2012)

¹³ Ibid

insinuated that Russia may have been dragging its feet, perhaps to exert pressure on Iran to ameliorate tensions.

On 21 August 2010, the Bushehr facility started to work and was qualified as an operational nuclear power plant. In early September 2011, Iran officially announced that the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant had been reloaded with fuel and successfully connected to the nation's power system¹⁴.

On 12 September 2011, the launch of the Bushehr nuclear power plant was announced by Iran government. This power plant was originally intended to be the location of a German-built reactor in the 1970s, however; the new reactor was to be built to Russian design specifications under an agreement between the Russian and Iranian governments for \$800-million. Iran had signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). However, it did not sign two additional protocols to the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) Program 93 + 2, which was to prevent states from developing nuclear weapons covertly. Iran was also planning to construct three to five additional reactor facilities for an estimated cost of \$3.2 billion. It was estimated that the total cost of building the reactor complex at Bushehr may be roughly \$4-6 billion since construction began in 1976.

Nuclear energy was a field in which Russia had an important advantage at a time in which Russia had fewer and fewer competitive technologies. For this reason, Minatom as well as companies such as *Tekhnopromexport* which had long delivered power equipment and built power stations in Iran were eager to sell their technology abroad. Minatom was to become one of the most proactive sectors of the Russian government in engaging Iran. Russian provision of nuclear technology to Iran was a particularly sensitive area, as it attracted consistent and intense criticism from the United States. This emphasis served to raise the salience of nuclear technology transfers to Iran in Russian foreign policy calculations.¹⁵ Notwithstanding Russia's economic interests in Iran, Russia acted in a cautious manner, pursuing its interests while ensuring that it did not unduly harm relations with its Western partners. Protracted negotiations over the text of UN Resolution 1737 continued until December 2006. Russia had learned a number of important lessons from the US invasion of Iraq. In October 2006, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov declared that, 'We cannot support and will actively oppose any attempt to use the Security Council to punish Iran or to use Iran's nuclear program in order to promote the idea of regime change.'

3.2. Military Technology and Weapons Sales

In November 2005, Russia reached agreement for the sale of 29 TOR-M1 short-range anti-aircraft systems to Iran in a deal valued at more than \$700 million. In response to questions about this sale, Defence Minister Ivanov stated that Moscow might supply Tehran with more weapons in the future. 'If Iran wants to buy defensive, I underline defensive, equipment for its armed forces, then why not?' Incidentally, during the previous spring, the United States had called on all countries to stop arms exports to Iran. Russian sales of arms and military technology to Iran responded to the need and demands of the Russian military-industrial complex. Russia came to use its cooperation with Iran to gain leverage in its relations with the United States and later to demonstrate its right as a sovereign actor to cooperate with whomever it chose. An area of cooperation between Russia and Iran which experienced less overt opposition from the United States, but constituted an important dimension of Russian-Iranian economic cooperation, was the oil and gas sector.

3.3. Oil and Gas Cooperation

Russian-Iranian cooperation sought to exclude the United States from negotiations on oil and gas exploration in the Caspian Sea. Their policies were meant to ensure that the United States was not able to gain a foothold through other Caspian littoral states. Russian-Iranian interests did not always coincide as they were in many senses competitors in the Caspian Sea. Nonetheless, what was able to bring them together was the greater threat of American penetration in this area.¹⁶ Russia was interested in lucrative cooperation in

¹⁴ *Bushehr*, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/iran/bushehr.htm> (Accessed on 31 May 2012)

¹⁵ Helen BELOPOLSKY (2009) *Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran, and Iraq in the Unipolar Era*, CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne.

¹⁶ Helen BELOPOLSKY (2009) *Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran, and Iraq in the Unipolar Era*, CPI Antony Rowe, Chippenham and Eastbourne.

Iran's energy, petrochemical, gas production, oil transit, and refinery industries. By March 2003, Russia and Iran came to an agreement on the creation of a joint venture for the development of gas production facilities in Iran and the supply of Iranian gas to international markets. This decision was made at the fourth meeting of the Russian–Iranian Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation with the participation of *Gazprom*.

By June 2006, *Gazprom* chief executive Alexei Miller and Iran's Deputy Oil Minister Nejad Hosseini agreed to study the possibility of forming a joint enterprise to develop oil and gas deposits. President Ahmadinejad, speaking at a meeting with President Putin in Shanghai, went further by proposing that Moscow and Tehran determine prices for natural gas together. Though this OPEC-like proposition has yet to go further than rhetoric, substantial cooperation in the field of oil and gas has continued with the December 2006 meeting of the Intergovernmental Commission, during which Iran invited Russian companies to set up new joint ventures for oil and gas extraction in Iran and third countries. Iran provided a multitude of opportunities for Russian companies, and these groups were responsive. This sector demonstrates the lack of coordination in areas of Russian policy with government policy following behind the actions of economic actors. The desire for economic gain was far more salient in this area than American influence. Russian oil and gas concerns in the Caspian Sea region were far more susceptible to American influence. Negotiations as to the status of the Caspian Sea had been ongoing. Given the inability to find consensus, there was major anxiety that if the littoral states failed to adopt suitable policies for the exploitation of oil and gas reserves, Western powers would gain a foothold. Russian–Iranian cooperation in this area sought to counteract American objectives.

3.4. Foreign Policy Crossroads

Russia's strengthening position on the Iranian question, which took place in 2009 definitely resulted from Obama's decision to reject placing missile defense sites in Poland and Czech Republic at that time.¹⁷ Russia's interests in Iran are well known and span from billions in arms sales and sales of nuclear technology to lucrative oil and gas contracts for Russian companies on- and offshore. This serves the dual purpose of keeping the US and its allies pre-occupied and preventing Western Companies from helping Iran to send its gas West through the proposed Nabucco gas pipeline.¹⁸

Moreover, with Russian President Dmitri Medvedev at his side, Bakiyev announced in Moscow in 2009 that he wants the US to leave Manas Air Base, key military cargo hubs at the airport of the Kyrgyzstan capital Bishkek that has been used by NATO and US troops in Afghanistan since 2001.¹⁹ This picture was a message to US that honey moon in Central Asia was over. With this move, the Kremlin signaled the West that to gain access to Central Asia's Western countries must first request permission from Moscow and pay the Kremlin for transit.²⁰ According to Trenin, US global hegemony is directly challenged by Russia's regional great power ambitions.²¹

As a result, it is inevitable that Russia will be a key element of a wide array of policies to the Obama administration, including dealing with Iran and the construction of a broader nonproliferation regime, energy security, nuclear arms reductions, and Afghanistan. Russia policy will also be central to US designs for NATO, including how to deal with Georgia and Ukraine.²² According to Baran, diversification away from Russian energy is not only important for the European and the Euro-Atlantic community's safety and

¹⁷ Feodor LUKYANOV: (2009) "US-Russian Relations", *Russian Analytical Digest*, No.60, 20 October, p.3.

¹⁸ Ariel COHEN: (2009) "How The Obama Administration Should Engage Russia", *Testimony Before Senate Foreign Relations Committee Hearing on "Prospects For Engagement With Russia"*, Available on site <http://www.heritage.org/research/testimony/how-the-obama-administration-should-engage-russia> (Accessed on May 2012).

¹⁹ Ibid, p.7

²⁰ Samuel CHARAP, Laura CONLEY, Peter JUUL, Andrew LIGHT, and Julian WONG: (2009) "After the 'Reset': A Strategy and New Agenda for US Russia Policy", *Center for American Progress*, July, p.18 Available on site http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/2009/07/after_reset.html (accessed May 2012)

²¹ Dmitri TRENIN: (2008) "Thinking Strategically about Russia", *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, p.2 Available on site http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/thinking_strategically_russia.pdf (Accessed on May 2012).

²² Stephen F. SZABO: (2009) "Can Berlin and Washington Agree on Russia?", *The Washington Quarterly*, 32:4, October, 23-41.

security, but also because of the essential role that it plays in the democracy efforts in Central and Eastern Europe –as well as in other parts of the former Soviet space such as the Caucasus and Central Asia.²³

3.5. Putin’s Tenure and Pick of Dreams of Iranian/Russian Axis

From the very beginning of his tenure, Putin proclaimed that building a strong state and restoring Russia’s worldwide standing were his major priorities. He quickly consolidated his power by increasing Moscow’s control over the provincial governors, who had often behaved as almost independent rulers by the end of Yeltsin’s regime. He also clipped the wings of some financial tycoons, putting some in prison and driving others to emigrate; this dramatically increased his power over the remaining moguls who had amassed enormous wealth through shady deeds and had considerable political clout during Yeltsin’s presidency. Putin’s foreign policy initiative was also conspicuously Asian-oriented and aimed to demonstrate that Russia again was a major power.²⁴

The two most important players in Russian foreign policy on Iran are President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin. Medvedev appears inclined to seek good relations with America and the West, and to see Iran as a problem. Prime Minister Putin, in contrast, appears to see America as an adversary and Iran as a highly lucrative potential partner for Russia. The two men, however, work closely together. Some differences may be more reflective of a policy debate than a power struggle.

4. Evaluations of Major Topics in Russia-Iran Relations

4.1. Role of Energy in Russia’s Foreign Policy towards Iran

As invests increases in the region for new reserve dwelling, the security need increases in a parallel way. Especially developed Western states become concerned about the regional security since many European states are planning to import oil and natural gas from the Caspian Sea. Moreover, states like Iran, Turkey and Russia are also competing over transfer routes of the hydrocarbons and security problems of each state are highly emphasized to get the biggest share of revenues from routes or export. While Russia is the least favorite route for the exporter states, Iran lacks support from the developed states like the U.S., and Turkey becomes a route with high costs and concerns for terrorist sabotages. As none of the states have perfect reasons for having the main route, the struggle over new routes continues to go on. This situation also puts Russia and Iran face to face as rivals. Both countries refuse and stand against the BTC pipeline. This is also one of the reasons—apart from the political and economic reasons on the Caspian Sea’s allocation among littoral states- why Russia and Iran cooperate on the Caspian Sea issue with other littoral states.²⁵

4.2. Role of Security in Russia’s Foreign Policy towards Iran

Iranian – Russian relations are based on military, political and economic dimensions of security complex. It is common knowledge that Iran buys most of her military equipment’s from Russia when she is not able to produce her own due to technical illiteracy or unavailability – thanks to the U.S. embargo. Military dimension is an important dimension on security complex orientation of Central Asia. When the first Russian oriented security complex emerged, apart from the economic side, military protection of Russia, both for external and internal threats, was very important. The reason why Turkey could not stay as the main actor in the Central Asia is that Turkey was not capable of helping the Central Asian states with their security problems. This is why Iran replaced Turkey later. Iran’s influence in Central Asia’s security complex was not actually very simple like in Turkish or Russian cases. Iran was able to provide light arms and simple technology to the Central Asian states, but when it came to high-technological weapons and military

²³ Zeyno BARAN: (2007) “Central and Eastern Europe: Assessing the Democratic Transition”, *Testimony for US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs*, Serial No.110-102, July 25, p.9 Available on site <http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/110/36990.pdf> (Accessed on 19 May 2012).

²⁴ Dmitry SHLAPENTOKH (2009) *Russian Elite Image of Iran: From The Late Soviet Era to the Present*, Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) Publication.

²⁵ Mona DINPAJOUH: (2009) *Russian Foreign Policy Towards Iran Under Vladimir Putin: 2000 – 2008*, Middle East Technical University.

equipment's, Iran was not capable of helping The Central Asian states as Iran had been buying these weapons from Russia.²⁶

4.3. Role of Regional Dimension in Russian Foreign Policy towards Iran

As a result of Russia's Eurasianists approach in her foreign policy, Central Asia and the Caucasus continues to be important for Russian interests, which results in a determinant factor for Russia's relations with Iran. Despite Russia's protective attitude towards the region and the rivalry between Russia and Iran, cooperation on oil and natural gas transfer projects became possible. What made cooperation possible is Russia's desire to reach further places in Asia like India and Pakistan. Using Iran's proximity to these states, Russia also enabled an open possible route for future oil and natural gas transfers. To sum up, regional issues like security threats and arms needs with hydrocarbon transfers bring Russia and Iran face to face or together many times either for cooperation or for rivalry. The type of interactions and situations between Russia and Iran depends on Russia's interests of the time. If Iran is somehow in the way of a possible interest of Russia, then rivalry is unavoidable while cooperation is only possible if Russia sees a positive outcome for herself in the end like regional stability and security via regional organizations or bilateral cooperation.²⁷

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, for Russian-Iranian relations, there were coinciding long-term interests in the settlement of regional and inter-ethnic conflicts, and the prevention of future security threats in the region. Both states expressed their mutual interest in the 'provision of security and stability in the strategically important region of Central Asia and the Caucasus'. This section addresses the three main sectors of regional cooperation, focusing on Russian-Iranian diplomatic efforts to find peaceable solutions to regional conflicts. Russia and Iran jointly tackled three major areas of regional tension: Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and the Caspian Sea. On the first two issues, Russia hoped that Iran would take a moderate position on the Islamic question and facilitate resolution to the conflicts. On the third, economic concerns were at play. Ensuring that the United States had as little influence as possible over the Caspian Sea region became a goal of Russian-Iranian regional policy. During Ahmadinejad's tenure as President of Iran the foreign policy of the country took a different approach from the previous administration. Relations with the West generally soured while relations with other parts of the world, including Africa and Latin America, were on the ascendance.

Russia's policy towards Iran starkly highlights the deliberate balancing behavior that Russia exhibited through its alignments with regard to the United States. The policy goals of economic actors became secondary to Russian geopolitical considerations precisely at those points when Russian-American relations were most strained. This, in turn, induced the state to step in and coordinate policy. Russian-Iranian cooperation in the fields of nuclear technology and weapons sales is useful in elucidating the evolution of Russian policy. In response to cracks in the Russian-American relationship, Russia undertook a policy of active balancing. Whereas Russian policy for most of the period was largely responsive to Iranian initiatives, Russia became proactive in its nuclear policy towards Iran as a result of its relations with the United States. Consequently, in the Iranian case, the American connection saw Russia come to use its relationship to clearly demonstrate its defiance and independence.

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²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Mona DINPAJOUH: (2009) *Russian Foreign Policy Towards Iran Under Vladimir Putin: 2000 – 2008*, Middle East Technical University.

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