

## Iran-Russia Relations: New Opportunities and Existing Problems\*

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Iran and Russia have had increasing and changing relations from 1991 to 2021. At first glance, the close political relationship of Russia and Iran has been on the bilateral, regional, and international levels. Tehran and Moscow have fluctuating political, economic, and technical-military trade, so the level of economic and trade cooperation has remained less than \$ 4 billion over three decades. Despite their cooperation in three major regional crises, this cooperation lacked institutionalization and lasting mechanisms. On the international level, Iran and Russia emphasize a multipolar and multilateral international system and oppose double standards on human rights and the protection of the UN Security Council, pursuing a common policy in this regard. At the same time, however, this does not mean that there are no problems in Iran-Russia ties, and the general trend of relations shows that despite common interests and threats, these relations have not been lasting and long-term ones and therefore have been faced with problems and limitations. The main question is why do Iran-Russia ties face problems such as limited trade, short-term regional cooperation, and being influenced by other international actors? In this article, it is observed that attitudes and programmes presented by domestic and international media, Russia's regional balance policy, and Iran's behaviour outside the international system have limited the level and depth of relations between the two states. To examine this hypothesis, the author first looks at the trend of relations over the last three decades and then discusses the opportunities and possibilities that affect these relations. Finally, he reviews and analyses the existing problems and obstacles hindering stable relations.

*Keywords:* economic relations, Iran, Russia, cooperation, counterterrorism, Syria

На протяжении трех десятилетий, в 1991–2021 гг., отношения Ирана и России претерпевали изменения. Можно говорить о тесном политическом взаимодействии между Россией и Ираном, которое развивалось на различных уровнях. Экономическое сотрудничество испытывало взлеты и падения, но внешнеторговый оборот оставался на уровне менее 4 млрд

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долларов в течение трех десятилетий. По мнению автора, для реализации целей взаимодействия РФ и Ирана необходимы его институционализация и создание долговременных механизмов сотрудничества. Иран и Россия выступают за многополярный мировой порядок, против двойных стандартов в области защиты прав человека, проводят общую политику в этих вопросах. Однако это не означает, что в ирано-российских связях отсутствуют противоречия. Несмотря на общее понимание многих вопросов международной безопасности, в рассматриваемый период эти отношения не были прочными, в их рамках возникали различные проблемы. Главный вопрос заключается в том, почему для ирано-российского взаимодействия характерны ограниченные объемы торговли, краткосрочное региональное сотрудничество и влияние на двусторонние отношения других международных игроков. В статье доказано, что формируемая мировыми СМИ повестка дня, слабость экономик России и Ирана, проводимая Россией на Ближнем и Среднем Востоке политика регионального баланса и реализация руководством Ирана внешней политики страны вне международной системы ограничили уровень и глубину отношений между двумя государствами.

*Ключевые слова:* экономические отношения, Иран, Россия, сотрудничество, борьба с терроризмом, Сирия

Iran-Russia relations over the last three decades, from 1991 to 2021, have been one of the most important issues in international politics and have been monitored by third parties such as the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. Some of these actors have even tried to force Russia to limit relations. Issues and events such as crises in Syria, Afghanistan, and Central Asia show that Tehran-Moscow ties go far beyond their bilateral relations and have a great impact on other states, regions, and international issues. On the other hand, if the severe decline of Iran's relations with Russia means that Iran is getting closer to the West, it will concern the Kremlin and may have important implications for Russia in regional and world systems. Therefore, after the Ukraine crisis of 2014, Iran, along with China, India, and Turkey, was also mentioned as one of the important actors in Russia's Greater Eurasian approach and eastern policy.

Therefore, Russia and Iran have had important interactions on the bilateral, regional, and international levels. On both sides, the issue of bilateral relations has been of great importance, always receiving serious attention in foreign policy documents, the statements of senior officials, and think tanks. However, these interactions have had many ups and downs, leading to periods of closeness and distance on various issues. Despite the importance of Tehran-Moscow ties and cooperation for both sides and other countries in the region, these relations still involve various problems. The level of economic cooperation is limited to less than \$4 billion and regional cooperation is not institutionalized. Russia's vote on six sanction resolutions against Iran from 2005 to 2010 and the fact that cooperation

between the two sides is influenced by the behaviour of other actors are major problems in maintaining the relationship.

How the ties between Tehran and Moscow have been over the last three decades, what ups and downs they have had, and what their achievements have been for both sides are some of the questions that we answer in this article. But the main question is why Iran-Russia ties have faced significant problems, such as limited trade, limited regional interactions, and instability on the international level? In response, I propose the idea that “domestic attitudes and representations in the media, the incomplete foundations of the two states’ economies, Russia’s regional balance policy, and Iran’s international game outside the system have limited the level of relations between both sides.” Of course, proposing these as the main factors to answer the article’s main question does not mean that other factors are denied or ignored. Rather, the author believes that these factors have more weight in explaining the problems of Tehran-Moscow relations; as long as they continue, relations and cooperation will remain limited. Any serious opening in relations will occur by finding a solution to these problems.

To examine the hypothesis, I try to analyse the qualitative content of documents and data on foreign policy and interactions between the two states and explain the causes and factors affecting the limited relations of Tehran and Moscow. Therefore, this study is explanatory in terms of its method and discusses the most important obstacles and problems in the development of relations between the two sides from a pathological perspective. I first describe the trends of relations between the two sides on the bilateral, regional, and international levels. Then, I discuss the problems, limitations, and main obstacles to relations. At the end, I will present future perspectives and conclude the discussions by analysing the factors affecting relations.

### **Trend and development**

New Iran-Russia ties began with a ten-year cooperation agreement between the two countries in 1989. In 2001, an agreement on the foundations of relations between the two countries was signed for a period of ten years: this was extended in 2009 and March 2021. According to these agreements, the cooperation between Iran and Russia, despite their differences and ups and downs, continued on bilateral, regional, and international levels.

Changing global, regional, and national geopolitical conditions for the two countries after the Cold War, the elimination of ideology in Russian foreign policy and detent in Iran’s foreign policy have paved the way for the further expansion of relations and cooperation. But, at the same time, relations between the two countries were limited by Russia’s pro-Western policies from 1991 to 1995. It was only after the Kosovo crisis in 1999 that Russia became frustrated with close relations with the West; in 2000, with Vladimir Putin coming to power and NATO and the West being listed as a military threat in Russia’s national strategic documents, Iran-Russia relations improved.

But this improvement did not last long; from 2005, the era of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's radical foreign policy and Dmitry Medvedev's "modernization partnership with the West" [Krumm, p. 10], we saw the reduction of cooperation. When the International Atomic Energy Agency referred Iran's case to the UN Security Council, Russia voted along with other permanent members in favour of the six resolutions and imposed various sanctions on Iran. These events, and the US's "reset" plan in 2009, gradually led to a serious reduction in relations. On 9 June 2010, Medvedev issued an order banning the sale of S300 missile systems to Iran [Rumer]. This ruling was a final blow to the ties between the two nations up to 2012.

When Putin was re-elected in 2012 and the Syrian crisis began, new relations with Russia were formed, the most important features of which were the "military coalition" in support of the Syrian government and counter-terrorism in the region. This cooperation has taken on more important dimensions since 2014, following the Ukraine crisis and the deterioration of Western relations with Russia. Between 2015 and 2018, Putin met with the Iranian leader three times. Therefore, the most important period of Tehran-Moscow ties was from 2013 to 2021, when bilateral relations entered a new phase characterised by dialogue, understanding, and cooperation on various issues.

The level of dialogue between the two countries' leaders has never been so high over the last five hundred years. The Russian president has visited Iran four times since 2013, and the Iranian president has visited Russia five times. In total, the two presidents have met about 17 times in six years. There has been a significant leap in the economic sector and in the field of military and technical cooperation; for example, Russia has delivered S-300 missile defence systems to Iran.

As we saw, Iran-Russia relations have operated on different levels over the last three decades. On the bilateral level, following the first decade, Russia became Iran's main source of advanced conventional arms and Iran's first military partner, and this technical and defence relationship lasted until the start of international sanctions on Iran in 2006.

According to some statistics, the amount of military technical relations has reached \$4 billion. Others have estimated the value of arms contracts at \$6 billion [Ehteshami, Gawdat, p. 156]. These military ties have also caused concern among the Americans; so, at various stages, including the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement in 1995, attempts were made to limit them. At the beginning of the Putin era, the Russian president continued the cooperation. The weapons that Iran bought from Russia have been crucial in strengthening its defence, and the Tor-M1 and S-300 defence missiles have helped secure Iran's airspace against any military threats.

Russia-Iran economic relations began in 1991 at about \$400 million and increased to more than \$3 billion by 2010, but then declined under international sanctions from 2011 to 2013 to their lowest level, less than \$1 billion. Annual trade averaged \$3.1 billion from 2007 to 2011, then fell

to \$2.33 billion in 2012. The following chart shows the trend of economic relations between the two countries from 1991 to 2014 (Fig. 1).

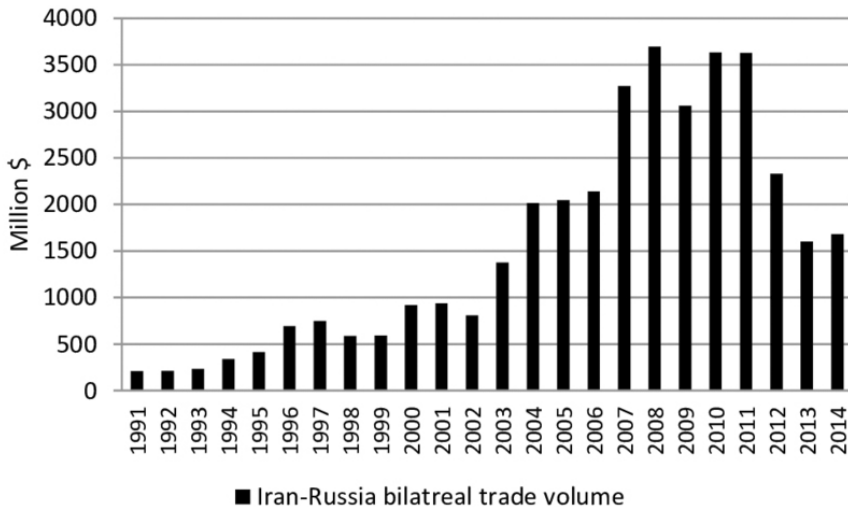


Fig. 1. Statistics of Iran Russia Trade 1991–2014 [Rasoulinezhad, Popova]

Since 1991, Moscow and Tehran have a common understanding of threats and mutual interests in a wide number of regions from South Asia and Afghanistan to Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the south Caucasus, and the Middle East, which has formed the basis of their cooperation. The threat of the expanding influence of Western powers and their allies, the emergence and spread of radicalism, fears of regional instability, and the possibility of spreading crises in the region between the borders of the two countries have been very effective in expanding this cooperation. Despite differences between the two governments' views on some regional issues, Tehran and Moscow cooperated significantly in the three crises of Tajikistan from 1992 to 1997, fought together against the Taliban from 1996 to 2001, and have engaged in counter-terrorism cooperation in Syria since 2012.

In the case of Syria, Iran-Russia cooperation has effectively helped regional security and stability, maintaining the government in Syria and preventing further crisis in this country [Karami]. Russia's short-term use in August 2016 of the Iranian air base near the city of Hamadan for bombing targets in Syria symbolizes that Russia-Iran relations have entered a fundamentally new phase [Тренин].

Iran, Russia, and India signed the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) agreement in 2000; since then, various measures have been taken to make this corridor operational. Ports in southeastern Iran have served as strategic transportation points to Russia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Afghanistan; India has begun investing in Chabahar to prepare the route. On 11 June 2022, INSTC began operations with the first shipment from Russia to India.

The two states also cooperate in the framework of regional organizations. Iran has been an observer member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) since 2005 and has applied for official membership since 2007, but remained outside until the summer of 2021. Finally, Iran's membership in the SCO was approved on 17 September 2021 during a summit in Tajikistan: Iran has started the process of joining the organs of this institution.

Under an agreement on trade preferences between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union in 2017, the two sides lifted customs restrictions on trade, so trade between Iran and its members has increased in recent years. The interim agreement to establish a free trade area between the EAEU and Iran came into force on 27 October 2019 and provided for a reduction in customs duties for 862 categories of goods. The commodity list covers approximately 50% of the total reciprocal trade between the partners. The trade turnover between the EAEU and Iran increased to \$2.9 billion in 2020, an 18 % increase over 2019 [Smagin]. According to [eaeunion.org](http://eaeunion.org), the EAEU and its Iranian representative are going to hold the next round of negotiations on a permanent and full-fledged free trade memorandum of understanding in the Russian capital in September.

On the international level, Iran and Russia oppose the unipolar and unilateral international system: with the expansion of NATO and the deployment of the NATO missile shield, there are common views, goals, and interests. They are also opposed to double standards in the field of human rights and, despite slightly different views, are willing to strengthen the UN and use UN mechanisms to resolve crises and international issues. Specifically, we can mention the two cases of Yemen and Iraq. On 28 February 2018, Russia blocked the adoption of a Security Council resolution on Yemen in which Iran was condemned. On 31 December 2019, Russia prevented the adoption of an anti-Iranian resolution on the attack on the US embassy in Baghdad.

One of the most important issues for Russia has been Iran's nuclear programme. Russia insists on maintaining N. P. T. and international control regimes within the framework of the concept of "strategic stability", an important principle of its foreign policy. At the same time, Moscow is concerned that Western states may use these international norms and regimes as a means for violating the national sovereignty of states. Therefore, Moscow has supported the peaceful settlement of this case.

However, during the Medvedev era and after the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board of Governors voted to refer Iran's case to the UN Security Council, Russia, along with other permanent members of the Security Council, voted in favour of the six sanction resolutions against Iran. In JCPOA, Moscow has had a balanced policy between the two sides to reach a nuclear agreement: the settlement of the nuclear issue has not had a significant negative impact on Russian-Iranian talks. The two sides continue to be interested in cooperating on a wide range of issues. Russian policy makers believe that a nuclear deal with Iran may even be in Moscow's interest because it will remove sanctions that have hindered Russia's economic activity in Iran and will ensure that will not become another red dot on the CIS margin [Kozhanov, p. 14]. Russia also expressed concerns



about the US's withdrawal from the nuclear deal with Iran in 2018 and welcomed the US's return to the Vienna talks at the beginning of 2021.

Reviewing the trend of relations between Tehran and Moscow over the last three decades, we see that they have had ups and downs and these relations have improved since 2012. With the Russian military operation in Ukraine, it seems that this cooperation will expand more than at any other time.

### **Opportunities and possibilities**

Since 1991 and the formation of a new international and regional system, Iran and Russia were placed in a different strategic environment: new opportunities were created for their relationship, such as new geopolitics in Eurasia, pressures and restrictions from the US, mutual economic needs, and serious political will among elites. Tehran and Moscow have significant interest in regional stability and security and countering terrorism and foreign intervention.

Over the past three decades, the two countries have been under varying degrees of Western pressure, from intervention in internal affairs under pretexts such as human rights to trying to limit their regional influence and economic sanctions. Iran needed new technologies during the post-war reconstruction period, and this was especially important in the field of military industry. These relations began in the 1990s, and Russia was the only market for Iran's military industry [Parker, 2009, p. 103—104]. Hence, before the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Iran from 2008, a large amount of weapons and technical supplies were provided. For Russia, too, in the new era of declining military sales, the Iranian military market was important, making Iran the third largest customer for Russian arms. UN Security Council sanctions have prevented Iran-Russia technical and military cooperation from continuing, but from 2020 and the official end of the Iran arms embargo under UN Security Council Resolution 2231, Iran-Russia technical and military relations have begun again.

The other field of relations is nuclear energy: in the late 1980s, Iran tried to gain supplies from foreign markets and chose Russia. From 1992 to 1995, Moscow was not to be deterred from negotiations for a contract worth nearly \$800 million for the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power station [Parker, p. 104]. On 4 September 2011, this power station began to operate and provide electricity to the national grid. This was the first in a network of nuclear facilities that reduce reliance on fossil fuels. On 11 November 2014, Russia agreed to build two new nuclear power reactors in Iran, with the possibility of six more, in a deal that greatly expands nuclear cooperation between the two countries [Kramer].

But beyond the geopolitical, environmental, and economic factors, we must mention the political will between the leaders of the two countries. In 2014, President Putin spoke of the beginning of a new phase in relations between the two countries and called Iran a good neighbour [Belobrov]. He has visited Iran four times in the last two decades and met with Ayatollah Khamenei. The first visit occurred in 2007: the Iranian leader considered

the expansion of Tehran-Moscow relations to be in the interests of both countries, stressing that an independent Iran and a strong Russia are good for both sides. The president of Russia also emphasized that Russia's cooperation with Tehran has no limits [Khamenei, 2007].

However, 2015 should be considered a very important period in the relations, the threshold of an important and crucial stage: this was when the Syrian crisis intensified and there was a meeting between the Russian president and the Iranian leader. In 2017, the Russian president stressed that Iran is a "strategic partner" and a "great neighbour" [Khamenei, 2017]. In 2018, they met for the fourth time: the Iranian leader emphasized the United States as a threat to humanity and welcomed the Russian president's views on the UN Security Council [Khamenei, 2018].

Therefore, the meeting of the leaders of the two countries and the events of 2014 to 2018 should be considered as a demonstration of the fundamental political will for military and political cooperation. It is an important fact that Iran's eastern policy is both a reaction to Western pressure and a proactive move in a changing global environment that contains opportunities for bilateral, regional, and international interactions [Sanaei, Karami]. Given the possibilities for cooperation between Iran and Russia (most importantly, military cooperation in the Syrian crisis), some analysts see their relationship as a strategic alliance on the regional level [Belobrov, p. 34], a strategic relationship [Velayati], or tactical cooperation [Tabrizi].

However, the realities of relations show that despite the important opportunities that exist for development, the two sides cannot be considered strategic allies. Thus, one can only equate Iran-Russia cooperation on regional issues with a "strategic coalition against terrorism", such as opposition to Taliban rule in Afghanistan in the 1990s and maintaining the Syrian government in the 2010s. They have cooperated militarily on the intelligence and operational levels to maintain regional stability and security.

One of the most important opportunities for Iran-Russia cooperation is Afghanistan: without this cooperation, regional security in Central Asia would be threatened. It should be considered that after the withdrawal of the US and NATO, the Afghan state will simply collapse under the pressure of the Taliban [Дуткевич]. The possible increase of insecurity in Afghanistan and its spread into Central Asia is not in Russia's favour at all. For Moscow, stability and successful cooperation with Central Asia are crucial, as this region is within its traditional sphere of influence and is where Russia pursues major projects such as the Eurasian Economic Union. Therefore, Russia will work to maintain and strengthen security in Central Asia, especially with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan as partners of the CSTO. Therefore, it seems that Iran and Russia are finding new opportunities for cooperation with the aim of achieving regional stability and security in Central Asia.

But the main problem is that despite a general trend in cooperation between the two countries and significant opportunities for development, this relationship lacks stability and institutionalization and is still under pressure. In the next section, I will discuss these limitations.



## Challenges and problems

Despite common interests and important cooperation between Iran and Russia over the past three decades, they disagree on several important issues. In general, their relationship lacks the basic foundations for continuity, stability, and expansion. In this section, we discuss four issues in the field of public opinion, trade, regional security, and international structural issues as the main problems in Iran-Russia relations.

**Negative media representations.** It is a hard fact that some bitter historical events, especially Iranian historical memory about the Caucasus wars in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the shooting of the first Iranian parliament by the Cossack officer Lyakhov, and the presence of the Soviet army in Iran (1941–1946), have not created good social capital for a relationship. The political systems of Iran and Russia also have different views on the world and the region. In fact, there is little ideological affinity between the modern Russian and Iranian systems. Patriotic sentiments, memory of the glorious past, and a desire to return the country to its former status, both globally and regionally, are strong in the leadership and among the population of both countries [Тренин]. Although the ruling elites want more and better relations with each other, there are different political ideas: pro-Western opposition in Tehran and Moscow stubbornly rejects the expansion of cooperation and through the media tries to influence public opinion negatively. So any Iranian government attention to its eastern policy and cooperation with Russia and China faces heavy criticism.

Public opinion in both countries does little to help rapprochement. It seems Russians are frankly indifferent to Iran. Ties between Moscow and Tehran do not attract much attention, and Iran does not provoke almost any emotion among most Russians. In contrast, Russia is of great interest to Iranians. Arguments about whether Russia can be trusted and whether it is worth establishing contacts with Moscow are regularly encountered in the Iranian media. Competitive elections in Iran have led to the fact that various political directions are trying to earn points on the Russian topic. The Iranian government, meanwhile, has invested heavily in trying to sway public attitudes toward Russia and paper over the centuries-old grudges Iranians hold against Russian imperial policies toward their country [Ziabari].

**Incomplete economic foundations.** In the economic field, despite numerous agreements and great economic efforts made by the trade sector, trade remains one of the slowest and most limited areas of cooperation between Iran and Russia. In the first place, the economies of the two countries are not complementary, as both are major exporters of raw materials and energy and importers of technology and industrial goods. This has prevented Tehran-Moscow economic relations from exceeding \$4 billion over the last three decades.

In terms of trade, Russian-Iranian cooperation also has its limits. Russia has a very narrow range of goods to offer Iran and economic problems prevent Russian companies from doing business with Iran. Iran currently lacks engineering and technological support, as well as equipment to upgrade and construct oil refineries and liquefied-natural-gas production

plants. However, Russia is unable to provide Iran with the required assistance, equipment, and technology. With Russia's mounting economic problems, the technological gap will increase. International sanctions against Iran also severely limit the options for Russia-Iran cooperation. As a result, in practical terms there is little substance behind the intense exchange of high-rank delegations and ideas [Kozhanov, p. 14].

The main obstacles standing in the way of effective economic cooperation can be considered as Russia's participation in international sanctions; an incomplete picture of mutual opportunities, especially for the private sector; bureaucracy and weak corporate structures; the premium that companies and nations place on cooperation with Europe and the West; a lack of systematic interaction between banking and insurance structures; a lack of fundamental agreements ensuring financial and insurance activity; the extremely low level of humanitarian ties; and a low level of mutual tourism [Belobrov, p. 28].

As mentioned before, one of the most important factors negatively affecting Russia-Iran relations is the sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council, the US, and the European Union. In most cases, sanctions against Iran do not directly affect Russia's interests, but bank sanctions complicate the settlement of financial accounts with Iran. Many Russian companies are naturally reluctant to lose their beneficial relations with Western partners because of Iran. Luke Oil, which has considerable business in the United States, has preferred to develop trade relations with Iran, despite promising developments in the oil sector [Belobrov, p. 29]. The chart below shows the trend of Tehran-Moscow trade and its decline in the years following Iran's economic sanctions from 2011 (Fig. 2).

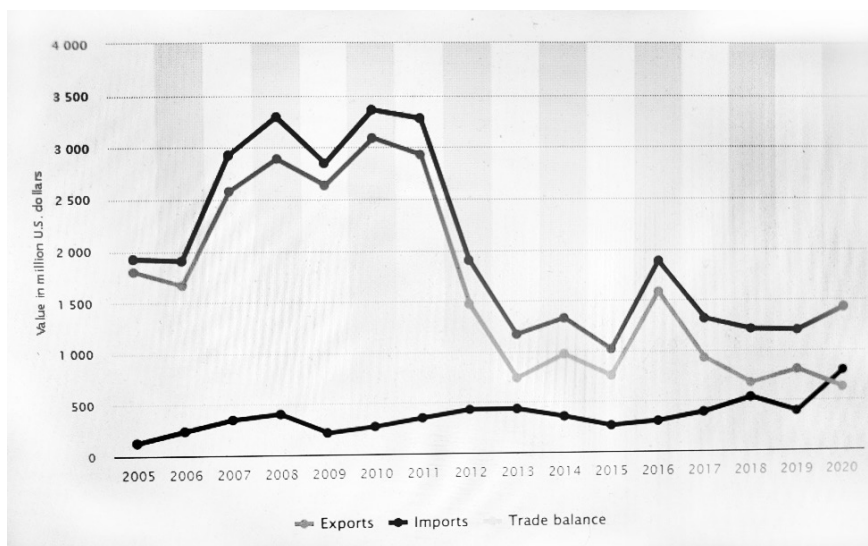


Fig. 2. Iran-Russia trade relations statistics from 2007 to 2020  
[Value of Russian trade in goods]

**Regional institutional instability.** Iran and Russia have different regionalisms; despite having a lot in common in their areas of interest, each of them pursues different attitudes and priorities. Iranian regionalism, based on the 2003 Twenty-Year Vision document, emphasizes the regional prominence of southwest Asia, which includes Central Asia, the Caucasus, the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Russia also considers the Central Asian region as its first foreign policy priority according to its foreign policy concept documents, including one from 2016. Although the two countries have common interests in these areas, there are also differences between Tehran and Moscow on regional issues.

In this regard, we should mention the disputes over the Caspian Sea and influence in Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. There is a lot of dissatisfaction with the Caspian Sea legal convention inside Iran because of the memory of land concessions in the Qajar period to tsarist Russia: this issue has caused an internal reaction [Grajewski, p. 31]. Russia's Middle East policy is based on regional balance and dynamic interaction with all countries in the region; as a result, Moscow's relations with Tel Aviv and Riyadh are as important as those with Iran. Iran's Middle East policy is based on strengthening the axis of resistance, restraining the United States, Israel, and Saudi Arabia and balancing with Turkey. This is significantly different from Russia's policy. During the cooperation between Iran and Russia in Syria, Moscow and Tel Aviv had many interactions and discussions [Кожанов]. In the view of Mark Katz, the possibility of increased conflict between Iran and its regional rivals could significantly raise the costs for Moscow of continuing to cooperate with Iran and highlight Moscow's inability to effectively play the role of mediator [Katz].

Another important issue is the fierce competition between Russia and Iran over Syria's future and their positions in that country. Although the competitive dynamics between Moscow and Tehran will never be transformed into hostility, they will affect key aspects of the crisis. While Russia seeks to strengthen its position in the Mediterranean, Iran considers strengthening its axis of resistance as its main goal. These two different approaches coexisted relatively comfortably at the height of the armed conflict, but as the war escalated, they no longer functioned in exactly the same way. In recent years, the divergent security priorities of Russia and Iran have also become increasingly clear [Lister]. According to Parker, Russia's cooperation with Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey has limited Iran's regional influence [Parker].

**Different international status.** Russia has a set of characteristics that place it in a different position in relation to global strategic issues: it sees itself in the context of the concept of "strategic stability" that needs to be recognized by the United States. It seemed that Russia did not want to enter into a serious and extensive competition with the West before 2022 and sought to maintain the rules of the great game with the presence and participation of Europe, the United States, and China. Balance on the international and regional levels was very important for Moscow. The 1990s

and 2008 to 2011 clearly show the influence of the Washington factor on Tehran-Moscow relations. According to one Russian analyst, "There are no guarantees that Moscow's relations with the West will not change and that these changes, in turn, will not affect its interests in Iran. As the Medvedev era demonstrated, Moscow could be tempted to sacrifice some of its stakes in the Islamic Republic for the sake of another reset with the United States" [Kozhanov, p. 14].

One of the other permanent problems of relations over the last two decades has been Iran's nuclear programme and the tensions surrounding it. Russia, while emphasizing maintaining N. P. T. and supporting UN Security Council resolutions, does not want the United States to ever interfere in the internal affairs of other countries under the pretext of maintaining international regimes. However, it is important for Russia to maintain the central role of the UN Security Council and the security regimes left over from the Cold War, and it is therefore ready to work with the United States to maintain those institutions. From 2006 to 2011, it was in terms of this logic that Russia voted for sanctions against Iran.

Under the influence of the nuclear issue, from summer 2006 into spring 2008 Moscow and Tehran continued their uneasy push-pull-but-don't-let-go dance. Russia awkwardly tried to lead Iran towards a softer stance on the nuclear issue, presumably calculating that its behaviour would strengthen Russia's long-term influence in Iran against other historical powers, particularly the United States. Putin reiterated that Russia still had concerns about the character and quality of Iran's nuclear programme. After prolonged bargaining, in December 2006, Russia joined other UN Security Council members in unanimously approving Resolution 1737, which for the first time called for sanctions against Iran for failing to suspend its nuclear enrichment activities [Parker, p. 301].

But unlike Russia, Iran is a great regional power that still considers ideology and revolution as its main feature and pursues a less pragmatic and more idealistic policy. The anti-Americanism inherent in the ideology of the Islamic Revolution, along with the bitter experiences of American double standards on various issues, has caused any relationship with Iran to be measured in terms of the other side's relationship with the United States, which has created many limitations for Russian relations with Iran. Druzhilovsky writes: "An important fact is that over the past three decades, relations between Russia and Iran have gradually developed, but have not been distinguished by permanent stability. Cooperation has begun on many new political issues. But even at this stage, there are disagreements related both to the change in the internal political paths of both countries and to the influence of external factors that limit the possibility of mutually beneficial cooperation. However, over past years, Iran has not posed a real threat to Russia and, on the contrary, has helped to resolve a number of regional and international issues" [Дружиловский, с. 25].

All of these issues show that we can understand the main problems of Iran-Russia relations in various ways. Tehran-Moscow interactions over

three decades (1991-2021) have problems in terms of attitude, fundamentals, institutions, and behaviour that have prevented these relations from becoming stable, continuous, and dynamic in order to be safe from the influence of third parties and reach beyond short-term and limited collaboration.

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This discussion about relations between Iran and Russia has showed that despite the significant need and opportunities for cooperation over the last thirty years, there have been many obstacles and problems regarding the expansion of interactions on both sides. As long as these relations do not become institutionalized and concrete arrangements, they will continue to be short-term and temporary. From the topics in this article, we found that relations before 2022 depended heavily on factors such as interactions between Russia and America and had not yet found an independent basis. However, conditions have changed significantly on the eve of the fourth decade of relations.

The end of military operations in Syria should not be considered the end of Iran-Russia cooperation: they still need cooperation and interaction in Syria and must enhance diplomatic cooperation for the future of this country. Events at the end of 2020 in the south Caucasus, the future fragility of the region, and the possibility of a new era of tension and war should also be noted: this can only be controlled through cooperation between Iran, Russia, and Turkey. Since the fall of the Afghan government in 2021, security concerns have grown in Iran, Russia, and Central Asia: the situation is such that stability can only be secured through cooperation between the member countries of the SCO. Here, too, relations between Tehran and Moscow will be very vital for regional security and stability. With the expansion of the SCO, Iran, the missing link in any regional security plan in Central Asia, will play a more positive role in security cooperation.

The complexity of the situation in central Eurasia following the escalation of the Ukraine crisis in 2022 and Iran's policy towards it show that the prospects for relations between Tehran and Moscow in the coming years are more serious than in the past. Therefore Tehran's new eastern policy, the extensive western sanctions against Russia, and Russia's adoption of a full-fledged eastern policy have led to fundamental changes in the relations between the two countries. Even if America returns to a nuclear agreement with Iran during new negotiations in 2022, it is unlikely that Iran-Russia relations will be limited.

### Список литературы

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