

## **Comparatives Examination of the “Strategic Relations” Concept on Relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation**

**Masoud Abdi**

*Ph.D Student of Political Geography, Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran*

**Abdolreza Faraji Rad**<sup>1</sup>

*Associate Professor in Political Geography, Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran*

**Rebaz Ghorbani Nejad**

*Assistant Professor in Political Geography, Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran, Iran*

*Received: 16 September 2019 Accepted: 4 December 2019*

### **Extended Abstract**

#### **1. Introduction**

The “cooperation” element in Tehran-Moscow relations in a number of cases such as the fight against terrorism, arms deal, and participation in implementing nuclear facilities has risen to a high level of “importance”; meanwhile, analysts have used notions such as “strategic unity” and “strategic partnership” to describe and analyze the relations between the two nations. Nevertheless, given the occurrence of the “tension” element in these relations due to factors such as Russia’s agreement with the approval of the Security Council’s Resolutions against Iran and refraining from the delivery of S-300 missile system to the Islamic Republic, a number of analysts have opposed the “hypothesized strategic” relations between Iran and Russia. By conducting a comparison between the concept of “strategic relations” and the relation between the two countries, the present study seeks to provide answers to the aforementioned ambiguities. Subsequently, the purpose of this study is to examine the requirements and components for the formation of strategic relations and offer a notion to analyze Iran-Russia relations.

#### **2. Review of Literature**

The theoretical framework of the study involves the conceptualization of the expression, “strategic relations” as well as offering its components and indices. The subject of strategic relations oversees certain relationships among nations with strategic dimensions. Relations between governments refer to the entire interactions that can be defined within the spectrum of cooperation to competition

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding author Email: a.farajirad@yahoo.com

and tension (good or bad). As a result, it can be inferred that the word “relations” in the expression, “strategic relations”, is a neutral word; therefore, this concept cannot be exclusively used to be referred to as overseeing cooperation or in other words, “good relations”. The notion of strategic relations incorporate any interactions within the spectrum of good to bad relations based upon competition or cooperation, provided that it occurs in security areas; or whether it follows vital objectives and advantages or whether there are actors involved who are capable of influencing the system. Strategic relations involve different forms such as “unity”, “partnership”, “coalition”, and “competition”. Originally, by defining different forms of strategic relations, countries or governments primarily seek to increase their powers and influence over the international system or mitigate threats. By establishing a form of collaborative strategic relations, they seek to provide deterrence against the threats they are facing.

The expression, “strategic relations” is not a form of relations; it deals with how relations are managed. There is a direct connection between strategic relations and the concepts of national interests and prioritization of actors accordingly. These relations are formed around national interests. It means that primarily, and until there are mutual security concerns, the purpose of strategic relations includes seeking cooperation in a variety of forms, i.e. the positive aspect. However, in case priorities are changed, then the competition between the actors would shape the strategic relations among them: their vital national interest would be affected by the competitions as well. Consequently, strategic relations can be defined as:

*A spectrum of bi- or multilateral relations formed over time, the nature of which is based upon cooperation and competition in different fields of politics, military, security, economy, society, and the environment, provided that it incorporates “strategic actions”, “activism of strategic actors”, “strategic consequences”, and “occurrence within strategic areas”.*

### 3. Method

The present inquiry is a descriptive-analytical study with the purpose of examining the legality that governs relations along with the variable of the study. Data collection was carried out using library studies, document and content examinations, and field works such as questionnaires, interviews, and observations.

### 4. Findings and Discussion

#### 4.1. Comparing the requirements of the formation of Iran-Russia strategic relations:

- **The presence of strategic interests and purposes in overlapping domains:** There are numerous mutual, overlapping, and opposing purposes and interests in Iran and Russia’s regional and international strategies; yet, each involves exclusive discretions that prevent higher degrees of cooperation between the two nations;

- **The presence of an urgent enemy or threat, or a mutual competitor:** One of the mutual purposes of the two nations includes confronting the presence and influence of the US and the West across the surrounding regions of Iran and Russia; however, the extent and severity of threats are not perceived equally by both Tehran and Moscow;
- **Mutual understandings with respect to the international system and its regulations:** Despite both Russia and Iran being revisionist nations, Russia seeks improvement within the present system framework while Iran pursues the transformation of the system and establishing a new order;
- **The presence of political will in leaders:** Though such a will is present in the Islamic Republic, it does not appear that the Kremlin possesses the same will to improve relations with Iran at the level of collaborative cooperation in strategic relations such as unity or partnership;
- **The uniqueness of relations between two parties:** Indices to assess this component include continuous meetings between the leaders, extensive economic, political, and military-security cooperation, the presence of a friendly atmosphere in bilateral relations, and the long-lasting interactions between the two nations. These indices were not observed in the case of Iran-Russia relations;
- **Institutionalization and regularity of relations:** The tangible indices of this component includes following a particular pattern in relations as well as establishing higher institutions to advance relationships. Examinations into Iran-Russia relations during the past few years did not indicate any regularities or following a specific pattern; moreover, it appears that Tehran-Moscow relations may be significantly affected by certain events and it is possible that the attempts of one party to focus on competitive purposes could result in extensive challenges with the other.

## 5. Conclusion

Interaction between Iran and Russia in the area of foreign policy is a function of both nations' perception of their position in the international power structure as well as their own geopolitical requirements. The two nations have numerous mutual, competitive, and opposing geopolitical purposes and interests and there are strong barriers and discretions against any type of cooperation; meanwhile, adapting the interests and purposes and reaching agreements on how to follow them can bring about countless benefits for both countries. Therefore, regarding the relations as solely being strategic or a type of unity would not affect their nature and the type of actions. According to the above examinations, the relations between Iran and Russia is currently a "watchful partnership" or a type of "forced cooperation"; it refers to selective cooperation in cases and subjects against which both countries perceive themselves as being obligated to take mutual actions. The realization of strategic relations between the two parties by Iran requires a clear definition and a consensus over national interest priorities, threats, and objectives.

If Russia seeks to reinforce its position at the region and in the world, i.e. remaining as an independent nation and not a member of the Western Bloc, then Russians should reach an agreement to rely on I.R. Iran as a dependable, powerful ally that is capable of asserting influence in line with mutual interests.

**Keywords:** Strategic relationships, Alliance, partnership, Competition, Islamic Republic of Iran, Russia.

#### References (In Persian)

1. Abdi, M. (2019). تبیین شاخص‌های موثر بر شکل‌گیری روابط استراتژیک بین کشورها، مطالعه موردی [Explanation of Influential indicators in formation of strategic relations between countries, a case study of the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation]. (Unpublished PhD Thesis), Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Tehran.
2. Hafeznia, M. (2006). اصول و مفاهیم ژئوپلیتیک [Geopolitical Principles and Concepts]. Mashhad, Iran: Papeli Pub.
3. Karami, J. (2005). روسیه و طرح خاورمیانه بزرگ: بازیگر حاشیه ای عمل گرا. [Russia and the Greater Middle East Plan: Pragmatic Marginal Actor]. *Middle East Studies Quarterly*, 6(3), 49- 66.
4. Karami, J. (2016). راهبرد امنیتی روسیه در غرب آسیا. [Russia's security strategy in West Asia]. Tehran, Iran: Abrare-e-Moaser Pub.
5. Koulaie, E. (1999). فدراسیون روسیه [Russia Federation]. Tehran, Iran: Institute for Political and International Studies.
6. Koushki, M. & Taheribazi, E. (2015). حضور روسیه در خاورمیانه در دوره پوتین [Russia's presence in the Middle East under Putin Administration]. *Journal of Central Eurasian Studies*, No.16, 43-62.
7. Mojtahedzadeh, P. & Rashidinezhad, A. (2011). تحلیل ژئوپلیتیکی سیاست خارجی روسیه [Geopolitical analysis of Russian foreign policy towards Iran's nuclear program 2000-2008]. *Geopolitics Quarterly*, 7(2), 1-39.
8. Nezamipour, Q. (2003). آثار سیاست‌های منطقه‌ای روسیه بر امنیت ملی جمهوری اسلامی ایران. [The effects of Russian regional policies on the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran]. *Middle East Quarterly*, 10(20), 1-32.
9. Omid, A. (2008). فرهنگ سیاسی و تاثیر آن در رویکرد ایرانیان به روسیه. [Political Culture and its Impact on the Iranian Approach to Russia]. *Central Asian and Caucasian Journal*, No.61, 65-90.
10. Shad, M. (). ایران در هندسه سیاست خارجی روسیه. [Iran in the geometry of Russian foreign policy]. Tehran, Iran: Abrar-e-Moaser Pub.

11. Vaezi, M. (2005). لگوی رفتاری آمریکا و روسیه در فرآیند تغییرات سیاسی اوراسیا. [Patterns of American and Russian behavior in the process of political change in Eurasia]. *Central Asian and Caucasian Studies Quarterly*, 4(29), 99-122.
12. Zargar, A. (2005). تنگناهای اتحاد استراتژیک میان ایران و روسیه. [Limitations of Strategic Alliance between Iran and Russia]. *Rahbord Quarterly*, No.36, 275-294.

#### References (In English)

1. Arbatove, A. (July 17, 2014). Iran, Russia, and the Ukrainian Crisis, *the National Interest*, available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/iran-russia-the-ukrainian-crisis-10902>, accessed: July 20, 2018.
2. Asisian, N. (2013). Russia & Iran: Strategic Alliance or Marriage of Convenience, *Small Wars Journal*. Available at: <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/russia-iran-strategic-alliance-or-marriage-of-convenience> accessed: July 20, 2018.
3. Czechowska, L. (2013). The Concept of Strategic Partnership as an Input in the Modern Alliance Theory. *The Copernicus Journal of Political Studies*, 2(4), 36-51.
4. Dutkiewicz, P. & kozhanov, N. (2016). Civil War in Syria and the Evolution of Russian- Iranian relations. *Emirates policy Center*. available at: <https://epc.ae/>
5. Eisnstadt, M. (1996). *Iranian Military Power; Capabilities and Intentions*. Washington DC: Washington near east Institute.
6. Fite, B. (2012). *U.S. and Iranian Strategic Competition: The Impact of China and Russia*. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).
7. Gajauskaitė, I. (2014). Strategic Partnerships in Foreign Policy: Comparative Analysis of Polish - Ukrainian and Lithuanian - Ukrainian Strategic Partnerships. *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review (The Journal of Military Academy of Lithuania)*, 11(1), 189-229. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2478/v10243-012-0028-x>
8. Ivanov, I.S. (2014). *Modern Russia-Iranian Relations: Challenges and Opportunities*. Moscow: Russia International Affairs Council.
9. Kam, E. (2016). Will Russia and Iran Walk Hand in Hand? *Strategic Assessment*, 19(2), 41-51.
10. Kassianova, A. (2006). Russian Weapons Sales to Iran: Why They Are Unlikely to Stop. *PONARS Policy Memo No.427*, 1-5. Available at: <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/russian-weapons-sales-iran-why-they-are-unlikely-stop>
11. Katz, M.N. (2016). Syria and the Regional Quagmire of the Middle East. IEMed. Available at: [www.iemed.org](http://www.iemed.org)
12. Omelicheva, M.Y. (2012). Russia's Foreign Policy toward Iran: A Critical Geopolitics Perspective. *Journal of Balkan and near Eastern Studies*. 14(3): 331-344.

13. Pieper, M.A. (2012). Russia and Iran: Strategic Partners or Competing Regional Hegemons? A Critical Analysis of Russian-Iranian Relations in the Post-Soviet Space. *Inquiries Journal*, 4(4), 1-2.
14. Preiholt, H, (10/06/2018). The difference of Strategic Relationship and Strategic Partnership. (Unpublished Interview).
15. Roberts, S. (2013). Russia as an International actor: The View from Europe and the US. *The Finnish Institute of International Affairs*. 37(2), 1-70. Available at: [https://www.fiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/fiia\\_report37\\_web.pdf](https://www.fiia.fi/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/fiia_report37_web.pdf)
16. Rossick, S. Reuter, E. (2007). *China - EU: A Common Future*. New Jersey: World Scientific Publishing.
17. Walt, S. (1987). *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.