

Iran and Russia: Past Experiences and Future Prospects

Jahangir Karami*

Associate Professor, Faculty of World Studies, University of Tehran.

Abstract

In this article, the author has tried to examine the history of developments in Iran-Russia relations and provide a theoretical framework for better understanding of the current status and future prospects of these ties. In this historical study, three questions shall be addressed: How to analyze centuries-old Iran-Russia relations and provide a realistic perspective for the future? What are the most important factors influencing the relations between the two governments? The method used in this research is based on a macro and ideological, historical, comparative and analytical approach to study the important periods in the history of the two governments and the analysis of relations between the two nations and the emphasis is on periods in which the relations between the two countries have been relevant. The author's idea in this article is that by changing the logic of the threat due to the change of geography, we can change the pessimistic atmosphere of the past towards relations with Russia and, based on the existing facts, engage in strategic cooperation on common issues.

Keywords: Iran, Russia, Threat, Alliance, Strategic Cooperation, Neighborhood, Political Relations

* Corresponding Author's Email: jkarami@ut.ac.ir

Introduction

A look at the past history of Iran and Russia shows that although they have been interacting with each other for more than a millennium, more than five centuries have passed since the official relations between the two governments began. Serious relations with political-military nature that associated with an element called the Ottoman Empire. As long as the Black Sea was monopolized by the Ottomans and they dominated its northern regions, such as the Crimean Peninsula, Iran and Russia lacked a common border. But with the weakening of the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century and the subsequent occupation of the North Caucasus by the Russians, the country gradually moved closer to Iran's borders. Iran-Russia relations initially led to a kind of alliance against the Istanbul threat because of the two sides' fear of the Ottoman Empire, but when the Russians were relieved by the Ottoman threat, they gradually turned to Iran's borders and occupied the Caucasus.

In fact, what drew these relations from the state of "cooperation and unity" of the Safavid period to the "war and threat" of the Qajar and Pahlavi periods was the element of "proximity and neighborhood". A neighborly situation that began with progress, war, and aggression toward Iran's spheres of influence and borders, placed Iran in a position of defeat in the hands of Russia for two centuries, accepting Russian intervention, or taking refuge in third parties (France, Britain, Germany, and the United States). This neighborhood, along with the element of conflict, war and intervention, continued within the Iranian borders and the surrounding area until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

According to the geopolitical logic of international relations, the existence of a powerful country in the neighborhood of a country that is weaker is a major threat to its security and independence, unless they have long lived through peaceful coexistence away from threats and interference. That is something that is usually less common. Naturally, as close as a threatening superpower is, the existence of small, proxy governments in a country's strategic environment is a situation that, if adopted in a precise, logical, and rational strategy, can prevent them from becoming a base for rival powers to threaten others.

Therefore, the combination of elements of power, proximity, aggressiveness, and expansionist ideology in the three periods, after the Safavid period until the end of the Pahlavi rule and then the post-Islamic period and the collapse of the Soviet Union, was different. The period of alliance in the first period, the threat of Russia in the second period against Iran and Iran's turning to alliance with other governments, then important cooperation and even occasional and thematic alliance has led in the last three decades.

The questions I want to answer in this article are how to analyze the relations between Iran and Russia in the past centuries with a realistic view and provide a realistic perspective for the future. What are the most important factors influencing the relations between the two governments? The method used is based on a macro and ideologically oriented, historical, comparative and analytical approach to important periods in the history of the two governments and the analysis of relations between the two countries. An important limitation of this article is its long period of time, and the author admits that this is kind of ambitious that it can be analyzed in an article. But trying to come up with something out of the ordinary, then they have to re-think their position. The author's outlook is future-oriented by changing the logic of the threat due to the evolution of geography. But the important thing is to adopt a balanced, and multilateral foreign policy with all the great powers.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The findings of international relations researchers in the paradigm of realism in the last century have shown that the world is chaotic and composed of states concerned with security, and that there is no way out of this problem except self-help or alliance-building. From this perspective, and in the light of this view, the author tries to discuss the relations between Iran and Russia in the last 5 centuries. To this end, relying on the latest developments in international relations, he uses the theory of the balance of threat. "Balance of Threat" theory emphasizes four elements of power, proximity, aggressiveness, and developmental intentions and motivations, and explains the source of governments' concerns based on these four factors.

Important concepts in the realist paradigm are threat and alliance. The threat mainly refers to the risks to survival and security, as well as the interests of a state. The threat is targeted by a variety of pressures and possibly even security and military action by the threat and its allies. The threatened government itself must be in a position to balance that alliance, or to create deterrence, or to ensure its security by creating an alliance or joining an existing alliance. Hence, the government presented as a threat will go through difficult conditions, and in order not to face such difficulties, it must prevent the formation of enemy alliances through preventive diplomacy. If his diplomacy is not successful, then he must secure his competitive and defensive power through the help of the alliance.

But the concept of unity means working together against a common threat. Finally, the most important formative and functional characteristics of an alliance can be stated as follows: the existence of a common threat, a common understanding of it, necessary will to deal with it, and contractual mechanisms and understanding for cooperation, organizational, information and operational communication for joint action, and diplomatic coordination for military announcements and warnings. The strategic nature of cooperation between the two countries must be distinguished by the concepts of strategic alliance with strategic partnership and the definition of strategy. Strategy is a concept that refers to vital, security, and long-term issues in a competitive environment. Strategic alliance is the highest level of cooperation between two or more governments against a common threat for a long time and within the framework of precise agreements and mechanisms. But strategic engagement can be collaboration against a common threat in a particular subject and section. Since this level of cooperation does not have a long-term feature, it is not accurate to use a strategic term for it, unless this participation is repeated in similar cases.

The author uses realist theories of international relations with an understanding of realism, strategic realism, defensive realism, aggressive realism, and considers the role of factors such as geography, power, aggressive motivation, common threat, balance, and diplomacy.

Age of Geographical Distance

From about five hundred years BC to 882 AD, when the government was formed in Russia, Iranians and Russians had social and cultural ties with each other, and there were common myths among their people, some of which still exist, and important in some areas of the two countries and are of interest to the people or in the literature and culture of Iran and Russia. There was a geographical connection between the Iranians and the Slavs in the North Caucasus and the shores of the Black Sea, but from the time of the Khazars government in the 6th to 10th centuries AD, a geographical distance was created between Iran and the Slavs.

The first Russian state, the Little Russia, was formed in 882 in Kiev, the current capital of Ukraine, and Iran was merged into the Islamic Empire after the Arab invasion in 7th and was a part of Islamic Caliphate till 9th which some Iranian local dynasties took a semi or full independence from caliphs. Iranian Buyid dynasty took control over caliphate and for a while they made caliphs as theirs' puppets. During the period from Samanid to Khwarezmshahi dynasties, Iran became independent from 819 to 1231, a flourishing and enlightened period (Starr, 2013). In the beginning 13th century Iran invaded by the Mongols. Before that time, Iran-Russia relations were largely limited to trade, and from time to time Russian tribes invaded the Caspian coasts, as noted in some historical books. Hence, the first Iranian-Russian contacts and communications in the form of government date back to the years of Samanid rule in Iran around the third and fourth centuries AH. (Jamalzadeh, 1993: 20). After Sassanid and Islamic Iran, Iran was mainly limited to Sistan and Makran to Khorasan and East of the Caspian Sea and was far from the territory of the Russians in the north of the Black Sea and had no concept of political and security relations in terms of geographical distance and lack of common threats.

With the Mongol invasions of Iran and later Russia, from the 13th to the 15th century, the two lands of Iran and Russia experienced a relatively common experience. With the arrival, killing and looting of the Mongols, Iran moved away from its radiant Enlightenment. From 1228 to 1501, the Mongols and Timurid rule of Iran marked a terrible experience for 273 years. For Russia it was also the same for 240

years from 1240 to 1480, which in the history of Russia the Mongol Yoke is still bitterly remembered. During this period, there were limited relations between the two governments.

In the post-Mongol period from the 15th to the 17th centuries, 1501 to 1722 for 231 years, Iran's golden age was during the Safavid period, with concepts such as the Shiite religion, powerful Iran, security and stability and prosperity, extensive relations with Europe, war and peace with the Ottomans is understandable. From Ivan the Great (reign from 1547 to 1584) to Peter the Great (independent reign from 1696 to 1725), Russia faced a golden age from, which is still considered a dream by the new Russian Slav and Eurasian views. The liberating religion of orthodox Christianity freed itself from the yoke of the Mongols, and the idea of Moscow as the third Rome made a bond between religion and state and its transnational mission. The powerful Russia and the decisive tsar made a period of security, stability and prosperity in Russian territory in the late sixteenth century. It led to a thirteen-year riot, ending the Rurik and the Romanov era beginning in 1613. From the turmoil of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Russia returned to prosperity and stability until Peter the Great in 1696.

The beginning of official and serious relations between Iran and Russia and the exchange of ambassadors and the expansion of trade relations date back to Safavid times. The common threat of Ottoman expansionism around the Black Sea led to the implicit and intermittent unification of Iran and Russia, and the non-proximity geography formed an important theme of relations. The relations of this period are mainly connected with the official political-military nature with an element called the Ottoman Empire. As long as the Black Sea was monopolized by the Ottomans and they even controlled its northern regions, such as the Crimean Peninsula, and some areas of the North Caucasus were in their hands, Iran and Russia lacked a common border. But with the successive defeats of the Ottomans from the 16th to the 18th centuries, and especially the conquest of these areas by the Russians, Russia gradually approached the borders of Iran. This neighborhood initially led to a kind of alliance against the Istanbul threat due to the two sides' fears of the Ottoman Empire's power, but when the Russians were relieved of the threat of Ottomans, they

gradually turned to Iran's borders and occupied the Iranian territories of the Caucasus. There was a serious political and military conflict between the two countries.

In 1001 AH (1592 AD), Shah Abbas I sent a trade delegation to Moscow to open a trade chapter, and three years later the Russian Tsar sent an ambassador to the Iranian court. In 1597, a Russian delegation arrived in Iran to sign a treaty of reciprocity and mutual military assistance, but the delegation fell ill and returned to Russia. In 1598, due to the Austrian-Ottoman war, the Russians tried to bring Iran closer to Austria. On July 9, 1599 (1007 AH), Sir Anthony Shirley and Hossein Ali Beyg, headed by a delegation of forty people, accompanied by thirty-two camels and mules carrying gifts for European kings, set out from Isfahan, and Shah Abbas personally took them out of the city. The delegation had two important missions: First, to establish political relations with European countries and to form an alliance with them against the Ottoman government, and second, to market Iranian silk, which was very good and its trade was exclusively the Shah's own. After a three-month journey through Gilan and the Caspian Sea, the delegation reached Haji Tarkhan and was greeted by Russian tsar envoys, but in Moscow they were ignored because of Shirley, who was English. (HushangMahdavi, 1986: 95).

Shah Abbas succeeded to defeat the Ottomans in the Caucasus, Kurdistan and Iraq in 1603-1612 and liberate many cities from Tabriz to Tbilisi. At a time when Shah Abbas was at war with the Ottomans, an ambassador from Russia came to him in 1614, and Shah Abbas said to him: "Tell my great brother the Tsar of Russia that if he needs money and troops, I am ready to give him and "If necessary, I will ask him without hesitation." In fact, it was from this period that Iran and Russia became neighbors due to the defeat of the Ottomans in the Caucasus (HushangMahdavi, 1986: 96). In 1617 and 1618, Russia was at war with Poland, and because of the great losses it had suffered, it asked the Iranian government for financial assistance in the amount of four hundred thousand Manats, and in return agreed to cede the city of Haji Tarkhan to Iran as bail. During a meeting with the Russian ambassador Shah Abbas expressed his desire for Iran and Russia to be neighbors, wall to wall, and that there be no third country between them that would cause inconvenience. As for the loan, it is not known

whether Shah Abbas gave it to them or not. Simultaneously with Shah Sultan Hussein Safavid, Peter the Great, who was very determined and sufficient, became the Russian Tsar and pursued a policy of aggression towards his neighbors by carrying out extensive internal reforms and strengthening the military forces. At that time, Velinsky was Russia's ambassador to Iran, and in a report to Peter, he noted Iran's great weakness and predicted Safavid extinction. (Savory, 2002: 122).

The reign of Sultan Hussein Safavid from 1694 to 1722 was the last Safavid period and the decline of this government, which led to the internal crisis with the fall of Isfahan in 1722 and despite important periods such as Afshar and Zand, Iran could not achieve the greatness of the Safavid era, stability and security and revive the prosperity of the past. This period until 1795 and the emergence of Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar had certain characteristics that were different from the powerful Russia that had experienced its modern era with the reforms of Peter the Great. During the era of Peter the Great, from 1682 to 1725, the Russians built St. Petersburg in 1703, and this powerful era continued until 1917 with turmoil and Russia was able to become a European power in the time of Peter, especially from 1815 to 1848, in the form of the Holy Alliance, the Guardian of the ancient European order. By getting close to Europe, Peter marked the era of Russia's industrialization and the emergence of a powerful Russia that was influential in European power equations, while at the same time evolving the relationship between religious community and government to create the distinct Russian of golden religious centuries.

Relations between the two countries were strained during this period with Peter the Great's invasions of northern Iran and the conquest of the western and southern shores of the Caspian Sea in 1722, Russian-Ottoman cooperation and the 1724 Treaty of the Partition of Iran. The return of the South Caucasus during the Zand period and Russia's offer to unite against the Ottomans in 1771 improved the relations. In 1724, with the fall of the Safavids, an agreement was signed between the Ottomans and Russia on the partition of Iran, according to which the Ottomans recognized the control of the Russian-occupied Mazandaran and Astarabad and a new

border line was drawn between the two countries from the confluence of the Aras and Kora rivers to Ardabil, and Tabriz, Hamedan, Kermanshah and all places located in the west of this border line were recognized as belonging to the Ottomans. Meanwhile, the two governments agreed to help King Tahmaseb II if he recognized these territorial changes in order to gain his kingdom on the rest of Iran's territory, but if he showed stubbornness and opposition, the two governments would be free to choose whoever they deemed more worthy to rule the kingdom of Iran (HoushangMahdavi, 1986: 149).

The Age of Neighborhood and Threat

After the death of Karim Khan Zand in 1776, the Russians began to build a series of fortifications and military strongholds along the Iranian border in the North Caucasus. The city's ruler was allowed to establish a trading post, and then, under the pretext of maintaining and protecting the trade, they began to build a military fortress and installed eighteen artillery pieces around it. Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar, who controlled those areas, ordered the ruler of Ashraf to expel the Russians, and the Russians returned to their country following the threat. This time the Russians turned their attention to Georgia and protected the ruler of Georgia in 1783. But Agha Mohammad Khan Qajar conquered Georgia in 1795 (Tranzio, 1980: 32). The following year, a well-equipped and strong Russian corps besieged the strongholds of Baku and Darband, besieged the Caucasus, and settled in Georgia, Dagestan, and Shirvan. But with the death of Catherine II, the Russians withdrew again and Georgia was recaptured by the Iranians.

Therefore, military operations in the area were suspended for some time. But in 1799, George XII of Georgia (Kingdom of Kartli and Kakheti) before his death, placed himself under the protection of Tsar Alexander I, and thus the conflict resumed. Since then, the Russian government has been in direct contact with Iran. Because in 1800 Georgia annexed to the Russian Empire completely (Tranznio, 1980: 33) and this was the beginning of the great wars between Russia and Iran, which first led to the Treaty of Gulistan in 1813. With the defeat of Iran in the second war with Russia, the Treaty of Turkmenchay was concluded in 1828, and according to the terms of these treaties, the

Caucasus region was separated from Iran, and in the nineteenth century Russia, along with Britain, became the main quasi-colonial powers in Iran.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, trade considerations prevailed over Russia's relations with Iran. This issue goes back to northern Iran and its economic benefits. But with the 1917 revolution in Russia and the overthrow of the tsarist regime, as well as the March 1299 coup in Iran, relations between the two countries fundamentally changed. Interestingly, on April 3rd 1917, 88 members of the first three terms of the National Assembly of Iran, in a telegram to the Russian Parliament, after declaring satisfaction with the victory of the "Great Russian Nation", portrayed the Russian Revolution to "Forough e Derakhshani" (a Bright Light) that would eventually turn the world upside down and erase the last darkness (TaherAhmadi, 2005: 3), but it did not take long for this revolution and its dominant ideology to become the biggest nightmare of the Iranian political system and nation. The Qajar period, with Russian invasions of the South Caucasus and the wars of 1813-1828 and the Golestan and Turkmachay treaties, led to the Russian intervention in Iran, while expanding trade between the two countries (about 60 percent of Iran's trade relations) and supporting the Qajar monarchy was on the agenda of the Russians to guarantee their influence, and in the constitutional era, they opposed constitutionalism. The treaties to divide Iran in 1907 and 1915 with Britain were St. Petersburg's last trick.

The communist revolution and the emergence of the Soviet Union and its opposition to Britain and the end of World War I, led Western capitalist countries to create a "safety" belt around the Soviet Union to prevent the spread of communism to the world, and Reza Khan's coup was part of this plan of containment. Russia's new government also sought to reassure neighboring countries that they are not threatened by Moscow. Based on the teachings of the ideology of communism and the unavoidable principle of the war on world capitalism and the inevitable fate of the communist revolution in all countries of the world, Moscow while taking friendly positions against the Iranian government, also considered assisting its opposition forces. A policy that continued in many neighboring or distant governments during Stalin's rule.

In many cases, Soviet diplomatic relations with other states took place in addition to providing aid to insurgent forces and subversive movements against the same government (Kulaei, 2000: 58-57). Vladimir Lenin had a budget in place to support these groups and from that point on, communist propaganda was to be used to attract the nations of the East (Clodin, 1998: 34).

After the occupation of Tehran in March 1920 by Reza Khan, the commander of the Cossack Brigade in Qazvin, a Soviet-era Russian-Iranian treaty was signed (February 1921). The agreement between the Russian government and Iran abolished the concessions received by the Russian government. On August 1941, between 85,000 and 100,000 Russian troops entered Iranian territory at the same time as British troops and occupied the north provinces. Simultaneously with these actions, important political events took place in Azerbaijan and Kurdistan. On September 3rd 1954, the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, led by Jafar Pishevari, officially announced its existence by issuing a statement containing an introduction and 12 articles expressing the basic views of the group's founders. The formation of the national government of Kurdistan, like the national government of Azerbaijan, was carried out with the help and support of the Soviet government.

During the crisis in the formation of the autonomous governments of Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, Iran called on the Soviet Union to refrain from supporting these governments in official correspondence. In response to Iran's letters, the Soviet Union repeatedly denied any involvement in the establishment of autonomous states and regarded them as spontaneous and independent movements. It was the United States (Harry S. Truman) that forced the Russians to cut off support for Azerbaijan and Kurdistan, and the crisis ended with the agreement of Ghavam and Sadchikov.

Despite various issues in the relations between the two governments, especially since the 1960s, the differences between the two countries slowly gave way to understanding. The Soviet government's policy toward the Iranian government changed, and relations between the two countries expanded. This time, developments in the relations between the two countries took place without the slightest connection with the interests of the people, that is, just when the Iranian regime was pushing its dictatorship with

severe repression, the honeymoon of Iran-Soviet relations began (Azghandi, 1997: 266).

Using the contradictions between the United States and the Soviet Union, the Shah sought to use the rapprochement with the Soviet Union as leverage to impose his views. But the Iranian government's economic-political dependence on the United States was so great that such measures could not have a serious impact. At the same time, the Soviet Union was reluctant to weaken its relations with the Arab revolutionary states and was cautious in meeting the Shah's demands. The Shah's rivalry with Jamal Abdel Nasser, who sought to improve relations with the Persian Gulf states, was significant in this regard (Koolae, 1997: 127). Relations between Iran and the Soviet Union expanded significantly in the early 1970s. By mid-1973, about 3,500 Soviet specialists were employed in various economic and industrial centers in Iran. It seems that this logic allowed the Soviet Union to show surprising resilience in the face of the Shah's major regional policies (Azghandi, 1997: 324).

After the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the Russians even forced the Tudeh Party to side with Imam Khomeini, and expanded their relations with Iran when the United States tried to put economic pressure on Iran. The Russians even offered to sell weapons to the new government of Iran, but the Iranian government refused that offer. At the same time, when many Western countries imposed sanctions on Iran, the Soviet Union allowed some of the Eastern Bloc's weapons to enter Iran indirectly. However, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was strongly opposed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Tehran rushed to the aid of the Afghan Mujahideen. At the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war, 1,200 Russian specialists were serving in the Iraqi army. The strategic deployment and secret gathering of soldiers at the borders since the spring of 1980 was in the form of maneuvers. However, the war was completely unexpected for the Soviets, with one Russian officer writing: "The truth is that our military translators were reporting a number of issues to me, Iraq, in particular, withdrew its gold reserves from Swiss banks before the start of the war, which meant they were preparing for war" (Pochtariiev, 2003: 2). With Iraq invading Iranian territory, the Soviet Union, while acknowledging the legitimation between the two

countries, called on Iraq to withdraw its forces from Iranian territory. (Afshordi, 2002: 8-337).

According to Moscow officials, the Gulf War enabled the United States to justify an increase in its military presence in the region. In its first statement, the Soviet government saw the imposed war as an opportunity for "American imperialism" to increase its influence and presence in the Persian Gulf region (Hubel, 1989: 143). Soviet leaders, therefore, called on the two countries to end the war immediately. At first, Moscow apparently refused to sell new weapons to Iraq. However, two factors in 1982 and 1983 changed the relations between Iran and the Soviet Union: the first was Iran's victory on the battlefields, and the second was the Suppression of the Tudeh Party by Tehran. The Russians concluded that there was almost no choice but to support the Iraqi government. This support could have saved the Iraqi government from collapse, prevented it from moving further toward the United States and the West, and, of course would have provoked Tehran's sensitivities (Khalilzad, 1984: 15). Until the end of the war, Soviet policy toward Iran did not change, and in the case of Iraq, the sale of weapons did not change fundamentally (Hermann, 1991: 42). Of course, the Soviet government from 1986 onwards did not have a clear policy towards the Middle East, Iran, and Iraq under Gorbachev, and was more involved with the West, but at the same time continued to send weapons to Baghdad.

With the end of the Iraqi imposed war against Iran and the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan, and then the letter of Imam Khomeini to Gorbachev in December 1988, the late Ayatollah Hashemi Rafsanjani, in the spring of 1989, as the Speaker of the Parliament of Iran, accepted the invitation of the Soviet Union, which resulted to signed agreements were reached on economic and technical cooperation, as well as new consular arrangements. The most important achievement of this visit was the signing of a 15 billion \$ agreements between Iran and the Soviet Union. The subject of the agreement was the development of trade cooperation and the expansion of investments. In this regard, between 2 and 4 billion dollars were allocated for military cooperation and arms transfers. Some have even estimated the value of the two countries' arms deals at 6 billion \$. (Ehteshami, 1999: 156).

Geopolitical Developments and New Security Environment

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran and Russia began bilateral relations and gradually gained a common understanding of mutual interests in the Central Asia, the Caspian and the Caucasus, which became the basis for their cooperation in these regions. The danger of expanding the influence of Western powers and their allies, the spread of crises in the region within the borders of the two countries was very effective in expanding this cooperation. Therefore, at the regional level, the two countries could have more fruitful cooperation. Both in Central Asia and in the Caspian and Caucasus, the two countries have the capacity to create institutions such as the Organization of the Caspian littoral states to resolve issues and expand development, security and cooperation. These institutions can take steps in regional development and economic, cultural and political convergence. The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a Muslim state and a progressive political system, can replace other models that promote anti-Russian propaganda. The two countries have expressed grave concern over the Nagorno-Karabakh crisis, and the Islamic Republic of Iran has sought to mediate between the parties to the crisis. Since 1994, the two countries have held a series of meetings between the parties to the civil war in the Tajikistan crisis in Tehran and Moscow, which led to a compromise in 1996 and thus ended the crisis. We should also mention the cooperation in supporting the Northern Afghanistan Coalition from 1996 to 2001, which led them to resist Taliban attacks.

But perhaps the most important problem in relations between the two countries in recent decades is that these interactions do not yet have the desired order and stability, and this depends on many factors, the most important of which is that the relations between the two countries have been strongly influenced by the form and process of Russian-Western interactions and have not yet found an independent basis of mutual interests. Another important factor should be seen in the attitude and mentality of Iranians and the psychological and ideational structures that affect the viewpoints of Russia, which complicates the interaction between the two governments. The point is that as long as Iran-Russia relations cannot be institutionalized and specific agreements and arrangements can be made, as in the past thirty years, they will be a function of Russia-West relations and a

cross-cutting cooperation. This will be to the detriment of the interests of both countries in the mid and long term. Given the deteriorating security situation in the world and the geographical spread of crises from Africa to China and the confusion of the United States and the West about all these crises in the world and the simultaneous conflict of the West in the Middle East and Central Eurasia and East Asia, cooperation between Iran and Russia in regional affairs is not necessarily against other governments in many cases. Tehran and Moscow can improve their relations on these issues and think about their cooperation more continuously and strategic partnership for security and stability and create balance in more common areas and in a more organized way.

Therefore, it can be seen that the two governments of Iran and Russia are not a threat to each other, and despite some competitive issues between them, at all three levels, bilateral, regional and international, they can have mutual opportunities for protecting each other's interests. Despite the important and different conditions in the past years, the relations between Iran and Russia have faced many difficulties at the bilateral and international levels, and still these relations, especially at the bilateral level, have not fully expanded to the optimal levels of real capabilities. The collaborations in business and technical fields have important potential for expansion. In this regard, Russian military and civilian technologies were of great importance to Iran, and the Iranian market could solve some of the economic problems for Russian products. In the field of agricultural production, Iran can relieve Russia of the pressure of sanctions (Karami, 2016: 17).

Cooperation between Iran and Russia on regional crises has been an important and effective issue; Iran and Russia have supported the Northern Alliance in the Afghan crisis against the Taliban, and even Iran has used the territories under influence of Russia to transfer weapons to the Northern Afghan Coalition. In the case of Syria, these collaborations have taken place at different levels over the years, the most important of which has been the use of the Nojeh air base. This level of cooperation is strategic and can be expanded, and not necessarily to the detriment of other countries. If Iran and Russia fail to work together in their common areas, especially in the South

Caucasus and the Middle East, instability in the region and regional imbalances could have dangerous consequences for both sides. It seems that the issue of Syria and the security cooperation between Iran and Russia can be the basis for bringing a strategic partnership closer to reality. However, Iran and Russia are involved in various issues in the region, from Afghanistan and Central Asia to the Caspian, Caucasus and Middle East, and in terms of stabilizing the region and countering terrorism, as well as maintaining the status quo and government structures and regional borders.

According to the definition of strategic partnership, Iran-Russia cooperation on regional issues can be considered strategic because the two governments have cooperated in the Tajikistan civil war, the Taliban's domination of Afghanistan and the Syrian crisis. Iran and Russia cooperation for security and military goals at the intelligence and operational levels have repeatedly examined to reach stability and regional balance, therefore, we can speak of a strategic partnership in the interests of the two countries and even the interests of the nations of the region against insecurity and terrorism.

Conclusion

From this brief historical overview of the relations between the two countries and comparing the most important decisive periods in the national life of Iran and Russia and with the help of the theoretical foundations of a realistic paradigm for the concepts of threat and alliance, the following points can be presented as preliminary results. The author emphasizes that these findings are still in the preliminary phase, and historical studies on the relations between Iran and Russia must be continued. Therefore, this issue should be approached with some caution, and perhaps it is too early to make serious statements in this regard. These initial points are as follows:

1. The historical periods of Iran and Russia from the ninth century AD shows an important bilateral relationship for comparative and analytical study, and it provides the possibility of serious results for the analysis of bilateral relations in the last twelve centuries. This can be especially important for presenting ideas for the future.

2. The historical ups and downs of the relations between the two governments in the centuries before the Mongol invasions and during

this period and after that until the end of the Safavid era are very close to each other. But after the fall of the Safavids and the fall of Isfahan and the rise of Peter and the construction of St. Petersburg, the situation for both sides changes. Iran is on the path of decline and weakness, and Russia is on the path to becoming stronger and more European. This is important for understanding the behaviors of Iran and Russia in all post-Safavid centuries until the collapse of the Soviet Union.

3. Geography has been an important factor in the relations between the two countries, and the interpretation that Helen Dencausse in her book *"Neither Peace nor War"* recalls that "this phrase, rightly or wrongly attributed to the former Shah of Iran, deserves attention. The future will be located. "He is reported to have said that if he had the right to choose, he would never have settled in Russia's neighborhood." (Dencausse, 1988: 223). In 1962, US President John F. Kennedy said during a reception for the Shah of Iran in Washington that "Iran has been living in the belly of a bear for many years" (Mirfendereski, 2004: 244). However, considering these geographical factors, the following propositions can be made:

- a. The periods of being neighbors in the 19th and 20th centuries have been a threat to Iran.
 - b. The geographical distance of the two countries has been a better opportunity for cooperation.
 - c. Geographical distance and the existence of common areas from 1991 to 2021 have led to strategic cooperation between the two countries.
4. The third party has been a central element in the relationship between the two sides:
- a. In retaining status: the government of Khazran.
 - b. In a state of threat: The Ottoman government, and terrorist groups.
 - c. In the status of a partner or supporter: Russia-Britain alliance in the first and second wars and the occupation of Iran and the role of the United States in the relations between the two countries in the last three decades.
5. The periods of power and independence of Iran's practice, the relations between the two countries have had a better balance:

The Safavid period, the Afshar period, the Zand period, the Islamic Revolution period.

6. During the period when Iran had a strong ally such as 1960 to 1979, relations were more proper.

7. Iran has never been a threat to Russia's existence: both in position of power and in weakness.

8. Russia has been an important element in the union of Iran and the West, from 1937 to 1979.

9. The most important periods for the relations between the two countries are the Safavid period, the Afshar period and periods from the last three decades such as the Tajik crisis 1992 to 1994, the Taliban period in Afghanistan 1996 to 2001, the Syrian crisis 2012 to 2017. The most important common features of these three periods are: a) The power and independence of the two governments; b) there are common threats; c) effective diplomacy.

10. To expand relations in the future, one must think of effective institutional mechanisms for bilateral relations, regional stability and international role-playing. The future international system is heavily influenced by the role of regional powers, and Iran and Russia, from Central Asia to South Asia and from the Caucasus to the Mediterranean, share common threats and common interests.

11. The two countries do not pose a threat to each other. Despite the problems that Iran and Russia have in some bilateral, regional, and international areas, as well as the negative mentalities of the past and the concerns of recent years, they cannot be considered as threats to each other. Even Russia's latest foreign policy document notes that Russia is pursuing a policy of comprehensive development of cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran and will assist in the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 2231. Elsewhere, it is pointed out that the need to engage with partners of the five Caspian Sea littoral states to complete the cooperation mechanisms on the basis of consensus and collective decision.

12. The possibility of a strategic alliance between the two countries is limited. But strategic cooperation is possible and can be expanded if it is seen in three specific cases. Therefore, the cooperation between Iran and Russia in regional issues can be considered as strategic because the two government cooperation in the three most recent

regional conflict situations, i.e., the Tajik civil war, Taliban control over Afghanistan and the Syrian crisis at the intelligence and operational levels. The policymakers have repeatedly called for security, stability and regional balance, and therefore a strategic partnership for the benefit of the two countries and even the interests of the peoples of the region against insecurity and terrorism is necessary. It does not mean strategic alliance in the strict sense of the word because it is limited to a specific subject time and is a short-lived matter.

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