

Policy of Russia and Iran in the Central Asia

Albert Vladislavovich Beloglazov and Eliza Ilgizarovna Khafizova
Kazan (Privolzhsky) Federal University, Kremlevskaya St. 18, Kazan, Russia

Abstract: The present study considers the policy of the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic in the Central Asia. The comparative analysis of their actions in three main directions that are topical to both entities was performed. These are relationships with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan as well as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Key words: Russian Federation, Iran, Central Asia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Shanghai Cooperation Organization

INTRODUCTION

Today the Central Asia is the region where the interests of a wide range of countries are intertwined. This is explained by the strategic position of the region and its resource base. In the beginning of the 21st century here the geopolitical antagonism of the world political actors, primarily of Russia, USA and China called by researchers the 'Second Great Game' evolved (Hopkirk, 2006) within the frameworks of which as is known, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China support each other.

However also other countries such as the Islamic Republic Iran pursue an active policy in the Central Asia. In this regard, the question arises: is it cooperation or competition prevailing in the regional policy of Russia and Iran? May Iran become the ally of Russian in solution of the crucial issues of the Central Asia?

The relationships between Russia and Tehran rely on the Agreement concerning the basic principles of relations and principles of cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran signed on March 12, 2001 (Anonymous, 2001). Their cooperation features a multi-dimensional nature: an active political dialogue is maintained, the commercial and economic, military technical and cultural-humanitarian relations are maintained, the inter-regional contacts are rather active. At the same time there are controversies between the states for example, different approaches to solution of the Caspian issue, cooling in relations due to refusal of Russia to sell to Iran the air defence missile systems S-300 in 2012.

Iran is demanded in the Central Asia it helps to solve the transport and energy issues, provides technologies, develops trading relations with the countries of this region, is the member of the Economic Cooperation

Organization, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, OPEC. However, it does not pursue such a large-scale policy in the region as Russia does. By maintaining relationships with all entities within the region, it gives preference to Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

Tajikistan holds a special place in the relations of Iran with the Central Asian countries which is determined not as much by economic and political grounds as by the factors relating to the ethnic-cultural proximity of these countries. Turkmenistan ranks among the priorities due to its geographic position: it is the only regional subject having the land border with Iran as well as adjoining it in the Caspian region.

The third point of contact of Russia and Iran in the region is the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Let's consider them one by one.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Cooperation of Russia and Iran with Tajikistan: Starting from the first days of its independence Russia has been actively supporting Tajikistan. Thanks in large part to it the five-year-long civil war in the republic was stopped (Beloglazov, 2011). Also today Russia plays significant role in assurance of the Tajikistan security. On its territory there are 201 Russian military facilities and the optoelectronic space surveillance complex 'Window' ('Okno'). Russia guarantees the security of Tajikistan as the ally within the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

At the same time, commercial and economic cooperation is being actively developed. Russia holds the first position among the foreign trade partners of Tajikistan, 24% of the foreign trade turnover of the republic falls to its share. The volume of trade for the last year made 1, 27 billion dollars.

The main items of the Russian export are the mineral products, wood materials, cellulose and study products, ferrous metals and corresponding products, equipment and mechanical devices, electrical machinery.

Besides, Russia implements investment projects related to hydraulic power engineering and aluminum industry. Thus for example, Russia invested over 500 million dollars in the construction of the hydraulic power plant "Sangtuda-1" in the Dangarinsky District of the Khatlon region. The construction was performed by efforts of Russia. The official ceremony of starting the first unit of the hydraulic power plant took place on January 20, 2008 (Hamrokhon, 2009).

The bilateral cultural-humanitarian cooperation is also being actively developed. In particular, Russia participates in the development of the higher education system in the republic. In Dushanbe, there is the Russian-Tadzhik (Slavic) University, the largest in the country, as well as the branch of Lomonosov Moscow State University.

However, the Iran vector of the foreign policy is also relevant to Tajikistan. In the messages of the President Emomali Rahmon to the High Council of Tajikistan he speaks of the necessity to develop cooperation with the nearest neighbors, especially with Iran. There are over 180 documents executed between Iran and Tajikistan that regulate cooperation in such areas as policy, economy, trading, science, culture.

At the same time, Iran ranks only the sixth place among the trade partners of Tajikistan holding the share of 4.5 %. The turnover between the states in 2013 made only 300 million dollars (Sharif and Rashidijon, 2014). Iran supplies to the republic primarily the food products sugar, eggs, vegetable oils, animal fats, meat products, confectionery products, chocolate, nuts, paste products as well as pharmaceuticals, soap, plastics, glass.

Therefore, Iran can not be the rival trader as against Russia in Tajikistan either by the volume of sales or by the range of products. It rather competes with Turkey holding the sixth position among the economic partners of Tajikistan.

Moreover, during the recent years Iran launched the large-scale investment projects in Tajikistan. These are primarily the hydraulic power plant "Sangtuda-2" in which Iran invested 220 million dollars and construction of the Anzob tunnel connecting the capital of the country Dushanbe with Khujand in which Iran invested 30 million dollars (Evstratov, 2012). One may also mention the agreement with Afghanistan concerning transportation of drinking water through the territory of this country from Tajikistan to Iran.

Here, especially by the example of the Sangtuda power plant, we observe partnership, not competition. Already in January 2005 Russia and Iran simultaneously signed with Tajikistan the Protocol of completion of the

two Sangtuda power plants having segregated the areas of responsibility. Further on Russia and Iran constructed these facilities at the same time while coordinating their actions.

In the area of political cooperation of Iran with Tajikistan the priority is assigned to the security sphere. This is determined by the presence of such issues as drug traffic, extremism, terrorism especially originating from Afghanistan. Thus, during the meeting with the Minister of the Interior of Tajikistan Ramzan Rakhimzade that took place in February 2015 his Iran colleague, the general Ismail Mogadam Zakhr noted that giving attention to the common historical roots, culture and religion of Iran and Tajikistan, the Islamic Republic Iran is ready for cooperation with Tajikistan of any kind including promotion of its security.

However, there is no Iran military infrastructure in Tajikistan; therefore, there is no competition with Russia in this area. Moreover, Russia and Iran have the same interests in striving for assuring security and stability of Tajikistan.

As to the cultural-humanitarian cooperation in Tajikistan the international symposia and workshops are regularly held that are dedicated to Farsi and the Persian literature, the Farsi Fund has been established, the libraries named after Rudi and Amir Jabir were constructed at the Iran's cost. Therefore, the actions of Russia and Iran in this area are not intersected but complement each other.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Relationships of Russia and Iran with Turkmenistan: In contrast to Tajikistan, Turkmenistan that declared the perpetual neutrality has not entered any integration institution together with Russia. Moreover, at the summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) in 2005 in Kazan, it announced that it will participate in this organization as an associated member only. This is why, the political interaction is restricted by bilateral meetings and the military technical cooperation is maintained at the minimum level.

Nevertheless, during the recent years Turkmenistan began escaping the isolation slightly and showing interest in the integration processes. Thus in 2012 it firstly agreed to hold the presidency of the CIS and on December 5, 2012 it held in Ashkhabad the Meeting of the Council of the chiefs of the CIS-states. Besides, upon the initiative of the President of Turkmenistan Berdimuhamedow the Declaration of the further development of the comprehensive cooperation in the area of CIS was prepared by the start of the summit.

In September 2014, the President of Turkmenistan participated in the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation in Dushanbe. The republic is pushed towards rapprochement with Russia due to the situation at the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan border that became significantly sharper after withdrawal of the coalition troops from Afghanistan in 2014. On its part Russia takes for one of the main priorities the necessity of maintaining stability and safety at the southern borders of the CIS. All of this creates prerequisites for deepening of relationships and return of Turkmenistan to the single political space with Russia.

Economically Turkmenistan cooperates with Russia more. In 2012, the volume of the Russian-Turkmen goods turnover net of gas reached 1, 4 billion US dollars from which the Russian export made 1, 2 billion. Within its structure the main share falls to the ferrous metals and products, wood products as well as machinery and vehicles.

The priority trend of the Russian-Turkmen economic cooperation is the gas sector. The Turkmen gas is transported to Russia through the gas pipeline "Central Asia Center" with the throughput capacity of 80 billion cubic meters per year. Already during the visit of the President S. Niyazov to Moscow in April 2003 the Agreement for long-term energy export from Turkmenistan until the year 2028 was signed (Luzyanin, 2007).

In the cultural-humanitarian sphere, the cooperation is less intensive than with Tajikistan. The most significant achievements are observed in the sphere of education. In Ashkhabad, there is the Russian-Turkmen Secondary School named after Pushkin at which education is performed based on the Russian curriculum. Also in August 2008 in Ashkhabad the branch of the Gubkin Russian State University of Oil and Gas was opened.

The relationships of Iran with Turkmenistan distinguish through stability and dynamism. Iran is considered to be one of the important trade partners of the republic. According to the experts' estimates in 2012, Iran ranked the third place (following China and Russia) among the principal trade partners of Turkmenistan.

The volume of the goods turnover between the two countries net of oil and gas reaches 1 billion dollars per year; within the last 2 years this figure increased by 15-20%. At the same time, the range of items being exported does not coincide with the Russian supplies.

The strategic area of cooperation is the gas sector: in 1997 the gas pipeline Korpedzhe Gurtkuyji with the throughput capacity of 8 billion cubic meters per year was constructed and in 2010 the gas pipeline Dovletabad Serakhs Khangeran rated at the annual delivery of 12.5 billion m³ of gas was started (Junny, 2009).

Thus, Russia and Iran also do not compete within the gas cooperation with Turkmenistan. Firstly, relatively small volumes of gas are pumped to Iran. Secondly, both pipelines from Turkmenistan to the North and to the South just like the Chinese pipelines to the East jointly guarantee the non-participation of Turkmenistan in the Western gas projects that compete with the Russian ones.

Besides, the Iran companies implemented in Turkmenistan various investment projects such as the program of development of fiber-optic communication, construction of the railroad Meshkhed-Serakhs-Tedzhen, design of the water facilities bunkers at the Merva plant, construction of the oil refinery plant in Turkmenbashi, liquid gas terminals, roads and highways, the 'Druzhba' dam. Since, Russia does not implement large-scale investment projects in Turkmenistan here there is no grounds for collisions.

Iran is ready to provide further assistance in development of Turkmenistan. According to the Deputy Minister of Industry, Minery and Trade of the Islamic Republic Iran Modzhtab Hothroutugh, "Iran is ready to support Turkmenistan in the development of the industrial capacity of the sea ports of this country, construction of petrochemical plants, seamless tube producing plant, cement plants, asphalt producing plants, gas-fired power plants, design and construction of irrigation and drainage systems, laying of power transmission lines".

In December 2014, the President of Iran Hassan Rouhani at the ceremony of opening of the railroad Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan emphasized its special significance. The new railroad not only connects the three countries but makes the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman more accessible and reduces the distance between them and China, Russia, Turkey, Europe. The railroad Iran, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan will allow carrying millions tons of goods and dozens of thousands passengers per year, however, its capacity shall be increased steadily. Besides, it shall be noted that it will connect the countries members of the Economic Cooperation Organization with the countries-members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

As we can see, Iran also does not hold out Russia as a competitor and believes that its infrastructural projects may be used in particular in the interests of Russia.

The cultural-humanitarian cooperation of Iran with Turkmenistan, is also less intensive than with Tajikistan. Exhibitions, tours of musical bands and performers, international conferences involving Iran and Turkmen, researchers are held. In 2014 in Turkmenistan, the days of the Iran culture took place. Obviously, no conflicts with the Russian policy may arise out of this.

Russia and iran in the shanghai cooperation organization:

As is known, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was created in 2001 by Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kirgizia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The declared tasks thereof were prevention and stopping the terroristic acts, separatism and extremism in the Central Asia.

Russia, now being the Chairman of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization holds it out as the most important tool for assuring safety in the Central Asia. For this purpose Russia works out the strategy of the Organization development until the year 2025 and promotes the concept of cooperation between the SCO and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Besides, it launched an initiative concerning the creation on the basis of the Regional anti-terroristic unit of the SCO of the universal center of integrated coordination of fighting against terrorism, drug and ammunition trafficking, organized crime and information security.

Iran was granted the observer status at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization at the summit in Astana on July 5, 2005, along with India and Pakistan. It is definitely interested in becoming the active and full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization to be able to cooperate with the active members of the integration structure on the full-scale basis. The significance of such cooperation was emphasized by Hassan Rouhani in his speech at the SCO summit in Dushanbe in September 2014.

Iran shares the approaches of organization to the principles of economic cooperation and fundamental international issues. Thus, it supports the concept of founding the Bank of the SCO development and participates in the interbank association which facilitates its participation in the regional projects. However, the issue of becoming the full member of this Organization is complicated for Iran due to unsettled issue relating to international sanctions of the country.

It is expected that the application of Iran concerning the transition from observers to the SCO-members will be re-processed at the summit of organization in 2015 in Ufa, Russia. Rapprochement of Russia and Iran within the frameworks of SCO will allow solving the issues relating to assurance of safety in the Central Asia in a more efficient manner.

Summary: Thus, Iran is the objective ally of Russia in the Central Asia. Coordination of efforts of Russia and Iran by pursuing the regional policy is not only possible but necessary as well. It will increase efficiency of their actions and have a favorable effect on the region the whole.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of foregoing, the conclusion may be drawn that the Central Asia is the strategically crucial region both to Russia and Iran. Their approaches to the main regional issues are alike to large extent: these are safeguarding the security and stability, fighting against drug traffic, extremism and terrorism, long-term economic cooperation with the countries of the region. At the same time, there are no severe conflicts and competition between Russia and Iran even in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan where their interests are intertwined. Participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization conciliates the positions of the two states even more.

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