

IRAN – CHINA DEAL: AN EPISODE OF IRAN’S LOOK TO THE EAST POLICY

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Abstract

Iran-China deal amid global power shifts from unipolarity to bipolarity suggests Iran’s counterbalancing vis-à-vis Western Powers, particularly U.S. as, the U.S. withdrew from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in May 2018 agreed upon on July 14, 2015, between Iran, the U.S., and its western allies. However, another view persists that Iran’s “Look to the East Policy” adopted back in 2005 was meant to strengthen relations with natural regional neighbors that seem a rational choice for Iran. This notion is somewhat true as ideological concerns became obsolete with the demise of the Soviet Union. Today’s foreign policy approach moves around the spatial(relates to geography) dimension as states cannot change their neighbors. Furthermore, it is in the mutual interest of the countries of the region as well. To understand the true essence of the Iran-China deal it is pivotal to understand the factual history and thorough understanding of Iran’s foreign policy on an ontological basis. Academicians gauge this deal from the prism of power balance or bandwagoning approach epistemologically, but this study uncovers the facts based on rational choice theory and its impacts on Iran.

Keywords: China, U.S. Hegemony, Global Politics, Foreign Policy, Regional Politics, Rational Choice, Iran

Introduction:

Contemporary global politics is a baffling chess game. Various players are emerging in the global political arena with their own pace and ferocity. States who will choose their battles with sagacity and pragmatics

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will be the one to triumph this contest. Myopic and one-state-centric policies will only constrain the foreign policy choices of any state.

President Trump's withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action in 2018 and subsequent maximum pressure efforts to bring Iran's economy to halt considerably constrained Iran's trade with European countries and India because of stringent sanctions. This maximum pressure policy was aimed to limit Iran's maneuvers regionally and globally. Iran's theological stronghold and its agitated 'forward defense doctrine' are two major impediments to President Trump's policy. In addition to the domestic stronghold, Iran has not been left lurching like a rudderless ship by its regional ally and U.S. A's alleged archrival, China. Apparently, this show of Iran-China amity hints at China and Iran's balancing and bandwagoning vis-à-vis the U.S.A. However, historical analysis suggests that Iran's east-ward tilt is not a novel policy overturn; in fact, this East-orientation has been a long-standing factor in Iran's foreign policy. This study based on rational-choice theory suggests that Iran's foreign policy is multidimensional and well-orchestrated by keeping in view Iran's best interests rather than mere U.S. centric balancing. Moreover, Iran's East approach has been a long-standing factor in Iran's policy carved out after substantial calculations and introspection.

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the long relations of present-day Iran and China going through the evolution processes of foreign policy to secure their respective national interests and perspicacious leadership. Furthermore, it encompasses the new measures adopted by them and their whomp on U.S. foreign policy goals. China has become a two-edged sword for the U.S. economically and politically. The U.S. should get rid of pervasive flaws in its foreign policy and revise it to buttress its hegemony and secure national interest that is expansion and consolidation of global power in which China is becoming partner slowly and gradually. The U.S. may lose its position with already prevailing strategies. It is to see that how much room the U.S. has to put itself to advance the county's national interest and better meet the challenges of forming new alliances.

Theoretical Framework: Foreign Policy of Iran

Foreign policy decisions of a state have been an interplay of various factors including internal and external determinants, ideational leanings of leaders, opportunities, systemic pressures, resources, political culture, public demands, economy, ethnography, geography, neighborhood, and regional and global aspirations of a state etc. In an article Darwich and Kaarbo has made an interesting case and argued that An FPA perspective proposes that central decision-making units (leaders) subjectively interpret domestic and

international constraints and opportunities affect foreign policy.¹ It also seems true in case of Iran that has moved from ideology to ambition relying on aggression and cooperation etc. In post-revolution period Iran’s foreign policy is often described as “as conflict-cooperation or aggressive moderate continua”.² It has oscillated between aggressiveness and accommodation under different administrations. To some scholars, this vacillation has been due to external pressures however some scholars view domestic factors as more important in determining state preferences and choices.

This study takes inferences “from here we begin”³ for the theoretical and conceptual basis of Iran’s Foreign Policy. Lawson argued that interstate relations in the Gulf region are characterized by rivalries more than by cooperation. Iran remains deeply embedded in the security concerns, the absence of any other superpower that can challenge US global domination, and the spiral of the arms race in the Middle East, deep-seated rivalries within the Middle East, nuclear imbroglio, and the emergence of a new, weak state, along Iran's northern border, and a number of other factors. At the same time, the Islamic Republic's economy is also suffering from the adverse effects of the ongoing "shortcomings and irregularities," but the government is struggling with the increasing fragmentation and the dissatisfaction of the people.⁴ The aggregation of these inner and outer difficulties has put Leadership of Iran under tremendous pressure to make decisions that would bring out Iran from strategic vulnerability on one hand and to advance the Islamic revolution on the other. The overall examination of Iran’s foreign policy theory and practice reveals that the overriding thrust of Iranian foreign policy continues to derive from ‘certain grand strategic preferences that transcend the faultlines of day-to-day politics’.⁵

Warnaar argued that studies of Iranian foreign policy point to the need for an approach that recognizes not just the relevance of ideas for foreign policy, but also acknowledges the social construction of the world relevant to foreign policy behavior, to allow for a better understanding of how Iranian foreign policy is made possible.⁶ In

¹ May Darwich, and Juliet Kaarbo, 'IR in the Middle East : Foreign policy analysis in theoretical approaches', *International Relations*, 34(2), (Sage Publications, 2020), 227

² Haji Amir Yousefi, "Political Culture and Irans Foreign Policy: A Comparative Study of Irans Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad and Rouhani." *World Sociopolitical Studies*, 2(2), (2018), 225-245

³ Fred H. Lawson, "From here we begin: A survey of scholarship on the international relations of the gulf." 36, no. 3, 2009. pp 337-357

⁴ Ibid.p. 339

⁵ Ibid.p.341

⁶ M. Warnaar, *Studying Iranian Foreign Policy: A Constructivist Approach*. In: *Iranian Foreign Policy during Ahmadinejad*. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

reality, Iran and Iranians hold a nostalgic self-perception about Iran's status and role in international affairs.⁷

Iran's East Policy-An Overview

Deterioration of U.S Iran relations and their long-standing animosity following the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 has been a crystal-clear trend dominating U.S-Iran relations. This Islamic revolution also disturbed the regional order and also ruined the slowly emerging alliance of moderate forces in the region.⁸ Ostensibly, the fundamental guiding principle of revolutionary Iran was Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's slogan "Na Sharq, Na Gharb. Faqat Jamhuri-ye-Islami."⁹ Practically, Iran had to suffer for saying no to US dictates and because it had pursued its interests in accordance with a strict independence motto that grew out of the revolution.¹⁰ However, In the post-revolution period, Iran succeeded in nurturing close ties with the ruling governments of the regional countries. It was because Iran had to lean towards the East to find allies to bear the brunt of sanctions and containment measures inflicted by the west. Following the Islamic revolution of Iran's foreign policy was premised on two fundamental tenets. Iran employed fiery rhetoric against the U.S to achieve foreign policy independence and turned eastwards. This eastward tilt was rational as well as necessary for Iran to prevent its crumbling. This Eastward tilt has morphed into a substantial policy especially since the 'Look to the East policy' in 2005.¹¹ This look to the east policy was aimed at reviving relations with Moscow, Beijing, and New Delhi to evade the west's containment efforts. This East approach was particularly intensified as the result of contemporary U.S maximum pressure efforts that Iran accelerated its regional diplomatic outreach.

Iran's look to the East policy: Prospects and Challenges:

Though Iran's relationship with eastern countries encompasses over centuries however there were substantial ups and downs after the triumph of the Islamic Revolution in 1979. In ASEAN states like Malaysia and Indonesia, Islamic movements braced the Iranian chronicle of creating a new

7 Arshin Adib Moghaddam, "Islamic Utopian Romanticism and the Foreign Policy Culture of Iran," *Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 14(3), 267

8 Raymond A. Hinnebusch, and Anoushiravan Ehteshami, eds. *The foreign policies of Middle East states*. (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2002), 283-309

9 Haleh Vaziri, "Iran's Nuclear Quest: Motivations and Consequences." *The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 315

10 Arshin Adib Moghaddam, "After the West: Critical Movements in the Discipline of International Relations." *Int'l Stud. J.* 15 (2018), 43

11 Mohsen Shariatinia, "Iran-China Relations: An overview of critical factors." *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs* 1(4), (2011), 57-85

world order based on Islamic Justice but it was offset by Saudi investment.¹² Since 1994, Malaysia has invested heavily in Iranian oil reserves. Both states went through a series of negotiations and treaties for outspreading bilateral relations. After the look east policy of Iran, a surge increase in bilateral trade was observed. The Iranian exports to Malaysia amplified from \$27 million to \$178 million between 2005-2007 but afterward, a sharp decline and fluctuation were observed.¹³ Despite US sanctions, Malaysia continued to back and assist Iran. The *Nikkei Asian* review proclaimed in 2019 that Iranian oil is still supplied immensely in Malaysia through the strait of Malaca underhandedly through Chinese embargoes. This prerogative was further reinforced by the shipping data that echoed a surge intensification in 86% of oil shipments between China and Malaysia through Kuala Sungai Linggi port.¹⁴ Currently, Mahatir Mohammad sturdily supported the Iranian regime and Malaysia acted as a duct with the support of China for the incessant flow of Iranian oil in the eastern client states. The bilateral interests of Malaysia and Iran both converge on manifold fronts for instance, ideological, political, religious, and economic. Malaysia contemplates the dependence of Muslim states on the west as quite devastating. In an exertion to condense this growing dependence, internal chaos, and inefficiency within Muslim states Malaysia along with Iran and Turkey opted for the Kuala Lumpur summit.¹⁵ The real challenge for Malaysia and Iran is constantly snowballing US pressure and strict sanctions over client states. Moreover, lately, Mahatir Mohammad has faced internal political chaos and was barred or excluded from his own political party.¹⁶ The power grappling in Malaysia, withdrawal of the US from JCPOA, the mounting investment, and concentration of the US in the south China sea deceptively made the imminent bilateral relations dreary and quite unpredictable.

Another Asian state Japan with a robust economy relied deeply on Iranian oil before US sanctions due to its budding industrial needs and the

¹² John Calabrese, "Iran's Economic outreach to South East Asia," (Middle East Institute 2016). Retrieved from: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/irans-economic-outreach-southeast-asia>. Accessed September 9, 2020

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Damon Evans, "Iranian oil flowing past Malaysia on way to Asian customers." *Nikkei Asian Review*, (2019). Retrieved from: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Iranian-oil-flowing-past-Malaysia-on-way-to-Asian-customers>. Accessed September 9, 2020

¹⁵ "Kuala Lumpur Summit: Five major issues facing Muslim world." (Al Jazeera, 2019). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/12/kl-summit-major-issues-facing-muslim-world-191217053320764.html>. Accessed September 9, 2020.

¹⁶ "Ex-Malaysia PM Mahathir Mohamad expelled from own political party." (Aljazeera, 2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/05/malaysia-pm-mahathir-mohamad-expelled-political-party-200528122220666.html>. Accessed September 9, 2020.

trade through the geostrategically important strait of Hormuz. After 1979, the foremost oil shipments of Iran were directed to Japan. Recently, Japan at times resisted the US narrative and arrangements on Iran. Japan tried hard for dispute resolution between the US and Iran but remained unsuccessful in any breakthrough.¹⁷ In October 2018, Japan's ambassador to Iran stressed the importance of bilateral relations between both states and articulated confidence in the Iranian future. In 2019, Iranian President Rouhani visited Japan and conversed matters pertaining to bilateral relations and trade between both states. Japanese Prime Minister Abe also visited Arab states in June 2019, in the milieu of escalating Arab-Iranian tensions. Japan faced a major dilemma over the US maximum pressure strategy, trade tussle between China and the US, and the possible future disruption of oil in case of obstruction of the strait of Hormuz that could plunge its economy into deeper recession (due to oil prices and decline in imports).¹⁸ Japan seems to be trapped between this rancorous spiral as on one hand it is a US ally and on other hand, it is enormously reliant on fossil fuels and oil. The mounting incongruity between Japan and the US over matters concerning trade and security seems palpable. Iran sensibly used this breach in the strategic thinking of Japan for its advantage.

Iran's looks to east policy yielded maximum benefits in bilateral relations with Moscow and Beijing. Moscow arrived at a bilateral trade arrangement with Iran in 2019 and assisted Iran in face of US sanctions. Moreover, the interests of both states are congregating in the Caspian Sea and energy cooperation in the immediate future.¹⁹ Moscow and Iran are now cronies in the military alliance functioning in Syria despite variances in inclusive end goals. The perceived peril and potential impacts of sanctions and apparent menace of internal stability assemble the interests of both states concerning shared objectives.²⁰ Russia and Iran opted for greater

¹⁷ Cary Baird, "Sanctions on Iran create diplomatic headache, rather than economic catastrophe, for oil-dependent Japan." *The Japan Times* (2018). Retrieved from: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/06/27/business/sanctions-iran-create-diplomatic-headache-rather-economic-catastrophe-oil-dependent-japan/>. Accessed September 9, 2020.

¹⁸ William Pesek, "Trump's Iran adventure has Japan over a barrel." *Asia Times* (2020). Retrieved from: <https://asiatimes.com/2020/01/trumps-iran-adventure-has-japan-over-a-barrel/>. Accessed September 9, 2020

¹⁹ Nicole Franiok, "Defining the Russia Iran relation." *ASP American security Project*. (2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.americansecurityproject.org/defining-the-russia-iran-relationship/> Accessed September 9, 2020

²⁰ Nikolay Kozhanov, "*Russia's Relations with Iran*" (The Washington Institute for near East policy, 2012). Retrieved from: <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/uploads/Documents/pubs/PolicyFocus120.pdf>. Accessed September 9, 2020.

easternization for facing the western pressure and purging of isolation that made the bilateral relationship more concrete.

In all three cases stated above in the setting of look east policy of Iran an obvious seamless merger and intermingling of oil diplomacy, regional stability, ideological convergence, economical interests, and geostrategic thinking remains evident within all eastern players. Each one is backing others for its own shared goals and objectives. The interdependence in the globalized world is an undeniable fact.

II-China-Iran Bilateral Relations

History of China-Iran Relations (since ancient times)

The historical relations between Iran and China started at the end of 200 BCE. Chinese dynasties including Hans, Yuan, Ming, and Song interacted with the ancient Persian empire (Anxi or Parthia) through a famous Silk trade route. The Persian products were disseminated to the central Asian states after they landed in China while Chinese products were moved towards Africa and the Middle East through Iran. In the book of Liang, an ancient olden Chinese book chronicles projected that joint combats were fought by Chinese and Persian forces (Sassanians) in face of aggressive Heptalites and nomadic Turks.²¹ Both states conjoined with each other for offering security to the trade caravans for reciprocated benefit. In post-Islamic retro the only major skirmish aroused over the region of Syr Darya otherwise both states subsisted tranquility and preserved cordial relations along with cultural contacts like Polo.²² During the Yuan regime, several Persian journeyed to China. Persian was proclaimed as one of the official languages of the Yuan dynasty. In Beijing, Muslim Academia was also erected.²³ Iranian astrophysicists worked during the Ming dynasty in China. The cultural connections were further amplified and partially influenced artwork and literary writings in Iran and China. The intermarriages were also begun in 1376 amongst distinguished families of both countries. Later on, the dealings were downcasted and shadowed by the upsurge of Imperialism and subjugation by western powers.

²¹ Macurie Fishberg, "*Materials for Physical Anthropolgy of Eastern Jews.*" (American Anthropological Association, 1907), 1. Retrieved from: https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=pfIQnqoQz0oC&pg=PA233&redir_esc=y. Accessed September 9, 2020

²² John W Garver, "Twenty Centuries of Friendly Cooperation: The Sino-Iranian Relationship." (the Globalist Rethinking Globalization, 2006). Retrieved from: <https://www.theglobalist.com/twenty-centuries-of-friendly-cooperation-the-sino-iranian-relationship/>. Accessed September 9, 2020

²³ *Chinese-Iranian Relations viii. Persian Language and Literature in China*, (2019). Retrieved from: <https://iranicaonline.org/articles/chinese-iranian-viii>, Accessed September 9, 2020

China-Iran Relations 1949-1978:

In 1935 Persia got its name changed with Iran. During the initial years of the cold war, Iran aligned its foreign policy with the west to avoid getting entangled under communism.²⁴ Due to this reason, Iran showed its reluctance to accord formal recognition to China in 1949 and to support China's entry into the UN. China's policy towards Iran was based on Iran's moves.

In the mid 14th century, the Chinese code of conduct towards Persia was very clear due to ideological differences. Persia adopted its pro-west foreign policy very consciously and deliberately.²⁵ There are myriads of examples in the history of such behavior e.g. China braced Muhammad Musaddaq's decision of the nationalization of the Persian oil industry. The reason to hold up this decision was to support the resistance of British and American Imperial policy. Although the U.S. gave a strong reaction to this in the form of supporting a coup d'état in August 1953 and toppled Mosaddeq's government that was a move against the Soviet Union.²⁶ China strongly opposed and curbed anti-communist alliances not only in Iran but in Africa and other third-world countries as well. Persia found China less dominant than the Soviet Union and comparatively mild towards third world countries generally and towards Persia particularly.

Post-1979 China-Iran Relations

Firstly the post-Islamic Revolution period witnessed a steady drop in close ties between China and Iran that remained encapsulated, convoluted, and constricted by Chinese prior support for Shah.²⁷ Though China immediately accepted the new setup and strived to mend its relationship with Iran by applying obsequious diplomacy, it remained a hard nut to crack. During the 1980's Iran-Iraq war China supplied almost 70% of the overall arsenals to Iran utilized in the war but proclaimed neutrality that enraged the Iranian administration. China dealt with it by abetting a war-wrenched Iran in the reconstruction phase by erecting Tehran underpasses, barrages, and

²⁴ Mohajer, Parviz. "Chinese-Iranian Relations v. Diplomatic and Commercial Relations, 1949-90", no.4, 438-44

²⁵ Morris Mossabi, "China Among Equals: Middle Kingdom and its Neighbours, 10th to 14th Century". (University of California Press, 1983), 246

²⁶ Charles Peter Melville, "Safavid Persia: The History and Politics of An Islamic Society", 224.

²⁷ Brandon J. Gentry, "The Dragon and the Magi: Burgeoning Sino-Iranian Relations in the 21st Century." *The China and Eurasian Platform quarterly* 3 (3) (2005), 111-125. Retrieved from: chrome-extension://padcapdkhelngdelppbbjmkmkfceoikg/content/pdf/viewer/viewer.html?file=https%3A%2F%2Fd1wqtxs1xzle7.cloudfront.net%2F6592801%2F12_dragon_magi_burgeoning.pdf%3Fresponse-content-disposition%3Dinline%253B%2Bfilename%253DThe_Dragon_and_the_Ma. Accessed September 4, 2020

fisheries, etc. Moreover, on the economic front in the post-revolution period, many conventional collaborators from the US and UK were driven out generating an ample void and opportunity for Chinese traders. So, bilateral trade rose up to new elevations approximately \$627 million to \$1,627 billion.²⁸ The bond was further intensified and diversified after the 1989 official visit of Ayat-Ullah-Kohmeini to the People's Republic of China starting a long-term energy deals-a win-win situation for both countries. In 1992, despite pressure from the western allies, China signed “a nuclear cooperation agreement with Iran”. China provided a security curtain to the Iran in UN security council and refused to support the proposed sanctions by the Bill Clinton administration in 1996. During this period the global interests of both states started to converge under, the umbrella of anti-imperial sentiments and third world slogans. Moreover, the growing cult of Iranian followers in the Middle East made Iran a potential partner for China in regional affairs.²⁹

Secondly, in the post 9/11 period, the vulnerability of Iran surged up after the consecutive invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Iran tried to negotiate with the US administration on all matters including Hezbollah and their weapons of mass destruction but the Bush administration replied that “we don’t enunciate with evil” ending any hope for future negotiations that pushed Iran towards greater collaboration with China. While China on the other hand was calculating the relative importance of Iran’s geostrategic position in the Persian Gulf and its oil resources. Therefore, this interdependence proved to be the start of a new beginning in the bilateral relationship between Iran and China. In the backdrop of US sanctions, pressure and the growing isolation of Iran China became the biggest trading partner of Iran under its new economic policy of “going out”. China invested heavily in the major energy, technology, and infrastructure sectors of Iran. In 2001 the net trade between both countries was approximately \$3.3 billion but in 2008 it roused up to \$25 billion. In the next four years, it was doubled to \$50 billion.³⁰ China remained actively

²⁸ Lubricated with Oil: Iran-China Relations in a Changing World." *Middle East Policy* 10 (2): 70 (2008). Retrieved from: chrome-extension://padcapdkhelngdelpbbbjmkmkfc_eoikg/content/pdf/viewer/viewer.html?file=https%3A%2F%2Fd1wqtxs1xzle7.cloudfront.net%2F49019279%2Fj.1475-4967.2008.00350.x20160921-25592-14irkds.pdf%3F1474486861%3D%26response-content-disposition%3Dinline%253. Accessed November 4, 2020

²⁹ John W. Garver, *China and Iran Ancient partners in Post imperial world*, (University of Washington, 2006). Retrieved from: https://books.google.de/books?hl=en&lr=&id=CPMoRVo3fSwC&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=sino+iranian+relations+before+Islamic+Revolution+in+iran&ots=z6DRxu1Hvk&sig=7JOxDAsldUAh_cHBxj5wtPLrwwA&r edir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false. Accessed September 4, 2020

³⁰ Zamenah, Radio, "Iran and China expanded trade relations." (Payvand, 2012). Retrieved from: <http://www.payvand.com/news/12/apr/1001.html>. Accessed September 4, 2020

engaged in the exploration and digging in the Azadegan oil field and the Yadavaran oil field and successfully negotiated an LNG deal of \$70 to \$100 billion with Iran for the next 30 years.³¹ Moreover, China assisted Iran in developing its oil and gas infrastructure in Neka and the Caspian sea. Since 2016, significant progress is made on the connectivity routes via train between both countries, and Xi Jinping during his trip announced extensive backing for Iran's permanent SCO membership. In 2019, Iran officially became part of BRI.

China-Iran Deal:

China Iran's being negotiated deal worth the US \$400 billion is ringing alarms for the US and the countries of the region. Both states are striving for a strategic partnership. This study asserts that their relationship stretches back to thousands of years in fact centuries and it is not a new move to counter the US. Being cognizant of the above-mentioned cues it is foreseeable that China and Iran remained close partners and gradually developed their relationship based on their asymmetric interdependence and geostrategic interests in the paradigm of game theory. Both states focus on finite as well as infinite goals (globally and regionally) and develop their foreign policy according to the realist approach.

The proposed deal is perceived as a major threat against the interests of the US and its allies particularly India, Israel, and Arab states. Washington post viewed it as the failure of maximum pressure tactics of the US administration but in reality, both states are endeavoring to deepen the already existing relationships that could generate both winners and losers but it will be wrong to confine it to merely curtailing the US. It's important to understand that this deal is overestimated and the core purpose is misapprehended and misconceived. It's not a secret move by China and Iran indeed it was a much-awaited draft of a comprehensive strategic partnership between both states since 2016. Moreover, it's important to understand that China enjoys this level of bilateral relations with many Arab states with huge investments under Chinese Arab policy.

Since the Hans dynasty period, the bilateral relationship between the two oldest world civilizations remained intact through a silk trade route. Currently, under this proposed deal, China is securing the third vital pillar of its foreign policy core interests related to economic development. This long-

³¹ Lubricated with Oil: Iran-China Relations in a Changing World." *Middle East Policy* 10 (2) (2008), 70. Retrieved from: <chrome-extension://padcapdkhelngde lppbbjmkmkfceoikg/content/pdf/viewer/viewer.html?file=https%3A%2F%2Fd1wqtxts1xzle7.cloudfront.net%2F49019279%2Fj.1475-4967.2008.00350.x20160921-25592-14irkds.pdf%3F1474486861%3D%26response-content-disposition%3Dinline%253.> Accessed November 4, 2020

term deal if pursued will provide energy security to China with a greater hold in the geostrategically important Persian Gulf.³² This deal will also directly attach Afghanistan with the BRI project. Moreover, It will reduce Chinese dependence on maritime chokepoints in case of any blockade. This deal will provide a lifeline to the dying Iranian economy with a leverage and support mechanism in the face of US sanctions.

Easternization is not a new phenomenon. The countries of the region are actively collaborating with one another on diverse fronts under BRI. The Iran-China deal is also linked with this larger picture. Due to the growing tensions with the US, China is seeking greater inclusiveness in its own neighborhood. China is also keenly aiming to build the Bandar-e-Jack port of Iran located in the strait of Hormuz-a potentially important oil loading site in the future.³³ China is seeking new markets for its 5G infrastructure that is slammed off in the west and the US. So, the primary purpose strongly adheres to economic prosperity and greater regional cohesiveness. The secondary factors could be attached to curtailing US influence by supporting Iran but again this is not a new tactic or approach. Indeed it’s just a new episode of the look east policy of Iran.

The Chinese involvement and collaboration on the military front also commenced in late 1980 and continued in the form of worm silk missiles and assistance in the training of Iranian military forces. China also provided a lot of advanced weapons and helped Iran in the development of its nuclear program through technological assistance since 1992. So, under this new deal, China further strengthened existing bilateral defense ties between both countries. The proposed threat of deployment of Chinese forces in Iran doesn’t seem conceivable as it could drain the relations with Arab states.

The Chinese investment in infrastructure projects in the post-revolution period remained a common practice. China reconstructed Iranian subways and dams after the destructive Iranian-Iraqi war. Moreover, China invested \$26.9 billion in Iran during 2005-2019 in this sector.³⁴ So, it is an old precedent with a new disguise to strengthen close collaboration between both countries.

The interests of both states converged under Beijing's third world theory and the amoral mentality but it is largely glued with civilizational

³²Alam Saleh, "Iran's pact with China is a bad news for the west." *Foreign Policy*, (2020). <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/09/irans-pact-with-china-is-bad-news-for-the-west/>. Accessed September 4, 2020.

³³Navtej Sarna, "Neither East Nor West, Only China." *Hindustan Times*. (2020). Retrieved from: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/neither-east-nor-west-only-china/story-1R51QEx2HRos1s2RKNIPbM.html>. Accessed September 4, 2020

³⁴Rupert Stone, "Don't believe the hype about China Iran deal ." *TRT World*, (2020) Retrieved from: <https://www.trtworld.com/opinion/don-t-believe-the-hype-about-the-china-iran-deal-38436>. Accessed September 4, 2020

solidarity and reciprocal collaboration on diverse fronts. Through this deal, Beijing is trying to influence the evolution of power structure in the world.

China-Iran Deal: How it is a move to counter the US?

China's Iran deal cannot be understood in segregation, it is molded and cemented by both exertions to counter the US and by the mutuality of core interests over the discourse of the time. Though the budding Chinese sustenance for Iran is not newfangled it gaudily compromised US deterrence power. The chain of cause and effect can be sketched out in this power tussle that fashioned a confrontational and aggressive relationship with the US.³⁵ So, this new effort is perceived to be undermining US hegemonic status. The mounting influence of China in the Middle East, Africa, and Iran endangered US interests. Chinese clasp and investment in major energy, infrastructure, and telecommunication projects along with the grip on maritime strategic chock points like the strait of Hormuz apparently on one side secured Chinese economic future and increased the world's dependency on China while on the flip side it undermined and dented US efforts to isolate or curtail Chinese footprint in the region. This deal if followed will stipulate breathing space to the putrefying and crumbling Iranian economy despite US maximum pressure tactics therefore, it will increase the regional and global stature of Iran. In the war of perception and propaganda, it will resonate with a negative connotation for the US in immediate future. Moreover, this deal replicates the importance of coexistence and multilateralism instead of aggressive unilateralism in the 21st century.

Conclusion:

Iran and China are the old regional partners. West and particularly U.S. media created the hype of the recently held Iran-China deal that was actually under consideration for four years. Iran has already adopted a policy to strengthen relations with countries in the region. Pertaining to its relations with China, it is more proactive. From defense to economy and development to politics China and Iran are planning to strengthen ties at all levels due to rapidly changing geopolitics in the future. China is not particular towards Iran albeit it has developed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to spread its footprint through investment and development all over the world ranging from small islands to the big countries. Iran also signed BRI and enthusiastically supported the idea on different forums since its inception. It is quite obvious in the era of globalization that bilateral relations do affect not only regional but international politics as well. Hence China's billions of

³⁵Alam Saleh, "Iran's pact with China is a bad news for the west." *Foreign Policy*. (2020). Retrieved from:<https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/09/irans-pact-with-china-is-bad-news-for-the-west/>. Accessed September 4, 2020

dollars investment pledge to Iran shook the other countries particularly those who are in the anti-Iranian block and are involved to isolate and try to isolate Iran from one way or the other. New York Times revealed that the Sino-Iran agreement draft is acquired even before the meetings were concluded and claimed they are cooperating in the areas of telecommunication, banking, and connectivity through ports, railways, and roads, which is so true. There is a wide range of cooperation areas between the two countries so is the military cooperation which is taken in a pejorative sense by the west. The U.S. takes every move of china as a competition be it defense-related or other than that. History is revising itself the U.S. had the curtailment policy for the Soviet Union in the past now it has the same policy for China in every region be it Asia, the Middle East, Africa, or any other part of the world. U.S. takes China’s BRI as a real challenge and is afraid of its expansion day by day hence Iran’s entry into it is intolerable for her.

This is a reality that China is growing its influence rapidly than ever before not only in East Asia and Africa but also in the Middle East, Iran is part of it. The U.S. who has been a sole superpower for decades feeling a challenge to its hegemony. This time Iran-China Partnership is entirely based on mutual benefits. Iran will refrain itself from being isolated in World politics and on the other side, China will be ensured in terms of energy supplies of the Persian Gulf which its energy needs heavily rely upon. China is undoubtedly unstoppable but its expansionist designs are very liberal in nature. China is using its soft power unlike the U.S. to pursue its vision as a rising new power. The U.S. should adopt coercive measures neither tactically nor strategically in response to curtail China. If it does so it will have to pay an unrepairable cost. Albeit the U.S. also should try to consolidate its hegemony through the use of the same soft power tactics internationally. The U.S. should propose a solution to the problems of developing countries that are more in number than the developed countries. These solutions should be formed to cater to their problems such as poverty, health, education, infrastructure, and employment.

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