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## **Преобладающие темы в заявлениях российских лидеров о стратегическом партнерстве с Ираном в контексте евразийской интеграции**

**Аннотация.** Целью данного исследования было изучить заявления российских лидеров о стратегическом партнерстве между Россией и Ираном, а также оценить и проанализировать, как российские политики видят формирование отношений между Москвой и Тегераном. Исследование опирается на данные архивов официальных сайтов Президента и Министерства иностранных дел Российской Федерации. Изучение комментариев российских чиновников продемонстрировало, что в последние годы стратегическое партнерство между Россией и Ираном стало одной из тем, представляющих значительный интерес. Основными темами комментариев были: укрепление связей, общее глобальное видение, приоритетные отношения, взаимодействие на высоком уровне и конструктивные двусторонние переговоры. Также было выявлено, что комментарии МИД РФ относительно стратегического партнерства с Ираном касались укрепления отношений, исторических достижений, сотрудничества, координации на уровне ведомств и расширения экономического и энергетического сотрудничества. Евразийская интеграция соответствует стратегическим интересам России в усилении ее геополитического влияния, экономического роста, энергетической безопасности, региональной стабильности и культурных связей. Россия поддерживает включение Ирана в проект евразийской интеграции, поскольку стратегическое партнерство с Тегераном может в значительной степени содействовать экономическому сотрудничеству, развитию проектов в сфере энергетики, политической поддержке, региональной стабильности, укреплению культурных связей и устойчивости к западным санкциям.

**Ключевые слова:** Россия, Иран, стратегическое партнерство, интеграция, Евразия.

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## **The Predominant Themes in Russian Leaders' References to a Strategic Partnership with Iran in the Context of Eurasian Integration**

**Abstract.** This study is aimed at examining Russian leaders' references to the strategic partnership between Russia and Iran, as well as assessing and analyzing how Russian policymakers refer to and view the formation of this relationship between Moscow and Tehran. Secondary qualitative data was extracted from the archives of the official websites of the Russian President and Foreign ministry. The examination of the references of Russian officials showed that in recent years the strategic partnership between Rus-

sia and Iran has become one of the topics of significant interest. The main themes in references to the partnership with Iran were strengthening ties, shared global vision, priority relationships, high-level engagement, and constructive bilateral talks. It was also discovered that the Russian Foreign Ministry's references to the strategic partnership with Iran revolved around strengthening relationships, historical achievements, cooperation, agency coordination, and increasing economic and energy cooperation. Eurasian Integration aligns with Russia's strategic interests in enhancing its geopolitical influence, economic growth, energy security, regional stability, and cultural ties. Russia supports Iran's inclusion in the Eurasian integration project because a strategic partnership with Iran can significantly enhance Russia's efforts toward Eurasian integration by promoting economic cooperation, energy projects, political support, regional stability, cultural ties, and resilience against Western sanctions.

**Keywords:** Russia, Iran, Strategic partnership, Integration, Eurasia.

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## Introduction

Eurasian integration is one of the priority programs of Russia's foreign policy aimed at shaping a new economic structure in Eurasia by focusing on the economy and integrating the network of trade relations between Russia and its neighbors. The main objectives of this program are to attract post-Soviet countries to Russia and keep Russia's neighbors close through mutual and intergovernmental trade cooperation. The expansion of this concept in the 2020s, including countries like Iran that began their collaboration by signing a preferential tariff agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union in 2018 and a free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union in December 2023, has paved the way for strengthening trade cooperation between Iran and the countries in the region, especially Russia.

Relations between Iran and Russia have seen an upward trend following the imposition of international sanctions against Russia due to Moscow's military operation in Ukraine. The onset of the second wave of sanctions has significantly accelerated cooperation between Tehran and Moscow, leading to discussions about forming a strategic partnership between the two countries. The increasing political, security, and economic ties between the two nations have strengthened the basis for this partnership.

The growing political relations and meetings between Iranian and Russian leaders and diplomats along with official announcements and statements about the determination of both countries to draft, sign, and implement a comprehensive strategic partnership agreement make this issue noteworthy due to its various implications.

This study is aimed at examining the references of Russian leaders regarding the strategic partnership between Russia and Iran. Its goal is to assess and analyze how Russian policymakers refer to and view the formation of this relationship between Moscow and Tehran. In this regard, the question was raised about the predominant themes in the Russian political leaders' references to the formation of a strategic partnership between Moscow and Tehran.

The strategic partnership strengthens both countries' influence in the Middle East and Central Asia. Russia and Iran can collaborate on regional security issues, counter-terrorism efforts, and political stability. By increasing bilateral trade and economic cooperation, both countries can mitigate the impact of Western sanctions. This includes joint economic zones, increased trade, and the use of non-dollar currencies. Another reason that explains the importance of this partnership between Moscow and Tehran is that they can collaborate on energy projects, including oil and gas exploration, which can enhance their energy security and reduce dependency on Western markets.

The partnership allows for the exchange of military technology and arms, bolstering both countries' defense capabilities.

There are also international consequences for establishing a strategic partnership between the two that affect the dominance of Western powers, particularly the United States, by presenting a united front against Western sanctions and political pressure. This partnership can shift global geopolitical dynamics, influencing international relations and alliances. The partnership can lead to broader strategic alliances with other countries, such as China and India, further enhancing their global influence. By working together, Russia and Iran can increase their diplomatic leverage in international forums, such as the United Nations, and push for policies that align with their interests.

Although the study of strategic partnerships between Iran and Russia is not new, it has not received much attention or research. There is a significant research gap regarding this form of relations between the two countries, as most studies have focused on strategic cooperation. In contrast, strategic partnerships are formed with specific goals and have their requirements. Moreover, previous research findings on Iran-Russia relations show a variety of inconsistencies and contradictions, necessitating a more precise study.

The main innovation of this research lies in its focus on strategic partnership and the study of political leaders' views on this subject. This was achieved by examining the official positions of the two countries through direct access to government archives, which plays an effective role in clarifying the views of policymakers influencing the developments and trajectory of bilateral relations. This contributes significantly to knowledge development, especially regarding Russia-Iran relations in the context of Eurasian integration.

## **Literature Review**

No research has been conducted to examine the political references to this issue or the perspectives of Russian or Iranian political leaders on the strategic partnership between these two countries. Therefore, the research area closest to the topic of this study is the examination of the different aspects of the strategic partnership between the two countries.

The strategic partnership between Russia and Iran has evolved since the 1990s, driven by mutual political, economic, and security interests. The scholarly literature of the late 1990s and early 2000s characterized this relationship by military cooperation on regional issues (for example, conflicts in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Nagorno-

Karabakh), arms sales, and technological collaboration [Jalali, 2001, Shaffer, 2001] because Russia needed foreign currency and influence in Central Asia and Iran needed arms, technology, and political support [Tarock, 1997, p. 217].

In the 2010s, the issue of strategic partnership between Russia and Iran evolved, particularly in the context of the Syrian conflict. While both countries share converging interests in Syria, including opposition to Western influence and military and security cooperation, they also have diverging goals due to ideological differences and competition for regional influence that caused this relationship to be characterized as more tactical than strategic, with pragmatic rather than systematic interactions [Tan, German, 2022, p. 7]. Also, some scholars argue that the relationship is best described as a “strategic alignment” rather than a strategic alliance [Omidi, 2022, p. 351]. Obstacles to a full strategic partnership include Iran's Islamic ideology and inflexible diplomacy [Вахшихтеж, 2019, с. 281].

In the 2020s, however, according to Kozhanov [Kozhanov, 2012, p. 234], despite these obstacles, Russia and Iran continue to explore opportunities for bilateral cooperation, particularly in energy and trade, as they seek to navigate the complex international landscape. Their cooperation has extended to various sectors, including defense, nuclear energy, and foreign policy [Atas, 2023, p. 270]. The relationship has been further solidified by mutual support in the face of international sanctions and opposition to US hegemony [Papageorgiou, Eslami, Duarte, 2023, p. 78]. Both countries view their partnership as a means to counter economic isolation and pursue development [Rezaeinejad, 2023, p. 41]. A new round of international sanctions against Russia concerning the Ukrainian conflict in 2022 and its alleged military cooperation with Iran have played a critical role in bringing the strategic partnership between Moscow and Tehran forward again.

## **Methodology**

The method used in this study to examine the positions of Russian leaders regarding the strategic partnership between the Kremlin and Tehran was based on a case study strategy focusing on the perspectives of Russian policymakers. In this case study, the references made by Russian political leaders to the topic of cooperation with Iran as a strategic partnership were considered. The time frame of interest to the researcher included the 2020s and covered statements made by Russian political leaders from the beginning of the second phase of the military operation in Ukraine in February 2022 to the present.

The data collection method for this research was a library study, utilizing archived data related to the research topic from official Russian websites. The data for this study were qualitative, secondary, and pre-existing.

Non-random purposive sampling was used, and the views of the President and the Foreign Minister of Russia, as the two main actors in the relations between the two countries, were collected. For this purpose, the texts of the speeches of the research sample at various events, including meetings, intergovernmental sessions, press conferences, phone calls, and similar occurrences, were searched. These texts' complete

and accurate translations into English are stored on the Russian Presidency and Ministry of Foreign Affairs websites. The keyword “strategic partnership” was selected to refine the search results, and by limiting the initial search results to the time frame of interest to this research, the necessary data were identified and extracted.

## Findings

Putin emphasizes the friendly and constructive nature of the relationship, noting that a new major interstate agreement on comprehensive strategic partnership is forthcoming. This indicates a formalization and deepening of ties between the two nations. According to the Russian President:

“Our interaction is on the rise; it is genuinely friendly and constructive. Soon, we will be able to consolidate the results achieved with a new major interstate agreement on comprehensive strategic partnership between Russia and Iran...” [Meeting with President of Iran Masoud Pezeshkian].

He believes that Russia and Iran share similar views on the global agenda, aspiring to establish a multipolar world order, uphold international norms, and maintain the pivotal role of the United Nations. This alignment suggests a strong ideological bond and mutual support in international forums. By indicating Iran-Russia’s similar view of the international system, he stated: “Generally speaking, I would like to emphasize that the approaches of Russia and Iran toward the global agenda are closely aligned or fully coincide. We are united by a shared aspiration to establish a just multipolar world order, to uphold international norms, and to maintain the pivotal role of the United Nations” [Meeting with President of Iran Masoud Pezeshkian].

Putin underscores Russia’s relationship with Iran is a priority and is thriving. This is reflected in their active cooperation on the international stage and their converging assessments of global developments:

“Our relationship with Iran is a priority for us, and it is developing very successfully... We are actively cooperating in the international arena and often share close or even converging assessments of the ongoing developments...” [Meeting with President of Iran Masoud Pezeshkian].

Russian President reaffirmed his commitment to further developing relations with Iran in a mutually beneficial spirit. This includes readiness for constructive partnership in addressing regional and international issues. In this regard, Putin stated the following:

“Both sides have reaffirmed their commitment to the further all-round development of these relations in a truly good neighbourly and mutually beneficial spirit. We also expressed readiness for constructive partnership in addressing acute regional and international issues” [Statement for media following Astana format talks].

The Russian Foreign Minister sees the partnership with Iran as multifaceted, strategic, and crucial for regional and global stability. The emphasis on formalizing agreements, long-term planning, and collaborative efforts in various sectors underscores the importance of this partnership in Russia’s foreign policy.

Lavrov’s statements emphasize the significance of the strategic partnership between Russia and Iran. He highlights that the Agreement on Comprehensive Strategic

Partnership will be a key factor in strengthening Russia-Iran relations, particularly through close defence cooperation and interaction for regional and global peace and security. By underscoring the importance of formalizing and deepening the partnership, he stated that:

“An Agreement on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran will be an important factor in strengthening Russia-Iran relations. The agreement is being prepared for signing in the near future. It will formalize the parties’ commitment to close defence cooperation and interaction in the interests of regional and global peace and security” [Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks at a high-level plenary meeting...].

According to the Russian foreign minister, drafting a new interstate treaty for a comprehensive partnership is a symbolic step in the relationship with Iran’s new leaders, indicating a quick start in their collaboration. He argued that steps taken to deepen this partnership reflect the proactive and positive approach towards strengthening ties:

“We are about to complete the drafting of a new interstate treaty for a comprehensive partnership between Russia and Iran. This would be a symbolic step in our relations with Iran’s new leaders. In fact, this relationship got off to a quick start” [Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s remarks and answers to questions...].

According to Sergey Lavrov, Russia-Iran relations have reached the highest point in their history, with significant untapped potential for further advancement. He believes the ongoing work on a new comprehensive treaty aims to determine the prospects for strategic cooperation over the next two decades. This shows a long-term commitment to enhancing the partnership, as he stated:

At the same time, there is significant untapped potential for further advancement in our partnership. To this end, work is now underway on a new and comprehensive “big interstate treaty” initiated by the Iranian president. Some time ago, Russia submitted its proposals and additions to the Iranian initiative to Tehran... It will determine the prospects for our strategic cooperation for the next two decades [Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s statement and answers to media questions...].

Lavrov praises the close cooperation between various agencies in important fields of Russian-Iranian ties, indicating effective collaboration and mutual efforts to develop the partnership. The Russian foreign minister directed his attention to “the close coordination between various agencies in key areas of the diverse Russian-Iranian partnership” [Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov’s statement and answers to media questions...].

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Essentially, the Russian president views the strategic partnership with Iran as a valuable asset with significant potential for further development. It is a cornerstone of Russia’s regional foreign policy and aligns with its broader geopolitical objectives. The partnership is seen as a “priority” and is described as “genuinely friendly and constructive” with “closely aligned” or “fully coinciding” approaches to global issues. Putin’s statements emphasize the desire to consolidate the relationship through a new

significant interstate agreement, signifying its strategic importance for Russia. Both nations share a common vision of a multipolar world order, a commitment to international norms, and a desire to uphold the role of the United Nations. In his statements, there is an emphasis on active cooperation in the international arena and a readiness for constructive partnership in addressing global challenges.

Eurasian Integration aligns with Russia's strategic interests in enhancing its geopolitical influence, economic growth, energy security, regional stability, and cultural ties. Russia supports Iran's inclusion in the Eurasian integration project because a strategic partnership with Iran can significantly enhance Russia's efforts toward Eurasian integration by promoting economic cooperation, energy projects, political support, regional stability, cultural ties, and resilience against Western sanctions. The examination of the references and verbal content of Russian political leaders regarding the necessity of elevating Moscow-Tehran relations to a strategic partnership indicates the importance of Iran in the Kremlin's political and economic calculations.

One limitation of this study is that focusing solely on the verbal content of Russian leaders may not necessarily reflect all dimensions of their true intentions. Another limitation is that there is no guarantee that this growing cooperation between Moscow and Tehran will remain unaffected by Eurasia's rapid political and economic developments and the relations of each of these countries with the West. Regardless of the apparent willingness of Russian leaders to form a strategic partnership with Iran, the structural weakness of Iran's economy and Western sanctions against Russia and Iran will negatively impact the prospects of this cooperation and create challenges, which is another limitation of the findings of this research.

For future studies, it is recommended to examine the statements of Iranian leaders that reflect Tehran's official stance on strategic partnership with Russia to uncover more aspects of this issue from the Iranian perspective. It is also suggested that the factors influencing the strategic partnership between the Kremlin and Tehran in various political, security, and economic domains should be analysed, and the challenges in the relations between the two countries should be considered to properly understand the prospects of enhancing mutual ties.

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