

THE TEHRAN SUMMIT, OR THE RUSSIAN PRESIDENT'S VISIT TO IRAN

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On 16 October, 2007, Tehran hosted the second summit of the Caspian states attended by Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Iran. The importance of this international event is thrown into bolder relief by the failure (recognized as such by observers and analysts, as well as the leaders of the countries involved) of the first Caspian summit convened in Ashghabad in April 2002, at which the participants agreed on few issues and failed to arrive at an agreed final document.

In 2002, the world and regional situation were very different; three of the countries were headed by different people: Iran, by Mohammad Khatami; Azerbaijan, by Heydar Aliev; and Turkmenistan, by Saparmurat Niyazov.

They got together in the capital of Turkmenistan to discuss the Caspian's status and the way its water area and the natural reserves should be divided—issues that surfaced when the Soviet Union died and the littoral Soviet Union republics became independent. In Soviet times, they shared the Caspian's reserves with all the other people of a single state. The Soviet Union's disintegration created numerous border problems; the fuel- and fish (mainly sturgeon)-rich Caspian acquired its share of post-Soviet problems.

The Iranian leaders, for example, were out to capitalize on this in order to claim larger share of the Caspian than before: they argued that, under the new conditions, the water body should be divided into five equal parts.

The post-Soviet states, however, refused to accept this. They insisted that the national zones should correspond to the lengths of the littoral line. In this case Kazakhstan would have received 28 percent; Russia, 18 to 19 percent; Turkmenistan, 19 percent; Azerbaijan, 21 percent, and Iran (along the Huseynkali-Astara line), 11.4 to 13 percent. Tehran preferred to look at the Caspian as a lake to be divided, in full accordance with international law, into equal shares (20 percent each). Iran also argued that it should get 50 percent of the Caspian, since the former Soviet republics, which appropriated the Soviet state's rights and shouldered its duties, should be satisfied with the other half.¹

¹ See: "Sammit v Ashkhabade: Piatero v odnoy lodke, ne schitaia SShA," available at [<http://www.yandex.cc/articles/2002/04/23/caspian/>].

Two years later, most of the littoral states were prepared to give Iran 13 percent. Andrew Neff, expert at the London-based World Market Research Center, described Iran's demands to expand its control zone to 20 percent as "excessive." Late President of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Niyazov subsequently moved over to Tehran's official position. Andrew Neff explained the U-turn by the May 2003 tripartite agreement Russia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan signed to divide 64 percent of the Caspian's northern part, from which Turkmenistan was excluded. Under this agreement Kazakhstan got 27 percent, Russia, 19 percent, and Azerbaijan, 18 percent² of the Caspian. The two countries were left with 36 percent of the water body to divide it between themselves as they saw fit.

In 2004, Head of the Center for Strategic Studies Andrey Piontkovskiy commented that Iran's claims had been provoked "by the squabbles among the post-Soviet states." He added that when Russia reached an agreement with Turkmenistan, "Iran would be forced to drop its claims." The old Soviet model would triumph, said the analyst, and the sea would be controlled by the post-Soviet states.³

By that time, the Caspian was generally believed to be one of the world's richest oil and gas areas. This explains America's inordinate interest in the region, which it declared to be a zone of its vital interests and lost no time in moving into it. This proved to be easy: in the 1990s, the political elites of the local "newly independent states" were not only looking at the West and the United States—they wanted to join NATO. Azerbaijan, which clashed over many issues with Iran, expected to succeed with America's aid. Washington, in turn, demonstrated no mean skills when playing on the Caspian states' contradictions.

This explains the very apt title "Sammit v Ashkhabade: Piatero v odnoy lodke, ne schitaia SShA" (Summit in Ashghabad: Five in a Boat, To Say Nothing of the U.S.). The United States included the entire Black Sea-Caspian basin in the sphere of responsibility of its troops deployed in the Gulf area.

The first summit was convened amid the far from simple relations among the post-Soviet states and their far from simple relations with Iran. Earlier, the Caspian was the scene of clashes between Iran and Azerbaijan, which complained that Iranian fighter planes were patrolling Azeri oil prospecting ships, while Iranian boats and aircraft drove them from the controversial zone. President of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Niyazov, who hosted the summit, went as far as saying that had they failed to divide the sea, it "would have smelled like blood."⁴

Disappointed with the failure, Russian President Vladimir Putin said, upon his arrival at the base of the Caspian Flotilla in Astrakhan, that Russia "should build up its presence in the Caspian" and ordered complex military exercises to be held the following summer for the first time in the last 10 years. He pointed out that the flotilla should actively fight terrorism, drug trafficking, etc.

This created the impression that the Caspian would become a militarized, rather than demilitarized, zone.

The first summit failed to fix either a time or place for the next meeting of the heads of the Caspian states. Not until April 2004, at a press conference convened after the meeting of the foreign

² See: E. Kravchenko, A. Tikhonov, "Prikaspiyskaia piaterka sygrala vpustuiu," *Finansovye izvestia*, 7 April, 2004, available at [<http://www.finiz.ru/economic/article819294>].

³ "Kaspiy budet podelen po sovetzkoy modeli," available at [<http://iran.ru/rus/bulletins/politic/2004-13/#19023>].

⁴ M. Kozyrev, A. Nikol'skiy, "Kaspiy pod pritsemom," *Vedomosti*, available at [<http://www.smi.ru/02/04/26/388252.html>]. Iran was displeased about the fact that in post-Soviet times mineral riches were being extracted in the Caspian very much because America had suggested this. A month or more before the summit, Steven Mann, special advisor to the U.S. State Secretary on Caspian energy diplomacy, during a visit to Kazakhstan, declared that the Caspian mineral resources should be actively extracted even before the status of the water body had been determined (see: "Sammit v Ashkhabade: Piatero v odnoy lodke, ne schitaia SShA").

On 26 March, 2002 in Moscow, speaking at an international conference on the Caspian's legal status, Steven Mann announced that the United States was no rival to Russia in the Caspian (see: "SShA poobeshchali ne meshat Rossii v Kaspiyskom regione," available at [<http://lenta.ru/economy/2002/02/26/caspian/>]).

ministers of the Caspian states, did Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov inform the journalists that the summit would be held in the latter half of 2004 in Tehran. He went on to say that the foreign ministers of Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan had reached this agreement on 6 April, 2004. "We shall report to our presidents," said he. "It is for them to fix the date of the summit."⁵

The presidents were obviously not ready; finally it was decided to meet in Tehran in 2007.

By that time, Iran's ruling regime had lost its earlier popularity and the situation at home was far from simple. In October 2007, it looked as if the people were tired of the regime and the mullahs, who had failed to justify the nation's hopes. The president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, and the nation's religious leader, Ali Khamenei, enjoy the support of a mere 10 percent of the total population (as the returns of the poll conducted in the summer of 2007 by Internet publications *Ruz-e Now* and *Baztab* showed).

A possible American attack on Iran is one of the favorite subjects of the Iranian media, which the regime is actively exploiting to remain in charge. The people, meanwhile, are reacting very indifferently to the threat—there are no signs of frantic preparations to rebuff any hostile American actions.

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On 15 October, President of Kazakhstan Nazarbaev arrived in Tehran to be met at Mehrabad airport by Foreign Minister of Iran Manouchehr Mottaki; the Iranian side obviously attached great importance to the visit. The president of Kazakhstan was the first to arrive and the first to negotiate (before the summit) with the IRI highest leaders—its president and Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, its spiritual leader. They discussed bilateral cooperation and agreed to increase the trade balance in the near future to \$10 billion a year (compared with the current \$2 billion).⁶ The Iranian media coverage was succinct and limited to fragmentary information about the talks. Journalists mainly wrote that bilateral relations should be developed and that the sides had signed "five documents on cooperation between Iran and Kazakhstan" in energy, transport, and other spheres.⁷ President Ahmadinejad pointed out that the two countries shared common approaches to the Caspian issue and to certain other international problems and expressed his conviction that bilateral economic cooperation "will reach the highest level."⁸ In fact, the president of Kazakhstan managed to settle all the problems of bilateral cooperation during his first day in Tehran. This probably accounts for his special position at the summit.⁹

⁵ RIA Novosti, 6 April, 2004.

⁶ See: *Tehran Times*, 16 oktobr, 2007.

⁷ See: *Hamshahri*, 16 oktobr, 2007; *Tehran Times*, 17 oktobr, 2007.

⁸ See: *Donya ye eqtasad*, 16 oktobr, 2007.

⁹ The observers pointed out that Russia and Kazakhstan had disagreed on more issues than the others: they disagreed over the bioresources quota and the need to add a clause on the freedom of transit in the Caspian (transit of energy fuels and pipelines on the seabed) to the Convention. The president of Kazakhstan insisted that the routes should be agreed with the countries, the national sectors of which would be directly involved in the project. Russia, in turn, believed that the five littoral states should agree on the Transcaspian pipelines. The president of Kazakhstan wanted the sea to be a demilitarized zone and suggested that military involvement on the sea should be limited to the border units in the sea. President Putin was against the division of the Caspian into "zones" and "borders" and described security and protection of bioresources as top priorities. The president of Russia pointed out that the development of the pipeline system should be carried out within the Caspian Five framework on the basis of consensus. "Environmental safety should be the yardstick of all projects, especially in the energy sphere," said President Putin who obviously had in mind the Transcaspian Pipeline Project actively promoted by the United States (see: N. Melikova, "Neagressivny Kaspiy. Rossia, Azerbaidzhan, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenia ukrepliait ekonomicheskie sviazi," available at [http://www.ng.ru/world/2007-10-17/1_tegeran.html]).

Meanwhile, President Putin's attendance allegedly remained questionable until the last day. The *Hamshahri* newspaper wrote that President Putin's arrival in Tehran on the morning of 16 October "disproved the rumors about the possible cancellation of the visit heatedly discussed by the Western media."¹⁰ The Iranian media deemed it necessary to point out that the Russian president has been subjected to strong American and Western pressure to cancel his trip to Iran.

During his visit to Germany, one of the German journalists asked President Putin whether he was prepared to go to Iran and what he expected to achieve there. The Russian president answered that he would attend the Caspian summit in Tehran, an event scheduled well in advance, and that he expected positive results from his talks with the Iranian leaders.¹¹

The Iranian leaders, in turn, expected much from the visit and spared no effort to prepare it. The international situation was very complicated, while the media of many countries were teeming with information about possible American military action against Iran.

The visit was very important for both states: first, this was Putin's second visit to the country, a fact that the Iranian leaders preferred to play down so as not to reveal its real value. The *Iran* newspaper pointed out that the visit was accompanied by biased commentaries in the American media and "certain European countries." They spoke a lot about the summit's real importance.

On the eve of President Putin's visit, *Donya ye eqtesad* carried an editorial, which said in particular: "From the point of view of Iran's vital interests, the coming Caspian summit is much more important than Vladimir Putin's visit."¹² The summit was described as a "historic day for the Caspian," since on 16 October, the participants signed bilateral and multilateral agreements on cooperation and a declaration of the five Caspian states, the 25 points of which opened the road to economic and political cooperation in the region. The forum was even presented as a step toward forming "another pole of the world economy."¹³

Tehran attached special importance to the visit of the Russian president: without him the summit would have been deprived of much of its political weight. The local media was brimming with information and photographs of the Russian leader; in collective photos the Iranian president invariably appeared next to his Russian colleague.¹⁴

Iran took adequate security measures long before President Putin arrived in the country; the measures were tightened as soon as the first information about an alleged attempt on the life of the Russian president reached the front pages of Russian and Western papers, even though it was treated as a political joke, or even a political provocation.

It should be said that on the eve of the summit, many of the electronic media offered very unusual (to say the least) coverage of the planned visit. They concentrated on the allegedly planned attempt on Putin's life and wrote next to nothing about the summit's agenda: the journalist community obviously doubted that the president of Russia would attend the summit.

The media remained just as riveted to the same two issues after the summit as before it: the Iranian nuclear file and the future of Russia's cooperation with the West and the U.S.

¹⁰ *Hamshahri*, 16 oktobr, 2007.

¹¹ In her interview to *Die Welt*, Angela Merkel described Iran as a regional hazard and a threat to Europe and the world. She favored more severe sanctions if the talks on the nuclear issue stalled. Vladimir Putin described his position on the sanctions with a great deal of sarcasm: "It is useless to scare the Iranian leaders or the Iranian people—they are not easily frightened" (N. Melikova, "Tehran-007. 'V Wisbadene govorili preimushchestvenno ob Irane,'" available at [http://www.ng.ru/politics/2007-10-16/1_tegeran.html]).

¹² M. Sadri, "Chera safar e putin mohem ast" (Why Putin's Visit Important), *Donya ye eqtesad*, 16 oktobr, 2007.

¹³ "Halge ye tehran qotb re jadid e eqtesad e jahan" (The Tehran Summit as Another Pole of World Economy), *Iran*, 17 oktobr, 2007; "Ruz e tarikhi ye Khazar" (Historic Day of the Caspian), *Iran*, 17 oktobr, 2007.

¹⁴ See, for example: *Keyhan international*, *Tehran Times*, *Iran Daily*, *Ettelaat*, *Keyhan*, *Jomhuri ye eslami*, *Tehran e emruz*, *Resalat*, *Jam e jam*, *Zaman*, *Etemad e melli*, *Aftab e yazd*, *Iran*, and other newspapers of 17 October, 2007.

Political analysts have correctly described and continue to describe the summit as a foreign policy move of Russia, which demonstrated that it is deeply concerned about what Washington and its allies are doing. There is a widely shared opinion that the trip of the Russian president and the nature of his meetings and talks were conditioned, to a great extent, by the American and Western, for that matter, course in relation to Russia and its interests in certain regions and the world as a whole.

Little was said about what appeared to be the region's central problem—the Caspian's status and its division—no prompt decision was expected anyway. Under the pressure of the global problems at hand, the Caspian issue was put aside to be discussed in the near future.

The Iranians, however, did not hesitate to state that they were dissatisfied with the division of the Caspian into national sectors. There were voices calling on Tehran to annul the “unfair” treaties of 1921 and 1940 related to “the lake” the Soviet Union had “imposed” on Iran: in the post-Soviet period, certain forces argued, the region should have acquired a “new community.”¹⁵

The Iranian leaders exploited the very fact of the second summit and the decisions on the development of regional cooperation to fortify their position at home and abroad. Tehran regarded the Russian president's participation as a diplomatic breakthrough, which discredited America's pressure on the IRI.

The Iranian political elite was satisfied with President Putin's statement made in Germany on 15 October to the effect that peaceful negotiations about Iran's nuclear program should go on and that other than peaceful methods were unacceptable. Iran attaches great importance to Russia's position on its nuclear research, which allows Iran to continue its national program. Even before the talks with the Iranian president, Vladimir Putin pointed out: “Every country has the right to implement peaceful nuclear energy programs.” It should be said that it was under the last Iranian monarch that Iran planned to launch a nuclear program, something that caused no objections and no fears of a nuclear bomb, even though the monarchy aspired to move the country into the front ranks of the world's leading powers with hardly predictable repercussions.

So far Russia is the only country that is helping Iran to carry out its nuclear program. It was thanks to the Russian president's position that the Tehran Declaration confirmed the rights of all signatories to the Non-Proliferation Treaty to develop peaceful nuclear energy within the Treaty and the IAEA mechanism.

The discussions of the military aspects of Iran's nuclear file pose several questions. First, Iran has just as much right as Pakistan, India, or Israel to develop defensive weapons. Whether these efforts are reasonable or safe is another question. Second, Iran announced several times that it was prepared to reject nuclear weapons and establish international control over its nuclear program. Third, if Iran cannot be trusted, the world community has reason to suspect that it has already created nuclear weapons of smaller capacity. Indeed, even in the United States weapon-grade plutonium disappears from time to time, while in the 1990s, goodness knows what changed hands in the CIS countries. Why not concede that Iran has already taken advantage of the situation and that today it is exploiting the nuclear file to secure its own political goals?

The statement President Putin made to the effect that he did not intend to set deadlines for the Bushehr project proved to be a strong move that earned him respect among the Iranians. It was especially important against the background of the recurring waves of criticism of Russia's alleged intention to deliberately slow down the project's progress.

Iran treated the words of President Putin as very important: “Under no circumstances should the littoral states allow the use of their territories by other countries to launch aggression or other military action against any of the member states.” This was entered into the final declaration.

¹⁵ *Etemad e melli*, 17 October, 2007. Mazandaran is a littoral historical area and province in northern Iran. Mohammad Khatami described the Caspian as Lake Mazandaran even during his visit to Azerbaijan in May 2002 after the first Caspian summit.

The Russian president agreed with the statement that navigation should be limited to the ships carrying flags of the littoral states. Security is another concern of the Iranian authorities, which explains why the *Iran Daily* carried an article entitled “5 Presidents Agree on Joint Security”¹⁶ on its front page.

Because of Azerbaijan’s specific relations with America and Russia the republic is Iran’s second politically important partner after Russia, something that the Iranian side subtly hinted at. Moreover, Azerbaijan will host the next summit of the littoral states in 2008.

Significantly, some Israeli analysts interpreted the clause of the summit’s final document, under which the littoral states undertook responsibility not to allow the use of their territories for aggression or military action by third countries against any of the member states, as an attempt to transform regional cooperation into a military bloc. The analysts expected that the world community would at least voice its concern.¹⁷ The Russian side, on the other hand, is convinced that the clause does not allow any third force (which primarily implies the United States) to turn the Caspian into a zone of conflict.

Gordon Jondro, spokesman for the U.S. National Security Council, announced after the summit that his country favored a “diplomatic approach” to the Iranian nuclear file,¹⁸ but the White House remained convinced that America had enough reason to use force against Iran. Some of the Democrats, Hillary Clinton campaigning for president among them, side with the incumbent on this issue.¹⁹

No wonder the Iranian leaders fear that the United States might use force to bring down the ruling regime. Iranian-American relations are not as simple as that; this is actively discussed in Iran at different levels.

There are Iraq-related contacts; Iran holds a very special position on this issue. At the early stages of the war and on its eve, Tehran remained neutral; at the same time, it used its influence with the Iraqi Shi’a community to wage its own political game in the region in the hope of changing the Iraqi political climate. The Shi’a community (neutral throughout the American military campaign) was in fact a lever Iran used to put pressure on the United States once Saddam Hussein had been removed from power. Tehran tried to use the void left by destroyed independent Iraq to acquire, through its allies, like-minded people or puppets, administrative instruments in Iraq.

Iran openly supported America on certain issues; in 2005, Foreign Minister of Iran Kamal Harazi congratulated the government and the people of Iraq on the successful parliamentary elections, which Iran described as a sign of maturity of a neighboring nation that had made an important step toward democracy based on the will of people, etc. The same statement said that the elections would promote the cause of regional stability and security without foreign military presence and would help establish closer relations and cooperation between the two countries. Spokesman of the IRI government Abdollah Ramazanzadeh declared that Iran would cooperate with the new regime, irrespective of its political orientation, for the sake of regional stability and the national interests of both countries.²⁰ Tehran willingly chose to give a helping hand to newly elected President of Iraq Talabani (a Kurd), who enjoyed Iran’s political support during the power struggle in the hope he would support its policy in Iraq.

Two weeks before the summit, the *Resalat* newspaper published bits and pieces of an interview by Dr. Ali Larijani, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran, to *Financial Times*.

¹⁶ “5 Presidents Agree on Joint Security,” *Iran Daily*, 17 October, 2007.

¹⁷ See: “Visit Putina v Iran: vzgliad iz Israeliia,” available at [<http://mnemia.zahav.ru/ArticlePage.aspx?articleID=4829>].

¹⁸ See: “Putin v Irane poobeshchal dostroit Busherskuiu AES, no sroki ne utochnil,” available at [<http://www.newsru.com/world/16oct2007/atoms.html>].

¹⁹ See: R. Beeston, “Comment: Putin Visit Kills Off Sanctions Drive,” *Times Online*, 16 October, 2007, available at [http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/middle_east/article2672044.ece].

²⁰ See: “Iran priznal uspešnymi proshedšie nakanune v Irake vybory,” available at [<http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php4?st=1107196320>].

The top Iranian politician offered his opinions about the Iraqi regime and its policy, about the American and Iranian positions in Iraq, and about the possible withdrawal of the occupation forces. The latter caused a lot of concern in Tehran because Washington might have shifted to the side of the new political forces in Iraq, which would cost the IRI its position in this country and the Muslim world as a whole.

Dr. Larijani pointed out that in the post-Hussein period, his country was the only one in the region to extend “constant support to the newly elected democratic government of Iraq” while, said he, “the American allies did nothing.” He denied that his country, according to American accusations, supplied the paramilitary units in Iraq with the latest weapons, acting through the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps. He dismissed this information as lies and demanded the names of the Corps members guilty of shady dealings with Iraq.²¹ In fact, he showed his country’s concern over the loss of Washington’s faith in Iran’s willingness to settle the Iraqi question and its readiness to start cooperating with the Sunnis of Saddam Hussein’s former narrow circle. He revealed the fact that he possessed information about secret negotiations between the Americans and Ezzat Ibrahim Al-Duri, one of the highest-ranking Baath members. He voiced the common opinion of the Iranian leaders who described the secret contacts as a “tragedy” for the Iraqis and offered his country’s services to maintain stability in Iraq when America began withdrawing its troops. “If the Americans provide the final schedule for troop withdrawal,” said he, “we shall help to organize it.”²²

The Iranians are obviously willing to overcome their disagreements with the United States and Europe—the nation is looking forward to completely restored contacts with both. During our stay in Iran in October 2007, we realized that the Western presence would be much more welcome than Russia’s, the attitude toward which is far from simple, it is even guarded and negative due to historical reasons. As an economically weak country, Russia cannot offer more or less large projects. Its weakness is confirmed by a trade turnover volume of \$2 billion (the same as with Kazakhstan), while Iran’s trade turnover with Germany is nearly \$25 billion.

In private talks, the Iranians frequently said that Russia, which exploited the contradictions between Iran and America in its interests, was worse than the United States. It is no wonder that on 17 October, 2007 the *Etemad e meli* newspaper carried a huge photograph of the heads of the Caspian states in Saadabad (the former shah residence) on its front page together with two articles entitled “The Meeting of the Heads of Caspian States with Supreme Leaders” and “Iran’s Contradictions with America and Europe are a Handy Tool for Russia.” The first article was adorned with the photo of Ali Khamenei, the second, with the photo of its author Ms. Elaheh Kulai, as if she was trying to warn the spiritual leader not to draw too close to Russia. The very fact that both articles appeared on the front page speaks volumes. The second article offers a succinct analysis of the summit and the international problems Russia faced and concludes that in the current situation Iran, for obvious reasons, was not in a position to negotiate the Caspian status and protect its national sovereignty. At the same time, Ms. Kulai, a member of the University Scientific Council, wrote: “Iran’s contradictions with America and Europe’s contradictions with Iran became a handy tool of Russia’s policies in these countries.”²³

Back in 2001, Elaheh Kulai voiced her conviction that the West’s position was the main factor of Russian-Iranian relations. As a member of parliament and an expert on Russia, she said: “Close

²¹ See: *Resalat*, 2 oktobr, 2007.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ E. Kulai, “Ekhtelafha ye iran va orupa, abzar e monaseb e bazi ye rusiye” (Russia can Use the Contradictions between Iran, on the One Hand, and America and Europe, on the Other, for its Own Game), *Etemad e meli*, 17 oktobr, 2007. In 2001 Ms. Kulai was chairperson of the Iranian-Russian Parliamentary Friendship group of the Islamic Council Assembly (Mejlis). In 2002, she was an observer of the subcommittee of the Iranian parliament for Caspian affairs and member of the Majlis national security and foreign policy commission.

relations between Russia and Iran are a natural outcome of the pressure on us from the West.” She went even further with another important statement to the effect that “Iran also wants to exert leverage to prevent a renewal of close ties between Russia and Iraq, with which Iran fought an eight-year war.”²⁴

Much has changed since that time, but Iran still treats Russia with caution, and this will not disappear soon.

The first steps toward a new regional structure of the Caspian states (with Iran playing an important role in this future Organization) and economic transformation of the Caspian Five were made in Tehran. The Iranian president described the summit declaration “a great achievement of our cooperation” and announced that the leaders of the Caspian states planned to convene an economic conference, on which a future Caspian economic structure would be patterned. Moscow was selected as the place of the forum to be held in 2008 under Vladimir Putin’s chairmanship.

The five countries agreed that the second Caspian summit was a success and that it opened new horizons of regional cooperation. Some painful issues, however, such as delimitation between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, were set aside to be addressed in the near future. The Caspian states agreed to refrain from the use of force when dealing with controversial issues and pledged not to interfere in the domestic affairs of independent states.

The winners and losers will be identified much later; so far there are several large-scale projects of economic cooperation, a channel between the Caspian and the Black seas being one of them. Iran has its doubts about the channel: it will add new options to the already existing communications, but it will strengthen Russia’s sovereignty still more. The opinion was voiced that Russia, rather than the Caspian states, would profit from it.²⁵

All the Caspian states, however, will undoubtedly profit from demilitarization of the Caspian, something that the expert community finds very important in view of America’s recent attempts to become involved in the reorganization of the Azeri Navy under the pretext of guarding the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. The United States invited Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to jointly develop military-technical cooperation in the Caspian.²⁶

Iran and its leaders are among the winners: they are working hard to preserve the system, which needs radical transformation under pressure of the logic of the country’s and world’s development. President Ahmadinejad fortified his position to the extent that he was able to replace some of the top figures in order to tighten his grip on power. Dr. Larijani, son of the late Ayatollah Amoli and son-in-law of the late Morteza Motahhari, comrade-in-arms of Imam Khomeini, who served Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council of Iran and was top negotiator on Iran’s nuclear program, resigned on 20 October, 2007. This put the nation in shock.²⁷ Officially he resigned on his own free will, but the nation and the media²⁸ interpreted it as the president’s intention to fill the most important posts with his own people.

The summit provided the international support the Iranian regime badly needed; to a certain extent the summit and Vladimir Putin’s personal attendance stabilized the domestic situation and drew millions of Iranians onto the regime’s side.

²⁴ Ch. Clover, G. Dinmore, “Iran and Russia to Discuss Caspian Shares,” *Financial Times*, 1 March, 2001, available at [<http://iskran.iip.net/review/mar01/1ft1.html>].

²⁵ See: A.B. Peyvandi Zade, “Ettesal e darya ye mazandaran be darya ye siyah aamal e hakemiyat e rusiye ya afzayesh e tranzit dar mantaqe” (Will the Joining of the Mazandaran Sea to the Black Sea Promote Russia’s Integrity or Increase Regional Transits?), *Khorasan*, 21 oktobr, 2007.

²⁶ See: Expert channel Federal Press, available at [http://www.fedpress.ru/federal/socium/world/id_71717.html].

²⁷ See: “Shok e khabari ye estefa ye larijani” (The News-Provoked Shock, or Larijani’s Retirement), *Khorasan*, 21 oktobr, 2007.

²⁸ See: “Khoda hafezi ye diplomat e hastei” (The Farewell of the Nuclear Diplomat), *Tehran e emruz*, Oct.21.2007.

The Tehran summit opened the doors for Iran to the Central Asian and Caucasian markets; the Iranian leaders are convinced that Russia did that to create a counterweight to the American and Turkish presence in the region. On the day President Putin arrived in Tehran and the summit opened, *Tehran e emruz* wrote: "Recently, Iran has greatly extended its economic presence in Central Asia, an area of Russia's traditional interests." The author also added that Moscow tacitly agreed that "the greater the Iranian presence, the narrower will be the American, Turkish, and to a certain extent Chinese presence in the region."²⁹

If Iran's presence in Central Asia expands, the local Shi'a community will swell with newly converted Sunnis. Iran never spared any efforts to spread its cultural and religious influence in the region. This has already been done in Kazakhstan where a Shi'a Internet portal has been functioning for some time.³⁰ The changed religious situation might affect the country's economic and political context. The next summit will reveal the extent to which Tehran has tapped the favorable situation in Central Asia.

The heads of the Caspian states agreed on regular annual meetings; the next is scheduled for October 2008 in Baku, which might finally settle the Caspian's legal status and other equally important controversial issues.

²⁹ "Kif e rusi" (The Russian Briefcase), *Tehran e emruz*, Oct.16.2007.

³⁰ The site [<http://al-gadir.kz/>]. There are Shi'a sites in Russia as well: [<http://imamat-news.ru/>], [al-shia.ru/], [shianet.ru/].