

THE REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN AND THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN: COOPERATION ACHIEVEMENTS AND PROSPECTS

Khurshed DODIKHUDOEV

*Ph.D. (Political Science),
deputy head of the Department of Foreign Policy and
Foreign Economic Development,
Center of Strategic Studies
under the President of Tajikistan
(Dushanbe, Tajikistan)*

Vafo NIYATBEKOV

*Chief specialist at the Department of Foreign Policy and
Foreign Economic Development,
Center of Strategic Studies under
the President of Tajikistan
(Dushanbe, Tajikistan)*

The Tajik and Iranian Geopolitical Factor in the Region

Diplomacy in independent Tajikistan seeks to develop relations with all the members of the world community. Moreover, the multi-vector nature of its foreign policy is also conducive to establishing priority cooperation with those countries with which stronger ties are mutually beneficial.

Recently, many states have acquired the label of "regional power." This term applies to those countries whose influence is not limited to only one theater of political, economic, and humanitarian activity. Whereby in a particular region, such states may have enough potential to directly affect the current political processes. Although this term is not new (it has been in circulation for more than fifty years), it has become increasingly popular over the last 10-15 years as those states that fit this category have become more active.

Today, one such state in the region is Iran. The influence of this country on current regional processes has perceptibly grown recently, which makes it possible to regard Iran as one of the sustainably developing regional powers.

After the formation of the U.S.S.R., Iran's political, economic, and cultural influence in Central Asia dwindled to nothing, but it always tried to retain its niche in the region even in Soviet times. Official Tehran's initiative to move its consulate from Leningrad (St. Petersburg) to Dushanbe in 1980

did not escape public attention. However, the Soviet authorities did not support the Iranian leadership's proposal at that time.

Iran is one of the four countries bordering on Central Asia, along with the Russian Federation, the People's Republic of China, and the Islamic State of Afghanistan. The appearance of five newly independent states attracted increased attention from the Iranian political establishment, which was manifested over time in specific projects that allowed Tehran to perceptibly reinforce its position in Central Asia.

Thanks to its rich natural resources, convenient geographic location, high export potential, and sufficiently large domestic market, Iran is capable of engaging in mutually advantageous trade and economic cooperation with many countries, including the Central Asian states.¹

For example, if Iran's interest in Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan is primarily prompted by their common land and sea supply routes, its interest in Tajikistan, which is geographically distant, is explained by the fact that they belong to the same language and racial group, as well as by their cultural and political communality in the past.

When it first began establishing relations with the Central Asian states, Iran drew up a strategy that initially focused on the cultural-historical communality among the nations, which Tajikistan best fit. Keeping in mind the common religious ties between Iran and the Central Asian countries, Tehran was nevertheless unable to make use of the Islamic factor due to the variety of different trends this religion professed, as well as to the political state of the country's foreign policy, which encouraged the drawing up and implementation of a new pragmatic policy aimed at carrying out economic measures and applying levers to strengthen its position in the region. Iran developed cooperation in mutually advantageous economic spheres of the Central Asian republics, including energy, transport, banking, and trade.

Tajikistan's declaration of its state independence was marred by the civil war in the country that lasted for five years and had tragic consequences for the republic. Iran's active, constructive, and diplomatic policy made a significant contribution to the peaceful settlement of the inter-Tajik conflict.

On 27 June, 1997, a General Agreement on Peace and National Consent in Tajikistan was signed in Moscow between the Tajik government and the United Tajik Opposition, the guarantors of which were Moscow and Tehran. Iran's contribution in this process helped to build trust among the region's states toward Iran.

2006 was declared the Year of the Aryan Civilization in Tajikistan. Various events that shed light on the contribution of the Aryan civilization to world culture were organized in the country during this undertaking. Present-day Iran and Tajikistan are the direct descendents of a once single Aryan civilization.

This undertaking also had some political elements—in July 2006, a meeting of the leaders of the three successor states of the Aryan civilization was held in Dushanbe. At present, this trend is more geopolitical than historical in nature. On the whole, the undertaking can be described as an attempt by the leaders of the two states, Iran and Tajikistan, to create an alternative idea to pan-Turkism, which does not meet the national interests of Tehran and Dushanbe.

Tajikistan was to become the geopolitical fulcrum of the entire Central Asian geopolitical telurocratic strategy. The republic is acting as the main base in this process, whereby its territory is becoming a geopolitical laboratory in which two competing impulses are coming together—the Islamic impulse of the Indo-European Eurasian South and the Russian geopolitical impulse coming from

¹ See: G. Khajieva, *Tsentrāl'naiā Azia i Iran: potentsial ekonomicheskogo partnerstva*, Documents of the International Conference on the Historical-Cultural Interaction between Iran and Dasht-i Kipchak, Dayk-Press, Almaty, 2007, p. 217.

the Heartland, from the North. In this way, it is logical to designate one more arc, Moscow-Dushanbe-Kabul-Tehran, along which an unprecedented geopolitical reality should develop.²

At present, active political cooperation is seen among the countries of this four-cornered structure, which is determined primarily by the actual diplomacy of these states in this region, with the exception of Afghanistan, which is dealing with its own domestic crisis.

Iran's foreign policy is generating tempestuous discussions on the international arena. Many of the opinions heard in the world reflect a lack of understanding of the essence of the Islamic state and the motives that Tehran is guided by when it makes a particular decision. When studying the present-day state of Iranian society, three factors must be taken into account equally—Iranian traditions, culture, and Islam.³

Iran's foreign policy on its northern borders is defined by four components:

- 1) Russian-Iranian relations;
- 2) the Islamic factor;
- 3) the global factor (the U.S.'s role in forming regional policy); and
- 4) Iran's idea about its key role in the development of Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus.⁴

Iran's return to the region's political, economic, and cultural life is defined by the republic's national interests. Close and stable relations with the Central Asian countries will lead both to the development of the border states and to progress in Iran's northern provinces.

Bilateral Economic Cooperation

Iran was the first country to open its diplomatic representative office in the Tajik capital. This happened after the Republic of Tajikistan declared its state independence. The Tajik embassy began functioning in Tehran in July 1995. And its opening was scheduled to coincide with the first official visit by the Tajik president to the Islamic Republic of Iran. At the initial stage in Tajik-Iranian relations, humanitarian cooperation prevailed. Specific economic projects could not be carried out due to the difficult political situation in Tajikistan, which kept them at the discussion stage.

Iranian president Khatami's visit to Tajikistan in 2002 and Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon's return visit in 2003 helped to get Tajik-Iranian relations off the ground. For example, the sides coordinated their positions on one of the largest investment projects in Tajikistan—the Sangtuda-2 Hydropower Plant.

This hydropower plant was to be built by means of joint efforts on the Vakhsh River (in the south of Tajikistan). The cost of the facility amounted to 220 million dollars, 180 million of which was invested by Iran and the other 40 million by Tajikistan. Construction officially began on 20 February, 2006. Sangtuda-2 is to go into operation in three-and-a-half years. The Iranians will receive all the profit for twelve-and-a-half years, and then the facility will pass completely over to Tajikistan.⁵ The

² See: A. Dugin, *Osnovy geopolitiki. Geopoliticheskoe budushchee Rossii*, Arktogeia Publishers, Moscow, 1997, pp. 354-357.

³ See: M. Sanai, "Vneshniaia politika Irana: mezhdru istoriei i religiei," *Rossia i musul'manskiy mir*, No. 8 (170), 2006, p. 157.

⁴ See: *Tsentral'naiia Azia v sovremennom mire: Vneshnepoliticheskie i geoekonomicheskie aspekty razvitiia*, Collection of papers, RAS IRISS, Center of Scientific-Information Research of Globalization and Regional Affairs, Department of Asia and Africa, Moscow, 2007, p. 89.

⁵ See: I. Kurbanov, Z. Abdullaev, "Iran prosit garantii i Tadjikistan gotov ikh dat," *Fakty & Kommentarii*, No. 11, 6 July, 2006.

launching into operation of the powerful hydropower plant will significantly raise Tajikistan's energy security and make it possible for the country to export its surplus electric power abroad.

Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon's official visit to Iran in January 2006 was constructive. It resulted in the signing of an entire set of documents which raised economic cooperation to a qualitatively higher level:

- an Agreement on Simplifying Bank Loans;
- a Memorandum of Mutual Understanding in Standards, Transport, Cargo Shipments, Energy, and Foreign Policy;
- an Agreement on Implementing a Project to Build the Sangtuda-2 Hydropower Plant;
- an Additional Protocol to the Memorandum on Mutual Understanding and Cooperation in Implementing this Project;
- a Joint Declaration on Developing Interrelations and Cooperation between Iran and Tajikistan.

The economic component dominated at the talks, in particular, questions of partnership were reviewed in the economy, the hydropower industry, and transport, to which a new sphere of bilateral cooperation was added—the development of information-communication technology. A decision was made to create a joint technical committee on information-communication technology founded by the Dadeh Pardazi IRAN Co. and the Tajik Ministry of Communications, the initial tasks of which were to hold advanced training courses for the employees of the Tajik Ministry of Communications, as well as to introduce new technology into the republic's communication infrastructure.

At the end of July 2006, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad paid a return visit to Tajikistan.

The high-level talks ended in the signing of six socioeconomic bilateral documents: a Joint Statement on the Development of Bilateral Cooperation; Memorandums on Cooperation in Justice, on Labor and Social Security of the Population, and on Free Trade; a Program of Cooperation in Tourism for 2006, and an Agreement on Privileged Trade.

The Iranian leader noted that over the span of 15 years, the two countries had signed more than 150 agreements, and their number was growing. He suggested carrying out several bilateral and trilateral projects, in particular, opening a joint university and new television station that would broadcast in Persian in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Iran in order to promulgate the culture of the Persian-speaking states. Moreover, the Iranian side confirmed its willingness to offer quotas to 100 Tajik students to take specialized oil and gas engineering courses at Iranian universities.⁶

Important regional projects were discussed during another official visit by the Tajik leader to Iran in May 2007. During the visit, several documents of mutual interest designed to intensify and expand economic cooperation were signed. In particular, the following can be mentioned:

- a Memorandum of Mutual Understanding on Cooperation between the Television and Radio Broadcasting Committee under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Radio and Television Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran;
- a Memorandum of Mutual Understanding on Bilateral Cooperation between the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Mines of the Islamic Republic of Iran;
- an agreement between the Somon Air Company of the Republic of Tajikistan and the Mahan Air Company of the Islamic Republic of Iran on the creation of a joint air company aimed at raising the quality of air services in the country;

⁶ See: "Sammit trekh prezidentov," *Fakty & Kommentarii*, No. 15, 3 August, 2006.

—an agreement between the Talko Tajik Aluminum Company State Unitary Enterprise and the Al-Mahdi Iranian Aluminum Company, in compliance with which Talko would be able to receive alum shale and coke, as well as supply Iran's Iralko Aluminum Company and Dubal Company of the United Arab Emirates with anode blocks.

It should be noted that today Talko is better supplied with equipment and technology than Al-Mahdi or Iralko and produces more aluminum than both of these companies. At present, Talko is ready to take part in investment and construction of new coke production in Iran and in equipping the Bandar Abbas port to enable it to transport its aluminum production. If this partnership is established, Talko will be able to provide itself with an alternative route for the transit of its cargo and commodities.⁷

The Tajik president proposed a project to build Rumi-Kumsangir (Tajikistan)–Kunduz–Mazar-i-Sharif–Herat (Afghanistan)–Mashhad (Iran) rail and road routes.

The development of transport infrastructure is one of the priority tasks of the national economy in Tajikistan today. Tajikistan is also carrying out similar projects with other neighboring states—China and Kyrgyzstan. For example, within the SCO, the Chinese side allotted large funds to reconstruction of the strategically important Dushanbe–Ayni–Istaravshan–Khujand–Buston–Chanak (the border with Uzbekistan) highway. Its total length reaches 410 km. The high-altitude Dushanbe–Kulob–Karakorum–Kulma highway linking Tajikistan and the PRC also went into seasonal operation relatively recently. This road offers Tajikistan the shortest route to the largest Indian Ocean ports and will also automatically promote an increase in goods turnover between the two neighboring countries.

In addition to this route, work has also been revived in the direction of Osh on the Dushanbe–Vakhdat–Nurabad–Tajikabad highway to the border of Kyrgyzstan. The total cost of the project amounted to 23.6 million dollars. The Asian Development Bank, which allotted 15 million dollars, and the OPEC Foundation, which granted 6 million dollars, were the main creditors; the Tajik government's share amounted to 2.6 million dollars.

In the near future, there are plans to build an Isfara–Osh highway that will bypass the Uzbek enclave of Sokh. Successful implementation of this project will alleviate many difficulties for the residents of the border areas of both countries, primarily by reducing to a minimum the number of conflicts on the border with Uzbekistan.⁸

Bridges linking Tajikistan with Afghanistan are also being built, since the latter occupies a strategic geographic position by providing access to other states (including India, Pakistan, and Iran), as well as in the opposite direction, from these countries to Tajikistan.

Operation of the Tajik–Iranian route linking the south of Tajikistan and the north of Iran will help to expand bilateral economic cooperation.

Building roads along the perimeter of the Tajik border is a demand of the times and will make it possible for Tajikistan to strengthen cooperation with other states of the vast Asian continent. Moreover, this will free the country from Uzbekistan's transport monopoly and deprive Tashkent of an important lever of pressure. At present, 80% of all the country's land routes pass through this country.

Tajikistan and Iran currently have a list of commodities that are of mutual interest. The list of goods exported by Iran to Tajikistan consists of coffee, tea, sugar, chocolate, paint, varnish, oil and petroleum products, carpets, rugs, ceramics, machinery, electrical equipment, clothing, furniture, as well as resin, rubber, and their derivatives. Aluminum and aluminum products, cotton, ferrous metals and metal production, glass, and glass products are delivered from Tajikistan to Iran.⁹

⁷ [http://www.prezident.tj/rus/novostee_Iran.htm].

⁸ See: V. Nijatbekov, Kh. Dodikhudoev, "The Republic of Tajikistan in the Regional Dimension," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (39), 2006, p. 80.

⁹ See: Kh. Abbasian, *Iran i Tadjikistan: piatnadsat let vzaimovyygodnogo sotrudnichestva*, Irfon, Dushanbe, 2006, p. 103.

The trade turnover dynamics between Tajikistan and Iran, although on the rise, still do not meet the actual potential. The latest figures are as follows: 1999—23.9 million dollars, 2000—20.1 million dollars, 2001—39.9 million dollars, 2002—44 million dollars, 2003—75.1 million dollars, 2004—55.9 million dollars,¹⁰ while by 2007, trade turnover was higher than 100 million dollars.

The Iranian government has encouraged its investors to invest money in the Tajik economy from the very beginning, and Iranian companies have been showing enviable activity. They are currently investing in almost all the branches of Tajikistan's national economy.

The Anzob tunnel, Istiklol, is another major Iranian project, which is located in the north of Tajikistan and links the Sogd Region with the state's capital. Construction of this tunnel cost the Iranian side 31.2 million dollars, 10 million of which were a grant and 21.2 million a loan; the Tajik government's share amounts to 7.8 million dollars. The cost of construction was largely determined by the difficult geographical terrain in the area of the tunnel, which is located at an altitude of 2,650 meters above sea level and is five kilometers in length.

We must note the immense strategic importance of this tunnel, which is confirmed by the republic's president, Emomali Rakhmon: "This tunnel symbolizes Tajikistan's first step out of its transport impasse. The days of having to travel hundreds of kilometers through another state in order to get from one region of our country to another are over."

After the Anzob tunnel, the Iranian Sobir International Company will begin building another one, the Chormagzak tunnel, in the republic's east in the Dushanbe-Kulob highway area (not far from the Nurek Hydropower Plant). The cost of implementing the project amounts to 60 million dollars and the tunnel will be 4.2 kilometers in length.

A more interesting project is the TochIron Joint Venture for manufacturing tractors on the basis of the Dushanbe Khumo plant and the Tabriz tractor plant. According to the agreement, 51% of the shares will belong to the Iranian side, while Tajikistan's Khumo enterprise, which will provide the production capacities, as well as the energy and communication equipment, will own the other 49%. The Iranian partner will supply the technology, and Iranian investments will amount to 10 million dollars. Initially, there were plans to assemble 1,000 pieces of machinery a year with a subsequent increase in production. There are also plans to sell ready-made tractors both on the domestic Tajik market, which is experiencing a shortage of agricultural technology, as well as beyond the country.

Agriculture has become another sphere of cooperation. According to the agreements reached and enforced in a joint memorandum, the Iranian side intends to modernize the existing infrastructure, as well as take part in creating additional infrastructure in Tajikistan, in particular a slaughterhouse that meets the demands of today's market. In turn, Tajikistan will begin delivering mutton to Iran, and the latter will export its poultry products to Tajikistan.

Exhibitions of Iranian goods are regularly held in Tajikistan to strengthen economic relations by looking for new contacts. Dozens of enterprises of the textile and food industry traditionally display their products at these fairs, as well as factories and plants that manufacture office equipment and household appliances.

In 2006-2007, significant changes encompassing new spheres of cooperation occurred in Tajik-Iranian economic relations. Following the agreements signed at the highest level, contacts were also activated at the interdepartmental level. For example, questions pertaining to cooperation between the Iranian province of Khorasan Razavi and Tajikistan were discussed on 25 May, 2007 in Dushanbe. One of the paragraphs of the protocol of intent signed at this meeting registered the intention of the Iranian Iran-Khudru Company to manufacture Samand cars in Dushanbe.

The Iranian side was willing to invest 60 million dollars to set up a production line of passenger cars, while the Tajik side said it was willing to purchase two thousand Samand cars in Iran in the near

¹⁰ See: *Statisticheskii ezhegodnik Respubliki Tadjikistan*, 2005, p. 256.

future for city taxi services. Terms were also agreed upon whereby the Iranian company would sell Tajikistan cars at a 30% discount of their net cost. One car costs approximately 5,000-5,500 dollars.

The simultaneous building of large and small facilities requires a large amount of building material. With this in mind, Iranian partners would like to build a new cement factory in Tajikistan with a production capacity of 1 million tons a year. Businessmen from Iran will invest 140 million dollars in this project.

Iranian investments in Tajikistan occupy one of the leading places and feature in almost all the key branches of the republic's economy.

Humanitarian Sphere of Cooperation

The great political and economic trust between Tajikistan and Iran is largely due to the common multi-century culture of the two countries, which is manifested by the Rūdakī Mausoleum in Penjikent and the Hamadoni Mausoleum in Kulob. Iranian architects took part in restoration work on the Rūdakī Mausoleum—the founder of Tajik-Persian literature. 2008 was declared the Year of Rūdakī and the Tajik Language in Tajikistan. There can be no doubt that this will promote further progressive development of bilateral humanitarian contacts. Cultural ties are occupying an important place in the interrelations between the states. For example, agreements have been signed which provide Tajik students with the opportunity to study in Iranian universities.

The revival of cultural contacts essentially means the revival of the multi-century Tajik-Iranian dialog that was interrupted during the 1920s. It is also worth noting that one of the first foreign cultural centers opened in Tajikistan was Iranian.

Iran has great potential with respect to training scientific staff and qualified specialists for Tajikistan. This process is still unilateral, Iran is financing the training of Tajik students (70 people) in its civil higher education institutions and of Tajik students at the theological training center in the town of Qom (260 people).¹¹

Tajik-Iranian Cooperation in International Structures

The Republic of Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran highly value their interrelations, which are also supplemented by contacts within the framework of international organizations.

Close cooperation between the two states is also seen within the framework of regional structures, such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the Economic Cooperation Organization, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, in which Iran has enjoyed the status of observer since 2005. The latter structure is of the greatest interest since countries with observer status—Iran, India, Pakistan, and Mongolia—have the possibility of swelling its ranks. Iran's potential entry into the SCO could have both positive and negative consequences. It could have a serious influence on the geopolitical and geo-economic processes in Asia.

¹¹ See: *Visit Prezidenta Rakhmonova v Iran mozhno nazvat' istoricheskim*, Rajab Safarov's interview on the results of the official visit by Tajik President Emomali Rakhmon to Iran in January 2006, available at [<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20060212035915491&mode>], 12 February, 2006.

- First, Iran's vast hydrocarbon resources will not only noticeably strengthen energy projects in the SCO, but will also give a significant boost to their implementation. In the near future, this sector could become one of the key vectors in the organization's activity.
- Second, historically Iran's traditionally strong influence in Afghanistan will make it possible for the SCO to carry out more constructive work in the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group (founded in 2005 within the framework of the organization). At present, the extremely complicated military political situation in Afghanistan means that the SCO must pay increased attention to the events going on in this state.
- And finally, third, Iran's membership in the SCO is transforming the region from Central Asia into Greater Central Asia with all the ensuing positive and negative consequences.

Iran's interest in the SCO is generated by the current international situation around Tehran. The complicated relations with Washington and the EU countries are prompting it to look for new partners. In this respect, membership in the SCO will make it possible for Iran to become a member state in an integration formation with two countries that have the status of permanent member of the U.N. Security Council, which will ultimately lead to the prospect of forming a new strategic triangle in Central Asia—Moscow-Beijing-Tehran. But it cannot be said that this process will have a positive influence on the further practical and mutually advantageous participation of some states in the region. Consequently, Iran could use the SCO as a tribune for protecting its national interests by declaring its own political position in international politics. Taking into account some of the Iranian leader's ambitious statements, this could have an influence on the Central Asian countries' relations with the U.S. and the EU states.

Another regional integration formation is the ECO, which appeared on the political map in 1964 and is a common derivative of the diplomacy of Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey, brought to life for the purpose of strengthening economic cooperation among the three countries. It existed in this form until 1992. Since then the organization has become much larger after acquiring seven new members at the same time: Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

The founders of the ECO were interested in further enlargement of the regional structure by means of the Central Asian countries, as well as Azerbaijan and Afghanistan. New states not only mean new sales markets, but also the possibility of promoting new ideas in a vast geopolitical space.

Those branches that promote the strengthening of regional integration were defined as the main vectors of cooperation—transportation routes, trade, and energy. Iran is one of the leaders of this organization; it is interested in the successful implementation of projects within the ECO, which will ultimately lead to Tehran's interrelations with its partners reaching a new and higher level of trust, raise Iran's political prestige in the region, and remove the problem of the country's isolation.

Cooperation between the Republic of Tajikistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran in regional structures is unfolding during intensification of the globalization processes which are going on at the same time amid the ever-frequent outbursts of "clashes of civilizations." This means preserving their traditional Islamic humanistic identity, since many trends of other civilizations are having a certain negative influence. Within the framework of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Iran is carrying out a policy aimed at consolidating the fragmented Muslim world.

At present, the ICO is made up of 57 of the planet's states and is one of the largest and most efficient regional structures. The Islamic Development Bank, the financial input of which is quite important for Tajikistan's national economy, is the most influential and productive branch of the ICO; many projects are being carried out with Iran's complete political support. The main spheres of investment are transportation routes, agriculture, public health, education, and the banking system.

One of the promising Tajik-Iranian projects in hydropower engineering to be carried out with the direct support of the Islamic Development Bank is building eight small hydropower plants in Tajikistan. This plan will be implemented in March 2009. The general contractor of the construction project is the Tajik-Iranian Rokhi Korvon-Gukharrud Joint Venture.

The small hydropower plants, the projected capacity of each amounting to 8,000 kW, will be built in different regions of the county. According to the construction plan, these projects should be implemented within eighteen months. The total planned cost of the eight projects amounts to 10 million dollars.

Taking into account the current state of affairs on the international arena, Tajikistan's diplomacy in Western Asia has been defined by a whole series of factors. Dushanbe has recognized the whole of Iran's strategic significance in its foreign policy. The territorial influence of present-day Iran stretches from the Near and Middle East to Azerbaijan, including the Caspian, as well as Central Asia. In the policy of a state that is largely tellurocratic, the tallassocratic factor also plays an important role. The latter is expressed in Iran's access to sea routes and their proficient use.

C o n c l u s i o n

Iran will continue to hold an important place in the balance of regional power. This is due to the intensification of trade and economic contacts between the Central Asian countries and Iran. Tehran is actively building up its own economic potential and claiming regional leadership. Iran's economic possibilities relating to these political mechanisms are capable of making the republic a strong center of attraction for the Central Asian states, including Tajikistan. In our opinion, the practice of isolationism carried out by Washington will not be capable in the future, if a pragmatic approach prevails, of compensating for the potential dividends gleaned by the Central Asian countries from their cooperation with Iran, given Iran's real geo-economic and geopolitical clout in the regional balance.¹²

The existing level of Tajik-Iranian relations makes it possible to draw a conclusion about their further development. In the next 5-10 years, they will inevitably and significantly strengthen, for which there are several reasons.

- First, Tehran has recommended itself as Dushanbe's reliable and stable partner, becoming, along with Moscow, a guarantor of peaceful consent in Tajikistan.
- Second, Iran and Tajikistan have created a more than solid contractual-legal base for regulating all the aspects of public life, whereby many of them are oriented toward the distant future.
- Third, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are two of the four border states with a large Tajik diaspora, linguistically they belong to the Turkic-speaking world, and Tajikistan itself is the only Persian-speaking country in the region. Their common language will become another strong basis for enhancing bilateral relations.
- Fourth, the positions of several states are becoming much stronger in independent Tajikistan: the traditional leader—Russia, and the most powerful Asian nation—China, with which Tajikistan has a rather long land border, as well as India, which is gaining momentum. Iran has established strong diplomatic relations with all the above-mentioned countries. Moscow, Beijing, and Delhi, despite all the contradictions between them, are extremely complaisant about the Tajik-Iranian tandem.

¹² See: S.K. Kushkumbaev, *Tsentrāl'naia Azia na putiakh integratsii: geopolitika, etnichnost, bezopasnost*, Kazakhstan Publishers, Almaty, 2002, p. 136.

On the whole, it can be claimed that there is a sufficiently high level of bilateral contacts in economic, political, and humanitarian cooperation. This is confirmed by the positive and progressive development dynamics in cooperation in various joint projects being carried out in Tajikistan. This fact characterizes Iran as a reliable and stable partner.
