

## IRAN IN RUSSIA'S CENTRAL ASIAN POLICY

Guli YULDASHEVA

*Ph.D. (Political Science), Member of the Expert Council  
for the Central Eurasia Analytical Project  
(Tashkent, Uzbekistan)*

### ABSTRACT

**T**he author analyzes the role and place of Iran in Russia's Central Asian policy and the impacts of the main foreign policy factors of the Middle East and the CIS.

This brings to the forefront Moscow's approach to its relations with Iran, the United States, and the European Union, as well as their development trends, discussed in the context of the Ukrainian crisis and the possible completion of talks on the Iranian nuclear file. The author concentrates on America's Middle East policy, the talks on Iran's nuclear policy, and the joint efforts of Mos-

cow and Brussels to bring the Ukrainian crisis to an acceptable settlement.

The above suggests the conclusion that Russia's Iranian strategy is primarily based on interaction with the U.S. and the EU as part of their common struggle against Islamic extremism. They are working toward settlement of the Iranian nuclear problem and Ukrainian stabilization.

Today, the mounting threat of Islamic extremism (emanating from Iraq), the geographic proximity of Europe and Russia, and the shared economic interests of the United

States, the EU, and Russia caused by the global nature of common security mean that we can expect their gradual drawing closer together, the scope and the nature of which will depend on the level of future compromises on the Ukrainian crisis and Iran.

In fact, the situation in the Central Asian countries that are seeking political and economic security largely depends on whether the main players involved in the Iranian developments will reach an acceptable balance of interests.

**KEYWORDS:** *Russia, Iran, the U.S., the EU, geopolitics, geo-economics, interest, extremism, security, strategy.*

## *Introduction*

Geographic proximity, security interests, and economic and geopolitical developments tie together the Iranian and Central Asian sectors of Russia's foreign policy; the possible lifting of international sanctions from the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI) has imparted more priority to these factors and moved them to the forefront. If the EU and the U.S. gain even more influence in Iran and Central Asia, the level of Russia's presence there will be significantly lower, which will do nothing for its geopolitical status.

The possible completion of the talks of the Six (or P5+1 Group) with Iran has made it even more important for Moscow to get unhampered access to energy resources and control of the Central Asian transportation and communication corridors in order to continue developing a unified economic zone (which should include Central Asia) and help the Russian government to reach key positions on the Caspian. These plans, if realized, will make Russia one of the main power centers of Eurasia, very much against Washington's interests in the region. Coupled with the already existing disagreements, this factor will add to the geopolitical tension.

Evgeny Lukyanov, Deputy Secretary of the RF Security Council, has pointed out in this connection: "The hegemony of the U.S.A. on the world stage has come to an end ... we need to sit down and negotiate the end of the cold war. No other organization apart from the U.N. and the UN Security Council can cope with the task."<sup>1</sup>

The developments in the Middle East and Ukraine, as well as the rapidly approaching pullout of NATO forces from Afghanistan are supplemented with the spread of extremism, drug trafficking, and illegal migration: taken together they threaten the stability of Russia's southern borders and its territorial integrity.

Amid the never-ending geopolitical disagreements with Washington (exacerbated by the Ukrainian crisis) one of Moscow's foreign policy priorities is to consolidate its partnership with Tehran in the most promising, including Central Asian, directions. Indeed, Iran might take on the task of ensuring continued stability in the RF Muslim regions and in the CIS countries to the south of Russia.

This is possible because *in the past there have been no more or less significant Sunni-Shi'a disagreements between Iran and Central Asia*. Indeed, their confessional disagreements never marred the peaceful relations these countries have been maintaining with Iran throughout history. Today, as in the past for that matter, their common cultural and civilizational Islamic identity was and remains important. The post-Soviet Muslims are attracted by Iran's *enlightened Islamic de-*

<sup>1</sup> [<https://crazyivanreport.wordpress.com/category/cold-war/>].

*mocracy*, which relies on the achievements of the West and the Islamic East. This is shown by the high level of the nation's political culture and the fairly strong influence of the pro-Western elite and the youth on the domestic stage. Outside its borders, *Iran plays a leading role in the Islamic world* and is one of the OIC leaders, a fact recognized by other Islamic heavyweights, Saudi Arabia and Turkey in particular. *In the economic sphere*, Iran offers the CA countries good opportunities to be involved in profitable energy, transportation, and transit projects and to reintegrate the region into the Silk Road project. *In the military-political sphere*, it can help oppose terrorist attacks and radical movements; today, it extends this type of assistance to Iraq and Afghanistan. The Muslims of Russia and Central Asia appreciate these factors and opportunities and welcome constructive partnership with Iran.

Iran believes that its relations with Russia are of key importance in the Greater Central East basin<sup>2</sup> (the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean). In this context, Tehran does not exclude cooperation with Russia in the oil and gas sphere. It, however, has its own interests in the Middle East unrelated to Moscow: it has foreign policy and economic relations with the EU, Turkey, and the Gulf countries, etc.

Continued disagreements between Iran and America, the still unregulated status of the Caspian, and the mounting instability in the CIS, the Middle East, and South Asia are forcing Iran to add flexibility to what it is doing in the region. This means that its cooperation with Russia might counterbalance America's moves in the region.

Russia and Iran have been pooling their efforts to draw the Central Asian countries into their cooperation sphere; on the whole, this correlates with implementation of the transportation and pipeline strategy, which both countries find geopolitically advantageous.

The following factors will make Russia's Iranian strategy successful:

- U.S. policy in the Middle East;
- The results of the talks on the Iranian nuclear file;
- The results of partnership between Moscow and Brussels in settling the Ukrainian conflict.

## U.S. Policy in the Middle East: Iraq

America's policy in the Middle East figures prominently as one of the factors in Russian-Iranian relations. Washington's geopolitical and geo-economic designs in the form of the Greater Middle East project (later the Greater Central Asia strategy) and the New Silk Road Concept, which betrayed the intention to join the Middle East, Central and South Asia into a single whole, contradict Russia's Eurasian integration projects with Iranian participation. This clash of interests explains the present confrontation between the U.S. and the Russian Federation.

The Iraqi crisis has clarified the level and potential development trends of cooperation between Moscow and Tehran; its outcome will change the geopolitical balance of power.

We all know that the fairly unexpected outburst of activity of the local Sunni organization called the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in June 2014 in Iraq pushed the country to the brink of disintegration and, according to the concerted opinion of the Muslim community, might have caused global jihad and clashes between the Sunnis and Shias.

---

<sup>2</sup> See: S.A. Naser, "Politika bezopasnosti Rossii," *Amu Darya*, Tehran, No. 6, Fall 2000, pp. 17-18.

The present crisis in Iraq has given birth to the following explanations of its origins:

- (1) Conspirological: America's short-sighted policy is keeping the process going through the radical Sunni states, Saudi Arabia being one of them, to rearrange the Middle East according to its geopolitical interests.
- (2) Incompetent and inefficient policy of the Iraqi government headed by Nouri al-Maliki.
- (3) Nonconformity of state and ethnic borders.

Conspirological theories look doubtful in the globalized world: the United States is hardly interested in fanning disagreements between Shi'a Iran and Sunni Saudi Arabia; likewise, it hardly needs new seats of tension and instability in the region.

- First, Iran's geographic location between the Near and Middle East adds to its geostrategic weight; continued instability and the "managed chaos" situation will threaten not only Washington's Greater Central Asia strategy, but will potentially threaten the United States: the Muslim population of the United States has been steadily growing from 2.6 million in 2010 to reach the forecasted 6.2 million in 2030.<sup>3</sup>
- Second, in the course of time it has become clear that Iran, which does not want disintegration of Central and South Asia and the Greater Middle East, is an important partner of the United States when it comes to ensuring security there. If the tension continues to climb, Iran's military potential can be strengthened by armed contingents of the CSTO and SCO.
- Third, Iran's geo-economic potential should not be underestimated: it is no coincidence that the first American oil monopolies that came to the country in 1921 still find its resources attractive. It should be said that the New Silk Road project (which most regional states approve as profitable) cannot be implemented without the constructive involvement of Iranian companies: this is not only strategy, the issue is related to America's image.
- Fourth, the Obama Administration's foreign policy shows that the American decision-makers are fully aware of the difference between Saudi Arabia pestered by problems and dynamically developing industrial Iran. This is the rationale of the efforts to find the best possible solution to the regional security problems that might lead to a compromise of sorts between Iran and Saudi Arabia. We should never forget that economically Riyadh depends on the United States and is tied to it by strategic agreements. Some American experts<sup>4</sup> call for achieving a balance of interests between Saudi Arabia and Iran and constructive relations based on mutually advantageous deals.

We all know that the Nouri al-Maliki government is incompetent and corrupt, yet many of Iraq's problems have been caused by domestic factors.

Most of the current conflicts are rooted in the countries' past: colonial powers and their allies shifted borders at will with no thought for the local people. Not infrequently, changes of this type trigger civil wars and international conflicts: the borders between the Soviet Central Asian Republics can serve as a pertinent example.

<sup>3</sup> See: V. Maltsev, "Soedinennye shariaty Ameriki. Okruzhenie Obamy podozrevaiut v svyaziakh s arabskimi radikalami?," 1 July, 2014, available at [<http://antiterrortoday.com/ru/glavnoe-segodnya/vybor-moderatora/4632-soedinennye-shariaty-ameriki-okruzhenie-obamy-podozrevayut-v-svyazyakh-s-arabskimi-radikalami>], 5 July 2014.

<sup>4</sup> See: E. Geranmayeh, "An Alliance of Convenience with Iran? Baghdad as 'Exhibit A'," 27 June, 2014, available at [<http://www.payvand.com/news/14/jun/1184.html>], 30 June, 2014; "Syria, Iran Join Fight against Iraq's Militants, 27 June, 2014, available at [<http://www.payvand.com/news/14/jun/1183.html>], 27 June, 2014.

This brings to mind the errors the Obama Administration made in the Middle East (in Syria, Iraq, and elsewhere),<sup>5</sup> which allows radicals to trickle from one territory to another.

An objective approach to the Iraqi crisis demands correct identification of the two interrelated factors behind it: America's inefficient Middle Eastern strategy and the incompetence of the Nouri al-Maliki government provided the radical movements with a chance first to consolidate and, in 2013, to unite into the ISIL.

Some Russian experts think that the Iraqi developments may bring Iran and the U.S. closer.

Indeed, on the eve of the final stage of the nuclear talks, Tehran would prefer stability in the neighboring territories with a large Shi'a community, which plays a significant role in ensuring Iran's interests in Syria. In an effort to settle the Iraqi crisis, Washington might find Iran's military-political and other resources handy.

In view of the possible displeasure of its traditional allies (Israel, Saudi Arabia, and others), American experts are very cautious in their assessments of the future of American-Iranian relations. They are convinced, however, that the United States will be drawn into the Iraqi crisis, which will open the channels of communication between Tehran and Washington at the minimum level needed to stabilize the situation. The ideological conflict and rivaling interests, however, will not disappear.<sup>6</sup>

In the last few decades, it has become clear that in the interdependent world (in which the developments in any country might challenge mankind) any geopolitical rivalry should take into account all possible threats, the ISIL being one of them.

Gilles de Kerchove, EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator, said that it is "very likely that the ISIS ... maybe is preparing, training, directing some of the foreign fighters to mount attacks in Europe, or outside Europe."<sup>7</sup> American experts expect ISIL attacks on the United States.<sup>8</sup>

It seems that the threats emanating from Iraq and other Islamic states may lead to constructive partnership being restored between the U.S. and Russia: they may organize cooperation with Shi'a Iran, an ally of both countries in this context.

America's approach to Moscow stems from its awareness of the threat of international terrorism emanating from the Greater Middle East. In turn, American experts stressed that the U.S., Europe, Japan, and even China want to see a prospering and stable Russia, a full-fledged partner in dealing with very serious world problems: nuclear proliferation, terrorism, energy, and global warming.<sup>9</sup>

It is equally important to draw Moscow into constructive cooperation with the United States: this might stem Russia's attempts to build a multipolar anti-American coalition. On the other hand, against the background created by the possible instability caused by the pullout from Afghanistan and the Iraqi crisis, continued American military presence in Central Asia suits Russia's interests: it will

---

<sup>5</sup> See: G.I. Yuldasheva, "K nekotorym aspektam politiki SShA na sovremennom etape: mnenie zarubezhnykh ekspertov," *ANO*, Center for Strategic Assessments and Forecasts, Moscow, 2 May, 2012; I. Konstantinov, "Istoki vozvysheniia Islamskogo gosudarstva Iraka i Levanta na Blizhnem Vostoke," 7 July, 2014, available at [<http://www.foreignpolicy.ru/analyses/istoki-vozvysheniya-islamskogo-gosudarstva-iraka-i-levanta-na-blizhnem-vostoke/>], 7 July, 2014.

<sup>6</sup> See: *Iran Nuclear Deal in Sight?* / Interviewee: Suzanne Maloney, Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy, Saban Center for Middle East Policy, Brookings Institution / Interviewer: Bernard Gwertzman, 26 June, 2014, available at [[http://www.cfr.org/iran/iran-nuclear-deal-sight/p33190?cid=rss-analysisbriefbackgroundundersexp-iran\\_nuclear\\_deal\\_in\\_sight?-062614](http://www.cfr.org/iran/iran-nuclear-deal-sight/p33190?cid=rss-analysisbriefbackgroundundersexp-iran_nuclear_deal_in_sight?-062614)], 30 June, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> R. Simcox, "ISIS' Western Ambitions. Why Europe and the United States Could Be the Militant Group's Next Target," 30 June, 2014, available at [<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141611/robin-simcox/isis-western-ambitions>], 4 July, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> See: D. Byman, "Five Myths about the Islamic State," 3 July, 2014, available at [[http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-the-islamic-state/2014/07/03/f6081672-0132-11e4-8572-4b1b969b6322\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-the-islamic-state/2014/07/03/f6081672-0132-11e4-8572-4b1b969b6322_story.html)], 3 July, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> See: *Washington ProFile*, 7 February, 2007-23 June, 2007 (see also: *Washington ProFile*, 14 June, 2007).

keep extremist Islam from the region and counterbalance China's growing might. This suggests that Washington is unlikely to introduce more anti-Russian sanctions, this possibility testified by America's fairly balanced approach to Moscow.

On the other hand, Saudi Arabia (probably the main enemy of Iran) does not want to aggravate its relations with Tehran still further. Riyadh, which has made the struggle against Islamic extremism its official policy, is moving closer to Tehran: a recent bilateral summit discussed the problems of regional security created by the ISIL radicals and the situation in Gaza.<sup>10</sup>

Iran is not alien to long-term planning in the region, and its plans are not always related to Moscow. This is confirmed by the steadily increasing diversification of its foreign policy and economic preferences and means that much will depend on Russia and Iran's skills to build their mutually advantageous political relations and coordinate their actions with other external actors (the U.S. in particular) in the sphere of security and the economy.

## Partnership with the EU on the Ukrainian Crisis

The future of Iranian-Russian relations will be shaped, among other things, by the nature and dynamics of cooperation between Russia and the EU on the settlement in Ukraine. So far, their relations remain frozen: the harsh anti-Russian sanctions introduced by the EU and the U.S. are still in place.

This and the international pressure on Iran because of its nuclear file have brought Iran and Russia somewhat closer. The sides have already signed a memorandum on more active economic cooperation and are discussing a multi-billion contract on Iranian oil. Iran's future SCO and BRICS membership is also being discussed: this will allow the member countries to defend their interests in the current highly competitive globalization context. It is obvious, however, that Russia (which is in a crisis) does not have enough resources to satisfy dynamic economic growth in Iran, while the problems faced by the SCO and BRICS during their transitional development will make it impossible for them to be competitive in the near future.<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, there is an objective economic interdependence between Russia and the EU. This means that as the disagreements over Ukraine subside, the sides will arrive at balanced and constructive cooperation in which Iran will also be involved.

Russia is the European Union's third largest trade partner: in 2013, it accounted for 9.5% of external trade, about 7% of export, and 12% of import.<sup>12</sup> "Russia meets one-third of the EU's need for oil and natural gas and almost one-quarter of its need for coal and oil products."<sup>13</sup>

It comes as no surprise that the EU Council, which met recently in Brussels to discuss the "third degree" trade and economic sanctions, postponed the final decision. The present fairly harsh anti-Russian sanctions, the result of a far from straightforward process, required prolonged negotiations to overcome the disagreements inside the EU.

---

<sup>10</sup> See: "Iran i Saudovskaia Aravia govoriat ob otkrytii "novoii stranitsy" v politicheskikh otnosheniakh," available at [<http://rus.azatutyun.am/archive/New/20140827/3282/3282.html?id=26552637>], 27.08.2014], 20 September, 2014.

<sup>11</sup> See: G. Yuldasheva, "Iranian-Chinese Relationship in the Central-Asian Policy Context," available at [<http://liia.lv/en/blogs/iranian-chinese-relationship-in-the-central-asian-/>], 20 September, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> See: "Summit ES-Rossia: statistika po trgovle tovarami mezhdru EC28 i Rossiey," 24 January, 2014, available at [[http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/russia/press\\_corner/all\\_news/news/2014/20140124\\_ru.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/russia/press_corner/all_news/news/2014/20140124_ru.htm)], 10 July, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> V. Chizhov, "Russia and the European Union: 20 Years On", *International Affairs*, No. 6, 2014.



The following is the main point for Russia: “to preserve its economic and political relationships with Europe and not to alienate other countries.”<sup>14</sup> Against this background, the current problems in relations between the EU and Russia pale into insignificance: the results of their rupture will be catastrophic. The expert community has pointed out that the EU does not want a seat of instability on its borders; it does not want the Slavic al-Qa‘eda that the U.S. is raising in Ukraine.

We should bear in mind that the far from identical approaches of Brussels and Washington to the Iranian nuclear file are reflected, at least partially, in the far from logical or even dual Iranian strategy of the West. The EU and U.S. positions on Iran bifurcated in the late 1990s when the European countries supported the Iranian reformers and a “constructive dialog” with Tehran.<sup>15</sup>

In fact, the European Union, which has its own geo-economic and geopolitical interests in Iran, does not need Tehran’s better relations with the United States<sup>16</sup>; while on the other hand, the potential nuclear threat (and the failures of the Iranian reformers, for that matter) has pushed the EU closer to the United States.

Until recently, a peaceful solution to the Iranian settlement sought for “through diplomacy led by Britain, France and Germany” suggested that “it would be in the best interests of Iran as well as the international community” if a military conflict between Iran and the U.S. was avoided.<sup>17</sup>

These are the limits within which the EU can develop its economic cooperation with Iran; the pipelines from Central Asia mainly to the EU markets (which do not exclude Russia) are another argument in favor of cooperation with Iran. The Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) presupposes six corridors, three of which will tie the economic centers of Europe and Russia to Eastern Europe, while the other three, East Asia, Europe and Russia, to South Asia and the Middle East.

The visit of EU High Commissioner for Foreign Affairs Catherine Ashton to Iran on 8-10 March, 2014 was more evidence of the mutual interests of Iran and the EU; during one of his meetings with the EU foreign policy chief, President Hassan Rouhani said that his government was “interested in establishing a new relationship with the European Union.”<sup>18</sup> The sides probably discussed closer strategic relations in the near future and trade on a wider scale. These plans include closer relations between the EU and Central Asia within the frameworks of their cooperation with Iran. The Central Asian countries are fully aware of what it means for their future.

Moreover, the fact that Federica Mogherini, former foreign minister of Italy, was recently appointed the new EU foreign policy chief<sup>19</sup> probably means that Brussels is looking for an agreement of sorts among all the interested sides. And this comes as no surprise, since, potentially, in 2014-2015 the anti-Russian sanctions will cost the EU €90 billion.<sup>20</sup> This explains why the Russian resolution of

<sup>14</sup> “Rossia, Evropa, SShA—kto razrubit Ukrainsky usel?,” oko planet.su, 1 July, 2014, available at [<http://antiterror.today.com/ru/analitika-doklady/analitika/4643-rossiya-evropa-ssha-kto-razrubit-ukrainskij-uzel>], 1 July, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> See: BBC, 2 December, 2003; *Financial Times*, 14 February, 2003; Reuter, 13 February, 2003; “UK Pressed to Clarify Differences with US Policy towards Iran,” IRNA, 26 April, 2003.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example: F. Vielmini, “Novaia iuzhnaia strategija. Evropa pered litsom anglo-amerikanskoy ‘bolshoy igry’ v Evrazii,” *Kontinent*, Astana, 23 May-5 June, 2001, pp. 32-35.

<sup>17</sup> See: “Britain Refuses to Sing to the Same Tune as US Against Iran,” *Payvand’s Iran News...*, 24 January, 2005; Iran Tops Straw’s Talks with Rice, Say UK Dailies; “Fischer to Focus on Greater US Role in Iran Talks with Rice,” IRNA, 24 January, 2005.

<sup>18</sup> [<http://tehrantimes.com/politics/114592-rouhani-tells-ashton-iran-seeks-new-ties-with-eu-based-on-common-interests>].

<sup>19</sup> See: *Mamedov E.* “EU’s Mogherini Could Usher in Better Relations with Iran,” available at [<http://www.payvand.com/news/14/sep/1019.html>], 21 September, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> See: “Lavrov: vazhno, chtoby v ES zdavy smyls vzial verkh nad ‘yastrebinymi’ nastroeniami,” available at [<http://itar-tass.com/politika/1447390>], 17 September, 2014.

the European Parliament suggests that the European Commission study the modalities of cooperation with the Eurasian Economic Union.<sup>21</sup> This means that restored relations are not excluded.

The West is ready to cooperate; otherwise Foreign Minister of Russia Lavrov would have not been invited to a conference on Iraq held in Paris on 15 September. Moscow, in turn, is demonstrating its readiness to talk to Washington on the key security issues. The Russian delegation at the nuclear talks with Iran issued a statement that “together with partners it is tilling the soil of future compromises.”<sup>22</sup>

Today, the future of the sanctions and progress in the relations between Russia and the European Union largely depends on whether Moscow is ready to stick to the Minsk agreements on cease-fire in Ukraine signed in September. The suspended talks on the Iranian nuclear program are slowing down the development of Russian-Iranian relations, which depend on big investments and high technologies.

## Talks on the Iranian Nuclear File

Successful negotiations between Iran and P5+1 on the Iranian nuclear file may play a key role in changing the relations between Russia and Iran. The fifth round, which took place in Vienna in July, did not, contrary to the expectations, bring the desired results (it was hoped that the final document would be signed on 20 July). Today, it is expected that the final document will be signed on 24 November.

There is a concerted expert opinion that “the final compromise agreement on the capacity and future growth of Iran’s program hinges on the definition of Iran’s ‘practical needs’ with respect to domestic uranium enrichment. Unfortunately, the P5+1 (U.S., U.K., France, China, and Russia plus Germany) and Iran have drastically different interpretations of just how much uranium Iran ‘needs’ to enrich.” Success will largely depend on whether a compromise on smaller numbers, smaller sizes of the centrifuges used for uranium enrichment, and the scope of its nuclear program will prove realistic. The amount of time needed to produce a weapon remains the only hurdle.

“From the P5+1’s perspective, Iran’s enrichment needs are smaller than its current capacity, enough only to supply its small research reactor and to conduct research into more advanced centrifuge designs.”

The Iranian side believes that the country “requires an enrichment capacity far beyond what it currently possesses. The ACA’s compromise proposal calls for limits on Iran’s enrichment capacity that would increase over time as Iran meets benchmarks under the terms of the comprehensive deal. In the long term, Iran could follow the emerging pattern in Europe and the United States in turning its enrichment processes entirely over to a multinational consortium. Meanwhile, Iran’s desire to continue modernizing its centrifuges could be met by allowing it to swap out older, less efficient models for more advanced versions, provided that Iran’s overall enrichment capacity remains constant, ideally at a level slightly below where it stands today. This compromise would not leave Iran with enough capacity to fuel its Bushehr reactor, but ‘firm foreign supply assurances’ could be made to assuage Iranian concerns.”<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> See: “Chizhov: rezoliutsiia Evroparlamenta kritichna po otnosheniiu k Rossii,” available at [<http://itar-tass.com/politika/1452099>], 18 September, 2014.

<sup>22</sup> “Peregovorny round Irana i ‘shesterki’ startuet v New Yorke,” available at [<http://itar-tass.com/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1452232>], 19 September, 2014.

<sup>23</sup> D. Davison, “Reaching a Compromise on Iran’s Enrichment Program,” available at [<http://www.payvand.com/news/14/jun/1181.html>], 30 June, 2014.



“Success in the negotiations will require compromise on both sides that includes a reduction of the number of centrifuges Iran is using to enrich uranium. Currently Iran has about 19,000 centrifuges installed and about 10,000 operating. Non-proliferation experts have suggested reducing that number to between 2,000 and 6,000 to ensure that Iran cannot quickly amass sufficient material for a nuclear weapon. One possibility, put forward recently by a former Iranian official and a group of physicists at Princeton University, would gradually phase out Iran’s first generation centrifuges and substitute a smaller number of more sophisticated machines, with strict limits on the amount of low enriched uranium Iran could stockpile. Iran has reportedly already agreed to concessions on several other key issues, such as modifying a heavy water reactor that will yield plutonium ... and agreeing to stop enriching uranium on a major scale in an underground facility.”<sup>24</sup>

*After reaching an agreement with the P5 + 1 nations, Iran will be able to produce nuclear fuel if it remains within the non-proliferation treaty and confirms the peaceful nature of its nuclear program.*

“The P5+1 nations and Iran agreed to resume negotiations in New York with a new deadline of November 24. Arms control expert Daryl G. Kimball says that while disagreements over some major issues like enrichment capacity and verification measures remain, ‘a comprehensive agreement is within reach.’ Kimball says that progress over the next few weeks will be critical as both President Barack Obama and President Hassan Rouhani have dwindling political space to conclude an agreement.”<sup>25</sup>

Today, the talks are strongly affected by the United States and the EU strategy firmly opposed to any Russia-promoted integration projects of the Eurasian Economic Union, on the one hand, and the mounting wave of extremist movements in Iraq, on the other.

Moscow is convinced<sup>26</sup> that the West might lift the sanctions imposed on Iran as soon as possible to halt rapprochement between Russia and Iran; it is concentrating its resources on exacerbating relations between Russia and Ukraine to undermine the Kremlin’s integration projects.

Seen from Washington, the crisis in Iraq looks like a chance for Tehran to promote its interests at the negotiation table, which explains why the U.S. is trying to separate the two issues.<sup>27</sup>

The July Vienna talks demonstrated that Washington is geared toward geopolitical and geo-economic considerations to the detriment of the struggle against the global threat of extremism. In fact, the different economic interests of the United States and the EU in relation to Russia and Iran deprive the West of a common platform and coordinated approaches. They merely respond to what Moscow and its potential allies are doing.

The Obama Administration finds it much wiser to delay the signing of the final document with Iran until the Ukrainian crisis is resolved in the interests of the U.S. and EU. At the same time, procrastination is fraught with political and economic problems of a much wider scale: the ISIL is spreading far and wide, while the political struggle in Iran and the United States is growing fiercer.

The above and the leading powers’ determination to fight religious extremism and promote their own integration plans amid the rapidly aggravating economic rivalry will force the sides, running against time and acting within a narrow political space, to sign the final document on the Iranian nuclear problem.

---

<sup>24</sup> B. Slavin, “Column: ‘Valiant’ in Soccer, Can Iran Achieve Diplomatic Goals?” *VOA*, 27 June, 2014, available at [<http://www.payvand.com/news/14/jun/1182.html>], 30 June, 2014.

<sup>25</sup> [<http://www.cfr.org/iran/clock-ticking-iran-nuclear-deal/p33457>].

<sup>26</sup> See: “Rajab Safarov: Sanktsii mogut byt sniaty s Irana uskorennyimi tempami,” *Vestnik Kavkaza*, 17 June, 2014.

<sup>27</sup> See: “Iran and World Powers Begin Nuclear Talks in Vienna,” 3 July, 2014, available at [<http://www.payvand.com/news/14/jul/1016.html>], 4 July, 2014.

## *Conclusion*

Russia's Iranian strategy will be determined by the results of its cooperation with the U.S. and the EU in the foreseeable future.

Partnership with the West, possible only if the nuclear talks prove successful, will give Iran investments in its high-tech fields, allow it to improve its infrastructure, address the regional security problems, and overcome the current global threats.

At the regional level, the money Western companies are prepared to pour into the transport and transit projects in Central and South Asia and the Middle East will accelerate Iran's reintegration with its culturally and religiously close neighbors. The sides involved should be ready for mutually advantageous concessions and compromises, without which partnership is obviously impossible (Afghanistan can serve as a pertinent example).

The U.S. and the EU will concentrate on Iran for the sake of their geopolitical development and political and economic security in Central and South Asia and the Middle East. At the same time, the undivided nature of global security associated today with the rising threat of Islamic extremism (emanating from Iraq), the geographic proximity between Russia and Europe, and economic considerations will force the EU and the U.S. in the future to gradually improve their relations with Russia.

On the other hand, in Iran the EU and the U.S. are still geo-economic rivals; we cannot exclude the possibility of Iranian, Russian, and, probably, Chinese opposition to the United States, something which does not suit Washington. Taken together, these factors will probably alleviate the present American-Russian disagreements and push the U.S. and RF toward seeking comprehensive ways to cooperate, the volume and nature of which will depend on the level of the compromises on Ukraine and Iran.

In view of the geopolitical disagreements described above, we can expect that the road toward cooperation will not be smooth. It seems that the sides will have to work hard to harmonize their interests in order to arrive at a compromise between Russia and the West. "Retreats" and flare-ups of local conflicts cannot be avoided, which will inevitably affect the relations between Russia and Iran.

The Central Asian countries, seeking political and economic security for themselves, are interested in the balance of interests of the main world actors around Iran. Lower geopolitical tension and stability in Central Asia will allow the local states to concentrate on the key problems of their political development at home.