

Considerations and key points in the Iran-Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Short Paper</p> <p>Main Object: International Relations Scope: Iran</p> <p>Received: 26 April 2025 Revised: ----- Accepted: 27 April 2025 Published online: 10 May 2025</p> <p>Keywords: comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement between Iran and Russia, Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Iran's three Islands (Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa), Russian Federation.</p>	<p>The 20-Year Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Agreement between Iran and Russia, signed during the official visit of Dr. Masoud Pezeshkian, the President of Iran, to Moscow on 17 January 2025 in a meeting with Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, consists of a preamble and 47 articles. Compared to the 2001 agreement, this agreement appears far more comprehensive and detailed, encompassing nearly all political, economic, cultural, and even social dimensions of Tehran-Moscow relations. However, from a legal standpoint, this agreement does not impose any binding obligations on either party—except in certain restrictive clauses—and merely outlines the framework, principles, and key areas of cooperation between Iran and Russia. One of the primary motivations behind the signing of this 20-year comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement was to maintain an independent and long-term relationship between Iran and Russia, regardless of their interactions or confrontations with the Western world. Additionally, the agreement's emphasis on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity holds particular significance due to the Russian Federation's supportive stance toward the United Arab Emirates' territorial claims over the three islands of Greater Tunb, Lesser Tunb, and Abu Musa. Moreover, the absence of a mutual military assistance clause in the event of an armed attack or military aggression—as stipulated in Article 3, Clause 3 of the agreement—distinguishes it from Russia's strategic agreements with countries like Belarus and North Korea. This provision is crucial in safeguarding Iran from being drawn into Russia's military conflicts with other nations, including Ukraine, thereby aligning with Iran's national security and interests. The timing of the signing of this comprehensive strategic cooperation agreement nearly coincides with the implementation of the Iran-Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) Free Trade Agreement, which takes effect on 15 May 2025. In this context, Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS will complement the Iran-EAEU Free Trade Agreement, further advancing the objectives outlined in the Iran-Russia Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Agreement.</p>

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1. Introduction

The 20-Year Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Agreement between Iran and Russia, which was signed during the official visit of Dr. Masoud Pezeshkian, President of Iran, to Moscow in a meeting with Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, on January 17, 2025 is in fact considered the fourth long-term agreement between Iran and Russia in the past century. The 1921 Treaty between the Government of Iran and the Government of the Federal Socialist Soviet Republic on February 26, 1921, the 1940 Agreement between Iran and the Soviet Union on March 25, 1940, the 20-Year Agreement on Relations and Principles of Cooperation between Iran and the Russian Federation on March 12, 2001, and finally the 20-Year Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Agreement between Iran and Russia on January 17, 2025 are regarded as four important and long-term agreements between the two countries.

In fact, the 20-Year Agreement on Relations and Principles of Cooperation between Iran and the Russian Federation, which was signed on March 12, 2001, was set to expire on March 12, 2021. However, this agreement had included a provision for automatic extension for a period of five years if neither party expressed an objection before its expiration, thus it was automatically extended to 2026. Yet, the leaders of Iran and Russia believed that the circumstances of both countries, as well as the regional and international environment, had significantly changed since the agreement's signing in 2001, and that the existing agreement could no longer fully address the developments and issues at hand. Therefore, a revision and update were deemed necessary. Finally, after three years of expert work and numerous consultations, the Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Agreement between Iran and Russia was signed by the presidents of the two countries. This new agreement, consisting of a preamble and 47 articles, appears to be far more complete and comprehensive than the 2001 agreement, covering almost all political, economic, cultural, and even social dimensions of relations between Tehran and Moscow. In practice, this Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Agreement encompasses a broad and diverse range of topics including: political relations, international trade, transportation, transit routes, energy (especially in the oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors), peaceful nuclear energy, defense and military issues, cooperation in combating terrorism, environmental matters and Caspian Sea affairs, countering money laundering and organized crime, technology (especially new technologies, information security, and cybersecurity), as well as scientific, educational, and sports collaborations.

For legal procedures to be completed, the Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Agreement between Iran and Russia was ratified by the State Duma (Lower House of the Russian Parliament) on April 8, 2025, and subsequently by the Federation Council of Russia (Upper House) on April 16, 2025. Following these approvals, Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, also signed the law ratifying the 20-Year Comprehensive Strategic Treaty with Iran on April 21, 2025. On the other side, since Article 77 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran stipulates that: "All treaties, protocols, contracts, and international agreements must be approved by the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Parliament)", this Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Agreement between Iran and Russia must also be ratified by the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majles) and approved by the Guardian Council to gain legal validity. However, as of the writing of this analytical article¹, the government has not yet submitted the bill of the Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Agreement between Iran and Russia to the Islamic Consultative Assembly; though it is expected that this will take place in the near future. With the agreement's ratification in the parliaments of both Iran and Russia, the Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Agreement between Iran and Russia will attain full legal and executive standing.

2. Notes and Key points

The Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Agreement between Iran and Russia contains important considerations and key points regarding its content, the context of its formation, and its implications and obligations, which are essential for a better understanding of this agreement. Some of these points are as follows:

- a) Essentially, agreements like the Comprehensive Strategic Cooperation Agreement between Iran and Russia primarily serve as a demonstration of political will to advance shared objectives. In reality, a "treaty" is any written agreement between two international legal entities, signed by authorized officials, possibly ratified by parliament. However, the content of such comprehensive treaties typically includes general commitments that clarify the scope of future exchanges and articulate the political will of both parties to pursue joint goals in those areas. Usually, no specific executive commitments are accepted in such comprehensive agreements; each general commitment would later require specific operational arrangements or more detailed agreements (IRNA, 2024). The Iran-Russia strategic agreement is

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no exception — in its current form, it creates no binding obligations, apart from a few restrictive clauses, and merely outlines frameworks, principles, and areas of cooperation. The agreement essentially reaffirms which areas are central to bilateral relations and the perspectives of Tehran and Moscow on these matters. Notably, in economic and cultural areas, this agreement imposes no binding commitments (Shouri, 2024).

- b) The agreement explicitly calls for harmonizing views on major international and regional issues. Key points include advocating for a fair and multipolar world order (preamble); opposing hegemony and foreign intervention (Article 2); emphasizing national sovereignty and non-interference (Article 3); cooperation within international organizations like the United Nations and regional organizations (Article 9); reinforcing peace and security in the Caspian Sea, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and West Asia (Article 12); and opposing unilateral coercive actions, including extraterritorial sanctions (Article 19). However, one challenge in such agreements is that while a framework is laid out, practical implementation requires specific, case-by-case agreements. Another important point is the differences in interests and occasional conflicts between Iran and Russia in various regions. For instance, while both countries align in Central Asia, their stances diverge in the South Caucasus. Although both oppose NATO expansion and support North-South transport routes and 3+3 cooperation, their interests often conflict — for example, regarding the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia from Georgia, Israel-Azerbaijan relations, and the Zangezur Corridor. Russia has also been reluctant to openly support the Aras Corridor (linking Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan via Iran) instead of Zangezur, as the latter enhances Russia's leverage in Armenia, while the Aras route bypasses Russian control through Iran. Additionally, Iran's gas exports to Armenia and Georgia compete with Russia's Gazprom, which dominates Armenia's gas market. Furthermore, although Iran and Russia have collaborated on the Rasht-Astara rail line, Russia has shown no support over the past decade for a direct Iran-Armenia rail link (Marand-Norduz-Meghri-Yerevan), which would threaten Russia's monopoly over Armenia's rail network (Kaleji, 2025). Such complexities and conflicting interests inevitably complicate the implementation of certain provisions, such as “strengthening peace and security in the Caspian, Central Asia, beyond the Caucasus, and West Asia” (Article 12). The more general and abstract the commitments, the easier they are to agree upon, but implementation of concrete provisions becomes more challenging and requires further agreements.
- c) In Paragraph 1 of Article 3 of the agreement, it is stated: “The

contracting parties shall strengthen their relations based on the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity, independence, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, respect for sovereignty, cooperation, and mutual trust." This is particularly significant given Russia's past support for the United Arab Emirates' territorial claims over Iran's three islands (Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa), acting as a deterrent against future similar stances from Moscow.

- d) A significant part of the military and defense cooperation is detailed in Articles 5, 6, and 7. These cover military exercises, exchanges of delegations and experts, military training programs, student and instructor exchanges, joint participation in exhibitions, search and rescue operations, and port visits by naval vessels. The agreement also includes provisions for joint counterterrorism efforts and combating transnational organized crime (Shahsavari, 2024). Notably, Paragraph 3 of Article 3, which drew considerable attention, states: "If either of the contracting parties is subjected to aggression, the other party shall not provide military or other assistance to the aggressor that would support the continuation of the aggression and will assist in ensuring that any disputes arising are settled in accordance with the UN Charter and other applicable rules of international law." Previously, Russia had no such declarative or practical commitment to Iran, and this clause merely formalizes that stance. This provision highlights that Iran and Russia do not intend to form a military alliance, and that the Kremlin would be unlikely to assist Iran militarily in the event of an attack by the US or Israel (Smagin, 2025). It's worth noting that since the annulment of Iran's bilateral military pact with the United States and its withdrawal from the CENTO treaty in 1979, Iran's defense strategy has been based on principles of self-reliance, independence, domestic production, and deterrence — with no country or regional organization committed to Iran's defense. Even full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) hasn't altered this, as the SCO is not a collective security organization like NATO or the Warsaw Pact. The absence of a mutual military assistance commitment, as reiterated in this agreement, is strategically important for keeping Iran uninvolved in Russia's military conflicts, including with Ukraine.
- e) Economic cooperation is addressed in Articles 18–27. Many of these reiterate previous agreements between the two countries. For example, using national currencies in bilateral trade has been agreed upon multiple times and is reiterated in Paragraph 2 of Article 20 (Shahsavari, 2024). Notably, the approximate simultaneity of this agreement with the implementation of the Iran-Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) Free Trade Agreement is

significant. Five years after the Preferential Trade Agreement (2019), which reduced tariffs on over 862 items (including 502 Iranian exports), the Free Trade Agreement was signed on December 25, 2023, in St. Petersburg and, after a year-long ratification process, was approved by Iran's parliament on February 5, 2025, and endorsed by the Guardian Council on March 2, 2025. The president signed it into effect on March 15, 2025. As the parliaments of the EAEU members (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia) had already ratified it, the agreement will take effect on May 15, 2025. From then, tariffs on 87% of trade goods between Iran and EAEU states will be eliminated, and non-tariff barriers will also be banned. A small percentage of non-strategic items will remain tariffed. Successful implementation will require expanded transport and transit infrastructure along the North-South Corridor, integrated multimodal transportation systems (sea-road-rail), completion of key railways (Rasht-Astara, Chabahar-Zahedan), increased port capacities in the Caspian Sea, Persian Gulf, and the Oman Sea, expanded Ro-Ro shipping in the Caspian, upgraded customs facilities, and stronger financial and banking agreements between Iran and Russia. Iran's membership in the SCO and BRICS is expected to complement this agreement and support the economic provisions of the Iran-Russia strategic agreement.

- f) The agreement was signed on January 17, 2025, just three days before Donald Trump's presidential inauguration, leading to speculation that it was aimed at countering the US. However, as noted, negotiations for the agreement had been ongoing for at least three years, and the text explicitly states it is not against any third party. One of the main motivations behind the 20-year agreement with Russia (and the similar 25-year agreement with China) is to establish an independent, long-term relationship irrespective of either country's relations with the West. Historically, Iranian officials and experts have believed Russia exploits its relationship with Iran as a bargaining chip in its dealings with the West, while Russian counterparts believe Iran turns to strategic cooperation only under severe Western sanctions and economic pressure, and distances itself when relations with the West improve. These agreements aim to dispel such perceptions and redefine ties independently of Western dynamics— especially crucial as US-Russia talks on Ukraine continue, indirect US-Iran negotiations on the nuclear issue proceed, and Trump's pressure policy targets Iranian oil exports to China.

3. Final Remarks

The Russian Federation has thus far signed agreements and treaties

similar to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement between Iran and Russia with fourteen other countries. Typically, through the signing of such agreements, states express their commitment to maintaining long-term relations and delineate the areas in which they intend to strengthen their ties. In essence, these types of treaties serve as a form of mutual reassurance and a declaration of intent to sustain and expand future cooperation (IRNA, 2024). Given the transformations in their bilateral and multilateral political, economic, socio-cultural, and military-security relations, Iran and Russia have sought to outline a long-term roadmap within the framework of a 20-year strategic agreement. This document defines the primary lines of cooperation, spheres of interaction, and the scope of reciprocal commitments. As Abbas Araghchi, Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister, has emphasized, this treaty is "not merely a political agreement," but rather "a roadmap for the future" (Sputnik, 2025). A crucial point is that the implementation of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement between Iran and Russia requires the drafting, signing, and execution of specialized agreements in the specific areas outlined within the main document. Naturally, throughout this process, the coordination and collaboration of various domestic institutions in both countries—as well as continuous bilateral engagement, particularly through the Joint Economic Cooperation Commission—are of considerable importance.

Another significant factor is the necessity of public support and backing in both nations for the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement and the broader relationship, which is frequently described by the authorities of both states as "strategic." The experience of other countries that have reached the stage of strategic cooperation and partnership—such as the United Kingdom and the United States, Azerbaijan and Turkey, Pakistan and China, or Russia and Belarus—clearly demonstrates that bilateral relations cannot remain limited to official, political, and elite-level interactions, but must also be supported by public sentiment. Unfortunately, due to historical factors and certain lingering negative perceptions within Iran's middle class, such a characteristic has not yet developed in the Iran-Russia relationship. The reality is that the only area in which Iran's middle class holds a distinctly positive view of Russia is the domain of literature and novels. The works of great Russian writers and intellectuals—such as Pushkin, Lermontov, Chekhov, and Tolstoy—continue to be among the most beloved literary pieces within Iranian middle-class society. However, this cultural affinity has yet to extend into other dimensions of the Iran-Russia relationship.

It seems that, at present, the economic, trade, and commercial sectors hold the greatest potential for cultivating such a trend. The active participation of chambers of commerce and private sector enterprises—particularly following the implementation of the Free Trade Agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union—will play a pivotal

role in this regard. This could gradually shift Iran-Russia economic and commercial relations away from a state-dominated structure toward a model resembling Iran's trade and financial ties with countries like Turkey and the United Arab Emirates. In such a scenario, it may be hoped that, over time and through a long-term process, the gradual popularization of Iran-Russia economic and trade relations, combined with growing public support, will facilitate the realization of the objectives and pillars set forth in the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement between the two countries.

Conflict of interest

The author declared no conflicts of interest.

Ethical considerations

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the author on reasonable request.

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