

62nd CICA International Conferences on Security

“Threats for Peace and Security: Asia vs. West”

Developments oblige the new Iranian Government to give a higher priority to its neighbouring countries

by

Ambassador A.A. Soltanieh

*President of the Vienna International Institute for
Middle East Studies (VIIMES)*

25-26 April 2022

Madrid, Spain

The research paper consists of five intertwined parts:

Part-I: Particularities of Iran and the region

Part-II: Challenges & opportunities of new government; Why a change?

Part-III: Promotion of bilateral relations with neighbouring countries

Part-IV: Promotion of cooperation with regional & interregional organizations

Part-V: National, regional, and international Security and their interrelations/interactions

Part-I: Particularities of Iran and the region



Persian Gulf

The Persian Gulf has been an area of geopolitical importance long before the discovery of oil. The external powers have always planned to interfere this region, UK was replaced by US

- **President Carter** announced on 23 January 1980: “An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America. And such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.”
- On 22 September 1980, **Saddam** attacked Iran, with fully fledged strategic support of US (meeting of Rumsfeld with Saddam on 20 December 1983, ...)
- The security threat in the Persian Gulf did not come from the Communist bloc as US always portrayed!

Persian Gulf (cont.)

- **Iraqi invasion of Kuwait** and the subsequent Desert Storm war paved the way for the next preplanned **military invasion of Iraq**
- Iranian position opposing the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait helped Iran's standing among the GCC states and improved Arab Iranian relations
- American officials do not miss a beat in their warnings to the GCC that Iran is the real long-term threat to the region, resulting in **\$billions arms sell**, and **The Abraham Accords**. But all is doomed to failure since they are based on miscalculations of the reality
- Apparently, the trade is still the *raison d'être* of Persian Gulf security. External actors are still concerned about access to and control of the supply of a valued commodity

Caspian Sea:

- The Caspian region is a resource-rich area with a unique locality that connects Europe and Asia in more than just geography
- Caspian basin's classification and resources have made this region strategically important
- From Caspian's own littoral states Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, to external actors like Turkey, European Union, China, United States, and India are all involved in the geopolitics of the Caspian
- Iran can play a crucial role in the International North-South Transportation Corridor, INSTC, from Chabahar and Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf to the Anzali Port in the Caspian Sea

The new government of Iran faced old and new challenges but unique opportunities as well.

Main Challenges:

- Regional security sustainable threats by Israeli regime since the occupation of Palestine and the policy of continuous settlement thus further expansion of occupation. Threat of attack against countries in the region specifically Iran
- US military presence with over 40 military bases, intervention with internal affairs of countries in the region
- Unfriendly relation of some Arab neighbours, with provocation of US and Israeli regime
- Covid-19 pandemic, economic problems due to US sanctions and inappropriate policies
- While having concerns about the JCPOA imposed restrictions and the violations by the US, the new government had to respect Iran's commitments and try to revive it
- High expectations of Iranian people for a genuine change and improvement

Opportunities:

- The failure of past policy vis-à-vis West, with non-compliance specifically on JCPOA, demand of people for an immediate foreign policy shift
- The crystal-clear signals by neighboring countries on their frustrations with reliance on the West, especially the US, and their willingness/determination for a change for promotion of the bilateral relation with Iran
- The coherence and close collaboration between three branches: legislation, judiciary, and executive.
- More convergence and cooperation between officials in charge of diplomacy and regional security front

Which developments require the new Iranian Government to give a higher priority to its neighbouring countries?

- The new Government was elected by its constituencies after the previous policy with special priority on the West had failed
- The degree of frustration vis-à-vis Western countries, by supporters of the previous Government, especially those with a so-called Western mindset orientation, as a result of hostile US policy in Trump era and weakness of EU on JCPOA
- Given such environment, the proposal of Dr. Raisi to materialize the great potential of the region, specifically neighbouring countries, sounded attractive and was welcomed by majority of constituencies
- The Raisi Government reiterated that it is also pursuing friendly relation with other countries, beyond its immediate orbit, the strategy of balancing foreign relations

Part-III: Promotion of bilateral relations with neighbouring countries.

Promotion of Iran-Iraq relation



Iranian President stressed:

- The Islamic Republic of Iran supports the unity, independence, security and the promotion of regional and international position of Iraq
- We consider the slightest insecurity in Iraq to be to the detriment of the whole region, so we welcome the realization of the interests of the Iraqi people and the establishment of a strong government in this country
- Any country in the region that neglects the hegemonic goals of the United States and the Zionist Regime will both disregard the interests of its nation and will spur Muslim nations' anger
- Good steps have been taken to develop and deepen relations between the two countries and we are determined to promote the level of relations and cooperation between the two countries in all fields to the full capacity and the development of bilateral and regional relations between Tehran and Baghdad, and lead to closer relations at the international level

Iraqi President stressed:

- The need for cooperation between the two countries to overcome regional challenges
- Establishing stability and security in the region is very important and, in this regard, we hope for the active role of the Islamic Republic of Iran
- Tehran and Baghdad have many common goals and objectives at the regional and international levels, and by strengthening the level of cooperation and coordination, we can take useful and effective steps to ensure the interests of our nations and the nations of the region
- The solution to the crises in the region is merely with the will of the countries themselves, and intra-regional solutions without the interference of outsiders
- The economic capacities of the two countries can serve the interests ¹² of the two nations

Improving Iran-Saudi relation

- New governments are opting for melting the ice, welcomes initiative to reduce tension and open a new chapter
- Iran has welcomed the Iraqi initiative for Iran-Saudi talks in Baghdad. Meetings have been held so far. The last one in March 2022 was however suspended after the mass execution of 81 persons in Saudi Arabia
- MFA of Iraq announced on 25 April 2022: 5th Round of meeting was held. Next round will be at diplomatic level
- Though some western analysts are of the view that Iran's recent interest in de-escalating tensions with Saudi Arabia comes as Riyadh, coming under increasing pressure from Yemeni Houthi and ultimately has no choice but to settle with the Islamic Republic, but the author is of the belief that Raisi's regional policy is genuine with political will

Promotion of Iran -UAE relation

- UAE Vice President and Prime Minister is among the first senior figures in the region to congratulate Dr. Raisi on his election victory
- On September 1, 2021, the **FM of Iran** following meeting with Prime Minister of the UAE, on sidelines of a regional summit in Baghdad said:
 - positive intentions and determination of the leaders of the two countries to bolster ties and stressed the importance of brotherly relations between the two countries
 - To enhance bilateral ties and the realization of regional cooperation, we will consult our neighbors, and cooperate and empathize with them
- **UAE prime minister** also commented on the meeting:
 - I wish him success in his new duties through the development of positive relations with neighbouring countries and consolidating relations based on the principles of wisdom and the interests of nations.
 - As always, our greetings to the Iranian nation, a neighbour, and a friend.

Promotion of Iran-Oman relation

FM of Oman arrived in Tehran on 23 February 2022

FM of Iran:

- Tehran and Muscat enjoy close relations and hoped the two sides would further improve ties
- Oman's "constructive" role in resolving some issues pertaining to the release of two British prisoners

Promotion of Iran-Turkmenistan relation

Referring to his visit to Turkmenistan, during phone call with counterpart on 15 March 2022, **President Raisi** highlighted :

- The importance of North-South Corridor, and hope that the two countries will witness evermore usage of their economic capacities
- Iran's will to broaden relations with Central Asian countries, especially with Turkmenistan.

Promotion of Iran-Azerbaijan relation

In a message to his counterpart on the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations, President Raisi underlined the following points on 14 March 2022:

- Need for further expansion of economic and trade relations between Iran and Azerbaijan it would benefit the interests of both nations
- Regional and international situations double the need for strong and regular relations between neighbouring countries, particularly those with cultural, historical, and civilizational common grounds.

Promotion of Iran -Tajikistan relation

In a message to Iran's President on 11 February 2022, President of Tajikistan felicitated Iran on 43rd anniversary of the Islamic Revolution victory:

- Expressing satisfaction from remarkable achievement following vast cooperation between the two countries
- and called for:
- expansion of mutual ties in different areas to protect both nations' interests
 - constant consultations at high-ranking level of utmost significance

Promotion of Iran- Afghanistan relation

A-Iran's Expectation of Taliban

On 13 Oct. 2021 Chairman of Iran's Strategic Council on Foreign Relations, Kamal Kharrazi, former FM, urged Taliban, the new ruler of Afghanistan:

- to eliminate terrorists in Afghanistan as their first and foremost duty
- The current Afghanistan rulers are duty-bound to fight against terrorism and prevent the terrorist group of Daesh (ISIS) from carrying out massacres and killing innocent people in schools and Shia mosques

B-Iran proposed “Triangle Initiative” in 2008, a plan for close collaboration between Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan, to combat drug trafficking, under the auspices of the UNODC. Noteworthy, that the author was then directly involved from the submission of the initiative to the UNODC and the establishment of operation headquarters in Tehran, followed by effective joint operations

Iran-Afghanistan joint committees of cooperation kick off

On 17 November 2021, Iran-Afghanistan joint committees of cooperation were held in **Kabul**. Iran's President Envoy:

- Iran and Afghanistan's interests are intertwined
- Due to the presence of foreigners, many problems have arisen for the people of this country
- A **roadmap** for joint cooperation and a 5-year to 10-year perspective should be drawn



Iran-Afghanistan (cont.)

C-Promotion of Industrial Cooperation

Iranian Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade, following talks with his counterpart, said on 17 March 2022:

- Iran and Afghanistan will cooperate **to mine iron ore**
- Afghanistan is rich in mineral reserves. With its high-tech know-how, Iran can help exploit the iron ore in Afghanistan. This will be mutually beneficial
- Afghanistan is one of the poorest nations in the world, he said, noting that the country lies at the crossroads of Central and South Asia and is sitting on mineral deposits worth nearly \$1 trillion, including critical industrial metals such as lithium

Promotion of Iran-Turkey relation



Turkey and Iran signed an agreement to comprehensively improve relations in a meeting at the 15th Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Summit held in Turkmenistan's capital Ashgabat on 29 November 2022.

Iran-Turkey (cont.)

- In October 2021, the **interior ministers** of Turkey and Iran signed a memorandum of understanding designed to prevent terrorism and illegal activities the countries face, particularly along their borders.
- The two countries are part of the Astana process, which was initiated by Turkey, Iran and Russia to bring the warring sides in Syria together to find a permanent solution to the decadelong war.
- Iran's Ambassador to Ankara said Iran supports Erdoğan's initiative to establish a 3+3 peace mechanism in the Caucasus region.

Promotion of Iran-Russia relation



President Putin and President Raisi discussed the development of bilateral economic relations and international cooperation in Moscow on 19 January 2022

Following the meeting with President Putin, President Raisi said:

- In the current, very exceptional conditions, where there is opposition to the unilateral actions of the West, including the United States, we can create synergy in our interaction
- Iran would continue to develop despite Western sanctions and threats and would work on establishing mechanisms for the gradual lifting of all sanctions and restrictions
- Common understanding of the two countries on regional and international issues is at the basis of joint cooperation
- We have a very good experience of cooperation with the Russian Federation in the fight against terrorism in the region... Such a very good experience can create the preconditions for us to apply this experience in many other areas
- Iran-Russia ties are on the path to become strategic relations

Iran-Russia (Continue)

President Raisi highlighted the following main points at Duma:

- The strategy of domination has now failed, and the United States is in its weakest position, and the power of independent nations is experiencing historic growth
- Strengthening Iran-Russia relations in bilateral and multilateral forms will boost the economies of the two nations and strengthen regional and international security
- NATO, on the other hand, seeks to infiltrate various geographical areas with new coverings that threaten the common interests of independent states. Promoting pro-Western governments and confronting independent democracies based on national identities and traditions is part of NATO's cultural projects that reflect the hypocrisy of this diminishing pattern of behaviour
- The United States has not fulfilled its obligations under the nuclear deal
- Iran is serious about reaching an agreement if the other parties are serious about lifting the sanctions effectively and operationally

Promotion of Iran-Pakistan relation

A-Pakistani President proposes :

On 16 Feb 2022, he directed State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) and Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) to make all necessary arrangements using local currency to boost trade with Iran

B-Gas pipeline from Iran to Pakistan

Pakistan's Finance Minister, in his interview with the Financial Times, expressed hope on 12 March 2022, that if the JCPOA is revived the gas pipeline project would also be revived since it is suspended due to US imposed sanctions.

C-On 23 March 2022, Dr. Raisi, addressing Pakistani PM, expressed satisfaction with the amicable ties between the two neighbouring countries, and said:

- The mutual exchanges will expand and consolidate more than ever
- The brotherly and friendly relationship can expand increasingly as a result of empathy and cooperation among authorities of both states in various fields and in line with ensuring interests of both nations

Part-IV: Promotion of cooperation with regional & interregional organizations

1-Realization of Membership of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

2-New momentum in Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO)

3-Participation at Summit of Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF)

SCO: 21st Summit, held in Tajikistan on 17 September 2021: Upon unanimous decision, the Islamic Republic of Iran became a **new member** of the SCO. This is considered as a turning point

President Raisi said:

- Cultural development is the first agenda of cooperation between civilised countries. Most of the world's cultural and spiritual treasury is located in Asia. **Asia** is the **cradle of human civilisation**, and its beating heart has been in China, India, Tajikistan and Iran

SCO (cont.), Raisi:

- My foreign policy orientation as focusing on "economic multilateralism" and strengthening "neighbourhood policy" in its broadest sense and strengthening its presence in regional organisations.
- At present, world peace and security are threatened by hegemony and challenges such as terrorism, extremism, and separatism; threats targeting a wide range of countries around the world, especially members and partners of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
- The One Belt-One Road Initiative, the Eurasian Economic Union and the North-South Corridor, as key projects in the field of infrastructural links,
- The SCO needs to design structures and mechanisms for a collective response to sanctions. Unilateral sanctions are not limited to one country but, as it has become clear in recent years, include more independent countries, especially members of the Organisation.



Raisi:

Each one of the ECO member countries has huge economic capacities which can be used to give a boost to the economic prosperity of the region

6th summit of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF),
Qatar, 21 February 2022



GECF (cont.)

President Raisi:

- We hope that this visit will be a step towards improving political, economic and trade relations between the countries of the region and the countries of the Persian Gulf
- Iran has proven its loyalty to all regional countries at difficult times
- Tehran welcomes regional cooperation in the interests of peace, security, and the progress of the nations of the region
- The presence of foreign powers in West Asia increases insecurity and concern
- We are ready to activate all areas for the expansion of bilateral and regional cooperation in the interests of both nations

Other dimensions of regional security:

A-Impact of Arab Spring on Iran-Arab relation

- The region, specifically Arab neighbors are facing a dilemma of what option to choose, Iran or west, mainly US. The developments since the Arab Spring, including the fate of Arab rulers, shows that they have to change the hostile policy vis-à-vis Iran to a cordially / respectful relation if not to a close and even strategic one.

B-Terrorism as well as menace of Mafia of Narcotic Drugs are serious threats to the national security of all states in this region. Records show that both have been triggered and manipulated by outside powers.

❖ Iran vis-à-vis terrorism, extremism, and violation

- MEK 17000 victims
- RDF
- WAVE
- HOPE

❖ Iran victim of Transit of Drugs

According to the reports of the UNODC, Iran is the war front of drug smuggling with about 80% of confiscations, sacrificing over 4000 law enforcement martyrs, preventing transition of drugs to Europe. Apart from some short diplomatic words, Europe has refrained from genuine shared responsibility and appreciation

Root Cause of Terrorism in the Middle East

The following official statements speak for themselves:

A-Donald Trump said on 11 August 2016 that President Barack Obama and Democratic rival Hillary Clinton the “co-founders” of Islamic State, that they are responsible for the rise of the militant group.

B-H. Clinton too confessed in one of her books and also orally:

They invaded Afghanistan... and we did not want to see them control Central Asia and we went to work... and it was President Reagan in partnership with Congress, led by Democrats, who said you know what it sounds like a pretty good idea... let's deal with the ISI and the Pakistan military and let's go recruit these mujahideen.

“Let's remember here... the people we are fighting today, we funded them twenty years ago.

“And great, let them come from Saudi Arabia and other countries, importing their Wahabi brand of Islam so that we can go beat the Soviet Union. “So there is a very strong argument which is... it wasn't a bad investment to end Soviet Union but let's be careful with what we sow... because we will harvest.”

Both Al-Qaida and ISIS terrorist groups massacred hundreds of thousand innocent civilians in the region specially in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Iran including Muslims, Christians, Yazidis.

The only option was to physically fight with the ISIS in Iraq and Syria, stop its advancement, and free the occupied lands.

General Ghassem Soleimani, the commander of Quds Branch of the IRGC, started the historical battle with ISIS

His successful fight put an end to the most horrified chapter of our contemporary age. The crystal message to Iran's neighbours is that they could count on Iran to defend them in case of any terrorist threat, by non-state actors or state terrorists.

The anti-terrorist global hero was assassinated by the US in Baghdad airport, while on his official visit to Iraq to resolve the disputes between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The determination of Iranian people to fight terrorists is augmented after this horrific assassination



Iran's Regional Security Policy and Concerns

On Army Day, 18 April 2022, the President said:

- Iran will never start a war but will counter any aggression with a remorseful and decisive response, with the high readiness of the country's military forces and the high intelligence elite of these forces in the face of regional and international developments
- The slightest movement of the enemy will not be hidden from the sharp eyes of our armed forces

Immediate economic achievement of the new neighboring focused policy

- In line with the new policy indicators show a **43 % Increase** in trade with neighboring countries
- The value of Iran's **non-oil trade** with its neighbours from March 2021 until March 2022: worth \$51.875 billion were exchanged between Iran and 15 neighbouring countries
- Turkey with \$6.1 billion, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with \$4.9 billion, Afghanistan with \$1.8 billion, and Pakistan with \$1.3 billion in imports from the Islamic Republic, followed by Oman, Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain

Deputy FM said on 25 April 2022 on EUROASIA:

- Russia 1.5 b\$
- Kazakhstan 500M\$
- Armenia 350Mb
- Bridge: Astra-Azarbajan 900 Truck
- China transit: Incehbroon-Sarakhs soon

Thanks for your kind attention