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Investigating Iran's Maritime Transport Development Solutions Affected by the War between Russia and Ukraine

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Abstract

Background and Theoretical Foundations: Moscow believes that the West's approach to Ukraine is carried out with two methods of expanding the European Union, known as the Eastern Partnership Program and encouraging Ukraine to join NATO. Therefore, the Russians believe that if Kyiv joins the European Union, other countries of the former Soviet Union will gradually leave the Kremlin's sphere of influence. In fact, Ukraine joining the European Union will not only border Russia with NATO, but will also reduce Russia's influence. In this regard, Moscow wants a pro-Russian government in Ukraine and therefore will not tolerate a pro-Western country that is a member of NATO.

Methodology: The research method is descriptive-analytical, which was collected and conducted through the study of library documents.

Result: The research hypothesis can be proposed in this way that the interaction between Iran and Russia, taking into account measures such as the permanent and official presence of Iran in the ports of the Mediterranean Sea and the Black Sea, greater convergence between Tehran and Moscow in solving the legal consensus of the Caspian Sea, the maximum benefit of the route of the Caspian Sea in the transit of goods in the North-South corridor can be realized. With the experiences they had learned from the past, this time the Russians came to the field with a more aggressive model against the actions of the West and NATO, and with military intervention and a show of power, they are trying to change the geopolitical game in their favor. Western reaction against this action caused increased pressure and intensified sanctions against Russia. Russia seeks to play an effective role in global

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equations and to improve its position in the international system and economic growth while expanding its sphere of influence. In this regard, it needs organizational and political cohesion for its benefit and in line with its defended values at the regional and global level. Nevertheless, the war between Russia and Ukraine can highlight Iran's status as a regional power.

Conclusion: In the interaction of the balance of power in the relations between the great powers following the Russian military attack on Ukraine, creating a buffer zone between Russia and NATO can contain opportunities and threats for the countries of the region, especially the Islamic Republic of Iran and its foreign policy. Therefore, Iran, as an intermediate power in the world, should pursue a policy based on a positive balance, seeking to make the most of the current gap created in the relations between Russia and the West, for its interests and national security. On the other hand, because the Russians are self-interested and have a realistic and pragmatic policy, they consider an independent and powerful Iran a geopolitical supplement to developing their influence and future. The cooperation between Tehran and Moscow in the last two decades has been going on in various dimensions, despite some inadequacies, and has continued, especially much more so in the fields of security and defense. The secret of Russia's renewed emphasis on naval power is that this country is seeking to gain its share of power in the international system. In the meantime, countries like Iran, which have an important position in the relations between Russia and the West, are affected by international competition, whether they like it or not. In the meantime, Iran can catch the opportune chances that are present in naval strategy and operationalize its natural potential. Operationalization of the opportunities can be realized for Tehran by formulating maritime strategy solutions and bilateral interaction with Moscow. Therefore, it is clear that the Islamic Republic of Iran with interaction and agreement with Russia and the permanent and official presence of the Iranian naval fleet in the sea ports Mediterranean Sea and Black Sea ports, and also by more convergence with Russia in solving the legal consensus of the Caspian Sea, can increase the development of its maritime transit cooperation. The sale of Russian oil and gas through the Caspian Sea, the maximum benefit of the Caspian Sea route in the transit of goods in the North-South Corridor, can also be another achievement of Iran in using the opportunity of the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine in this region

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, naval power strategy, Iran, maritime transport



1. Introduction:

During the Soviet era, Ukraine was the second-largest political and economic power, following Russia, although it ranked third in terms of land area, behind Kazakhstan (Zhuravleva, 2015). Geographically, Ukraine is the second-largest country in Europe, after France. Following its independence in 1991, Kyiv's foreign policy has consistently oscillated between alignment with Western nations and the Russian Federation. A primary factor contributing to this fluctuation is the inability of Ukrainian statesmen to establish a stable balance in foreign relations, which has hindered efforts to mitigate the sensitivities of both Russia and Western countries regarding Ukraine (Nasrin Dokht, 2006).

The demographic and linguistic characteristics of Ukraine can be categorized into two distinct groups. The first group comprises residents from the eastern and southern regions of Ukraine, including the Crimean Peninsula and the city of Sevastopol. This population predominantly speaks Russian and identifies primarily as Orthodox Christians, exhibiting a strong pro-Russian sentiment. The second group includes residents from the western regions of Ukraine, who are predominantly Catholic and advocate for closer ties with Western nations. The existence of this duality within the population leads each group to perceive alignment with either Russia or Western Europe as a potential solution to their respective challenges. Furthermore, Ukraine's geographic proximity to major powers has rendered it a significant focal point for geopolitical tensions.

Due to its unique geopolitical position, Ukraine occupies a significant role in the foreign policies of both Russia and the United States. Following Ukraine's independence, Kremlin politicians did not regard this republic as an independent nation separate from Russia. Concurrently, the United States has sought to establish its influence by promoting the westernization of Ukraine and countering Russia's traditional dominance in the region. The ongoing crisis in Ukraine represents the most recent manifestation of tensions between Moscow and the West since the end of the Cold War. While some crises, such as the one in Ukraine, may appear to erupt suddenly, a thorough examination of their underlying causes reveals deeper historical roots.

In the interim, countries such as Iran, which occupy a significant position in the dynamics between Russia and the West, find themselves involuntarily impacted by this competition. The current structure of the international system is not bipolar; rather, it allows for a multiplicity of interests that compel nations to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes without necessarily aligning with one side of the conflict. Consequently, the behaviors and interests of states are increasingly influenced by extensive crises, such as that in Ukraine. Although Ukraine does not share a common border with Iran and is not situated within Iran's immediate regional context, Iran's interests are nonetheless significantly affected by the ongoing competition between the United States and Russia regarding Ukraine.

2. Purpose and Method of Research:

This study employs a descriptive-analytical methodology and utilizes library resources, including books, publications, and articles. The primary objective of this research is to investigate the factors influencing the enhancement of Iran's naval power strategy in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Furthermore, the study aims to propose potential solutions and opportunities for Iran to achieve a robust economic position and a strengthened geopolitical stance through maritime transit.

3. Definition of Concepts and Theoretical Foundations:

1.3. Maritime Geopolitics:

Maritime geopolitics operates under the same principles as broader geopolitical theories, with a distinct emphasis on the interactions occurring within aquatic environments, including oceans, seas, lakes, straits, and waterways. Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan is credited as a foundational figure in the theoretical exploration of sea power. He posited that the initial step toward achieving global supremacy lies in the control and surveillance of maritime domains. According to Mahan, naval forces possess a significant advantage in conflicts among powers, as they are better positioned to seize the initiative. For instance, he cited Russia as an example, arguing that



despite its vast territorial expanse, the country has not translated this size into proportional global influence. Mahan asserted that without access to open sea areas, even a large empire like Russia would remain stagnant and unable to realize its potential for development (Ezzati, 2017).

Mahan posited that maritime powers would invariably maintain a strategic advantage over land powers, which are inherently encircled by sea power. His seminal work, "The Influence of Sea Power upon History," garnered significant attention within global political circles shortly after its publication. The relevance of Mahan's theories continues to be a topic of discussion in naval education programs and academic discourse at universities. The substantial investment and focus of major world powers on maritime capabilities underscore the enduring significance of naval forces as a critical component of national power (Widen, 2015).

In the writings of Mahan, alongside the historical and theoretical contributions of Sir Julian Corbett, the overarching role of sea power in the evolution of military strategy is examined, as well as the advantages and constraints that sea power may encounter in the 21st century. Among the intrinsic benefits of naval power are its adaptability, flexibility, and the capacity for unrestricted mobility across the vast expanses of the Earth's surface, which encompasses all terrestrial landmasses.

2.3. Naval Strategy:

A review of naval strategy over the past century reveals that it functions as a subset of national grand strategy, encompassing a broad spectrum of maritime and coastal activities and interests. Grand strategy represents a comprehensive framework designed to achieve national objectives, while maritime strategy specifically addresses all dimensions of national power pertinent to a nation's maritime interests (Hattendorf, 2013).

Recognizing that strategists are responsible for establishing priorities, policies, plans, and decisions underscores the importance of formulating an appropriate strategy as a fundamental aspect of national policy. Each country's maritime strategy reflects its unique challenges, threats, opportunities, capabilities, and ambitions, making it difficult to attain a holistic understanding from this perspective. The concept of sea power

strategy posits that the ocean serves as a vast arena that can be leveraged to navigate geographical, diplomatic, or military challenges. The strategic imperatives articulate the role of naval forces in both preventing and, when necessary, winning conflicts to fulfill national objectives (Gary, 2005).

It is evident that during the 19th and 20th centuries, naval strategy primarily concentrated on the navy's role in wartime, with military fleets at the forefront of this focus. However, in the 21st century, the scope of naval strategy has broadened from a mere assemblage of military vessels to encompass the entire spectrum of maritime activities. In this contemporary context, naval strategy addresses all facets of national power related to maritime interests, with the navy playing a crucial supporting role. Maritime strategy extends beyond mere defense; it incorporates various elements of power, including diplomacy, security and defense, maritime trade, fishing, resource exploitation, protection and regulation of the exclusive economic zone, coastal defense, national border security, safeguarding coastal islands, and engaging in regional and global issues associated with the utilization of oceans and the airspace above them (Hattendorf, 2013).

In recent years, there has been a significant shift in naval strategy and geopolitics from projecting power over the seas to exercising power from the seas. For strategists, the utilization of maritime domains entails purposeful and long-term operations. The concept of sea power extends far beyond the mere possession of naval vessels marked with numerical designations. Maritime strategy encompasses a nation's capacity to fully, freely, and safely navigate the seas in pursuit of national objectives (Till, 2004).

Sea power theorists, such as Alfred Thayer Mahan, while acknowledging various dimensions of sea power, have often constrained their discussions of naval strategy to specific elements, particularly the navy. It is important to recognize that "navy" and "naval power" are not synonymous; naval forces represent only one component of broader naval power. In contemporary discourse, the navy has evolved to encompass a more expansive definition that transcends the mere presence of military vessels. Consequently, maritime strategy is not solely focused on military assets but also incorporates other facets of maritime power, including economic considerations.



Hence, this research investigates the impact of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine on Iran's naval strategy and proposes several solutions aimed at enhancing Iran's naval capabilities within this context.

3.3. Maritime Transportation:

The high capacity of ships makes maritime transportation one of the most economical and cost-effective methods for moving large quantities of goods. This mode of transport is particularly well-suited for long-distance transportation of low-value, heavy, and bulky items. However, it is important to acknowledge its disadvantages, including being the slowest form of transportation and its unsuitability for perishable goods. Furthermore, maritime transport significantly contributes to water and environmental pollution.

Maritime transportation is a critical component of the logistics sector, playing a vital role in the development of international trade. It is regarded as one of the most effective transportation methods due to several advantages, including low shipping costs, reliance on valid and legal documentation, and the efficiency of transporting large volumes of goods. When discussing maritime transport, large cargo vessels equipped to carry diverse types of goods come to mind. Maritime transport is an integral aspect of global trade, and the provision of various services within this industry is essential for facilitating successful international transactions. If maritime transportation operates efficiently, it is likely to enhance the volume of international trade (Kafili Metabli, 2019).

Historical evidence indicates that trade and civilization have flourished along the shores of lakes, rivers, and seas for approximately ten thousand years. In this context, trade and transportation evolved concurrently, and over time, advancements in science and technology have rendered the shipping industry a paramount means of transporting goods (Poursadegh Mousavi, 2017).

The advantages of maritime transportation are substantial, leading to its predominance in global transportation. Among these benefits are the following:

1.3.3. Affordability:

One of the most significant advantages of maritime transportation is its cost-effectiveness. The expenses associated with the maintenance and repair of ships are relatively low. Furthermore, the challenges and repairs encountered in maritime transport are minor compared to the construction and maintenance costs associated with rail and road transport.

2.3.3. Capacity for Large Cargo:

Maritime transportation is particularly well-suited for the movement of large and heavy goods. This mode of transport allows for the efficient conveyance of bulky items without incurring damage, which is a notable advantage of utilizing sea transport.

3.3.3. Operational Resilience:

The maritime transportation system can function effectively under various weather conditions, including heavy rainfall, snow, flooding, and storms. In instances where rail and road transport may be compromised, the advantages of maritime transportation become even more pronounced (Pahlavani et al., 2013).

4. Research Findings:

1.4. The Importance of Seas for Russia:

Russia is situated in Northern Asia and Eastern Europe, bordered by the North Pacific Ocean and the Arctic Ocean, and it shares maritime boundaries with the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, and the Baltic Sea. This expansive nation has land borders with 14 Asian and European countries and possesses maritime connections with nations surrounding the Bering Sea, the Sea of Japan, the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, and the Baltic Sea. Consequently, it is evident that Russia has numerous maritime borders; however, a significant portion of these borders remains frozen for most of the year, which limits their practical commercial and military efficacy.

In its pursuit to reinforce its status as a pivotal power in Eurasia, Russia aims to emerge as one of the central poles of global influence. Historically, major



powers—such as the Netherlands in the 17th century, Britain during the 18th and 19th centuries, the United States in the 20th and 21st centuries, and China in the 21st century—have maintained formidable naval forces. Acknowledging this precedent, Russia has recognized that to reclaim its position in international politics, it must enhance its capabilities in the maritime domain, which holds significant commercial and security implications. In this context, both the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea are crucial for Russia due to their strategic geopolitical importance. These bodies of water are not only in close proximity to Russia but also host a considerable presence of NATO forces along their shores—three NATO member states (Turkey, Romania, and Bulgaria) in the Black Sea and seven (France, Italy, Greece, Spain, Slovenia, Albania, and Croatia) in the Mediterranean. Thus, these maritime borders carry substantial geopolitical and security significance for Russia.

Since the onset of the 21st century, Russia has demonstrated a renewed focus on these vital seas, resulting in improved relations with coastal nations in these regions. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia's naval power experienced a decline across multiple dimensions. The size of its naval personnel was halved, and between 1992 and 1997, military spending was reduced by 5%. During the 1990s, economic challenges coupled with the Russian authorities' intent to curtail military expenditure led to a significant deterioration of naval capabilities. However, according to estimates from the Russian International Peace Research Institute, military spending increased by 7.5% in 2015 compared to the previous year, amounting to approximately 4.5% of the country's total budget. A significant portion of this budget has been allocated to naval forces (Srivastava, 2016).

For instance, the Black Sea serves as a strategic crossroads for East-West and North-South trade routes and has drawn foreign powers due to its unique geographical position. It is perceived as a crucial outlet to warm waters for Russia; given that access to the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman is limited, the Black Sea represents Russia's most accessible and reliable route to open waters such as the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. Russia's primary objectives for its presence in the Black Sea include safeguarding its southern flank and countering NATO's encroachment in the region. Economically,

control over the Black Sea enhances Russia's ability to monitor its gas pipelines (Srivastava, 2016).

Russia's strategic goals in the Black Sea can be summarized as follows:

1. Protection of the exclusive economic zone.
2. Ensuring the security of information pathways within the Black Sea.
3. Maintaining military dominance through comprehensive control over maritime communications and countering non-coastal state forces, particularly NATO.
4. Safeguarding and advancing economic and security interests in the Mediterranean (Delano, 2014).

2.4. Conflict between Russia and Ukraine in the Crimean Peninsula:

In the context of the Brussels Agreement of February 25, 2013, the President of Ukraine reached an understanding with European Union officials that a series of reforms to Ukraine's judicial and electoral systems would be implemented prior to the final signing of the agreement establishing a free trade zone between the European Union and Ukraine. Negotiations regarding this agreement had commenced in 1999. However, on November 21, 2013, President Viktor Yanukovich announced in Lithuania that he would not sign the free trade agreement with the European Union (Moroney, 2002).

The crisis in Ukraine can be traced back to President Yanukovich's refusal to sign the free trade agreement under pressure from Russia. This decision prompted widespread protests from opposition groups, who took to the streets in dissent. Ultimately, following the escalation of street protests and the tragic deaths of five individuals, Yanukovich was removed from office by a parliamentary vote and subsequently fled to Russia. In the aftermath of these events, Russian forces occupied the Crimean Peninsula, citing the need to support the Russian-speaking population in the region. This occupation culminated in a referendum held on March 16, 2014, during which the Crimean Peninsula was officially claimed by Russia (Alpher, 2014).

The events surrounding Crimea represent a critical factor in the conflict between Russia and the West regarding Ukraine. Following the annexation of Crimea, tensions escalated in eastern Ukraine, particularly in the Donetsk,



Luhansk, and Kharkiv regions. These tensions ultimately led to the occupation of government buildings by opposition groups in Donetsk and Luhansk. The Ukrainian government characterized these groups as terrorists and initiated a military operation aimed at quelling their actions. However, this operation was largely unsuccessful due to the evident support these groups received from Russia. On April 17th, a meeting in Geneva involving the foreign ministers of the United States, Russia, Ukraine, and the head of European foreign policy resulted in an agreement intended to restore order and resolve the conflict. Nonetheless, this agreement was never implemented (Wang, 2015).

Following these events, presidential elections were conducted on May 25, 2014, in regions under the control of the Ukrainian government. Petro Poroshenko, a 48-year-old businessman and billionaire, emerged victorious in the first round of the election, securing a majority of the votes. However, the day after the election, pro-Russian separatists launched an attack on the provincial airport in eastern Ukraine and successfully seized control of the facility. Contrary to the expectations of the organizers and Western supporters of the elections, the announcement of the results did not quell the unrest. Separatists targeted two Ukrainian military aircraft, and ultimately, a Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777, carrying approximately 300 passengers, was shot down in airspace over Region 10 by means that remain unidentified. The orders for this launch and the specific side of the conflict responsible for it remain unclear, resulting in the tragic loss of all occupants aboard (Sputnik, 2015).

A significant factor driving military intervention and conflict between Ukraine and Russia is their geopolitical context. Notably, both countries possess coastlines along two strategically important bodies of water: the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea, where Russia maintains military bases. This maritime geography plays a crucial role in shaping Russia's defense and security policies, providing a lens through which to analyze its actions in both Ukraine and Syria. The significance of maritime considerations was evident even prior to the crises in these regions. Scholars have long recognized that Russia views naval capabilities as a vital component of its resurgence (Willet, 2009).

3.4. Russia's Interests in Ukraine and the West's Conflict:

In response to Russia's actions in Crimea, the United States and the European Union imposed sanctions on individuals implicated in the annexation of Crimea in three distinct phases. Additionally, various forms of pressure were exerted from Western entities toward Moscow. These measures included Russia's withdrawal from the G8 group, the cessation of certain military and technological security collaborations with Russia, the implementation of economic sanctions against Russia, the passage of a resolution in the United Nations General Assembly condemning the illegality of Crimea's annexation, and an increase in NATO's military presence and activities in the Black Sea region. Furthermore, NATO member states located in proximity to Russia also participated in these collective efforts to exert pressure on Russia regarding its actions in Ukraine.

By seizing Crimea, Russia effectively altered the regional balance of power in its favor. The annexation enabled Russia to gain control over approximately half of Ukraine's coastline along the Black Sea, thereby enhancing its influence over this strategic maritime area. Moreover, by asserting full sovereignty over Donetsk and Luhansk, Russia can operate a comprehensive military base on the Crimean peninsula, deploying various types of naval vessels alongside land and air forces without restrictions from Ukraine. Consequently, Ukraine has emerged as a bastion for Russia against NATO and serves as an eastern barrier against Europe. In this context, Ukraine holds significant strategic value for Russia beyond mere geopolitical rivalry; it facilitates the establishment of a naval fleet in the Black Sea, centered in the port of Sevastopol on the Crimean peninsula, which is of paramount strategic importance to Russian interests (Bahman, 2014).

According to the aforementioned cases, many strategists contend that Russia is perceived as a global power when allied with Ukraine, whereas it is regarded as merely a regional power in the absence of Ukraine. Consequently, from a strategic perspective, Ukraine occupies a central position in Moscow's geopolitical considerations. Russian analysts assert that the West's approach to Ukraine is characterized by two primary strategies: the expansion of the European Union through initiatives such as



the Eastern Partnership Program, which enhances Brussels' influence, and efforts to diminish Russian influence while encouraging Ukraine's integration into NATO.

Moscow views Ukraine as the focal point of its confrontation with the West. The Kremlin believes that if Kyiv were to join the European Union, other former Soviet states would gradually distance themselves from Russian influence. Indeed, Ukraine's accession to the EU would not only bring NATO closer to Russia's borders but would also jeopardize President Vladimir Putin's vision of establishing a Moscow-led geopolitical system. Should Ukraine exit this framework, only independent former Soviet republics—many of which are governed by authoritarian regimes—would remain within it. Such a scenario would undoubtedly be detrimental to the international image of Putin's Eurasian Union. In this context, Moscow seeks to install a pro-Russian government in Ukraine and is unlikely to tolerate a pro-Western regime that aligns itself with NATO.

In summary, the crisis in Ukraine has intensified the geopolitical competition between Russia and the United States across various regions of the world, particularly evident in their respective policies regarding issues in the Middle East. Russia has been expanding its relations with countries such as Iran, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and has notably strengthened ties with Hezbollah in Lebanon. This trend is also observable in Latin America, where Moscow has increased its diplomatic engagement with several nations. Furthermore, Russia has begun to support both right-wing and left-wing movements across different European countries in varied ways, which may potentially alter the political landscape of Europe in favor of Russian interests (Bahman, 2014).

4.4. The structure of Geopolitical Relations between Iran and Russia with a Look at the Conflict between Russia and Ukraine:

1.4.4. Alignment of Iran and Russia:

Since its establishment, the Islamic Republic of Iran has consistently objected to various aspects of the international order, perceiving them as unequal and disproportionately favorable to the great powers. The conflict

between the West and Moscow, particularly in the context of Ukraine, exemplifies a confrontation between a major power and the dominant leader of the current world order, aligning with Iran's overarching international aspirations.

During the signing of the annexation agreement for Crimea, President Vladimir Putin criticized the unilateralist approach prevalent in the international system, asserting that Western nations, led by the United States, believe they have been divinely appointed to determine the fate of other peoples. He further argued that Western powers have persistently sought to isolate Russia because it stands firm in its independence and defends its sovereignty. Putin explicitly condemned unilateralism, stating, "In my opinion, when the world becomes unipolar or when someone tries to make it this way, they will always harbor the illusion that all issues can be resolved through sheer power" (Putin, 2014).

These statements resonate with the sentiments expressed by the Islamic Republic of Iran from the outset of the revolution to the present day. The fact that the leader of a significant global power articulates critiques of the existing international order in language akin to that used by Iranian officials is noteworthy. Additionally, it is important to highlight that the prevailing mindset among the Eurasian leadership in Russia today posits that globalization equates solely to Westernization and Americanization, which must be actively resisted. This perspective closely parallels the Islamic Republic's critique of the contemporary world order.

2.4.4. Russia's Interests in Iran:

Given the self-interested nature of Russian foreign policy, characterized by a realistic and pragmatic approach, an independent and powerful Iran is likely to attract significant attention from Moscow. Russian leaders may perceive such an Iran as a strategic ally, viewing it as a geopolitical asset that could enhance their influence in the region and facilitate their future ambitions.



Russian elites, particularly those aligned with Eurasianist thought, envision a future Iran as a promising nation capable of achieving authentic technological modernization. This perspective is grounded in Iran's rich historical traditions and unique civilizational experience, which they believe could position Iran as a valuable ally for Russia. Such an alliance could potentially help prevent global disorder and foster the establishment of a new, equitable international order.

In contrast, Russian engagement with a weak and vulnerable conservative Iran is likely to be marked by skepticism and caution. Conversely, Moscow would be inclined to foster closer ties with a robust and independent Iran. Russian strategists contend that a strong regional Iran does not pose a threat to Russia; rather, it represents an opportunity for collaboration in Southwest Asia.

Drawing on theories of the balance of power and balance of threats, Russian policymakers argue that a stronger Iran enhances its capacity to counteract their geostrategic rival, the United States. Consequently, they are motivated to mediate existing tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia and to address other disputes in order to facilitate the expansion of their influence. The Russian leadership recognizes that a weakened Islamic Republic of Iran could exacerbate the crises of Western pressure and Islamic extremism, potentially spilling over into Russia itself. Therefore, to mitigate these shared threats posed by the United States and its allies, and to cultivate mutual interests, alignment with Iran becomes essential in the context of geopolitical shifts at the regional level.

While Russian officials publicly assert that they do not seek imperial ambitions, it is evident that they are actively pursuing geopolitical transformations in the region. Achieving these objectives will likely necessitate a strategic partnership with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

3.4.4. The War between Russia and Ukraine and Its Impact on Iran's Naval Transport and Expansion:

The dynamics of the balance of power among great powers following Russia's military invasion of Ukraine present both opportunities and challenges for the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran. While it

may be premature to assert that the world is entering a new Cold War era, particularly in light of the deteriorating trust among global powers, it is evident that one of the significant ramifications of this event is the erosion of the global consensus surrounding the existing international order. Consequently, as a regional power, the Islamic Republic of Iran should adopt a policy grounded in a positive balance of power, seeking to capitalize on the current rift between Russia and the West to advance its national interests and enhance its security.

The contemporary structure of the international system is not strictly bipolar; countries are not compelled to align exclusively with one side of the conflict. However, the interests of nations whose actions yield substantial international repercussions are increasingly influenced by ongoing crises, such as that in Ukraine.

Although Ukraine does not share a common border with Iran and lies outside Iran's immediate regional context, Iran's interests are significantly impacted by the competition between the West and Russia over Ukraine. The military conflict initiated by Russia and its various regional and international consequences have garnered considerable attention from political analysts and scholars in international relations. This war has implications for Eurasian security, the configuration of international relations, as well as contributing to crises related to food and energy supplies.

The reasons behind the onset of the current conflict have been subject to various analyses. However, it is unequivocal that a geopolitical perspective, particularly regarding the security and economic significance of maritime areas, is a fundamental aspect of Russia's foreign policy that warrants careful consideration. No nation possesses sufficient resources to ensure maritime security independently; thus, it is imperative for governments, non-governmental organizations, international bodies, and the private sector to collaborate effectively in order to address emerging threats and promote shared interests. Such collaborations are especially critical in the realm of maritime security, encompassing the fight against maritime crimes, including terrorism, as well as enhancing information sharing and exchange. The renewed emphasis on naval power by Russia can be attributed to its desire to assert its influence and secure its position within the international



system. While Russia boasts formidable air and land forces, it remains comparatively weak in the maritime domain and is actively seeking to rectify this deficiency. In this context, countries like Iran, which occupy a pivotal role in the dynamics between Russia and the West, are inevitably influenced by international competition.

Over the past two decades, cooperation between Tehran and Moscow has evolved across multiple dimensions, particularly in the fields of security and defense, despite certain shortcomings. Efforts have been made to enhance interaction within the maritime domain by fostering collaboration aimed at bolstering the naval capabilities of both nations. This paper will further investigate and analyze Iran's naval transport sector and the potential benefits it may derive from the current geopolitical landscape, particularly in light of Russia's confrontation with the West amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine. Consequently, this section will outline potential strategies for enhancing maritime power through the expansion of naval transport as a central focus.

- The permanent and official presence of the Iranian naval fleet in the ports of the Mediterranean Sea:

Control over maritime domains is undeniably crucial for the management of economic arteries, particularly for a nation like Iran, which is geographically flanked by water on both sides and is currently subject to international sanctions. The country's intensified efforts to enhance its naval capabilities in the Persian Gulf and open waters in recent years underscore the necessity of establishing a "strategic naval force" in response to the escalating economic warfare against Iran. This assertion is reinforced by Ayatollah Khamenei's emphasis on the importance of securing and controlling maritime routes in Iran's surrounding environment. According to Alfred Thayer Mahan, countries positioned advantageously in maritime contexts possess greater opportunities to assert initiative during conflicts.

Given Iran's constraints within its immediate environment and the broader international system, it is imperative for the nation to leverage both its commercial shipping fleet and military navy to secure a favorable position and ensure the continuity of international trade. This necessitates the identification and operationalization of new maritime strategies within regional and extra-regional contexts. Consequently, the topic of maritime

geopolitics emerges as a significant consideration, particularly regarding Iran's presence in distant seas. For instance, access to the Mediterranean Sea through the strategic port of Latakia represents a vital economic asset for Iran, serving as a critical maritime gateway to Europe. Furthermore, Iran's increased engagement in joint naval exercises with Russia and the deployment of Iranian naval vessels to Tartus port exemplify efforts to bolster its naval capabilities.

In January 2017, Russia and Syria formalized an agreement that entails the expansion of the Russian naval base in Tartus, which is set to last for 49 years, with an option for an additional 25 years unless either party expresses intent to terminate it. This agreement stipulates that the base will operate with complete immunity, exempt from the jurisdiction of the Syrian government, ensuring that Russia's movable and immovable assets are protected from any confiscation or enforcement actions by Syrian authorities (TASS, 2017).

The primary impetus behind Russia's interest in maintaining control over the port of Tartus on the Mediterranean coast is its strategic competition with NATO. Should Russia lose control of this port, the eastern Mediterranean would likely fall predominantly under NATO influence.

Consequently, the port city of Tartus holds significant strategic importance in the context of Russian-Syrian relations. Russia's legitimate intervention and collaboration with Iran in addressing the Syrian crisis indicate a shift in its strategy regarding regions where U.S. interests are pronounced. This alignment with Iran's approach to countering U.S. unipolar hegemony reflects a broader geopolitical strategy. To balance the power dynamics influenced by the United States in this region, Russia's acceptance of a robust ally like Iran at the port of Tartus—and by extension, in the Mediterranean—presents a viable option. This collaboration enhances the coalition among Iraq, Iran, and Syria, potentially serving as a source of strength for Iran and expanding its maritime strategic influence. The port of Tartus represents a critical gateway for Iran to Europe, facilitating the completion of its transport corridors connecting the east and west. By integrating land and maritime transit routes from East Asia to Europe, Iran can attract transit customers effectively.



Furthermore, NATO's expansion into Eastern Europe, the Baltic region, and the Black Sea has prompted the United States to intensify its surveillance of western and southwestern Russia, conducting military drills and deploying advanced weaponry in these areas. As of December 2022, Russia has achieved significant military success on the southern front in Ukraine, particularly along the Black Sea. Should Russia secure dominance over the northern shores of the Black Sea, Ukraine would effectively become a landlocked nation, reducing the principal actors in this maritime domain to Russia and Turkey. Regardless of the war's outcome, Russia seeks to enhance its control over the Black Sea. In this context, Iran has the opportunity to establish a permanent presence in Russian Black Sea ports, positioning itself as an influential economic, political, and security partner while simultaneously enhancing its maritime transportation capabilities through increased influence in the region.

- Greater convergence of Iran and Russia in solving the legal regime of the Caspian Sea:

The ongoing conflict suggests that Russia is intent on altering the existing unipolar international order and has adopted positions that markedly diverge from those of countries in the Middle East. This shift may have significant implications for Western interests. Among the strategies Russia appears to be pursuing are the development of strategic and maritime cooperation with India, as well as broader collaboration with Iran, Iraq, and other regional actors.

In this context, the relationship between Russia and Iran is particularly noteworthy, as both nations face Western sanctions, which may foster a greater alignment of their respective interests. Such convergence could facilitate more effective resolutions to legal disputes regarding the Caspian Sea and contribute to the establishment of a lasting agreement. Additionally, safeguarding the interests and security of the Islamic Republic of Iran in this maritime domain would be significantly beneficial.

The primary security challenge in the Caspian region arises from the absence of a legal consensus governing this enclosed sea. This lack of a specific legal framework has engendered disputes and complications concerning the exploitation of shared resources and fields within the Caspian Sea.

Furthermore, it has allowed for the interventionist presence of trans-regional powers such as the United States and NATO, leading to increased militarization and posing environmental risks and threats to the region. Each of these factors adversely affects the security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The alignment and convergence of these two regional powers—Iran and Russia—may not only provide a clearer pathway to addressing these challenges but also enhance the naval capabilities of both nations by countering the influence of trans-regional powers.

- The sale of Russian oil, gas and commodities through the transit route of the Caspian Sea is an opportunity for Iran:

The imposition of an embargo on Russia by Western countries, coupled with the fact that over 60% of Russia's trade is conducted with European nations, has created a significant gap in this sector for Europe. In response, the European Union is actively seeking alternatives to Russian energy supplies. The Islamic Republic of Iran, which possesses the world's second-largest natural gas reserves and is geographically proximate to the Caucasus region, presents a viable option for gas transit to the European Union. The ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia is likely to enhance Iran's capacity to facilitate energy transfers to Europe via the Caucasus. This situation provides a substantial opportunity for the Islamic Republic of Iran to strengthen its relations with customers of Central Asian energy resources by addressing their needs through exports and offering improved economic incentives, despite the prevailing Western sanctions.

Conversely, Moscow views the expansion of trade relations with Iran as a strategic means to mitigate the impact of sanctions. In this context, Russia and Iran have entered into a contract valued at 70 million euros, involving an exchange of oil for goods. Official announcements indicate that the two nations will collaborate closely on the construction and maintenance of production facilities, the development of electrical infrastructure, and activities within the oil and gas sectors, as well as trade in machinery, equipment, consumer goods, and agricultural products. The United States has expressed concern that revenue generated from these transactions will bolster Iran's regional and international standing.



The establishment of swap contracts with Moscow, along with the exportation of Iranian oil and gas via the Caspian Sea, will enhance Iran's role in political and commercial relations within this maritime domain. Furthermore, expanding the export of essential goods—such as grains—through Iran and bartering them with other Russian clients will reinforce Iran's geopolitical influence in the region. Consequently, it is imperative for the Islamic Republic of Iran to make concerted efforts to capture this market and promote trade through the Caspian Sea. This initiative would serve to elucidate the significance and strategic importance of this waterway for both Iran and the broader region.

- Maximum benefit of the Caspian Sea route in the transit of commodities through the North-South corridor:

One of the critical areas of the Caspian Sea is its transportation network, particularly its connection to the North-South Corridor. This corridor comprises three segments, with the central segment being hybrid in nature; it commences at Bandar Abbas and terminates at the northern ports of Iran, including Amirabad Port, Anzali Port, and Caspian Port. From these ports, goods can transit into Russia via the Caspian Sea and continue their journey by rail. The North-South Corridor is of considerable significance, as it has the potential to generate substantial revenue for the Islamic Republic of Iran. Furthermore, these transportation corridors enhance security within the participating countries, as they create interdependence among them.

Currently, many goods transported from India and East Asia to Europe traverse an extensive distance of approximately 17,000 kilometers. However, by utilizing Iran as a transit hub, this distance can be reduced to just 7,000 kilometers, resulting in significant economic advantages in terms of both time and cost. The development of the North-South Corridor entails establishing a shipping line in the Caspian Sea, enhancing the ports of the involved countries, constructing a highway around the Caspian Sea, and improving the railway networks of the relevant nations. For Russia, it is more advantageous to facilitate trade with India through Iran than to rely on the lengthy maritime routes around Africa or through the Suez Canal to St. Petersburg.

In general, the routes for transporting goods from Asian countries to Russia via Iran are three to four times shorter than existing alternatives. Currently, the ratio of Russian goods exports to Iran stands at three to one, resulting in ships carrying Russian goods returning nearly empty. These vessels could instead be utilized to transport goods transiting from India and Southeast Asia to Russia. If goods are transferred through this corridor, the duration of cargo transportation from Southeast Asia to Western Europe could be reduced by at least three to four days, while costs could decrease by 15 to 20 percent (Akhbari et al., 2021).

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has significantly disrupted trade in the Black Sea, jeopardizing nearly one-third of the world's exports. The closure of all Ukrainian ports, coupled with the blockade of Russia's western borders, has prompted numerous governments to sever trade ties with Russia. In this context, the utilization of the Caspian Sea transit route has conferred a strategic advantage upon Iran, positioning it favorably to connect the trade corridors of East and Southeast Asia with Europe.

Should Iran successfully operationalize its hybrid transit system—which encompasses maritime, rail, and road transport—it stands to capitalize on this opportunity, thereby enhancing its maritime power through economic means. To promote trade in commodities and facilitate the North-South Corridor, the following measures are recommended:

- A) Completion and modernization of ports in Iran and Russia.
- B) Establishment of shipping lines dedicated to transporting large cargo across the Caspian Sea.
- C) Strengthening the transport fleet by increasing the number of both large and small vessels operating in the Caspian Sea.
- D) Enhancing the transportation of oil and gas from the Caspian Sea.

5. Conclusion:

Drawing on lessons from past experiences, Russia has adopted a more aggressive approach in response to the perceived destructive actions of the West and NATO. Through military intervention and demonstrations of power, Russia aims to reshape the geopolitical landscape to its advantage. In



reaction to these actions, Western nations have intensified sanctions and increased pressure on Russia. The Kremlin seeks to assert a more influential role in global affairs, enhance its position within the international system, and foster economic growth while expanding its sphere of influence. To achieve these objectives, Russia requires organizational and political cohesion that aligns with its values at both regional and global levels.

In this context, the Islamic Republic of Iran emerges as a strategic ally for Russia, given their shared interests and closer positions on various issues. The relationship between the two nations presents an opportunity for the Kremlin to strengthen bilateral cooperation. Furthermore, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine may serve to underscore Iran's status as a regional power.

Numerous studies have been conducted to analyze the underlying causes of the current conflict; however, it is essential to underscore the significance of a geopolitical perspective, particularly regarding the security and economic importance of maritime areas within Russia's foreign policy. The renewed emphasis on naval power by Russia reflects its ambition to assert its influence and secure its interests within the international system. In this context, countries such as Iran, which occupy a pivotal position in the dynamics between Russia and the West, are inevitably influenced by international competition.

Iran has the potential to capitalize on favorable opportunities presented by naval strategy, thereby operationalizing its inherent capabilities. This operationalization can be achieved through the formulation of maritime strategic solutions and fostering bilateral interactions with Moscow. Consequently, it is evident that the Islamic Republic of Iran can enhance its maritime transit cooperation by engaging with Russia and establishing a permanent naval presence in the Mediterranean and Black Sea ports. Additionally, greater collaboration with Russia in addressing legal consensus regarding the Caspian Sea could further facilitate this development.

Moreover, Iran stands to benefit from the sale of Russian oil and gas through the Caspian Sea, maximizing the utility of this route for goods transit within the North-South Corridor. This strategic positioning allows Iran to leverage the ongoing confrontation between Russia and Ukraine to its advantage in the region.

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