



Russian Eurasianism and Attitude toward the Islamic Republic of Iran: Foundations, Ideas and Practical Results

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ABSTRACT

Eurasianism is a political philosophy including three external, middle and internal levels. In the external level, the world is multi polar which means there are several international centers for making decisions including Eurasia. Eurasia does not only refer to Russia but also Russia and the former Soviet countries. In the middle level, there is an integration of the former Soviet states in creating a supranational model (different states). In the internal policy level, it means the political structure of the society which is assessed as a value in relation to liberal model of citizenship and nationalism. These are the three levels of Eurasianism through which only one form of foreign policy will be formed. Eurasianism theory also dedicates an important place to Iran. They have recognized Iran as one of the main allies of Russia in the war against the so called "the Western-American uni polar" world. Accordingly, the main question of this research is: how is Eurasianism and its effect on Islamic Republic of Iran? To answer this question, it can be said that, firstly, Islamic Republic of Iran is a natural part of Eurasia. Geographically, Iran is located in central Asia and it is in the centre of Asia. Moscow's Eurasianism policy can have positive influences on all continents especially Iran in various fields as political, economic, security and military.

Keywords: Foreign policy; Russian Foreign Policy, Eurasia, Eurasianism, Iran and Russia Relations.

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INTRODUCTION

Eurasia and Eurasianism are two terms which have been proposed since 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the intellectual and political fields. Eurasianism, as a concept, is rather a vague term in Russia's foreign policy. This concept has had various changes since the beginning and there have been different interpretations by different groups which based on this ideology, Russia and its surrounding countries haven intermediate position between Europe and Asia and their culture is a mixture of popular culture existing among Slavic and Turkish Muslims. In this way, according to Europeanism, Russia never seems to be quite European and although based on Asianism most of the Russian land is located in Asia, it is not absolutely Asian and what is called New Eurasianism today is a kind of conservative ideology which was appeared in 1990s. Based on this ideology, Europe is not the peak of development, but Russia must wash out the western appearances and put away the embedded avarice in European identity. Russian Eurasianism involves part of Russian national identity dimensions. Eurasianists believe that the main point of Russian nationality movement is its European being. The fact that Russian Identity has been westernized is condemned by them and they ask for an increase in its power (Browning & Lehti, 2009: p. 34).

One of the old scientists named Marlin Laruelle rejects this idea that Russia is in Europe margin and knows its geographical location as a pretext for providing the third way of messianic (Laruelle, 2008: p1). The third way of Messianic is a justification for Russia to follow a replacement path in order to change to an independent power pole in the international system. This is a common theory among the tradition of the 19th. c middle Slavs, Classic Eurasianist in 1920 and the contemporary forms which is the main issue of this study. In this way, since the beginning of 2000c, the term Eurasia has been entered into an extended general realm. Although the theories of Eurasiaist are not known enough, this idea that Russia is a Eurasian country and the centre of a historic continent based on Hartland Mc Inder theory is increasing. So, Eurasianists are finding significant ideological dimension and lose their integrated form (Sengupta, 2009).

Concerning geographical ideology, the main thesis of Eurasiaist was condemning the western epistemology empire that Russia is a backward country based on the West historic view. However, Eurasiaist believe that Russia must put aside whatever it has learned from Europe and look at itself in a geographical view. Eurasiaist agreed on the third worlds union; they were sure about the highness of non-western cultures and the ultimate fall of Europe (Paradowski, 1999).

According to Eurasianists, the unity of Eurasian land can be seen in its geometrical nature which is involved in

rationalization and explanation and it's following of verifiable sciences. According to their belief, Eurasia is the only country in which their climate, earth and living things are in adjustment to each other. So, it can be seen that the basis for defining Eurasia is geographical and Eurasianists must now explain that the main feature of Russia is that to be a horizontal power. However, it is said that European countries have founded their political identity based on the development of democratic system in a vertical form (Clover, 1999).

Clearly, Eurasianist's Russian version of the anti-cosmopolitanism is standing based on the geopolitical theories of Dugin. Geopolitics is the main field of his theories. For him, geopolitics serves a government in which it is developed. So, Russian geopolitics can only be Eurasiaist; because it has revived the position of this country as a big power (Ingram, 2001). According to Dugin, geopolitics is in contrast with democracy. Dugin divides the world to four civilization realm: America, Africa-Europe, Asia-Pacific, and Eurasia. In Europe, it must be united with Germany, a country which is interested by Dugin. Germany is regarded as the heart of Europe. In Asia, Russia must be united with Japan considering Pan-Asian ideology of Japan and Berlin-Rome-Tokyo Axis during World War II. In the Islamic world, it chooses Islamic Republic of Iran and introduces Iran as one of the opposite forces to the United States and requests Iran to unite all the countries in the Arab World, Pakistan and Afghanistan (Laruelle, 2008: p 205).

In this way, regarding Russian Eurasianism and its effect on Islamic Republic of Iran, it can be said that: firstly, Islamic Republic of Iran is a natural part of Eurasia since according to some Geopolitics analysts, Iran is partly located in central Asia and it is also in the heart of Asia. Moscow's Eurasianism policy can have positive influences on all continents especially Iran in various fields as political, economic, security and military (qtd. In Dugin Ochsenreiter)

Theoretical Framework: Constructivism Theory

The theoretical framework used in this research is constructivism theory. Constructivism is an approach which has been in the sociology of knowledge and meta-theoretical debates in the social sciences before introducing in international relations. Its roots in Sociology, goes back to Chicago School and Phenomenology. This view emphasizes on the Social Construction of Reality. What is considered as the world is a thing devised and created and not something that can be natural and pre-existing.

In another words, there is no independent and direct access to the world. All human actions are formed and find meaning in the social spaces and this is the meaning which more or less forms to the reality of the world. It means that the world is the congregation of interpretation networks which is made by individuals and human groups. According to Nicholas Ounf, constructivism begins with functions that are what is done, actions and the words which are spoken (Ounf, 1994, 16). The school is trying to create a bridge between various rings of materialist, positivist, idealist and interpretivist.

Constructivism school is in fact a kind of shortcut between rational approaches (realism and liberalism) and descriptive approaches (post modernism, post-structuralism and critical school) that provides a new way for scientific and theoretical research. In constructivism, emphasizing the fabricated and institutional characteristics of the concept of the state, its identity is deemed to not as a technical or psychological issue, but a relational issue which arises and changes through the

interaction of actors with each other by participation in collective meanings and through a developed social world and therefore, they are not fixed, rather similar to each other; hence, all identities are conditional, dependent on the interaction and they are alive within an institutional context.

On this basis, national identity and state identity are created in relation to the other states and nations. So, the identities of the states are changeable according to the historical, cultural, political and social conditions (Karami 2006: 43-44).

In case of Russia, whatever has created the identity of this country is summarized in four elements of ethnicity, religion, political system and geography, which are Russian - Slav specific features, Orthodox religion, the tsarist autocracy and Asian - European geographical features. Among these elements, in many cases, there has been coexistence; however, there has been conflict among them. Based on what has been imposed in Russia in recent years; it seems that national identity is still an essential problem (Sakwa, 202: 255).

Based on the mentioned matters, Russian Eurasianism encapsulates some aspects of Russian national identity. National identity is what forms the foreign policy decision making in a basic level. Eurasianists believe that the main point of the expansion of Russian nationality is its Europeanism. The fact that Russia has been westernized, has been irritated them and they requested the increase in the power of this country (Browning & Lehti, 2009: 34); and they believe that the increase in power is made through revival of Eurasian thinking in the foreign policy of this country. In this way, Eurasianism has preferred relationships with moderate Muslim countries.

In this theory, Iran has a key role. After 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, in terms of strategic position, this country is placed in making Eurasianism independent atmosphere. If there has been conflict between Iran and Russia and they find solutions in war, these issues today are only solved through peaceful and strategic unity.

Economic Relations:

Cooperation in the Energy Sector

Meanwhile, competition in gas international markets shows a divergence point. Iran and Russia have convergence in developing opportunities in energy sections. Moscow is dissatisfied with the low level of Russian participation in energy activities. Russian participation in Iran energy issues so far includes Gazprom participation in South Pars 2 & 3; Lock Oil in Anaran and Russian Oil in Azadegan. In addition, Gas Prom has signed a contract with Iran Oil National Company regarding development of Azar field in 2012 (Khajhepor 2012).

As for the Kremlin, the development of energy resources in energy sector is a top priority; this can contribute to build confidence in the future of Iran's gas exports which won't waken the Russian energy market in Europe and Asia. Tactical movements, under the influence of the West sanctions on Iran, can also be positive regularly. For example, in June 2010, two weeks after new terms of European sanctions in Tehran, Russian Energy minister, Sergei Schematgo states that cooperation between Russia and Iranian companies regarding oil, gas and petrochemical industry is active and has been developed extensively in its work (Kramer 2010). After that date, Russian companies made an agreement to export gasoline to Iran against US and EU punishments. In addition,

both sides made an agreement to trade with their own local currency against banks penalties imposed by US and EU.

Nuclear Cooperation between Iran and Russia

The date of Atomic cooperation between Iran and Russia goes back to 1990. It is when Moscow and Tehran had an agreement to build the first Atomic power plant in Bushehr. Since the beginning, Russia met Iran based on Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and restrictions on peaceful projects. Disclosure of secret Iranian nuclear program seriously affects Russia's cooperation.

Tehran's effort to keep the investigation secret has led Russia's government to reconsider some aspects of bilateral relations. One of these points is Moscow's efforts to prevent Iran from the use of these substances and Russia's help to develop weapons of mass destruction. For example, some agreements were signed with Tehran in 2005 which guaranteed fuel return from Bushehr to Russia.

Otherwise, Iran could potentially use it to produce plutonium (Solkov, 2010). Second, in order to avoid to provide the needed technology to produce mass destruction weapons of mass, Moscow has limited its cooperation in the field of space missiles. In conclusion, all space programs of Iran and Russia in past decades have been performed with minimal participation of Iran (Parker 2012). Third, Russia has seriously revised its military agreements with Iran. In 2001 before nuclear conflict, both countries signed some agreements regarding military cooperation. Since 2010, when Moscow decided to postpone S-300 sales to Iran, Russian arms exports to Iran gradually decreased.

In addition, Russian authorities put pressure which makes the sale of dual usage goods to Iran stricter. Cross-border nature of US sanctions and this fact that these actions are punishments supported by numerous countries and through which economic ties between Iran and Russia faced damage and almost all joint projects with Iran, Russia and Qatar in gas cooperation were blocked (Flanagan 2013).

Meanwhile, in the beginning of 2011, Russia restarted efforts to solve international disagreements. In July 2011 Sergi Lavrov, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, suggested a step by step scheme to Iran and 5+1 to gradually resolve the issue. The plan was welcomed cautiously by West and warmly by Iran. Although the proposal was not fully functional, Moscow began to support Iran and the West to start a conversation that the negotiations reached to possible agreements between Iran and the six countries of the West on Tuesday 14 July 2015.

Military-Security Cooperation:

Military Cooperation

In the light of new Eurasianism after China and India, Iran has been considered as the third buyer of arms from Russia. Russia also has permitted Iran to produce military equipments and following that, the number of Russian military advisor presenting in Iran is increasing. Hence, in 2002, the West rejected Iran's quest for providing some arms (Rasizade, 2002). On the other hand, Iran and Russia military cooperation instead of developing America and Turkey military

cooperation is a kind of reconstruction of Cold War stereotypes. In this way, delivering advanced weapons to Iran is in order to fulfill the needs of Iran's Defense. Developing new great game in the Caspian region has highlighted the military cooperation. The continued conflict between US, Iran and Israel has contributed to expand these cooperations.

At this time, the Gorchonmerdine was cancelled by Putin and provided the modernization of Iranian military forces by Russia (Koolae 2005).

There is no doubt that Tehran and Moscow consider themselves as committed partner but they compete in some cases. One of the issues affecting bilateral relations between Iran and Moscow is sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran. Russia and Islamic Republic of Iran both have independent foreign policy against US. Nevertheless, West block has tried to keep Russia in East block to deal with Iran regarding nuclear programs (Freedman 2001). In fact Russia's political manner, especially the temporary actions with western powers on Iran's sanction, has stimulated Iranian politicians, because it lead to increase dishonesty in Russian political motivations. In recent years, Iranian analysts have reasoned that Moscow has used nuclear issue as a bargaining tool for getting preferences from the West; meanwhile it has simultaneously convinced Islamic Republic of Iran to prevent 5+1 sanctions against Iran.

In summary, Moscow has used nuclear crisis to get economic and political advantages on both sides of Iran and West. Hence, it must be considered that this suggestion that could lead to finding a solution for nuclear crisis has been prewritten by Russia. No doubt that lack of the presence of western countries, Russian companies are able to be benefited from the horizon of Iran's economy and infrastructures. But the amount of investment and foreign trade comparing to many trading affairs that Tehran has made with other countries are low. Hence, in nuclear and military sections, Iran has been a profitable country for Russia in a way that Iran's tendency toward Russian weapons is increasing. Since 1991, Russia has told missile, tank and military vehicles to Iran. Russia is also going to participate in 5 billion dollars' project for making five nuclear reactors (Khajepour, 2012: p 17).

In addition, military, economic and political interactions between Iran and Russia can open gates to Russia to go toward Persian Gulf waters in which there is a traditional field of US interests. Interestingly, despite partial economic interests, Moscow has more interests for preserving territorial integrity. Tehran, instead, looks at Russia as a technological and tactical source.

Caucasus Areas:

Russian Federation and Islamic Republic of Iran are cooperating in security fields at present. The issues in Caucasus issues can only be solved through Iran and Russia cooperation. Chechnya extremists and westernized Azerbaijan are a challenge for Moscow and Tehran. According to Foreign Policy Journal, Baku is hosting Israel's military air base against Iran; however, this issue was rejected by Israel's ministry of foreign affair sometimes later (Jewish journal.com, 2012). At that time, Azerbaijan was the nearest ally to NATO-Turkey and it has some military agreements with Ankara. Regarding Chechen and its effect on Moscow-Tehran tie, Iran's behavior has been one of the clear points of its foreign affairs to Russia.

Defending liberation movements is in contrast with States' interests and the supporting countries must choose whether liberation movements or the governing state. Choosing both of the simultaneously means losing both parties. Iran's position at the time of heading Islamic Conference Organization regarding Chechnya has provided secure feelings from Iran for Russian governors and after 9/11, North Caucasus crisis as an internal issue in Russia have cut the interference of other countries in Russian affairs in North Caucasus (Sanaee and Karami 2008: p. 339).

Central Asia Areas:

In central Asia, Russia, Iran and the countries region has tried to preserve the energy and road line security without the presence of hyper countries as the US and China. Since security issues are mainly internal and due to the geographical distance of this region with Europe and lack of access to free waters, an external threat cannot be imagined.

Today, the strategy of providing and selling energy, geopolitics, pushes Central Asia to Russia on the one hand and to the West on the other hand (Amir Ahmadian, 2001: p.146). Iran and Russia cooperation is clear in this issue but it is potential and it has prevented Iran from presenting in activities related to energy export and transit in the region. In the global scope, Russia as a country out of OPEC is in competition with Iran to get oil markets. Another common issue regarding Iran and Russia is drugs.

At the time of Taliban, Iran and Russia had more cooperations in this case. The north corridor for transiting drugs is through Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and the central corridor is through Iran. Another path is Pakistan in which drug is transited to South Asia and Persian Gulf through Karachi harbor that necessitates Russia and Islamic Republic of Iran to cooperate in this field (Fatima2014).

Political Field:

Caspian Sea Areas

At the time of Soviet Union, Iran and USSR had affairs based on 1920 and 1940 treaties. After the collapse of Soviet Union, the Caspian Sea entered a new big game (Mojtahed Zadeh & Hafeznia 2003).

Iran and Russia has emphasized on the joint exploitation from the sources in the Caspian Sea for the first time; but Azerbaijan and Qazakhstan for the first time opened the path for the other great players in order to reduce Iran and Russia penetrating into the region. Russia and Qazakhstan reached to a separate agreement in case of dividing their boarder line in 1988. So, only Iran emphasizes on preserving the Caspian Sea's right regime. Russia has started this deal with Azerbaijan in 2001. Iran has objected on this agreement and has called it illegal. Creating a committee in the sixth parliament in Iran to observe the process of the new regime in the Caspian Sea is symbol of this concern (Jaffe & Manning 2001).

In Ashkhabad Convention in 2002, Turkmenistan government tried to impose the Hosseingholi – Astara borderline to Iran. Following that Russia announced a military maneuver after this convention which was interpreted as Iran and Russia encounter by political experts.

Qazakhstan which has always been in search for exact and sensitive affairs with Russia has been invited to these

negotiations. Therefore, Ashkhabad Convention showed that the "Big Game" in The Caspian Sea is more complicated (Koolae & Hafezian 2010).

Iran is the only country in the world that can provide a strategic corridor for Central Asia to high seas and this is the point which has negative effect on the Russia's exclusive interests in accessing to these Republics. Russia is not satisfied from the connecting role of Iran; however, it prefers it to America's influence in the region. Russia, after the collapse of the USSR has profited from the role of transportation in connection among the Caspian republics with global markets. Changes in the transportation paths and finding new commercial partners can lead to a decrease in the Russia's penetration after the collapse of Soviet Union. There is no doubt that Russia is not satisfied with this situation; but Iran's influence is less costly than its western competitors. The issue of Gas and oil pipeline for transporting the Caspian Sea energy has become one of the main issues related to the Caspian Sea's right regime. The traditional path of Russia can revive its presence in the republics of region; The East path toward China is a long and costly path and the South path has been always rejected by the US and it has supported the Baku – Tbilisi – Jeyhan pipeline (Koolae 2010).

The effect of Arab Spring and Syrian Crisis on Iran and Russia Affairs

Russia and Iran are shared in the results coming out of Arab Spring events in the Middle East.

Iran's government does not support opposing movements in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia because they are originated from foreign factors which are in contrast with Iran. But in Syrian crisis, Iran and Russia have the same position and both of them and both welcome political solution to resolve the disputes peacefully.

Arab Spring support by the West was interpreted as an effort to reduce Russia and Iran penetration in the region. Since the beginning of Arab Spring the political leaders of Iran have supposed that the happened events for changing the geographical map of the Middle East have been to weaken the main role of Iran in the region. They also try to decrease the hand of Russia from Eastern Mediterranean and Hydrocarbon resources which are exported from Russia or with the help of Russia. The Western authorities have been trying to decrease the role of Iran in the region with changing the political system and reviving the western control in the region from Casablanca to Islam Abad.

In this field, Islamic Republic of Iran and Russia have moved towards good relations. Despite the fact that these countries affairs revolve around main issues as sanctions against Iran, foreign economic issues, military upheavals, and nuclear issues. Russia and Islamic Republic of Iran have stated their concern in this regard. This common position in reviving general principle in Eastern Mediterranean has been a respect to the land integrity of all countries in the region. Lack of a long term strategy by the US and west is clear in the region. Iran has changed to a leader in the region without having any overt military action. Generally, Russia and Iran have been changed to as strategic allies in the region by protecting Syria through military intervention and bilateral cooperation of these two countries seems natural.

However, bilateral affairs represent lack of mutual trust and cooperation which are increased by international sanctions. In

fact, Syria has been changed in to a factor for removing the strategic obstacles between Iran and Russia. In September 2012, the president of Islamic Republic of Iran, Hassan Rouhani suggested Vladimir Putin an active consultation among the countries in the region concerning the sensitive issues in the Middle East (Beobrov 2014).

Conclusion:

As it was stated, Eurasianism concept dates back to the 19th century. Most of Russian scholars similar to the proponents of Slavic ethnics believe that the main problem of Russian nationality is its Europeanism. The fact that Russian identity is westernized has been irritating them and they asked for the increase in the country through reviving Eurasianists thinking. Based on this theory, Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the regions in which they want to put their thinking into practice. As it was mentioned, the root of Eurasianism thinking is in Russian identity and in this way, a constructivist view can be influential for checking Islamic Republic of Iran and Russia relations considering the variables of Eurasianism theory.

As it was mentioned, the new Russian identity which is formed based on Eurasianism, Islamic Republic of Iran identity constructed in a way that requires strategic alliance with the country and hence the identity determines interests between the two countries in various fields.

One of these fields is Economy. In this way, it seems that the effect of Eurasianism is in economical fields in the field of Energy and atomic cooperation between two countries. This factor of identity has shown itself in economic cooperation. Because both energy exportation and atomic cooperation have political and practical consequences which has more significance than ordinary economic event. In atomic cooperation fields, since the beginning Russia contacted Iran based on NPT and the limitations regarding peaceful projects.

Certainly, Iran's identity was shaped as the "other" in the mind of Russian agents, there was no necessary trust regarding atomic co operations between the two countries. However, in the other field, energy, pointing to the West and Europe dependence to the role of Iran and Russia in energy exportation, especially gas exportation, one can find out a hidden alliance to oppose hegemonic structure of international system, an alliance which its main purpose is on the current structure of international system. However, this structure putting some security measures, has made Iran and Russia to sell energy to provide their political and security requirements. This common position due to common identity leads to decrease in the competition of these two countries in selling energy and finding new markets.

Another region near these two countries in case of security is Central Asia and Caucasus. Iran having language, historic, cultural and civilization links in the region has tried to make a common identity and interests for itself. On the other hand, Russia having five hundred years of presence in these regions and doing actions for identity homogenization as destruction of historical resources, changing alphabet from Arabic to Russian, obligating teaching Russian in different times, institutionalizing some Russian culture and functional use of these regions since the time of Soviet Union, called this region in a new geopolitical concept as 'near abroad' after the collapse to show the practicality of the region for the region.

In this way, competition is the main aspect of the presence of Russia and Iran in the region in case of identity. Another issue

in the political field is concerned with the issues regarding geopolitical location of Central Asia. Surrounding in land lack of access to high seas is a beneficial restriction for Russia. Except Russia, Iran is the only country being able to provide access to high seas. Russia is not satisfied with this point and this is another issue for Russia and Iran competition in the Central Asia and Caucasus. However, both countries have had cooperations in the field of security so far. This experience has shown that the problems in the Caucasus region can be solved by Russia and Iran cooperations. In Central region, Iran, Russia and the other countries in the region are able to control and preserve the security of energy and transit routes without presence of the US, China and Turkey.

In the field of Syrian upheavals and Arab Spring, Active participation of west especially the US in the region for redefining regional security through clear meaningful systems, Iran has encouraged Russia to make good relations for more participation and opposing west in the region. Despite the fact that the affairs of both countries have been influenced by significant issues as sanctions against Iran, Foreign economic issues, military tension and nuclear issues.

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