

Chapter 9

Reflections on the Development of Strategic Relations Between Iran and China

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ABSTRACT

This research seeks a strategic framework for Iran-China relations through the analytical method and using the theoretical model of interdependence. The main question of this research is to examine the variables of these strategic relations. The research hypothesis is that the three variables of transportation, energy, and security exist as platforms for cooperation between the two countries based on the “interdependence” model. Due to rapid industrial growth, China has an increasing demand for fossil energy. Iran’s three relative advantages include the provision of a stable energy supply, secure transit access to Central Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean, and the establishment of security in the Middle East. This study first analyzes the nature of bilateral relations between Iran and China. The nature of Iran’s objectives in bilateral relations with China comprises two levels: “economic” and “political”. The nature of China’s objectives in bilateral relations with Iran includes two levels: “geographical areas of China’s soft power objectives” and “energy security”. It then examines Iran’s position in three situations based on China’s soft power harmony under the Belt and Road project. Finally, the interdependence variables of Iran and China under the Belt and Road Initiative are analyzed.

1. INTRODUCTION

Civilizational relations between Iran and China have a long history of more than 2600 years, centered on the Silk Road between the two countries. The two countries, China and Iran, are interdependent due to their prominent position in the regional and global geopolitical structure. As the world’s second-largest economy and a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China plays an important role in Iran’s strategic relations. China’s power structure in the international system is constantly growing. Based on

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its economic power, China is striving for more power and changing the shape of international relations. The indicators of the superiority of Chinese power in various economic dimensions as well as political and military influence have expanded and are of interest to Iran's diplomatic apparatus. China's policy of balancing and de-escalation is always of interest to Iran. China has been actively involved in the Iranian nuclear issue (Djallil, 2011: 236). As a result of Western sanctions, Chinese companies entered the Iranian gas industry after Western companies had left the country. Both Iran and China have not accepted the order desired by the United States and are trying to change this order, and this issue has significant implications for the creation of a strategic alliance with China, leading to the emergence of new powers in the international arena, Asia and the Middle East. Will China believes that America's plan to contain this country involves making the environment in East and Southeast Asia unsafe, creating differences with neighbors, making the main route of energy transmission unsafe, and conflicts with neighboring and American protectorate countries. In this regard, some overlaps in the two countries' foreign policies, economic and military exchanges and energy cooperation are the factors for the development of relations between the two countries. In order to counter America-centered actions of the West, China has taken extensive measures in partnership with the emerging countries of the world economy in the form of BRICS, the Eurasian Bank and also the "Belt and Road Initiative", the latter being a geo-economic mechanism that attracts the attention of the world. . This megaproject has annexes in the form of bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements. One example is the comprehensive cooperation agreement (25 years) between Iran and China. In 2020, the 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement between Iran and China was signed by both sides as part of the Belt and Road Initiative. This document also pursues geopolitical goals (geo-economics', geo-strategic and geo-cultural). However, relations between Iran and China are not yet institutionalized and are far from ideal. Despite Iran and China's common interest in addressing regional and international threats, strategic and stable relations between the two parties have not developed. By analyzing the nature of relations between Iran and China, this research concludes that these two countries have different goals in their relations with each other, which are not contradictory at the same time, but challenges may arise. China wants to expand its soft power through the Belt and Road project, and Iran wants to improve its economic and political conditions by following China's development model.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK (INTERDEPENDENCE)

In international relations, the existence of common interests in various fields forms the basis for cooperation between countries, and the growth of such cooperation leads to interdependence over time. In this research, the theory of interdependence was used to explain the strategic relations between Iran and China. The interdependence theory smooths out the strategic relations between countries by increasing the cost of military actions and aligning the economic interests of countries, creating the basis for long-term economic and political relations. This theory expresses the intersection of economics and politics in international relations. The two political and economic systems interact closely, and the ideas that focus on the superiority of one over the other are trapped in a form of reductionism (Gill & David, 1988: 77). Robert Cohen and Joseph Nye are the most important and original creators of the theory of interdependence, who see the influence of military power and force as a useful and effective instrument in the

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