

## *Iran's New Presence in the Chess of the Black Sea Region and the Caucasus*

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the new policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran regarding the Black Sea Region and the Caucasus. The historical and pre-revolution mindset in Iran with respect to the strategic importance of these geographies faced serious shift after the 1979 Revolution and then with the USSR dissolution in 1991. With the succeeding developments in its surrounding geographies on the eve of 21<sup>st</sup> century, Iran began to outline a powerful mental plan to consolidate and/or renew its place in the strategic map of these regions. This article argues that, Iran began to introduce short and long term energy supply projects and provided support for it in these regions. Within this framework, the aim is to understand the factors that has stimulated Iran's attention and new engagement in these geographies and its vitality both for itself and for the countries of these regions and the world. This paper has found that the historical heritage is the major factor for Iran's engagement in these regions. Nevertheless, this factor might not explain Iran's success or failure. However, other issues such as Iran's new economic, political and security motives based on a multi-dimensional approach in the last two or three decades, plus its geographical location and geopolitical position, have played roles in this regard.

**Keywords:** *Black Sea, Caucasus, Iran, Energy, Security, Economic, Collaboration*

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

*History and historical heritage, cannot always explain all aspects of a country's interactions or counteractions with its surrounding geographies, or its success or failure in this processes. Iran is not excluded from this phenomenon. Iran's influence in the Black Sea region and the Caucasus traces back to the Achaemenid Empire (550 BC-330 BC) and to Safavid Dynasty (1501-1736). Countries like Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan have been parts of the properties of the Iran Emperors before the Tsardom of Russia captured these lands in 11th Century. However, Iran could not systematically maneuver in various fields in these geographies based on its historical influences or historical heritage, although, such a characteristic can explain the political stances of Iran and its relations with the countries of these geographies, which is out of the scope of this article. At the same time, the new economic, political and security issues are among the most important determining factors in this respect. Besides, the United States of America ("-U.S.") and Russia's new energy and security policies in these regions have had both enforced and stimulated Iran for the new positioning and political stances and, of course, new role-playing. Iran has either naturally been seeking good and trustworthy allies in these relatively volatile regions or has been trying to strengthen its relations with the existing, not much firm and steadfast, allies or friendly countries.*

After the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, Iran has adopted different approaches towards these regions and the post-Soviet independent states, influenced by regional and international developments and also based on the necessities of its domestic policies. Iran has, in fact, started to design new diplomacy oriented policies towards these regions, also mostly based on or influenced by the ideals of the Islamic Revolution. The latter has actually been contemplated differently by the countries of these regions and has negatively affected their perception of Iran. Although, Iran was among the first countries which recognized the newly established independent states.

Based on these factors, this article intends to find the motives for Iran's new presence and engagement in the Black Sea Region and the Caucasus and discover the regional and global vitality of its presence. Through description and analysis, using various resources, the article firstly assesses Iran's understanding of sea power in order to grasp an idea of Iran's motives for

new engagements, the potential implications and opportunities considering its geographical position. Secondly, Iran's engagement in the post-1979 Revolution will be pointed out. This discussion is significant as it clarifies and answers some of the "what", "how", and "why" questions regarding Iran's new engagement in these regions. Thirdly, it evaluates Iran's share in the economic, security and political equations of these regions to understand the impact of its engagement in the broader collaboration. Fourthly, it examines Iran's reaction to the new regional dynamics, and finally the future outlook will be discussed as the conclusion.

## **2. SEA POWER, A KEY TO GLOBAL PREDOMINANCE**

Geologically, 71% of the earth's surface is covered with water and most of that 71% that is under water is oceans; only the 29% is land (USGS, 2016). On the other hand, the notion of "sea" and its strategic significance in the world politics and international relations is not a contemporary issue, rather it is traced back to the ancient times as well as British Empire. For instance, Greeks were active seafarers seeking opportunities for trade and finding new independent cities at coastal sites across the Mediterranean Sea (Colette Hemingway & Sean Hemingway, 2007). The concepts of 'Command of the Sea' and 'Sea Power' have always been significantly important. Rubel (2012) argues that the countries' navies have always sought to control communications on the sea in order to protect one's own commerce, disrupt the enemy's, move one's own army, and prevent the movement of the enemy's (Rubel, 2012).

In the same way, in 1890, Alfred Thayer Mahan, the American strategist credited his reading of Theodore Mommsen's six-volume *History of Rome* in his memories, *From Sail to Steam*, for the insight that sea power was the key to global predominance (Sempa, 2014). Mahan (1890) reviewed the role of sea power in the emergence and growth of the British Empire. He believes that sea is a "great highway" and "wide common" with "well-worn trade routes" over which men pass in all directions (Mahan, 1890).

Mahan (1890) famously listed six fundamental elements of sea power: geographical position, physical conformation, extent of territory, size of population, character of the people, and character of government (Mahan, 1890). Taking Mahan's fundamental elements of sea power as the basis

for understanding the dynamics around these strategically important but geopolitically intricate regions, Iran's mental strategic map of the Black Sea region and the Caucasus and the ambitions for its interactive participation could be defined and assessed.

On the other hand, having the straits and strategically significant Canal in one's geography is not always an advantage, but rather would be a headache in terms of threats against national security and the energy security. There are many examples of countries such as Turkey, Egypt, Iran and Yemen, for instance, that not only inflicted lots of tensions or variety of threats but also took the advantages of their straits and strategically significant Canals of Dardanelle, Bosphorus, Suez and Bab-el-Mandeb, since their geopolitical position has made them closer to the industrial nations and powers and also provided them with the chance of becoming the member of regional and international organizations. In the same way, Iran's advantage of its particular place within the geopolitical strategies of the big powers has been diverse since, in one hand, this geopolitical importance has saved Iran staying out of the full or permanent colonies of big powers during the history and, on the other hand, it has caused Iran to lose parts of its lands when the big games were being played by the big powers for decades. For instance, Iran played an important role and acted as a strategic bridge for the victory of the Allied countries during World War I and II, but its people faced serious problems such as famine and diseases that led to the death of thousands.

In this regard, heir to one of the world's oldest civilizations, Iran's geographical location and geopolitical position in the world and regional map brought for it potential risks and also potential opportunities; Iran is bordered to the northwest by Armenia, the de facto Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, and Azerbaijan; to the northeast by Turkmenistan; to the east by Afghanistan and Pakistan; to the south by the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman; to the north by the Caspian Sea; and to the west by Turkey and Iraq. It is the second largest country in the Middle East and the 18<sup>th</sup> largest in the world. With nearly 78.4 million inhabitants, Iran is the world's 17<sup>th</sup> most populous country. The country's central location is in Eurasia and Western Asia, and its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz makes it an important geostrategic country for both the direct investments and as transit corridors using its geography, sea or land, (Geopolitica, RU, 2017). This geographical

structure has made countries of the Black Sea region, the Caucasus and the Central Asia such as Turkey, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, etc. seriously important for Iran since Iran is connected to the Europe and the west by land and sea through these countries. For instance, Iran has always tried to reach the Black Sea through Armenia and through Kazakhstan to the countries of the Northern and Western Europe. Iran has also been attempting to find a way to reach China via Kyrgyzstan through a railroad project passing through Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

Every country would experience change in due course, affected by some domestic and non-domestic factors or incentives. Since the 1979 Revolution and later on with the beginning of a new period on the eve of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Iran has been incited to expand and renew its strategic interests in these regions; although, it has not remained immune and intact due to a tsunami of violence and regional conflicts. Meanwhile, Iran has not been looking for regional predominance or hegemony through sea power as this is not in accordance to the spirit of the Islamic Republic, as has been continuously reiterated by the officials in Iran or would mean a serious risk and threat to its already endangered strategic interests (Larijani, 2015).

The Islamic Republic of Iran followed the principle of multi-dimensional approach in its policies towards the Black Sea region and the Caucasus in order to move the paths of divergence to convergence and also from diversity to uniformity. Besides, the Caucasus has been considered by some experts as being geopolitically supplemented to Iran. So that, the convergence oriented understanding of these regions by Iran has had great importance. Based on this understanding, countries are not able to react or respond to the challenges of the development process by themselves since these challenges are often comprised of transnational dimensions. For this reason, countries need and tend to cooperate to manage the situation. This is also applicable for Iran, as this country has been trying to benefit the potentials in various fields through the best use of its capacities based on convergence in economic engagement and energy supply in addition to paying close attention to the security issues.

### **3. IRAN'S ENGAGEMENT IN THE POST-1979 REVOLUTION**

It was only after the end of Iraq imposed war on Iran; that is, 20 August 1988 that Iran could assess the opportunities for new approaches in its domestic and foreign policies. During two consecutive terms of the presidency of Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the years 1989-1997, the normalization of Iran's attitudes in foreign policy began as the result of the adopted policies (BBC, 2017). The second term of his office coincided by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which, in fact, provided the Islamic Republic an opportunity to have a new outlook towards the Black Sea region and the Caucasus. However, the dire climate of the region as a center for the continuous rivalry of the main rivals of the cold war and their allies in one hand and the policies and approaches of the next governments in Iran on the other hand, the prospects of promotion of convergence in economic initiatives and maintenance of peace and stability were deemed a difficult and an unreachable task. Though, any of these approaches and policies are said to be a quest for the realization of the objectives mapped by the 1979 Revolution. More accurately, following the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and the emergence of seriously vulnerable new post-Soviet states in the northern borders of Iran and due to the importance of the oil resources in the Caspian Sea and the rise in the competition of the regional and international actors, a resistance pattern was introduced by the ideologies of the Islamic Revolution against the imperial American trends in order to both renew and regenerate its natural or expected status and guarantee the peace and stability. So, despite Iran's intention for convergence and interactive collaboration, it has continued its policies based on the motto of "anything but U.S. policy", besides showing respect to the governing formula in international relations and world politics. Two examples from the western medias and personalities which might reflect the western understanding of the nature of Iran's power would both add spice to the discussion and help better understand the issue. In October 2013, "The Economist" published a report underscoring the need for stripping Iran of its nuclear program "to stem the rise of Persian power." A "nuclear Iran," it asserted, would seriously challenge western interests in the Middle East and endanger "Israel's right to exist." The magazine concluded that "when Persian power is on the rise, it is not the time to back away from the Middle East" (The Economist, 2013). This report is a reflection of the western and the U.S. understanding of Iran's regional initiatives,

which indispensably affected Iran's economic and energy projects in the Black Sea region and the Caucasus. Arguing from the opposite angle, as the second example, CNN quoted Hillary Mann Leverett, a former U.S. National Security Council official as saying, "why Iran's rise is a good thing". He told, "In reality, Iran's rise is not only normal, it is actually essential to a more stable region," because America's recent "imperial overstretch" to permanently create a pro-American regional order, and the post-1979 Faustian bargain involving Israel and Saudi Arabia to contain Iranian power, had failed" (CNN, 2015).

On the other hand, the challenges Iran has been facing in its domestic, regional as well as in international spheres have made the decision-making mechanisms for Iran more uncompromising, arduous and perplexing with respect to these regions. Since 2013; that is, during the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> governments, Iran has embarked on an effective start to focus on the possibilities of strengthening the already existing transit sea and land corridors and also to introduce new projects such as the tripartite economic agreements for the development of the port of Chabahar, called as Chabahar transit agreement signed between Iran-Afghanistan and India (Payvand, 2016). The finalization of the agreement is to bind and connect the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea (including 6 countries that are Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Bulgaria and Greece) and also the fulfillment of "Iran-River Canal" or "Iranrud" project or the "North-to-South Shipping Road Project". The latter, as a "trans-Iranian canal", will provide the cargo and commercial ships to pass through Iran to Black Sea and Mediterranean Sea and to Indian Ocean (Sputnik news, 2016). Russia is the number one supporter of this project because to the Russian, this project will put an end to the sea power hegemony of the west. Similarly, European and post-Soviet states will also benefit from it. But it seems the US is worried about this alternative to the Suez Channel.

**Figure1.** Navigable channel linking the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf



Source: <https://sptnkne.ws/c6eT>

Similarly, the Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor is strategically important. The following summarization of the characteristics of this corridor explicitly indicates how Iran's role in this corridor is vital and also challenging:

- ✓ A new route to connect Iran to Europe.
- ✓ An alternative to the transit road of Iran-Turkey-Europe.
- ✓ Serves as a trade hub not just for the Middle East but also into Europe and Central Asia.
- ✓ It is not more economical in terms of fuel for the vehicles and transportation or distances but because of some mutual border challenges for the transport companies and truck owners of Iran and Turkey; this route is welcomed as an alternative rout by the Iranian companies.
- ✓ This corridor is a connection and transit route between six countries that are Iran, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Bulgaria and Greece.



- ✓ This corridor is also a transit route for gas and electricity transportation from Iran to Armenia and then to Georgia.
- ✓ This corridor is geo-strategically important because it is a chance for Iran to increase its assertive and intuitive presence in the region.
- ✓ It is the best ever gate for the regional economic developments and the convergence as well as the interactive return of Iran to the South Caucasus.

In the most optimistic situation;

- ✓ This corridor is vital for Armenia and Georgia in times of any possible sanction by Turkey and Azerbaijan.
- ✓ It has the potential to limit the influence of Turkey and Azerbaijan in Georgia's markets or will cause the emergence of regional rivals for Turkish goods in Georgia's market.
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The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), as an outcome of series of negotiations between the P5+1 countries and Iran, has become an incentive for Iran to promote its trade exchanges with its surrounding geographies and the EU countries. Of course, the latest moves by Trump administration in abrogation of the deal and unilaterally levying new sanctions on Iran, though believed to be fundamentally flawed (Ashford,

2017), will substantially endanger Iran's multiple projects towards the Black Sea region and the Caucasus. It will finally impede Iran's multi-dimensional policies towards these regions.

#### **4. IRAN'S REACTUONS TOWARDS NEW REGIONAL DYNAMICS**

There is no doubt that any sovereign state and even the non-state actor, regardless of being rightful or not, reacts to any changes or developments in its vicinities. A long background of common history and civilization between Iran and the countries of the Caucasus and the Black Sea region would have necessitated the Islamic Republic to respond and react to the changes and renew its geopolitical interactions.

The collapse of the Soviet Union provided ultimate grounds for all regional and international actors to redefine their national interests in the Black Sea region and the emergence of new independent states. Iran acted the same and outlined new equations in its relations with the newly independent countries in the regions of South Caucasus and Central Asia and began its direct contact with the governments and the people. For Iran, the command of the sea or the sea power might not be the same as that of the big powers, but a kind of reconsideration of policies towards the seas around its geography has been seen as more necessary as political, economic, and technological developments because the sea power has seriously influenced the dynamics of the geopolitical interactions of the other countries. Under such a condition, the task for Iran to be actively present in the Black Sea region and the Caucasus has both necessitated serious attention and consumed lots of resources as the west and the U.S., above all, has made Iran so engaged with various issues since the 1979 Revolution.

To be involved at the center and the heart of this chess as the great powers always expect, requires Iran to fully cooperate, collaborate and to be in convergence with them without any preconditions. The Black Sea region and Caucasus form a triangle of fighting against terrorism, separatism and energy transfer, which Iran is desired or expected to be at the center of junction of strategic interests of this triangle. At the same time, four major countries, namely, Iran, Turkey, Russia and U.S. have largely diverging but some common interests in these regions. These regions are

the arenas of rivalry for the main rivals of the cold war; that is, Russia and U.S., since the two countries seek to maintain their dominant influence and preferential access to resources and, at the same time, try to limit each other's strength. Under such a climate, Iran has tried to balance its interactions and counteractions with the countries of the region by supporting the developments and economic initiatives. That's why Iranian officials behave consciously and cautiously. What Iran upholds is to follow the path of convergence in economic issues, energy supply and security cooperation and to introduce ideas and projects to the relevant countries in the region or take suggestions by the leaders of the region in order to be share its capacities more actively.

The start of the promotion of economy oriented projects based on convergence and real interaction came when all grounds were provided. Since 1992, Iranian officials have begun to outline some grand projects with the centrality of the Black Sea, as well as, land, railroad and sea transportation considering the geopolitical and strategic importance of the Caspian Sea, Persian Gulf and the Black Sea. Except some countries which have tried to stay cautious, these projects are supported by the officials in the countries of the Caucasus and the Black Sea region, through the meetings of "The Joint Economic Commissions".

## **5. IRAN'S SHARE IN THE ENERGY SUPPLY, SECURITY AND POLITICAL EQUATIONS OF THE REGION**

The transit and transport corridors that are already mentioned in this study are for some reasons, both vital and challenging. Iran is the key for the security of energy supply and/or the diversity in the energy supply for both of these regions and the Europe. Energy diversification has emerged as one of the most important priorities for a majority of member countries in the EU. In case of the EU's need of Iran's energy supply, Europe, like U.S. has come to the understanding that it has to be prepared for major changes in its energy supply structure. The increasing demand of energy in Europe combined with its high reliance on Russia have led the EU to look to the Caspian Sea region for alternative energy resources. And, Iran, which owns the third largest combined oil/natural gas reserves worldwide (following Russia and Saudi Arabia) will certainly play a significant role in this structure as a supply option, of course, if the regional and global political developments allow it. This process, promotes the substantial

potentials for energy cooperation between Iran and the EU countries. Friedman (2003) argues that, Europe's interest in Iran is quite different with regard to oil, on the one hand, and natural gas on the other. The gas sector is politically more complex and important, while, oil is more interesting from a global supply perspective (Friedman, 2003). Although Iran is the fourth largest oil exporter worldwide, it is not counted as the only major supplier of either oil or natural gas to the region and the EU.

The security of energy supply has become more important and sensitive in the post-Soviet Union period since U.S. began to put more effort in establishing a new arrangement for the regional hegemony. In consequence, Russia has increased efforts in emerging as a main rival to U.S. hegemony in the regional and global spheres by making use of its huge oil and gas reservoirs. In the same vein, Iran's oil and gas, as in the last decades and centuries, has become a major factor for global and regional economic, security and political equations.

However, the increasing and effective U.S. presence and involvement in these regions, in particular in the Persian Gulf and the Black Sea, has won Iran more credibility in terms of its roles in the security of energy supply in these strategically important regions. Of course, security and political transformation with the end of the bipolar system, has affected Iran's role in this regard, in the sense that, as the result of the process of globalization of economy and politics, the countries' security become compatible with their interests and, as the result, their economic growth and political power become interconnected with energy security. Along with these issues, the rise and fall of the oil and gas prices in the global market has also a prompt effect on the economy and political stances of not only the oil and gas exporter countries but also all the consumers (IMF, 2000). Consequently, finding the most economic and secure routes for transferring energy has earned a significant importance and sensitivity in the formation of regional and global politics. On the other hand, since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the big powerful actors and international companies have started widespread competitions in the West Asia, Middle East, Persian Gulf and Central Asia to take the control of the flow of energy and its transportation routes. Naturally, trying to find the most secure, economic, and cheapest route has become one of the most important preferences of the countries. In particular, big powerful countries began to apply their diplomacy tools,

hard and soft power, for ensuring the security of their energy supply. The security of the energy supply is not limited to the security of the transportation routes, rather, the diversification of the energy resources is one of the most important guarantees not only for the big powers, but also for the global energy market. The latter is another issue, which has put Iran in the center of the big actors' attention.

There are some measures and policies which Iran adopted since 1991 towards these regions. These measures and policies represent the amount and nature of Iran's attention and intentions:

1. Promotion of economic co-operations with the regional countries as the backbone of political cooperation.
2. Playing a mediator role in regional crisis.
3. Supporting and helping other regional countries in their membership in international and regional organizations.
4. Development of security cooperation with the regional countries in the fields of fight against terrorism, radical Islamism, drug trafficking and organized crimes.
5. Benefiting its geopolitical location to connect with different regions in the Caucasus, the Black Sea region, Central Asia, Persian Gulf, etc.
6. Emphasizing the national interests with respect to the sovereignty and interests of others.
7. Guarding its security, as the most important preferences of Iran in these regions.
8. Iran's policy towards the South Caucasus, mainly influenced by the country's desire to maintain good relations with Russia, and at the same time, balancing Turkey's influence and power through the Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan factors.
9. Functionally, Iran's policies towards the region are seemingly based on the ambitions rather than the mere economic factor; Iran has been trying to

promote close cooperation with Russia in order to prevent the influence of the west and to maintain the security of the region through inter-regional mechanisms rather than intra-regional.

10. Iran has had an average or below-average share of investments in this region because it has been facing serious economic challenges domestically.

11. In general, it is possible to say that a shift from Revolution-oriented policies in the foreign policy approach of Iran has emerged since the beginning of the first decade of 1990 or even at the beginning of the third millennium since it was in one way or another opposed to the international status quo. Therefore, the ideological interests were replaced by the renewal of its historical heritage in the region in terms of power and influence and based on respect to the sovereignty of the regional countries.

12. In contrast with many analyses and perceptions, Iran has determined, some short and long term road maps, not perhaps so much consistent, for its influence in the economic, security and political equations in the Caucasus and the Black Sea region. Though, it seems that Iran has kept the track well and on the framework of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), it will share more in the region in the near future. These regions have become the center of the government's new policies if Trump's new sanction policies permit.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

The Black Sea region is the geographical region of Turkey. It is a bridge between Europe and Asia and countries like Turkey, Iran, Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Europe and U.S. are the potential and/or main rivals. The countries of the Black Sea and the Caucasus are on the route to some grand projects such as Black Sea-Caspian Sea Corridor project known as the Eurasia Canal project.

The Persian Gulf-Black Sea Corridor is also significant for the economic boom of these geographies. This corridor will serve as a trade hub not just for the Middle East but for Europe and Central Asia as well by creating a new transport corridor that would connect four countries including Iran, Armenia, Georgia and Bulgaria. Other routes such as the Caspian Sea-Persian Gulf corridor is a project which will seriously affect some

countries regional and international economic and strategic interests. On the other hand, any form of crisis in these regions easily and quickly spills over to near and far locations because of their geopolitical intricacy and intractable marine and land communication routes. Obviously, there are still big and unsolved security concerns in terms of energy diversity and energy transferring since, despite its strategic importance, the Caucasus, in particular, is often portrayed as a remote and violence-plagued place; not a war zone as it was once, but parts of it is known to be a home to organized crimes, separatist activities and radical Muslims. It is covered with a jumble of mountains situated at the periphery of the central region.

However, it is not a new phenomenon that the oil, gas and other natural resources and reserves in the Black Sea region and the Caucasus are tied with security issues and politics. We have learned from the far and near histories how the major actors like the Ottoman and Russia on the one hand, and U.S. on the other, were competing for the hegemony on the Black Sea and the Caucasus, right after the 2<sup>nd</sup> world war and also during and after the Cold War, and how the countries like Germany and France were reacting to those political and security policies. Countries like Iran and Turkey have been cautiously seeking consolidation for their positions in these processes. Turkey has more relevantly and closely been following the developments as this country is a NATO member and also located in the Black sea geography. Countries' attempts in leaving each other behind to stay involved in the affairs of these regions to consolidate their share in the economic, security and political equations, in one way or another, can be defined or evaluated in line with Mahan's six fundamental elements of sea power. As it is understood, history and historical background cannot work as a major factor for the countries' success or failure in their approaches and policies, however, history and historical background work as a motivating factor and an incentive.

The change in Iran's mindset toward these regions, like that of other countries, has been affected by some domestic and non-domestic factors or incentives. However, its new engagement followed the principle of a multi-dimensional approach towards the Black Sea region and the Caucasus. Iran has been following the path of divergence to convergence in order to move from diversity to uniformity. Based on such understanding, Iran knew it was not able to react or respond to the challenges of the development

process by itself since these challenges are often comprised of transnational dimensions. For this reason, Iran has showed green light for cooperation in various fields in order to manage the situation despite many challenges.

There are two pictures; big and the bigger, which can be drawn out from the whole discussion. The big picture is that Iran's multi-dimensional approaches mostly deal with the countries of these regions on bilateral, trilateral and multi-lateral basis. However, the problem is that Iran's strategy in interactions or counteractions towards these regions has been neither consistent nor compartmentalized so that a lot of expectations and resentments imposed on Iran for its gradual engagement in the region despite its historical might in terms of its sea and land powers.

The bigger picture is that as long as the policies of other regional and non-regional countries provide the grounds for the secure and guaranteed interconnection of Iran's energy and economy to the global system, its interests with regards to relations with the countries of these regions and its convergence and uniformity moves are not jeopardized, Iran will stay supportive to new initiatives and projects based on clarity, consistency and credibility.

However, the latest unilateral move by the Trump administration to sink the P5+1 nuclear deal with Iran is worrying and also can play as a new driving engine for Iran to introduce new energy based strategies, which might put the U.S. interests at risk. Iran has tried to renew its place and at the same time keep the existing balance safe. Iran's new positioning is very close to Mahan's six fundamental elements of sea power: geographical position, physical conformation, extent of territory, size of population, character of the people, and character of government. Iran's new strategic policies attracted most of the countries in these regions due to their convergent nature which also encompass Rubel's argumentation and insights on the "command of the sea" and "sea power".



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