

RUSSIA-IRAN MILITARY COOPERATION:

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THE DYNAMIC IS CHANGING DRAMATICALLY
BECAUSE OF DRONES IN THE UKRAINE WAR

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Research Paper

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Abstract

Russia's struggles in Ukraine, marked by military setbacks, pushed Moscow to seek a cost-effective arms supplier. Iran readily stepped in. Supplying Russia with UAVs, particularly Kamikaze drones, marked a significant shift in Russo-Persian military ties. Historically, this was an "asymmetric partnership." Russia, one of the few to offer Iran arms and political support, held the upper hand. Conversely, Iran, with minimal "bargaining power," relied heavily on Russia as other major powers were either indifferent or hostile to it. However, this imbalance was more due to "urgent need" than mere "power disparity." For two centuries, challenges ranging from internal revolts, British pressures, to the war with Iraq and international sanctions compelled Iran to lean on Russian military aid. The West and Israel's persistent threats only deepened Iran's reliance on Russia. Now, the dynamic has shifted. Russia's dire need for arms introduces a new mutual dependence in Russo-Persian military relations.

Keywords

Russia, Iran, Ukraine, Drone (UAVs), Urgent Need, Asymmetric Partnership,

Historical Background of Russo-Persian Military Cooperation

Historically speaking, Russo-Persian military cooperation has developed through five different stages.

Stage One: An Alliance Based on Mutual Threat Perception

In the 15th century the Russo-Persian partnership began as an offensive alliance against the Ottoman Empire.¹ During this stage, the shared urgent need to confront the Ottoman Empire led the two nations to collaborate. In this brief period, given that both the Russian Tsardom and the Iranian Safavid Empire possessed comparable military strength, their cooperation was marked by a symmetric and equal dynamic. However, this phase concluded in the mid-16th century when the Safavid Empire withdrew from the alliance by striking a peace agreement with the Ottomans.

Stage Two: The Emergence of a Semi-Patron-Client Partnership System

By the mid-19th century, Iran's Qajar dynasty was pressed to address imminent threats from Great Britain and domestic revolutionary movements. Left with few alternatives, the Qajars sought the Russian Empire's support. The Russians responded positively, offering military aid and establishing the Persian Cossack Brigade.² This dependence on Russia for Iran's survival shifted the Russo-Persian military collaboration into a semi-patron-client dynamic.

Stage Three: The Absence

Eventually, the victory of the constitutionalists led to the overthrow of the Russian Empire-backed Mohammad Ahmad Shah and to the coronation of the eleven-year-old Ahmad Shah in 1909, ended the bilateral military cooperation.

From 1909 until 1989, Russo-Iranian military cooperation was non-existent, as they sided with each other's enemies. Iran expanded ties with the United Kingdom (1909-1925), Germany (1925-1941), and the United States (1941-1979), to which Russia responded by invading Iran in 1914 and 1941 and also increasing cooperation with Iran's major regional rival, Iraq. Later, the political chaos in Russia following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 diverted the Kremlin's attention from foreign policy to domestic affairs, depriving Russia from having a consistent policy toward military relations with Iran.

Stage Four: The Gradual Return

Given Yeltsin's Russia faced financial difficulties and needed immediate liquidity, the Kremlin agreed to sell a range of weapons to Iran. In this period from 1991 to 1999, Russia supplied Iran with military equipment, armored vehicles, anti-tank missiles, aerial defense systems, and submarines. A significant portion of those weapons were either assembled or licensed for production in Iran, positioning Russia as a semi-military mentor to Iran.

Table 1: Russia's Arms Sales to Iran from 1991 to 1999

| Weapon Description | Promised Quantity | Delivered Quantity | Year of Delivery | Production License |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| T-721MI Tanks' Engine | 104 | 104 | 1994-1995 | Negative |
| BMP-2 | 1500 | 413 | 1993-2001 | Negative |
| Fagot anti-tank missiles | 5000 | 5000 | 1991 | Positive: Boraq IFV |
| T-72 M1 tanks | 1000 | 422 | 1993-2001 | Negative |
| Malyuta anti-tank missiles | 5000 | 5000 | 1995 | Positive: RAAD |
| D-30 122mm towed gun | 100 | 100 | 1997 | Positive: Shafie D-301/HM-40 |
| Konkurs anti-tank missile | 3000 | 3000 | 1998 | Positive" Towsan-1 |
| Kvadrat SAM system | 2 | 2 | 1995 | Negative |
| 3M9 SAM missile | 120 | 120 | 1995-96 | Negative |

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Considering these events, one can argue that after nearly a century of minimal military cooperation between Iran and Russia, the collapse of the Soviet Union and Yeltsin's ascendancy rekindled Russo-Persian military ties. This renewal was driven by Russia's financial predicament and Iran's urgent need to rejuvenate its military, which had suffered significantly during its eight-year-long war with Iraq. In this period, Iran procured weapons worth \$1.814 billion from Russia.³ However, Iran's fervent pursuit of Russian arms and civil nuclear ties understandably raised alarms in the United States about the potential disruption of the regional balance of power. Consequently, in 1995, President Bill Clinton designated Vice President Al Gore to negotiate with Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin regarding arms sales to Iran.⁴

Under the Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement, Russia committed to not entering new arms contracts with Iran, but was allowed to fulfill its delivery obligations under existing contracts until December 31, 1999. In reciprocation, the U.S. assured it would not impose sanctions on Russia for these ongoing arms sales to Iran. However, like many of Yeltsin's policies, the Gore-Chernomyrdin Agreement lost momentum when Yeltsin left office.

Yeltsin's departure momentarily interrupted the steady resurgence of military cooperation, but this pause merely set the stage for its continuation. Generally, throughout this stage, Iran heavily depended on Russia for diplomatic support and arms supplies. However, Iran lacked any significant leverage over Russia to use as bargaining power, leading to continued asymmetric cooperation between the two countries. This stage persisted until Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. At that point, Moscow's acute need for arms led to a reliance on Iran's military support. This transition marked the onset of the fifth stage in Russo-Persian military cooperation, where the previously asymmetric relationship evolved into a relatively mutual dependency.

Table 2: The Evolution of Russia-Iran Military Cooperation

| Stage | Period | Nature of Cooperation |
|--------|--|---|
| First | 15 th -16 th Centuries | Symmetric and Equal Alliance |
| Second | 19 th -20 th Centuries | Semi-Client (Iran)-Patron (Russia) System |
| Third | 1909-1989 | Hostile/Insignificant |
| Forth | 1991-2022 | Asymmetric: Russia is the dominant actor |
| Fifth | 2022-Present | Relative Mutual Reliance |

The Return of Russian-Iranian Military Leadership Under Putin’s Presidency

When Putin assumed the reins of the Kremlin in December 1999, swift shifts in both foreign and domestic policies became evident. Notably, in 2000, just after the deadline set by the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement, Putin openly repudiated the accord.⁵ His choice to restart arms sales to Iran was driven primarily by two significant considerations:

1- Russia’s Stature in the Global Arms Market.

The fall of the Soviet Union and Yeltsin's succession dealt a considerable blow to Moscow's standing in the global arms sales arena. This decline was particularly poignant for the Kremlin, which, after decades of rivalry with the United States, had risen in the 1980s to claim the top spot in arms exports. Throughout that decade, Moscow met roughly 35% of the worldwide demand for arms,⁶ annually exporting an average of \$60 billion worth of weaponry.⁷

The Soviet Union's dissolution, compounded by the widespread industrial disbandment and administrative turmoil, saw Russia's rank in the arms market plummet. The 1990s witnessed Russia's annual exports dwindling to \$20 billion – merely half of their 1980s figures⁸, Further complicating the situation, numerous traditional clients of the Soviet defense sector, such as India and Egypt, began gravitating towards Western arms suppliers, depriving Russia of its accustomed market share. Confronted with such circumstances, the Kremlin faced limited avenues to rejuvenate its arms industry and augment its clout in the Middle East. One prominent strategy that emerged was the revitalization of arms trade with Iran.

2- *Political Doctrine:*

Vladimir Putin's background as a former KGB officer imbued him with a deep cognizance of Russia's diminished potential to emerge as a paramount global force. Rather than vying to usurp the U.S. as the dominant power, his vision pivoted towards metamorphosing the global landscape from a U.S.-centered unipolar framework to a multipolar one. This shift crystallized in what came to be recognized as the Primakov Doctrine,⁹ advocating alignment with nations not in favor of the U.S., including the likes of Syria, Iran, Armenia, and China. The Kremlin envisaged that such collaborative ventures would catalyze the transition to a multipolar global setup.¹⁰ Conceptualized by Yevgeny Primakov, who served as Foreign Minister between 1996-98 and Russia's Prime Minister from 1998-99, the doctrine delineated Russia's foreign policy across five principal tenets:¹¹

1. Uphold an independent foreign policy.
2. Facilitate the transmutation of the international system from a unipolar hegemony to a "multipolar order."
3. Reinstate dominance over the erstwhile republics of the Soviet Union.
4. Deter the expansion of NATO.
5. Forge strategic coalitions with rising non-western global powers, chiefly China and intensify relations with the developing world.¹³

By 1999, Russia ventured back into the Middle Eastern theater, forging alliances with the nations of Iran, Armenia, and Syria.¹⁴ This maneuver aimed to counteract the prevailing U.S.-endorsed regional framework. Contemporary relationships Russia maintains with Iran and Syria are rooted in the Primakov Doctrine's emphasis on challenging NATO's expansion and the overarching influence of the U.S. in the region.

Similar to Russia, the foreign policy decisions of Iran today are significantly influenced by the political norms and ideologies of the Islamic revolutionaries. Under the leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979, the Islamic Republic of Iran was established. The newly formed revolutionary government laid out its foreign policy credo as "Neither West Nor East."¹⁵ However, following Ayatollah Khomeini's death in 1989, there was a subtle shift in Iran's foreign policy, which manifested as the "Pivot to East" strategy, which involved strengthening ties with countries such as India, China, and Russia.¹⁶

In this framework, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the current Supreme Leader of Iran, emphasized the critical role of this eastern pivot, stating, "In foreign policy, our preference leans eastwards rather than westwards, prioritizing neighbors over distant nations, and nations sharing common values with us over those that don't. These preferences outline our current priorities."¹⁷ Further elucidating the rationale behind the "Pivot to the East" strategy, Ali Akbar Velayati, Iran's former foreign minister and a top strategic advisor to Ayatollah Khamenei, outlined three fundamental factors:¹⁸

1. Eastern nations, including China, India, and North Korea, have historically never showcased colonial intentions or ill will toward Iran.
2. Much like Iran, these Eastern nations have been on the receiving end of the imperialistic endeavors of Western powers.
3. There's a noticeable shift of global power centers from the West to the East.

Highlighting the enduring importance of the "Pivot to the East" strategy, since 1990, Iran has transitioned through eight different administrations led by five presidents, each with diverse

political ideologies; however, this pivot remained a consistent cornerstone of their foreign policy. The contemporary military cooperation between Russia and Iran finds its roots in Iran’s “Pivot to East” policy and Russia’s “Primakov Doctrine.”

Due to political alignment, Putin's determination to re-establish Russia's prominence in the global arms market and Iran's pressing need for military rejuvenation, bilateral arms trade surged. Between 2000 and 2006, Moscow agreed to sell Iran air defense systems and Su-25 ground attack aircraft. In 2007, Russia commenced the delivery of the Tor-M1 anti-aircraft missile system to Iran, a transaction estimated to be valued at approximately \$700 million. Later, in 2007, Russia agreed to sell Iran the S-300 air defense system.

Given the sophistication of the S-300 at the time, it is reasonable to argue that the S-300 deal was intended to be a new high point in Russo-Persian cooperation. However, it took a turn in a very different direction.

Table 3: Russia’s Arms Sales to Iran from 2000 to 2021

| Weapon Description | Promised Quantity | Delivered Quantity | Year of Delivery |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Mi-8MT/Mi-17 | 20 | 20 | 2002-2003 |
| SRAAM R-60 for Su-25 | 40 | 40 | 2006 |
| Su-25 Ground Attack Aircraft | 6 | 6 | 2006 |
| 67N6E Gamma Air Search Radar | 1 | 1 | 2009 |
| Tor-M1 mobile SAM System | 29 | 29 | 2006-2007 |
| 9M338 SAM Missile for Tor-M1 SAM system | 750 | 750 | 2006-2007 |
| 1L119 Nebo-SVU Air Search Radar | 2 | 2 | 2009-2010 |
| Kasta-2E2 Air Search Radar | 2 | 2 | 2009-2010 |
| 1L222 Avtobaza-M Air Search Radar | 2 | 2 | 2011 |
| 64N6 Air Search Radar | 2 | 2 | 2016 |
| S-300PMU2 Favorit | 4 | 4 | 2016 |
| 48N6 SAM | 150 | 150 | 2016 |

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The Internationally Forced Pause

Despite all the progress in Russo-Persian military relations during the first decade of Putin’s presidency, the second decade of his rule was quite challenging for bilateral relations. The international sanctions against Iran, due to its concerning nuclear program, convinced the Russians to distance themselves from Iran and put a hold on the delivery of the system.

Despite prior collaboration, in 2010, Russia opted to suspend a deal that would have delivered S-300 surface-to-air missile systems to Iran. This choice was consistent with UN Security Council Resolution 1929, which levied sanctions on Iran due to concerns about its nuclear program. This

move marked a notable blow to Iran's defense potential and strained the arms relationship between Iran and Russia. In response, Iran, which was threatened by the United States/ Israel and desperately needed to empower its aerial defense, attempted to hold Russia accountable by filing a lawsuit in 2011 in the International Court of Arbitration, seeking compensation for breach of contract.¹⁹ However, the threat of a lawsuit did not change Russia's decision, which led to a decline in Russian arms transfers to Iran, from \$368 million in 2006 to \$4 million in 2015.²⁰

In 2016, a year following the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) or the Iran nuclear deal, Russia and Iran formalized an agreement for the delivery of an upgraded version of the S-300 missile system. This nuclear accord catalyzed a noticeable uptick in arms transactions, with Iran's imports from Russia surging to \$413 million. However, these imports witnessed a drastic slump, plummeting to roughly \$3 million over the subsequent four years leading up to 2020. This downturn in arms agreements could be attributed to an array of factors, notably the 'United States' withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018, coupled with external pressures from Israel and the Arab states of the Persian Gulf exerted on Russia.

Nevertheless, while arms deals have seen a reduction, other facets of bilateral military collaboration have witnessed growth, particularly in mutual military drills and exercises. Throughout this period, naval exercises between Russian and Iranian ships continued, culminating in unique tri-nation exercises with China and various drills in the Indian Ocean. Concurrently, Iran's domestic arms industry became more self-sufficient, developing an advanced arsenal and seeking to export arms as a new revenue source amid U.S. sanctions.

In September 2020, the "Kavkaz 2020" drill was conducted,²¹ followed by the second "Maritime Security Belt" exercise in the Indian Ocean in February 2022. All of these developments illustrate a pattern of growing collaboration and complexity in joint military exercises between Iran and Russian. Given these developments, it's clear that from Putin's accession in 2000 to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Russo-Persian military ties exhibited an asymmetric nature. In this partnership, Russia, standing as one of Iran's rare allies among the major powers, held a dominant position. Simply put, before the Ukrainian conflict, Iran functioned as the less influential entity in the Russo-Persian alliance, leaning heavily on Russian support without possessing substantial leverage to ensure Moscow upheld its commitments.

Stage Five: The War in Ukraine, A Turning Point in Russo-Persian Relations

Following the onset of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the swift imposition of sanctions that further isolated Russia, Moscow sought to strengthen ties with nations holding anti-Western sentiments, like Iran. During the war's escalation, their military rapport visibly intensified. Just as Iran's urgent need for arms once drove them to seek Russia's assistance, this time it's the Kremlin's pressing need for weaponry that pushes Russia to cooperate with Iran, thereby enhancing Iran's defense capabilities.

The momentum of Russo-Iranian relations accelerated as the Ukrainian Armed Forces effectively countered the Russian advance into central Ukraine and began reclaiming areas previously occupied by Russian forces. The situation intensified when Western nations initiated a concerted effort to supply Kyiv with military gear, while cutting off Russia's access to military technologies. In this setting Iran has demonstrated its proficiency in producing affordable missiles and drones, became especially significant to Russia.

Fortunately for Russia, a diplomatically isolated Tehran swiftly responded to Moscow's call for assistance, supplying them with a substantial number of kamikaze drones. As Iran became Russia's main weapons provider and with the growth in bilateral trade, the dynamics of Russo-Persian relations underwent a profound transformation. Beyond financial incentives, Iran had political and ideological reasons to support Russia's military endeavors. For Iran, the Ukrainian conflict represents a facet of the broader East-West power struggle, wherein a Russian victory translates to an American setback.

Another undercurrent influencing Iran's stance is psychological. The prestige of being a major arms supplier to a power like Russia, boosts the national pride of a country that felt dominated by superpowers just decades ago.²² This sentiment was evident when Ayatollah Khamenei lauded Iran's drone capabilities, heralding the nation's "formidable" drone industry as a "national pride."²³

In July 2022, Putin's visit to Iran further solidified the alliance. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei described Russia's actions in Ukraine as "preventive," signaling Tehran's alignment with Moscow.²⁴ This was in stark contrast to the Iranian government's official neutral stance, which habitually calls for a "peace settlement." While the specifics of Putin's meeting with Khamenei remain undisclosed, subsequent events—like Iran's provision of kamikaze drones to Russia—imply a deepening of ties. Iran has joined Belarus as a prominent supporter of Russia in the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. Supplying Russia with drones significantly augmented its military capabilities. Historically, Russia prioritized the development of high-precision missile systems, hypersonic weapons, air defense systems, and armored equipment over its UAV fleet creating a gap that Tehran was aptly equipped to fill.²⁵

Iran has since supplied an undisclosed number of Shahed-131 kamikaze drones to Russia. These drones have proven invaluable to the Russian forces, especially in targeting Ukraine's energy infrastructure. However, despite their effectiveness in damaging Ukrainian facilities, these drones haven't drastically altered the war's trajectory.²⁷ Their limitation lies in their inability to target dynamic, mobile units, preventing them from stifling Ukraine's growing counteroffensives. Nevertheless, these drones are still valuable to Moscow on three levels: inflicting damage on Ukraine, bolstering domestic propaganda, and weakening Ukrainian morale.

Given the drones' relative success and Russia's challenges in ground offensives, Moscow has sought further support from Iran's defense industry. This includes inquiries about the Fateh-110 and Zolfaghar short-range missiles, capable of hitting targets from 300 to 700 kilometers away.²⁸ British reports from early 2023 indicate that Iran also transferred approximately 100 million bullets and 300,000 shells to Russia.²⁹

The weapons exchange between Russia and Iran is not unilateral. Western officials have indicated that various Ukrainian light and semi-heavy weapons, including Javelin anti-tank missile launchers and Stinger anti-aircraft systems, have been captured by Russian troops during Ukrainian retreats. Subsequently, there are claims that Russia has transferred some of these US and NATO-made weapons to Iran. It is believed that Iran intends to reverse engineer these weapons, either to produce replicas or to devise countermeasures against such American-made armaments.³⁰

Determining Russia's rationale behind transporting its captured weaponry to Iran is challenging. Russia could be transferring these weapons as a form of repayment to Iran. Alternatively, these

might not be mere "payback," but rather a request from the Kremlin for Iran to replicate these weapons or to help the Russian military counter them more effectively by identifying their vulnerabilities. Given Iran's track record in defense — such as producing Tofan anti-tank guided missiles modeled on the American BGM-71 TOW missile and long-range drones based on American Sentinel drones by Lockheed Martin — Moscow's choice to involve Iran for such purposes seems astute. If the motivation is repayment, however, the balance appears to tilt heavily in Russia's favor, considering what Iran has provided in terms of weaponry. The specifics of what Iran stands to gain from its armaments exports to Russia remain nebulous. While monetary compensation would benefit Iran's beleaguered economy, the relatively low cost of Iranian military products and the global outcry against its drone exports suggest that financial incentives may not be Tehran's only motivation in becoming Russia's primary arms supplier.

The Kremlin likely has incentives that Iran would deem more enticing, such as sophisticated military equipment. There's a considerable possibility that in return for Iran's military hardware, Russia might supply Iran with advanced weaponry. This includes the Su-35 combat aircraft, which would be a significant upgrade for Iran's aging Air Force. While Russian officials have not openly acknowledged such negotiations, Iranian authorities have expressed interest. As a testament, Iranian Air Force Commander Hamid Vahedi, in a conversation with the Borna news agency, revealed that acquiring Su-35 fighters is on their radar.³¹

This theory has been substantiated by US officials as well. John Kirby, the Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the National Security Council in the White House, suggested that Russia aims to collaborate with Iran on weaponry development and military training. In return, Moscow is poised to provide Tehran with unparalleled military and technical backing, potentially cementing their relationship into a comprehensive defense alliance.³²

The Impact So-Far

The Russian invasion of Ukraine marked a pivotal shift in Russia-Iran relations. Post-invasion, Moscow's increasing reliance on Iranian weaponry, notably kamikaze drones, elevated Iran to the status of Russia's primary arms supplier. This development cultivated a mutual dependence, resulting in a "balance of reliance" between the two nations. While Iran's defense sector caters to Russia's wartime needs, Moscow appears poised to reciprocate by providing Iran with advanced fighter jets and anti-missile defense systems. This evolving relationship reflects a "cross-functional" alliance where each nation leverages its strengths to compensate for the other's shortcomings. The Ukraine conflict has thus transformed the Russo-Persian dynamic from an "asymmetric partnership" to "interdependent cooperation."

In this new paradigm, Russia offers Iran sophisticated aircraft and anti-missile systems, items Tehran lacks. In turn, Iran supplies Russia with cost-effective, potent weaponry. Yet, this military alliance isn't the sole facet of the Russo-Persian relationship witnessing evolution; their economic ties have also seen significant developments.

The Challenges Ahead

While the growth in bilateral relations is evident, Russo-Persian ties aren't without significant challenges. A perennial issue is the rivalry in the energy market.

Post Western sanctions, which restricted Russia's access to European oil markets, Moscow began eyeing alternative markets, especially in Asia. This move posed a challenge for Iran, which had traditionally viewed Asian markets, particularly China, as a key revenue source. With Russia offering competitive discounts in these markets, Iran's oil exports saw a decline by a quarter.³³ Furthermore, Russia began to surpass Iran in exporting other commodities to Asia like steel, bitumen, and petrochemical products.³⁴

However, this strategy could backfire on Russia. While accessing the Asian markets offers Moscow a new revenue stream, pushing Iran out, particularly when it faces a significant monetary crisis, might incentivize Tehran to strike a nuclear deal with the West. Such a deal could lift sanctions, paving the way for Iran to return to the global energy market.

The potential return of Iran to the energy market didn't escape Russian attention. By March 2022, as the Ukrainian war showed signs of dragging on, Russian leaders grew wary of Iran's potential resurgence in the energy sector. This apprehension became evident when Vladimir Putin voiced concerns about the West's willingness to strike a deal with Iran, stating: "They are ready to make peace with Iran, [and] immediately sign all the documents (to renew the Iran nuclear deal)."³⁵ Subsequently, Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, unexpectedly demanded that sanctions imposed on Russia due to the Ukrainian conflict shouldn't impact Russia's trade with Iran.³⁶ This was a highly difficult request to fulfill, which made many wonder if Moscow is trying to sabotage the negotiations with Iran, and postpone Iran's return to the energy market. While this move raised eyebrows, Russia's ambassador to Iran later clarified that it was linked to outstanding payments from Iran. By March 15th, Russia announced that they received "written guarantees" from the United States about sanctions not affecting Russo-Iranian cooperation, though no evidence of such assurances was presented.

Considering Iran holds the second-largest gas reserves and the fourth-largest oil reserves globally, its re-entry into the oil market could lead to a substantial drop in oil and gas prices. This would challenge Russia, which already offers competitive rates in Asian markets, potentially making it financially infeasible for Moscow to sustain its market share through price discounts. Hence, it would be reasonable for Russians to be concerned of Iran's return to the energy market.

In terms of relations with Iran, Russia must factor in the perspectives of the Arab states of the Persian Gulf as well as Israel. Enhanced cooperation with Iran could alarm the Arab nations, particularly Saudi Arabia, prompting them to lean towards the West for security reassurances. This poses a substantial challenge; Saudi Arabia has been instrumental in maintaining relatively high oil prices by limiting OPEC's oil output and cutting its own production.³⁷ A strategy that has been advantageous for countries heavily reliant on oil export revenues, such as economically strained Russia. Consequently, the Saudis wield significant bargaining power, potentially constraining the scope of Russo-Persian collaboration.

Additionally, various reports suggest that Russia might compensate Iran by supplying them with sophisticated weaponry, like the SU-35 or other advanced aerial defenses. It's reasonable to infer that Israel is apprehensive about this burgeoning and untraditional Russo-Iranian partnership and the potential shifts in their defense collaboration. Israel, like Saudi Arabia, possesses considerable bargaining influence which it can employ to keep Russia in check.

The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) boasts one of the most sophisticated aerial defense systems for short-range targets, the Iron Dome. Its effectiveness was evident during the 2021 Gaza War.

Given this backdrop, deploying the Iron Dome in Ukraine could dramatically counteract Russia's UAV assaults on the country. Yet, Israel has so far declined Ukraine's request for the Iron Dome³⁸ Tel Aviv has been circumspect about the extent of its support for Ukraine, wary of Russia retaliating by arming Iran. If Russia actualizes this Israeli apprehension by supplying Iran with advanced arms, Israel might reciprocate by bolstering Ukraine's arsenal, thus impeding Russia-Iran military collaboration. In light of these considerations, it's clear that Russia's pressing need for oil and gas revenue, coupled with concerns over Israel broadening its support for Ukraine, are significant impediments to the deepening of Tehran-Moscow military ties.

The Prospective of the Future

It might be too early to claim that the Russo-Persian collaboration, post-Ukraine War, is producing into a formal alliance. However, there's no denying that the relationship between Tehran and Moscow has entered a new stage. The previous dynamic, which saw Iran heavily reliant on Russia, especially when it came to arms supply and UN Security Council vetoes, has evolved into a more balanced relationship. Since the Ukraine conflict, Russia's growing dependence on Iranian drones and weaponry has given Iran a role as a primary arms provider. Additionally, Iranians, adept at navigating sanctions, have been guiding Russians in dodging similar constraints.

Currently, the Russia-Iran dynamic centers on two nations aiming to capitalize on each other's strengths and shortcomings, despite their competition in various markets. A standout aspect of this developing bond is Iran's newfound influence, unseen in the last two centuries of Russo-Persian ties. This influence is not only due to Russia's defense requirements but also from external elements, such as the possibility of Iran brokering a fresh Nuclear Deal with the West. Russia's discounted oil sales could be further impacted if Iranian oil and gas reenter global markets, pushing prices down straining Russia's finances and impact its military operations.

Outside factors could amplify or diminish the ties between Russia and Iran. China is a prime example, its immense industrial might could easily replace Iran as Russia's top arms dealer and meet Moscow's pressing military demands. Additionally, being the primary energy buyer for both Russia and Iran, China could also significantly influence their energy relations.

While the conflict in Ukraine transformed the Russo-Persian ties from a lopsided relation to one of mutual dependence, however variety of internal and external factors such re-implementation of Iran Nuclear Deal, Israel's and Arab states' reaction to the Russo-Persian collaboration, China's stance on the Ukraine war and arms supply to Russia might indicate a new direction for the Russia-Iran military partnership.

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