

Russian ambassador to Tehran: More nations to reject dollar in global trade

IRAN DAILY - As the recently appointed Russian ambassador to Iran, how would you outline the primary objectives for collaboration between Tehran and Moscow in this new era?

ALEXEY DEDOV - Well, I should say that at the current moment, the dynamics of relations and cooperation between Russia and Iran are very high. Cooperation is developing in many fields. First of all, our leaders and other officials have close contacts. Only this year, the presidents of the two countries have communicated by phone three times. There is a very good exchange on the level of security councils, too. Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation Nikolai Platonovich Patrushev visited Iran in November and his Iranian counterpart Ali Shamkhani paid a visit to Moscow in February. A good exchange of views has also taken place between the foreign ministers of the two countries. For example, Iranian Foreign Minister Amir-Abdollahian paid a visit to Russia at the end of March. At the end of last year, a friendship group representing Russia's State Duma, led by Vladimir Abdualievich Vasilyev, had a visit to Iran. Russian State Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin traveled to Iran in January. And hopefully, in the near future, Speaker of the Iranian Parliament Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf will visit Russia. So, there are many manifestations of cooperation.

In the economy, there are also quite good figures. For example, two years ago, growth was 40%. Last year it was 20%; and our trade turnover reached \$4.86 billion. Of course, the leading role in this process belongs to the joint Inter-Governmental Commission, which is led by Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak and Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji. The productive meetings of the commission were held at the end of October and early November in Grozny. In the field of cooperation on projects, of course, the leading one is the construction of phases two and three of the Bushehr nuclear power plant.

In the culture and education field, Russia has increased the number of scholarships to 300 people. There was also some cultural cooperation including film festivals. Russian artists have participated in the film and music section of Iran's Fajr Festival. A choir music festival was held in Saint Petersburg. In the sports field, a football match was held between Isfahan's Sepahan and Russia's Zenit teams. Other mixed games were also held. Therefore, the bilateral relations are in multidimensional areas.

As for priorities, I think we shall continue development cooperation in all these

fields. Of course, I agree with the opinion of our Iranian partners who express their satisfaction and the level of our political cooperation in various fields. But they encourage us and themselves to put bigger stress on the economic field because some additional work is needed to further improve in this direction. Five billion dollars, of course, is not enough. The potential of our countries is much bigger.

When might we anticipate the conclusion and ratification of the long-term bilateral agreement between Iran and Russia? Would you expand on its significant features and the various aspects it encompasses?

Well, there is quite intensive work on this agreement. It's supervised by our leaders, by our ministers of foreign affairs. Of course, since the signing, I would not disclose the precise contents of these documents, but I should say that it is a very solid agreement that covers almost all aspects of cooperation between Iran and Russia. And the role of these documents in our presumption is that they should give long-term additional dynamics to the development of cooperation between the two countries, which has a multifaceted character. It is a very big and good solid document for the long-term prospect.

In light of Russian presidential aide, Mr. Igor Levitin's recent remarks in Tehran on the possibility of multilateral economic contracts in the region alongside existing bilateral relations between Tehran and Moscow, in which domains do you envision the proposed multilateral cooperation to be occurring, and which regional nations could potentially partake in these mutually beneficial ventures?

At the beginning of April, Mr. Levitin visited Tehran. He had very good and substantial meetings with Vice President Mokhber, Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani, and, of course, with Transportation Minister Mehrdad Bazrpash, as well as meeting in the Iranian Parliament. As I said, they are very constructive and very substantial. And the main topic was the International North-South Transport Corridor. As you know, it leads from Russia, through the region of the Baltic Sea, and from Leningrad to India, via Iran's territory. The North-South Corridor has three routes that cross the west coast of the Caspian Sea, and then directly through the Caspian Sea and the eastern route. Of course, each of them goes through Iran to Bandar Abbas, and from there to India by sea. So now, what is the main point of the agenda? To reach the maximum capacity of the western route. The discussion is about the construction of a railway

from Azerbaijan's Astara to Iran's Astara, to the city of Rasht. As you know, the Qazvin-Rasht railway was constructed several years ago. So, this would enable transportation from the Leningrad district to Bandar Abbas, wholly by rail transport. This will greatly save time.

How does Moscow perceive the recent developments in regional dynamics, particularly concerning the Iran-Saudi Arabia accord and the normalization of relations among regional countries and Syria? Is there a potential for trilateral collaboration between Iran, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, and how might a substantive agenda be established in this context?

Of course, we welcome the decision to restore diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. And of course, we are proceeding from the fact that it will greatly improve the entire regional situation in the Middle East and even wider. We were supporting this process. We contact our Iranian friends and Saudi friends, and encourage them to bring their positions closer. As for Syria, of course, these trends are positive in our presumption. You know that Saudi Arabia invited President Assad to the summit of the Arab League. And of course, Russia has always stood for the return of Syria to the Arab family because this would be a great contribution to stability in the Middle East.

Regarding the trilateral cooperation between Iran, Saudi Arabia and Russia, we should see how the bilateral relations and the normalization process between Saudi Arabia and Iran develop, and what projects and plans would be exercised. And proceeding from this, when the cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia reaches the practical stage, we will see where Russia can join these two countries to make the projects more effective. But for this, we have to wait some time for the practical aspect of these collaborations.

The role of Chinese mediation in the recent Iran-Saudi Arabia agreement has notably captured Western attention due to China's growing influence in the Middle East. What is Russia's stance on this development, and how might its Middle Eastern policies adapt to these emerging regional trends?

Of course, we welcome the important role which China played in the normalization of relations between two great countries, Iran and Saudi Arabia. The primary agreements or understanding were reached between the Secretaries of Security Councils of Iran and Saudi Arabia at the beginning of March in Beijing. They didn't

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lose their impetus and contacts continued through the meetings. Also in Beijing, two ministers of foreign affairs, Mr. Amir-Abdollahian and Mr. Bin Farhan held talks. And, of course, this is positive and we welcome these developments. As for Western countries, they feel disappointed with the normalization because they consider the situation of tension between countries favorable for their political interests. They were satisfied with the Iranian and Saudi confrontation. They used this opportunity and, of course, they are disappointed that these confrontations came to an end.

Recently, we have been hearing about de-dollarization, or reducing the role of the U.S. dollar in regional and international exchanges. Russia has also managed to reduce the role of the U.S. dollar in its economic relations with some of its partners, including China and India. How serious are these matters and how do you envision the process ahead?

Well, as you know, our economy, like the Iranian economy, is under sanctions. So, under such conditions, I think, it's quite a logical decision to start de-dollarizing our external trade operation. We must take into consideration the difficulties which both countries face in dollar transactions because of sanctions. Of course, it concerns not only Russia and Iran, but our trade partners. Actually, by taking into consideration the political situation, we think the de-dollarization process will continue and widen. Of course, it will weaken the United States' position as the unique holder of the instrument of international accounting mechanisms. We see that this process is expanding. Even the French president suggested that Europe should minimize its dependence on the U.S. dollar's extraterritoriality.

The contract concerning the official financial mes-

saging systems of Iran and Russia (SEPAM and SPFS) in February 2023 is said to potentially extend and connect to the Eurasian countries. Could you elaborate on this?

The process is going on and it's very positive. We are now prioritizing financial and banking cooperation with Iran, given our common focus on ensuring the sustainability of bilateral payment and settlement infrastructure, independent of intermediaries from third countries. Work on the creation of sustainable payment and settlement infrastructure is continuing through relevant agencies, and we strongly hope that it will bring practical results.

The public and experts seem to believe that Russia is not playing an active role vis-à-vis the recent developments in the South Caucasus and perceive this as passivity amid escalating tensions. Has Russia taken or is considering any measures to restore peace in the region?

I should say that we are active participants in the normalization of South Caucasus. Let me mention the format 3+3 with the participation of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. That's one troika; and Russia, Iran and Turkey form another troika. We strongly hope that in the foreseeable future, a meeting under the framework of this format will finally take place. Now it's Tehran's turn to hold such a meeting and, hopefully, it will offer a practical contribution. Of course, we are directly participating in the process of normalization between Armenia and Azerbaijan as well.

Western responses to proposed peace plans for Ukraine appear incoherent; they rarely tend to welcome them warmly. Why is that? And how do you foresee the future of the war in Ukraine? Is an imminent resolution plausible, or should we brace for a protracted conflict?

Moreover, how might a viable resolution be attained, and what is Russia's perspective on a potential intermediary and peace plan on Ukraine? What should a peace plan bring for Ukraine?

First of all, I should note that, so far, we do not see the situation as being ripe for a peaceful transition of this process. The destructive line of the "Collective West," led by Washington, remains unchangeable. The task is to deal Russia a strategic defeat on the battlefield, with the hands of Ukraine. They want to force Russia to give up, because of the independent policies exercised by our countries, which are based on the principle of international law and equality of international politics. We see and hear from Kyiv, Washington, and Brussels, the statements that this military action should not stop and the country should not come to negotiations. We proposed negotiations, but the West and Ukraine didn't want to listen. As for the principles [of peace], we have formulated them. First of all, it is the cessation of hostilities by Ukrainian Armed Forces and the cessation of armed deliveries by the West. Then the withdrawal of international mercenaries from the territory of this state, neutral and non-bloc status of Ukraine, the refusal of Ukraine's request to join NATO and the European Union, the confirmation of the non-nuclear status of Ukraine, and the recognition by Kyiv and the international community of new territorial realities. In the meantime, the demilitarization and de-nazification of Ukraine, the protection of the rights of the Russian-speaking people, as well as the rights of national minorities, and the cancelation of sanctions are also the case. These are quite acceptable conditions. There is nothing excessive in it. They are quite reasonable. This is how we see it.

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