

Raisi leads the charge for Russia-Iran-China's 'new world order'

OPINION Amidst all the sadness and grief over the loss of Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi, let's take a moment to showcase the critical path he helped forge toward a new global order. In the nearly three years since Raisi ascended to the Iranian presidency, Eurasian integration and the drive toward multipolarity have become fundamentally conducted by three major actors: Russia, China, and Iran, which, by no accident, are the three top "existential threats" to the hegemonic power.

Increased Eurasian integration

On May 19 in Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin invited Iran's ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali to be at the table in an impromptu meeting with the cream of the crop of Russia's Defense Team.

The key message portrayed was that Moscow has Tehran's back, and Russia completely supports the stability and continuity of government in Iran, which is already fully guaranteed by Iran's constitution and its detailed contingencies for a peaceful transition of power under even unusual circumstances.

As we are now deep into total hybrid war mode — bordering on Hot — across most of the planet, the three civilization states shaping a new system of international relations could not be more obvious. Russia-Iran-China (RIC) are already interlinked via bilateral, comprehensive strategic partnerships; they are members of both BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and their modus operandi was fully unveiled for the whole global majority to examine at Putin's crucial summit with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing last week.

In short, none of the three Asian powers will allow the other partners to be destabilized by the usual suspects.

A stellar record

Late President Raisi and his top diplomat, foreign minister Hossein Amir-Ab-

dollahian, left a stellar legacy.

Under their leadership, Iran became a member of BRICS, a full member of the SCO, and a major stakeholder in the Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU). These are the three key multilateral organizations shaping the road to multipolarity. Iran-Russia relations reached the next level in trade and military-political cooperation. Two years ago, Putin and Raisi agreed on a comprehensive bilateral treaty. The draft of the core document is now ready and will be signed by Iran's next president, expanding the partnership even further.

A hypersonic joint statement

The overarching charter of what a new system entails was revealed at the recent landmark Putin-Xi summit via a stunning 10-chapter joint statement, over 12,000 words long, with "cooperation" appearing no less than 130 times. This document can correctly be interpreted as a joint hypersonic manifesto comprehensively blowing up Washington's artificial "rules-based international order".

Iran, sanctioned to death for over four decades, is now learning directly from China and Russia about their efforts to destroy "decoupling" narratives as well as the effect of a tsunami of Western sanctions on Russia.

Iranian Acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani had previously remarked that thanks to Iran's "exceptional geo-



The illustration shows the former Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi (R), the current Chinese President Xi Jinping (C), and the current Russian President Vladimir Putin, each in front of one of the landmarks of their respective countries.
● THECRADLE

political location" reaching West Asia, the Persian Gulf, the Caspian Sea region, and wider Eurasia, Iran can contribute to the "economic growth and economic potential" of all regional players. Putin's visit to China in May included a visit to the northeastern powerhouse Harbin — which has strong geographical/historical links to Russia. A giant China-Russia Expo attracted over 5,000 commercial firms. It's not far-fetched to imagine an equally successful Russia-Iran Expo at a Caspian port.

Promethean project

What links Russia, China, and Iran is, first and foremost, an emerging framework designed by sovereign civilizational states. The fateful passing of president Raisi won't alter the big picture in the least.

We're in the middle of a long process against an environment conditioned for decades by pain and fear. The process has gained immense traction these past few years, starting with the official launch of the New Silk Roads in 2013.

The New Silk Roads, now known as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is a Promethean project that is as much geopolitical as geoeconomic. In parallel came the gradual expansion of the SCO's role as an economic cooperation mechanism.

The Iranian bombing of ultra-protected Israeli territory with perfect precision — as a response to a terror attack on its diplomatic consulate in a third country — sent a crystal-clear, game-changer message, completely understood by the global majority: the hegemon's power in West Asia is coming to an end.

Losing the Rimland is anathema to perfectly American geopolitics. It must be back in its control as it knows how important it is.

New direction

The angel of history, though, is pointing in a new direction — to China, Russia, and Iran as the natural sovereigns shaping the re-emergence of the Heartland. Concisely, these three sovereigns have the epistemological level, will, creativity, organization skills, vision, and tools of power to realize a true Promethean project.

It may sound like a miracle, but the present leadership in all three states shares this common understanding and endeavor.

The full article first appeared on The Cradle.

Iran-Pakistan relations after Ebrahim Raisi

By Taimur Shamil
Scholar

OPINION

Former Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi and foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian's deaths in a helicopter crash are being mourned in Pakistan as well as Iran, two neighboring countries with close relations. This was shocking for many in Pakistan because of the close relations and also because this news came at a point where Raisi paid a visit to Islamabad last month in May to improve relations that were thought to be under strain after recent border skirmishes.

Raisi's recent visit to Pakistan came at a crucial point in the backdrop of regional dynamics. Iran is facing various political pressures domestically as well as internationally. The recent terror wave, missile strikes with Israel, domestic and international pressures, conflicts with the neighbors, and sanctioned economy have taken a toll on Iran's strategic outlook. Iran's neighbor, Pakistan, too faces multiple challenges; increasing terrorist attacks, strained relations with Afghanistan over terrorism, aggressive posturing from the Modi government in India, and a fragile economy with an aggravating inflation rate and energy crisis. These common issues have brought Iran and Pakistan closer to seeking avenues for cooperation that can potentially address mutual security, economic, and geopolitical concerns.

Raisi's visit was important and timely. Political observers saw it as an attempt to improve and mend ties with Pakistan after recent skirmishes that saw missile strikes from both sides citing

terror outfits operating in respective countries. Another perspective behind Raisi's visit was the pressure that Iran is facing internationally, especially after its recent rift with Israel.

Regionally, Iran is attempting to attract alliances and keep any political stalemates at bay. Its détente with Saudi Arabia is an example of how Iran is trying to avoid political deadlocks and continue with its strategic goals. It is important to observe that Iran's relations with China have strengthened over the years, with China's promising investment of \$400 billion over the span of 25 years, a cooperation agreement signed in 2021. This has given Iran a new strategic outlook. Raisi's visit to Pakistan came in this backdrop; to explore new avenues for cooperation and to address the irritants in the relationship. Pakistan, while observing the regional changes, believes that Iran is a neighbor that needs to be engaged positively. Pakistan and Iran share approximately 562 miles of border which tends to provide trade potential but is also marred by security issues. The border tensions aren't new and have their roots in history as well as recent past. However, there is much in common that needs to be explored. Both sides have deep cultural roots, as Pakistan is believed to host the largest Shia population outside of Iran. This provides Iran with significant cultural and religious affiliation and roots in Pakistani society and culture. This gives Pakistan an exceptional strategic space in larger Iranian, as well as regional, geopolitics.

Pakistan and Iran relations are generally peaceful with no major setbacks or fractures. However, terrorism is an irritant in the relationship that undermines the security of both states and



Iran's late president Ebrahim Raisi (front) and Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif (L) jointly inaugurate the Mand-Pishin border market by planting a tree sapling in southeast Iran on May 18, 2023.
● IRNA

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regional security at large.

Iran continues to grapple with the Jaish-al-Adl terrorist outfit that it believes operates from Pakistan. Pakistan also believes that Baloch terrorist groups like Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) and others are part of a terrorist network based in Iran. Nonetheless, the discourse of terror networks continues to be highlighted. A common threat for both Iran and Pakistan is the Islamic State of Khorasan (ISKAP); a terror group that operates in the region with scattered presence in Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

Beyond security, there are several other issue areas between Pakistan and Iran. Economic integration remains at the top. Much has been speculated about the bilateral trade. However, there are multiple areas where Pakistan and Iran lack integration and need special emphasis. For instance, Pakistani Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif and Iranian president Raisi inaugurated the first border market at the Mand-Pishin border crossing at the Pakistan-Iran border in 2023. This certainly was a step forward in realizing that Pakistan and Iran have great potential for trade. Estimated bilateral trade volume, which is currently \$2 billion, can reach somewhere around \$10 billion. Still, this is the first trade point that will be followed by five more border markets. Nevertheless, the market still lacks state-of-the-art infrastructure, business-linked amenities, market-focused trade, and business facilities that can support the potential for trade originally envisaged.

Moreover, smuggling still remains one of the key areas that hampers formal trade and potential for business. One of the many reasons for this issue is

that the government-facilitated trade markets at the border crossings are a recent phenomenon as compared to the informal trade that has been going on between Pakistan and Iran. This has much to do with the local border-oriented trade culture that has been in practice for decades or rather, centuries. More or less similar is the case with the areas that border Pakistan and Afghanistan. The question there is not entirely the same but comparable to the Pakistan-Iran border. Therefore, a comprehensive mechanism that can link the Iranian and Pakistan markets, in fact, lacks proper groundwork and comprehensive economic strategy from both sides.

Another area that lacks proper economic strategy is that there is a perception that policies made at the official level have limited input from the business community itself. The commercial routes, economic zones, and border markets must be chalked around a rigorous and well-thought-over trade strategy seeking substantial input from the trade community. Any initiative that sidesteps the business community would shake the desired economic goals.

Much is being speculated about Iran's foreign policy after Raisi. It can be assumed that not much is likely to change in Iran's foreign policy approach or its general foreign policy conduct. Iran's foreign policy regarding neighbors is likely to continue the same way; amicable and positive. Late Raisi's attempt to improve relations with Pakistan would be remembered as a positive step in the right direction for bilateral relations and regional peace.

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