

## UNDERSTANDING THE REVITALIZATION OF RUSSIAN-IRANIAN RELATIONS

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The intensity of Moscow's current contact with Tehran is unprecedented in Russia's post-Soviet history. Both the Russian and Iranian authorities are determined to create a solid foundation for bilateral dialogue, and their dedication to deepening ties is largely determined by their geopolitical interests. Yet despite the potential for improvement, there are serious obstacles that may hamper or even halt cooperation.

### Turning a New Page

- The beginning of a new period in Russian-Iranian relations was marked by the return to the Kremlin of President Vladimir Putin in 2012.
- The Arab uprisings that began in 2011 left Moscow with a shrinking political and economic presence in the Middle East. This outcome demanded that Moscow be more active in maintaining contacts with Tehran.
- In 2014, tensions between Russia and the West stemming from the Ukraine crisis also drove the Kremlin to strengthen cooperation with Iran.
- The Iranian authorities see Moscow's attempts to improve relations with the Islamic Republic as a long-awaited chance to form a close partnership with Russia.
- Iran has gradually become disillusioned with the possibility of a quick and complete lifting of the punitive economic measures imposed on it. This has compelled Iranian authorities to be more active in their dialogue with countries—like Russia—that are ready to cooperate even in the face of sanctions.
- Tehran may also consider ties with Russia to be a plan B in case negotiations over its nuclear program fail or do not lead to the results it desires.

### What's Next?

- A settlement of the nuclear issue would not have a significantly negative effect on the Russian-Iranian dialogue; the two sides would remain interested in cooperation on a wide array of issues.
- External factors will continue to create room for cooperation between Russia and Iran. But the formation of any comprehensive strategic alliance with Tehran is still not in Moscow's interest because it could harm Russian dialogue with others, including Israel and Gulf Cooperation Council countries.
- Russian-Iranian economic cooperation has limits. To capitalize on opportunities available, Moscow and Tehran have to determine to what extent and in what areas real economic cooperation is possible.
- Russia and Iran must determine in which political spheres their collaboration makes sense and can be effective—in other words, where they can go beyond mere consultations. On certain issues, the Russian and Iranian positions are close, but it is not certain that the two will agree.
- Without clear answers to these economic and political questions, further progress on the dialogue between Moscow and Tehran is unlikely.

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