

Experts: Russia's refusal to participate in Peace project - one more proof of Moscow's distancing from Tehran

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According to some experts, Russia's refusal to participate in a joint gas project with Iran shows the change in Moscow's political course on Tehran, but according to others - Russia's reorientation to more profitable projects.

"Cooperation [of Russia] with Iran came with too much roll in favor of Iran, the President of the Institute of Middle Eastern Studies Yevgeny Satanovsky told Trend in an e-mail. - Tehran will have to wean from it - the list of Russia's partners is much greater than Iran's, and Moscow can choose profitable projects, and not grasp at everything as it was in 1990s. "

Late last week it became known that Russia refused to participate in a large-scale geopolitical project - building a gas pipeline Iran-Pakistan-India, known as "Peace". Russia's ambassador to Pakistan Andrei Budnik said that "no Russian company is interested in the implementation of the gas project between Pakistan and Iran."

According to Satanovsky, Peace gas pipeline project is risky, and its economic effectiveness raises serious questions because of the terror threats on the road.

"Instability in Pakistan, including in the border area with Iran, is growing, he said. - Baluchi separatism, activation of the Punjabi Taliban, a clear failure of the coalition in Afghanistan are the main reasons for refusal to participate in the construction of the pipeline."

Satanovsky believes that another argument against it is that India has not yet confirmed the readiness to accept the pipeline in its territory and does not participate in the project.

"India always calculates the economic risks in large-scale projects, he said. - If Delhi with its energy demand outside the project, then something is wrong with the project."

Peace Gas Pipeline Project, with a cost of \$7.6 billion, is designed to transport Iranian gas to Pakistan. The gas will be supplied from South Pars field. The initial capacity of pipeline will be 22 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year, which is expected to be increased to 55 billion cubic meters.

The length of this pipeline should reach 2,700 kilometers, with 1,100 kilometers passing through the territory of Iran, 1,000 km - Pakistan and 600 km falls on the territory of India. The diameter of the pipeline will be 1,400 millimeters, but in case of India's refusal to

participate in the project, its diameter will be 1,050 mm. According to an agreement, the construction was to begin in mid-2010 and will last approximately five years.

Iran has already built 900 km of the pipeline with a diameter 56 inches from the gas processing plant Asalue to the city of Iranshahr.

In 2008, India announced its withdrawal from the project, citing the reasons for the need to resolve the question of the price of gas transit with Pakistan in order to fully participate in the gas project.

According to U.S. expert **Ted Galen Carpenter**, the decision on the gas pipeline is the latest sign of Russia's changing policy regarding Iran.

"The Kremlin has become increasingly nervous about Tehran's behavior, especially with respect to the nuclear issue, and is beginning to react accordingly," Carpenter, Vice President for Defense and Foreign Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, wrote in an e-mail to Trend.

According to him, Moscow has gone from being a generally reliable friend and commercial partner of Iran to adopting a much more ambivalent posture.

"Russia's greater receptivity to strong UN economic sanctions and the apparent retreat on the willingness to sell S-300 missiles are other indications of a shift in attitude, said Carpenter. Bilateral relations have not yet reverted to the mutual hostility that existed when the Shah was in power, but they are now decidedly less cordial than they have been in recent years."

Russia, who formerly opposed against the introduction of tough new measures against Iran and insisted on a diplomatic solution to problems, has joined the United States, Britain, France and Germany in their support for the IAEA resolution, however, insisting on conducting "dual path" strategy with regards to Iran, involving the combination of sanctions and negotiations.

On Sept. 22, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev signed a decree banning the transfer of S-300 missiles, armored vehicles, combat aircrafts, helicopters and ships to Iran. This is envisaged by a presidential decree on measures to implement UN Security Council resolution 1929 dated June 9, 2010. The contract to supply Iran with five battalions of S-300 PMU-1 was signed in late 2007. The deal amounted to \$800 million.

Professor Kamran Dadkhah believes the relationship between Russia and Iran is a complicated one.

"On the one hand, Russia does not want a strong or nuclear Iran. On the other hand, Iran is confrontational towards the United States and a thorn on the side of America. Russia considers this behavior advantageous to its interest and would encourage it, albeit underhandedly," Dadkhah, professor at U.S. Northeastern University.

According to him, Economically, Russia has benefited from the animosity between Iran and the United States. "On the issue of the Caspian Sea, Russia has practically deprived Iran of its rights under 1921 and 1940 agreements, said Dadkhah. - Russia has also sold airplanes and military equipment to Iran although the volume of trade hasn't been considerable. It also took over of the building the nuclear facility in Bushehr".

But according to him, Russia is a player on the international arena. It is not the superpower it was before the collapse of the Soviet Union, but it strives to gain a respectable place among the nations.

"Hence, it is important for Russia not to be seen as being cozy with a "rogue state" like Iran, Dadkhah said. - The relationship with the United States is far more important for Russia than its trade and relationship with Iran."

He believes that Thus, Russia will play a double game: It will keep a relationship with Iran but it will not be an expanding relationship. Whenever, the United States put pressure on Russia, Russians will back down.

Iran, on the other hand, has benefited the ruling click to claim a "foreign enemy" and grab and entrench their absolute power, but this practice has been detrimental to the national interest of Iranian people, he said.

"The country has been deprived of the ability to choose the best alternative or trade with the most beneficial partners, said Dadkhah. As a result countries like China, Russia, the United Arab Emirates, and now even Turkey and India, have taken advantage of the situation and have benefited their economies at the expense of Iranians."

Iranian expert on international issues Hasan Behishtipur doubts about this news, saying that if there are any changes in Russian policy towards Iran, the new policy must be announced by the representatives of the Russian leadership, but not at the level of Russian embassy in Pakistan.

"The Russian embassy can not help but be aware that resolution 1929 does not envisage actions against Iran's energy sector, Behishtipur told Trend in a telephone conversation. - Despite that the United States, Europe, Canada, Australia and Japan have introduced energy sanctions against Iran, Russia's policy differs from the policies of these countries."

In addition to inspections of Iranian ships and shipping restrictions in the country, the resolution 1929 envisages sanctions on Iranian banks abroad if they are alleged to have relation to the development of Iran's nuclear or missile programs. The resolution also calls for vigilance in carrying out transactions involving Iranian banks, including the Central Bank.

Adopted by the U.S. Congress on June 24, the bill on unilateral anti-Iran measures and additional sanctions approved by the foreign

ministers of 27 EU countries in July are aimed mainly at Iran's energy sector and include freezing investments in oil and gas sector of the country, a ban on the transfer of industrial technologies and equipment, as well as provision of specialized services.

According to Behishtipur, if Russia would cooperate with the U.S. in the field of energy sanctions, it would be a new policy of Moscow.

"We need to wait for such a statement by the official representatives of Russia, he said. - I think that the statement was made by the embassy which did not have enough information. But if Russia really intends to implement the new policy, then, making statements in such form, it assesses the possible reaction. "

T.Jafarov contributed to the article.