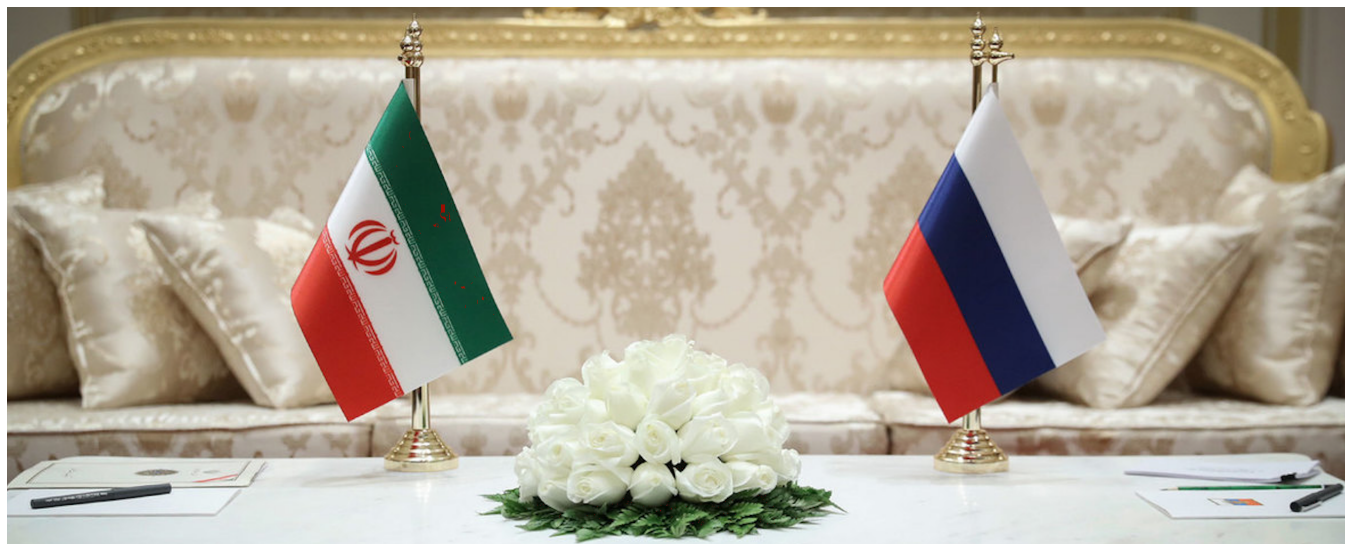


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IRAN–RUSSIA TREATY REFLECTS NEW LEGAL FOUNDATION FOR STRATEGIC COOPERATION



From Russia's perspective, the Western bid to restore UN sanctions on Iran is "neither legitimate nor lawful". Washington's withdrawal from the JCPOA and Europe's failure to fulfill its commitments render such actions invalid. Moscow's stance is rooted in both legal principles of nonproliferation and its strategic partnership with Tehran, which aims to counter unilateral Western pressure. The new treaty is an important step in updating the legal foundation of Iran–Russia relations. It does not constitute a mutual defense pact but rather a flexible framework for comprehensive cooperation. The agreement strengthens Iran's diplomatic leverage in a multipolar world where regional states increasingly pursue balanced relations with major powers.

How do you assess the legal and diplomatic basis for the recent attempt to trigger the snapback mechanism on Iran at the UN?

From a Russian standpoint, the effort to revive UN SC sanctions against Iran is neither legitimate, not legal. Snapback was designed as an insurance mechanism for Western participants of the JCPOA that they would have leverage on Iran in case it violated its provisions. The sad irony of this story is that no mechanism was developed to guarantee that those Western states would stay committed to their obligations under the deal. In a situation when the United States left the JCPOA, and the E3 could not meet Iran's expectations regarding its economic benefits promised under the deal, they have no right to trigger snapback. This is why Russia denies Western claims that UN SC sanctions on Iran have been restored. And Western diplomats know that it was an unfair move on their part; it is just that they didn't want to miss an opportunity to put additional pressure on Iran.

To what extent is Russia's opposition to the snapback linked to its broader geopolitical interests in Iran and the Middle East?

Russian position on the snapback is based on three factors. I'll name them without putting in any order; they are all equally significant. One: as a depositary state of the NPT and guarantor of the nonproliferation regime, Moscow seeks balanced, fair and legally grounded diplomatic measures to ensure nuclear nonproliferation. Military attacks, threats to use force, and unilateral sanctions, as well as arbitrary attempts to impose UN SC sanctions, work against this goal and only motivate states to develop nuclear weapons. Two: Iran is Russia's strategic partner, and Moscow is motivated to safeguard Tehran from pressure that is unfairly put on Iran by the West. Russia and Iran are on the same boat when it comes to resisting Western pressure. Three: UN SC sanctions that E3 wanted to reimpose on Iran have to do with nuclear and military cooperation. Both are important for Russia-Iran bilateral relations. For as long as Iran cooperates with the IAEA, Russia sees no reason why it should limit its cooperation with Iran.

From your perspective, how does the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty change the strategic balance in Eurasia, particularly in the context of Iran–Russia relations?

The importance of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty should be neither underestimated, nor overestimated. Its primary task is to update the legal foundation of Russia-Iran cooperation and recognize that it has greatly improved since the previous treaty was concluded in 2001. The new treaty gives a new status to the parties and covers the potential spheres of cooperation more extensively. With that, one should notice that the treaty does not contain provisions on mutual defense: neither Russia, nor Iran is obliged to enter a military conflict if a third party starts military hostilities against one of them, but they must refrain from helping the aggressor and can consider ways of providing military assistance to their strategic partner based on their own capabilities. So when one speaks about the strategic balance in Eurasia, they should not confuse military alliances based on mutual defense obligations and strategic partnerships that consider military cooperation as an option, not as an obligation. This is what both Moscow and Tehran have agreed on, which means it suits their preferences and their vision for bilateral cooperation.

To what extent could this agreement alter Iran's diplomatic leverage vis-à-vis Western powers, especially in the face of sanctions and international pressure?

Since the Islamic Revolution, Iran has proclaimed Neither East, Nor West policy, which meant securing Tehran's sovereignty from major global powers. The more the relations between Iran and Western powers deteriorated, the more Tehran looked towards the East, meaning China and Russia. Its membership in SCO and BRICS has been one of the examples of the Eastern policy. There are voices in Iran who seek balance between East and West, but to the detriment of their ideals, the West itself does not leave Iran credible, viable option to develop relations based on mutual respect and concessions. Western leaders supported the war that Israel and the US waged against Iran, they put pressure on Iran at the IAEA and the UN Security Council, and all they want from Tehran is to cede its natural right under the NPT to have national enrichment program, not to say about other aspects of Iran's foreign and defence policies. Unlike the times when the Obama administration and its European partners demonstrated willingness to take into account Iran's interests and concerns, now we can see no appetite in the West for real



diplomacy with Iran. They don't leave Iran a choice to cooperate with them while protecting national interests and retaining dignity.

Do you think this agreement will encourage other regional actors to pursue similar strategic partnerships?

If one looks at West Asia and neighbouring countries, there's an overlap of strategic cooperation agreements between regional states and three global powers: United States, China, and Russia. Recently we observed the conclusion of a strategic agreement between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. This is how multipolarity plays out in the region: exclusive Cold War type alliances are being replaced by multi-vector strategic diplomacy, and states like Saudi Arabia, UAE and Turkiye (despite the fact that it is a NATO member) have demonstrated that they have successfully benefited from this shift.

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