

КАСПИЙСКИЙ РЕГИОН В ГЕОПОЛИТИЧЕСКОМ ПРОСТРАНСТВЕ

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN CENTRAL ASIA AND IRAN'S ROLE

Mehdi Sanaie
(Islamic Republic of Iran, Teheran)

The collapse of the Soviet Union at the beginning of the 1990's was regarded as a factor in the intensification of forming regional groups at the world level. At the same time, the viewpoint of regionalist analysts was also considered as one of the principal foundations of world order after the collapse of bipolar system. The rise of the five independent republics created new opportunities for cooperation in political, economic and cultural spheres in new circumstances. The neighboring countries such as Iran, Russia, Turkey, China, Pakistan and India which have strategic interests in the region also located at the front of creating more and new ties through bilateral, multilateral and regional relations with Central Asian republics. After the collapse of the past economic structures and disconnection of inter-regional ties, new independent countries of Central Asia sought to vary their economy and search new regional partners. Having rich energy sources and the necessity of searching new ways for transmitting them and also the necessity for revival and compilation of ethnic and national identity considering historical and ethnic components intensified this feeling for cooperation. This cooperation in the framework of various and occasionally inharmonic organizations formed with the presence of Russia and in the case of ECO (Economic Cooperation Organization) three countries of Turkey, Iran and Pakistan. In the second half of the 1990s Shanghai Cooperation Organization also appeared and was reinforced and developed.

Simultaneously, Central Asia republics dealt with establishment and development of their relations with great intraregional countries and their relations with these countries became the principal factor in the political, economic and cultural spheres in these republics. In this case, Iran's role also became significant. Iran and Central Asia have many ties and serious economic and cultural complementary grounds. At the same time that the development of some sections of Iran's relations with this region have been under effect of intraregional political relations but the existing potentials of cooperation and mutual requirements is the principal and determinant factor in this regard.

Regional cooperation in Central Asia has been encountered with successes and failures; and the reasons for that have been in the focal point of analysts. The main question is that what are the main reasons and causes for cooperation in Central Asia and in which frameworks are this cooperation explainable and what is Iran's position as a great regional country?

Theoretical Framework: new needs and necessity for cooperation

Theoretically, international relations field was mainly under effect of two main approaches: idealism (particularly between two world wars) and realism (particularly from the beginning of 1940s). These two approaches tried to analyze every thing with great concepts like "peace, ideas, interests and power". But under the effect of new facts and the successes of "functionalist" theories in the social science, some thinkers of this field tried to pay attention to "objective and real needs and necessities of the new world" instead of macro theories and greater concepts such as "peace and war".

From this viewpoint, instead of that states seek to destroy the foundation of conflict, war and armed rivalry (the matter that is not possible) it is better to satisfy existing needs at the lower and more limited levels through establishment of non-political and participatory

organizations in scientific, technical, economic, social and cultural sections. Naturally, establishment of such limited functional organizations in such sections as production and distribution of energy, transportation and medicine is easier than creating great political organizations that restrict the national sovereignty of states to which the states do not surrender and as a result they will be inefficient even if be created. But continuous development of organizations that are created for satisfying scientific and objective needs and have special functions can persuade states to extend cooperation and even admission of limits for their sovereignty because of the lack of sensitiveness to these organizations.

Therefore, there is such a hope that as the result of increasing the realm of kinds of functional communications, ties and organizations that fold the national borders, national institutions change gradually and cooperation became the dominant factor in bilateral, regional and international levels. The experiences of Europe from the 1970s and the South and East Asian countries from 1980s and also the North America show this viewpoint.

Generally, from 1970s the theories of "regional cooperation and integration" were considered seriously as the result of functionalism and then neo-functionalism theories. But before that also in the idealist theories a serious attention was paid to cooperation. In those theories, the issue was mainly considered legally and institutionally; and under the title of "federalism school", cooperation was considered as the result of compilation of legal rules and establishment of legal institutions.

Later in the 1960s cooperation issue was looked at from the "communication" theory viewpoint. From this approach, integration and cooperation process was considered on the basis of exchanges between states such as trade, tourism, communications and immigration. This theory could only inform us of a certain level of cooperation in a certain region or between a series of states but it could not explain its cause or provide recommendations and solutions for reinforcing it.

Therefore, it is only possible in the framework of functionalist theories that we can regard the cooperation and integration of the countries of a region as a "process" and as an "ultimate stage". Later, these theories themselves as the result of extreme emphasis on needs and functions and the lack of consideration for the role of elites, decision-makers and political institutions were criticized and the new school of "neo-functionalism" tried to correct it by adding these factors.

We conclude from these disputes that objective and real needs of the nations and states of a region which are resulting from the reality of neighboring and nearness or locating in a common geographical, political, cultural and economic sphere, create a series of problems, troubles and interests that all of those states have common interests in solving them and cooperation with each other for exploiting its interests. This very matter makes it necessary to create communications at bilateral and multilateral levels and to create mechanisms, organizations and common structures for them. Naturally, if this issue be reinforced by common factors such as history, culture and the will of elites and decision-makers of political system and harmonic political trends, then it can convert cooperation to an economic and political integration in an evolutionary process.

Neo-functional theory gives us a suitable conceptual framework for regional cooperation in Central Asia. On this basis, necessities, mutual needs and common interests resulting from cooperation is the main reason for all actors for regional cooperation.

Central Asia: an ancient region with new necessities

After a short-period transition in the beginning of 1990s Central Asian republics who followed their economic development, security and political stability in cooperation with great powers and outside the region, in the mid of 1990s sought to reinforce regional cooperation and to establish new institutions for regional cooperation. A similar change in the Russian foreign policy in 1994 and paying more attention to the East and the region also reinforced regional cooperation in Central Asia. We can analyze the reinforcement of "Commonwealth Independent States" (CIS), Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Collective Security Organization and Eurasia Economic Community in the very direction.

We can regard present period and after 2003 as a new period of paying attention to regionalism in Central Asia. We can consider the greatest specialty of this period as the common outlook of regional countries to establishing security and political stability among members in the framework of membership in divergent unions and also the presence of feeling a common threat among regional countries.

Regional countries now have a share in a concern about alleged procedures towards globalization. It is felt that these procedures that provide social order may unstable them. It is while states and political orders are still the ultimate end of political loyalty in our region. Regional settings in addition to that are suitable instruments in the hands of states for preserving their political independence, are also a means for mobilizing political sources and upgrading national interests.

Nowadays, energy and its transmission, mutual economic needs, religious extremism, transit of narcotics, identity and cultural crisis in the globalization process and also establishing relationship between traditional and ethnic values with democratic trends in the framework of political structures are of the main problems for the regional countries which provide a list of existing necessities for regional cooperation.

In relation with integration, we can neither talk about a federal system that form among these republics and neighboring countries, nor expect from the private section of these countries and non-governmental communications without presence and wide influence of states. It is the mutual interests of cooperation, mutual needs and existent necessities that provide the necessary ground for elites and states.

Iran is also a powerful country in the neighboring of Central Asia which is on the one hand enjoys economic and cultural ties with this region and on the other hand, using its geopolitical position, it can be a suitable transit route for oil and gas pipelines and other commodities of Central Asia. Iran is the shortest, most secure and economically viable route to the sea.

In addition to that Iran links two Iranian and Islamic civilizations and enjoys historical and traditional common things with Central Asian republics it is the center of energy of the region and links the Gulf, the Caspian Sea, Central Asia and the Middle East. Iran while enjoys the forth rank of oil sources and the second rank of gas sources, has 6400 km border with the Caspian Sea and 1200 km border with the Gulf. So it is dominant over the Hormoz Strait through which 11 million barrels of oil are exported daily. Although the issue of exporting energy from this region is under effect of US-Iranian relations but Central Asia region cannot neglect the transit potential of Iran.

Iran's route is the shortest, most secure and economically viable way for transmitting energy and Iran's railways network can transit 20 million ton of commodities annually. On the other hand, Iran enjoys a key role in existing highways of the region namely Asian railway and north-south corridor.

Iranian and Central Asian economies can also complement each other. Although the amount of exchanges between Iran and Central Asian republics is now about one billion dollars and it seems that the Iranian part has not yet showed necessary success for exploiting existing capacities but there are many grounds for its growth.

Iran's integration with the region can be in the framework of bilateral cooperation, multilateral and also such organizations like ECO and SCO. It seems that one of main problems of existing regional organizations has been the power vacuum and extended rivalries and divergence among its main members. Existing common threats in the region has caused that during recent years Shanghai Cooperation Organization be in the focal point.

Simultaneous presence of Russia and China in this organization has increased its importance. Iran's membership as observer and its full membership can increase its efficiency.

The growth of Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Iran's membership in it can help solving the various paradoxes which there are in the economic, political and cultural spheres of the region.

Iran's membership in this organization can link a vast realm of the Middle East and the Gulf region in the frameworks of an organization and provide a special geo-strategic

position. On the other hand, existing rivalries in energy transmission can become a deep and constructive regional cooperation.

Iran's presence can also result in controlling religious extremism in the region and exchanging experiences. Iranian Islam and its relation with the region for about two decades has proved that Iran is following constructive methods for society and the principles conforming with political, social and economic development.

It seems that in recent years and with a more realistic outlook, the paying attention to regional cooperation has increased. This cooperation instead of being a kind of idealism and seeking a kind of federalism or a unitary community is looking at existing necessities for cooperation and mutual interests of which all regional actors will be benefited. This feeling of need for cooperation which is reinforced by feeling common threats may transform some former secret rivalries into cooperation if it be organized within institutional framework and suitable structures. It may ultimately cause the cooperative potentials reach the appearance and performance. Although every success in this cooperation is finally depending on development and growth of political, economic and social processes in every one of the regional countries proportionate with the world changing conditions.

КАСПИЙСКИЙ РЕГИОН НА РУБЕЖЕ ТЫСЯЧЕЛЕТИЙ: БОРЬБА ЗА РЕСУРСЫ И ТРАНСПОРТНЫЕ КОММУНИКАЦИИ

Ю.А. Зюзин
(Россия, г. Астрахань)

Сложившаяся ситуация в Каспийском регионе характеризуется тем, что интересы региональных и внерегиональных государств тесным образом переплетаются как в энергетической области, так и в сфере международной безопасности. Это в полной мере относится к России, США, Китаю и Европейскому Союзу (ЕС), которые оказались в числе ведущих игроков. Современные геополитические реалии показывают, что великие державы, с одной стороны, ищут пути налаживания сотрудничества на двусторонней и многосторонней основе со странами региона, в том числе в энергетической сфере и в сфере политической по устранению угрозы международного терроризма. С другой – в той или иной форме ведут большую игру, определяемую национальными, геополитическими и геоэкономическими интересами. В геополитическом понимании регион Прикаспия включает в себя гигантскую территорию на стыке Европы и Азии. В него принято включать пять собственно прикаспийских государств. Кроме того, «околокаспийскими» являются страны субрегионов Северного Кавказа, Закавказья и пространства Центральной Азии. Ряд экспертов причисляют к «каспийским» республикам Узбекистан и Грузию, а Анкара еще в 1997 г. провозгласила Турцию «прикаспийским государством». В целом, можно выделить следующие группы интересов. Первый круг – прибрежные прикаспийские страны (Казахстан, Туркменистан, Азербайджан, Россия, Иран). Эти государства пытаются решить внутренние проблемы за счет поставок энергосырья на мировой рынок. Второй круг – страны зоны транзита (Россия, Иран, Китай, Турция, Грузия, Армения, Украина, Румыния, Болгария и другие), которые пытаются извлечь дивиденды из транспортировки энергосырья по их территории. Третий круг – традиционные региональные игроки (Россия, Иран, Китай, Турция), которые стремятся максимально укрепить стратегические позиции в регионе. Четвертый круг – крупные мировые игроки (США, ЕС, Россия, Китай), рассматривающие Каспий как элемент геополитической борьбы за контроль над стратегически важными регионами мира»¹.

Процесс трансформации политики основных заинтересованных государств в Каспийском регионе можно условно разделить на три основных периода. Первый период (конец 80-х – первая половина 90-х гг.) характеризуется появлением на миро-