



**4th International Scientific Conference on Political, Economic  
and Cultural Relations of Georgia and Iran**

**Conference Proceedings**

December 20, 2018

Bakuriani, Hotel Villa Palace

# **Pathology of Political Relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Georgia (2000-2017)**

## **Abstract**

Primary focus was made on railway connecting Georgia and Iran that enables Georgia to have an opportunity of making contacts with the Near East countries. In parallel to activate the measures for the transport corridor, he talked on possibilities of enhancing economic relations; he claimed that Georgia is not using Iran's potential since Iran is not among the main trade partners for Georgia and currency transfers are not performed which is caused by political will.

Ajil also noted that Georgia has possibilities to get the products of Iran in the international market under the cover of Georgian products.

## **Introduction**

In the past, the British, Ottoman, and Russian empires have always had an effect on Iran's relations with the present Caucasus, but the collapse of the Soviet Union and that of the former security arrangements created a new geopolitical atmosphere in the easternmost region of Europe. Subsequently, it also provided a new breathing space for Iran to establish new relationships with newly independent units in the region. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, particular geopolitical conditions, legacy of socialism and strategic position of this territory, as well as the competition of regional and trans-regional powers, created dramatic changes in the region that influenced Iran-Georgia relations.

It seems that among the countries in the South Caucasus region, Iran has experienced the slightest success in its relations with Georgia. In other words, as the I.R Iran managed to expand its relations with two other regional countries, namely the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia, this did not happen in Georgia. Various reasons have been responsible for the lack of favorable development of political relations between the two sides, especially in the new millennium. The pathological study of this issue is the main subject of this research.

Therefore, the main question is: "What factors have politically undermined relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Georgia in the time period from 2000 to 2018?" The main hypothesis is that: "Iran's security-centered and anti-Western approach and its closer relations with Russia, on the one hand, and Georgia's Western-oriented approach to foreign policy, and in particular, its closer relations with the United States and the Israeli regime, as well as its membership of NATO, on the other hand, have been among the most important political factors undermining relations between the two sides."

## **1. Theoretical Framework: Neo-Liberalism**

The foreign policy pursued by Iran and Georgia can be analyzed and explained based on the logic and concepts of various theories and schools. However, it should be noted that any

single conventional international relations theory has not necessary capacity to analyze all the dimensions and general conditions governing relations between the two countries. Accordingly, one of the important issues in studying the foreign policy of Tehran and Tbilisi is to select an appropriate theoretical approach.

Iran, as a revolutionary country and Georgia as a Western-oriented country with transatlantic tendencies, have many common and conflicting interests. The two-state relations are based on mutual interests, and therefore, in the view of the author, the theory of neo-realism can be used for analyzing relations between the two sides in an appropriate manner.

The behavioral model of states in international relations is such that they are interested in competing to maintain and increase their power and security. According to Richard Betts: "Realists focus mostly on results rather than motivations" (Betts, 2015: 33). Realists emphasize that choices are always made between bad and worse, and for this reason, they focus on costs and not on impractical commitments and do not endanger their interests.

Until 2008, Georgia had tied its interests with the United States and the European Union, and felt that closer relations with the West would lead to its prosperity and to ensure its national security. But with the perception that Georgia and the Caucasus region have lost their former status in US foreign policy after the 2008 crisis, Georgia's leaders realized that they could not rely solely on Western support for their own security. Therefore, Tbilisi has adopted a realist approach to its relations with the regional countries. Because strategic and close relations between Tbilisi and Washington can provide only a part of Georgia's security and defense needs and cannot guarantee Georgia's vital security interests. In some cases, it might even have limited the power of Tbilisi to develop its relations with emerging regional powers. As a result, the goal of Georgia's diplomacy during the last decade has been to create a proper balance of power in the region and to promote it and to diversify its foreign policy portfolio, which is consistent with its national interests and regional balance of power.

The theory of neo-realism is complementary to the theory of realism. Realism is the most classical theory of international relations which seeks to explain international relations based on power. Power is considered the main and central concept and element for the realists. The theory of neo-realism is a theory that explains the political phenomena and the behavior of the units of the system based on the characteristics of the structure of the international system. The two concepts of power and national interests are considered as the most important features and key concepts of this theory, and constitute a basis for regulating relations. According to this theory, countries are the simplest, most rational, and most important actors on the global stage seeking more profits and benefits. (Waltz, 1979: 23)

Although the theory of neo-realism is not enough to understand Iran's foreign behavior and its relations with Georgia or vice versa, it is more effective than idealist school or some other theories. Because, post-revolutionary Iran, despite its special ideals, in many occasions, it has acted realistically as a nation-state in foreign policy. The Islamic Republic of Iran, along with paying much importance for culture, values and ideology, considers that its survival and national interests are also of utmost importance and in its relations with countries such as Georgia, it has undoubtedly acted and will act on the basis of national interests.

Another important point is that the foreign policy of Iran should be defined according to the specific circumstances of each region. For this reason, Iran's foreign policy is less ideological or idealist in Central Asia and the South Caucasus compared to the Middle East. (Vaezi, 2010: 64)

Therefore, in this article, the theoretical model of realism is studied as one of the new regionalist approach adopted by Tbilisi and Tehran.

## 2. Factors Constraining Iran- Georgia Relations

### 2-1. Georgia- Israel Relations

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the division of this empire among the commonwealth countries, Georgia also began to establish relations with other countries, including Israel, and on June 1, 1992 the two countries establish their diplomatic relations. These diplomatic relations continued in various fields and the officials of both countries frequently travelled to each other's countries. In the same vein, Israel was one of the first countries to help the Georgian government after the flood of 2015 in Tbilisi. Israel and Georgia agreed on a visa - free regime between themselves in 2013. These measures have had a positive impact on the tourism industry in Georgia. 100,000 Israelis in 2016 entered the country; this figure shows a 57% increase compared to that of 2015. But, with regard to the goals of this kind of cooperation, former Israeli ambassador to Georgia, Yuval Fuchs, says: "Sometimes small countries can be important under certain circumstances." (Rahenejat and Kabiri, 2018: 148)

Georgia seems to be of great economic, diplomatic and cultural significance for Israel. The important point is that Israelis' capital and technology are present in Georgia's economy and industry. This should be effective in formulating Tbilisi's regional policy, especially in its relations with Tehran, and the way Georgia looks to Israel in the international community.

#### Trade between Georgia and Israel (in million dollars)

Year	Export to Israel	Import from Israel	Year	Export to Israel	Import from Israel
2000	Below 1 million (535)	2	2008	3	39
2001	Below 1 million (537)	Below 1 million (802)	2009	2	71
2002	Below 1 million (778)	1	2010	4	14.5
2003	Below 1 million (980)	1	2011	3	28
2004	2	4.5	2012	36	32
2005	1	9	2013	2.5	31
2006	3	22	2014	4.5	41.5
2007	13	23	2015	6.5	22.5
2016	5	10			

Source: World Bank.org

The direct presence of Israel in Georgia and its investment in various fields in this country could negatively influence Iran's presence.

This trend will become clearer when economic agreements are signed in the form of multilateral treaties between the countries of the South Caucasus, including Georgia, and Israel; these treaties will definitely extend from economic issue to the security fields, which would not be desirable for the Islamic Republic of Iran, given the hostility between Israel and Iran.

Considering that Israel believes that the Islamic Republic of Iran aims at its total destruction, and has continued its nuclear and missile programs for military and hostile purposes, even after the conclusion of the nuclear deal; Israel is required to have some presence in the proximity of Iran's borders in case of a possible war with Tehran. Therefore, Georgia could be one of the countries with appropriate geographic location for Israel's military purposes. For this reason, Tel Aviv officials believe that they should have a physical presence as well as a military and logistical base in this country; also they should prevent any close and deep relation between Tehran and Tbilisi (Koulaei and Rezaei, 2017: 940).

Any Georgian-Israeli political security cooperation could lead to the lower level of positive influence and become a threat to Iran's national security, given the strategic security policy taken by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Hence, the development of relations between Israel and Georgia in political, economic and security dimensions would lead to divergence in relations between Tehran and Tbilisi

## 2-2. US- Georgia Relations

Georgia is located in a region that is of particular importance due to the existence of several political blocs in the North Caucasus and tensions between Azerbaijan and Armenia. This region has become a place for geopolitical competition between Russia and the United States to create an international order. (Lynch, 2006: 7). For this reason, the United States has prioritized the expansion of its relations with Georgia within its regional agenda. The development of economic relations between the two countries clearly illustrates this issue.

### Trade between the US and Georgia (in million dollars)

Year	Export to the US	Import from the US	Year	Export to the US	Import from the US
2000	7	69	2008	102	241
2001	8	63	2009	36	231
2002	13	68	2010	187	180
2003	15	90	2011	143	245
2004	21	110	2012	226	213
2005	26	148	2013	137	254
2006	58	129	2014	207	287
2007	149	184	2015	104	253
2016	68	213			

As the statistics show, the level of trade between the two countries is very high, and Georgia is the biggest trade partner of the United States in the South Caucasus region. One of the main reasons for this is that Georgia has access to high seas, an advantage which other regional countries are deprived of. On the other hand, there are disputes between Georgia and Russia and, consequently, this has led to the US support of Georgia.

One of the reasons for great powers' economic presence in their influence zones is creating favorable conditions for consolidating their military and security presence. One of the most important goals of the United States is to influence the political structures of the Caucasus. In fact, one of America's policies is to confront Russia's ambitions and, in order to do this, it needs to expand its influence in the Caucasus, including Georgia, in order to end the military presence of Russia. (Omidi, 2010: 94) The removal of Shevardnadze in November 2003 by the Rose Revolution that was a part of the color revolutions, and the coming to power of Mikhail Saakashvili created an opportunity for Washington, and Saakashvili soon became an anti-Russian leader (Newnham, 2015: 163).

Georgia's defense capability has increased substantially through US aid, and Georgia wants to deepen this cooperation. The support of the US government and its emphasis on the necessity of ending the occupation of Georgia's regions is of particular importance to the Tbilisi government. Georgia continues its support to the US proposed coalitions. Georgian troops trained in the framework of US training programs participate in international peace-keeping operations, including the NATO-led program in Afghanistan.

Hostility between Iran and the United States has given a security aspect to Iran-Georgia relations. For example, Iranian officials have repeatedly expressed concern over the development of the US military presence in the region. From Tehran's point of view, Tbilisi is a Washington ally in the Caucasus; therefore, Georgia's cooperation with the West directly affects Iran's security.

Relations between Georgia and the United States in the last decade have been primarily formed in opposition to Russia's presence and influence. Also, the US is considered one of the most important enemies of Iran, according to its foreign policy structures; a factor contributing to divergence between the two countries in political terms.

### **2-3. NATO- Georgia Relations**

As a gateway to the Caucasus, Georgia has based its foreign and security policy on joining Euro-Atlantic structures, especially NATO, and has pursued this policy and strategy over the last decade.

The South Caucasus is also of great significance for NATO due to its geographic, strategic and geo-economic situation, as well as its proximity to the Black Sea region. The Caucasus is of great concern for NATO, for many reasons including vast natural resources and reserves, especially energy resources in the Caspian region, being a major center of gravity providing the corridors of transportation and transit for energy products and commodities, the West's link with Central Asia, new Eurasian border, having common border with Europe or European security shield, and finally its economic and military importance (Cordesman, 2013: 90-91).

### **Expanding Trend of Relations between NATO and Georgia until 2016**

Year	Extent of Expanding Relations
1999	Georgia's unofficial assistance to peacekeepers in Kosovo
June 2004	Istanbul Summit; focus of NATO leaders on the South Caucasus, decision to appoint a representative from the region
2004	Georgia was the first country which endorsed the Irap deal with NATO
2005	Signing a transit agreement between NATO and Georgia, which allows ISAF to send its assistance to Afghanistan through Georgia and other member states
2006	Serious discussions among NATO members about Georgia's membership and its goals for joining the organization
April 2008	Bucharest Summit; examining Georgia's qualifications for joining NATO
August 2008	Allies' concerns about armed conflict between Georgia and Russia. Proposing the formation of the NATO Group for Georgia
September 2008	NATO foreign ministers travel to Georgia, signing the NATO-Georgia Commission framework document and holding opening ceremony in Tbilisi
March 2010	Agreement for a new project that would help Georgia to carry out reconstruction after the disaster of war

April 2010	Georgia's agreement with NATO to cooperate on counter-terrorism operations in the Mediterranean
August 2010	NATO's decision to promote effective military cooperation in the framework of NATO-Georgia relationship (holding the first annual Military Committee in 2011 in Georgia)
January 2015	Completion of the ISAF operation in Afghanistan in December 2014; Georgia's cooperation to help Afghan security forces
July 2015	Georgia hosts NATO exercises; with the participation of more than 700 troops from Bulgaria, Georgia, Lithuania, Romania and the US
September 2016	Two day visit of NATO leaders to Georgia, emphasis on the importance of a new agreement and Georgia's readiness for joining NATO
November 2016	Holding a 10-day maneuver attended by 220 staff members at the Joint NATO Training and Evaluation Center in Georgia

**Source: Nato.int**

Given the fact that the South Caucasus region is situated in the neighborhood of the Islamic Republic of Iran, it has been always regarded as its security shield, so that Iran considers that security in this region is vital for its own security and, insecurity and instability in this region lead to insecurity in its borders. Therefore, the Islamic Republic of Iran considers the expansion of NATO to the east, and in particular, to the South Caucasus, a serious security threat to itself. Undoubtedly, the expansion of NATO to the security frontiers of the Islamic Republic of Iran is a serious threat to Iran. Indeed, the presence of NATO means the strengthening of the US presence in the region within the framework of US-Iranian strategic rivalries in the political, economic, security and military dimensions.

**2-4. Extensive Relations between Iran and Russia**

Since the emergence of the Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Republic of Iran has not had a good relationship with the West and has been hostile to the United States. Under these circumstances, the foreign policy strategy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has unwittingly focused on expanding ties with the Eastern powers, especially Russia. Russia has experienced many changes in its relations with the West, and has always considered Iran a good option for developing its foreign relations in various dimensions. In particular, the two sides are geopolitically close to each other. Russia does not have good relations with Europe and the United States. This country has been specifically sanctioned by the West, especially after the crisis in Ukraine in 2014, followed by the occupation of the Crimean peninsula. Therefore, Russia became inevitably more commercially oriented towards the East. Similarly, Iran and Russia have shared interests in the Middle East region subsequent to the Syrian crisis, and the two sides have become natural allies during this crisis and together succeeded to manage the crisis. In addition, Iran lacks new military technology because of Western sanctions and is trying to import these technologies from Russia. For example, Iran purchased S300 anti-missile defense system from Russia in 2016. Relations between the two sides have expanded in different fields including investment of Russian oil companies such as Gazprom in the energy fields of Iran, cooperation in the organization of gas exporting countries, construction of nuclear power plants, and scientific and academic cooperation. Also, working together in the framework of the Shanghai Organization and frequent visits of leaders to each other's countries show the importance of relations for Iran and Russia. Given the US withdrawal from JPCOA in April 2018 and the resumption of US unilateral economic sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran, Russia's role in mitigating the effects of economic sanctions and bypassing them has increased for Iran.

According to Iran's trade mission in Moscow, the volume of foreign trade of Iran and Russia in the first half of 2017 was \$ 737 million. This year, Iran exported \$ 228 million to Russia, and imported \$ 509 million from this country. The figures show a 36 percent increase in the volume of trade between the two sides. (Russia.tpo.ir) The statistics shows that the volume of trade between the two sides is not significant, despite the fact that both countries have large economies. The important point is that, given the economic data, it seems that political and security factors play a greater role than economic factor in increasing the importance of Iran and Russia for each other.

Georgia has not had good relations with Russia since 2008. Tension in relations between Tbilisi and Moscow in August 2008 led to the military clashes between Georgian troops on the one hand and the Russian forces who supported separatist groups in Abkhazia and South Ossetia regions, on the other hand. Following 5-day clashes, Russia officially recognized the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and Georgia cut its diplomatic ties with Russia. This led to Georgia's greater tendency toward the West and closer relations with Russia's rivals, putting relations between the two sides in a deadlock.

The Islamic Republic of Iran did not recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, however, due to the importance of Russia in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the development of relations with Russia has been on the agenda more than ever. Evidently, the expansion of relations with the enemy of Georgia can negatively affect on its relations with Iran.

## **Conclusion**

The development of mutual relations is very important for both Iran and Georgia. However, the absence of a common border between the two countries (contrary to Armenia and the Republic of Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus) can also be considered as one of the main reasons for not expanding relations between the two countries, however, the obstacles that the US, Russia, Turkey and Israel have intentionally or unintentionally created for Tehran and Tbilisi to establish closer relation, have played an effective role in the process.

The Georgians regard Iran as a powerful regional economic and political power and while they are interested in expanding relations with Iran, they are worried about closer relations between Russia and Iran. On the other hand, the Georgians are heeding considerations made by Washington and Tel Aviv in relation to Tehran, which has a negative effect on Tehran's relations with Tbilisi. However, Georgia needs to receive energy from Iran and to transport Iranian gas to Europe and Iran needs Georgia to gain access to a new route for exporting its gas to Europe, so that they can play a complementary role for each other in economic terms.

To prevent divergence between Iran and Georgia, the following remarks could be taken into account:

- Investment in different economic fields in Georgia and more presence of Iranian businessmen in this country
- Development of parliamentary relations
- Increasing Iranian oil and gas exports to Georgia and creating an appropriate environment for using Georgia's transit route on the North Corridor

-Developing the appropriate political and security relations between Iran and Georgia in the framework of long-term meetings

-Creating a favorable terrain for holding cultural and scientific dialogue, given the existence of a common cultural and historical background

- Further expansion of tourism relations

Many factors involved in creating divergence between Iran and Georgia are shaped by foreign actors. Iran and Georgian can enhance their economic and political relations by formulating a coherent plan. This could prevent jeopardizing their national security.

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# **Role of Iranian center and Persian literature and language studies in the cultural cooperation between Iran and Georgia through SWOT analysis**

## **Abstract**

A. Jafar placed a great emphasis on enhancing the so called medical diplomacy in Georgia-Iran relations. According to him, it is possible to deepen political, military and cultural relations by increasing scientific relations. Scientific diplomacy has an important place in 5-year action plan of Iran. He also mentioned that Georgia is a strategic area for Iran and the latter has special relations with Georgia in South Caucasia which is coming from historical past and future potential. Deepening scientific relations with Georgia is also the interest of Iran.

According to A. Jafar it is also necessary to equip the decision-makers with scientific knowledge which is possible by the scientific diplomacy. He also noted that Georgia is not using Iranian scientific experience and capabilities well. Iran would greatly appreciate to deepen cultural dialogue and relations with Georgia that is currently blocked by the United States.

The cultural and historical interrelationships of Iran with the countries of the region, especially Central Asia and the Caucasus, have contributed to a deep link between nations, and these shared contributions have contributed to the development of Iranian studies and Persian literary places. However, Iran's geoalctic and geopolitical significance has caused Has been established in many countries of the world and prestigious educational institutions, Iranian-Iranian seats and Iranian culture to have a better understanding of Iran. In the meantime, Iran's and Georgia's religious, cultural and historical ties and ties have led to the consideration of Iranian literature and culture in Georgia, as well as the areas for promoting the promotion of the Persian language, the establishment of centers for Iranian studies and literature in Georgia But this process faces challenges, threats, opportunities and weaknesses that prevent the true impact of these centers on the cultural interactions between the two countries. To this end, the paper, with the presence of library-documentary studies and the SOWT method, is about answering the question: What role do Iranian think tanks have in Iran and what are the opportunities and strengths, threats and weaknesses of these centers? The hypothesis of the article is that Iranian centers of Persian literature and linguistics have a lot of potential for acting in cultural diplomacy between Iran and Georgia, which these diplomatic arbiter have problems, some of which are the traditional approach, Lack of financial support, increased literacy centers with the support of rival countries and ... The findings of the paper show that Iranian centers of study in the Oriental studies of the universities of Georgia and the institutions for the promotion of Persian language and literature in this country have the appropriate capacities for cultural and cultural cooperation in the interaction between Iran and Georgia, which should be supported by governments and

facilitation In the relations between these institutions in both countries, the process of interaction and peaceful coexistence of culture and the growth of progressive thoughts and ideas in both countries will increase, and in the light of this, the political relations of the two countries will be affected and the volume of relations in the fields of Economic, political, cultural, and even scientific. However, investment and cultural planning in the field of Iranian centers of geography in Georgia can bring cultural soft power, which brings a benevolent, peaceful and fair-minded image of the two countries in the international community, and the achievement this relationship between nation-states is also a world free of violence and the spread of global peace.

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# **Georgia's foreign policy orientation, realistic or idealistic**

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## **Abstract**

Many factors make the Caucasus region susceptible to a variety of internal and external military conflicts, including inter-wars and civil wars. In light of the extensive ties of various natures between the Caucasus region and neighboring and non-neighboring states, and European Union with long-term interests in this region and especially in Georgia, where, uneven progress in state-building and democratization occurred simultaneously, with high levels of political instability and violence, which had implications not just for the immediate affected states but also for others. The state authorities began to look for options that would bring recognition of and support to Georgia by the international community. Tense relations with the new Russia, which was itself torn apart by internal problems, promised very little. And now, from when Georgia became a sovereign state conducting its own independent foreign policy. The national security and foreign policy priorities have been widely debated over the past few years, but the official concept of that foreign policy has yet to be fully developed. The author's objectives is to pinpoint not only the pattern of Georgia's foreign policy orientation, but also influence of regional powers. The author quests whether Georgia's political orientation is realistic or it is based on political idealism. The hypothesis of this study is; Georgia's foreign policy is a sustainable strategic orientation, which is national security and national interest oriented. To explain the issue, the author considers Georgia's relations with neighboring and non-neighboring states, which have inaugurated formal diplomatic relations with them approximately shortly after declaration of independence. Findings of study indicate that; Georgia's foreign policy western-oriented and its integration with the West, and more specifically its intention to join NATO, has made Iran very nervous.

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# **Foreign impacts on Iran-Georgia relationships: comparative research of Russia and the United States**

## **Abstract**

Throughout centuries and before the formation of new governments in the Caucasus region, relations between Iranians and Georgians have always been based on neighborly relations. In the early 20th century, a fundamental change in relations was formed, most notably the invasion of Georgia by Georgia's Red Army 1921 and turned Georgia into one of the Soviet republics. During this period, Iran-Georgia relations were affected by the rivalry between the Soviet-American leadership of the East and the West. But the most significant development that occurred in the late 20th century in the history of Georgia and its relations with Iran was the collapse of the Soviet Union and eventually the independence of the country. This event initiated a new chapter in the relationship between Iran and Georgia. In the post-Cold War era, the United States and other NATO nations were trying to use the weakness of Russia to fill the vacuum of power created by the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the beginning of the 21st century, Georgia made one of the most important areas of competition A geopolitical relationship between America and Russia. Naturally, in this context, relations with Iran were also affected. Nevertheless, the main issue raised is the quantity and quality of the impact of Iran-Georgia relations on foreign powers. To answer this question, an attempt has been made to use the comparative method to examine the impact of the relationship between Iran and Georgia from Russia and the United States. The preliminary hypothesis of this paper is that over the past three decades, the relationship between Iran and Georgia as an independent variable has been severely affected by the positions of major powers, including Russia and the United States.

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R. Baizid has underlined and put emphasis on US attempts to hamper deepening Iran-Georgia relations. Besides, R. Baizid mentioned that Russian Federation, like the United States, is negatively estimating the prospects of enhancing cooperation between Iran and Georgia

# **The Role of International Transport Corridors in Bolstering Ties Between Iran and Georgia**

## **Abstract**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union expanding and deepening ties between Iran and Georgia has been impeded by a number of factors such as: underdeveloped infrastructure; not prioritizing Caucasus by Iran's foreign policymakers and third parties' opposition to Iran's involvement in regional projects. For these reasons even in the post-JCPOA period, signs of Iran's active engagement with Georgia were difficult to find. Unlike two other Caucasian countries Georgia is not Iran's immediate neighbor and relations between two countries have not been expanded remarkably even comparing to Iran's modest ties with Armenia and Republic of Azerbaijan. However, such static nature of bilateral relationship can be transformed into a more dynamic and less fragile one. A number of factors can motivate policymakers to make a positive change in terms of regional cooperation by planning economically beneficial transport corridors. Geographical position, economic preoccupations and trade and energy-related issues have provided Iran and Georgia with such an opportunity. Nowadays countries of various regions of the world- specially those in dire need of fueling the process of economic development—are desperate for getting involved in international transport corridors. These transport corridors can effectively mitigate unemployment, increase national revenues, strengthen security and improve infrastructures of participating countries. In this article we will discuss the potential role of transport corridors involving Iran and Georgia (of which Persian Gulf- Black Sea is the newest one) in leading bilateral ties to a less susceptible level. The authors hold that Iran and Georgia until recently have developed few economically attractive joint projects and as a result have found enough reasons for engaging with alternative partners. However, their participation in transport corridors may pave the way for closer cooperation due to remarkable economic and security advantages.

## **Introduction**

Geography has provided Iran and Georgia with a unique opportunity to connect lubricant markets of various parts of the world to each other. Persian Gulf and Black Sea can hardly be

ignored by any plan or initiative which is designed to increase trade across the planet. Developing transport infrastructures to shorten the route from Persian Gulf to Black Sea will have positive consequences not only for Iran and South Caucasian countries but also for industrial centres and energy hubs of Asia and Europe. Thus, Iran and Georgia may ensure invulnerability of bilateral relationship in long-term by prioritizing the fulfillment of their transport capacities to participate in joint economic corridors. In the following article authors will discuss the potential role of developing transport corridors in bolstering bilateral ties after a brief look at the short history of the two countries' relationship since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

### **A Brief Review of Bilateral Relationship**

Islamic Republic of Iran's attitude towards the South Caucasus has been pragmatic and stability-oriented, and has enabled policymakers to maintain good working relations with Caucasian republics since 1991 (Weiss & Zabanova, 2017). However, Iran's relations with its Caucasian neighbours has never been consistent with geopolitical considerations; and geographical, historical and cultural realities over these years (Atai, 2012: 133 & 134). There has been a mismatch between the opportunities and achievements of Iran's foreign policy in this region. In spite of the fact that the South Caucasus is a quite significant region in terms of Iran's security and national interests, the Islamic Republic of Iran as a regional power has not formulated an active foreign policy to deal with these three northern neighbours (Koolaei & Hafezian, 2010: 408).

Georgia and Iran established diplomatic relations in 1992, and since 1994 a Georgian embassy has been functioning in Tehran. Unlike two other Caucasian countries Georgia is not Iran's immediate neighbor. Unfortunately relations between the two countries have not been expanded remarkably even comparing to Iran's modest ties with Armenia and Republic of Azerbaijan. U.S. and Israel have always been wary of the expansion of cooperation between Tehran and Tbilisi and have expressed concerns about deepening ties between Iran and Georgia from time to time. However, Georgia's strong pro-Western foreign policy orientation and its close relationship with the U.S. have not necessarily led to strained relationship with Iran unlike some expectations.

In 2003, Iran cautiously reacted to Rose Revolution and implicitly welcomed it. The Islamic Republic of Iran at the moment emphasized on Iran's support for Georgians' desire to democratize their country and condemned any foreign intervention in Georgian domestic affairs (ISNA, 11/1/2003). After war of August 2008 Georgians came to understand that they can not rely on West's support to ensure the country's security. Since then Georgian government paid more attention to bolstering ties with regional powers (Nodia, 2011). By the end of the Bush era, the U.S. started to distance itself from Georgia, and after the beginning of the Obama administration, relations between Tbilisi and Washington was affected by Obama's efforts to improve the U.S.'s relationship with Russia. As Dmitry Shlapentokh pointed out during the Five-day War the Georgians were quite disappointed about the absence of direct U.S. support when Russian troops were near the gates of Tbilisi (Shlapentokh, 2012).

Following the 2008 Russo-Georgian War in South Ossetia, Tbilisi had to diversify economic ties with regional and overseas countries in order to find markets for Georgian products that were not allowed to enter the Russian market anymore. Iran could be a substitute to the Russian market. (Kraus & Souleimanov, 2016: 458). Unlike what Georgia expected, Iran did not recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In November 2010, Saakashvili had a conversation with Iran's Foreign Minister and thanked Iran for its support of Georgia's territorial integrity (Shlapentokh, 2012).

Georgia has faced many problems in securing its fuel needs since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Cooperation in energy has been a major aspect of the shared interests of Iran and Georgia. Strengthening economic ties with Tehran seems to be beneficial to Georgia. In 2006, Moscow blocked gas deliveries to Georgia and Iran provided Georgia with gas. Since then Tehran continued to imply that it was ready to provide Georgia with fossil fuels (Shlapentokh, 2012). The export of 30 million cubic meters of Iranian gas to Georgia in the winter of 2006 following Russian gas being cut off, which led to the loss of 90 percent of the country's gas and disruption of its power plants, shows Iran's importance in Georgia's foreign relations. Georgia was reported to be very interested in joining the Iranian-Armenian energy cooperation. The Iran-Armenia pipeline was opened on 19 March 2007 by the Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad (Koolae & Hafezian, 2010: 406).

Georgian-Iranian economic ties began developing after the 2003 Rose Revolution, especially as Tbilisi's relations with Russia soured. Trade turnover between Georgia and Iran rose from

\$10.4 million in 2003 to \$176.8 million in 2013; in 2016, it stood at \$131 million. Currently, the main Georgian export good with relative potential for growth is live sheep, whereas Georgia imports construction materials such as bitumen from Iran. Trade with Iran is unlikely to become a major driver of economic growth any time soon due to its structure and low volumes. Georgia could attract many Iranian companies during the sanctions period, especially in the agriculture, food, and construction industries because of its liberal business climate, lax residency requirements, and geographic closeness. In official data, Iranian FDI has never exceeded \$1.8 million, although these figures do not account for investments coming from expatriate Iranians. When Georgia lifted visa requirements in January 2011, many Iranians relocated to Tbilisi, registering companies in the Poti Free Zone on the Black Sea (Weiss & Zabanova, 2017).

With all this, generally speaking, since the collapse of the Soviet Union expanding and deepening ties between Iran and Georgia has been impeded by a number of factors such as: underdeveloped infrastructure; Georgia's economic problems; and third parties' opposition to Iran's involvement in regional energy projects. For these reasons even in spite of the JCPOA, Georgia preferred to cooperate with the republic of Azerbaijan as its long-term energy partner.

In 2015 Iran represented only a small part of Georgia's trade as it occupies only 1.3 percent, while countries like Turkey, Bulgaria or Azerbaijan vary from 8.3 to 9 percent. The biggest opportunity to increase Iran's trade turnover with Georgia could be provided by the latter's energy market, which is now mainly supplied by the Republic of Azerbaijan. Thus, little trade dependency between Georgia and Iran can be found right now (Gaudešius, 2017: 45). Since 2008 the trade balance between Georgia and Iran has oscillated around \$200 million. Overall, Iran's involvement in the Georgian economy lags significantly behind that of Turkey (Kraus & Souleimanov, 2016: 458).

JCPOA was a relief to Islamic Republic's neighbours in the South Caucasus which were expecting an increase in Iran's trade and investment activities in the region. However, the anticipated benefits were slow in coming (Weiss & Zabanova, 2017). With a population of approximately 80 million and the 18th largest economy in the world, as well as large oil reserves and the world's second largest proven stocks of natural gas, Iran certainly seems like a potential source of economic opportunity. As mentioned earlier, Iran has been discussed as a means of diversifying Georgia's energy supply, a market for Georgian exports and a source of tourists and foreign investment (Jijelava, 2017: 14). However, Donald Trump's withdrawal

from nuclear deal and reimposing sanctions against Iran have once again tarnished prospects of a more prominent regional role for Iran. Washington makes relentless efforts to isolate Tehran more and more by maximizing the costs of doing trade with Iran. However, coping with such an unpleasant atmosphere requires putting more emphasis on regional cooperation. Iran and South Caucasian republics should acknowledge that sticking to joint regional economic plans will consolidate their sovereignty and facilitate the process of economic development.

### **Advantages of Developing Transport Corridors**

A transport corridor is a collection of routes constructed from the transport networks of adjoining countries and bounded by gateways. Economic corridors develop out of transport corridors, connecting economic agents along a defined geography, linking economic nodes or hubs, in which large amount of economic resources and actors are concentrated. By doing so, they link the supply and demand sides of markets (Dossani, 2016: 60). Transport corridors can contribute to stability and security, increase employment and speed up economic development of participating countries. In other words, once developed, transport corridors can bring about prosperity and peace.

Economic corridors are meant to attract investment and generate economic activities within a region, on the foundation of an efficient transportation system. The economic corridor integrates infrastructure development with the trade, investment, and other economic potentials of a set of specific geographical areas, while at the same time undertaking efforts to address social, environmental, and other potentially adverse impacts of increased connectivity. Establishing an economic corridor, then, is a holistic strategy that improves and enhances investments in transport, energy, and telecommunications in the region. A highly efficient transport system means goods and people move around the region without excessive cost or delay. This improvement promotes further economic growth and regional development, thus contributing to poverty reduction (Brookings, 2013). To accomplish sustainable development, corridor initiatives will need to display a level of long-term thinking, creative design and multi-dimensional approaches to implementation that is likely unprecedented. Whereas economic corridors imply multiple dimensions of economic development, transport corridors are a primary area of focus in infrastructure development and trade (Dossani, 2016: 59). If a country has the potential to become a transit country

thanks to its geographic location and wants to use this potential to enhance its international standing, it should create the appropriate legal framework and political environment and set up the proper physical infrastructure (Amirahmadian, 2017/11/10).

### **Iran and Georgia as Components of an International Transport Corridor**

The South Caucasus region is capable of using its geographic position to transform itself into a transport corridor for flows of goods and energy resources between Iran and Europe (Weiss & Zabanova, 2017). The transit potential of the countries along with the energy factor has become the focus of interest of regional and global actors in the Caucasus (Ordabayev, 2016: 6). Iran's geographical and strategic position has also provided it with immense potential for cargo and energy transfer and also made it a viable choice as the pipeline route for Caspian oil and gas exports and as the potential transit route connecting Persian Gulf and Black Sea. The Iranian domestic infrastructure for oil and gas transfer is, in its current condition, relatively developed and can be much more efficient by renovation and expansion (Kazemzadeh, 2017).

Transport and energy infrastructures have always played a key role in the formulation of foreign strategies of Armenia, Georgia and Republic of Azerbaijan (Davtyan, 2014: 22). Despite all the difficulties and challenges it is highly possible that Iran remain an important potential supplier in Europe's future plans. As a leading actor on the geopolitical energy scene of the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus, Iran is moving in a direction that would force all players to acknowledge it as the connecting factor between the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf (Kazemzadeh, 2017: 5). Georgia might benefit from Iranian oil and gas resources in different ways such as diversifying its own supply of oil and gas, acting as a transit hub or serving as a location to produce value-added exports. Georgia could also benefit as a transit country for Iranian gas heading for Europe (Jijelava, 2017: 14).

Iran is striving to serve as a trade hub not just for the Middle East but into Europe and Central Asia by creating a new transport corridor that would connect four countries, including Iran, Armenia, Georgia and Bulgaria. Iran is planning to launch a new transport route running from the Persian Gulf to the Black Sea. Business people in Tehran hope Iran can become a new conduit in the Middle East thanks to its location, high levels of security, diverse economy and educated workforce (HuffPost, 7/13/2016). The Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor will connect

Persian Gulf countries and their Eastern neighbours such as India to Western Europe via territories of Iran, Armenia, Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Bulgaria and Romania (ISNA, 28/2/2017).

The benefits of cooperation between Iran and Georgia in the fields of energy and transportation will be remarkable enough to be valued by both states. Georgia needs foreign investment and energy security to ensure its economic growth. Iran is concerned about losing its capacity as a transit country due to the development of those corridors which are designed to bypass Iran. Constant access to Western energy markets is another encouraging goal for Iran which finally will result in reinforcing its stability and security.

Iran and Georgia, although not sharing a border, geographically are very close to each other. Iranian minister of foreign affairs has noted that geographical positions of the two countries is the reason to deepen mutual ties between Iran and Georgia. The minister also said that plans to cooperate in energy, transition of goods and transport sectors are underway. Iran has promised Georgia to invest in hydropower engineering and agriculture and also to discuss the potential of supplying natural gas to Georgia. The desire to integrate into Georgia's energy sector was reiterated in 2015, as news agencies reported that Iran plans to launch two power plants in Georgia. In 2016, it was affirmed by both countries' energy ministers, as the framework for building the Hydro power plants is already on the way. In the last few years both countries have signed memorandums of understanding to expand bilateral cooperation in different fields of economy, especially in the energy sector (Gaudešius, 2017: 43).

However, there are obstacles which slow down the realization of any transport corridor involving Iran and Georgia. On the one hand, Armenia has never developed its transportation relations with Iran partly because of Russian pressures. The Russians have prevented Armenia from developing a gas pipeline or even railroad access to Iran (Ordabayev, 2016: 23). On the other hand, corridors planned by Western powers until now have been aimed at bypassing not only Russia but also Iran. In addition, Republic of Azerbaijan is Georgia's first energy partner at the moment with well-developed energy transport infrastructure (oil and gas pipelines and railroads) connecting two Caucasian neighbours. Thus, investing in new projects to transport energy may sound irrational from a pure economic point of view. Completing the construction of Qazvin-Astara railroad seems to be the fastest option on the table to increase transit capacity of Iran and bolster relations with its South Caucasian neighbours. Developing such a land route consisting of railroads and highways to Republic of Azerbaijan does not face strong

opposition of international or regional actors. Construction of more developed transit infrastructure to cut the costs and increase the capacity of transporting goods and energy between Iran and Armenia is another necessary step to realize the great potential of Iran and Georgia as parts of a bridge connecting East and West.

## **Conclusion**

Participation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in developing international transport corridors can pay a contribution to the consolidation of its national security and stability, because other participant countries can benefit from peace and security in Iran. Therefore, Islamic Republic of Iran must prioritize investing in transport corridors to take advantage of its economic capacities and geographical location. International transport corridors such as Persian Gulf-Black Sea bind Iran's interests to those of neighbouring regions and countries especially in the South Caucasus and maximize the negative consequences of isolating this country. As a result Islamic Republic of Iran can more easily neutralize anti-Iran policies of transregional powers. Georgia offers one of the shortest routes to European markets. Unique geographical position of Georgia as the only non-landlocked country in the South Caucasus makes it remarkably relevant for realizing goals and interests of an energy-rich Iran. From all this, we can come to the conclusion that Iran and Georgia are not automatically at odds with one another in terms of planning regional economic projects. The two countries have almost no conflicting interest. However, aspirations of some regional and transregional actors as third parties are among the most important obstacles hindering expansion of bilateral ties. Hence, Islamic Republic of Iran must increase its investment in transit infrastructure to facilitate access to South Caucasian countries. East Asian and South Asian countries may also be willing to develop such corridors in order to cut the costs of exporting goods and importing energy. Connecting Persian Gulf to Black Sea via Iran and South Caucasus region is economically and politically beneficial to Georgia. Activating such a transport corridor will create new jobs, speed up economic growth and reinforce social and political stability in all participating countries.

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## **Cultural, trade and political relations between Iran and Georgia during the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 10<sup>th</sup> presidential elections in the Islamic Republic of Iran.**

There were no active relations between Iran and Georgia under the President of **Ahmad Nejad**. After **H. Rouhani** became the President of Iran the situation has been changed and there are some progresses in regard to enhancing relations between the two countries.

According to A. Vali, working in ideological direction will not be successful in the relations between Georgia and Iran; focus must be made on economic relations.

Georgia-Iran relations have been dynamically changed over the history that as caused due to several factors.

The role of Russian Federation in regard to trade balance; he expressed his wish to have Iranian banks and companies like Turkey in Georgia. He wants Iranian technology, construction materials, medical equipment and other products to be imported to Georgia. At the same time, he underlined the great importance of making close coordination and contacts between universities and education institutions in the frames of national interests.

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