On January 20, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Sayyid Ebrahim Raisi completed a two-day official visit to Moscow. The Iranian leader arrived in Moscow for the first time since taking office. His visit included talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, a visit and address to members of the Russian State Duma, and personal meetings with a number of Russian politicians and business people.

According to official information from the Kremlin, the talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin covered a wide range of bilateral cooperation issues, current international and regional issues, and the implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian nuclear program (JCPOA). As Raisi noted at the end of the meeting, similarities of positions on many issues were confirmed. The IRI leader said that given the potentials that Iran and Russia have, the ground is ready for the countries to develop relations in economy, politics, trade, science, culture and many other areas. The Iranian President emphasized the existence of a document on strategic cooperation between the two countries, which can determine the perspective for at least 20 years going forward. They passed this document to their Russian colleagues. The Iranian side believes that this document will define strategic interaction between the Islamic Republic and the Russian Federation for the long term. Proposing a plan for such strategic cooperation, which, among other things, could become a synergy for confronting the West, Raisi stressed that, “We in the Islamic Republic of Iran have no restrictions on developing and expanding ties with friendly Russia and these ties will become strategic. Therefore, these relations will not be short-term or situational – they will be permanent and strategic.” Raisi stressed that Russia and Iran have common interests, and cooperation between the two countries in the region will definitely ensure security and prevent unipolarity in the world.

Touching upon the most pressing topic of the international agenda, Raisi once again publicly stressed that the
development of nuclear weapons is not part of Iran’s defense strategy; IRI intends to negotiate on its nuclear program if the US and other international actors are ready to lift the sanctions previously imposed on Iran.

Raisi and Putin discussed ways to enhance the already established nuclear energy relations between Iran and Russia, a $5 billion joint project to build additional units at the Bushehr nuclear power plant, for which the countries plan to create a financial line of support.

Speaking at a plenary session of the Russian State Duma, the IRI leader outlined his views on the development of relations between Moscow and Tehran, the fight against terrorism and other topical global processes. He said that strengthening Iranian-Russian relations in various formats would lead to a new step in the economic development of both countries, as well as help peace and security in the region as a whole. And in this respect, the task and responsibility of cooperation between the parliaments of the two countries to ensure the legislative implementation of the decisions reached at the highest level between the leaders of the two countries are growing. In this context, the Iranian side supported Russia’s initiative to hold a conference of parliamentary speakers on countering terrorism and strengthening regional cooperation with the participation of China, Pakistan, Russia and Turkey. As the Iranian leader noted, Moscow and Tehran are creating an alternative pole of power, one example of which is the two countries’ close cooperation over the past six years in Syria to destroy terrorists together.

Raisi is convinced that the war against radical forces is only part of an even more global process - the fight against expansion and domination. In this context, he pointed out that the “strategy of domination” and maximum pressure chosen by the US had failed and led to a weakening of Washington’s position. The same applies to the rest of its NATO allies.

During his official visit to Moscow, Ayatollah Sayyid Ebrahim Raisi, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, met with Mufti Ravil Gaynutdin, Chairman of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Russia, who called it symbolic and significant that Raisi performed the Maghrib evening prayer right during his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin.

Although no agreements were signed publicly between Russia and Iran during the Iranian leader’s official visit to Moscow, the visit itself was nevertheless highly regarded not only in the two countries, but also beyond. In particular, it confirmed the decline of the Atlantic world order and the construction of a new multipolar world. This visit showed that the two countries are united not by the principle of “we are only friends because of a common enemy” and both sides’ objective rejection of Anglo-Saxon policies. Tehran and Moscow have many common themes and interests, both in the international arena and in bilateral cooperation, many of which have yet to come to fruition. Iran is an important ancient civilization. By creating its own unique type of state after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran has emerged as one of the leaders of the Islamic world, despite the fact that the Shi’a faith practiced by Iranians is shared only by a minority of the Muslim Ummah.

Iran is grateful to Russia for the crucial contribution it made to the so-called “Iran deal,” an agreement that allowed the West to save face while clearing Iran of allegations of working on nuclear weapons. Negotiations are now underway to return to this deal, but given Washington’s unwillingness to negotiate under Trump, Iran is now demanding guarantees: first the removal or at least easing of sanctions, and a commitment not to break the agreement by the US. The objective justification for such actions by Tehran is clear, given the shaken confidence in the consistency of US, and indeed the West’s, policy.

Under these circumstances, Tehran’s desire to find further support not in the West, but in a rapprochement with China and Russia, which is now intensifying, is understandable. Iran’s actions to become a full member of the SCO and its intention to work as closely as possible with the Eurasian Union attest to this. Iran has already signed a strategic partnership agreement with China; now it is Moscow’s turn. Yes, Iran is now constrained financially by a Western-led restrictive policy, introduced shortly after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which has been in place for more than 40 years. But it was and still is potentially one of the key, most powerful and richest countries in the world, not to mention a close neighbor of Russia. A strong and independent friendly Iran is beneficial for Russia, and therefore Moscow’s active participation in the process of returning it to its rightful place in the world will pay off both economically and geopolitically.

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