

Iran - China relations 1991-2016

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ABSTRACT

China's strong economic, military and diplomatic relations with Iran are due to the isolation imposed on Iran from Western countries because of its nuclear program. Over time, the relationship between the two countries has changed based on trade and economic cooperation to unbalanced dependence. China sees Iran as a potential partner. To limit the influence of the United States of America in the Middle East, but it does not depend entirely on Iran to meet its oil needs. In contrast, Iran is engaged in a bitter conflict with the United States and faces geopolitical competition from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Cooperation Council; therefore, it strengthened its relations with China to obtain economic, diplomatic, and military support.

Keywords

China's Strong Economic, Gulf Cooperation Council, Sino-Iranian Relations.

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Introduction

The Sino-Iranian relations are among the distinguished relations, as the two countries have close relations, and China stresses the importance of its political, economic, and cultural relations with Iran and the cooperation in contemporary issues. Iran is a natural power in the Middle East whose function is to rid Western hegemony, especially American hegemony. Both China and Iran - alike - do not like to submit to American control in the Middle East. China is considered one of the international actors in the political arena due to its human, economic and military capabilities. China also enjoys multiple ingredients that made it a country among the major countries. It enjoys an important strategic position - regionally and internationally - and this is reflected in the quality of the ingredients that have contributed to the consolidation of China's leading role - regionally and globally - and China has become - thanks to the policies that have been adopted - the second-largest economic power after the United States of America. Its geopolitical position made it control the land, sea, and air navigation routes, which increased its financial position in the world. Iran seeks to consolidate its relations with China as a strategic partner that can help Iran alleviate its isolation, support its economic growth, and provide it with weapons and modern technology; to make Iran a dominant regional power in the Middle East. Sino-Iranian

relations are not without some problems. China is one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council that is negotiating with Iran over its nuclear program; therefore, the Chinese government and most of the industrial sectors in China have adhered to the sanctions imposed by the United States and the United Nations on Iran's nuclear program. And Chinese policy toward Iran is still based on balance caution and respect - generally - the sanctions and restrictions that the US-led, while benefiting from the opportunities provided by Iran's isolation. Beijing does not want Iran to possess nuclear weapons, nor does it open confrontation, and it does not care about Iran's regional ambitions. Still, it sees Iran - in general - as a stable country in a turbulent region, and this may help protect China's economic and geographical interest's strategy. And Iran's quest to strengthen its relations with China is an important element to reduce Iran's international isolation.

The Trade and Political Dimension of Sino-Iranian Relations

The trade dimension is considered one of the most important factors that dominated Sino-Iranian relations since its inception during the imperial rule of Persia, as Iran entered into a commercial partnership with China through the overland route of the Silk Road, which was used by Chinese

trade convoys from northern China through Persia and then to European countries[1].

During the rule of the Parthian state in Iran and the rule of the Han dynasty in China, trade relations expanded between the two countries, and the two sides exchanged ambassadors and goods, including Chinese silk, which was exported to Europe through Iran. During the Sasanian rule of Iran, Iranian-Chinese relations witnessed a state of tension between them. This is because of Iran's monopoly on the silk trade that used to reach Europe, and this led to the discontent of the Chinese government, which led it to ally with Iran's traditional enemies at the time, namely the Romans. With the beginning of the Islamic conquests of Iran, the Sassanid state sought help from the Chinese government to confront the Islamic conquests. Still, its efforts in this did not succeed, as the Muslims could conquer Iran and spread the Islamic religion throughout the country. [2].

Sino-Iranian relations are considered one of China's foreign policy pillars, as Iran's location is of geopolitical importance to China. This is due to its location in the southwest of the continent of Asia, as it overlooks the strategic sea lanes: such as the Arabian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Caspian Sea; Which made it the link between East and West, as it is the natural corridor of global trade, and Iran forms a bridge linking Central and East Asia, West Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean, as it is bordered to the east by Pakistan and Afghanistan, to the north by Turkmenistan, and the south by the Gulf The Arab region and the Gulf of Oman, and to the west Iraq and Turkey, as it is a vital route for the movement of trade between East and West [3].

Iran

What increases Iran's strategic importance is that it sees in the Arab Gulf region a vital field that achieves its political and economic ambitions and aspirations, and this contradicts the American policy in the Arab Gulf region and is consistent with the Chinese vision, which does not oppose any role played by Iran commensurate with its weight. Regional in the area [4].

Iran played an important role in its relations with China. The first cooperation treaty between the

two countries was signed in 1920 AD in the Italian capital, Rome, which provided for diplomatic and political exchange, consular representation, and embassies and consulates for both countries. Thus, strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries and developing trade relations between them. However, this treaty was objected to from inside Iran due to the losses it caused to Iranian merchants due to importing and bringing Chinese goods into the country; Which is a burden on the father and to him and harms Iran's national interest [5].

China

As for China, it is considered the largest developing country in the continent of Asia, and it shows pessimism towards foreigners, as China was in the past an arena for the invasion of ethnic groups different from this country; Therefore, security occupied a special place in China's foreign policy since ancient times, and in modern times there is a sense of threat and danger to China by major countries, especially after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 by the Chinese leader Mao Tse Tung, as based on China's strategy in his distrust of the great powers countries [6].

Therefore, the Chinese government sought after 1949 AD to pay attention to the development of the Chinese economy because of its importance in the Chinese national security strategy. Therefore, comprehensive economic reform was adopted in the country and work to diversify and modernize the Chinese economy and diversify the sources of funding for the raw materials that China needs. To achieve this, peace must be preserved according to what was planned by the revolution leaders in China [7].

The relationship of China and Iran is considered one of the comprehensive relations at the international level. Because it always involves achieving the interests of both parties, as the relations of countries are often based on regional and global data, and Iran is one of these countries of great importance to China; For geographical, economic, geopolitical, and geostrategic reasons because Iran is located within the Middle East region, which includes more than 60% of the

world's oil reserves, and 40% of its natural gas reserves; That is why China has paid special attention to the Persian Gulf and Iran because it is in a dire and growing need for Iranian oil[8]. And thus increasing the importance of Iran, it has oil reserves and gas large is an important source of energy through which the industrial base in China provide oil; That is why China adopted the strategy of keeping the Persian Gulf open by aligning with Iran because of China's fear of any embargo on energy supplies to it in the event of any tension between it and Taiwan [9].

Bilateral Relations between China and Iran through different Stages of History

During the sixties and seventies, the conditions were not favorable for the expansion of bilateral relations between China and Iran ;this is because of Iran's foreign policy orientations that it adopted during that period, during which Iran stood to the West as a strong ally against the socialist camp, including China. Iran entered into a strategic alliance with the United States of America, as Iran did not recognize the People's Republic of China until the early seventies. This is in line with US policy towards China .After the visit of US President Nixon to China in 1972, Iran moved to improve its relations with China, and the bilateral relations between the two parties began to expand as they took on clear commercial and economic dimensions during that period. [10].

In 1976, the Chinese economy witnessed the opening to the capitalist system, as China took a series of measures and reforms in its economic system, which began in 1978, which gave the Chinese financial strength and diversity, which contributed to increasing job opportunities and exploiting workforce in a country [11].

In 1979, China adopted the open-door policy and improved its relations with the United States of America in the commercial fields. Iran also witnessed a change in its political system after the Islamic revolution that the country saw at the time, and these political changes affected the nature of bilateral relations between China and Iran ,after the latter turned in its relations with the United States to hostility ,as it became clear that each side was going against the other. In the eighties, China made important changes in

its trade policy and institutional structure to deal with foreign trade and foreign investment, opening the country to buy and trade, and encouraging foreign investors to invest inside the country [12].

During the eight-year Iraq-Iran war, it announced its position on the war of neutrality, but it was exporting weapons to the two countries, as China's arms exports to Iran amounted to one billion and 143 thousand dollars, while Chinese arms sales to Iraq were 5 billion dollars, i.e., three double its arms sales to Iran [13].

During this period, Iran mobilized all its resources to serve the war effort, and imports from China were limited to the military side. On the other hand, China supported Iran through military equipment and military technology, and ammunition production factories. In 1985, Iran signed an agreement with the Chinese government to cooperate in the field. This cooperation between the two countries continued in the military area until the end of the Iran-Iraq war in 1988 [14].

After the end of the Iran-Iraq war, China sought to attract Iran's foreign trade towards the Chinese industry, as China assisted Iran in the reconstruction of what had been destroyed by the war for eight years, especially with regard to the infrastructure of roads, bridges, factories and building materials such as cement, iron, copper, zinc, and Equipment for the oil and petrochemical industry and the construction of dams and electric power plants, and thus the volume of trade exchange seemed to double between the two countries, as the amount of trade exchange amounted to about 341 million dollars in 1991 [15].

It seems that Iran and China's internal and external policy was - to a certain extent - useful during that period, as it moved away from revolutionary and ideological goals and headed towards economic reconstruction and military modernization. Also, the two countries' survival in isolation by the United States of America and its partners has pushed Iran and China To deepen cooperation between them in various fields and strengthen diplomatic cooperation to resist the pressures of the United States and the West regarding human rights in the two countries.

In the year 1992 AD, Iran turned towards Chinese technology and goods. China assisted Iran in establishing major development projects and transfer advanced technology to Iran. In the same year, China signed with the Iranian government a contract for the implementation of the Tehran metro project to cover the entire capital, Tehran, to provide China 75% of the project equipment, as well as the necessary financial support and advanced technology to implement this project [16].

The non-energy trade relations between China and Iran were important to the bilateral relationship, as China participated in the development of Iranian infrastructure and then invested in mining operations, constructing dams and developing ports, as well as building commercial ships and selling consumer goods; Therefore, trade and investment played the role of the great catalyst for China to expand its relations with Iran. Because it provides Chinese state-owned companies with opportunities to win foreign contracts and sell their goods abroad while contributing to providing jobs for Chinese workers. Cooperation in civil nuclear energy in 1997 was a major element in the relationship between China and Iran; this helped China earn substantial profits that enabled it to modernize its nuclear energy infrastructure [17].

China has sought, through its military relations with Iran, to find a strategic value to help Iran develop its military capabilities to confront the American hegemony over the Persian Gulf; Because the US alliance with the Gulf Cooperation Council is a confirmation of the existence of a security system that is compatible with US interests in the Middle East; Therefore, the presence of Iran as a country equipped with advanced military equipment - to some extent - achieves China's goal in preventing this geographically and strategically important region from falling under American hegemony [18].

Trade and investment also formed a major component of bilateral economic relations, as Chinese engineers built bridges, dams, railways, and tunnels all over Iran. Sinohydro Corp the Chinese side signed an agreement with the Iranian side to construct the longest dam in the world in the Lorestan region, located in the west of the country, and this dam helps expand Iran's domestic energy resources and allows it - in the

future - to sell more oil on the international market. And China held talks with Iran to build a railway line that would connect the western Chinese province of Xinjiang with Iran via Tajikistan and Afghanistan [19].

During the nineties, the Soviet Union collapsed. It is considered the opposite pole of the United States of America in the international equation politically, economically, and ideologically. The disintegration of the contract of the socialist system and the isolation of the United States as a superpower became clear, it sought to exercise more economical and commercial pressures on China, and this matter contributed - and significantly - to increasing rapprochement and cooperation in the commercial and economic fields with Iran; To avoid US pressure on China [20].

It can be said that the American factor constituted - after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran - an obstacle to improving Iranian-Chinese relations because American pressure was a pressure factor on China in its foreign policy, especially after Iran's exit from the alliance led by the United States following the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran.

China's dependence on energy supplies from Iran has increased rapidly as it is the main supplier of oil exported to China. Despite the multiple fluctuations that China and Iran have witnessed, the continuity and development of bilateral relations have been maintained and developed. This is among the principles that cannot be bypassed in foreign policy. For the two countries, just as China has adopted within its foreign policy - in East and West Asia - respect for the unity and sovereignty of states and non-interference in their internal affairs. We also find its keenness to adopt the principles of peaceful coexistence within the international community [21].

And China is willing - through closer ties with Iran - to maintain the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, and Iran, which has become a node, is important in the new silk energy, which connects the Arabian Gulf Road and the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, China. The Asian network is only to secure continuing the energy that China needs to sustain its growing industrial base [22].

In this regard, there were joint meetings between the two countries leaders. As a result, it was

agreed to sign many bilateral treaties and agreements, which have become the mainstay of trade and economic cooperation and the strengthening of friendly political relations. Furthermore, China viewed Iran as a commercial market for goods and Chinese goods, as they contributed to increasing the volume of trade exchange with Iran, which is one of China's most important energy partners, as China is the largest consumer of Iranian oil, which makes it desperately need it all the time [23].

Iranian - Chinese relations are subject - politically - always different considerations, including economic considerations and the positions of the two countries, international and regional issues, and China enjoys an exceptional position as an emerging country in the East Asian region as a global state, and want to - at the same time - maintaining This position and its consolidation; Therefore, it is necessary to interact with the new international system, and Beijing believes that the newly developed country must play according to the rules of behavior prevailing in the contemporary international design. To achieve that goal, it is necessary to face various challenges at the international level [24].

Therefore, China became more involved in the Middle East and expanded its trade and economic relations with the Arab Gulf states, especially in the field of energy, as the Gulf States supplied China with about 58% of the Middle East's oil. However, the increasing dependence on imported oil raised the concerns of the Chinese leaders [25]. The rapid growth of the Chinese economy, economic development, and the US energy restrictions against China have caused major concern to the Chinese leaders. They have deliberately taken many measures to reduce that concern by establishing more economic relations with the oil-producing countries, particularly the Gulf States and Iran, which was considered one of the most important oil exporters to China. Saudi Arabia and Iran are the mainstay of Chinese oil diplomacy in the Arab Gulf region. China has sought to achieve security and energy within its foreign policy in the Middle East. Despite all the efforts made by China regarding energy investment, Diversification of its oil resources, Iran is still one of the most important oil suppliers to China [26].

It seems that the Chinese alignment with Iran in the Persian Gulf is nothing but an attempt by China to prevent the closure of the Gulf by the United States, which controls the western bank of the Persian Gulf and seeks to impose a naval blockade on energy supplies destined for Iran to China, due to the American sanctions on Iran; Therefore, China set out to establish onshore pipelines and railways to transport oil; To bypass the US guarded sea lines of communication.

Because of the US sanctions imposed on Iran, China has deliberately reduced its oil imports from Iran to maintain its position among the countries exempted from US sanctions imposed on Iranian oil exports. Despite those sanctions, China continued to buy half of Iranian oil exports, which constitutes an important part of Beijing. Oil and gas are among the main pillars of Sino-Iranian relations [27].

Iran occupies second place in terms of the amount of oil exported to China. It secures about 14% of the oil exported to China, and Chinese companies are investing in oil projects in Iran. China has avoided the American sanctions imposed on the Iranian energy sector. For example, in 2000, the Chinese company obtained a concession to extract natural gas from Iranian oil fields and establish petroleum refining stations in Tehran and Tabriz. In the same year, the Chinese company Sinopec obtained the construction of an oil berth in the port of (Naka) located on the banks of the Caspian Sea in northern Iran [28].

The first phase of the Tehran Metro was also inaugurated by Chinese companies operating in Iran, as this project was considered one of the largest railway projects implemented by Chinese companies outside the country, and the Sino-Iranian partnership exceeded the infrastructure project to include major industrial projects, so China established car factories. And the construction of giant oil tankers with credit loans from Chinese banks. These companies also contributed to the modernization of the fishing fleet and maritime transport and the development of metallurgical industries. China also provided Iran with equipment for the oil, gas, petrochemical industries, heavy diesel engines, and large electric motors. Half of the payments were made to Iran. The value of those goods from Iranian oil sales to China [29].

The increasing demand for crude oil in the face of the economic and industrial growth that China is witnessing has prompted it to strengthen its relations with Iran in light of the great international competition, especially between oil-consuming countries, and to work on the necessity of perpetuating this strategic commodity. On the other hand, Iran is aware that China is the future market for its products from Oil and its derivatives, especially in international sanctions imposed on Iran due to the Iranian nuclear program. Therefore, since oil occupies a central place in the bilateral relations between the two countries, the two parties signed an energy agreement in 2004 AD worth 70 million dollars, under which China will be supplied with liquid gas and oil in exchange for China to develop the Doran oil field in Iran [4].

In contrast, Iran has been keen to develop its relations with China through the formation of a joint committee for trade with Beijing aimed at developing marketing and economic relations between the two countries and strengthening bilateral relations on an institutional basis embodied in the Sino-Iranian Economic Committee that works on the comprehensive development of bilateral relations in all fields and Enhancing cooperation in the areas of energy, trade, economy, marketing, technical, agricultural and tourism services, and cultural and scientific exchange between the two countries [28].

It seems that the policy of containment and boycott followed by the US administration towards Iran, which Western countries responded to and worked to implement that policy, was one of the factors that prompted China to strengthen its economic, commercial, and military relations with Iran in light of those sanctions.

The commercial cooperation between China and Iran was not limited to oil. Still, cooperation agreements in other fields, including the natural gas industry, the oil industry, and the petrochemical industries. In 2004, China signed an agreement with Iran, according to which it imports 250 million tons of natural gas from Iran. For 30 years and 150,000 barrels of crude oil per day, the agreement included investment programs in oil production, exploration, petrochemical industries, the natural gas industry, and the development of South Pars fields, which is

considered one of the richest natural gas fields in the world. [30].

China has found in Iran a permanent partner for its exports and a supplier of the increasing Chinese demand for energy. In 2006, the Chinese-Iranian relations witnessed a new phase that was more developed and cooperative. The two countries focused their cooperation according to the balanced common interest and not on one party over the other. China was seeking to win In the Iranian market to sell consumer products in exchange for Iran helping China develop projects by supplying it with oil [31].

In 2007 China Petroleum National Corporation agreement signed for the development of offshore gas fields in Iran ,worth up to 5 3 ,million dollars has also signed another contract worth \$ 2 billion to develop oil fields in northern Iran. Furthermore, China supported the Iranian In addition, because of the limited refining capabilities in Iran - which used to import a third of its refined products from China - Iran signed an agreement with the Chinese government to develop the Azadegan oil fields in the west of the country and to produce liquefied gas from the southern areas in Iran [32].

The weight of Iran's strategy in the region is increasing in the current situation .This is due to the presence of China in the Persian Gulf as an ally of Iran. On this basis, Iran organizes its relations with China based on bilateral cooperation and in various fields. Through this relationship, Iran seeks to secure its security interests in the region and strengthen its military relations with China, which was considered one of the strategic relations that had an active role in the region by maximizing the regional security benefits of Iran in the Arab Gulf region [33].

China has maintained its relations and trade exchanges with Iran and its strategic relations with the West and the United States of America. Nevertheless, we note some overlaps in the foreign policy of Iran and China and the convergence of views on strategic issues and the common denominators of Tehran and Beijing represented by the approach that has been adopted in the foreign policy of both countries, which is represented in non-interference in the internal affairs of the countries of the world [34].

Despite the US sanctions imposed on Iran, the volume of trade exchange between China and Iran

in the energy field in 2010 AD amounted to 10 billion dollars, so that China became the largest importer of Iranian oil. Thus Iran was able to reduce its trade balance deficit with China by increasing its oil exports to Beijing; in contrast, the latter increased its exports of goods, consumer goods, industrial and electrical products that invaded the Iranian market. Thus, despite the severe economic sanctions imposed on Iran in 2010 AD by the US administration, the economic and trade relations between China and Iran did not witness a significant decline, but on the contrary were increasing many times, as Iran's trade with China alone represented more than a quarter of its trade with all countries of the world, which made China the largest trading partner of Iran [35].

Because of these sanctions, the economic relations and trade between the two countries do not mean that it was full and surpassed, where suspended Chinese companies in 2011 contracts for a huge \$ 2 billion to develop the field of Pars oil in southern Iran for fear imposed on Iran international sanctions [36].

The institutional cooperation between China and Iran made them allies against the United States of America and its threats to the two countries, as Beijing considered Iran, a partner to limit American influence in West Asia and the Persian Gulf, which prompted Beijing to strengthen its relations with Iran in various fields, including extremism and terrorism, which is considered a The most prominent security and political concerns of Iran and China, as both countries are exposed to its constant damages and threats [37].

In the year 2015 has engaged China in nuclear negotiations with the P5 + 1, which resulted in the Iranian nuclear program where China supported the nuclear deal agreed but could not resist US pressure on imposed economic sanctions on Iran withdrew China National - similar to the company the French - From investing in energy in the Iranian market [38].

Iran relies heavily on China's opposition to Washington's efforts to ban arms exports to Iran, a position that became clear through China's opposition to Washington's call in the UN Security Council to set an arms embargo on Iran. At the same time, there was a tendency to sign a strategic agreement between the two countries, at a time when the regional and

international situation is witnessing complex developments through which China emphasizes the policy of cooperation with developing countries and seeks to make joint efforts to achieve peace, stability, and development in the region and the world [39].

It seems that China's relative support for Iran in its nuclear conflict with the West and the United States of America is an illustrative example of the problem of cooperation between the two countries. Although Beijing voted in favor of American decisions, it played a large and important role in delaying the passage of those resolutions in the UN Security Council and changing the tone and the sharpness used towards Iran in international forums.

Despite these international sanctions, the two countries continued to develop the volume of trade and economic relations between 2013, 2014 to 2015, and 2016, when trade exchange witnessed a noticeable decline during that period in trade exchanges between the two countries. Then the volume of exchange returned Trade increased with implementing the nuclear agreement in practice in 2016 after the lifting of international sanctions against Iran [40].

Because of Iran's real need to improve its relations with China within the new context, the two parties agreed to establish relations based on a comprehensive strategy and within the process of polarization in the new international order and the globalization of the economy, China and Iran agreed to be strategic partners, which gives priority to strengthening their relations in foreign policy, and adopting the sound and stable development of bilateral relations serves the common interests of the two countries and maintains peace and stability in the region and the world [41].

To enhance the political discourse of senior officials on issues of common interest and enhance mutual trust between the two countries, the two parties agreed to establish a mechanism for the annual meetings of foreign ministers and periodic meetings for political consultations. The two sides also stressed the need for communication between central governments and cooperation within the framework of local governments and political parties. Furthermore, to exchange experiences and enhance interaction in

various fields, the parliamentary association and legislative bodies of the two countries were confirmed at different levels, and the two parties agreed to support each other in important issues related to the basic interests of the two countries, including independence, national policy and territorial integrity [42].

China is considered one of the actors and can play all the roles simultaneously; as characterized by political and economic capabilities made it occupies a special place in Iran's foreign policy, which is considered a player a regional of effective the Middle East, and this is mutually beneficial Iran - China relations in all fields [43].

China is one of the main pillars that Iran seeks to strengthen and strengthen its relations with as an ally in the region .To counter US influence in the Persian Gulf, and this expands - also - from China's influence in Asia and the Indian Ocean, and is what made the strategic importance of Iran beyond the side of the economic and trade cooperation between the two countries.

Conclusion

One of the most important results that reached this research

1. Through its relations with Iran, China was able to obstruct American and international efforts to shape decisions towards Iran regarding the Iranian nuclear program
2. The continuous cooperation between China and Iran has impeded the United States' efforts to increase its diplomatic pressure on China to reduce its trade and economic ties with Iran, which prompted it to strengthen its relations with Beijing to subjugate the United States strategically.
3. The relationship between China and Iran is much greater than the limits of cooperation in the field of energy and trade; The matter is linked to the central goal of China's foreign policy of pacific international expansion and transformation into a multipolar global system, which would make the United States lose its hegemony over the international system, and then gain a foothold in the Middle East to serve Chinese interests.

4. The American pressure on China to reduce its relations with Iran was limited in impact and useless due to China's economic strength and position as the second economy globally and the political weight it enjoys in the UN Security Council.
5. The increasing Chinese role within the Iranian economy will create a kind of hegemony and influence on Iranian decision-making regarding the limited options and options available to Iran.
6. China is aware of Iran's importance as an ally politically and commercially in the Middle East.
7. The insecurity in the Persian Gulf will inevitably endanger China's interests from the United States; Therefore, Iran constitutes a major link for the transit of oil pipelines to transfer energy from the Caspian Sea to China, which maintains its strategic partnership with Iran.

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