

Iran's Role in China's Foreign Policy: A Case Study of the 25-Year Agreement

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Abstract

In 2019, a document was signed between Iran and China, which is known in the general literature as the 25-year agreement between Iran and China, and the cooperation between the two countries for 25 years in various fields, including 'political', 'executive', 'manpower', 'cultural', 'judicial', 'security and defense', 'regional', and 'international' cooperation.". This research seeks to answer the question that according to the 25-year strategic agreement between Iran and China, what is Iran's position in Beijing's foreign policy? The hypothesis of the current research, which was investigated in a descriptive-analytical way, is that with the end of the Cold War, the direction of China's foreign policy changed from "non-commitment" to "partnership agreement".

- The 25-year agreement between Iran and China can be evaluated in this approach. Addressing this issue is important from the point of view of the 25-year agreement between Iran and China, as well as from the point of view of China's foreign policy. This study will show how the Chinese implement their strategies in the form of a coordinated and planned policy against Iran. Empirical findings showed that since 1993, the number of Chinese partners in the form of a partnership agreement has been increasing, so that Beijing currently cooperates with more than seventy-eight countries. This means that participatory diplomacy has become an important tool in China's foreign policy in recent years. Of course, the pattern of China's strategic partnership varies from country to country depending on its position in the country's foreign policy. The theoretical findings of this research also showed that the foreign policy direction of this country is not fixed and changes under the influence of national interests in different situations. Also, the article shows that China uses three different strategies regarding Iran.

Keywords: Iran, China, economy, foreign policy, strategic partnership.

Introduction

This article offers a realist analysis of China's partnership strategies through the lens of Iran—a case that highlights the broader global implications for balance-of-power dynamics and U.S. grand strategy. A brief overview of China's foreign policy direction shows that from 1949 to today, China has changed its direction from alliance policy to "non-alignment" and from "non-alignment" to "partnership agreement". The evolution of China's relations at the level of the international system has been a tortuous process. Since the formation of the People's Republic of China, the leaders of this country have reviewed their relations with different countries at the level of the international system. In the process of historical transformation of its relations with the international system, China has changed its role from a revolutionary and alien state to an active and finally constructive participating country. This innovation enabled the Chinese government to direct its diplomatic efforts in a completely new direction, with the aim of China's emergence as a great power in harmony with the international system; Therefore, it is looking for more areas to expand its scope and influence in the world and communicates with all governments regardless of their political system. One of the most important regions for China is the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, among which Iran has a special place for this country. The Middle East is still one of the most dynamic regions in the world; Because it is undergoing economic, geopolitical, and security changes that affect not only the countries of the Persian Gulf, but also the global powers that compete with each other to influence it. The relations between Iran and China are the main driver of the changes that are currently taking place. Cooperation between these two countries is not new and has been expanding ever since the Iran-Iraq war (1988-1988). Their pragmatic friendship expanded during this war and created the foundation of cooperation that today strengthens Iran's economic and regional position and gives

China a strategic position in the Middle East. These conditions become more important in the broader context of China's challenge to US hegemony.

The relations between Iran and China have been important in many aspects and historical narratives have brought the two governments closer to each other. The feeling of national humiliation at the hands of foreigners, anti-colonial tendencies, and also, dislike of the unipolar system, are among the common features of the two countries. The connecting link of these feelings is the opposition to American unilateralism and hegemony in the international system. During the past 30 years, China and Iran have been cooperating with each other in a variety of political, security, and economic interests based on an active but limited partnership. In 2012, while a broad coalition of countries in the world sought to stop Iran's nuclear development, China supported Iran with a different degree of economic and military requirements. Although China does not have a fixed doctrine for the relationship with Iran, some people examine the relationship between China and Iran in the framework of the strategic alliance and emphasize the requirements of this alliance. According to them, China is seeking to create an anti-American bloc in the region by joining forces with Iran. Others take a critical view of these relations and evaluate them as one-sided and in favor of China. According to them, China is seeking colonial relations with Iran. Others consider the relations between China and Iran to be beneficial to the Islamic Republic. In such a way that in the conditions of international sanctions and isolation, China will be a reliable partner for the Iranian government; Therefore, a clear picture of the strategic situation of China-Iran relations is not available, and the problem of the current research is the lack of a clear and comprehensive picture of Iran's position in China's foreign policy; The purpose of this article is to examine the content of the 25-year agreement between Iran and China, as a factor in determining Iran's position in China's foreign policy. Also, this article seeks

to show basically where is the position of such agreements in China's foreign policy directions and Iran's position in this country's foreign policy?

Theoretical Framework

Research Although the subject of the current research can be examined in the form of various theories, the theory of realism, due to the assumptions and principles hidden in it, can better help in the analysis of this subject; Because it considers governments as the main actors of the international system, and national interests as the key element of relations between countries. This attitude is also true for China; Because this country also seeks to establish relations with various countries with a kind of realistic view from the point of view of power. The theory of realism, which has cast a shadow on international politics for more than two decades after the Second World War, has the following assumptions: national governments are the main actors of state-centered systems; Domestic politics can be clearly separated from foreign politics; International politics is a struggle for power in an environment without a superior central authority; In a decentralized international system made up of states that have equal rights and sovereignty, there is a hierarchy between two national states in terms of their abilities in the form of bigger powers and smaller states (Ranjbar, 1999, 36).

In the realistic view, power and national interests are two central elements. From this point of view, a wise actor is someone who constantly seeks to promote his interests. The conceptual range of these interests is wide and includes material and spiritual factors. To put it more clearly, both the protection of the territory and the preservation of values are among its assumptions. Here, power and interests are placed next to each other, and the rational behavior is such that it is simultaneously and continuously in line with their promotion. For realists, political action relies on dogma and caution, and realistic knowledge of the national and international

environment. The various viewpoints raised in the framework of the school of realism about international politics have common beliefs that the main axis of the aforementioned beliefs is that governments naturally seek to gain as much power as possible and the reason for such a situation is the dangerous and chaotic nature of the world. They live in it; Therefore, one aspect of the thought focused on power is that in the field of international politics, the ability of any government depends on its power. The theory of realism goes further and claims that the success of any government depends on making the acquisition of power its main and immediate goal; Because governments can protect themselves and increase the welfare of their citizens only through power (Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff, 1993: 240-247).

According to realists, due to the importance of military power in foreign policy, the distribution of military power among states remains one of the most significant determinants in international politics. This is what is called "balance of power" in realism theory. Realists argue that the prospect of creating an obvious and fundamental change in the international system is not very promising. They are of the opinion that power is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and has both military and civilian components. Realist theorists have developed frameworks for categorizing the elements of national power. Such capabilities include not only military forces, but also technology levels, population, natural resources, geographic factors, form of government, leadership, politics, strategy, and ideology (Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff, 1993:142). Most of the realist writers agree that the location of a state affects its national capabilities and the harshness of its foreign policy. Geography shapes the options available to governments and imposes often severe constraints on possible foreign policy choices. Due to their specific geography, some governments are more vulnerable than others to the domination of foreigners, and others have strategically more important geographical positions. According to the realists,

the access to important waterways and the extent to which the country is unprotected or protected from foreign enemies due to the shape of its borders affect the foreign policy of that government. Realists argue that abstract moral principles cannot be applied to specific political actions. Statesmen operate in an international environment that is different from the domestic environment of countries due to the lack of powerful political institutions, legal systems, and generally accepted criteria for behavior. From the point of view of realism, there is no coordination of interests between governments, and the only thing that governs their relations is power and national interests (Seifzadeh, 1991:106). From the point of view of realism, relations between countries are based on continuous conflict that leads to full-scale war. Based on this, war is a normal issue in relations between countries; Because this constant conflict among different countries without the existence of cooperation grounds, makes war a normal and natural issue and sometimes even necessary (Seifzadeh, 1995:107). Other realists consider security as the primary goal of foreign policy. Sherman is of the opinion that if the security of a country is not guaranteed, the hope of survival is futile and if a country cannot create the desired security, how will it be able to achieve its other goals, including the welfare of its citizens?

"Participation" in China's foreign policy

The old principles of China's foreign policy are summarized in the framework of five principles of peaceful coexistence: mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefits, and peaceful coexistence. In 1954, within the framework of a communist government, Chinese leaders were trying to approach non-communist countries in Asia to assure them that China would not interfere in their internal affairs. Through strategic partnerships, by encouraging multipolarity and anti-hegemony, China creates a favorable environment for its emergence. The

purpose of strategic partnership is to convey the message that relations between governments should not be influenced by differences in values, institutions, forms of government, or social systems. Each government should be allowed to determine its development path and social-political system without foreign interference (Zhongping & Jing, 2014:4). The fact is that China's foreign policy has always been trying to establish a balance between the strategy of alliance and coalition, and the policy of non-commitment. From Beijing's point of view, the United States uses various aspects of its hard and soft power to prevent China's peaceful growth and development, and China alone cannot contain the United States. Therefore, China should look for allies. On the other hand, completely abandoning the non-commitment strategy is also unrealistic; Because potential alliance partners are few and any alliance formed is weak and likely to provoke a serious reaction from the United States. The third way to solve China's security dilemma, which is between a formal alliance and a policy of non-alignment, is that China should develop a certain degree of security cooperation with other countries in a changing international environment.

Beijing's alternative strategy is "partnership", which does not necessarily target a third party and, unlike alliances, lacks an inherent internal conflict. Tang Shiping argues that partnerships between governments are relatively common and are formed based on mutual interest (Shiping, 2010). In a strategic partnership, governments are relatively independent, and this independence enables actors to abandon or change partnerships as needed. Strategic partnerships can have no military commitments. As is the current partnership between China and Russia. Xiaohui believes that forming an alliance is contradictory to China's foreign policy traditions, but forming a partnership is a reasonable practice (Xiaohui, 2015:73).

"Partnership" differs from conventional alliance thinking while avoiding the shortcomings of a noncommittal strategy. Partnership agreements are the dominant approach among China's foreign policy approaches, although the concept of partnership agreements is not always clear in international relations. Partnership agreement often means "what states form" (Holslag, 2011:295). Partnership can also be used to describe an alliance. China uses partnership as a way to advance its national interests, but what makes China unique It is the fact that Beijing has placed the partnership networks at the center of its foreign policy strategy. The number of countries that have given more importance to the establishment of partnerships is very few. By the end of 2016, China has seventy-eight countries and five regional organizations, the Arab League, CELAC ASEAN, and the European Union) has established cooperation, which is 45% of the 174 countries that have formal diplomatic relations with China. The term "comprehensive" refers to cooperation in economic, technological, cultural, and political fields. This relationship is bilateral and multilateral, which means that the partner countries may cooperate with multilateral issues, including cooperation between the government and the people. The term "strategic" also means that cooperation between two countries is not only of general importance for bilateral relations but also stable and long-term and overcomes ideological differences and political systems. Finally, the term "partnership" means cooperation between two countries based on mutual respect, mutual trust, and equality. Both parties are trying to create a win-win relationship that is mutually beneficial (Li & Ye 2019:5). China has signed a special type of partnership with each country, which can be divided into three categories: (1) regular partnership (2) strategic partnership (3) comprehensive strategic partnership.

Cooperation within the framework of these partnerships starts from a simple partnership, is promoted to a strategic partnership, and finally reaches a comprehensive strategic partnership.

"Level", "Importance" and "Formality" are three important indicators to show the quality of a partnership. In general, regular participation is characterized by a relatively low level of interaction. Its purpose is essentially a diplomatic effort to gauge whether or not future cooperation is possible; Therefore, these agreements are often driven by the desire to put future relations on a firmer footing. Meanwhile, "strategic partnership" and "comprehensive strategic partnership" usually take place at higher levels and with broader programs and more formal mechanisms for cooperation. Furthermore, while strategic partnerships are still limited to cooperation in some areas, important areas, and often limited to closer economic cooperation, comprehensive strategic agreements often include relatively detailed plans for bilateral cooperation and establish specific communication channels to facilitate regular exchanges. It is between heads 2014:141-143), (Feng & Huang.

The Chinese government is particularly cautious about establishing comprehensive strategic partnerships. Therefore, before reaching an agreement on a comprehensive strategic partnership, three conditions must be met: political trust, dense economic relations, cultural exchanges, and good relations in other sectors. Wilkins describes partnership as a structural framework for cooperation between two or more parties, which is organized in a flexible and non-binding manner, and whose purpose is to achieve common interests and address common challenges in different subject areas and to facilitate it (2008). (Wilkins, 263-264) From this point of view, a partnership has four prominent features that distinguish it from other orientations: First, the partnership includes a structural framework for cooperation between countries that goes beyond normal diplomatic interaction and regular exchange between institutions, and it provides various government agencies. The institutional structure of these links varies from case to case and is usually embedded in joint statements that specify the areas

of cooperation of the main agencies involved and the mechanisms established to advance cooperation (Paraneswaran, 2008:264). Second, partnership-based relationships are characterized by high flexibility. This means that it does not include formal commitments such as those in alliances or coalitions. Moreover, since such partnerships are not heavily institutionalized, the costs of entry and exit are relatively small and symbolic. John Ciorcian argues that in the post-Cold War period most developing countries preferred this type of limited commitment because it allowed them to obtain rewards, such as economic or security assistance, without jeopardizing their independence. Be 2010:264), Nadkami). This issue is also important from the point of view that relations based on participation are not necessarily considered against a third country and do not arouse the sensitivity of others (Wilkins, 2008:364). Thirdly, instead of being formed in the light of threats, strategic partnerships are formed in the light of goals, interests, and common characteristics. Goldstein, 2014:31-34) Partnership frameworks include cooperation between countries, including commercial cooperation, economic, cultural, scientific, health, welfare, and security cooperation (Chidley, 2014:154). The same applies to partnership agreements involving China as a party. They usually employ different sectors for cooperation, including economy, politics, security, science and technology, and culture. Among these different areas, several authors admit that the promotion of economic relations, including access to markets, investment opportunities, and natural resources, is of primary importance to the Chinese government. 2014:86), Goldstein). Fourth, unlike alliances, partnerships are relatively process oriented. They are often a tool for cooperation between governments to achieve cooperation. An essential aspect in this context is their ability to reduce uncertainties in relationships, not only in front of the international environment but also among partners (Wilkins, 2008:536).

Reasons for the formation of relations between Iran and China

Opposition to the international order and unipolar world

Similar views on global affairs and mutual interests have formed the basis for cooperation between China and Iran. Today, the fact that the two countries have upgraded their bilateral relations to a comprehensive strategic partnership shows that their relations have been prioritized. But while there is political will on both sides to strengthen cooperation, there are also significant obstacles to doing so. The United States is an important issue for both countries. In fact, the relations between China and Iran; It has its roots in pragmatic cooperation in similar and overlapping fields, but in recent years has evolved into a relationship and partnership that is clearly opposed to the US-led international order. While there has always been an overtly anti-American element to this relationship, this dynamic has become more prominent as China more assertively presents itself as an alternative to US global leadership. Accordingly, Chinese, and Iranian elites have repeatedly criticized the international order led by the United States, which both countries see as "unfairly unipolar" and threatening their interests. Based on this, Iran considers China to be the only world power that has the ability to provide diplomatic support against the pressures of the United States (Xiyue, 2020).

Common historical features

Iran and China have common characteristics that strengthen the cooperation between them. Both countries are inheritors of great empires, and their shared official history shows that their relations go back to ancient times. This is not an exaggerated claim; Because, a long time ago and during the ancient empires, the trade between China and Iran was started at the time of

the establishment of the Silk Road by the "Han Dynasty" in the first century BC (Vatanka, 2019: 5).

Iran's geopolitical and geostrategic position

From Beijing's point of view, Iran is an attractive country for cooperation. The country has huge reserves of oil and natural gas, providing a growing market for Chinese companies. Also, Beijing considers Iran's geographical position as a strategic benefit for securing the security of important trade routes, and considering Iran's geopolitical situation in the Middle East, places Tehran outside the territory of America's allies; Therefore, it allows Iran to move more easily towards China's interests. In addition to important economic relations, Iran's leaders consider China as a strategic partner, which can help them neutralize American influence at the global and regional levels. Iran feels surrounded by the United States and its allies in the region and near its borders; Therefore, China's expanding activity in the Middle East is considered a positive development (Harold & Nader, 2012, 5).

China's strategies towards Iran

China has a population of about 1.3 billion people and in the field of its foreign policy, it follows specific and diverse strategies (Tabatabai, 2011, 175). The Chinese want to establish a multipolar system and strengthen their role in this system. (Asgari, 2007). They have a specific approach to each region and for this purpose, three strategies are more prominent than other strategies of China, which are: the strategy of expanding economic cooperation, The strategy of failure, and the strategy of deviation. The first strategy was followed until 2013, and the other two strategies have attracted the attention of the Chinese. Iran now acts as an important part of China's overall strategic approach to global affairs. The approach that is determined based on the

Marxist-Leninist-Orthodox understanding of international power dynamics, we will continue to examine China's strategies towards Iran:

The strategy of "development" of economic cooperation

In the grand strategy of China's foreign policy, expanding relations with great powers and creating a degree of coordination with the international system has been one of the country's basic priorities; Priorities that limit its relations with countries like Iran. In the same direction and following China's economic development, the level of relations between this country and its alignment with great powers has also increased; Therefore, it can be claimed that the Middle East in general and Iran in particular is one of the most important issues and China has no choice but to show a level of companionship and cooperation with these powers (Alami, 2011:14). China considers Iran only a part of the larger strategy of global interaction and economic development and does not put all its eggs in one basket (Figueroa, 2022:17). With the Islamic Revolution of Iran and China's change of approach with the "open door policy", Iran had become an important source of energy to serve China's growing industries and population. In addition, Iran was a way to penetrate the Gulf; Thus, over four decades, their relationship evolved in three stages: military cooperation during the Iran-Iraq war (1980s), energy cooperation in the 1990s, with China's rapid industrialization and oil trade that defied sanctions. But at the same time, China's approach was only based on the expansion of economic cooperation, and three times the sale of arms to Iran was delivered to the Iraqi government to generate foreign currency (Yacoubian, 2019:11). Therefore, in some periods, China's approach to the Middle East and Iran has been more or less influenced by American policies, and despite trying to adopt an independent position, it has not been able to align with American policies (due to the volume of its relations with this country in various fields, political, economic, and technical) to avoid. China has used Iran's card to play

with the West. China's positions on Iran's nuclear case, referring it to the Security Council and approving its resolutions, and restricting economic relations with Iran following the approval of sanctions, are examples of Chinese cooperation with the international system and non-cooperation with Iran, which this country is in line with. has done its own national interests (Barzegar & Hosseini, 2011,73)

On the other hand, Beijing, along with Iran, also cares about Pakistan and has an active presence in the port of Gwadar in Pakistan to provide land connection with Europe and exploit the North-South corridor (Tadbir Eghtesad Research Institute, 2015:1). China, in line with its grand strategy, considers self-stability and cooperation in relations with America and great powers as the best option and tries to show itself as a responsible shareholder in the international system. Naturally, the responsible shareholder in the Western-oriented order cannot establish special relations with the countries that the West considers as a threat; Therefore, it can be said that China's cooperative relations with great powers, especially Western powers and America, create important limitations for Iran-China relations (Mazar, 2019:25). On the other hand, China's extroversion, and its attempt to enter the field of regional rulemaking will force this country to have strategic allies, including the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"Failure" strategy and Iran's position in the "Belt and Road Initiative" program

The strategy of defeating the Chinese government is inspired by the theory of the weakest links of international capitalism of Leninism. According to Lenin, the international anti-communist forces form a complete chain of capitalist countries and regions since the beginning of the 20th century. Some links in this chain, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, are strong and are considered the most advanced democracies of industrial capitalism; But other circles, such as the less developed circles of the world, are the weakest circles of international

capitalism. According to the theory of defeat, communists should first focus on breaking the weakest links of the enemy. The latest iteration of the Chinese government's Leninist failure solutions is an ambitious initiative called the Belt and Road Initiative. This initiative was designed by the General Secretary of the Communist Party, Xi Jinping, and was approved by the party in 2013 to withdraw control over the areas least affected by the leading anti-China powers (Maochun Yu, 2021).

This plan seeks to connect Asia with Africa and Europe through land and sea networks, to improve regional integration, increase trade, and stimulate economic growth, and define several main priorities: policy coordination, and connecting trade infrastructure without hindering financial integration. and public relations. Three factors have played a role in the formation of this plan; The first factor is China's competition with the United States. The second factor is the legacy of the 2008 financial crisis for China, during which the country's market was saturated, and this plan provided an alternative market for large Chinese state-owned enterprises outside the country's borders. The third factor was supporting businesses and the dynamism and mobility of the economy of the central provinces of this country, which were lagging behind the coastal areas. (Jie & Wallace, 2021).

China's increasing influence along with the Belt and Road initiative has many strategic implications; Because Beijing seeks to connect its economic, geostrategic, and security interests. This situation is nowhere more evident than in this country's relations with Iran; Because it helps China to increase its points of interest and connect the Middle East and Eurasia together. (Hamrah & Eliassen, 2001:4).

Beijing's plan was warmly welcomed by Tehran from the very beginning. This plan, which connects China with the world markets through an extensive and ambitious set of land and

sea trade routes across Eurasia and nearby seas, has placed Iran at the center of China's global plans. While dozens of collections are supposed to participate in this plan (based on some calculations between 50 and 65 companies). Iran is one of its key components, which is estimated to cost a total of about one trillion dollars in a period of 10 to 15 years. Iran's natural geography has made it the only sustainable bridge from the seas of the world to the landlocked countries of Central Asia (a market of about sixty-five million people) and three states of the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia). In addition, China's commitment to becoming the superior economic and political power in the heart of Eurasia cannot be underestimated. Iran provides a very good guarantee to dominate Central Asia (against alternatives that may appear in the future). (Fazl-e-Haider, 2019, 16-19)

Currently, Central Asia has three exits to world markets. East through China, South through Iran, and West through Russia. The successful implementation of the Belt and Road Plan provides the possibility of China's de facto control over two of the three exits. Among the five Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan is the leader in relations with Iran, and it is the link connecting this country to the world markets through Iranian ports. In December 2014, a 925 km long railway line was opened from Kazakhstan to Turkmenistan and towards Iran. From a geopolitical point of view, the expansion of Iran-China relations is based on Beijing's determination to bypass and counter US pressure, and Chinese State Counselor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi confirmed this in his latest visit to Iran, saying, "China is constantly with It will oppose unreasonable and unilateral sanctions" (Al-Qahtani, 2021). The Chinese plan has also created ambiguities for the Iranians. One of Iran's biggest infrastructure projects in the last decade has been the development of Chabahar port on the coast of the Indian Ocean. China has made a huge investment during this period to implement the plan of its rival, the Gwadar port of

Pakistan, and on the other hand, India, as a competitor of this country, has invested the most as Iran's partner in the development of Chabahar. Along with India, Japan is also interested in investing in Chabahar to strengthen relations with Iran, take control of the consumption market, and use Iranian soil as a gateway to Central Asian markets (Khetran, 2018: 50-51). Despite this, such a conflict of interest does not create an obstacle for the implementation of the Iranian part of Beijing's programs in the Belt and Road Initiative. In addition, Beijing looks at Iran and Central Asia not only from an economic point of view, but also from a security point of view. China and Central Asian leaders regard Iran as an inevitable, and perhaps desirable, security partner. The reason for such an attitude is not only Iran's geography. They consider Iran as a non-threatening actor in a key field, i.e., the export of revolution and Islamic ideology. This is welcomed by Central Asian countries and China; However, the Chinese are very concerned about the role of Sunni countries as a launching pad for the propagation of radical religious doctrine in their Muslim regions, which is related to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia; But their fear about Iran is not true. For this reason, despite the large volume of trade, in the field of security, it has had very limited cooperation with the Arab countries of the Gulf. Recently, Saudi Arabia and China discussed the fight against terrorism for the first time, and on the other hand, Iran has had several stages of security and defense dialogue with China (Vatanka, 2021:126).

According to what was said, the Islamic Republic of Iran has a decisive position in this plan because it is the only big country that connects the belt and the road. An issue that is also mentioned in part of the document about 25 years of cooperation between the parties. In this way, Iran is a country in the Belt and Road plan for the Chinese government, which must be achieved in order to survive and succeed in the face of the "failure" plan.

Deviation strategy and 25-year contract

China, at the same time as the failure strategy, has also put another strategy on the agenda, which is called the deviation strategy, and now it has become a long-standing practice in Beijing. Deflection includes supporting all disgruntled regimes that are staunch enemies of the US and its allies to divert US strategic assets and policy focus and turn areas outside of China into one quagmire for the US. For decades, China has been the main supporter of many anti-American regimes to implement this plan. The main audience of the mentioned plan was North Korea, North Vietnam, Cuba, Venezuela, the Palestine Liberation Organization, and of course Iran. It is against the interests of the Chinese government to see the weakening of countries like Iran that are fighting the United States together. The United States played the China card during the Cold War with the Soviet Union, and now China is skillfully playing the Iran card against the United States and its allies. The biggest manifestation of Iran's card for China is the "25-year partnership between China and Iran", which has asked Tehran to form this partnership on a large scale and promised extensive investment in Iran's key industries, infrastructures, economic and financial sectors. which creates a lot of dependence on Beijing (Maochun Yu, 2021).

The 25-year contract between Iran and China

China's criteria for partner selection According to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, partnership building is a hallmark of China's new diplomacy. He says, "After the end of the Cold War, we applied the experience and lessons of history promptly and managed to create a new approach for the formation of "partners" instead of allies, which is one of the coordinates of the Cold War period" (Wang, 2015). Access to the resource market and investment opportunities, the existence of a common border with China, and the extent of the gap with the West are among the main criteria for China to enter a partnership process (2019:5), Li & Ye). China's new

diplomacy is of various types and levels such as non-strategic partnership; strategic partnership; strategic cooperation participation; comprehensive strategic partnership; Comprehensive strategic partnership follows cooperation and special strategic partnership. Due to the deepening of strategic relations between Tehran and Beijing, in recent years, the level of relations between them has been upgraded from a non-strategic partnership to a comprehensive strategic partnership. In this regard, it should be noted that, from Beijing's point of view, the countries that are at this level of cooperation have gained special strategic and economic importance at the same time.

Although the discussion of the 25-year agreement between Iran and China was raised in public circles around the beginning of the summer of 2019, a document of this importance has an older basis. The basis of this agreement should be found in the "Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement between Iran and China" in 2015. This agreement includes twenty articles on five areas of cooperation. In this article, we read: "Given the firm will of the parties to develop the relations between the two countries and considering the complementarity of the economic capacities as well as the existence of various fields of cooperation in the fields of infrastructure energy, industry, technology, and other common fields, the two sides agree, the consultations And put the necessary negotiations to conclude a 25-year comprehensive cooperation contract on the agenda. (Iran's Presidential Information website, 2015). Following that, in August 2019, Ali Larijani, Speaker of the Parliament, announced that Iran has developed a 25-year cooperation plan with China. Also, in August 2019, it was announced that Iran would submit the initial draft of the 25-year-old document to the Chinese authorities. Finally, President Hassan Rouhani reviewed and approved the final draft of the 25-year plan for comprehensive cooperation between Iran and China on June 23, 2020, in the meeting of the government board.

In that meeting, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was assigned to sign this program during the final negotiations with the Chinese side based on long-term mutual interests.

Finally, on March 27, 2021, the document of the 25-year comprehensive cooperation program between Iran and China was signed by the foreign ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Mohammed Javad Zarif) and the People's Republic of China (Wang Yi); The document was compiled to operationalize the sixth paragraph of the joint statement of the presidents of the two countries in January 2016 to improve the relations between the two countries at the level of comprehensive strategic partnership and provide a platform for the comprehensive development of cooperation between the two countries. Based on the document published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the 25-year comprehensive cooperation program has been prepared and approved in three political-strategic, economic, and cultural dimensions.

It should be noted that in the political-strategic dimension of Sindh, it seeks to achieve goals such as: improving the level of cooperation in regional and international institutions.

In the economic aspect, the two countries are looking for cooperation in the fields of oil, industry mining, and energy-related fields. It should be mentioned that in the aforementioned document, the participation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the China Belt and Road mega project and cooperation in the development of special and free zones, including on the Makran coast, is emphasized. The two countries also intend to expand financial, banking, customs, infrastructure, and communication cooperation by relying on the development of investment and project financing. Among the cultural dimensions in the mentioned agreement, we can mention the increase of tourist exchange and media, academic, and non-governmental organizations. did

Of course, during the 25-year comprehensive cooperation program, the strengthening of defense infrastructure, countering terrorism, and cooperation in various defense fields have also been emphasized, which cannot in any way indicate that the nature of the agreement made is military. It can be said that due to the tactical nature of the approved agreement, Beijing and Tehran have upgraded the level of their strategic relations from military to infrastructural, economic, and financial-banking issues. Contrary to the popular belief that the 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement between Iran and China lacks legal dimensions and strong binding rules, it should be acknowledged that the mentioned document not only explained and developed a written road map for the parties to the agreement, but also the two parties to create a deep bond. A bilateral, friendly, stable, stable, and long-term relationship requires compliance with international legal dimensions.

Iran, China, and the 25-year strategic cooperation agreement

Iran and China have quietly drafted a broad economic and security partnership that would pave the way for billions of dollars in Chinese investment in energy and other sectors and undercut American efforts to isolate Iran. Also, this document mentions the issue of deep military cooperation with Iran, which potentially gives China a foothold in a region that has been a strategic concern of the United States for decades. This document calls for joint training and exercises, joint weapons research and development, and information sharing. The draft agreement with Iran shows that China, unlike many countries, feels that it is in a position to defy the United States and is strong enough to resist US sanctions. (Myers & Fassihi, 2020) They send a message to Washington that China has extensive geopolitical influence in the Middle East. One of the most important factors that helps to understand the growing influence of China in the Middle East and North Africa is the concern about the reduction of the commitment of the

United States to the region, which in turn increases the importance of the issue of China's preferences in the Persian Gulf (Fulton, 2021). What distinguishes Iran's cooperation with China from others is that both China and Iran have global and regional ambitions and conflicting relations with the United States, and a security aspect is visible in the agreement. The military aspect of this agreement concerns the United States; Just as the unprecedented joint naval exercise of Iran, China, and Russia in 2022 in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Oman prompting concern from U.S. policymakers; China's growing influence in East Asia and Africa has challenged the interests of the United States, and the Middle East is the next battleground where Beijing can challenge the hegemony of the United States, this time through Iran. This is especially important because the 25-year strategic agreement and its implications go beyond the economic sphere and bilateral relations. For China, this agreement can help guarantee the country's energy security; Because the Gulf supplies more than half of China's energy needs. The 25-year agreement between China and Iran inevitably changes the political landscape of the region in favor of Iran and China and strategically counterbalance the influence of America. This agreement allows China to play a greater role in one of the most important regions of the world (Yazdanshenas & Saleh, 2020)).

The political orientation of these two countries has long-term consequences for Washington's interests in the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific. First and foremost, Iran's actions in the Middle East preoccupy the United States and prevent it from fully focusing its strategic focus on the Indo-Pacific region - which the United States refers to as the "priority theater". has done - to change as a result, Beijing has more opportunities to expand its influence and presence in the Pacific and India. As the United States continues to maintain forces and investments in the Middle East, it can focus less on the Indo-Pacific and this situation will benefit China (Green &

Roth, 2021:19), because, the United States in this region seeks to strengthen its position and strategic goals with the cooperation of countries such as Japan and strategically counterbalance and erode the position of China (Hudson, 2019). Some other advantages of the strategic cooperation between Iran and China in the form of a 25-year agreement for Beijing include China's share of a major source of oil, although Iran provides a small part of China's total oil imports, finding a large foreign market for Chinese goods is important. It is special (Figuerola, 2021). However, it has been difficult to bring Iran into Beijing's geostrategic orbit in recent years for some reasons, and despite being beneficial to China, Iran has been heavily sanctioned by the international community, especially the United States, as a disaffected country. The 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) changed these calculations and created a lifeline for Iran by reducing international sanctions. At the same time, China did not lose any time to attract Iran's opinion. Tehran will be less likely to comply with the will of the international community to abandon its nuclear programs with the massive injection of Chinese economic aid and guaranteed payments for guaranteed oil supply. This Chinese action fulfills Beijing's strategic ploy in line with the "deflection" program to keep the United States mired in a deep quagmire in the entire Middle East (Holmquist & Englund, 2020).

Conclusion

The relations between Iran and China are pursued in the framework of various strategies for both Iran and China. The common theme of this relationship is, first of all, dissatisfaction with the international order and unilateralism of the United States in the arena of the international system. Both countries have tried to challenge this order in various periods; But China considers itself a great power alongside other powers, unlike them, it does not seek to colonize third-world countries, and the history of this country speaks of such behavior, and with

this mindset, it has cooperated with other countries, including Iran. With the coming of Deng Xiaoping and the change of China's policies in the international arena, the approach of economic development and improvement of China's situation was placed on the agenda of foreign policymakers, and contrary to their revolutionary ideology, they turned to cooperation with the great powers and the capitalist system. At this time, in general, China was aligned with the policies and positions of the United States and was moving in the same direction, in order to achieve favorable economic progress and development. The economic cooperation development strategy was followed by them at this time. Attention to Iran in the field of China's foreign policy in this period of time was done with the aim of achieving economic development and the consumer market to sell Chinese products and productions and take advantage of Iran's oil. After achieving this goal, China changed its strategy in the international system and turned from a country aligned with the United States into a disaffected and opposed country that tried to challenge the international capitalist system, in this regard, the governments and countries opposed to America, including Iran, got help. In this scene, Iran became an important country for the Chinese that could break the circle of American capitalism and prevent America from gaining power in Iran. For this purpose, the Belt and Road Plan was put on the agenda of China's foreign policy, and Iran played a significant role in this chain, which could connect China with Europe and other countries. The third strategy that became the head of China's political behavior is the diversion strategy, which means supporting all governments opposed to the United States and its allies to lead the country to a meeting outside of China by deviating and changing the position of the United States. The 25-year agreement between Iran and China was concluded for this purpose, to challenge America's position in various regions, including the Middle East, Asia Pacific, etc., and to expand its influence in these regions. In this strategy, stabilizing the

geopolitical and geostrategic position is very important for the Chinese. In general, Iran is important; Because, from various aspects, including its geographical location, rich energy resources, Iran's political approaches to the international system, etc., it can help its goals and plans.

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