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A Great Game with New Players: Iran's Eastern Orientation in Central Asia and its Effect on U.S. Policy

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Introduction

Central Asia is a region of both emerging strategic importance and historical geostrategic rivalry.^a As oil production declines in Alaska and the North Sea, and the Gulf States continually oppose foreign investment, Central Asia's vast untapped reserves are becoming one of the few viable regions for future investment in energy production.¹ More importantly, however, is the fact that these resources are hotly contested by a number of global great powers, including the United States, China, Russia, and India, prompting not only what has been called a "New Great Game" to acquire Central Asian oil,² but a major shift in the diplomatic priorities of Central Asia's regional actors.

Central Asia is often analyzed solely in terms of one specific policy area, i.e., "pipeline diplomacy" or counterterrorism, but it is equally important to grasp how these policies fit in with emerging changes in the global distribution of power. As relative economic power shifts eastward towards countries like China, Russia, and India, the rest of the world will have to adjust accordingly. Consequently, it is important for the United States to understand what interests these countries have in Central Asia, how the pursuit of those interests affects the regional balance and what implications this has for U.S. interests both regionally and globally.

We can see the effects of these emerging dynamics most clearly in the foreign policy of Iran. As Russia begins to reassert influence over former Soviet satellites, and China's booming economy compels it to seek ever-larger sources of petroleum, Iran's diplomatic attention will increasingly be drawn eastward. While Russia and China see Iran as a conduit for energy and a proxy to divert U.S. political resources, Iran sees its eastern neighbors as a much-needed respite from U.S. imposed isolation and, more importantly, as a hedge against potential military intervention or regime change. More specifically, Iran's eastern ties can provide diplomatic cover for its controversial nuclear enrichment program, as well as blunt the effects of Western imposed sanctions.

This article will explore the geopolitical relationships between Iran, China and Russia, and the implications for U.S. policy. Relations between Tehran, Beijing and Moscow are solidifying and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Nevertheless they are imperfect and therefore susceptible to American political influence and economic leverage, provided the United States pursues a policy with conceptual focus and adequate political backing.

Ultimately, the United States should pursue a policy that emphasizes both multilateral cooperation and deeper ties with India. Just as Iran has furthered its interests through associations with Russia and China, so too can the United States further its own interests by advancing its strategic ties with a rising India. Stronger ties with India will afford it greater leverage to secure its interests, without sparking the immediate backlash of the region's great powers. Although America may not be able to reverse China and Russia's geopolitical rise or significantly chill their warming relationship with Iran, rational policy objectives and regional allies can influence emerging trends to better serve its interests.

Iran's Geopolitical Interests in Central Asia

Iran's policy towards Central Asia is driven by a pragmatic calculation of interests rather than the desire to export Shi'a Islam.³ Broadly speaking, Iran seeks to achieve regional stability so it can develop Caspian Oil resources and then divert those resources through pipelines running through Iran. Tehran also seeks to create new regional structures which foster stable relations with its neighbors. This could also serve the secondary functions of deterring or complicating further US regional involvement and providing a basis for both fostering cooperation and mitigating disputes with Russia.⁴ These endeavors remain part of a larger effort to restore Iran's "natural" role as a major regional power, which has been thwarted by years of revolution, international isolation, and strategic estrangement

with the United States.⁵ The major obstacles to this goal are the Russian military and naval presence in the Caspian Sea, the threat of separatism and ethnic conflict in the newly-formed Central Asian republics, and the ubiquitous American presence in the region.⁶

But Iran's relations with China and Russia in Central Asia serve a much larger geopolitical goal. By fostering workable (albeit imperfect) alliances with the region's great powers, Iran has managed to provide itself with the diplomatic and economic cover necessary to stand up to the United States in its recent row over its covert enrichment of uranium. In the long term, Iran's relations with China and Russia allow it to conduct a foreign policy that is increasingly unencumbered by the Western attempts at diplomatic isolation. Though these relationships have global implications, they ultimately have their roots in the distribution of Central Asian oil resources and the mutual need to balance against United States' increasing economic and military involvement in the region.

Russian-Iranian Relations

Relations between Moscow and Tehran are based on a combination of economic interests and strategic necessity. Unlike China, which must increasingly import petroleum to fuel its burgeoning economy, Russia does not depend on Iran to satiate its growing energy needs. Russia, however, desperately needs foreign revenues to finance growing governmental budgets, and it wants opportunities to demonstrate its diplomatic independence from the West.⁷ Concurrently, Iran needs Russia for investment in its economy, military, and most importantly, its budding nuclear enrichment campaign. Both countries view their relationship as a counterweight to increasing U.S. influence in the region. Russia views U.S. military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan as well as NATO's expansive Partnership for Peace program as encroachments into its historical and strategic sphere of interest, while Iran views such actions as part of a larger attempt of economic isolation and strategic encirclement.⁸ Thus, both countries have economic and strategic incentives for further cooperation.

Russian-Iranian relations underwent a significant shift in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Whereas historically Russia and Iran have been strategic enemies, the end of the Cold War has brought opportunities for both rapprochement and tactical disagreement. Iran's rapprochement with Russia began in the late 1980s and grew as the United States became a major power in the Middle East following the 1991 Gulf War.⁹ Iran needs Russian weapons to maintain its military position in the region, and Russia sees in Iran a potential strategic ally that could disrupt Western oil supplies in

the Persian Gulf.¹⁰ Because of this, Iran did not recognize Azerbaijan until after the Soviet Union collapsed in November 1991, and after the breakup Iran refrained from exporting Islam to the newly-formed Central Asian republics. Iran also refrained from raising a serious issue with Russia's counterinsurgency operations in Chechnya and its anti-Muslim policy in Bosnia.¹¹

Tensions have arisen over Russian and Iranian shares of the oil-rich Caspian Sea. Russia traditionally argued that the Caspian's resources belonged equally to Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Iran. However, Russia's desire to participate in Western-led development led it to reconfigure its claim to the Caspian seabed based on national-territorial lines. Under this scheme, Iran would receive a 13 percent share of the Caspian – far less than the 20 percent it felt it was entitled to.¹² These tensions were exacerbated on July 23, 2001, when an Iranian gunboat ordered two Azeri vessels chartered by British Petroleum to withdraw from a portion of the Caspian where a significant oil deposit is said to exist.¹³ While British Petroleum claimed that it would cease all operations in the disputed area until the conflict was resolved, and the United States offered muted criticism of the Iranian government, the Russian response was significantly harsher. Russian statements on the issue were decidedly unfriendly to Iran, and Russia drastically restricted its exports of weapons to Iran. This serves as an example of the pitfalls inherent in Russo-Iranian oil diplomacy, even as Russia worked to mend the strained relationship.¹⁴

Russia is also concerned about the possibility of a joint Ukraine-Iran pipeline that could potentially pump 706 billion cubic feet of Iranian natural gas past Russia and towards Europe.¹⁵ Such a pipeline would provide Iran access to lucrative European markets and loosen Ukraine's dependence on Russian energy supplies, significantly weakening Russia's energy monopoly in the region. Tensions have been exacerbated by Iran's insistence that it constitutes a viable alternative to Russia for providing Central Asian oil to European markets.¹⁶ Turkish and Russian officials managed to forestall the 2005 plan to build a \$5 billion pipeline between Iran and the Ukraine, but Iran's strategic interest in energy diversion will likely keep the idea from being permanently shelved.¹⁷

The relationship is not entirely immune to U.S. influence. Russia became alarmed in 2003 when Iran admitted that it had been conducting clandestine research activities for almost two decades.¹⁸ It responded by significantly downplaying its public support of Iran's nuclear ambitions, allowing the IAEA to establish deadlines on Iran's full disclosure of its nuclear program¹⁹ and ultimately threatening to delay or halt its assistance in the production of the Bushehr reactor entirely.²⁰ Iran's reaction was to "play the European card," threatening to offer the contracts for six additional nuclear

reactors to the French instead of the Russians.²¹ While Russia ultimately did complete the reactor, it nevertheless acceded to U.S. demands requiring Iran to ship its spent nuclear fuel back to Russia.²²

In spite of these differences, a strong relationship still exists between Iran and Russia. The most compelling example of this is Russia's decision to finish the Bushehr nuclear reactor. This was done in spite of both stringent U.S. objections, and Russian-Iranian disputes over the Caspian Sea. The motivations for this endeavor were both economic and strategic: On one hand, it provided Russia with hard cash and an implied Iranian promise to purchase additional reactors, while on the other hand, it gave Putin the chance to prove his independence from the United States.²³

Sino-Iranian Relations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

Since the end of the Cold War, Sino – Iranian relations have been marked by a significant increase in economic and military cooperation. In 1990, bilateral trade between Iran and China stood at approximately \$314 million; it skyrocketed to \$5.6 billion in 2003 and to over \$7 billion in 2004.²⁴ China is currently Iran's top oil importer (importing over 150,000 barrels of Iranian crude per day²⁵) and is looking to expand its economic cooperation into the automobile, aerospace, and aluminum markets. At the same time China is strengthening ties with Iranian labor and building up Iranian infrastructure.²⁶ China is strengthening its military ties with Iran as well. Between 1997 and 2000, Beijing sold approximately \$600 million in conventional arms to Iran, up from \$400 million between 1993 and 1996.²⁷ This included anti-ship cruise missiles, surface-to-air missiles, combat aircraft, patrol ships and advanced missile technology. Despite its obligations to the Missile Technology Control Regime, China is thought to have aided in the development of Iran's Shahab-3 ballistic missile,²⁸ and is also suspected of providing key assistance with Iran's chemical weapons programs, as well as in its efforts to acquire nuclear technology.²⁹ More publicly, China has provided diplomatic support by diluting the UN Security Council's consensus against Iran's nuclear program,³⁰ welcoming its admittance into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and contemplating ways to get Iran admitted into the WTO.³¹

China and Iran's strategic compatibility provides the foundation for this cooperation. For China, working with Iran is seen as a way to quell the Shiia-based Uighur separatist movement in Xingjian, provide security on its western boarder, and prevent its "strategic encirclement" by U.S. bases in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan.³² By far the most important aspect of Sino-Iranian cooperation is oil.

During the Cold War, China pursued a policy of energy self-sufficiency, but by the mid-1990s its burgeoning economy had forced increasing reliance on foreign oil. By 2001, China was importing over 34 percent of its petroleum needs, with imports expected to *quintuple* by 2025.³³ The Sino-Iranian relationship is motivated nearly as much by economic well-being as by energy security. Recognizing that its sea-based supply routes could be disrupted by the U.S. naval presence in the Gulf, China began investing in numerous overland pipelines through Central Asia and sees Iran as a major transport route for oil.³⁴

Similarly, Iran views China as an instrumental ally in securing regional supremacy. While Iran benefits militarily from Chinese arms transfers³⁵ and economically from its substantial trade in energy, it ultimately views China as an alternative to scarce Western investment³⁶ and an outlet to mitigate the effects of Western-imposed diplomatic isolation. Thus, Iran's relations with China are part of a much larger "Eastern strategy," where Iran uses its warming relations with Eastern powers to balance against an increasingly hostile West.³⁷

These ambitions have been at least partially realized by Iran's involvement in the Sino-Russian Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The SCO was created in June 2001 as an expansion of the 1996 "Shanghai Five," a regional grouping comprised of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The SCO subsequently added Uzbekistan as a full member, while including Mongolia, Pakistan, India and Iran as observers.

Although the SCO ostensibly seeks to combat terrorism and expand economic cooperation amongst its member states, its real motive is to provide a security framework that diminishes American influence in Central Asia.³⁸ The potential for the SCO to develop into a full-fledged "eastern bloc" is troubling for the West, as an SCO incorporating Iran would essentially become an "OPEC with bombs;" an energy-rich alliance encompassing almost half of the world's population and stretching from Taiwan to the Persian Gulf.³⁹ Of course the most relevant example of the SCO's rising influence is its July 2005 proclamation that U.S. military presence in Central Asia should be limited to the duration of its Afghanistan campaign only.⁴⁰ Iran sees the SCO as an opportunity to combat Sunni extremists (which threaten its oil and gas pipelines), curb heroin trafficking (Iran has over 2 million addicts), provide a forum for Iran to engage Central Asian States without antagonizing Russia, and give political cover against Western antagonism.⁴¹

The SCO has also been fraught with difficulties, with national interests often trumping multilateral concerns. China and Russia are apt to cooperate on security issues even as they often have divergent economic interests, with Russia preferring to trade energy resources with Europe rather than China.⁴² Additionally, the SCO is constrained by the expansive role of NATO's Partnership for Peace, which not only outpaces the SCO in terms of resources and organizational ability but also includes all SCO members with the exception of China and Russia.⁴³ Whether common strategic interests will overcome organizational difficulties and national struggles to partition Central Asia's oil remains to be seen. What is known, however, is that the SCO provides a viable, if imperfect, forum for China, Russia, and Iran to further their mutual strategic interests: energy development, collective security, and resistance to the West.

Strategic Balancing and Emerging Trends in Central Asia

The emerging prominence of China and Russia has had a marked effect on Central Asian politics and especially on the foreign policy of Iran. Both countries give Iran ample diplomatic cover in the UN Security Council and provide much-needed economic and military investment to allay the effects of Western sanctions. In return, Iran is seen as a source of energy and foreign investment and a foil to America's global ambitions. Consequently, in spite of tactical difficulties, the relationships between Tehran, Moscow and Beijing are likely to continue to grow for the foreseeable future.

There is some debate over whether this relationship constitutes overt strategic balancing against the United States. Relations between the three have certainly improved since the 1990's, largely due to a confluence of economic and strategic interests and Iran's fateful decision not to promote Shi'a Islam in the region. On the other hand, the relationships are marred by Iran's international isolation, and the zero-sum nature of Iran's foreign policy interests (e.g., oil diversion, lack of transparency on the nuclear question, and the legal rights to the Caspian Sea). Russia and China benefit from their relations with Iran, but it is not without cost. Iran's relationship with Russia is described as a "tactical alliance,"⁴⁴ and while its relationship with China is arguably stronger, the SCO has yet to develop into a full-fledged security institution such as NATO.⁴⁵

Regardless, strong mutual economic benefits coupled with the common desire to offset American regional encroachments have created a geopolitical trend that favors greater cooperation between Iran and its Eastern neighbors. Indeed, as Russia and China continue to rise, the United States may find it increasingly difficult to secure its interests both in the Caspian region and globally. Significant diplomatic room for the United

States still exists, however; the tactical disputes between Iran and Russia over oil and the difficulties in securing collective action in the SCO, give the United States significant diplomatic room to maneuver. Although the United States may not have as free a hand as it did in the 1990s, it can still secure its interests, provided that Washington pursues a rational policy that is mindful of the contemporary dynamics of power.

U.S. Interests and Policies in Central Asia

After the Cold War, Central Asia was largely peripheral to U.S. interests. The United States sought to strengthen the independence of the former Soviet republics and their transition to more democratic forms of government but offered relatively little in terms of political aid or military engagement.⁴⁶ When vast energy reserves were found in Central Asia in the mid-1990s, U.S. economic and political involvement aimed at developing Central Asia's hydrocarbon resources, thereby preventing a Russian monopoly on oil and gas pipelines, increased.⁴⁷ It was during this time that the United States began to promote NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) in an effort to promote regional stability and draw the former Soviet republics away from a reemerging Russia.⁴⁸

As with all aspects of foreign policy, September 11th represented a turning point in America's outlook on Central Asia. Not only was Central Asia used as a staging ground for aerial attacks into Afghanistan, but the region itself risked becoming a safe-haven for terrorists, as shown in the close ties between Al-Qaeda and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU).⁴⁹ Consequently, the U.S. sought temporary basing rights in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and significantly increased its military aid to the region.⁵⁰ Over time, however, America's attention waned, and a number of Central Asian states began to question America's commitment to the region. As it became increasingly clear that U.S. involvement would not mature into a long-term partnership, many Central Asian states began to revert to a more multi-vectored foreign policy of courting the United States when they must, but also maintaining strong ties with Russia and China.

The Inconsistencies of America's Central Asian Policy

The actions of the United States in Central Asia have caused a security dilemma. Security dilemmas occur when efforts to increase one's own security, subsequently *decrease* the security of other states in the region. Because these states now feel less secure, they seek to defend themselves, ironically making the environment less secure for all parties involved.⁵¹ American attempts to woo individual Central Asian states are

necessary to secure its share of hydrocarbon resources and maintain a check on terrorism. Since Central Asia comprises a strategic sphere of influence for Russia, China and Iran, these overtures are viewed as antagonistic and threatening, prompting further diplomatic coordination. Unfortunately for the United States, attempts to gain strategic footholds in Central Asia are often plagued by its pursuit of incompatible goals using insufficient political resources. Thus, the United States is left with the worst of both worlds, neither earning the trust of the region's great powers nor generating enough leverage to significantly counter their emerging power.

The United States exacerbates these tensions with its preference for ad-hoc bilateral ties with the Central Asian republics and inconsistent commitments to democratic reform. Since the end of the Cold War, the United States preferred to deal with the Central Asian republics on a bilateral basis, relying on multilateral institutions only when they excluded Russia and China (such as with the PfP).⁵² The idea behind this was to wean the Central Asian republics away from Russian influence, ultimately preventing the reemergence of Russia's imperial ambitions in the post-Soviet space.⁵³

Although U.S. aid to the region rose considerably after September 11th, it was mostly tied to satisfying immediate security needs⁵⁴ and included no provisions for long-term security guarantees.⁵⁵ Nor did it include a firm commitment to a regional security architecture that could serve as an alternative to Russian military protection or Chinese economic influence. Thus, while the exploitation of these bilateral ties has allowed U.S. military access in countries like Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan after the July 2005 SCO timetable for withdrawal,⁵⁶ they failed to provide a positive reason for Central Asian nations to join the American camp permanently.⁵⁷

American bilateral ties with Russia and China have not been nearly as robust, which contributes to their increasing apprehension with America's regional posture. Despite being in close proximity for a number of years, U.S. and Russian military bases have rarely been in communication. The United States pays surprisingly little attention to regional cooperative initiatives such as the SCO.⁵⁸ The result of this inattention is increased apprehension by the region's great powers, making them more hostile to U.S. interests and more receptive to overtures from Iran.

The U.S. method for promoting political reform has also created tensions in the region. More liberal governments are seen as advantageous to long-term U.S. interests, as they would potentially seek closer alliances with the West than Russia or China. To serve American interests best, however, this policy must be pursued within a larger framework of regional security, rather than as a single-minded policy of "reform or

regime change.”⁵⁹ Not only must countries have significant incentives to engage in political reforms, but there must be credible consequences for a failure to do so. The goal must be to build a sustainable program of political reform that occurs within a larger conception of sustainable regional security without turning a blind eye to blatant abuses of humanitarian rights or leaving the Central Asian republics to the tender mercies of a resurgent and neo-imperialist Russia

If America wants to promote democracy, it must bring something significant to the table, such as more permanent political relationships and more comprehensive economic aid, but still maintain enough regional leverage to dissuade countries from reneging on their promises of liberal reforms. Otherwise, the United States runs the risk of forcing democracy promotion in conflict with other U.S. objectives, while actually doing very little to promote democracy.⁶⁰ In the short-term, the U.S. should focus on democratic preconditions such as encouraging foreign investment or socioeconomic reform, so as to promote long-term liberal objectives without unduly antagonizing the region’s major players.⁶¹

U.S. policy in Central Asia suffers from a number of inconsistencies. The U.S. seeks bilateral relationships but fails to give them proper diplomatic backing. It aims to completely isolate Iran, while at the same time containing or alienating Russia and China. It attempts to draw the Central Asian republics away from Russian influence while refusing to grant them mutual security pacts or commit significant political resources to the area.⁶² The result is a policy that has achieved none of its objectives. Central Asian republics, such as Uzbekistan, which were once enthusiastic supporters of U.S. influence, are now disenchanted with the United States’ lack of political commitment.⁶³ Similarly, the U.S. isolation of Iran unwittingly drove it into the arms of China and Russia, affording it the means necessary to resist U.S. demands to suspend its enrichment of uranium.

Proposals for Reform: A Focus on Multilateralism and the Emerging Indian Alliance

The United States must approach Central Asia differently. It is time for U.S. officials to acknowledge that it may not be able to achieve *all* of its regional objectives, and consequently must develop a more focused foreign policy that can influence regional relationships to be more favorable to its interests. In essence, the United States needs to increase its leverage in ways that mitigate the perception that it is a universal threat to the region’s great powers. While Iran has developed increasingly strong ties with Russia and China, the relationship is far from perfect or impenetrable. Iran has its own agenda that

sometimes conflicts with other actors in the region. The United States may not stop these relationships from advancing, but it can ensure that they do not impinge on its policy objectives by lessening its antagonism of the great powers in the region.

A focus on multilateral (as opposed to bilateral) relations may help.⁶⁴ By engaging regional organizations like the SCO, the United States can advance its interests in ways that take other nations into account, thereby reducing the tensions that it has so far engendered. Furthermore, a focus on multilateralism can emphasize common goals among the great powers (such as combating terrorism), while reminding states that the United States has a legitimate role to play in the region. All of this will help to ameliorate tensions and give the United States breathing room to address its concerns vis-à-vis Iran.

Multilateralism, however, will not be a complete panacea. The United States has a legitimate interest in containing Iran, promoting democratic political reform, thwarting the re-imposition of Russian rule over the former Soviet states, and stemming the emerging influence of China. Likewise, Russia, China and Iran have a strategic interest in reducing U.S. influence in the region. Consequently, the United States will need additional political leverage to bolster its position in the region and encourage policies that are compatible with its interests.

This leverage can be gained by strengthening America's already growing ties with India, which complements the Bush Administration's previous efforts to allow U.S. investment in India's civil nuclear power industry.⁶⁵ There are many factors that favor a "natural partnership" between the United States and India. Politically, both countries are democracies with largely market-based economies, and both see an emerging threat in China's rise to regional dominance.⁶⁶ Trade between the two nations has boomed since the early 1990s, reaching \$32 billion in 2006, while the 2.5 million Indian-Americans living in the United States are one of the country's wealthiest and best educated immigrant groups.⁶⁷ Although relations between the two countries were relatively distant during the Cold War, India and the United States have since increased cooperation in a number of areas, including the provision of nuclear power, the increased trade of high-technology goods, expanded military-to-military cooperation, and arms sales.⁶⁸

As India emerges as a pan-Asian power, its interests and attention in Central Asia are likely to grow. Worried about the possibility of strategic encirclement by an energetic China and a historically bellicose Pakistan, India has sought to protect and increase its economic and political assets in Central Asia.⁶⁹ Specifically, India hopes to use its rising economic profile to invest in Central Asian infrastructure, promoting

regional stability and influencing the direction of Trans-Asian oil pipelines.⁷⁰ In military matters, India has negotiated basing rights in Tajikistan to counter Pakistan's closing of its airspace to Indian planes, has formed a security relationship with Uzbekistan to counter the rise of Islamic terrorism, and aims to supplant China as the region's major arms supplier.⁷¹

A closer and more coordinated relationship with India could aid U.S. interests in Central Asia. India and America have strong cultural and economic ties and have common foreign policy objectives, namely combating terrorism and containing a rising China. America can use India's long-standing relationship with Russia to promote democratic reform in way that would be more palatable to Russian interests, and India's growing economic presence can compensate America's often haphazard commitment to the region. Since India also has observer status in the SCO, it can use this as a pulpit to voice common Indo-U.S. concerns. By forging closer ties with India, the United States can pool economic and political resources and deflect accusations that a unilateralist America is imposing its singular will on the region.

Of course, India has its own objectives which the United States will have to take into account. India maintains close ties with Iran based on its growing need for a reliable source of Middle Eastern and Central Asian oil.⁷² The United States will have to find a way to help India address its energy needs, while at the same time dissuading it from becoming too dependant on Iranian oil. This should not be an insurmountable task, given America's enormous economic leverage, its previous commitment to Indian nuclear power, and Iran's continual diplomatic isolation. If successful, however, the emerging relationship with India can provide the United States with the economic influence and regional legitimacy to secure its interests in spite of the rising influence of China and Russia.

The politics of Central Asia are in a state of transition, brought about by emerging changes in the global distribution of power. As China rises and Russia reasserts itself, the United States will find it increasingly difficult to impose its will unilaterally on other countries in the region. Iran, China, and Russia have formed an imperfect but growing relationship based on the mutual gains of oil production, and the common need to thwart U.S. regional encroachments. This relationship not only allows all three countries to better pursue their regional interests in Central Asia, but also gives Iran the economic and diplomatic cover necessary to ignore Western demands to halt its nuclear enrichment program. While the United States may not be able to fully reverse these trends, it can nevertheless begin the creation of a regional order that better protects its interests. By rationalizing its policy objectives, encouraging multilateral cooperation, and, most

importantly, allying itself with an emerging India, the United States can ensure that these recent developments work towards its own benefit.

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- 71 *Ibid.*, 150-51.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 149.