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## LOOKING-EAST IN THE IRANIAN FOREIGN POLICY: THE POLITICO-IDEOLOGICAL INCLINATIONS AND PRACTICAL IMPERATIVES

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*As counterintuitive as it may at first seem, Iran embarked upon a policy of looking-East long before many other nations adopted such a critical approach in their dealing with the outside world. Various aspects of the orientation, however, did not receive equal attention or did not yield desired results simply because the importance and weight of each relevant objective pursued by successive Iranian governments in East Asia waxed and waned largely based on the Middle Eastern country's domestic requirements. Despite its fluctuating nature and mixed outcomes in the past, looking-East is widely expected to last as a pillar of Iranian foreign policy approach for decades to come at a crucial time when Tehran is unable, or actually unwilling, to chip away at its key differences with Western countries especially the United States of America.*

**Keywords:** *Looking-East, Iran, East Asia, foreign policy, international trade, energy, sanctions.*

### Introduction

The political entities of the Northeast Asian region (henceforth East Asia), including the greater China (comprising mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao), Japan, South Korea, and North Korea have all played an increasingly indispensable role in Iran's interactions with the outside world over the past several decades. In spite of its profound significance and massive ramifications for Iranians in short and long-term, the academic studies on the topic have, for the most part, remained sparse and scattered. Still, a great deal of the relevant literature, particularly the materials available in the Persian language about Iran's multifaceted connections to East Asia are, by and large, encapsulated by the concept of 'looking-East.' After all, the looking-East notion in Iran was, from the very beginning, about the Mideast country's relationship with East Asia, though this concept has also been used to imply a similar connotation with regard to certain foreign policy orientation of many other countries across the world (Calabrese 1991: 9–11).

Looking-East has certainly been a powerful framework in grasping some critical elements of Iranian interactions with the outside world for several decades. Iran was among the first countries in the world which adopted a looking-East orientation in its international relations, turning the concept into a 'guiding principle' for many interested observers to detect and evaluate certain purposes and performances of the country beyond its sovereign borders. Of course, looking-East a la mode was yet to become either

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a major orientation in foreign policy of many other countries or a widely-used concept among pundits and experts to appraise new dynamics in international politics (Jacques 2012). Even in Iran itself it took some time before looking-East emerged as a rather convenient concept, and definitely not yet a well-crafted and prevailing theme among relevant politicians and interested specialists to carve out and analyze their country's approach toward East Asia, though some Iranians have often applied the term more broadly to cover Tehran's orientation *vis-à-vis* Russia and all countries located in South and Southeast Asia as well (Xinhua 2018a).

The present study, therefore, argues that looking-East in the Iranian context, in spite of its clear-cut wording and connotations, has largely remained a vague and less-explained concept. As far as Iran's relationship with East Asia is concerned, few interested people have actually bothered to provide an explicit definition of the looking-East notion or specify its main characteristics in more details. In some other cases, it seems that the whole concept is either misunderstood or exaggerated, and its exclusive features are somewhat couched in confusing caveats. On top of that, even the relevant official documents, which conventionally spell out Tehran's overall objectives and strategies in foreign affairs, are often fraught with such limitations and shortcomings. What is, then, the crux of the problem? If looking-East happened to shape a critical foundation of Iranian foreign interactions with the outside world for several decades, why did not the concept attract corresponding attention and scrutiny among various interested observers and experts here and there? What does essentially explain such subtle discrepancy between what looking-East was supposed to be about in Iran and the relevant policy the Persian Gulf country virtually executed over a course of several decades?

#### **Framework of Analysis: Looking-East and Its Ideational Intricacies**

Looking-East is, by and large, a recent phenomenon and a rising trend among a large number of countries around the world. Even major European countries such as Germany and Britain are no longer skittish in demonstrating their looking-East proclivities (Beyme 1999). And while one country is obsessed with potentially huge politico-economic interests stemming from its looking-East leaning, the other one is astonished by significant socio-cultural perks deriving from some Eastern experiences. This orientation in various parts of the world has, moreover, a lot to do with critical changes in the weight and status of China over the past decades. Whether it is for pure politico-strategic calculations or for particular economic and financial statistics, the rise of China has truly grabbed the attention of the whole world, obsessing many nations how to benefit better from forging closer connections to Beijing in various political, economic, technical, military and cultural areas. Today, looking-East stands, first and foremost, for making the most of what China can offer regardless of any strategy or terminology a given country carves out in order to achieve such important national goal (Xinhua 2018b).

Despite its significance, however, the rise of China turned out to be the continuation of a trend rather than giving birth to a new phenomenon. In fact, it all started with the Japanese experience of industrialization and economic development long before the so-called 'Asian tigers' took a leaf out of Japan's book to transform fundamentally their flatlining socio-economic systems. China and several other important Asian nations, India in particular, were essentially latecomers which strived to catch up with their rela-

tively successful counterparts in East Asia in various industrial and technological fields before emerging as a credible economic and financial power on the world stage (Cumings 1987). For a great number of nations across the globe, including many countries in the African continent, therefore, looking-East as a contemporary development means to learn and benefit from the Asian trajectory of industrialization and technological achievements through fostering some sort of symbiotic economic and financial relationship with as many as resourceful and promising partners throughout Asia (Abdulai 2017: 112).

For all its principal economic and technological objectives, looking-East for many nations has also certain political, strategic, military, and even cultural connotations. In its narrowest sense, this aspect of looking-East is often regarded as an alternative to looking-West, and it is normally pursued by non-Western countries which may be already in good terms with the West. Although the economic and technological accomplishments of some Asian countries have persuaded many non-Western nations to engage them more enthusiastically in some politico-strategic and security fields; however, this vision of looking-East is not necessarily about the thriving Asian states alone. Russia, for instance, has been a major stakeholder and a prime destination for such peculiar view of looking-East since many countries in the world, from Egypt and Saudi Arabia in the Middle East to India and Indonesia in Asia, have attempted in more recent decades to cultivate better ties with the Russians by including Moscow in their broader looking-East orientation (Cook 2012: 67; Mason 2015: 77).

No matter what looking-East may conjure up for many countries in the world, the trend has basically a longer history in Iran, encompassing all those politico-strategic and military as well as economic, technological, and cultural elements. Although the Islamic Republic is credited with the looking-East approach, nevertheless, some elements of such orientation also came into view in the pre-Islamic Republic era when the Pahlavi dynasty vowed to create a 'second Japan' particularly in the aftermath of the first oil boom of 1973 (Shawcross 1989: 174). The Iranian looking-East tendency had, therefore, a longer period of gestation ahead of the time the Chinese eventually embarked in earnest upon their policy of 'reform and opening-up' (*gaige kaifang*) in 1978. In the decades that followed the establishment of the Islamic Republic, looking-East was to play a critical role in laying the foundations of lasting relationship between Tehran and its counterparts across the East Asian region. In one decade political and military objectives upped the ante, while economic interests and technological requirements gradually emerged to have a strong say in Iran's growing partnership with East Asia in other decades (Azad 2017).

Still, a major misfortune is that the Iranian predisposition to looking-East was not all it was cracked up to be. As Malaysia did under Mahathir then, the looking-East approach in Iran could be about understanding what was really going on in Japan and the other crouching four 'Asian Tigers' before China moved to soon emulate their successful model of development and economic growth (Dore 1998). If embraced wholeheartedly and implemented carefully, a successful looking-East orientation in Iran had to be about learning the values of hard work, frugality, saving, and living within one's means. There were certainly many other valuable points, both at micro and macro levels, to grasp while displaying looking-East propensities, but for the least a genuine attention to and good understanding of these constructive mores could, in turn, help the Iranian so-

ciety to boost its efficiency, productivity, creativity, and innovation in one way or another. A truly looking-East approach in Iran had to bring forth such critical outcomes so that the country could reap the lasting rewards of its long-term and rather close connections to East Asia (Bianchi 2004: 124).

The looking-East orientation in Iran would have had a better chance of fulfilling those core objectives in long haul, moreover, if the policy had been advocated and carried out by the people who had skin in the game. If the elite policymakers and their top advisors were truly intrigued by what was going on in East Asia, looking-East would certainly lead to more much finer outcomes for the country and its successive generations. This required a powerful coterie of individuals who had gleaned first-hand lessons from modern developments in one or more East Asian countries. Such a group of people would definitely be more effective in commanding a looking-East approach if its core members could speak an Asian tongue, enjoy Asian cuisine with gusto, and keep in regular contacts with their friends and counterparts in East Asia. But a major trouble with the Iranian experience was that the authorities who planned and put into practice a looking-East orientation over several decades were all but devoid of those distinguished yet highly beneficial characteristics (Korea Herald 1989: 2; Polk 2009).

As a corollary to that, therefore, the looking-East approach in Iran was hardly a pre-planned comprehensive policy to achieve specific goals within a certain time framework. The orientation often got more traction under special circumstances, while in other occasions some people in influential positions were not sure if the country needed a looking-East approach in the first place. Iran has indubitably never abandoned its looking-East approach and the country's steadfast attachment to this policy has delicately waxed and waned under different historical conditions (Bulliet 2007). Still, Tehran ultimately favored material elements over ideational gains whenever the country was boasting about or beefing up its looking-East credentials. In fact, looking-East was to serve as a convenient contingency of sorts, assisting the Iranians to muddle through in one chaotic decade after another. Even those soft aspects of the looking-East approach which had less pecuniary attributes were to be ineluctably affected by the way the Iranian government perceived and handled its counterparts in East Asia during the past several decades.

### **Ideologically Inexplicit: Looking-East in the View of the Authorities**

As this research argued earlier, looking-East has hardly been a well-thought and carefully-organized policy approach under the theocratic system of the Islamic Republic. Providing some definitions or elaborating certain features of the looking-East orientation has, by and large, become a recent phenomenon in the Middle Eastern country. A great deal of this new development has to do with the signing of the 25-year Iran–China agreement which caused consternation among many Iranian citizens, forcing some relevant officials to explain more and more about Tehran's largely-developing interactions with Eastern powers, China and Russia in particular. For over four decades, therefore, nearly all public speeches and statements given by top officials of the Islamic Republic here and there or myriad reports and documents published by different government institutions were generally devoid of any specific references to looking-East or its key characteristics in the midst of Iran's uninterrupted, and sometimes increasingly growing, partnership with Eastern nations, including Russians.

In a public speech in February 2018, it was probably the first time when the Islamic Republic's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, made it clear his own position with regard to the looking-East notion by stating that 'In foreign policy, one of our current priorities is to prefer the East over the West, prefer neighbors over faraway territories, and prefer the nations and countries which share commonalities with us over others' (The Office of the Supreme Leader 2018). In a number of ensuing speeches or during official meetings with several top officials from East countries, such as Xi Jinping from China and Vladimir Putin from Russia, Khamenei echoed a similar rhetoric by highlighting the significance of fostering better ties with some powerful and resourceful nations in the East primarily to overcome various economic and financial hardships caused by the US-led West against Iranians. In general, what sums up his relevant perspective is that 'looking-East would be logical and rational approach to sort out foreign relations of the Islamic Republic, and based on such orientation Iran should give priority to relationship with Eastern countries' (Pakayeen 2022).

By comparison, the so-called reformists and moderate leaders in the political establishment turned out to be rarely straightforward concerning their opinions about looking-East. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was an architect of the Islamic Republic's foreign policies and personally negotiated a series of Tehran's early critical deals with Eastern countries, was a dyed-in-the-wool pragmatist, if not say opportunist, and often surrounded himself with a whole array of relatively pro-West and liberal-minded advisors and ministers. For Rafsanjani, the looking-East orientation was ultimately 'Iran's strategic policy' through which the Persian Gulf country could essentially go around various economic sanctions and international restrictions in the hopes of sorting out its critical differences with the West in due course (IRNA 2004). Rafsanjani as well as his like-minded successors and influential disciples, therefore, were hardly ideologically and intellectually pro-East politicians who were willing to still stick to their official views under any changing circumstances conducive to rekindling Tehran's ties with Western countries, particularly the United States. That was really no coincidence why the former Foreign Minister, Mohammad Javad Zarif, once told his audience at the social network of Clubhouse that 'looking-East makes no sense at a time when China itself looks at the West' (Aftab News 2021).

At the end of the day, conservative authorities and their stalwart proponents were more prepared to demonstrate publicly their pro-Eastern proclivities and push back, sometimes avowedly, against those critics who did not wish closer ties between Iran and Eastern powers. Ali Akbar Velayati, who was the Mideast country's foreign minister for more than a decade and half and still serves as the supreme leader's top advisor in international affairs, for instance, regards 'looking-East as a strategic requirement to achieve the Islamic Republic's economic, political, and security interests.' In his view, 'It is natural for us (Iranians) to prioritize any region which facilitates the ground to acquire our objectives and interests better and faster' (Basirat 2018). In the same way, more recently in a speech given at the 'National Conference of Iran and Neighbors,' Yahya Rahim Safavi, a former commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and a top military aide to the supreme leader, pointed out that 'a new era has begun in Iran's foreign policy... and the looking-East approach as well as developing all-out relationship with China and Russia have dumbfounded and caught off guard the

arrogant Western enemies, some regional rivals, and even some forces inside the country' (ILNA 2022).

Given the large number and weight of the looking-East sceptics in Iran, however, some powerful conservatives after returning to power have in recent months being pushed to somehow walk a tightrope of balancing both viewpoints by asserting that their political orientation is actually 'looking to the East' and not 'turning to the East;' a surprisingly appeasing pronouncement which has put them at odds with their indefatigable fellow-conservatives in the political and security establishment of the Islamic Republic. In January 2022, for instance, when the Iranian foreign minister tried to elaborate the current government's looking-East approach by asserting that 'we want a balanced foreign policy with both Eastern and Western parts of the world,' the conservative *Tasnim News Agency* swiftly rebuked his statement, reminding him that 'the looking-East policy is not a positive balance between the East and the West, but it is to create a strategic connection to acquire the shared interests of Iran with Russia and China as well as other powerful Eastern countries' (Tasnim News Agency 2022).

### **Politico-Strategic Stakes: Swinging Rhetoric**

It may sound counterintuitive, but the first true venture in the Iranian looking-East approach coincided with the time when the newly-established Islamic Republic launched a staunch political campaign of 'neither the East nor the West.' The 'East' was the Soviet Union-led communist bloc, but the giant communist China was also a major stakeholder of that somewhat disunited association. Ironically, the Chinese, as well as the communist North Koreans, were to be soon courted for the urgent war requirements which the ongoing internecine conflict with the neighboring Iraq had demanded in spite of all anti-great powers and anti-communist postures promoted by the newly-established regime of the Islamic Republic (Parker 2000). Beijing had particularly its own legitimate reasons to pay no heed to the rhetoric of political slogans in Tehran, while accepting ungrudgingly to lend a helping hand to the neophyte rulers of Iran; it was about a fierce geopolitical rivalry with Moscow, it was about a strong attachment to the strategic significance of Iran no matter what type of political system or ideology ruled the country, and, more importantly, it was about the badly-needed huge material benefits to be secured through military, and other types of, cooperation with the new Iranian authorities (Calabrese 1990).

The main architect of the Islamic Republic's first chapter of looking-East orientation was actually Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani who played a very instrumental role in carving out and implementing Tehran's foreign policies toward East Asian countries, especially China and North Korea. Throughout the war period, Rafsanjani made several trips to East Asia during which he laid down some critical foundations of Iran's long-term connections to the region (Hashemi Rafsanjani 1999: 281–289). Once the war came to a grinding halt and Rafsanjani took the helm of the Iranian presidency, looking-East was to now primarily serve a number of other non-political and non-military objectives as the post-war reconstruction plans called for closer economic and technological relationship with East Asian states, especially Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Surrounded by a rather pliant and sycophantic cohort of many West-educated technocrats and liberal-leaning ministers and advisors, Rafsanjani was hardly a diehard proponent of Tehran's deep engagement with the East in long-run, but his half-hearted fondness for the East almost al-

ways enmeshed in pragmatism, and that is why his looking-East legacy survived long after he left the office of presidency in 1997 (Lorentz 2007: 119–121).

Under the Khatami presidency, political as well as cultural themes took the center stage as Tehran's foreign and particularly domestic politics were engulfed in a lot of contentious ideational and non-material squabbles. Iran was officially in favor of better engagement with a wider world, but the continuation of various international limitations and constraints inimical to the country's interests and ambitions forced it to often talk and act selectively. Looking-East certainly did not lose its luster, but it was now only one of the several perplexing topics the country was juggling with regionally and internationally. The East was supposed to be just a partner, if not say a junior partner, in the company of a loose coalition which the Khatami-led Iranian government invited to its sensational project of 'dialogue among civilizations.' What particularly made the looking-East orientation still relevant during this period, even if unofficially, was Iran's pattern of international trade which was increasingly yet inevitably shifting in favor of more and more exchanges with China and other East Asian countries, especially South Korea (Gonzalez 2007: 99–101).

Meanwhile, what compelled Iran to soon rekindle its looking-East approach, and even shore it up as a pillar of its official foreign policy, was the international controversy about the country's nuclear program which clouded over the final years of the Khatami government and the entire presidency of his successor, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. This time, looking-East was to display its potentials simultaneously in all politico-strategic as well as in economic, technological, and cultural domains. Politically, Iran had to increasingly tilt toward the East in order to overcome its growing international isolation and neutralize a slew of multipronged sanctions levied against Tehran in the wake of its nuclear program (Lantaigne 2016: 202). With regard to the economic and technological aspects, the looking-East policy under Ahmadinejad was to curry favor with many East Asian corporations and investors so that they could replenish the country's growing demands. Moreover, the cultural element of the looking-East orientation was promoted by Tehran to primarily pave the ground for the desired outcomes of the economic and technological facets, leading to an unprecedented encroachment of East Asian countries upon the Iranian society in all those areas.

When Hassan Rouhani was elected as Ahmadinejad's successor in June 2013, however, Iran's relations with the outside world unexpectedly underwent a seismic change. More importantly, the U.S.-led West's willingness to negotiate with the new Iranian government over the nuclear stalemate for a surprisingly prolonged period of eighteen months brought about significant developments in Tehran's foreign interactions. In particular, the ensuing results put the Iranian looking-East orientation in serious jeopardy as some influential people in the country dared to even question the rationale behind the policy in the first place (*Kharidaar* 2018a: 1). In fact, a state of euphoria over a high possibility of rapprochement between Iran and the West that followed the signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between the Iranians and their counterparts in the Sextet (United States, France, Russia, Britain, Germany, and China) gave the sceptics a golden opportunity in order to challenge almost every aspect of the looking-East approach. By singling out specific cases of exploitation and abusive treatment of Iran by East Asian countries in the pre-JCPOA era, the opponents of looking-East in-

tended to particularly prepare the public opinion for a potential shift in the Iranian grand strategy away from the East and in favor of the West (*Kelid Daily* 2018: 1, 4).

Looking-East in Iran, however, proved once again to be both deep-rooted and resilient as the second term of the Rouhani presidency roughly coincided with the ascendancy of Donald Trump at the helm of American politics. In sharp contrast to the approach of the Obama administration toward Iran, Trump tossed aside unilaterally the nuclear deal and then vowed to punish the country with ‘the most biting sanctions ever imposed.’ Moreover, Europe with which the Iranian government had developed better ties since 2013 was in relatively weak position to either resist the Trump administration's anti-Iran policies thoroughly or provide Tehran with enough guaranteed support in various politico-economic and technological fields. The whole episode left the anti-looking-East forces in Iran in a very defensive position as the country was once again on the whims of its major partners in the East to survive the new bouts of international isolation and crippling sanctions (*Ghanoon Daily* 2018: 3; *Farheekhtegan* 2018a: 9). Political inclinations and practical imperatives in Iran had been dubiously destined to be at odds for the umpteenth times, enabling the looking-East phoenix to pull through and, *sotto voce*, reap the reward.

### **The Military Factor: From Favorite to Flavor**

Arms deals, and generally military affairs, greatly contributed to the initiation of a serious policy of looking-East in Iran after the inception of the Islamic Republic and the follow-up Iran–Iraq War. It was actually this area of cooperation that sowed the seeds of instant cooperation between the new Iranian authorities and their counterparts in China and North Korea, though South Korea and Taiwan also engaged in some limited yet stealthy deals in armaments with Tehran during the war (Brzoska 1987). Besides that critical initial impact, the military component played an important role in the continuation of the Iranian looking-East approach in the aftermath of the Iran–Iraq War. In fact, military and defense cooperation survived to serve as a pillar of Iran's foreign policies toward East Asian countries no matter if only China and North Korea in the region were relevant to this sensitive business. And while the military element persisted in being consequential in the official ties between Iran and China, it remained the *raison d'être* of bilateral relationship between Tehran and Pyongyang in long run (Azad 2018).

Moreover, the military component became a touchstone through which many other stakeholders could measure the Iranian looking-East policy and its ramifications on Tehran's connections to East Asia. It was the very military cooperation between Iran and East Asia which, from the beginning, made the whole concept of looking-East approach highly sensitive. Short of delicate deals in arms and military equipment between Tehran and the East Asian states, that is China and North Korea, there were hardly any compelling rationale for many other parties here and there to put the entire relationship of Tehran with that region on notice right after the outbreak of the Iran–Iraq War (Cronin 2008). It was again for this pivotal reason that Iran's subsequent ties to its partners in East Asia became a subject of tight scrutiny after the bloody war brought to an end in 1988 (Eisenstadt 1996). Iran's post war-looking-East orientation certainly experienced a lot of dynamisms, but it was almost always the military ingredient which captured both the interest and attention of many other stakeholders.

On top of that, Iran's military and defense interactions with East Asia became a bone of contention between the advocates and critics of the looking-East orientation. Of course, the line between the two groups was pretty much blurred during the Iran–Iraq War period when there was little, if any, difference across the political spectrum with regard to securing the war requirements in every possible way. In the post-war era, however, the dividing line between the proponents and opponents of military connections to East Asia began to give way to open yet cautious avowals of differences. Supporters particularly gave prominence to the timely and constructive role of East Asian countries to meet Iran's urgent military needs during the war with Iraq. In their view, moreover, the war-time's unique contribution of East Asia needed to be regarded as a blueprint for any future cooperation in military and defense affairs between the two parties simply because those Asian states had already proved that they could be helpful and reliable for Tehran in tough times (*Farheekhtegan* 2018b: 1, 9).

Meanwhile, the critics of military and defense interactions with East Asia were not all liberal and pro-West forces as this group also included isolationists and nativists whose considerations and priorities in foreign policy were rather contrasting, though their reservation about and objection to close military cooperation with the East happened to be less vocal and less effective. The critics primarily worried that purchasing more and more military stuff of subpar quality from East Asian countries could potentially put at risk the capabilities and readiness of Iran's armed forces in long haul. They emphasized their point by, for instance, highlighting an increasingly growing investment by some of Iran's neighbors in obtaining more sophisticated defense and military equipment supplied through the Western countries fraught with newfangled technologies. Additionally, the critics had other more immediate concerns as they did not want the West put the spotlight on Iran because of the country's 'suspicious' military and missile cooperation with East Asian countries (*Kharidaar* 2018b: 1).

Regardless of all those contrasting views, nevertheless, looking-East in military affairs in Iran moved pretty much in lockstep with the politico-diplomatic dynamics. As exemplified by its politico-ideological slogans, the Islamic Republic initially and self-righteously rejected to buy arms from the Soviet Union, while it soon purchased almost any type of Soviet-made weapons from North Korea, China, Libya, and a number of Eastern European countries. During the Iran–Iraq War period, arms purchases from North Korea and China were particularly very critical as Pyongyang and Beijing supplied about 43 percent of the imported weapons in 1985, and almost 70 percent a year later (Cordesman 1987: 29). This was in sharp contrast to the pattern of looking-West in arms which Iran had experienced roughly a decade earlier. As a case in point, Iran had purchased some 77 percent of its armaments from the United States worth more than \$7 billion between 1972 and 1977 alone, making even the Western European countries queasy because Washington was then selling more and quality weapons to Tehran than it was selling to any other ally including Israel (Tarock 1998: 73, 93).

In the post-war era, arms purchases from East Asia lost its significance over time as cooperation with the region in non-military affairs gradually became a major characteristic of the Iranian looking-East approach. Still, the Iranian–North Korean connections continued, for quite long, to remain as a highly contentious aspect of the looking-East orientation because the cooperation between the two countries now involved some critical missile and probably nuclear issues. Iran's military cooperation with China, howev-

er, underwent new dynamism as Beijing was walking on eggshells trying to give priority to its rising interests in the West (*Renmin* 2017). As a corollary to that, China either terminated or highly regulated its military and missile deals with Iran in order to draw less attention to an over increasing level of interactions between the two countries in various other areas. In recent years, Iran and China have once again vowed to expand and deepen their military and defense connections part of which might come into being as an implication of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), but little has really been detailed on the broad nature and scope of such prospective collaborations between the two sides (Bing 2015).

### **Technology Transfer: On the Coattails of Politics**

As experienced by all newly-industrialized nations, the transfer of advanced technology can greatly speed up the process of growth and economic development. Technical know-how is also a key force to sustain the industrial power and economic strength of a country (Reddy 1996: 4–5; Pack 2008: 47–54). A serious policy of technology transfer has, therefore, a relatively long history in Iran, harkening back at least to the post-oil shock of 1973 when the country, under the Pahlavi monarchy, vowed to join the ranks of the world's industrialized countries by the end of the twentieth century (Graham 1978: 113, 206). Besides exhausting various potentials in the West, Iran even turned to East Asia for exploring new ways of transferring technical expertise and industrial knowledge. Two cases of such technology quest were, for instance, the signing of the \$3.6 billion industrial project of Iran–Japan Petrochemical Complex (IJPC) with the Japanese Mitsui and the 50–50 joint refining venture between the National Iranian Oil Corporation (NIOC) and the South Korea Ssangyang Corporation. Both projects eventually failed, and this early technological looking-East adventure thereby went into tailspin after the Pahlavi dynasty reluctantly passed the torch (*The Financial Times* 1983: 481).

Under the Islamic Republic, technology transfer was not first a major priority of the government as the country was grappling with its urgent war requirements throughout the 1980–1988 period. In the post-war era, various reconstruction and development programs as well as increasing industrial and economic demands forced the successive Iranian governments to delve onto all possible methods for bringing in the required technology and industrial skills. Since Iran's relationship with the West remained, by and large, frosty in one decade after another, the transfer of technology needed to gradually emerge as a major aspect of the looking-East orientation. Still, the technological looking-East hardly achieved a major breakthrough under any reformist or conservative government as the very policy was constantly encountering a number of critical internal and external impediments. Internally, technology transfer, like some other areas, was burdened with malaises such as unstable exchange rates, mismanagement of foreign exchange, and an unsound economic structure exemplified by a dominant influence of the state in almost all politico-economic decision-making processes, though the private sector was often encouraged to play a more visible role (Cohen 2004: 195; Friedman 2008).

Externally, the technological looking-East, like all other steps and methods taken to acquire technology somewhere else, was virtually overshadowed by Iran's political, and especially nuclear and missile, stalemates with the West. The country was perpetually suspected that it was using the imported technologies to fast-track its nuclear and missile programs. Such accusations were especially piercing with regard to the dual-use and

sensitive technologies which could be easily manipulated for military and nuclear projects. Allegations of such genre naturally paved the way for new and more severe regimes of sanctions levied again Iran, aiming to curtail the country's ability to have convenient access to foreign technologies and industrial know-how. Of course, even East Asian countries were not really willing to share with Iran, on a silver platter, their latest technologies and sensitive technical knowledge regardless of how the country was going to use them. But the sanctions had the power to seriously curtail their level and scope of technological cooperation with Iran in many other safe and routine fields on a selective and limited basis (Kozhanov 2018: 34).

An overwhelming majority of Iran's foreign partners for technology transfer in both public and private sectors, therefore, succumbed ineluctably to various arm-twisting strategies of the United States that emerged virtually as the main architect behind carving out and implementing several types of sanctions against the Iranians since November 1979. Exerting pressure upon the American friends and allies often proved to be an easy task, while Washington could sometimes resort to any tool in its disposal in order to convince, or even compel, the US rivals and adversaries not to help Iran with technology and industrial know-how (Blanchard and Kerr 2009: 11). The meat of the matter was that the US government developed, over time, a series of legal measures to wield tremendous pressure on foreign entities which were willing to engage in transferring certain types of technologies to Iran. Those legal tools made it quite possible for Washington to inflict a hefty penalty on targeted foreign entities 'by freezing their US properties, limiting their ability to trade with the United States, prohibiting them from obtaining US government procurement contracts, or otherwise impairing their ability to work with US entities' (US GAO 2010: 24).

Despite all those hurdles and setbacks, nonetheless, the Iranian looking-East approach needed to take care of the country's growing technological requirements, even by unconventional means if required. As the first and second steel and petrochemicals producer in the Middle East, respectively, for instance, Iran and its expanding consumer constituency of some 80 million people perpetually required a whole host of technical and industrial goods. Obliging its East Asian conventional partners to share technology and invest in industrial knowhow gradually became a semi-official policy of the Iranian government, enabling it to exploit the acquired foreign technologies for satisfying the insatiable domestic demands and improving the country's rising export potentials (Shapiro 2009: 274–275). For large and resourceful Eastern companies, establishing joint ventures with major Iranian companies was sometimes a fitting formula, while large financial rewards could occasionally tempt smaller East Asian firms, and even private Asian businessmen or businesswomen with the dual nationality of a Western country, to sneakily supply to Iran this or other desired type of technology, and if necessary its old or obsolete version.

### **Crude Oil: The Lubricating Lotion of Looking-East**

Unlike other aspects of the looking-East approach which somehow involved an Iranian initiative, oil certainly played a major role in persuading East Asian states to themselves make overtures to Iran from the 1950s onward. Iran for long time remained either the most important or a major supplier of crude oil to Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, while the Iranian government under the Pahlavi monarchy replied back the well-intention of its East Asian customers by refusing to boycott them in the wake of the

1973 crisis during which the Arab countries of the Middle East had decided to stop supplying oil to all US allies here and there (Howell and Morrow 1974: 51). Oil even played a part in the pre-Islamic Republic chapter of North Korea's relationship with Iran to the extent that Pyongyang negotiated in March 1975 a \$200 million loan from Tehran in order to cover shipments of Iranian crude oil. In the same way, the Maoist Chinese started to purchase small quantities of Iranian oil after 1974 when China itself was still an exporter of petroleum before becoming a net importer of oil some two decades later (Slater 2010: 29).

Under the Islamic Republic, oil still remained a pivotal factor in the strategic thinking of almost all East Asian states toward Iran. They desperately needed the Iranian crude oil no matter what type of political system or ideological doctrine was ruling the country. The oil dependency of East Asian states thus facilitated the ground for the Iranian officials to forge friendly ties with their Asian counterparts, bankrolling various important policies of Tehran toward the region especially its nascent looking-East orientation. As oil gradually made up a lion's share of Iran's exports to several East Asian countries, and as oil revenues accounted for a great part of the Iranian government's annual national budget one year after another; however, the petroleum pendulum slowly but surely swung in the other direction to relatively favor East Asia. The looking-East approach was to be ineluctably affected by this new development because from now on the policy orientation had to strive, in every possible way, to assure a safe and sufficient amount of oil supply to Iran's East Asian partners (*Hamshahri* 2018a: 1, 3).

Of course, the emergence of new petroleum suppliers from different parts of the world and the ensuing glut of cheap oil on the markets played a critical role in curtailing the erstwhile desperate of East Asia for the Iranian crude. The situation aggravated virtually from the time the United States-drafted economic sanctions effectively targeted Iran's oil exports. This happened surprisingly under the Obama administration, but his successor, Trump, also found the crude export a powerful weapon for browbeating Tehran. Consequently, the country was forced to sell oil only to a small number of countries most of which located in Asia, while fewer countries among that remaining coterie were in a comfortable position to import a large share of the Iranian crude. The problem became much worse when, under certain sanctions laws, Iran could no longer receive its oil money from those few countries which possessed an American permission (like South Korea) or enjoyed some international clout (like China) to continue buying the Iranian crude (*Abrar Eghtesadi* 2018: 1).

The US-led pressures on Iran's oil exports and energy revenues certainly left the looking-East orientation with tremendous troubles. Prior to Trump's oil threat against Tehran, China, South Korea and Japan were importing some 27, 10 and 7 percent of Iran's crude oil exports, respectively. Even without counting the oil which Iran was supplying to Taiwan and North Korea, close to half of the Iranian petroleum exports were flowing to East Asia, putting the region in a very strategic position with regard to the oil revenues which the country needed in order to manage its day-to-day affairs. As stated clearly by their relevant authorities, Iran's East Asian oil customers were no longer very desperate for the Iranian oil because there were some other oil producers waiting in their wings to supply as quick and confident as possible more than enough crude to the region. Although countries like China were not willing, for various strategic and economic reasons, to quit importing the Iranian oil in total, they were expecting to be given

some extra bonus under such special circumstances befallen Iran (Abdo 2018; *Global Times*, 2018).

It was, therefore, reported that Iran offered discounted oil in an attempt to curry favor with its crude customers in East Asia and somewhere else. Moreover, Iran had apparently proposed to its oil partners some sort of preferential investment opportunities in exchange for continuous oil purchases at desired quantities, though the relevant authorities in Tehran considered such sensational measures to be quite normal in international energy markets. On top of that, Iran's overdependence on its East Asia for crude exports and oil incomes was to tip the scales handsomely in favor of its Asian partners, giving them out of the blue significant leverages over the country's political economy as a whole (*Al Jazeera* 2018). This somber situation would also deal a devastating blow to the whole concept of looking-East, compromising its saving grace by turning it virtually into the only policy option left for the Iranian government to pursue for now rather than sticking to it as a desired policy among several approaches the country had power to choose in coping with an unsympathetic world.

### **Importing Goods: On the Lookout to Substitute**

Although the business of purchasing various types of non-military goods from East Asian states and using the practice as a somewhat bargaining chip in dealing with those countries often turned out to be an unchallenging task for the looking-East approach, nevertheless, certain relevant policies of East Asian countries greatly facilitated this Iranian undertaking in the region. From the first oil shock of 1973 onward, recycling part of the oil revenues earned by Middle Eastern countries, Iran in particular, became a high priority of the export-oriented policies in the developing and industrializing East Asia (Limbert 1987: 14–16). Moreover, the other critically important incentive was to bring down an increasingly expanding trade deficit with the Middle East because of additional imports of energy resources from the region. Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and later China all drew a bead on insatiable and bankable markets of Iran, carving out different strategies at various stages of their economic growth in order to increase their exports to Iran, though this staunch orientation was equally persuaded in some other parts of the world simply because of the export-oriented nature of development model in East Asia (Perkins 2013).

Although Tehran trades virtually with every country in the world, however, there happened to be equally good reasons for Iran to over time succumb a great deal of its domestic markets to almost all types of manufactured products supplied by East Asia. Relative geographic proximity, lower costs of imports, a more flow of Iranian oil toward the East, and a policy of importing low-cost products to satisfy citizens in the middle to lower-income brackets each certainly played an important role in accelerating the rate and scope of imports from East Asia. Iran's chilly relationship with the West and especially the swinging regime of sanctions levied against Tehran, however, tremendously influenced the dynamics of imports into Iran from East Asian countries over the past several decades (Roy 2013: 172–175). The looking-East approach was thereby tasked with a key objective of sorting out domestic requirements through importing almost every type of commodity which the Iranians were no longer able to purchase from the West because of the sanctions diktats.

As a corollary to that, for instance, a seismic regional shift took place in the Iranian pattern of imports between 1994 and 2006; the share of the European Union declined markedly from more than 50 percent to around one-third, while the share of Asia ratcheted up from 9 to 27 percent (US GAO 2008: 29). After 2006, the East Asian countries of South Korea and China particularly dominated Iran's imports from Asia as some brands from these two countries successfully made inroads into almost every Iranian household. Some European countries like Germany could occasionally, especially in the halcyon period between the signing of the JCPOA and the withdrawal from the nuclear deal by the Trump administration, improve their share of imports into Iran, but the European bloc as a whole never managed to claim back its erstwhile domineering position in the country. In sharp contrast to some Western nations such as the Germans, the Chinese made perennial progress in lucrative Iranian markets by positioning themselves as the largest imports partner of Iran accounting for roughly one-fourth of the country's imported goods.

According to the latest data, China, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and South Korea occupy the position of the top three imports partners for Iran, supplying 24.62, 14.67, and 7.92 percent of the country's total imports, respectively. Of course, the UAE does not have any credible brand of its own, and a great deal of its exports is virtually the products it receives from various Western and particularly Eastern countries before the tiny Arab state re-export them to some profitable places such as Iran. In 2017, for instance, exports and re-exports to Iran from the UAE reached more than \$17 billion mostly through the entrepôt of Dubai (*Financial Tribune* 2018). The foregoing figures, however, usually do not cover various types of East Asian products which are smuggled perpetually and imported informally into Iran through a slew of porous borders surrounding Iran. This phenomenon also contributed profoundly to the omnipresence of East Asian brands and goods throughout the Iranian society sometimes with critical ramifications for Iran's ties to the region, and generally its looking-East orientation.

The crux of the problem was that imports became so profitable that many people joined the business, giving rise to a massive shutdown of companies, large lay-off of employees, and detrimental destruction of domestic brands and products (*Vatan-e Emrooz* 2018: 1, 3). Many among the citizenry further agitated because of the low quality of various goods imported particularly from China at a critical time when the perceived behaviors of East Asian countries regarding the West-led sanctions sharply contradicted what the tenable ideals of the looking-East approach were supposed to be about. As a consequence of all these disagreeable developments and lamentable experiences, many among the disinterested and impartial class of intellectuals and educated echelons eventually joined the crowd of looking-East sceptics, questioning the rationale behind the Iranian government to invest considerably on forging closer connections to East Asian countries without convincing its constituency that how the Iranian society in general was to benefit from such relations on an equal footing in long run (*Aftab-e Yazd* 2018: 1; *Hamshahri* 2018b: 5, 6).

### **Diversification: Bringing Variety to Non-oil Exports**

The vision for generating non-oil revenues to be on a par with the income Iran makes from exporting crude oil essentially harkens back to the pre-first oil shock era. The very first oil shock actually dealt a severe blow to the dream of having a dynamic non-oil

economy with kinetic energy for exports and self-sustainability as the country was swiftly swept into an orgy of spending, consumerism, and indulgence. In the aftermath of the second oil shock, moreover, the thought of having a national budget markedly independent of oil earnings became further untenable because Iran subsequently encountered a humongous hemorrhage of human, capital, and natural resources all of which strategically required to build a robust, competitive, and enterprising economy. The follow-up Iran–Iraq War was another bout that wreaked havoc on Iran's domestic production and non-oil exports, compelling the country to mobilize all of its domestic resources in order to survive the tumultuous conditions of an eight-year long military campaign dubbed as the longest conventional conflict of the twentieth century (Shelley 2015: 255–257).

After the end of the Iran–Iraq War and the commencement of reconstruction programs, assisting the non-oil sectors of the Iranian economy and increasing the share of non-energy exports once again became an important plan of the government in Iran; a policy which was to be later endorsed and often promoted equally by successive conservative and reformist governments. One critical reason behind this strategy was frequent fluctuation and instability in oil prices which could sometimes become a major setback for the estimated annual national budget and a hazardous hiccup in the funds required by various planned reconstruction and development programs (McNally 2017: 139–141). More importantly, the continuation of frosty politico-diplomatic relationship with the West as well as the repercussions of different sanctions imposed on Iran badly influenced the overall situation of the Iranian economy, forcing the government to find alternatives ways, such as the promotion of non-oil exports as a means of earning foreign exchange, in order to vouchsafe some stability in financial and monetary policies (Katzman 2004: 5–6).

As part of the looking-East orientation, therefore, Iran paid particular attention to East Asian markets for its relatively growing volume of non-crude oil exports. Of course, domestic markets in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan were not traditionally in favor of purchasing more non-oil products from Iran, but even importers from these countries, South Koreans in particular, were convinced to gradually increase their share of Iranian products besides crude oil. Another far more favorable target in the region was China whose domestic consumption markets were expanding by leaps and bounds one year after another, whetting the appetite of many Iranians both in public and private sectors to capitalize on prospective Chinese demands for Iran's non-oil exports (IPRC 2007: 19). This upbeat outlook about China coincided with dwindling potentials of markets in the West which had long been the main destination for some of Iran's traditional and famous non-oil products, though the ongoing regime of economic sanctions had also played a very effective role in ruining the availability and marketability of Iranian goods in the West (*Ghanoon Daily* 2015: 8).

The looking-East approach was partially successful in catapulting Iranian non-oil products into East Asian markets, making of China and South Korea two of Iran's top five destinations for non-crude oil exports. China eventually became the top customer of Iranian non-oil goods, importing various products ranging from marble to minerals and from pistachios to petrochemicals. In recent years, China's share of the country's non-oil products has been on the increase in tandem with the growing clout of the Chinese over the Iranian international trade, importing something around 19–25 annually; a figure interestingly pretty close to what Iran imports from the East Asian country each

year. Moreover, the UAE has again played a dubious role in facilitating a ground for the promotion of Iranian non-oil exports as the Arab country is now one of the top three destinations for Iran's non-energy goods. Some of the non-oil products which Iran supply to the UAE would ultimately find their way into the consumption markets of East Asia after being repacked and re-exported somewhere inside the sovereign borders of the Arab entrepôt (International Monetary Fund 2011: 12–13).

Meanwhile, the resolve of the looking-East policy to ship larger cargos of non-oil goods to East Asia was not really without disapproval and defiance in Iran. Exporting non-oil Iranian products to other parts of the world was certainly a safe and less contentious issue as compared to a disputable and often ill-advised practice of filling out domestic markets with any type of foreign goods, but cherry-picking and hoarding certain desirable goods and then selling them to other countries, all managed often by a number of unscrupulous monopolies, had some ramifications for the society in large (*Kayhan* 2018: 1, 4). This was particularly the case when a sharp plummet in the value of national currency could make it rather hard for many middle to lower-income families to buy some exportable exotic products access to and purchase of which they had long taken for granted. It was simply unacceptable and outrageous for such susceptible group of citizens when they had to bargain over imported saffron and walnuts of subpar quality, while similar stuff of much higher quality and reputation produced in Iran became inaccessible them due to their wholesale exports to China and other countries (*Jahan Sanat* 2016: 12; *Farheekhtegan* 2018c: 9).

### **Cultural Links: Belated Overtures**

Looking-East in the realm of culture has by and large been less cultivated and less celebrated as compared to various other areas of bilateral interactions between Iran and East Asia in contemporary history. In fact, a great deal of Iran's cultural obsession turned out to be about its immediate region as well as about the West whose introduction to popular socio-political discourse in the society since the nineteenth century preoccupied many Iranians across the political spectrum one generation after another. Moreover, East Asian societies themselves encountered a relatively similar phenomenon which had a profound impact on their cultural connections to some other regions, including the Middle East. As a corollary to that, when Iran established its formal politico-diplomatic ties with East Asian countries in modern times, culture, and generally cultural affairs, hardly became a very hot issue or a contentious topic involving the two sides, though they often signed a slew of cultural agreements and engaged in many cultural programs and events accordingly (*Middle East Economic Digest* 1989: 3).

Iran under Pahlavi, for instance, used to have rather close relationship with Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan until 1971 when Tehran switched its diplomatic allegiance from Taipei to Beijing. From holding friendly soccer match to giving approval to town twinning, Iran certainly engaged in many cultural activities with the region over years. But such cultural undertakings were predominantly about some strategic and politico-economic considerations rather than about any genuine cultural attachment to East Asian countries. Even when the Shah vowed to create a 'second Japan' in the Middle East, his hypothetical vision was ultimately about accomplishing certain economic and technological objectives by Iran. For all cultural contribution to the successful rise of Japan in the aftermath of the World War II and despite so much critical developments

unfolding in other East Asian countries during his reign, the Shah visited Japan and Taiwan only once in June 1958, while the political capital of many Western countries had become his royal rendezvous until he was toppled from power in early 1979 (Bill 1988: 154).

When the Islamic Republic ascended to power, Iran initially became more alienated from East Asia culturally. The ‘neither the East, nor the West’ moto left no doubt that the new socio-political culture emerged in Iran could hardly be captivated by the communist culture of China and North Korea, while the American allies of Japan and South Korea were in a less favorable position to win over Tehran in terms of the new cultural lexicon championed by many top authorities of the Islamic Republic (*Javan* 2018: 1). After all, East Asia was far away, and the countries located in that region were not perceived to be principally a fertile ground for an ardent promotion of the political ideology the Islamic Republic stood up for (Schmitt 2018). During the ensuing Iran–Iraq War period, culture and generally cultural affairs still mattered little in Tehran's growing politico-military connections to East Asia because the immediate issues of hard politics dominated everything and genuine people to people interactions between Iranians and their counterparts in the region were almost non-existent.

Although in the aftermath of the Iran–Iraq War culture did not become part and parcel of the Iranian looking-East orientation, nevertheless, cultural issues gradually and often sporadically manifested themselves in various areas of interactions involving Iran and its East Asian partners. A number of historical Japanese and Chinese dramas were dubbed and broadcast through national TV channels before the arrival of the Korean Wave (*Hallyu*) about one and half decades later. Moreover, East Asian countries were invited to participate in different cultural programs which were initiated and hosted by Tehran here and there under the ‘dialogue among civilizations’ project during the presidency of Khatami. Despite their immediate importance, developments of such genre eventually proved to be somewhat ephemeral since they produced little tangible results in long-term with regard to bridging the existing cultural gaps between Iran and East Asia societies (Jin and Liming 2011; Millward 2013: 49, 71). The crux of the problem was that these so-called cultural measures were launched to primarily serve some instant political and economic interests rather than making a permanent contribution to Iranian–East Asian cultural dynamics.

In spite of the staying power of the foregoing impediments and limitations, however, over the past one and half decades the Iranian looking-East approach has apparently been more cognizant of the importance of culture in materializing its critical objectives in East Asia in long haul. In fact, from the commencement of the Ahmadinejad presidency onward the role of culture has been relatively more discernible in various areas of Iran's connections to East Asian countries. In politico-diplomatic circles as well as in business and scholarly meetings involving the two sides, reference to culture and cultural issues almost became an integral part of talks and discussions (Sevilla 2017). More importantly, Iran launched, albeit belatedly, academic studies about East Asian countries at a number of top universities, particularly those located in Tehran, and the country's major policy research institutes as well as think tanks paid more attention to East Asia. The looking-East orientation had long been ignorant about the cultural facet, and such late measures were intended to partially make up for that drawback (*Shargh Daily* 2018: 4).

## Conclusion

No matter how inadvertently and unwittingly, Iran embarked upon a policy of looking-East long before such a foreign policy orientation became a prevailing trend in the world. The nature and scope of the Iranian move also differed considerably than a similar course of action taken by many other nations toward East Asia. In fact, few other countries adopted a looking-East approach as diverse and multifaceted as the initiative Iran opted for advancing its interests in that region. More importantly, the Iranian looking-East drive turned out to be a litmus test of sorts through which various other stakeholders could conveniently, and often accurately, get the measure of Tehran's strategic plans and foreign policy behaviors toward a large part of the world. For Iran, the internal implications of the approach were equally, if not say more, salient regardless of the fact that looking-East was initially formulated, and later maintained and buttressed up, to meet certain domestic requirements in almost all politico-strategic, military, economic, technological and cultural areas.

In spite of its critical significance and profound impacts, however, the Iranian looking-East approach did not prove to be a very well-calculated and well-crafted strategy spelled out by well-informed authorities and experts. It was more about pursuing a sort of realist pragmatism in foreign policy rather than attachment to an ideational orientation as spelled out by the IR theory of constructivism. A fair number of the officials and advisers who played a key role in carving out and implementing looking-East over decades even had some other policy priorities in mind before contemplating about the possibility of steady and all-out relations between Iran and East Asian countries. Additionally, the orientation was often subject to geopolitical expediency based on the nature of Iran's relationship with the West rather than engaging in the approach based on the country's firm conviction in and unwavering commitment to the East. This is a main reason why different aspects of the looking-East orientation did not receive equal attention as the significance and weight of the politico-economic and techno-cultural elements in looking-East waxed and waned largely in accordance with Iran's domestic imperatives.

All in all, the Iranian looking-East orientation over a course of several decades underwent lots of ups and downs a great deal of which came about as an inexorable consequence of Iran's volatile and fluctuating relationship with the West. But things have changed substantially as the relevance of the approach to the Middle Eastern country's overall peace and prosperity has coagulated and become stark in its clarity. If looking-East sometimes perceived to be an irresistible alternative and a well-timed reservoir, the policy approach seems to be, from now on, an acute necessity and pressing prerequisite to many aspects of domestic and foreign policymaking in Iran. Currently, a lion's share of the Iranian two-way trade and commercial transactions hinges on stable and symbiotic connections to the East, providing more credence to the strength and durability of the looking-East approach. Regardless of any probable seismic change in the nature and scope of Iran's relationship with the West, looking-East will, in all likelihood, endure as a linchpin of Iranian approach to the outside world for a foreseeable future.

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