

Russia Strategises with Iran for the Long Haul in Ukraine

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Ignoring the hype in the US media about White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan's Kissingerian diplomacy over Ukraine, the secretary of Russia's Security Council Nikolai Patrushev, former KGB counterintelligence officer and longstanding associate of President Putin, travelled to Tehran last Wednesday in the equivalent of a knockout punch in geopolitics.

Patrushev called on President Ebrahim Raisi and held detailed discussions with Admiral Ali Shamkhani, the representative of the Supreme leader and secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council. The visit marks a defining moment in the Russia-China partnership and plants a signpost on the trajectory of the war in Ukraine.

The Iranian state media quoted Raisi as saying, "The development of the extent and expansion of the scale of war [in Ukraine] causes concern for all countries." That said, Raisi also remarked that Tehran and Moscow are upgrading relations to a "strategic" level, which is "the most decisive response to the policy of sanctions and destabilisation by the United States and its allies."

The US State Department reacted swiftly on the very next day with spokesman Ned Price warning that "This is a deepening alliance that the entire world should view as a profound threat... this is a relationship that would have implications, could have implications beyond any single country." Price said Washington will work with allies to counter Russian-Iranian military ties.

Patrushev's talks in Tehran touched on highly sensitive issues that prompted President Vladimir Putin to follow up with Raisi on Saturday. The [Kremlin readout](#) said the two leaders "discussed a number of current issues on the bilateral agenda with an emphasis on the continued building up of interaction in politics, trade and the economy, including transport and logistics. They agreed to step up contacts between respective Russian and Iranian agencies."

In this connection, Patrushev's exceptionally strong support for Iran over the current disturbances in that country must be understood properly. Patrushev stated: "We note the key role of Western secret services in organising mass riots in Iran and the subsequent spread of disinformation about the situation in the country via Persian-language Western media existing under their control. We see this as overt interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state."

Russian security agencies share information with Iranian counterparts on hostile activities of western intelligence agencies. Notably, Patrushev sidestepped Iran's suspicions regarding involvement of Saudi Arabia. Separately, Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also publicly offered to mediate between Tehran and Riyadh.

All this is driving Washington insane. On the one hand, it is not getting anywhere, including at President Biden's level, to raise the spectre of Iran threat and rally the Arab regimes of the Persian Gulf all over again.

Most recently, Washington resorted to theatrics following up an unsubstantiated report by Wall Street Journal about an imminent Iranian attack on Saudi Arabia in the coming days. The US forces in the West Asian region increased their alert level and Washington vowed to be ready for any eventuality. But, curiously, Riyadh was unmoved and showed no interest in the US offer of protection to ward off threat from Iran.

Clearly, Saudi-Iranian normalisation process, which has been front-loaded with sensitive exchanges on their mutual security concerns, has gained traction neither side gets provoked into knee-jerk reaction.

This paradigm shift works to Russia's advantage. Alongside its highly strategic oil alliance with Saudi Arabia, Russia is now deepening its strategic partnership with Iran.

The panic in spokesman Price's remarks suggests that Washington has inferred that the cooperation between the security and defence agencies of Russia and Iran is set to intensify.

What alarms Washington most is that Tehran is adopting a joint strategy with Moscow to go on the offensive and defeat the weaponisation of sanctions by the collective West. Despite decades of sanctions, Iran has built up a world class defence industry on its own steam that will put countries like India or Israel to shame.

Shamkhani underscored the creation of "joint and synergistic institutions to deal with sanctions and the activation of the capacity of international institutions against sanctions and sanctioning countries." Patrushev concurred by recalling the earlier agreements between the national security agencies of the two countries to chart out the roadmap for strategic cooperation, especially in regard of countering western economic and technological sanctions.

Shamkhani added that Tehran regards the expansion of bilateral and regional cooperation with Russia in the economic field as one of its strategic priorities in the conditions of US sanctions, which both countries are facing. Patrushev responded, "The most important goal of mine and my delegation in traveling to Tehran is to exchange opinions to speed up the implementation of joint projects along with providing dynamic mechanisms to start new activities in the economic, commercial, energy and technology fields."

Patrushev noted, “Creating synergy in transit capacities, especially the rapid completion of the North-South corridor, is an effective step to improve the quality of bilateral and international economic and commercial cooperation.”

Patrushev and Shamkhani discussed a joint plan by Russia and Iran “to establish a friendship group of defenders of the United Nations Charter” comprising countries that bear the brunt of illegal western sanctions.

With regard to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Shamkhani said the two countries should “intelligently use the exchangeable capacities” of the member countries. He said the danger of terrorism and extremism continues to threaten the security of the region and stressed the need to increase regional and international cooperation.

Patrushev’s visit to Tehran was scheduled in the run-up to the conference on Afghanistan being hosted by Moscow on November 16. Iran and Russia have common concerns over Afghanistan. They are concerned over the western attempts to (re)fuel the civil war in Afghanistan.

In a recent op-Ed in Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Russian Special Presidential Envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov alleged that Britain is financing a so-called “Afghan resistance” against the Taliban (which is reportedly operating out of Panjshir.) Kabulov wrote that the US is baiting two Central Asian states by offering them helicopters and aircraft in lieu of cooperation in covert activities against the Taliban.

Kabulov made a sensational disclosure that the US is blackmailing the Taliban leaders by threatening them with a drone attack unless they broke off contacts with Russia and China. He said, specifically, that the US and Britain are demanding that Kabul should refrain from restricting the activities of Afghanistan-based Uyghur terrorists.

Interestingly, Moscow is exploring the creation of a compact group of five regional states who are stakeholders in Afghanistan’s stabilisation and could work together. Kabulov mentioned Iran, Pakistan, India and China as Russia’s partners.

Iran is a “force multiplier” for Russia in a way no other country — except China, perhaps — can be in the present difficult conditions of sanctions. Patrushev’s visit to Tehran at the present juncture, on the day after the midterms in the US, can only mean that the Kremlin has seen through the Biden administration’s dissimulation of peacemaking in Ukraine to actually derail the momentum of the Russian mobilisation and creation of new defence lines in the Kherson-Zaporozhya-Donbass direction.

Indeed, it is no secret that the Americans are literally scratching the bottom of the barrel to deliver weapons to Ukraine as their inventory is drying up and several months or a few years are needed to replenish depleted stocks. ([here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#))

Suffice to say, from the geopolitical angle, Patrushev’s talks in Tehran — and Putin’s call soon after with Raisi — have messaged in no mistaken terms that Russia is strategising for the long haul in Ukraine.

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