

# The Multipolar “Iran-Russia-Turkey Troika” Overshadows “Unipolar Joe Biden” in West Asia.

## Pepe Escobar

The presidents of Russia, Iran, and Turkey convened to discuss critical issues pertaining to West Asia, with the illegal US occupation of Syria a key talking point

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Global Research, July 21, 2022

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#), [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#)

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*The Tehran summit uniting Iran-Russia-Turkey was a fascinating affair in more ways than one. Ostensibly about the Astana peace process in Syria, launched in 2017, the summit joint statement duly noted that Iran, Russia and (recently rebranded) Turkiye will continue, “cooperating to eliminate terrorists” in Syria and “won’t accept new facts in Syria in the name of defeating terrorism.”*

That’s a wholesale rejection of the “war on terror” exceptionalist unipolarity that once ruled West Asia.

### Standing up to the global sheriff

Russian President Vladimir Putin, [in his own speech](#), was even more explicit. He stressed “specific steps to promote the intra-Syrian inclusive political dialogue” and most of called a spade a spade: “The western states led by the US are strongly encouraging separatist sentiment in some areas of the country and plundering its natural resources with a view to ultimately pulling the Syrian state apart.”

So there will be “extra steps in our trilateral format” aimed at “stabilizing the situation in those areas” and crucially, “returning control to the legitimate government of Syria.” For better or for worse, the days of imperial plunder will be over.

The bilateral meetings on the summit’s sidelines – Putin/Raisi and Putin/Erdogan – were even more intriguing. Context is key here: the Tehran gathering took place after Putin’s visit to Turkmenistan in late June for the 6<sup>th</sup> Caspian summit, where all the littoral nations, Iran

included, were present, and after Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's travels in Algeria, Bahrain, Oman, and Saudi Arabia, where he met all his Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) counterparts.

## Moscow's moment

So we see Russian diplomacy carefully weaving its geopolitical tapestry from West Asia to Central Asia – with everybody and his neighbor eager to talk and to listen to Moscow. As it stands, the Russia-Turkey *entente cordiale* tends to lean towards conflict management, and is strong on trade relations. Iran-Russia is a completely different ball game: much more of a strategic partnership.

So it's hardly a coincidence that the National Oil Company of Iran (NIOC), timed to the Tehran summit, announced the signing of a \$40 billion strategic cooperation agreement with Russia's Gazprom. That's the largest foreign investment in the history of Iran's energy industry – badly needed since the early 2000s. Seven deals worth \$4 billion apply to the development of oil fields; others focus on the construction of new export gas pipelines and LNG projects.

Kremlin advisor Yury Ushakov deliciously leaked that Putin and Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in their private meeting, "discussed conceptual issues." Translation: he means grand strategy, as in the evolving, complex process of Eurasia integration, in which the three key nodes are Russia, Iran and China, now intensifying their interconnection. The Russia-Iran strategic partnership largely mirrors the key points of the China-Iran strategic partnership.

## Iran says 'no' to NATO

Khamenei, on NATO, did tell it like it is:

"If the road is open for NATO, then the organization sees no borders. If it had not been stopped in Ukraine, then after a while the alliance would have started a war under the pretext of Crimea."

There were no leaks on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) impasse between the US and Iran – but it's clear, based on the recent negotiations in Vienna, that Moscow will not interfere with Tehran's nuclear decisions. Not only are Tehran-Moscow-Beijing fully aware of who's preventing the JCPOA from getting back on track, they also see how this counter-productive stalling process prevents the collective west from badly needed access to Iranian oil.

Then there's the weapons front. Iran is one of the world's leaders in drone production: Pelican, Arash, Homa, Chamrosh, Jubin, Ababil, Bavar, recon drones, attack drones, even kamikaze drones, cheap and effective, mostly deployed from naval platforms in West Asia.

Tehran's official position is not to supply weapons to nations at war – which would in principle invalidate dodgy US "intel" on their supply to Russia in Ukraine. Yet that could always happen under the radar, considering that Tehran is very much interested in buying Russian aerial defense systems and state of the art fighter jets. After the end of the UN Security Council-enforced embargo, Russia can sell whatever conventional weapons to Iran it sees fit.

Russian military analysts are fascinated by the conclusions Iranians reached when it was established they would stand no chance against a NATO armada; essentially they bet on pro-level guerrilla war (a lesson learned from Afghanistan). In Syria, Iraq and Yemen they deployed trainers to guide villagers in their fight against Salafi-jihadis; produced tens of thousands of large-caliber sniper rifles, ATGMs, and thermals; and of course perfected their drone assembly lines (with excellent cameras to surveil US positions).

Not to mention that simultaneously the Iranians were building quite capable long-range missiles. No wonder Russian military analysts estimate there's much to learn tactically from the Iranians – and not only on the drone front.

## The Putin-Sultan ballet

Now to the Putin-Erdogan get together – always an attention-grabbing geopolitical ballet, especially considering the Sultan has not yet decided to hop on the Eurasia integration high-speed train.

Putin diplomatically “expressed gratitude” for the discussions on food and grain issues, while reiterating that “not all issues on the export of Ukrainian grain from the Black Sea ports are resolved, but progress is made.”

Putin was referring to Türkiye's Defense Minister Hulusi Akar, who earlier this week assured that setting up an operations center in Istanbul, establishing joint controls at the port exit and arrival points, and carefully monitoring the navigational safety on the transfer routes are issues that may be solved in the next few days.

Apparently Putin-Erdogan also discussed Nagorno-Karabakh (no details).

What a few leaks certainly did not reveal is that on Syria, for all practical purposes, the situation is blocked. That favors Russia – whose main priority as it stands is Donbass. Wily Erdogan knows it – and that's why he may have tried to extract some “concessions” on “the Kurdish question” and Nagorno-Karabakh. Whatever Putin, Russia's Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev and Deputy Chairman Dmitry Medvedev may really think about Erdogan, they certainly evaluate how priceless is to cultivate such an erratic partner capable of driving the collective west totally bonkers.

Istanbul this summer has been turned into a sort of Third Rome, at least for expelled-from-Europe Russian tourists: they are everywhere. Yet the most crucial geoeconomic development these past few months is that the western-provoked collapse of trade/supply lines along the borders between Russia and the EU – from the Baltic to the Black Sea – finally highlighted the wisdom and economic sense of the International North-South Transportation Corridor (INTSC): a major [Russia-Iran-India](#) geopolitical and geoeconomic integration success.

When Moscow talks to Kiev, it talks via Istanbul. NATO, as the Global South well knows, does not do diplomacy. So any possibility of dialogue between Russians and a few educated westerners takes place in Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and the UAE. West Asia as well as the Caucasus, incidentally, did not subscribe to the western sanctions hysteria against Russia.

## Say farewell to the ‘teleprompter guy’

Now compare all of the above with the recent visit to the region by the so-called “leader of

the free world,” who merrily alternates between shaking hands with invisible people to reading – literally – whatever is scrolling on a teleprompter. We’re talking of US President Joe Biden, of course.

Fact: Biden threatened Iran with military strikes and as a mere supplicant, begged the Saudis to pump more oil to offset the “turbulence” in the global energy markets caused by the collective west’s sanction hysteria. Context: the glaring absence of any vision or anything even resembling a draft of foreign policy plan for West Asia.

So oil prices duly jumped upward after Biden’s trip: Brent crude rose more than four percent to \$105 a barrel, bringing prices back to above \$100 after a lull of several months.

The heart of the matter is that if OPEC or OPEC+ (which includes Russia) ever decide to increase their oil supplies, they will do it based on their internal deliberations, and not under exceptionalist pressure.

As for the imperial threat of military strikes on Iran, it qualifies as pure dementia. The whole Persian Gulf – not to mention the whole of West Asia – knows that were US/Israel to attack Iran, fierce retaliation would simply evaporate with the region’s energy production, with apocalyptic consequences including the collapse of trillions of dollars in derivatives.

Biden then had the gall to say,

“We have made progress in strengthening our relations with the Gulf states. We will not leave a vacuum for Russia and China to fill in the Middle East”.

Well, in real life it is the “indispensable nation” that has self-morphed into a vacuum. Only bought-and-paid for Arab vassals – most of them monarchs – believe in the building of an “Arab NATO” (copyright Jordan’s King Abdullah) to take on Iran. Russia and China are already all over the place in West Asia and beyond.

## De-Dollarization, not just Eurasian integration

It’s not only the new logistical [corridor](#) from Moscow and St. Petersburg to Astrakhan and then, via the Caspian, to Enzeli in Iran and on to Mumbai that is shaking things up. It’s about increasing bilateral trade that bypasses the US dollar. It’s about BRICS+, which Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Egypt are dying to be part of. It’s about the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which formally accepts Iran as a full member this coming September (and soon Belarus as well). It’s about BRICS+, the SCO, China’s ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Eurasia Economic Union (EAEU) interconnected in their path towards a Greater Eurasia Partnership.

West Asia may still harbor a small collection of imperial vassals with zero sovereignty who depend on the west’s financial and military ‘assistance,’ but that’s the past. The future is now – with Top Three BRICS (Russia, India, China) slowly but surely coordinating their overlapping strategies across West Asia, with Iran involved in all of them.

And then there’s the Big Global Picture: whatever the circumvolutions and silly schemes of the US-concocted “oil price cap” variety, the fact is that Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Venezuela – the top powerful energy-producing nations – are absolutely in sync: on Russia, on the collective west, and on the needs of a real multipolar world.

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*This article was originally published on [The Cradle](#).*

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