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The main areas of cooperation between China and Iran in the 21st century

UDC 327(510+55)»XX»
DOI <https://doi.org/10.24195/2414-9616.2024-4.22>

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The relations between China and Iran in the 21st century are a topical study in the field of international relations, which attracts the attention of both domestic and foreign scientists and analysts. The article analyzes the main spheres of cooperation between China and Iran at the current stage, namely political, economic, energy and military. Such research methods as: historical method; document analysis; case-stage method; methods of induction and deduction were used in the article.

It is important that modern Sino-Iranian cooperation is based on the 25-year Comprehensive Cooperation Programme between Iran and China signed in March 2021, which covers various areas of cooperation. Political cooperation between Iran and China is extremely dynamic and multifaceted. It is worth noting that one of the main types of cooperation is economic cooperation, as China and Iran have significant economic ties based on mutually beneficial interests. China is one of Iran's largest trading partners, and both countries use the yuan as the unit of account. In addition, Iran is an important market for Chinese goods and technologies.

The energy sector is also important, as Iran is one of the main suppliers of oil to China, which provides the country's energy needs. China, for its part, invests in infrastructure projects in Iran, such as transport corridors and industrial facilities, and also finances in the development of oil fields, for example, one of the largest Iran's oil fields, South Pars.

The article also examines the military cooperation between Iran and China, which is defined by a wide range of interactions in the military-strategic sphere, including technology exchange, joint training, and the supply of military equipment. In particular, it is mentioned about naval training between China, Iran and Russia, which were held in 2019–2024.

Key words: China, Iran, Middle East, international relations, foreign policy.

The purpose of the study is to analyse the main areas of cooperation between China and Iran in the twenty-first century.

Research methods. The following research methods were used in the study: the historical method (to study the dynamics of Iranian-Chinese relations); document analysis (to study official materials such as international agreements, statements of politicians, diplomatic documents and other records reflecting relations between the countries); case study method (to analyse events and situations in relations between Iran and China); methods of induction and deduction (to formulate general conclusions of the study).

Results. Modern Sino-Iranian cooperation is based on the Comprehensive Cooperation Agreement between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Iran, which was signed in Tehran on 27 March 2021 for the 25th term, with the signing ceremony attended by Foreign Minister Wang Yi on the one hand and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Iran) represented by its head, Mohammad Javad Zarif [8]. For Iran, participation in this agreement also means participation in the One Belt, One Road programme, initiated by China in the 2010s.

It is worth noting that the basis for the signing of the Iran-China Comprehensive Agreement was laid by the leader of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, during his visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran in January 2016 [11]. The Comprehensive Partnership Agreement includes key areas of cooperation such as military, economic, political, cultural, and humanitarian. The political part of the Agreement states that

the development of bilateral relations between Iran and China is in the interests of all parties. In addition, the agreement provides for the establishment of a mechanism for regular annual meetings of the foreign ministers of the two states and periodic meetings of the respective deputy foreign ministers. The parties also strengthen cooperation between legislative bodies through inter-parliamentary exchanges and cooperation in the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Asian Parliamentary Assembly.

Political cooperation between Iran and China is reflected in their interaction at various levels, providing both countries with new opportunities and prospects. It is also worth noting that China and Iran have held a number of high-level meetings to discuss cooperation in various fields. In 2020, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in Tehran. This meeting was important for the development of bilateral relations between China and Iran, as it was aimed at discussing cooperation in the diplomatic sphere and the fight against terrorism. For example, at the end of 2023, it was announced that the strategic partnership between Iran and China would be expanded to include further deepening cooperation in the fields of technology, science, education, and high technology, which indicates a high level of trust and mutual interest between the two countries [12].

Economic cooperation and investment are a key element of interaction between two countries. In the field of economic cooperation, Iran and China are actively developing various joint projects that

contribute to the growth of both economics. An important part of economic cooperation is the implementation of the Chinese initiative 'One Belt, One Road', which aims to develop transport and economic infrastructure, including Iran, making it one of the key countries in supporting this initiative [2, p. 174-175]. Some of the most significant projects include the development of oil and gas industry, infrastructure projects, and the development of technology and innovation. It is worth emphasising that China is actively investing in Iran's oil and gas sector, financing the development of new oil and gas fields, modernising production and increasing its efficiency. For example, a joint project between the Chinese company CNPC and the Iranian company NIOC is to develop the South Pars gas field Pars II in Iran. Chinese investment in Iranian energy sectors, particular in the development of oil fields such as South Pars and renewable energy sources, is seen as a strategic step for both countries, contributing to sustainable economic growth.

China's investments in Iran's energy sector have a positive impact on the development energy cooperation between two countries. China is one of the largest consumers of energy resources in the world, and Iran has significant oil and gas reserves. China and Iran are actively implementing plans aimed at strengthening cooperation in the energy sector. These include important measures such as increasing oil production in Iran further increase exports of this resource to China. It is also planned to expand gas production in Iran and further export it to China [5, p. 110].

In the future, China and Iran plan to deepen cooperation in the energy sector, including the development of new oil fields, construction of new power plants and refineries, and development of infrastructure for energy transportation. An important stage is the introduction of the latest energy technologies in Iran, where China provides active assistance and support. These joint initiatives are not only aimed at strengthening energy cooperation between two countries, but also contribute to the development of economic partnership and promote stability and prosperity in the region. According to UBS, energy trade between China and the Middle East could increase by USD 423 billion by 2030, of which USD 77 billion will come from renewable energy sources [7].

China is also actively investing in infrastructure construction in Iran, including the development of railways, motorways and ports. For example, a joint project to build a railway from Tehran to the border with Afghanistan, which helps to develop a trade and transport corridor through Iran. Iran and China have resumed container rail traffic at the Aprin port in Tehran, which is aimed at improving trade relations between two countries. The resumption also marked

the launch the China-Iran-Europe railway corridor, which is intended to connect these countries with European markets. The full route will run through China, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. This will provide Iran with a new trade route, as currently 85% of its international trade depends on sea transport. With the new railway route, Iran will become an important trade hub between Asia and Europe, while China will gain access to the West Asia and Europe markets. This corridor will also help both countries circumvent Western sanctions that hinder their trade» [10]. The new railway line connecting China and Iran via Turkmenistan was officially launched on the 16th of July with the first transit departure train from China's Shaanxi province in the northwest to Tehran. New Iranian President Massoud Peseshkian confirmed that he will continue the course of his predecessor, stressing the importance of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with Russia and China within the framework such structures as the BRICS, SCO and the Eurasian Economic Union [9]. In the investment sphere, Iran is also actively considering opportunities for cooperation with China in high-tech industries such as information technology and telecommunications. This opens up new prospects for innovation and exchange of experience in these areas. In addition, both countries are actively developing joint projects in agriculture and manufacturing, which contributes to the diversification of economic cooperation and ensures the sustainability of resource exchange [1, p. 117-118].

It is worth noting that China is one of Iran's largest trading partners, providing it with access to the market, which contributes to the mutually beneficial exchange of goods and services. An important feature of Sino-Iranian trade relations is that both countries use the Chinese national currency, the yuan, as a unit of account. Iran supplies China with energy resources and in return receives funds in yuan, which is used to purchase goods in China [3, p. 172-173].

The particular importance for the development of economic and trade relations is the bilateral agreement between Iran and China signed in 2021 for 25 years, aimed at strengthening their strategic partnership and expanding economic ties. This initiative envisages investments of approximately \$400 billion in various sectors of the economy of both countries. In particular, it is planned to increase trade to \$600 billion by 2026, jointly build infrastructure facilities such as railways, roads and seaports, and strengthen cooperation in the fields of energy, investment, economic zones and technological exchange [8]. In general, Iran-China economic cooperation is important for both countries, as it contributes to their economic development and strengthening their national positions on the world stage.

Military cooperation between Iran and China is determined by a wide range of interactions in

the military-strategic sphere, including technology exchange, joint exercises, and the supply of military equipment. It is worth emphasising that Beijing and Tehran conduct joint military exercises and training to improve the effectiveness of their military forces. This allows them to improve tactical skills, exchange experience and develop coherence between military structures. In 2017, China and Iran held their first joint naval exercises. And, in 2019, China, Iran and the Russian Federation launched joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean and the Sea of Oman. According to the leaders of the above-mentioned states, the purpose exercises are to deepen practical cooperation between the navies of the participating countries at sea and strengthen regional security. In 2022 of January, Iran, China, and Russia held the third joint naval exercise in the northern Indian Ocean, and exercises were held in 2023 under the name 'Northern Interaction-2023' and in 2024 'Maritime Security Belt-2024' [6].

However, it is important to note that such a military partnership, joint naval exercises and geopolitical rapprochement between China, Iran and Russia are concern to the international community, in particular to the United States, Ukraine and other European countries. After all, this significantly affects regional and global security and stability. In his book 'The Grand Chessboard', Zbigniew Brzezinski envisaged the unification of Beijing, Tehran and Moscow into an 'anti-hegemonic coalition' in Eurasia to counter the global dominance of the United States. The rapprochement between three countries has been active in recent years, but has intensified with Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. If the alliance of three countries is successful, the current global order could be reformatted. If, in addition the economic cooperation, states agree on military and military-technical cooperation, the global security system may undergo significant transformations [4].

Conclusions. Thus, having analysed the main areas of cooperation between China and Iran, we can conclude that the countries are actively cooperating in the economic, energy, military and political spheres. It is important that modern Sino-Iranian cooperation is based on the 2021 Comprehensive Cooperation Programme between Iran and China, which covers various areas of cooperation. Political cooperation between Iran and China is well developed. Both countries assist each other in achieving strategic goals both regionally and globally. The economic cooperation and investment between Iran and China constitute an important foundation for the development of both countries. The technologies exchange, innovations and investment resources contributes creating mutually beneficial conditions for economic growth and strengthening their national positions on the global stage. The One Belt, One Road initiative is the basis and incentive for the development of infrastructure

and transport links, which facilitates trade exchange and promotes cooperation in various sectors of the economy. The energy sector is also important for the countries, as China is one of the largest energy consumers in the world, and Iran has significant oil and gas reserves. Tehran supplies China with large volumes of energy resources and in return receives funds in yuan, which it uses to purchase goods from the latter. That is why the prospects for cooperation between China and Iran in the energy sector are quite high. Military cooperation between Iran and China is determined by a wide range of interactions in the military-strategic sphere, including technology exchange, joint exercises, and the supply of military equipment. It is worth noting that since 2017, China and Iran have been conducting joint naval exercises. The latest joint naval exercise, Maritime Security Belt 2024, took place in 2024 in the trilateral format of China-Iran-Russia.

In general, the partnership between Iran and China is an example of how countries can jointly develop and promote their own interests. Thus, Iranian-Chinese relations can be described as mutually beneficial, covering various areas of cooperation. However, it should be emphasised that China's strong economic, military and diplomatic relations with Iran are due for two key factors: first, Iran's growing international isolation, especially from the West, and second, the authoritarian nature of both the Iranian and Chinese regimes. That is why relations between two countries can hardly be called equal, as China has much better geopolitical position.

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Основні сфери співробітництва Китаю та Ірану у XXI столітті

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Відносини між Китаєм та Іраном у XXI столітті є актуальним дослідженням у сфері міжнародних відносин, яке привертає увагу, як вітчизняних так і іноземних науковців, аналітиків. У статті проаналізовано основні сфери співробітництва Китаю та Ірану на сучасному етапі, а саме політичну, економічну, енергетичну та військову. Використовувались такі методи дослідження як: історичний метод; аналіз документів; метод кейс-стаді; методи індукції та дедукції.

Важливо, що сучасна китайсько-іранська співпраця базується на угоді про «Всеосяжну програму співробітництва між ІРІ та КНР» терміном на 25 років підписана у березні 2021 року, яка охоплює різні сфери співпраці. Політичне співробітництво між Іраном та Китаєм є надзвичайно динамічним та багатогранним. Варто зазначити, що одним із основних видів співпраці є саме економічне співробітництво, адже Китай та Іран мають значні економічні зв'язки, що базуються на взаємовигідних інтересах. Китай є одним з найбільших торгових партнерів Ірану, як розрахункову одиницю обидві держави використовують юані. Окрім того, Іран є важливим ринком збуту для китайських товарів та технологій.

Важливою є і енергетична сфера, оскільки Іран є одним з головних постачальників нафти до Китаю, що забезпечує енергетичні потреби цієї країни. Китай, зі свого боку, інвестує в інфраструктурні проєкти в Ірані, такі як транспортні коридори, промислові об'єкти, також фінансує розбудову нафтових родовищ, наприклад одного із найбільших родовищ Ірану, Південний Парс.

У статті, також розглянуто і військову співпрацю між Іраном та Китаєм, яка визначається широким спектром взаємодій у військово-стратегічній сфері, включаючи обмін технологіями, спільні навчання, постачання військового обладнання. Зокрема, зазначено про військово-морські навчання між Китаєм, Іраном і Росією, які проводились у 2019–2024 роках.

Ключова слова: Китай, Іран, Близький Схід, міжнародні відносини, зовнішня політика.