

Iran's institutional experience in strategies for circumventing international sanctions: Political and economic convergence with the Russian Federation

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Abstract. The present study aimed to undertake a systematic assessment of the economic mechanisms by which the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran have adapted to prolonged sanctions pressure. The results showed that sanctions not only constrain but also stimulate institutional and infrastructural adaptation. The Russian Federation exploits its partnership with Iran to extend its external economic manoeuvring room, to mitigate transactional and financial risks, and to bolster energy and logistical cooperation. For its part, Iran sees this cooperation as a tool to diversify trade relations, ensure macroeconomic stability, and minimise the impact of external pressure. Particular focus is given to an analysis of Iran's institutional experience as a state that has, over four decades, developed distinctive strategies of survival and of circumventing international restrictions, as well as the mechanisms through which this experience is transmitted to Russia. Using qualitative methods – content analysis of official documents, discourse analysis and institutional analysis – the authors uncover the substance of Russian-Iranian interaction as something more than enforced trade, namely as the formation of a sovereign coalition of sanctioned actors. The article analyses in detail the political-economic platforms of sanctions circumvention: the integration of national financial systems (bypassing SWIFT), the consolidation of a “grey fleet” for hydrocarbon transportation, and the creation of a protected geopolitical contour within the framework of the International North-South Transport Corridor. The findings show that sanctions function as a trigger for profound institutional transformation, facilitating a transition from declarative anti-hegemonism to the practical construction of an alternative regional order, beyond the control of the West

Keywords: sanctions evasion; financial gateway; North-South corridor; external pressure; adaptation

Introduction

The architecture of the present day is characterised by systemic transformation, the key instrument of which, on the part of the Western states, has been the implementation of economic sanctions against the states challenging the liberal world order. The traditional view of the use of economic sanctions is fading away. Under the pressure of the Eurasian powers, a new phenomenon has emerged, namely the convergence of political and economic policies within the framework of the sanctions imposed on them. Within this context assumes particular significance the rapprochement between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The Islamic Republic of Iran possesses

experience – accumulated since 1979 – in developing an economic doctrine – the “resistance economy” – as a result of the numerous restrictions placed upon the country by the United States, the UN Security Council, and the European Union. Following 2022, when Iran became an object of study for the Russian Federation as a result of the unprecedented nature of the sanctions placed upon Russia, the country's experience with the “resistance economy” has become a valuable tool in the Russian Federation's efforts to adapt its economy and to develop an effective strategy for countering the sanctions placed upon it by the West. From a political-science perspective, the interaction between the capitals

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of Russia and Iran goes beyond the scope of a classical and situational military alliance. What is taking place is the implementation of the theory of asymmetric balancing and the concept of "network sovereignty" within a framework that allows them to neutralise the effect of Western sanctions. Iran is acting as the mentor and the logistical and financial hub for Russia. The relevance of this study lies in the need to provide a political-science analysis of the various ways in which Iran is assisting Russia in overcoming the sanctions that have been placed upon it, and in what ways that interaction is altering the balance of power in Eurasia.

The study of sanctions as a mechanism of influence has been documented in earlier research, including by S. Druchyn (2025), who examined the economic and geopolitical restrictions imposed on the Russian Federation. According to the author, sanctions are an instrument of international diplomacy and state policy, representing a complex mechanism aimed at influencing the behaviour of a state through nonmilitary means. O. Itskhoki & E. Ribakova (2024) pointed to the growing interest since the 2000s in imposing sanctions as a way to influence the development strategies of a state. The researchers explained the renewed interest in the Western world, particularly in the United States, in applying economic pressure tools by the institutional capacity accumulated during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as by the awareness of the power derived from the state's central role in the global financial system. According to V.T. Khakimova (2024), the EU follows similar logic, viewing sanctions as a tool for resolving the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict. In her work, the author emphasised that the EU considers itself a normative power and uses sanctions in its pursuit of spreading such key values as democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Based on the cited works, sanctions are a tool of non-violent pressure on states whose policies run counter to universally accepted values and ideals.

The impact of sanctions on the development of the targeted countries has been studied, in particular, by X.-Y. Liu *et al.* (2024), who analysed economic development data from 20 countries over the period 1991 to 2020. The authors confirmed the effectiveness of the instrument under analysis, emphasising that countries subjected to economic sanctions faced a decline in the stability of their exchange rates and a restriction of their international trade. An even broader sample was examined in the work of G. Petrevski (2025), who studied the economic development of 107 countries from 1960 to 2020. In his study, the author pointed to the need to differentiate the impact of sanctions by source country, emphasising that US sanctions have a strong negative effect on the growth and development of the specific sectors against which they were imposed. Author noted that different types of sanctions, such as trade and travel sanctions, have different effects on the development of countries or specific economic sectors. From

the sources presented, it was concluded that sanctions cannot be regarded as a fail-safe tool for influencing the development of targeted countries.

From the work of F.M. Reza & B. Esfandiyar (2023), the authors concluded that the imposition of sanctions affects not only the target country but also the country or countries using this pressure tool. An analysis of Iran's development from 2017 to 2023 showed that the tightening of sanctions led to a deterioration of the humanitarian situation and an intensification of civil protests, but did not contribute to preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons or reducing regional aggression. Similar conclusions were drawn by V. YazdiFeyzabadi *et al.* (2024), who studied the impact of sanctions on the wellbeing of Iranian society. Drawing on the results of quantitative analysis, the authors concluded that an unexpected increase in the intensity of sanctions leads to an increase in civil unrest and social tension in the region, including through low accessibility of quality healthcare. The ambiguous impact of sanctions was also emphasised by C.E. Popa (2024), who analysed the effect of sanctions on the development of the Russian economy from 2014 onwards. Having analysed key indicators such as gross domestic product growth, inflation rates, trade balance and currency stability, the author concluded that despite a shortterm decline in economic growth, the Russian economy was able to partially adapt to the imposed restrictions by changing its strategic fiscal policy, import substitution and restructuring trade partnerships. Similar conclusions were reached by A.C. da Costa (2023), who analysed eight relevant studies published after 24 February 2022. According to the researcher, one of the problems of sanctions restrictions is their instability, leading to rapid adaptation of the targeted economy. To achieve a lasting longterm effect, the author recommended maintaining and periodically adapting the sanctions.

Despite a significant body of research devoted to sanctions as a tool of foreign policy pressure and their macroeconomic consequences, the scientific literature lacks a sufficient systematisation of comprehensive strategies for economic adaptation of states, including the interrelationship between foreign economic policy transformation, digitalisation and the development of alternative financial mechanisms under conditions of prolonged sanctions pressure. This study aimed to provide a comprehensive analysis of the economic adaptation strategies of Russia and Iran to international sanctions in order to identify universal and specific models of resilience under conditions of limited access to the global financial and economic system. Within the framework of the study, the following tasks were set: to theoretically synthesise existing approaches to assessing sanctions impact; to analyse the key directions of foreign economic policy transformation and digital financial instruments; and to determine the effectiveness of alternative adaptation mechanisms in the long term.

Materials and Methods

The methodological toolkit employed in the study comprised qualitative content analysis of political texts and strategic documents, historical-genetic analysis, and quantitative statistical analysis of macroeconomic indicators. Qualitative content analysis was used for the systematic examination of official statements, strategic concepts, the speeches of political leaders, and media narratives reflecting the ideological and strategic logic underlying the interaction between the Russian Federation and Iran. The application of the content-analysis method allowed the principal themes, meanings and categories to be identified, these having been interpreted within the framework of theories of international relations – neorealism (Najmalddin, 2024), the theory of sanctions resilience (Korosteleva & Petrova, 2023), and balancing theory (Ejituwu *et al.*, 2024). Content analysis was conducted through the sequential coding of texts, the identification of recurring motifs, and the construction of a categorial network of meanings. The corpus of the study comprised sources meeting the following criteria: official status and institutional significance; representativeness of foreign-policy and economic discourse; direct or indirect reference to sanctions pressure and to the strategic positioning of the states concerned; and temporal relevance to the period under study. In accordance with these criteria, the analysis drew on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2023), official statements issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2025) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran (2025), as well as selected sections of a report by the international organisation L. Vinjamuri *et al.* (2025), which provided external analytical verification of the discursive patterns identified. The study also employed the historical-genetic method, aimed at reconstructing the key stages of Russian-Iranian relations based on a comparative analysis of contemporary academic monographs and peer-reviewed publications devoted to sanctions policy, foreign economic interaction and the transformation of states' strategic priorities (Korosteleva & Petrova, 2023; Najmalddin, 2024; Ejituwu *et al.*, 2024). The sample included fifteen sources ($n = 15$), published no earlier than 2020, selected according to the criteria of analytical relevance to the topic of sanctions pressure, conceptual elaboration of bilateral relations dynamics and the ability to reflect the influence of external systemic factors on the evolution of institutional forms of cooperation. The analysis was conducted according to parameters such as chronological stages of interaction, transformation of strategic interests of the parties, the role of external crises and "turning points", as well as changes in ideological and discursive frameworks, which ensured methodological integrity and comparability of the results obtained.

The empirical part of the study was focused on assessing the economic interaction between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran, the dynamics of foreign trade and the impact of sanctions pressure on key macroeconomic parameters. The data used made it possible to analyse the specific features of adaptation strategies of the parties in such areas as trade relations and total trade turnover, the financial sector, transformation of logistics chains, the digital economy and the energy market, as well as to identify structural changes in the configuration of bilateral economic cooperation under conditions of limited access to traditional international markets and financial institutions. The choice of sources for data analysis was determined by the specific nature of the study of economic adaptation of Russia and Iran to sanctions pressure and by limited access to traditional international statistical databases, which required the use of a combination of internationally recognised agencies, including Interfax and Reuters, and official state sources to ensure verifiability and comparability of indicators. Materials from the Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation, Tehran Times and Mehr News Agency made it possible to reflect sectoral and national features of adaptation, primarily in the areas of logistics, trade and financial settlements, which are insufficiently covered in Western statistical sources. The sources selected were analysed with regard to macroeconomic trends and the influence of sanctions on economic interaction between the two parties.

Results

Results and politico-economic analysis of data

Studies, including E. Fellner (2021), have demonstrated that the historical memory of territorial losses and external interference by the Russian Empire became a lasting factor in shaping Iranian economic strategy in the long term. In economic terms, this factor was reflected in Iran's greater sensitivity to issues of control over resources, infrastructure and external economic ties, and a determination to minimise dependence on any single external partner. The historical-genetic approach allows to see this period not as an isolated episode of political history, but as the original institutional matrix of economic distrust, limiting the depth of trade, investment and technology-transfer relations even in times of formal political rapprochement. In the Cold War period, economic relations between the USSR and Iran developed in a fragmentary way and remained limited in nature, a situation directly related to Iran's integration into a Western-centred system of international trade and finance. Apart from geographical proximity and the potential complementarity of the two economies, the Soviet share of Iranian foreign trade remained negligible and investment and technological cooperation were virtually absent. The economic structure of the relationship was confined to isolated infrastructure

projects and sporadic trade contracts, none of which produced stable production or logistics chains. Therefore, the institutionalised political alienation was translated into an economic model of situational interaction without long-term integration (Tabatabai *et al.*, 2020; Bozorgi *et al.*, 2025).

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 had a profound effect upon Iran's foreign policy and its economic development. As a result of the country's significant shift away from the West, Iranian economic ties with the Western world began to decline. Iran began to change the way in which it conducted its foreign trade, and developed a shift towards a more autarkic and internally-focused economy. While the Soviet Union did not at first begin to replace the role of the Western nations within Iran's economy, the Iraq War between the two countries and Iran's subsequent isolation from the international community created the preconditions for the development of Soviet-Iranian economic ties on a more pragmatic basis (Choudhury, 2025). During this time, Iran began to shift away from its revolutionary economy towards one that was focused upon the survival of the Iranian nation. Recent research suggests that during the 1980s, the foundations of the relationship between Russia and Iran were laid, particularly in sectors related to energy, the military-industrial complex and infrastructure (Seyedi Asl & Zabardastalamdari, 2025).

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of Russian-Iranian economic relations. The removal of ideological barriers between the two countries and the shift of Russia towards a pragmatic approach to its foreign economic policy paved the way for the institutionalisation

of economic cooperation between the two nations. The 1990s and 2000s saw an increase in the turnover of trade between Russia and Iran, mainly due to the supply of Russian equipment and armaments to Iran as well as the participation of the two countries in various nuclear-energy projects. The construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant, for instance, involved the transfer of technological knowledge from Russia to Iran, the training of Iranian technicians by Russian experts, and the signing of various contracts between the two countries (Aslan & Aslan, 2024). At the quantitative level, this stage was characterised by growth of trade turnover from an extremely low base with persistently high volatility. Qualitatively, economic ties were marked by narrow product specialisation, by the predominance of project-contract forms of interaction and by the absence of stable production and technological chains, all of which heightened their dependence on the prevailing foreign-policy climate. The economic interaction had an asymmetric nature: for Russia, Iran was a market for exports and a tool of regional presence, and for Iran, cooperation was of a compensatory nature, partially compensating for sanctions restrictions and technological gaps. The dynamics of economic ties were significantly influenced by external systemic factors, including NATO enlargement, the strengthening of the American presence in the Middle East, and uncertainty surrounding the legal regime of the Caspian Sea, all of which constrained the development of transport and energy corridors (Kakachia *et al.*, 2022; Jahangir, 2024). The causes and factors underlying the formation of Russian-Iranian relations across political, economic and other dimensions are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The evolution of the strategic priorities of Russia and Iran in the post-Soviet period

Parameter	Russia	Iran
Dominant motive	Restoration of great power status	Preservation of the regime and sovereignty
Attitude towards the countries of the pro-American bloc	Competitive	Confrontational
Nature of the partnership	Instrumental	Compensatory
Institutional forms	Contracts, agreements	Long-term political ties

Source: compiled by the author based on K. Kakachia *et al.* (2022), M. Aslan & H.K. Aslan (2024), K. Jahangir (2024), S. Seyedi Asl & Sh. Zabardastalamdari (2025)

The data presented in Table 1 demonstrated an asymmetric structure to the economic partnership, reflecting the differing strategic motivations of the two parties. For Russia, economic interaction with Iran is subordinated to the task of expanding its external economic manoeuvring room and of consolidating its status as a great power, whereas Iran makes use of this partnership as an instrument for offsetting the costs of sanctions and for preserving macroeconomic stability. These differences bear directly on the institutional forms taken by cooperation: from contract-oriented agreements and a project-based approach on Russia's part, to Iran's pursuit of long-term, politically protected

economic ties. In the current stage of the development of economic relations between Russia and Iran, both countries have been moving towards convergence of their economies. After 2014, and especially after 2022, both Russia and Iran have experienced the introduction of various sanctions against them. These sanctions have contributed to an increase in the use of monetary transactions in the national currencies of the two countries only, an increase in barter transactions between the two countries only, and an increase in the development of projects related to energy and transport between the two countries (Korolev, 2022; Aslan & Aslan, 2024). The sanctions have been an

external constraint, but also an element of the structural transformation of economic policy. For Russia and Iran, they have resulted in a reorientation of trade flows, deepening energy cooperation and the search for alternative mechanisms of financial integration outside the Western institutional frameworks. In this

sense, the political rapprochement has played a subsidiary role in creating the institutional conditions for the realisation of economic projects and the coordination in international forums (Jahangir, 2024). The principal characteristics of the present stage of interaction are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of current Russian-Iranian interaction

Criterion	Characteristic
Type of relations	Strategic pragmatic rapprochement
Key factor	Sanctions pressure
Dominant discourse	Anti-hegemonism
Level of institutionalisation	Above average
Degree of sustainability	Dependent on external crises

Source: compiled by the author based on A. Korolev (2022), M. Aslan & H.K. Aslan (2024), K. Jahangir (2024)

The data presented in Table 2 point to the formation of a model of strategic, pragmatic economic rapprochement, underpinned by sanctions pressure as the key external stimulus. The level of institutionalisation of cooperation is assessed as above average, although its sustainability remains contingent upon the dynamics of external crises and upon shifts in the global economic climate. From the perspective of socioeconomic factors, sanctions pressure has accelerated the formation of adaptive models of economic interaction, including de-dollarisation of settlements, expansion of energy contracts, cooperation in the military-industrial complex and the development of transport and logistics infrastructure. Russia views Iran as an important element of the regional economic architecture and a channel for circumventing sanctions barriers, whereas Iran gains access to Russian technologies, investments and sales markets (Ajdari *et al.*, 2024; Aslan & Aslan, 2024). Historical-genetic analysis makes it possible to interpret this economic convergence not as a short-term response to a crisis but as a result of the long-term accumulation of adaptation experience to sanctions regimes. For Iran, this experience has been shaped since the 1990s; for Russia, since 2014 – a factor that has ensured relative institutional compatibility of approaches to economic sovereignty and foreign economic diversification. Thus, the development of relations between Russia and Iran in the perspective of history does not constitute an independent line of analysis, but only serves as the background against which the analysis of the economic processes that took place between the two countries can be undertaken.

Economic logic and institutional value of Russian-Iranian strategic discourses

The qualitative content analysis of official and expert materials of the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran revealed that the central semantic core of bilateral interaction in the political-discursive dimension is formed by a common understanding of a multipolar world order as a normatively preferable

and historically determined model of international relations. Multipolarity is systematically constructed in Russian strategic discourse not as a neutral description of the transformation of the global system, but as a mobilising narrative, directed at the delegitimisation of the Western-centred order and at justifying the necessity of a redistribution of power within the international system. Contemporary research shows that under conditions of sanctions pressure and international isolation, multipolarity in Russian discourse acquires the function of an ideological framework for foreign policy, allowing confrontation with the West to be presented as structurally inevitable and historically justified (Chatterjee & Petrov, 2024; Audinet, 2025).

In the Iranian discursive field, the category of multipolarity is imbued with additional ideological content and is closely linked to the concepts of anti-hegemonism, resistance and the defence of revolutionary sovereignty. Unlike the more institutional-realist Russian interpretation, Iranian official and expert text's view multipolarity as a means of undermining an unjust international order based on sanctions, asymmetric access to markets and coercive policies. Studies devoted to the transformation of Iranian foreign policy in the 21st century indicate that the idea of multipolarity has become a key element of the "Look to the East" strategy, aimed at diversifying foreign economic and political ties under conditions of a prolonged sanctions regime (Mardani *et al.*, 2025). Content analysis showed that in both discourses, multipolarity performs primarily not a descriptive but a legitimising and mobilisational function. It is used to present Russian-Iranian rapprochement as a strategically grounded and long-term choice, rather than as a situational response to current external pressure. This approach corresponds to the theoretical logic of strategic narratives, according to which states use interpretations of the international order to form sustainable coalitions and justify foreign policy decisions in the eyes of domestic and external audiences (Chebankova, 2023).

One of the significant findings of the analysis is the degree of convergence of the interpretations of the role of the West in the world. The Russian government and the diplomatic establishment interpret the role of the West as one of the agents of the destabilisation of the international system through the use of sanctions, military-political alliances and extraterritorial pressure to preserve its position of dominance in the world. A similar logic is reproduced in Iranian materials, where Western influence is interpreted through the prism of historical experience of sanctions isolation, the threat of regime changes and the undermining of national sovereignty. The recurrence of these semantic constructs indicates the formation of a common antihegemonic discursive field, within which Russia and Iran position themselves as states resisting the asymmetric distribution of power in the world system (Chatterjee & Petrone, 2024). In theoretical terms, this discursive shift is consistent with the logic of balancing, in which the coordination of positions is aimed not at forming a formal alliance but at limiting the dominance of the leading actor through political, economic and symbolic interaction. As contemporary studies show, this form of coordination is characteristic of states under sanctions pressure seeking to expand their strategic manoeuvring space without formal commitments (Audinet, 2025).

A separate and stable category in the identified semantic structure is the theme of sanctions. The content analysis showed that in the Russian and Iranian discourses the sanctions are not considered as a temporary or extraordinary measure, but as a structural element of the modern international environment. The reliance on terms like “economic war”, “unilateral illegal restrictions” and “instrument of pressure” is indicative of a process by which the sanctions regime has become normalised within elite political thinking. At the same time, in both cases a move away from a rhetoric of victimhood towards a rhetoric of adaptation and resilience can be witnessed, reflected in the emphasis on alternative financial mechanisms, regional formats of cooperation and technological sovereignty. This kind of discursive pattern indicates a shift from a reactive model of survival towards a proactive strategy of institutional adjustment which is also manifested in recent studies on Iran's foreign economic policy (Mardani *et al.*, 2025). The results of the content analysis occupy a specific place within the regional level of analysis, above all the Middle East. In the Russian and Iranian sources, the region is always described as a space where the unipolar model has lost its effectiveness and the Western intervention is seen as a factor of chronic instability. Both states present themselves, discursively, as responsible actors operating within the framework of international law and the principle of sovereignty, a stance that reinforces the symbolic compatibility of their respective strategies and offers a basis for the coordination of action within the region (Chatterjee & Petrone, 2024).

In the regional context, the Syrian case is the most concentrated version of the practical dimension of this rapprochement. The content analysis revealed that in official Russian texts the participation in the Syrian conflict is coded mainly through the categories of legitimacy, sovereignty and the fight against terrorism, whereas in the Iranian discourse Syria is interpreted as a key element of the “axis of resistance” and a source of strategic depth. Despite this difference in interpretative frameworks, the two discourses converge in according priority to the preservation of the existing political regime and to the prevention of externally imposed transformation. This points to the formation of a functional compatibility between strategic narratives, one that reduces the transaction costs of coordination and enhances the resilience of the partnership amid ongoing international turbulence. A comparative analysis of Russian and Iranian narratives, set against other authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regional blocs and presented in the L. Vinjamuri *et al.* (2025) report, made it possible to regard the ideological articulation of anti-hegemonism not merely as a political-discursive phenomenon but also as a factor in economic coordination under conditions of sanctions-related constraint. Unlike a number of other regional partnerships, in which anti-Western rhetoric is fragmentary or situational in character, the Russian-Iranian rapprochement is accompanied by the formation of a relatively coherent normative framework that performs an applied function – reducing the perceived risks of economic interaction and enhancing the predictability of partner behaviour. The durability of this framework further reinforces the symbolic legitimacy of the cooperation between these two countries, enabling the conclusion of long-term contracts, the development of energy and transport cooperation, and the expansion of settlements outside of the Western financial institutions.

In the course of the analysis attention was paid to the interpretation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict within Iranian discourse with particular attention to its indirect economic consequences. As a rule, the conflict is not directly assessed in official Iranian statements. However, the argument on “root causes” related to NATO enlargement and to the violation of the principle of indivisible security is reproduced. Such a position allows Iran, on the one hand, to align itself with the Russian interpretation in a discursive manner and, on the other, to avoid formal commitments that could lead to additional economic costs or to secondary sanctions. The content analysis reveals a symbolic association of the conflict, within Iranian discourse, with Iran's own experience of sanctions pressure, creating a shared field of meaning and contributing to the institutionalisation of economic adaptation, including the development of alternative payment mechanisms and logistics routes. The aggregated results of the coding and categorisation process are presented in Table 3, reflecting the main discursive elements and their theoretical interpretation.

Table 3. Codes and categories of the qualitative content analysis of Russian-Iranian interaction

Code	Category	Key indicators	Theoretical interpretation
C1	Multipolar world order	"Multipolarity", "just order"	Neorealism, balancing
C2	Anti-hegemonism	"Unipolarity", "Western hegemony"	Balancing theory
C3	Sovereignty	"Non-interference", "independent path"	Neorealism
C4	Sanctions	"Economic war", "pressure"	Sanctions resilience
C5	Adaptation to sanctions	'Alternative mechanisms'	Sanctions resilience
C6	Syria	"Legitimate government", "resistance"	Practical balancing
C7	Ukrainian conflict	"Root causes", "security"	Neorealism

Source: compiled by the author based on E. Korosteleva & I. Petrova (2023), Ministry of the Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2023), S.C. Ejituwu *et al.* (2024), F.H. Najmaddin (2024), L. Vinjamuri *et al.* (2025), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Islamic Republic of Iran (2025), Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation (2025)

Analysis of the table of codes demonstrated that the strategic rapprochement between Russia and Iran rests upon stable semantic categories that encompass both economic content and applied effects. The category of multipolar world order indicates the desire of both Iran and Russia to form an alternative architecture of economic relations. The Russian Federation's Foreign Policy Concept states that the establishment of a multipolar world order is essential for restoring the balance of power, indicating a desire to diversify economic trade partners (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2023). Iran discussed in its document the benefits of a multipolar world order indicated a desire to have greater control over its own economic and financial flows (Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation, 2025). Thus, this semantic category indicates a neorealist understanding of the benefits of an alternative economic order for both Iran and Russia. The category of anti-hegemonism serves as a signal of trust between the partners. The ways that Russia and Iran have stated that the "unipolar world" and the "collective West" pose a threat to their countries and citizens, respectively (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2025; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 2025) indicates that each country is aware of the potential for other countries within the category of anti-hegemonism to contribute to any coordination of the energy and transportation projects mentioned in the article. A cost of this type of political alignment is recognised in the country descriptions, however, as both Russian and Iranian descriptions indicate potential difficulties in accessing advanced technologies, which incurs additional costs for those countries to compensate for the lack of available technologies.

The categories of "Sanctions" and "Adaptation to sanctions" include the most economic content. The category of "Sanctions" includes elements that indicate the creation of new types of settlements, new methods of payment, and the deepening of energy cooperation between the Russian Federation and its partnering nations. Each of these elements of "strategic closeness" includes the potential for the greatest long-term economic value for the Russian Federation. Other elements

within the category, however, are found to be more symbolic than any economic outcomes. The regional category of "Syria" indicates some of the economic benefits that emerge from the political interactions between the Russian Federation and other nations. The category of "The Ukrainian conflict" indicates that while the conflict between Russia and Ukraine was a source of tension for the Russian Federation, it also led to the acceleration of certain economic changes initiated by the Russian Federation. The content analysis thus allows to state that the interaction between Russia and Iran is formed not only by the convergence of ideological positions between the two nations, but also by the pragmatic economic logic that is present between the two countries. The aspects of the interaction that relate to the adaptation of the sanctions and the creation of alternative economic mechanisms between the two nations is that which provides the long-term value of the partnership between Russia and Iran, whereas part of the ideological content of the two nations functions merely as a means of legitimising the partnership and the symbols associated with it.

Economic adaptation of Russia and Iran to sanctions pressure: Logistics, financial platforms and domestic economic effects

The results of the quantitative analysis showed that economic interaction between Russia and Iran has a high degree of adaptability to Western sanctions, which is reflected in the dynamics of trade turnover and in structural changes to external economic flows. According to official data of the Intergovernmental Commission on Trade and Economic Cooperation, confirmed by the Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation, trade turnover between the two countries increased by 16.2% in 2024 to about USD 4.8 billion. This growth attests to an expansion of bilateral trade against the background of sanctions pressure and to a reorientation of the foreign-economic priorities of both countries (Reuters, 2025). Further official statements by the Russian authorities confirm an acceleration in trade relations. In the first quarter of 2024, trade turnover grew by 48% relative to the corresponding period of the previous year: Russian exports

to Iran increased by 77%, while imports from Iran rose by 13% (Mehr News Agency, 2025). These figures reflect not merely an increase in the exchange of goods but also a strengthening of predictability and trust between economic actors, thereby creating a basis for long-term contracts and joint infrastructure projects. The structure of trade turnover has likewise changed: according to data from the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, the share of industrial goods in exports rose to USD 1.4 billion by the end of the Iranian year 1404 (20 March 2026), up from USD 1.1 billion the year before (Tehran Times, 2025). This shift attests to a strengthening of technological and production-related cooperation, as well as to a gradual reduction in dependence on raw-material exports in favour of industrial goods.

Adaptation to the existing sanctions regimes is also evident in the financial sphere. More than 80% of the bilateral settlements that take place between Russia and Iran are conducted in their national currencies – the rouble and the rial, respectively. According to the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran, Mohammadreza Farzin, an international currency agreement with Russia is already in operation and uses an agreed commercial exchange rate for the currencies of the two nations (Mehr News Agency, 2025). This agreement includes the use of national currencies in trade, as well as the integration of bank messaging systems and payment card systems. The impact of digitalisation within the Russian and Iranian domestic markets is felt in a variety of sectors. Russia has seen the benefits of integrating its Financial Message Transfer System into its banks and commercial organisations to manage currency movements and reduce costs. Iran has experienced the benefits of integrating its Shetab payment system with the Russian MIR payment system, which has stimulated economic activity within domestic e-commerce and industrial sectors. Moreover, small and medium-sized enterprises within both countries have experienced an increase in the availability of financing and credit, which has furthered their growth within the domestic markets and allowed them to compete better with domestic and foreign competitors alike. Thus, the digitalisation of settlement platforms strengthens financial stability and liquidity in domestic markets, reduces transaction costs and creates a foundation for long-term economic cooperation outside Western financial structures.

Changes in logistics also have a direct impact on domestic markets. Transport corridors through Central Asian and Caucasian countries, as well as the active use of the North-South route, contribute to the diversification of supplies and a reduction in dependence on European routes. As noted at the XVI International Economic Forum “Russia-Islamic World: KazanForum 2025”, the increased capacity of highways and border crossing points on the Russian-Azerbaijani and Russian-Iranian borders opens up new channels for trade

with South Asian, African and Middle Eastern countries (Ministry of Transport of the Russian Federation, 2025). These measures stimulate the growth of domestic logistics services, create jobs, develop infrastructure clusters and improve the efficiency of goods distribution within the countries. New supply channels contribute to the formation of parallel supply chains that minimise disruptions in the domestic market. In Russia, this is manifested through increased utilisation of regional transport hubs and warehouse complexes, stimulating the development of the domestic transport industry. In Iran, the expansion of the transport corridor through Azerbaijan strengthens the position of local logistics operators and promotes the growth of domestic turnover of industrial and consumer goods. Combined with digital platforms, this ensures efficient inventory management, accelerates goods turnover and reduces the cost of logistics operations, increasing the resilience of domestic markets to external shocks and restrictive measures.

Energy cooperation has likewise been adapted to the new conditions. The Russian Minister of Energy, Sergei Tsivilev, stated that the two countries had agreed upon a route through the Caspian natural gas pipeline to deliver natural gas from Russia through Azerbaijan to its intended recipient of Turkey, with an initial planned delivery of 1.8 billion cubic metres of natural gas in the year 2025 and the potential for the volume to be expanded to 55 billion cubic metres of natural gas in the future (Interfax, 2025). Such projects provide for energy security and stimulate the development of domestic gas-transport networks, construction firms and service enterprises, generating direct economic returns for both states. Domestic energy markets benefit from an expanded supply, from a reduction in the risk of disruption, and from increased investment attractiveness in projects relating to energy distribution and storage. The influence of digital platforms and of transport diversification is likewise evident within the trade and processing sector. In Russia, the automation of settlements through the Financial Message Transfer System, together with integration with Iran, allows financial flows to be optimised for large industrial enterprises and for small and medium-sized enterprises alike, reducing time delays and the costs of international operations. In Iran, the use of Shetab and of digital logistics tools stimulates the development of regional distribution centres, improves control over the movement of goods, and supports growth in domestic production and processing. In economic terms, this contributes to a reduction in import costs and accelerates the adoption of innovative methods of supply-chain management.

The official statistics taken together confirm that sanctions are creating new economic alliances and forcing states to rebuild their external economic connections and logistics routes. New transport corridors, integrated digital platforms and adapted energy routes

are shaping systemic change in the domestic economy, contributing to growth in trade turnover, to the stabilisation of currency settlements and to the strengthening of energy cooperation. The domestic markets in both countries are becoming more flexible and resilient to external shocks, raising the economic value of strategic partnership and lowering the dependence on Western infrastructure. Therefore, both the quantitative analysis and the official statistics confirm that sanctions are not only a constraint but also a stimulus for the formation of stable economic mechanisms that increase trust, reduce transactional risk, and form long-term economic stability. New transport routes, the integration of payment and digital platforms, and the diversification of energy chains contribute to the institutionalisation of economic cooperation, provide domestic economic benefits and create a foundation for further strategic and infrastructural rapprochement between Russia and Iran.

Discussion

Sanctions as a manifestation of “soft power” were also confirmed in the work of Ya. Yakovenko *et al.* (2025), who examined the conditions under which the use of restrictions is most effective. According to the authors, multilateral sanctions initiated by international organisations such as the EU, the UN, or coalitions demonstrate the greatest effectiveness. The idea presented by authors of imposing sanctions as a tool for creating or maintaining a certain world order correlates with the results of the content analysis of Russian-American interaction. According to this analysis, sanctions are interpreted as a manifestation of hegemony and a threat to multipolarity. Such an interpretation was also found in the work of G. Saridakas *et al.* (2022), who predicted the impact of the Russian-Ukrainian military conflict and the imposition of sanctions restrictions on the reshaping of the world order. According to the authors, the imposition of sanctions can strengthen the international influence of the United States, which has gained the opportunity to become a key supplier of resources, replacing Russian gas exports to Europe. Based on the results of the comparative analysis, it was concluded that despite the expressed readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation to adapt to restrictions, the political leaders of the countries nevertheless acknowledge the influence of this instrument on their strategic development. In conditions of international tension, economic restrictions remain the most frequently used tool for maintaining world order and protecting universal values. A key element of joint strategies has been the diversification of channels for circumventing restrictions. If at the initial stage of sanctions pressure cooperation was predominantly reactive in nature, by now it has become fully institutionalised. Coordination of actions on the use of the “grey fleet”, the creation of extensive networks of shell

companies in intermediary jurisdictions and the introduction of systems for disabling automatic identification during hydrocarbon transportation demonstrate an example of the formation of a sovereign infrastructure operating in parallel with the legal international legal framework controlled by the West. This confirms the theoretical thesis that harsh external pressure inevitably undermines the monopoly of global regulatory institutions, stimulating the creation of alternative interaction networks.

The study also examined the idea that countries against which sanctions have been imposed seek to adapt to restrictions by creating new strategic partnerships. According to historical-genetic analysis, the development of Russian-Iranian interaction has passed through several stages – from political antagonism to politicoeconomic interaction, which gained particular intensity in 2014 and 2022. The idea of wave-like development of strategic partnerships under conditions of sanctions restrictions was also confirmed in other studies, including A. Bijan (2026). According to the author, the interaction between the Russian Federation and Iran is not systemic but rather episodic in nature, balancing cooperation with shared threats against strategic caution to maintain flexibility with regional players such as Israel, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The idea of episodic partnership between countries in response to increasing sanctions pressure was also confirmed in the work of V. Gergiieva & M. Herrera (2025), who analysed the new phase of Russian-Iranian partnership after the escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict in February 2022. The authors emphasised that despite the bilateral agreement signed in 2025, which cemented the commitment of both countries to a policy of resistance to the West, Russia’s support for Iran is symbolic in nature. Pointing to the symbolic nature of support, authors emphasised, in particular, that in the event of escalation of nuclear proliferation, Tehran would be forced to seek more reliable allies in the security sphere. Thus, the correspondence between the present study and earlier works lies in the recognition of the existence of different historical stages and heterogeneous intensity of Russian-Iranian cooperation. However, the situational nature of such cooperation and its impact on the countries’ ability to adapt to the restrictions imposed against them requires additional investigation.

From the conducted study, it was concluded that even situational strategic partnership helps Iran and the Russian Federation adapt to sanctions pressure from the United States and Western alliance countries. This conclusion was drawn on the basis of an analysis of the countries’ adaptive strategies in trade, the banking sector, digital technologies and other industries. The results obtained partially or fully agree with the findings of previous studies, in particular R.M. Oghli *et al.* (2024), who showed that under sanctions pressure,

the economies of Russia and Iran develop structural mechanisms of internal resilience and diversification of external ties, including expansion of trade with alternative markets, growth of local production and promotion of national payment schemes – a pattern that correlates with the concept of “resistance economy” as an adaptation strategy to restrictions. Such development confirms that sanctions do not lead to complete economic isolation but stimulate the formation of new institutions of economic interaction and financial platforms, reducing dependence on Western systems and providing a foundation for sustainable development under external pressure – a trend observable both in researchers’ and in the results of the present study. The idea examined in the study of the economy’s ability to adapt to sanctions pressure also found partial confirmation in the work of A.I. Azhar (2024), according to which Iran’s economy demonstrates sustainable development despite the country having been under international pressure since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, i.e., for over 45 years. The findings of the author are consistent with the results of the present study, according to which in 2024 trade turnover between Russia and Iran increased by 16.2%, new logistics routes emerged, and 80% of settlements between the countries are conducted in national currencies. The correspondence identified, however, is partial, since the study focused only on the shortterm results of RussianIranian influence in the context of sanctions pressure. The analysis of longterm influence was reflected, for example, in the work of F. Kazemof *et al.* (2025), who noted that sanctions reduce countries’ access to various opportunities, including technological innovation. Based on the study materials, Iran and the Russian Federation were able to partially overcome this limitation by creating their own financial settlement instruments, including the MIR card. At the same time, the research objectives did not include an analysis of the longterm impact of sanctions in the technological sphere, as examined by reserchers: the absence of opportunities for international cooperation within certain segments of the economy gives rise to an outflow of human resources, which, under conditions of a changing economy, may prove more damaging in its consequences than financial restrictions.

The correspondence between the present study and earlier work confirms the relevance of the chosen subject and the need for its more detailed examination. The contribution of this study to academic discourse lies in its emphasis on the complex nature of Russian-Iranian cooperation as a means of adapting to sanctions pressure. An understanding of the nature and key elements of such cooperation helps to explain why the application of particular sanctions instruments fails to produce the intended result. Through the comparison of the results of the present study with those obtained in former studies, it is possible to conclude that the collaboration between Russia and Iran under the

conditions of sanctions has a situational yet significant character. The interaction of these two countries allows each to adapt to the impact of sanctions and to develop new routes and platforms for the increase in resilience of their domestic economies. Though the long-term impact upon the technological sphere is limited and the middle class in Iran is experiencing instability as a result of this partnership, the partnership is overall beneficial to Iran and Russia in terms of minimising the risks to their economies. Thus, the interaction between Russia and Iran proves to be a helpful relationship for each of these countries in the face of sanctions and in the need to maintain economic development within their economies.

Conclusions

The results of the study showed that the evolution of Russian-Iranian interaction was determined primarily by changes in the external economic environment and in the prevailing sanctions regimes, moving from limited and fragmentary economic contact during the Cold War towards more institutionalised forms of economic cooperation after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The most significant strengthening of economic ties between the two countries took place in 2014 and 2022-2024, when the tightening of sanctions against the Russian Federation acted as a catalyst for the reorientation of trade flows, financial settlements and logistics routes. Despite the expansion of interaction in trade, energy, finance and transport, Russian-Iranian cooperation is still situational in character, a feature accounted for by the differences in the economic motives of the two parties: for the Russian Federation, the partnership is predominantly instrumental in nature, directed towards expanding the external economic manoeuvring room and reducing the costs of sanctions, while for Iran it functions as a compensatory mechanism for sustaining macroeconomic stability, preserving the regime, and protecting economic sovereignty under conditions of prolonged sanctions isolation.

The identified differences in the motivations of the parties determine the specific nature of institutionalisation of cooperation: the Russian side focuses primarily on contractual and projectbased forms of economic interaction, whereas Iran is interested in more stable and politically protected economic ties capable of ensuring longterm compensation for sanctions restrictions. Under conditions of intensifying sanctions pressure, a model of strategic pragmatic economic rapprochement is being formed, in which sanctions act as a key external factor structuring trade, financial and logistics decisions, while antihegemonic discourse performs a supporting function, creating a normative framework for coordinating economic policy and reducing transaction risks. Content analysis showed that economic interaction is institutionally supported by

stable semantic categories, among which the central place is occupied by “sanctions”, “adaptation to sanctions”, “sovereignty” and “multipolar world order”, interpreted by the parties primarily in the context of financial autonomy, market diversification and alternative economic mechanisms.

The economic cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran has become visible in the increase in their trade turnover by 16.2% in 2024, the increased volumes of their exports to the Russian Federation that reached USD 1.4 billion, as well as the decision of both countries to convert up to 80% of their trade into their national currencies. Each of these indicators suggests that the adaptations that both Russia and Iran have implemented to reduce its dependence upon the financial institutions and currencies of the West are having some degree of effectiveness. Beyond these adaptations in the terms upon which the two countries' economies may trade with one another, those countries have also begun to develop alternative transportation routes for their goods, such as the “North-South” International Transport Corridor, and have begun to utilise alternative financial instruments within their economic relationships with one another, such as the integration of the Russian “Mir” card payment systems within Iranian territory. Each of these developments helps to reduce the costs and challenges of their economic trade with one another, to increase the resilience of their domestic economies, and to enable the development of economic circuits that exist independently of the Western economic institutions.

At the same time, the findings of the study indicate that the situational character of the development of the economic relationship between Russia and Iran has a limiting impact upon the relationship's potential for long-term development. While the relationship between the two countries has been associated with a variety of benefits to Russia and Iran during the short- and medium-term, risks to the economic relationship emerge in relation to the technological lag that the two countries exhibit relative to the remainder of the globe's economies, as well as in relation to the potential for the development of economic imbalances between the two nations (either as a result of nuclear escalation between the two countries, or as a result of the implementation of secondary sanctions against either Russia or Iran). Consequently, then, the strategic partnership between Russia and Iran will likely only provide the two nations with the ability to offset the economic effects of sanctions upon certain sectors of their economies, rather than allowing those economies to experience long-term growth. Thus, the relationship has been effective in providing benefits to Russia and Iran during the short- and medium-term, but has been limited in providing long-term growth to those economies.

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Conflict of Interest

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Эл аралык санкцияларды айланып өтүү стратегияларында Ирандын институционалдык тажрыйбасы: Россия Федерациясы менен саясий жана экономикалык жактан жакындашуу

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Аннотация. Бул изилдөөнүн максаты – Россия Федерациясы менен Иран Ислам Республикасы узак мөөнөттүү санкциялардын басымына экономикалык механизмдер аркылуу кантип ылайыкташканын системалуу түрдө баалоо болду. Изилдөөнүн жыйынтыктары санкциялардын гана чектөө эмес, ошондой эле институционалдык жана инфраструктуралык адаптация үчүн стимул катары да иштээрин көрсөттү. Орусия Федерациясы Иран менен өнөктөштүгүн чет элдик экономикалык маневр аянтын кеңейтүү, транзакциялык жана каржылык тобокелдиктерди азайтуу, ошондой эле энергетика жана логистика тармагындагы кызматташтыкты бекемдөө үчүн колдонуп келет. Иран кызматташтыкты соода байланыштарын диверсификациялоо, макроэкономикалык туруктуулукту камсыз кылуу жана тышкы басымдын таасирин минималдаштыруу каражаты катары карайт. Негизги көңүл төрт он жыл ичинде тирүү калуу жана эл аралык чектөөлөрдү айланып өтүү боюнча уникалдуу стратегияларды иштеп чыккан мамлекет катары Ирандын институционалдык тажрыйбасын талдоого жана бул тажрыйбаны Россияга өткөрүү механизмдерине бурулат. Сапаттык ыкмаларды (расмий документтердин мазмунун талдоо, дискурс талдоо жана институционалдык талдоо) колдонуп, авторлор орус-иран кызматташтыгын жөн гана мажбурдуу соода маселеси катары эмес, санкцияланган катышуучулардын суверендүү коалициясын түзүү катары ачыктайт. Макалада санкцияларды айланып өтүүнүн саясий жана экономикалык платформаларынын деталдуу анализи берилет: улуттук каржы системаларын интеграциялоо (SWIFTти айланып өтүү), гидрокарбонаттарды ташуу үчүн «күрөң флотту» координациялоо жана Түндүк-Түштүк Эл аралык транспорт коридорунун алкагында коопсуз геосаясий периметрди түзүү. Изилдөөнүн жыйынтыктары санкциялар терең институционалдык трансформацияны детүргүч катары кызмат кыларын, декларативдүү анти-гегемониядан Батыштын көзөмөлү жок альтернативдүү регионалдык тартип архитектурасын практикалык түзүүгө өтүүнү жеңилдетерин көрсөтөт.

Негизги сөздөр: санкциялардан качуу; каржылык өтмөк; Түндүк-Түштүк коридору; тышкы басым; адаптация

Институциональный опыт Ирана в стратегиях обхода международных санкций: политико-экономическая конвергенция с Российской Федерацией

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Аннотация. Цель данного исследования заключалась в системной оценке экономических механизмов адаптации Российской Федерации и Исламской Республики Иран к длительному санкционному давлению. Результаты исследования продемонстрировали, что санкции выступают не только ограничением, но и стимулом к институциональной и инфраструктурной адаптации. Российская Федерация использует партнёрство с Ираном для расширения внешнеэкономического манёвра, снижения транзакционных и финансовых рисков, а также укрепления энергетической и логистической кооперации. Иран рассматривает сотрудничество как инструмент диверсификации торговых связей, обеспечения макроэкономической устойчивости и минимизации воздействия внешнего давления. Основное внимание уделяется анализу институционального опыта Ирана как государства, выработавшего за четыре десятилетия уникальные стратегии выживания и обхода международных ограничений, и механизмам передачи этого опыта России. На основе качественных методов (контент-анализа официальных документов, дискурс-анализа и институционального анализа) авторами раскрывается содержание российско-иранского взаимодействия не просто как вынужденной торговли, а как формирования суверенной коалиции санкционированных акторов. В статье детально анализируются политико-экономические платформы обхода санкций: интеграция национальных финансовых систем (минуя SWIFT), координация “серого флота” для транспортировки углеводородов и выстраивание защищенного геополитического контура в рамках Международного транспортного коридора «Север – Юг». Результаты исследования доказывают, что санкции выступают триггером для глубокой институциональной трансформации, способствуя переходу от декларативного антигегемонизма к практическому созданию альтернативной, неподконтрольной Западу архитектуры регионального порядка.

Ключевые слова: обход санкций; финансовый шлюз; коридор «Север – Юг»; внешнее давление; адаптация