



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on December 11, 2023

## Russia and Iran Forge Closer Ties After Putin-Raisi Visit

On December 7, Russian President Vladimir Putin told his Iranian counterpart Ebrahim Raisi, who was in Moscow on a state visit, that Moscow and Tehran have developed strong ties over the past years and have bolstered their respective economies as a result. The leaders discussed bilateral ties and wider global challenges, including the Israel-Hamas conflict.

Putin also told Raisi to “convey his best wishes” to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, Iran’s head of state. “Thanks to his support, we have gained good momentum over the past year,” Putin said, pointing to cooperation in energy and education.

Moreover, both countries are investing in Iranian railroads, which are meant to become a part of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

A network of sea, rail, and highway routes spanning more than 7,200 kilometers, the INSTC is designed to connect Russia’s city of St. Petersburg, on the Baltic Sea, to Mumbai in India via the Caspian Sea and Iran. The project, the origin of which can be traced back to 2002, involves a total of 11 countries.

The INSTC purports to reduce the time needed to transport goods from the Baltic to India and double cargo turnover on the route. It is poised to be twice as efficient as moving the goods through the Suez Canal, as per some media reports.

According to Putin, bilateral trade between Russia and Iran has already increased by 20 percent over the past year and reached some \$5 billion. “We are engaging in active cooperation across the entire spectrum of our bilateral relations,” the Russian president said.

Raisi also praised both nations’ progress in the fields of energy, agriculture, and education, but said that further steps could be made to enhance cooperation in these areas, which would be “in the interests of our states and our peoples.”

For his part, Putin voiced his hope that the Eurasian Economic Union, which includes Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, would be able to sign a free-trade agreement with Iran by the end of 2023.

During the talks, Putin joked that he had considered visiting Tehran while visiting Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) last week. Putin had made a one-day working visit to the Middle East, surprising many and sparking discussions about the veracity of Moscow’s purported international isolation after the start of its military operations in Ukraine.

The Russian president told Raisi that he was flying over Iran on his way back to Russia and thought that



AP Images  
Vladimir Putin and Ebrahim Raisi



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he could just land in Tehran and meet his Iranian counterpart right away. However, Putin said he did not do that as he was informed that the Iranian president was already about to leave for Moscow.

Raisi replied by saying that Iran was ready to welcome Putin at any time and invited the Russian president to visit Iran. Putin said he accepted the invitation and would avail himself of the chance when available.

Notably, in televised opening remarks, neither leader alluded to their countries' strengthening military alliance, a source of worry for the United States, which claims Iran is supplying Russia with weapons to use against Ukraine.

Nonetheless, during his discussions with Putin, Raisi accused the West of backing "genocide" by Israel against Palestinians in Gaza.

Putin said it was crucial to discuss the situation in the Middle East, particularly in the Palestinian territories.

Raisi responded via a translator, stating that "what is happening in Palestine and Gaza is of course genocide and a crime against humanity," adding it was "even more sad" that such actions were supported by the United States and the collective West.

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu was present at the December 7 meeting, as was Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak.

Iran supports the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas, the ruling authority in Gaza, in its war with Israel. Russia has relations with all major players in the Middle East, including Hamas and Israel, which it incensed by hosting a Hamas delegation in Moscow in October.

Anti-Russian observers have said that the Israel-Hamas war has diverted global attention from the war in Ukraine and enabled Moscow to align itself with developing countries in solidarity with the Palestinians, boosting its global image.

Putin has declared that the sight of suffering and bloodied children in Gaza makes "tears come to your eyes," for instance.

Additionally, Russia and Arab countries have slammed the West for alleged double standards by backing Israel's bombing and siege of Gaza while accusing Russia of war crimes.

Israel has previously maintained that claims of genocide were unfounded and that its actions target Hamas, not civilians.

Last month, the Kremlin acknowledged that Russia and Iran were developing relations, "including in the field of military-technical cooperation," but refused to elaborate on a suggestion by the White House that Iran may be contemplating supplying Russia with ballistic missiles.

Iranian authorities have said military cooperation with Russia was expanding day by day.

[Last month](#), Iran said that it had confirmed arrangements for Russia to supply it with Su-35 fighter jets, Mi-28 attack helicopters, and Yak-130 pilot training aircraft.

White House spokesman John Kirby recently described the burgeoning Russia-Iran defense relationship as "worrisome."

While Russia has been outspoken in its call for a Gaza ceasefire, unlike Iran, it has refrained from directly condemning Israel and looked the other way as the Israeli military occasionally attacked targets



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in Syria — a country closely linked to Russia.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov also clarified Russia's links with Hamas during the 21st Doha Forum in Qatar on Sunday, December 10, maintaining that Moscow's contact with the Palestinian terrorist group was restricted to Hamas' Qatar-based political branch.

"Hamas carried out a terrorist attack on October 7, which we immediately condemned. Hamas has a political branch operating in Doha, and we have relations with that political branch, and we immediately contacted the people in Doha to discuss the fate of the people taken hostage," Lavrov contended.

By the time Israel and Hamas agreed to a temporary ceasefire and hostage exchange last month, Russia had evacuated more than 750 of its citizens, including 300 children, from the war zone, flying most back to Moscow.



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