

**THE EVOLVING TEHRAN-MOSCOW AXIS
SUMMARY OF A 'MIDDLE EAST FORUM' WEBINAR
WITH IRINA TSUKERMAN**



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Ukrainian born Irina Tsukerman is a New York-based lawyer and analyst focusing on information warfare in the Middle East and Russia. The president of Scarab Rising, Inc., a media and security strategic advisory firm, her publication on Muslim Brotherhood financing appeared at the Abu Dhabi International Book Fair last May.

INTRODUCTION

The Kremlin and the 'Deep State' in Iran, despite their disparate backgrounds and political agendas, have formed a working alliance against the West. Iranian media even trumpeted a "new world order" when Putin visited Tehran last month.

The MEF webinar addressed by Irina Tsukerman looked at the current areas of tension and cooperation between the two states as well as its implications for the United States.

SUMMARY OF PRESENTATION BY IRINA TSUKERMAN

- Despite a historically complicated and troubled past, as well as a background of both cooperation and competition on oil and gas related matters, Iran and Russia have by virtue of other developments and circumstances been drawn closer together as exemplified in the aftermath of the Ukraine war by the sale of Iranian Drones to the Russian military following President Putin's high-profile visit to Tehran.
- The influence of Russia increased in the aftermath of the 1979 Revolution when the then Soviet Union was able to increase its level of cooperation with the Islamic security institutions and in particular the intelligence services.
- These kinds of cooperation have over the years resulted in an increase in the number of Russian 'assets' within those organizations in Iran.
- Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia and Iran for a while went their separate ways and dispute over the allocation of territory and distribution of rights in the Caspian Sea, in which the Iranians were allocated an area that was less than their original expectations resulted in some tension between the two countries.

- Over the years until the Ukraine war, Russia has had the upper hand in this bi-lateral relationship – especially as it also wanted to weaken the Iranian hand in Syria by giving a green light to Israeli overflights on missions targeting IRGC assets and Iranian proxies in Syria.
- In the aftermath of the Ukraine war and the fact that a weekend Russia has had to redeploy some of its Syrian assets (e.g., S-300/400 batteries) to the front with Ukraine, the previous situation has now changed with Iran in a stronger position.
- As a result, even in the region Russia is increasingly creeping towards a closer relationship with Iran at the cost of somewhat abandoning its previous neutral stance with respect to Iran and some of the Persian Gulf States.
- For its part, the Islamic Republic wants greater Russian support for legitimizing its actions and blocking moves against it at the UN Security Council.
- Iran has also become involved militarily with Russia as a result of its desire in joining the ‘Shanghai Group’ along with China.
- Putin’s recent visit to Tehran (along with that of the Turkish president) – in the aftermath of Biden’s trip to the Middle East – led to the announcement of greater cooperation and more mutual dependence between the two states. This included the sale of Iranian drones and missiles to Russia while Russia agreed to provide Iran with its requirements of grain (some of which is believed to have been smuggled from Ukraine).
- Russia has had to manoeuvre delicately its ties with Israel especially over the situation in Syria. In reality both parties, given their various interests, have an incentive for trying to manage this difficult situation.
- As for Western reaction to these developments, the response needs to be holistic and multi-faceted (i.e., using covert action as well trying to win hearts and minds) and above all on Iran, the West should not be beguiled by any thoughts regarding ‘mythical reformists’.
- Hence, the West will need to focus on ‘enemy calculations’ and plan its future moves for even a possible ‘regime change’ on those basis.

