

FBIS TRENDS
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USSR-Iran

Soviet and Iranian treatment of recent visits to Moscow by Iranian officials suggests that both sides are trying to improve the atmosphere in relations and widen the basis for bilateral cooperation. Moscow used the visits to emphasize its desire for closer political and economic ties and to reiterate a plea for a negotiated settlement of the Iran-Iraq war. Tehran eschewed criticism of Moscow's cooperation with Iraq and its occupation of Afghanistan, focusing instead on prospects for improved economic relations.

Moscow Accents Positive Prospects From Iranian Visits

Despite its long association with Iraq, cemented by a 1972 friendship and cooperation treaty, Moscow over the past year and a half has sought to establish a dialogue with Tehran in an apparent effort to widen the basis for bilateral cooperation. The 4-6 August visit of Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Larijani was the third high-level Soviet-Iranian Foreign Ministry contact since April 1985, continuing the dialogue established then by Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Kazempur-Ardabili's trip to Moscow, which was reciprocated by then-First Deputy Foreign Minister Korniyenko in February 1986.¹ Moscow gave Larijani a high-level reception: he met with two full Politburo members, President Gromyko and Foreign Minister Shevardnadze, as well as with Lev Tolkunov, chairman of the Council of the Union of the Supreme Soviet. In 1985, Kazempur-Ardabili met with only one Politburo member—Foreign Minister Gromyko.

Soviet media coverage of Larijani's visit seemed designed to underline Moscow's interest in improved bilateral relations. A 4 August TASS report, published on *Pravda's* front page the next day, said that Larijani gave Gromyko a message from President Khamane'i, "which speaks of the Iranian leadership's desire to develop good-neighborly relations with the Soviet

¹ Kazempur-Ardabili's visit was the highest level Soviet-Iranian contact since the 1979 revolution. That visit and Korniyenko's trip are discussed in the *Trends* of 17 April 1985, pages 7-10, and 26 February 1986, pages 13-19, respectively.

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Union." According to TASS, Gromyko "emphasized that the Soviet Union is a proponent of good relations with Iran and favors their development in both political and economic fields."

Consistent with broader Soviet foreign policy strategy, Moscow appears to be trying to bypass persisting bilateral differences with Iran in order to establish common ground on international issues. According to TASS, Gromyko asserted that "opportunities for cooperation" would expand if Iran "occupies a position of peace" and comes out against nuclear war. TASS also reported that both Gromyko and Shevardnadze briefed Larijani on Gorbachev's speech of 28 July 1986 in Vladivostok, which addressed matters of security in the Asian-Pacific region and announced the withdrawal of six regiments from Afghanistan. Soviet media have criticized Iran in the past for supporting the antigovernment rebels in Afghanistan, but there was no indication that Gromyko or Shevardnadze raised this subject.

Despite the continuing differences registered by Moscow's characterization of the Shevardnadze-Larijani meeting as having been "frank and business-like"—the same phrase used to describe Korniyenko's February talks in Tehran—Soviet media also sent more positive signals. TASS reported on 5 August that the meeting with Tolkunov was held in a "frank and friendly [*dobrozhelatelnyi*] atmosphere," and Moscow radio on the 11th reported Larijani's remarks at a Tehran press conference assessing his talks as "positive and constructive" and his opinion that there were no "serious obstacles to extending relations between Iran and the USSR." Moscow had been more reticent about publicizing positive signs during Korniyenko's visit.

Oil Minister Visit Soviet-Iranian dialogue was further bolstered when Petroleum Minister Aqazadeh made what TASS described as a "short business visit" to Moscow. Like Larijani, Aqazadeh was received at a high level, meeting on 19 August with Premier Ryzhkov, and TASS accentuated the positive in its report on this meeting as well. Describing their conversation as "businesslike," the report said that the two men had agreed that "the difference in social systems" of the USSR and Iran "should not act as an impediment to fruitful relations" and that they both advocated developing bilateral ties "along the road of strengthening trust and good-neighborliness." In an indication of Soviet willingness to expand trade with Iran, TASS added that "it was noted that the current level of Soviet-Iranian commercial and economic ties does not correspond to the potential of the two countries."

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Iran-Iraq War Moscow used both visits to reiterate its call for a negotiated settlement to the six-year-old Iran-Iraq war, but it avoided assigning any blame for the continuation of the conflict. Gromyko's remarks to Larijani, as reported by TASS, were typical of how the Soviets handled the issue: "Both sides would be showing wisdom if they ended the war and commenced talks," Gromyko said, asserting that "one day of war is worse than three years of talks."

Soviet commentary during and after the Larijani visit has been slightly less favorable to Iran, criticizing Tehran's pursuit of military victory. A Persian-language commentary broadcast to Iran on 5 August implicitly rebuked Iranian President Khamene'i for "categorically" rejecting a recent proposal by Iraqi President Saddam Husayn for ending the war, recalling Gromyko's remark that "one day of war is worse than three years of talks." Similarly, on 13 August *Izvestiya* reported favorably on the Iraqi peace initiative but said that Khamene'i had "flatly rejected" it and that he had asserted that the "war can be ended only after the 'aggressor has been punished.'" (U/FOUO)

Tehran Evinces Optimism on Broadening of Ties

In contrast to their low-key treatment of Korniyenko's February visit to Tehran, Iranian media have given wide play to Larijani's warm appraisal of his talks in Moscow and his optimism regarding improved relations. Larijani characterized his talks with Soviet officials as successful and spoke enthusiastically of the likelihood of expanded economic and political cooperation with the Soviet Union. He termed the visit "positive and constructive" during a 10 August press conference reported by the official Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA). Adding that "Tehran-Moscow relations look to the future," he asserted that there are "no major impediments" to relations with Moscow and announced that Foreign Minister Velayati has been invited to visit Moscow "in the current Christian year."

Officials other than Larijani have eschewed public comment on the results of his trip. In the only other leadership reference to Larijani's Moscow talks, IRNA reported on 11 August that President Khamene'i had discussed "the latest developments in Tehran-Moscow relations" with Iran's new ambassador to the USSR, noting that relations "must be expanded on the basis of mutual respect." The absence of high-level leadership comment on the talks, however,

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is consistent with the extreme sensitivity Iran has shown regarding the possibility of improved relations with the USSR, particularly in light of Moscow's support for Baghdad in the Iran-Iraq war and its occupation of Afghanistan.

Media comment on the visit has been sparse, but a 9 August Tehran radio commentary entitled "The Outlook for Soviet-Iranian Relations" cautiously noted that "overall" there would be "a better future" for bilateral relations. The commentary cited the need for "good-neighborliness" because of Iran's long border with the USSR, a justification that has frequently been used by Iranian leaders for holding meetings with Moscow.

Minimizing Impediments Larijani indicated that the major political obstacles dividing the two countries—the Soviets' support for Iraq and their occupation of Afghanistan—would not be allowed to stand in the way of improved economic ties. According to a Tehran radio report on his press conference he was careful not to criticize the USSR on either issue. When asked about the possibility of Iran's ending its support for the Afghan rebels in return for Moscow's stopping its assistance to Baghdad in the Gulf war, Larijani noted only that his delegation had "talked extensively about regional issues" with Soviet officials and had "made our views known to them."

Larijani said Iran welcomed the recent announcement of the withdrawal of some Soviet forces from Afghanistan. Rather than condemning the Soviet occupation, he said only that the presence of Soviet troops there is "a mistake," explaining that it is "damaging to the interests of the region since it will increase American influence there." His statements comport with a 31 July statement by an Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman that welcomed the Soviet plan to withdraw some of its forces on the grounds that after a full withdrawal the United States "would have no excuse to continue its growing interference in the region."

Progress on Economic Issues Larijani reported further progress on "commercial, transportation, industrial, scientific, and technical" issues in connection with preparing the agenda of the 10th session of the standing commission on Iran-Soviet joint economic cooperation. His visit was thus a continuation of talks on economic and commercial cooperation held during the 11-18 June visit to Tehran of a Soviet delegation of economic experts. An agreement to revive the commission, which has not met since 1980, was made during the Korniyenko visit to Tehran. The commission is expected to meet at an as yet unannounced date later this year.

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One economic obstacle to improved ties—the 1985 exodus of Soviet technicians from several large-scale projects in Iran, including power stations and a steel mill—has apparently been removed. According to Tehran radio on the 10th, Larijani announced that after negotiations “the Soviet side expressed the inclination to finish these projects.” The departure of thousands of Soviet technicians, ostensibly out of fear of Iraqi air attacks, had caused continuing resentment on the part of the Iranians.

Iranian Gas Sales Larijani also noted progress on the sensitive issue of gas exports to the Soviet Union. Reporting that his discussions focused on “bilateral cooperation in the fields of oil, energy, and oil exploration in the Caspian Sea,” he announced at his press conference that “Iran is interested in exporting gas to the USSR and to Europe through Soviet pipelines.” The resumption of gas exports, which were halted shortly after the 1979 revolution, has been a sensitive issue due to Tehran’s persisting dissatisfaction over the level of Soviet payments. Shortly after Korniyenko’s visit, Iran’s parliament speaker, ‘Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani, noted in a 9 February press conference that the issue remained a major impediment to bilateral ties. Rafsanjani explained that the Soviets “were buying our gas cheaply and so we cut off our export of gas and said that they would have to pay the market rate for it” (*Ettela’at*, 10 February).

The visit to Moscow by Petroleum Minister Aqazadeh was also a sign of progress on the gas issue. According to a Tehran radio report, one goal of his trip was to discuss with Soviet officials “coordination and cooperation in the field of oil and gas,” including specifically “the possibility of resuming gas exports to the USSR.”

Background The positive Iranian media treatment accorded Larijani’s visit contrasts sharply with negative leadership and media comment on the Korniyenko visit, when officials and commentators played down the importance of the talks and used the occasion to criticize Moscow’s positions on regional issues. While they did not rule out the possibility of expanding economic relations, Iranian leaders focused on Afghanistan and the Gulf war as major impediments to enhanced ties. During Korniyenko’s visit Tehran seemed to go out of its way to express support for the Muslim rebels in Afghanistan, and after his departure Rafsanjani, in a 9 February press conference, reiterated Iran’s insistence on Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and denounced Moscow’s assistance to Baghdad. (U/FOUO)

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Korea

Pyongyang Toughens Line on Resuming Dialogue With Seoul

North Korea appears to be engaged in a reassessment of the stalled dialogue with the South and has hardened its conditions for resumption, citing political developments in the South as a factor. At the same time Pyongyang has not abandoned its counsel to anti-Chon forces against using unduly confrontational tactics.

For the first time in the current round of the inter-Korean dialogue, Pyongyang has formally linked progress in the talks to political conditions in the South. A 10 August joint statement, issued in the name of North Korea's delegations to the suspended economic, Red Cross, and parliamentary talks, went beyond the usual calls for Seoul to abandon its "provocative" policies and demanded that it must stop "suppressing" South Korean students and "immediately release those illegally arrested" before dialogue can be resumed.

Since the current round of dialogue began two years ago, Pyongyang has not officially made Seoul's domestic policies an issue in the talks. The North has generally confined itself to asserting that a proper atmosphere for dialogue cannot exist in the absence of "democratization" in the South and insisting that it has the right to comment on South Korean politics even during periods of dialogue. It has complained less about Seoul's treatment of student demonstrators than about South Korean charges that the students are linked to the North, a charge Pyongyang claims further damages the atmosphere for talks. Kim Il-song's New Year addresses in 1985 and 1986 in fact seemed to make a special effort to tone down remarks regarding the South Korean domestic political situation, implying that the North Koreans were prepared to isolate that subject from the dialogue process.

The fact that the North has now linked the ROK domestic political situation to North-South talks serves to underscore Pyongyang's recent pessimistic assessments of the prospects for dialogue, especially in the light of past precedent. In August 1973, when an earlier round of talks began to break down, the North began to argue that the South had to halt its "suppression" of