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The New Geopolitics of Asia: Towards Cooperation and Interdependency

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Abstract

Significant economic prosperity in some Asian nations over a sustained period has left impacts on different areas of international relations. This paper explores the process of geopolitical developments in Asia, and examines the possible ways and means to ensure that these developments are in accordance with the common interests of Asian nations. Revealing an Iranian perspective of the geopolitical changes in Asia, the author traces the quest for independence to the rise of a development discourse in the Asian continent in the post-World War II period. He also studies the challenges ahead of the rising Asian powers such as energy security and lack of regional arrangements for conflict management and resolution. Pointing to Iran's salient status in world energy market, the author suggests the ways that Iran can contribute to the Asian energy security. The paper finally suggests measures for the promotion of Asian interdependency and cooperation including development of a normative system, development of a collective security structure and promotion of Asian cooperation.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Asia, Interdependency, Economic Development, Developmental State, Energy Security.

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Introduction

Developments in Asia and the future of the continent's geopolitics have been widely and extensively discussed in world politics in recent years. Rapid economic growth and development in a number of Asian countries over a sustained period have had serious implications in different areas of international relations. Developments in Asia reflect social constructs -- both abstract and concrete -- that appear to have progressed much faster than similar processes in the West proper. Since these constructs are still unfolding, it is both necessary and helpful to arrive at a better understanding of their potentialities in different respects as well as of the challenges involved.

Abstract constructs, as witnessed in the emerging Asia, are based on interactions, and the principles, rules and norms governing them, and also on the interdependency that emanates from the process. Concrete constructs instead refer to the objectives, particularly the economic and security interests, of the countries involved – in the case at hand, Asian countries.

As analyzed here, these structures – both abstract and concrete - interact with each other to form what can be called "Emerging Asia" - an entity that can lead to greater Asian interdependency. In this regard, it is important to look into and explore the challenges the new, emerging Asia faces and how such challenges could be addressed and tackled, for which Asia's future geopolitical role and status in the world, and equally the interaction among Asian countries, will be of great significance.

Given what was mentioned, this paper first attempts to have an overall look at the trend of geopolitical developments in Asia, and secondly, to look into the possible ways and means to ensure that these developments move in tandem with the shared interests of countries and peoples across the continent. Needless to say, the paper will reflect an Iranian view of the process as well as of the possible options for the future geopolitics. Within this general framework, three specific areas of Asian cooperation and interdependency will be discussed: economic development; energy security; and regional organizations.

Asian Geopolitics: From Quest for Independence to a Development Discourse

Asia has undergone constant tumult and change during the 20th century, especially in the post-World War II period. Given the prevailing political and ideological conflicts in the post-War world, Asia, as other regions, experienced a long period of tension. The overall situation somehow changed

since the 1970s when some Asian nations, especially in East Asia, turned their attention to economic growth and development. The end of the Cold War and the subsequent global emphasis on economic and development issues further buttressed the Asian trend and gave it a much higher global profile. In fact, the new trend of sustained economic growth and development in the continent has helped the gradual emergence of 'Asian interdependency' despite deep-seated cultural and ethnic differences and against a backdrop of old civilizations in history with glorious past (Singh: 2006, 2-3).

The developmental state first emerged in a number of small and medium-sized Asian countries, where it played a leading role in promoting economic growth and development. Later, it emerged in such powerful Asian nations as China and India. At the same time, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, significant geopolitical changes occurred in the international system, which also affected Asia dramatically as well (Vaezi: 2008, 57). The significant rise of developmental states has been one of such consequences. These states have contributed to the twin objectives of improving the global image, status and role of the continent as well as the emergence of the idea of 'Asian interdependency'.

Regional Boundaries

Looking to the past, it might be fair to say that great power politics and rivalries have played a crucial role in shaping geopolitical attitudes in Asia. While there is little consensus on Asia's exact geopolitical boundaries, a certain degree of integration has been achieved in some parts of the continent, which can be seen in the case of such emerging entities as Asia-Pacific in east Asia and Eurasia in northwest Asia – even though both of the regions are geographically situated in Asia. Only the territories situated beyond the Western borders of the Indian Subcontinent towards East are considered – and called – Asia (Saghafi Ameri: 2002). Fact of the matter is that the Middle East has always been – and continues to be – an integral part and parcel of Asia, as corroborated by geographical maps from time immemorial.

Discussions in recent years in on the necessity of building strong regional institutions for cooperation and security reflect the growing awareness to this effect on a continental scale. Some experts have even gone so far as to propose the formation of military and security organizations - which might be considered premature at this stage. The need for the establishment of security arrangements and structures, needless to say, would present itself as

a realistic step once adequate progress has been made on more general aspects of cooperation among Asian countries. The reality on the ground would rather dictate that before security issues could be addressed as such, Asia will have to turn its attention to more urgent challenges in need of preliminary dialogue and cooperation in such areas as active regional crises; chronic political tensions; weak economic structures, especially in lesser developed areas; limited markets; shortage of capital resources; as well as cultural, religious and ethnic diversity.

As a recent example of this rising Asian solidarity when U.S. President Barack Obama endorsed India's bid for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council, China declared that it understands New Delhi's "aspirations" to play a bigger role in the UN and is ready for consultations with it over reform of the world body (China Ready for Consultation with India over UNSC Reform: 2010). Obama's endorsement of Indian efforts at becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council clearly demonstrates the larger role Asia will play in the future world geopolitical equations, while Indians speak of a 'strategic partnership' between India and the United States (Khazanichi: 2010). At the same time, Chinese positive reaction to such a prospect indicates to what extent the Asian powers believe in Asian solidarity and interdependency.

Economic Development: A Basis for Asian Interdependency

The rise of Asia in recent years has been mainly due to the sustained economic growth and development of a number of countries. This process has also led the countries involved, especially in East Asia, to concentrate further on economic and developmental policies, which would have also required smoother and better relations with their neighbors and others – including in the area of historical, ethnic, and cultural differences, and even border disputes. The fact that some Asian countries with a history of deep hostility tend to avoid entering into active tension or conflict with each other clearly reflects their economic and developmental priorities. As indicated earlier, this process has elevated the overall status of Asia on a global scale and made it a center of economic gravity. Therefore, it may not be a far-fetched idea to call the 21st century as the 'Asian Century', – as alluded by some Asian analysts. While Europe as a dominant pole in the 20th century has lost its previous unique position, Asia which enjoys a huge and mostly untapped reservoir of resources and tremendous potentials – in such varied fields as oil and gas, minerals, and more importantly, a large,

capable labor force - is in a position to flourish in the decades to come (Asia Description: 2006). Asia's current capabilities in producing agricultural products, foodstuff, and a wide range of consumer goods and services, over and above being the largest energy producer in the world (Asia Description: 2006), will certainly play a critical role in this regard.

Turning from the supply side to the realm of demand, Asia also happens to be one of the largest markets in the world. Asia accounts for 60 percent of the world's population (almost 3.2 billion people) and one-third of world trade. In fact, China, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea and a few other Asian countries put together embody more than half of the world's consuming market. Both China and India – the two major Asian powers – continue to experience rapid, sustained economic growth. India today has a 'middle class' of over 300 million people, with an average purchasing power of \$3000 per month. And as predicted by the World Bank, India is on the way to become the third-largest economy -- after China and the United States -- by 2025. This would explain the growing interest in this continent and particularly in its major economies by other countries and regions (Saghafi Ameri: 2006).

Taking international developments in recent years in various fields into account, some experts seem to believe that Asia has already entered a new era of continental interdependency, which had eluded it previously due to such factors as its sheer size and diversity of all kinds. The net impact of the new dynamism and development on Asia's overall rising stature and leverage in international relations is undeniable. This situation is also exhibited in the substantial increase in the kind and level of extensive communication facilities and services between and among Asian countries themselves and with the rest of the world inclusive of such traditional areas of exchange as trade and tourist exchange, air and shipping lines, as well as new networks as Internet and satellites. Substantial developments in the field of finance, both at the continental and international levels, is in fact another important aspect of the new trend.

Energy Security: A Basis for Asian Interdependency

Asia's high rate of economic growth and concomitant rise in energy consumption during the past decade have in fact made the question of access to energy - and energy security - a growing challenge for the continent. According to the International Energy Agency publications, demand for energy in Asia (excluding Japan and South Korea) will increase by more than 42 percent by 2030, while the corresponding figure for the

United States and Canada will be 26 percent (Swanstrom: 2005).

Available data on the world oil reserves indicate that at the present time there exist 1,118 billion barrels of proven oil reserves worldwide, 735 billion barrels (62 percent) of which are situated in the Persian Gulf region (BP Statistical Review of World Energy: 2005). Moreover, 40 percent of the world gas reserves are also located in this region. It is estimated that the daily production of crude oil by the Persian Gulf states will increase from 26 million barrels in 2010 to 35 million barrels in 2020. According to the same estimates, the share of this region in the world's crude oil production will grow from about a current 27 percent to 33 percent by 2020 (Energy Information Administration: 2004). It has also been estimated that energy consumption in the developing world will be doubled by 2025. Based on this, Asia's share within the entire developing world will amount to 69 percent (Myers Jaffe: 2004, 13-14).

The impressive growth of energy consumption in Asia accounts for its large share in the increase of global energy consumption. The average annual growth rate in energy consumption in Asia's industrializing nations has been 3 percent as compared with 1.7 percent worldwide. According to the International Energy Agency predictions, Asia's growth in consumption accounts for 40 percent of the growth worldwide. While Asia's current oil consumption is 82 million barrels per day, or 40 percent of its current production, the level of consumption within the continent is bound to increase significantly during the next two decades as Asian countries continue to develop economically (Asian Identity in Global Oil Market: 2005). In 2006, countries in Asia and the Pacific consumed three times more oil than they produced. As a result, the Asia Pacific region is more dependent on imported oil than any other region in the world (Wu: 2008, 1-2).

According to the existing data, the region's oil consumption will reach 25 to 30 million barrels per (mbd) day by 2010 -- most of which will be imported from the Persian Gulf area (Vaezi: 2006). China alone is estimated to import 3 to 5 million barrels of oil by 2010, while it imported less than 300,000 barrels per day a decade earlier -- a total of 104 million barrels in 1999 (Caldar: 2005). The situation for India is equally impressive. While India imports 60 to 70 percent of its current oil needs, it is estimated to become the third largest energy importer in the world by 2025 - importing 91 percent of its energy consumption needs (Hate: 2006). India's annual oil demand has been estimated to increase by 219 percent in average between 2002 and 2030, implying an increase in its dependency on imported oil from

68 percent in 2004 to 91 percent in 2030 (See www.indexmendi.com). The estimated increase in oil consumption from 4 mbd in 2010 – of which 3,350,000 barrels are to be imported - to 5 and 6 mbd in 2020 and 2030 respectively (World Energy Outlook: 2004), shows the magnitude of the increase as well as the level of dependence on foreign oil. India's reliance on imported natural gas, which has been estimated to increase from 9 percent in 2006-07 to around 14 percent by 2010 (See Countries Covered: India), will be bound to experience further rise as the economy continues to grow.

For instance, given the sustained pace of economic growth in the Chinese economy since the 1990s and the general trend of growing reliance on imported energy, future energy security happens to constitute one of the strategic challenges. Based on such a realization, the Chinese have undertaken extensive efforts during the past decade to continually improve and strengthen their relations with the oil producing countries in the Middle East – the Persian Gulf. As part of this overall approach, they have pursued a three-pronged energy strategy vis-à-vis the region:

1. Pursuit of an active diplomacy geared to the expansion of relations with the countries capable of long-term supply of energy resources.
2. Active promotion of the presence and involvement of Chinese oil companies in the oil activities in the region, whether in the form of investment or in developing oil fields.
3. Promotion of the engagement and investment of Middle East oil companies in China's refinery sector and energy market.

The Chinese have been quite successful in implementing this strategy in the Middle East. They have concluded major contracts with both Iran and Saudi Arabia – traditional rivals as two important OPEC members.

Asian Model of Energy Security

As already indicated, the substantial economic development in East Asia and India, especially in energy-intensive sectors and industries as well as urban infrastructure, has in turn increased the need for energy. Given the general decline in energy production, particularly oil production, in other parts of the world, the most economical option to meet these rising needs would be to rely on the abundant sources in other parts of the continent; i.e., West Asia, especially the Persian Gulf. The sheer size of the proven reserves in this area, both oil and gas, not only can meet the short-term needs but also the long-term demand - generally estimated to run for the next 50 years.

This is one side of the energy coin in Asia. The other side concerns the abundance in the continent of energy resources, which could also be called Asia's self-sufficiency in energy. Such a huge potential is further complemented with other resources such as technology and manpower – both skilled and unskilled - which have contributed to the recent rapid and sustained economic growth and development in the continent. One of the important implications of the new situation arising from this rapid, substantial development concerns how to bring the two sides together within an overall Asian framework, as alluded to earlier 'Asian interdependency', building on Asian energy self-sufficiency and drawing on an Asian sense of solidarity. Expanding the requisite interactions among energy importers and exporters in Asia, over and above the mere dictates of supply and demand, calls for approaches and policies of a strategic nature and at more institutional levels geared to addressing the question of long-term energy security (Myers Jaffe: 2004, 13-14).

While ensuring energy security constitutes an important place on the foreign policy agenda of the energy-importing countries in East and South Asia, achieving development – long-term, sustainable development – is among the urgent as well as strategic concerns of the energy-exporting countries in West Asia, inclusive of the Persian Gulf area. The current and future needs of these countries are mostly in the areas of advanced technology and adequate investment, especially in the field of energy, which is by definition both capital- and technology-intensive. Judged from a strategic, long-term vantage point, the mutuality of these real interests between the two regions in Asia should be considered as the necessary condition for both regions to move in the direction of consolidating the existing links and elevating them to the level of institutionalized interdependency.

Iran and the Asian Dialogue on Energy Security

Iran's geographical location, situated between two energy-rich areas – the Persian Gulf in the south and the Caspian Sea-Central Asia to the north – is in itself a privileged position, which is much strengthened with its huge oil and gas reserves. A century-long experience in exploration, utilization and export of oil adds much to Iran's repertoire of unique features in the field of energy. These capabilities and potentialities, once put in the context of Iran's political independence and its proactive outlook and orientation towards cooperation with Asia, serve as extremely positive factors for

meeting the growing energy needs in Asia (Oil and Development Book), and for the specific objective of ensuring long-term Asian energy security and continental solidarity (Vaezi: 2008, 57).

A cursory look at the relevant fact and figures could help provide a better picture of the Iranian situation. With an estimated oil reserve of 137 billion barrels, Iran owns almost 12 percent of the world's oil reserves - 106 billion barrels of which are situated inland and the rest offshore. As for gas reserves, the second largest in the world, out of a total 27 trillion cubic meters, 8.99 trillion cubic meters are situated inland and 17.75 trillion cubic meters offshore. In terms of production, Iran currently produces 4 percent of the world's oil and 5 percent of the world's gas (Country Analysis Briefs: Iran).

The original idea of establishing the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline in the first place, and extending it further to link to China, had been conceived within the overall framework of promoting Asian solidarity and interdependence, and should be seen as a first step in that direction. That idea has also received further impetus from the intended gas pipeline between India and Pakistan – generally referred to as the 'Peace Pipeline' – which, once realized, would also have an important impact on the long-simmering Kashmir dispute between the two states.

The bilateral cooperation between Iran and Asian countries can also be further expanded and institutionalized at another level - multilateral level. The multilateral track, for which already exists adequate organizational/institutional infrastructure, requires that the countries in the continent, both the energy-supplying and the energy-demanding groups, move in the direction of establishing the necessary dialogue in and through the existing institutions and organizations – which will be addressed in the next section. Iran, given its pivotal geographical position and extensive relations with a wide range of Asian countries, can certainly play a crucial role in contributing to the promotion of such a dialogue on energy (Vaezi: 2007).

Regional Organizations and Asian Interdependency

Rapid economic growth and development in East Asia has also led to the emergence of regional organizations, reflecting the needs arising from the new dynamism and necessitating further collective, multilateral efforts and cooperation in different fields on the part of the countries involved. In this section, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) will be briefly discussed.

1- Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

On 26 April 1996, representatives of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan gathered in Shanghai, China, to announce the creation of the 'Shanghai Five Pact' with the explicit objective of fostering military trust among themselves. A few years later, however, the Pact was transformed into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which accepted Uzbekistan as a new member and Iran, India, Pakistan, and Mongolia as observers - thus expanding its breadth, diversity, and potentials for regional cooperation. SCO, in its current formation, represents a total geographical size of 37 million square kilometers and a total population of 2.7 billion people. About 20% of global oil reserves and 50% of global gas reserves are located in the territories of its member and observer states. Moreover, the Organization covers a huge area of great geopolitical and geo-strategic significance, which is deemed to increase as a result of steady rise in Asia's economic and political status and weight on a global scale.

The conclusion of the Shanghai Five Pact reflected that China had come to the point of easing its previous concerns about the security of its 4000- km-long borders with Russia as well as the 3000-km-long borders with the Central Asian Republics. The settlement of border disputes between the two states served their respective goals (Pannier: 2006). The Pact also helped to remove the security concerns of the three Central Asian republics, which were particularly interested in benefiting from China's growing economic dynamism and military prowess. It is worth noting that China's membership in the original Pact Five - and the subsequent SCO - was a marked departure from an earlier reluctance to join regional arrangements and organizations. The new different approach should therefore be understood from the vantage point of China's growing status, weight and influence in the region and what appears to be her future ambition to become a world power.

It is true that security issues were from the very beginning on top of the political agenda of the Shanghai Five Pact. However, the 9/11 events and the subsequent U.S. attack on Afghanistan changed the situation dramatically and heightened the concerns across the board. Rising concerns in the post-9/11 period about the growing influence of Al-Qaeda and Taliban elements in Central Asia led, as a consequence, to a heightened Western and U.S. sensitivity towards the area, and ultimately to an increased U.S. military presence. The SCO member states also had their own security concerns, on the one hand, from the NATO's eastward enlargement, and on the other, about the activities of extremist elements and currents in Central Asia. The

dominance of security issues in SCO discussions led then President Putin to announce in a 2007 interview that new SCO slogan was 'security by partnership'. He further expressed hope that "increasing cooperation in the region in the fields of education, science and economic development would overshadow security issues" (www.mid.com: 2007).

Given the presence of these two major powers, i.e. Russia and China, it can be said that SCO is gradually assuming a larger role than a mere regional arrangement- hence the growing image in the Western media of the emergence of a new power in the region (Pannier: 2006) and simultaneously the keen interest on the part of a number of countries to join the Organization.

2- Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)

It is fair to say that the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the symbol of integration in East Asia. While this regional arrangement had been initially formed on the basis of a security concern vis-à-vis power rivalry in the area, and in particular as a reaction to China's outlook and policies, its overall orientation has undergone substantial change over time. The new trend in ASEAN outlook and policies started to pick up in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War era. The rapid and sustained pace of economic growth and development in the area since the early 1990s soon turned the group into the main pillar of regionalism in East Asia.

The Asian Regional Forum (ARF), established in 1994 as an unofficial mechanism for multilateral dialogue in the Asia-Pacific area, currently has 27 members and pursues such goals as dialogue, negotiation, confidence-building and preventive diplomacy. Another mechanism for cooperation in the field of finance, established in 1997, is ASEAN+3 Forum, comprising ASEAN member states plus China, Japan, and South Korea. Establishment of such mechanisms in the 1990s within the framework of ASEAN points to the gradual maturity in the work of the group and is also indicative of the impact of the changes in the situation and the atmosphere surrounding it – as witnessed in the Asian financial crisis of 1997. Substantial expansion in the 1990s in intra-regional trade contributed much to the deepening of economic and trade integration within ASEAN. Conclusion of free trade agreements within ASEAN and between its members and other countries outside the group – for example, the recent agreements with the European Union in 2009 – is another indication of the expanding integration. EU is one of ASEAN's major trading partners and a main source of investment flows into ASEAN. The ASEAN's total trade with EU has grown from

USD 186.7 billion in 2007 to USD 202.5 billion in 2008. The total EU FDI flows to ASEAN has also grown from USD 10.6 billion in 2006 to USD 12.4 billion in 2008 (Overview of ASEAN-EU Dialogue Relations).

It is of note that in recent years ASEAN has taken steps to somewhat ameliorate its peculiarly exclusive focus on economic and trade issues. As part of its response to the criticisms leveled against it, ASEAN at its 13th session in Singapore in November 2007 adopted a human rights charter, which aims at paying attention as a group to the human rights situation in its member states. More importantly, the member states could reach a historic moment in their journey towards establishing a regional human rights mechanism. After fifteen years of discussion, dialogue and debate about its utility and significance for Southeast Asia, ASEAN member states committed themselves to establishing the Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights in July 2009 (Staggs Kelsall: 2009, 2). They have likewise paid some attention to such politically sensitive issues as the establishment of a nuclear free zone in Southeast Asia. These efforts, however, are in their initial stages of development and would need time to mature.

Consequences of Asian Developments

Having discussed the trend of developments in Asia over the past two decades, we can now look at the consequences of these developments – positive repercussions and emerging challenges.

A) Positive Repercussions

A rapid, sustained process of economic development and substantial accumulation of wealth and power by a vast number of Asian countries have markedly improved their situation and elevated their status, individually and collectively, and accorded the continent as a whole a much stronger position on the global scale. Continuation of this trend, as is generally predicted, will further buttress the global weight and influence of the Asian countries, and the continent in its entirety. The growing Asian weight and influence has not been confined to the areas of economy and trade only. In fact, that has helped promote a higher political profile – at all levels – coupled with bigger political ambitions. This is best manifested in the still continuing political-diplomatic drive of both Japan and India for a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council, which also reflects their respective rivalry with China as a permanent member of the Council.

As for the multilateral track, ASEAN and its innovative mechanisms and arrangements have contributed to an increasing level of cooperation among

Asian countries on security issues. A similar trend has also been pursued by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This trend, at both bilateral and multilateral levels, has in itself helped to further entrench the position and status of the rapidly developing Asian nations.

B) Emerging Challenges

Change, as is usually the case, entails both opportunities and challenges. We have already looked at the positive consequences of the rapid development process in Asia. It is equally necessary – and important – to take stock as well of the possible challenges arising from the process. Past history seems to indicate that systemic changes at the international level involving the emergence of new powers has been, more often than not, coupled with violence and war.

The challenge that should be of particular concern to Asian countries relates to the general lack in the continent of requisite institutions and practices for conflict resolution and management of common interests. This is an area that needs to be addressed and tackled in earnest, at both bilateral and multilateral levels. Global and regional multilateral organizations active in Asia enjoy the necessary institutional capacity and experience to contribute to this effect.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to look at the process of development in Asia over the past two decades, and also taken stock in very broad terms of the opportunities and challenges arising from this process. In light of the discussion in the preceding pages, especially taking the idea of Asian interdependency as well as the emerging challenges into account, one could consider the following as areas in need of urgent attention and action.

1. Development of Normative System/Establishment of Requisite Institutions

Promotion of the Asian interdependency as a concrete objective for the entire continent and its regions and sub-regions calls for active and proactive interactions among Asian nations in various fields. Effective promotion of interaction and its institutionalization requires, first and foremost, a set of generally agreed principles, norms and rules, as well as requisite institutions and organizations. Development and articulation of the needed normative system might require a step-by-step process at the sub-regional and regional levels before it could be elevated to the level of the entire continent. The same

also applies to the establishment of needed institutions and organizations, which is somewhat easier due to the fact that such organizations already exist in one form or another at different levels in Asia.

2. Development of a Collective Security Structure

Given the critical importance of the element of security and stability, particularly as the development process continues and more challenges and threats emerge in different fields, establishment of the requisite institutions and structure for the promotion and maintenance of collective security at the sub-regional, regional and continental levels constitutes another urgent imperative. As in the case of the normative system, this objective can also be pursued first at sub-regional and regional levels before moving to the continental level. The existence of institutions in various parts of Asia already catering to security concerns, at different levels of articulation and efficacy, can be utilized for the further development of the needed structure. Combating terrorism and extremist violence should also be part of the mission of the collective security system. Establishing a comprehensive security structure in Asia can consolidate and deepen other material structures in the new Asia by maintaining security and stability.

3. Promotion of Asian cooperation

Sustainable development in parts of Asia has contributed to the enhancement of cooperation in different fields at the sub-regional, regional, and continental levels. The state of cooperation among countries across the continent has progressed substantially in recent decades, especially since the end of the Cold War with gradual easing of ideological conflicts and rivalry. Expansion and deepening of cooperation in the field of energy between and among the energy-rich countries in West Asia (the Persian Gulf and Central Asia) and energy-poor developmental states in East and South Asia should be considered as one of the concrete results of the unique Asian experience. Perpetuation of the rate and pace of sustainable development, not only in East and South Asia but its expansion to other parts of the continent, appears to depend, in large measure, upon the security of energy resources and guaranteed access to it at stable, reasonable prices, which calls for the establishment of requisite structures and mechanisms. Iran is in a privileged position to assist promoting the continent-wide cooperation in the field of energy. Active participation of Asian partners – both public and private – in the further development of Iranian oil and gas industries would in turn help Iran in playing such a role.

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