

CHECKMATE: Russia-Iran Treaty SHOCKS The West | Dr. Pietro Shakarian

On January 17, 2025, Iran and Russia signed one of the most consequential treaties for West Asia in the past 200 years. The "Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership" is a game changer in much more than just the military sense. It sets the stage for a new era of civilisational cooperation and erects a fire-wall against the diabolic strategy of US/NATO/Israel to plunge even more nations into utter chaos. Today I'm talking to Dr. Pietro Shakarian from St. Petersburg's Higher School of Economics, one of Russia's most prestigious universities. Speaking fluently Armenian, Russian and English, Pietro is a historian of Russia and the Soviet Union, with a PhD from Ohio State University. He recently wrote a most detailed analysis of the new Russo-Iranian strategic partnership treaty, which is what we want to discuss today, so Pietro, welcome. Dr. Shakarian's analysis of the Russia-Iran Strategic Partnership treaty: <https://usrussiaaccord.org/acura-exclusive-pietro-a-shakarian-the-russo-persian-partnership-pact-significance-and-implications/>

#Pietro

Their message is very unequivocal and clear. And this, again, goes back to our Article 12: Don't repeat Syria in the Caucasus or in Central Asia. By the way, Turkey is also quite active with NGOs in Central Asia to influence, let's say, the societies in Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, or Kyrgyzstan to be anti-Russian or opposed to China or whatever. But what they're saying is, don't try this or don't participate in this. And by the way, Turkey, if you're smart, you'll work with us.

#Pascal

Hello, everybody. This is Pascal from Neutrality Studies. And today I've got a fascinating scholar with me. I'm talking to Dr. Pietro Shakarian from St. Petersburg's Higher School of Economics, one of Russia's most prestigious universities. Speaking fluently in Armenian, Russian, and English, Pietro is a historian of Russia and the Soviet Union with a Ph.D. from Ohio State University. He recently wrote a detailed analysis of the new Russo-Iranian Strategic Partnership Treaty, which is what we want to discuss today. So, Pietro, welcome.

#Pietro

Pascal, it's a great pleasure to be on your show. Thank you for having me.

#Pascal

Thank you for taking the time on a Sunday. Tell me, first of all, why you decided to write a very long and detailed analysis of what this new treaty means. And you also point out a couple of very important articles in there that I haven't seen in the general discourse. What exactly is the significance of this treaty to both Russia and Iran?

#Pietro

Well, first and foremost, we have to understand this treaty as a reflection of the strengthening of Russo-Iranian relations, specifically in the past 10 years, but you could even extend it to the past 30 years. Now, I could go back even further in history, right? I start off my article with 1829 with Kostromirza's mission to St. Petersburg following the death of Alexander Gorbachev, but the Russian-Iranian history from that point to today was a bit more varied. I mean, there were some ups and downs and so on and so forth. I'm not going to go into that completely because the main focus I have today is to discuss this treaty.

But this treaty really codifies on paper, and I note this at the end of the article, what the state of Russo-Iranian relations has become. They had a treaty on the books from 2000, and that needed desperately to be updated, especially in light of recent events. Now, what do I mean by recent events? Specifically, we look at the Russo-Iranian collaboration with regard to Syria, especially during the period of 2015, exactly eight years ago now. It's hard to believe how fast time goes. But in particular, there were also developments in the Caucasus, as well as in Gaza and Ukraine.

And in particular, Ukraine, because basically this kind of brought Russia and Iran closer together as two sanctioned countries, two countries that were pronounced to be isolated, quote-unquote, by official Washington. And in the end, we see actually they are proving to the rest of the world that they are bucking this isolation. And the question is, how truly isolated are they? I mean, we're seeing in here articles in this treaty, for example. And these are the articles that are probably most discussed about how they're going to bypass SWIFT. They're going to create new kinds of economic exchange mechanisms. Also, they discuss measures on mutual sanctions support. They're not going to support any kind of unilateral coercive measures against the other signatory, and so on and so forth.

So that's a huge thing. Right off the bat, to look at this in the framework of what I call the rise of the rest, the BRICS, this is number one. This is the idea of Russia and Iran coming together as part of this rise of the rest. But there's also a significant defensive component to this treaty. It doesn't mean an alliance. The Iranian officials say that, and the Russian officials say that. It's true because if you look at the articles, it's not yet something like a military alliance. It creates the framework for something like that, but it's not yet that, right?

A pivotal article, actually, when we look at this treaty, is Article 3. And Article 3, Section 3 has in it this note. This is actually Section 3, where it basically prohibits support for the aggressor. So if one

of the signatories is attacked, then the other signatory cannot support the aggressor in the event of that attack and will diplomatically support the other country, right? So it's not yet getting to a point where, if Iran is attacked, Russia would support them, or if, let's say, Russia is attacked, Iran would support them. It's not yet that locked in, but it creates the foundation for something like this. So that's that.

And also, the other thing I wanted to mention is how, and this is what I'm getting to shortly in our discussion, how Eurasia-focused it is. So much of our discussions with Russia and Iran focus on the Middle East, and with good reason. We see their positions on Syria and many other issues. Even though Russia does not directly support Iran on the issue of the axis of resistance, it has supported diplomatic efforts to stop the atrocities, really genocide, in Gaza, right? Russia and China were among the first countries calling for a ceasefire. We saw, unfortunately, what happened with that. But this treaty is of enormous historical significance.

#Pascal

I'm quite glad that you're pointing out Article 3 because what that promises, or what this is, is what this channel is also, by its name, dedicated to. This is a neutrality agreement where both sides promise their military neutrality in case of a third-party war, which is something Russia has been doing a lot. The most important one of those being the Russo-Japanese Neutrality Pact in the Second World War, the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact.

#Pietro

Yeah.

#Pascal

And actually, interestingly enough, Russia also has a similar article now with North Korea, at least if the North Korean publication of their treaty is correct. So do you think Russia is currently trying to build a new network, not so much of allies, but of confirmed partners with these security components that would say, like, no, we will not ally, but we will not be enemies to each other?

#Pietro

I think that's definitely part of it. Especially within the frameworks of BRICS, I mean, we're coming off the Russian BRICS presidency. So they are definitely looking at the idea of expanding their international connections outside of the focus on the West, right? Because their international ties, I mean, overwhelmingly before, have been very focused on Europe and North America. If you look at the Russian Foreign Ministry's priorities in the world, the West used to be among the top, and now

they've sunk considerably in that ranking. But the other thing is, it's a little bit more than that because when we talk about, for example, some of these other articles, when I talk about, for instance, Article 12, Article 13, Article 14, there is an extraordinarily significant Eurasian dynamic.

And this is very important to understand because look at the basic geography, Pascal. Iran mostly corresponds to the historical Iranian plateau, right? Or we can also maybe call it the Iranian or the Persian cultural continent, which spans, I mean, we're talking also, this could informally include in the idea of Greater Iran, the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia in this kind of informal Persian sphere. But really, Central Asia and the Caucasus, these areas are zones of joint cultural influence, we could say, between Russia and Iran, historically going back many centuries. We think about Uzbekistan, for example.

We look at the great cities of Samarkand. There's enormous Persian influence in these places. So you have that, but also it's extraordinarily important for Russia and Iran in a security framework, in a security dynamic, because it's also well known that the West, in particular Western war hawks and Western big energy, wants to get into this region to undermine the influence of Russia, Iran, and also China, because Central Asia adjoins China, right? And there have always been these visions for, let's say, a trans-Caspian pipeline, basically to expand what is now the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline further east across the Caspian to Turkmenistan.

Turkmenistan is a country that has maybe the world's fourth or fifth largest reserve of natural gas. Incredibly important. It's also not counting Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. These countries in Central Asia are enormously, enormously energy-rich. They're a big prize on the geopolitical chessboard. If we go back to Zbigniew Brzezinski's grand chessboard, a lot of, I guess you could say, war hawks in the West, allied with big energy interests, want to kind of cut in here to contain, as they see it, Russia and Iran. So it's not without coincidence that Article 13 is devoted entirely to the Caspian region.

#Pascal

Can you tell us what it says?

#Pietro

Well, basically, the overall point—would you like me to go over Article 12, 13, or 14?

#Pascal

Tell me what's important about them. Can you tell us what they are?

#Pietro

Well, first of all, Article 12 of these treaties basically obliges the signatories, as I wrote in my article, to promote the strengthening of peace and security in the Caspian region, Central Asia, Transcaucasia—which is the South Caucasus—and the Middle East. It unequivocally calls on the sides to cooperate with the objective of preventing the interference and destabilizing presence of third states, which most certainly means, first and foremost, the United States, but also the United Kingdom. BP has a 30% stake in the BTC pipeline.

Also Israel, and also the states of the EU. You could include Turkey in that, although there might be some debate: is Turkey a part of this region, or is it an interloper, right? From the Iranian and Russian point of view, the view of Turkey has not been so positive since the events in Syria, right? But in any case, it's against the third state. So that's one whole article. That's the main focus of it. And the Caspian Article 13 details specifically, in these four sections, the necessity of this region to both Russia and Iran in terms of, you know, maybe we can say security cooperation, economic cooperation, north-south cooperation, right? We talk about this idea of the north-south corridor.

The Caspian Sea is another potential avenue for that, not only over land through Azerbaijan or through Turkmenistan, but also overseas. You have that option as well. In addition, even cooperation in the energy sphere is a big one, as well as cooperation on ecological issues. We also have to consider that the Caspian is a common body of water between Iran and Russia, right? So there's that. But that article alone, you have to think. I look at this also as a historian because, you know, I've written a book about Anastasia Mikoyan and Soviet nationality policy. I've studied the history of the Caucasus.

And so I look at this treaty and I look at Article 13, for example, and I see that they are devoting an entire article to just one region, the Caspian region. That tells me a lot, which is really interesting because in the press conference of Putin and Pashinyan, they only mention, as I wrote in the article, I mean, excuse me, they mention the Middle East six times and they mention the Caucasus three times. They don't mention the Caspian region once. But yet, if you read the text of this article, if you read the text of this treaty, it's enormously significant in my point of view that they're devoting an entire article with four sections to the Caspian region alone. Then you have Article 14.

#Pascal

Do you think, in a way, this is... I mean, carving up is the wrong word, but this is an agreement between these two very big powers that basically the Caspian Sea region is their cooperative sphere, and they actively promised each other to prevent third states from trying to intervene the way that things are happening around the Black Sea? I mean, from a Russian perspective, the Black Sea used to be something that they only needed to worry about in terms of, like, with Turkey. But with them, they had a working arrangement, especially during the Cold War. And then, you know, basically the

Black Sea is today a contested area and had, depending on how things go with Ukraine or... Had they gone a different way, the Black Sea would be another NATO lake. So this march to the east is something that this is supposed to stop from the Russian perspective.

#Pietro

Well, the Black Sea is enormously significant. The Black Sea basin has always been enormously significant to Russia, not only in terms of Ukraine but also in terms of Georgia. Right now, Georgia is very smartly, very wisely, I would say, developing an independent pro-Georgian geopolitical vector—not pro-Western, not necessarily pro-Russian. They are pursuing a pro-Georgian geopolitical vector, right? Unfortunately, that government is under enormous pressure from the West to unequivocally ally with the West. Also, it has been included in the past in these geopolitical schemes to undercut Russia in the South, right?

In the Black Sea Basin, stretching toward the Caspian Basin, through the, like I say, the BTC pipeline. Fortunately for the Georgian people, because we saw the outcome of such policies with Saakashvili in 2008, they have a very pragmatic government in power in Tbilisi. And we can say that that's another potential zone of concern for Russia, too. Ukraine, certainly as well. I mean, this is why Russia puts such a high premium on it, in addition to other reasons, obviously. I mean, Crimea, I don't need to go into the deep Russian history over Crimea. And also, you know, the fact that it's majority Russian.

But in addition to those very deep emotional reasons, the deep emotional attachment, I mean, we're talking also about the history of the Crimean War, World War II, and so on and so forth. But aside from all that, we can even go back to Prince Vladimir and his baptism. I mean, I can go deep into the history of Crimea. It's important for Russia. But the bottom line is that the northern Black Sea area is very important for Russia. And in particular, in the context of this Ukraine conflict, a lot of buzz, as you probably well know, has been made about Odessa on the Black Sea. I mean, not only is it, again, very emotionally significant to the Russians, but it's very strategically important, too.

#Pascal

But I think one of your arguments, or what you're telling us, is that despite the fact that Russia and Iran themselves framed or talked about their treaty in the context of the Middle East, which is exactly what was going on—Syria was going on at that time—and in the context also of Ukraine, this is naturally something that a lot of commentators would perceive it as. Your argument is that this treaty is also very strategically aimed toward the Caspian Sea and shielding the Caspian Sea.

#Pietro

Yeah, not only the Caspian Sea, but also the Caucasus and Central Asia. That Eurasian area, I mean, the former Soviet republics of the Caucasus and Central Asia, combined with that area. Again, this is

kind of where Russia and Iran, their interests very much intersect. And that's enormously significant in this treaty. It comes out more than the Middle East. The Middle East is mentioned. Now, where the Middle East, I think, factors even more significantly in the context of this is not only in terms of the recent events that we focus on so much, but also the shadow of what happened, the shadow of Syria. This treaty is also telling us that basically we're not going to let another Syria happen. We're not going to let this happen in our backyard.

We're not going to let it happen, let's say, in the Caucasus or in Central Asia or anywhere. Right. What Article 12 is saying is we're the cops on the block, and we're going to enforce the situation here and make sure that external players don't get in to undermine our national security. That's what they really are pushing here, Pascal. I mean, it's a big thing. It's not even counting all the other articles about cultural cooperation and so on and so forth, the promotion of Persian literature in Russia, Russian literature in Iran, and so on and so forth. But this is very significant, especially when we take into account you have these smaller countries in the region. You have, for example, Armenia.

You have Nikol Pashinyan. He's flirting with the West, with the EU. Not a very smart move. We saw how this show ended with Mikheil Saakashvili. For Armenia, the security implications of this are really, really serious and very dire. But also Ilham Aliyev in Azerbaijan, even though he talks a good talk with Putin, at the end of the day, he has been very, very close with Israel, with Turkey, with NATO in the region. And there is certainly concern that, you know, he could maybe attack Armenia, maybe take this region known as the Zangezur Corridor, or actually really it's known as the Syunik province, but the historical region of Zangezur in the south of Armenia. And that could cut off Iran from the Eurasian Economic Union.

Now, there's also a political way. If you're the Western strategist and you want to disrupt the Russian-Iranian contact in the Caucasus, there are two ways you can achieve this. One is through the brute force way, where you have Aliyev take or attempt to take the Zangezur Corridor. The other way might be if you have Nikol Pashinyan try to withdraw from the Eurasian Union and join the EU, which I think is really idiotic because you have to think... Why, of all times, if you're ever going to join the EU, why would you join it now when Europe is in immense, immense crisis? Right. I'm sure you can tell our listeners all about that, Pascal, from a Swiss point of view. But this is the worst time.

#Pascal

But this seems to be his strategy. I mean, even if it is, Pashinyan—and by the way, also Georgia, the Georgian government officially said, we still want to join the European Union. We're just not okay with all the bullying that's going on and a couple of the requirements. But they are still very pro-EU. And this is a reality that we also need to deal with, even though it is not a good point in time. Both of these countries, Armenia and Georgia, would benefit from being a place to cheaply produce products and then export them into such a large market. Absolutely, 100%.

#Pietro

They've already benefited enormously from Russia's economic rise because I can tell you, living in St. Petersburg, that it's very prosperous. It's not what they say. I mean, I've been back to the States, and people ask me, "Are people starving in Russia?" as if it's like 1918 or something like that. And I'm like, no, not really. It's completely different than what you think. I mean, you should come and see it for yourself. It's extraordinary. I mean, Russia is booming. I even went to the regions.

I went to the villages. I went to the Karelian Republic. I went to Petrozavodsk. And I saw the villages when I was on the train from St. Petersburg to Petrozavodsk. It's amazing how there are freshly painted houses and flowers. The Russian countryside even looks pretty good, at least in this part of northwestern Russia. I mean, I'm not speaking for the whole of Russia because it's an enormous country, and I'm sure there are parts that don't look so good. You know, this is the case with any large country. But yeah.

#Pascal

But that's the thing, we need to come back again to Iran because there's still so much to talk about within the region. But you're absolutely right. The question, though, is, I mean, the other way to get to Iran is through Kazakhstan. I mean, there's only one more country on the other side of the Caspian Sea because the Caspian Sea is the smallest of the seven, right?

#Pietro

Well, frankly, yes. And actually, this is what I've been saying, you know, because there was this idea, let's run the pipeline through Azerbaijan. Well, Azerbaijan is not very reliable. I mean, look at how they treated Russia with the whole plane issue. You know, the plane crash that happened recently in the vicinity of the Caspian Sea. This was due most likely to bird interference. Yet Ilham Aliyev was jumping up and down, saying that the Russians shot it down, even by mistake. And he was demanding apologies and so on and so forth. And yet the Russians did not shoot it down. The plane went all over the Caspian Sea until it nearly reached the coastline. It was an unfortunate crash, an unfortunate tragedy, but it was not something that was caused by Russia.

But the fact that he was so willing to do that, if I were Russia, especially after the whole Syrian business, I would look at that very, very suspiciously. Now, I think the idea of Russia and Iran is that if we run that Caspian pipeline through Azerbaijan, then we can control Aliyev more. But there's always that risk that you could repeat what happened with Turkey, where we give Turkey stuff, we give Turkey all sorts of concessions with the hope that they'll be more reasonable, that they won't do anything crazy. But then what happens? Turkey allies with Israel, and the next thing we know, HTS is in Damascus. Right? And Russia and Iran don't want to see that repeated. So actually, if I were Russia and Iran, frankly, I would think about making that pipeline go through Kazakhstan, like you say, and Turkmenistan.

Not only are those countries, you know, reliable political regimes, governments that really, we can say at the end of the day, are fairly friendly toward Russia and Iran. Actually, they're quite friendly toward Russia and Iran. But also the West is courting, in particular, the big energy companies, and they're really, really trying to court Turkmenistan to be part of the Trans-Caspian pipeline. If I were advising, if I were to say this to, let's say, the Russians, I would say, and the Iranians, I would say, if you want to really kind of wrap up the situation there, you want to kind of get them more on your side, right? And a pipeline would be a good way to do that. I'm sure the Turkmen would not object.

#Pascal

But the treaty actually foresees the pipeline going through Azerbaijan, right?

#Pietro

No, no, no. This was declared later, actually one day after the treaty was signed. Because I read the treaty. The treaty came out, and they signed it. Putin signed it on the 17th of January. Then on January 18th, I believe, it was announced that there was this idea to run the pipeline through Azerbaijan, the post-Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, which is important also to know because there's another very significant detail of this agreement. When we go back to when we talk about defense, Article 3, Section 4 obliges the parties against supporting separatist movements on each other's territory. Now, Iran has a very difficult history with this because, unfortunately, Russia, as the Soviet Union, had supported breakaway movements in northern Iran after the Second World War with the Kurdish Republic at Mahabad.

By the way, that's Mahabad, Dr. Pietro Shakarian's hometown. And also the Azerbaijan region of northern Iran. Now, the original Azerbaijan region would be Iranian Azerbaijan. The name of the Republic of Azerbaijan was adopted much later, in 1918. But that's a complicated history. The bottom line is that you also have a case where, in more recent decades, the post-Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan, led by Ilham Aliyev, with Israeli support and also American support, especially from American war hawks, has been voicing aspirations to maybe claim the Azerbaijani-inhabited areas of northern Iran. Most of northern Iran is inhabited by Azerbaijanis; it's the Iranian Azerbaijanis.

And these kinds of irredentist designs are even played up, like I say, by, you know, fellows at the Atlantic Council, like Brenda Shaffer. So this is something that concerns Iran, plus also that issue of separatism. It's very relevant to Russia, too, because you look at what Kaja Kallas of Estonia recently said. She was saying that we should aspire for not only Russia's defeat in Ukraine, but the breakup of the Russian Federation itself. And her point of view is also espoused by many pundits in Washington, for instance, at the neoconservative Hudson Institute. So it's relevant to both Russia and Iran, this issue of separatism. And that's another thing, too, that they would have to consider. If I were them, looking toward the east, toward Central Asia, toward Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, that would be of enormous importance.

#Pascal

So, I mean, we are entering, or we are already inside, this new multipolar configuration of the international system, or multinodal if we go by Chas Freeman's conceptualization of it. And the point is, the map of the world, the way that we are used to it, and this kind of relatively static moment—although that comes with a lot of asterisks because it hasn't been that static, especially in Europe after all—is not the case anymore. We are now in a world where the United States says, "Oh, by the way, Greenland's going to be ours. And Canada, why don't you join us? And we're going to get the Panama Canal."

And Alexander Mercouris is saying, like, yeah, this is the return of the spheres of influence or interest. And we see now Syria. Syria is basically gone. A good part of it, a chunk of it, is now being integrated into Israel or into Israel's occupation zones. I mean, Israel itself is a state that is constantly morphing and has no concrete solution. But we also see how Turkey is taking good parts of it. And, you know, we see how states are trying to reshape the map. And do you think, do you interpret the treaty that we're talking about as something that goes in that direction or rather something that tries to say, like, no, we will try to create stability in the region so that we can do business with each other?

#Pietro

I think it's definitely the latter option. They don't want to see the dissolution of the post-World War II order. I mean, they don't want to see, necessarily, a world where it's dog-eat-dog, right? Or the right of the strong. You're hearing these kinds of talking points now, that we can take, for instance, when we talk about Greenland, these kinds of rhetorical points that we could take Greenland militarily. This is not in the view of Russia and Iran. They don't want this, right?

Yeah. On the other hand, they don't want third-party states to intervene in the region to create chaos and conflict, and so on and so forth. But they envision basically an area of cooperation where states represent their own interests. And if they're smart—it's a big, big "if"—if they're smart, they will see the benefits of working closely with their neighboring countries like Russia and Iran economically, through business, through energy, and so on and so forth.

#Pascal

In this sense, it's a strategy to counter the efforts of the US and Israel in the region, because it is by now utterly clear that the entire thought process of how to have Israel prosper is by laying waste to everybody around it, right? Just burn it all and make sure that everybody fights with each other so that you can prosper.

#Pietro

Well, I mean, that's the idea. But, you know, I mean, even in the long term, you'd have to ask yourself, is it even good for Israel's security? I think it's bad, but I do think it's the strategy that they are going to pursue. But I agree with you. That is the strategy, unfortunately. And it goes back even to Iraq. You know, when we look at Iraq, we look at not only Iraq, but also Libya. Look at Syria. It goes on and on and on. And I think, you know, frankly, this treaty says, no, we're not going to have that. There has been, unfortunately, some speculation, by the way, that, you know, could Iran end up like Syria, you know, be under such sanctions pressure and all that.

One thing I will say, though, is that Iran, from what I know about Iran, is strong enough as a state that it can withstand this. Plus, you have to think, Pascal, they control their own natural resources. The Assad government, on the other hand, had its oil controlled by the Americans, whether it was directly controlled by American troops or by the Kurds. It was very hard to sustain such a regime or government on a basis where there was little or no control of the natural resources that would help enrich and sustain it. There were enormous problems with corruption, as we know, and it's extraordinarily unfortunate for the Syrian people.

#Pascal

It's absolutely horrific. And the dream at the moment, at least in Tel Aviv and Washington, is to pull that off on Iran, right? And then break it up and break up Russia. I mean, break everything up.

#Pietro

I know, and it would be cataclysmic if that happened. Well, first of all, you have to think, even when we talk about Iranian Azerbaijanis, they're not interested in becoming part of, for example, Ilham Aliyev's Azerbaijan. Azerbaijanis in Iran, Azeris, they're very integrated within Iranian society. They see themselves first and foremost as Iranians. And a great example of that is the president, Raisi. Also, Khamenei, by the way, is of Azerbaijani origin. I mean, they're very integrated within the Iranian culture and Iranian elite. You know, Azerbaijan in many ways, I mean, for Iran, it's almost like you could liken it maybe in terms of its historical relationship to Manchuria and to Baghdad.

China or maybe historically Ukraine to Russia is a very, very important, enormously important region, and the Azerbaijanis in Iranian Azerbaijan don't want to have anything to do with the post-Soviet Republic. They're just fine being part of Iran. But there is this, like you say, this kind of very strong neoconservative idea that let's break them up and not only break up Iran, but break up Russia. There have even been movements to support different republics in Russia breaking away. And I don't just mean Chechnya. I'm also talking about, you know, the Komi Republic, for example, or Kalmykia.

You name it. There have been, you know, these efforts to balkanize Russia, and the balkanization efforts might seem like wonderful master plans to certain thinkers in the Beltway in Washington, D. C., but imagine the enormous consequences of this. If that did succeed—it won't succeed—but if it

did succeed, it would be cataclysmic for Eurasia. Imagine all the security problems you would have, all the new issues that would be there. If you had a million statelets in the landmass of northern Eurasia and also the Iranian plateau, it would be a mess. It would be a mess, Pascal.

#Pascal

And they don't understand that.

#Pietro

Iran is not the size of Mongolia.

#Pascal

It's not Syria. It's not the size of Mongolia. I mean, it was 10 years of war when the Balkans were Balkanized in Yugoslavia, and it was absolutely horrific. And it was also bad for the Europeans, which just makes it crazy that the EU Europeans are all on board with these kinds of stupid strategies. But there's one more wild card that I would like to get your take on, and that is the Turks. Historically, the Turks have always been playing with everybody and playing everybody against everybody else. And they're doing the same thing again now. And if you look at the Turkish world, I mean, the Turkish world obviously extends all the way to Turkmenistan, right?

#Pietro

Or even beyond, I mean, to Kyrgyzstan. Or even to... even all the way to... I mean, we could take it all the way to Kashgar, right? I mean, we could take it all the way to Urumqi. You know, there are Turks, as we know, in Western China. And we talk about the Uyghurs and all of this business.

#Pascal

But absolutely... And this is... I mean, they're, of course, separate from today's political Turkey. So we cannot... But... This is a consideration that needs to be kept in mind, especially if we look at the intersection around Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, which is really a focal point now. What do you think the message of Tehran and Moscow is toward Turkey when it comes to this region?

#Pietro

Like I said, their message is very unequivocal and clear. And this, again, goes back to our Article 12: don't repeat Syria in the Caucasus or in Central Asia. By the way, Turkey is also quite active with NGOs in Central Asia to influence, let's say, the societies in Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, or Kyrgyzstan

to be anti-Russian or opposed to China or whatever. But what they're saying is don't try this or don't participate in this. And by the way, Turkey, if you're smart, you'll work with us. You know, we were extending our hand to you with Syria. We had peace dealings over Syria with you.

If you were smart, you would have worked with us, and the world would have been a much more stable place. Well, you know, unfortunately, Turkey, this is going to end very badly for them because they're going to learn the hard way. When you have a balkanized country to yourself, it's not a security boon for you. It's not a plus for Turkey. Plus, Turkey has so many other problems. Twenty-five to thirty percent of the population of Turkey is Kurdish. There has not been a serious effort by any Turkish government to integrate these people and these regions into Turkey. There has only been war and repression against the Kurdish nationality.

#Pascal

Since 2015, they did the opposite. Erdoğan actively undermined the reconciliation process that was underway, actively did away with their party, their political party, and cut them out of the political process.

#Pietro

And I was stunned by that because I thought to myself, you know, Mr. Erdoğan, I mean, he was smart actually at first. Admittedly, I will say that because he was negotiating with them. That's what you do if you're the Turkish president. He was also quite smart early on to get the military under civilian control because in Turkish history, as we know, they would have a coup every so often if the political leader stepped out of line. To his credit, he got the military under civilian control. But then, you know, he created his own kind of, you know, power, yeah, sultanate in Turkey. And I think, frankly, again, if they're smart, they'll work with Russia and Iran, right?

But unfortunately, you also have to think about the limitations Turkey has. Turkey is a member of NATO, and to some extent, if you're Russia and Iran, that's always going to be something you're looking at. No matter what we do, Turkey, at the end of the day, is still integrated within the Western military structures, right? Not only militarily integrated within those structures, but also, we can say, politically and ideologically. I mean, you have to think, Turkey joined NATO in 1952, I believe it was, and they have been working very closely, doing military exercises and military cooperation with the United States. They have been trained for decades to hate the Ruskies, to hate the commies, and it's not going to change overnight. It's not going to change overnight.

#Pascal

Turks have a long history of playing both sides. I mean, also during the Second World War, the best thing that happened to Turkey was that Germany attacked the Soviet Union because that took all the pressure off them. And when we look at Iran, you know, in the Second World War, the Soviet

Union and Great Britain invaded them in order to forestall any kind of Iranian cooperation, especially with oil deliveries to Germany.

#Pietro

And also, the other important thing was the Lend-Lease, securing that. Because you have to think about Iran geographically. First of all, there was also a history there, even, unfortunately, at the beginning of the century, where Britain and Russia, as the Russian Empire, had divided Iran into spheres of influence. Russia was actually involved in intervening during the period of the Persian Constitutional Revolution. But when we look at this period of World War II, a big element of it was the Lend-Lease supply, to secure those supply lines between Britain, the Western allies, and the USSR. And, yeah, absolutely.

But Turkey, like you say, was extraordinarily smart. They did conclude an agreement with Germany in 1941, but they were very keen to be neutral during the course of the war. The Soviet Union, early on, suspected that Turkey was leaning toward Germany. But in the end, Turkey was not. And then also, if you notice, one of the things they did was wait until it was very clear that Germany lost the war. It was very clear that the Soviet Union was pushing through, liberating its lands and winning the war in Europe. Then, all of a sudden, Turkey declared war on Germany.

#Pascal

In February 1945, and of course, they never actually fired a shot at the Germans, but they did that in time to join the United Nations. So Turkey is actually really good at sensing the change of times. But if we now suppose that we live in this world in which we are again closer to a system of the 19th century than of the 20th, there are no permanent friends, only permanent interests. Russia and Iran accept that premise. But currently, their interests align, so they would like to create stability in their immediate neighborhood. How high do you think the chances are that they can achieve it with this treaty and with the cooperation that they're trying to get going also through BRICS and integrating Turkey through BRICS in that idea?

#Pietro

I think definitely they're going to succeed. I can't say how successful they'll be in terms of bringing in Turkey to that, because Turkey, as we know—look at what happened with Syria. Again, I bring up that point. But between them and their cooperation in Eurasia, I think it's a very good future, and I can only see positives out of that. Also, I think Russia has a long tradition of Iranian studies as well. So there's also envisioned in this agreement, by the way, academic cooperation, like I said, and also cultural cooperation. It's going to be big. Unfortunately, the significance of this was missed by many Western commentators. Maybe they might have framed it in a crude way as some sort of military alliance, but it's not necessarily an outright alliance. It is extraordinarily significant. If you look at it from a historian's point of view, Pascal, it is incredible.

#Pascal

One more point that some commentators made, especially Alexander Mercouris, is that there might also be the Russian interest in reassuring, security-wise, the Iranians that they don't need a nuclear weapon in order to be safe. Do you also see that aspect in this?

#Pietro

I do, because Russia does not want nuclear proliferation. They want to contain that, and they want to promote the peaceful use. I mean, this was also another article of the treaty, that Russia would assist Iran in the peaceful development of nuclear energy. Now, I can't say how Israel will interpret that. Israel might make allegations that Iran is creating a bomb or something like that in order to create a reason to go to war with them. But I think, at the end of the day, Russia will not allow such a scenario to pass. I think that Russia does not want Iran to develop a nuclear weapon, and I think the Iranians themselves don't want to develop a nuclear weapon. The only reason that this idea comes up is simply because they think if we have no choice, if we're in a hostile environment, we have to develop a nuclear weapon, right?

#Pascal

It's very important to point out that Ayatollah Khomeini is the one who says, "No, we're not going to do that because it's against the teachings of God."

#Pietro

This is an absolutely important point, and everybody skips over that detail, which is rather significant in the West. I don't think that they have the desire to develop a nuclear weapon, but I do think that they have the desire to use nuclear energy in a peaceful way. They can certainly work with Russia on that, and they are. I mean, this treaty, Pascal, I can't stress enough, lays the foundation for big, intensive cooperation between Russia and Iran.

#Pascal

Might it be a reason for the U.S. and Israel to try to kill it on arrival as soon as possible?

#Pietro

I mean, they're going to try, but I think, frankly, you know... The timing of the signing of this is quite significant. I mean, there were also delays on the Iranian side, and so on and so forth. But I think it was interesting how they decided just days before Trump gets inaugurated to sign this agreement, right? I think it was very important because it signals that, first of all, to the United States, we're not going to compromise on our relations with Iran. They're very important. They're

very significant. That's a red line. Even to the point that if you try to integrate us back into the world community, let's say somehow... And Ukraine is another topic for another day. I don't want to go into that. We only have a few minutes left.

But if somehow the Ukraine war were to end tomorrow and you were to integrate us back into the international system, there is no way that we would be willing to play along with sanctions against Iran or any kind of limitations against Iran again. So don't even dream about it. And that's one of the messages that they're sending when they're signing it on the eve, literally, of the inauguration. And also they're sending a signal to Israel: you better not try anything. You better not think that you can get away with some war against Iran. First of all, just the idea of even doing that. Think about the size of Iran. Like I said, it's the size of Mongolia. It's a huge country. And to think that they could get away with a serious-style operation.

#Pascal

The problem is the neocons are a group of people who have a long history of utterly overestimating the power of the United States military. But once they light the goddamn thing on fire, it then burns, and it sometimes even burns them, right?

#Pietro

Absolutely. I mean, it's like they're playing with fire, but they do it anyhow.

#Pascal

So that's the tragedy, which is why, even if you think that there's no rational strategy to win a war against Iran, you still need to be worried that these lunatics will do it.

#Pietro

Well, and I agree with you, actually. It was quite interesting because I was at this conference recently in Yerevan, and there was an American colleague there, and there was a Russian colleague there. It was interesting because the American colleague was saying, you know, that he thinks Netanyahu is going to push for war with Iran. And, you know, the Russian colleague was saying, well, no, no, no, I don't think he's that crazy necessarily. But, you know, you should not underestimate them, even if it looks completely irrational, right? They might go ahead and actually go along with launching an attack. And it would be incredibly destabilizing and incredibly tragic. But that doesn't stop them. I mean, we see it happen over and over again. It's like Jack Matlock, the former U.S. ambassador, said, you know, the definition of stupidity is doing the same thing over and over. And that's exactly what they did with Iraq, with Libya, with Syria. It goes on and on.

#Pascal

But the point again is, it works if the strategy is to destroy everything, right? And even if nobody enunciates it, even if maybe nobody thinks about it, this is currently what is happening, what's naturally occurring in that region. Sorry, I mean, what's unfolding there. And if they continue that, they might try it with Iran. They might.

#Pietro

Well, unfortunately, I mean, yeah, and that's why Iran has no illusions about that, and neither does Russia. And the other thing we can also say is if you're a small state, right, in this great game, whether you are Armenia, Georgia, or Azerbaijan, the best strategy for you to take would be, and I think you would endorse this, neutrality. Try and work with the larger powers and get along. And actually, also, you know what that does? It enhances your value. Because if you're neutral, then you become a player. You become a subject of international law, not an object of international law.

#Pascal

The tragedy of Ukraine is that it was totally safe, fine, and sound as long as it was actually neutral. The moment it drifted away from that, the greatest security is not having the most bombs. The greatest security is that nobody wants to attack you. Yes, absolutely.

#Pietro

And actually, that's what I think, like we were talking about before the beginning of the recording. Finland is a great example. When you pitch your neutrality, you're throwing away your sovereignty. You're throwing away your ability to be a player. Finland was a player when it was neutral. Same thing with Sweden. It's a player when it's neutral. And I'm actually a little bit concerned even about Switzerland from some of the news reports I hear once in a while. So, yeah, I hope, again, for small states, the best course is to be neutral and to avoid these kinds of geopolitical entanglements.

#Pascal

Completely agreed. And for large states, they are striking big deals again. So, Dr. Pietro Shakarian, if people want to read your analysis, where should they go?

#Pietro

They should go to the American Committee for U.S.-Russia Accord. I'm so used to saying East-West Accord, but they should go to the American Committee for U.S.-Russia Accord.

#Pietro

They'll find it there and also on antiwar.com. So, again, the website antiwar.com and the American Committee for U.S.-Russia Accord. Those are the places you've got to look.

#Pascal

Everybody, you heard where to go, and we will certainly have Pietro back on the channel again. Dr. Pietro Shakarian, thank you very much for your time.

#Pietro

Pascal, thank you for having me, and good luck with your other endeavors on this Sunday.