

Review

The ASEAN factor in Iranian foreign policy

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In the current systems, international organizations are operating stability and making an opportunity for integration and cooperation between governments. In this regard, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is very important as one of the major regional organizations in terms of political, economic and security trends and can provide economic and welfare goals in the region through providing basic goals. The aim of the present study is to determine the position of ASEAN in Iran's foreign policy with emphasis on economy and proposals for expansion of relations in this section. The research is descriptive-analytical, and in methodology, non-strategic and economic policy has been underlined as required for trends in Iran's foreign policy approach to economic relations with this organization. The results showed that given the approach of "Look East Policy" in Iran's foreign policy, the process of interaction should be taken for détente and providing economic benefits. Despite the relationship between ASEAN and other main non-member countries and given the Muslim-Majority and cultural affinities with Iran, the role of the organization in Iran's foreign policy is inevitable for the economic and welfare needs and political influence in the region as well as making extensive relations especially in economic.

Key words: Southeast Asia, integration, Look East Policy, foreign policy, Iran.

INTRODUCTION

Iran as a major Asian country has to make good relations with Asian countries due to geopolitical position. With a quick review of Iran's relations with Asian countries, we can find that these relations in different dimensions have always been established at an appropriate level, but, at times due to political changes, they have had ups and downs. In this regard, the Silk Road is among the samples of this cooperation especially in economics. Therefore, the "Look East Policy" as a special approach to Iran's foreign policy is not new and has a long history. Geo-strategic developments led many countries to review their foreign policy. It was more important for great regional powers with global interests. Asia and Iran affected by recent developments were not exempted from it (Salar, 2010). Asia has great human and material potential in which the emergence of new economic

powers in the continent has been provided. Here, Southeast countries and Southeast Asian Nations known as ASEAN can be cited especially in terms of economic growth overwhelmed global economy (1.1 trillion dollars, UDM, 1.4 1 trillion dollars, GDP). ASEAN is a political and economic organization of countries located in this region. It was established on 8 August, 1967 by the Philippines, Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia, and Singapore as a show of solidarity against communist in Vietnam within its borders and the prevention of unrest (Sazmand, 2011). Following the conference of the heads of the five men-tioned countries in Bali, Indonesia, in 1976, economic cooperation was on the agenda. It was weak in the mid-1980s and in 1991, where Thailand's proposal on establishing a free trade area was revived and now is as a regional leader in the field of economics

and security. This organization will pursue two main goals:

1. To accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region
2. To promote regional peace and stability through law and justice in regional relations as well as adherence to the principles of UN charter

Overall, in recent years, Iran's dispute with the West has been among the foreign policy of perennial pastime in the years after the Islamic Revolution. The main dispute now between Iran and western countries especially the US is Iran's nuclear issues (Sadeghi and Shafiee, 2011). Hence, the "Look East Policy" approach to foreign policy and the trends toward regional cooperation is necessary to get out of the sanctions and threats. Since choosing the "Look East Policy" in the political system with the goal of economic cooperation is followed, the approach to the east should be analyzed to clearly determine whether the selected option in the current critical juncture can provide economic benefits to Iran in the region. The research is descriptive-analytical. In this paper, an attempt is made to study Iran's relations with the countries listed through the theoretical discussions on the regional integration and the study of the East.

Theoretical background

Regional integration

Interest in regional cooperation in the world has a long history; however, global developments especially after the World War II intensified this trend. This cooperation has formed in various forms and degrees in all fields of political, economic, security and social or a combination of them. Although experience in the years following World War II reflects the East-West political influence in the formation of regional alliances and cooperation with NATO, gradually, over time, and profound changes such as the collapse of the Soviet, political interests faded in regional organizations and economic development has been replaced. Economic cooperation is perhaps the most important kind of regional collaboration because countries alone do not provide all the factors of production and in this context, are faced with restrictions. On the other hand, economic cooperation brings prosperity, wealth and power and helps governments to achieve political and security goals that are among critical objectives and national interests of countries (Javid, 2009). Integration means the combination of components in a total. It is meaningful within a country and among a number of countries in the region. In the first sense, it means the integration of various parts of the country and second, it means integration of the countries in the

region. Integration is a range that at least means economic integration and at most, political unity and a common foreign policy. Economic integration means increased interdependence in the region based on indicators such as inter-regional trade and harmonization of procedures, standards and business rules (Omidi, 2008). Integration is the base of human societies and can be traced in the writings of Aristotle, Saint Augustine, Ibn Khaldun and Hegel. But it was introduced as a theory by an English researcher, David Mytrany for the first time between the two world wars. Most of the theorists have accepted the theory of functionalism. Scholars such as Talkyt Parsons consider the conflict as an unusual complication and believe that the consensus in domestic and international policies should take place of conflict because systems like organisms can only stay through unity. Therefore, these theorists consider national governments as the reason of conflict and believe that liberation from the narrow framework and turning to the international community and regional integration is the prelude to world peace. Ernest Haas considers integration as a process in which political players in different countries are urged to replace loyalty, expectations and political activities into a new pillar of the constituent institution in national governments with legal authority. However, neo-functionalists like Haas do not underestimate national governments and interests but believe that when these governments realize that their interests will be provided better in a new community or union, they turn to such a center. Some theorists consider integration as a process and some make it as a condition and others know it as the final product of political unity (Amjad, 2005).

Regarding the integration and regionalism followed by Iran, in particular, the international sanctions against Iran's nuclear program have led Iran to strengthen trade relations with major countries of East Asia such as China, Japan and South Korea, ASEAN as well as India (Omidi, 2010). On the other hand, problems and crises of the countries have led to think about the assistance of other countries for integration and security in the region. Among the common issues causing integration between Iran and these countries are: being a part of the Muslim population of ASEAN countries, resulting in close cultural affinity between Iran and these countries, opposition to colonial west, considering this part of Asia to the Middle East issues especially Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and etc. They led countries of the region to pay special attention to this part.

Look East Policy: definition and scope

Look East policy is a strategic approach to the regions beyond the borders of Eastern, Southeastern and Northeastern Iran to deepen relations with the present

countries in these regions in such that special attention will be paid to collaboration and alliances with them – through collective cooperation within the framework of regional integration institutions such as ASEAN, SAARC, ECO, DE EIGHT and cooperation organization of Shanghai- in order to provide interests and increase security. These areas include East Asia (with major players like China, Japan, and South Korea), South Asia (like India and Pakistan), and Southeast Asia (like Malaysia) plus Russia. Countries in this region together have formed a collection of oriental civilization. According to some analysts, they are currently rising and integrating (Adami, 2011) and are faced with significant developments economically. In a brief review, the reasons for Iran's close relations with east and their desire to expand relations with Iran can be noted: East Asian countries are demanding access to the Iranian market. For instance, Iran's trade with China in 2002 was about 4.5 billion dollars. Now 40 Chinese companies are working in Iran's energy and construction industries; thus, our market has gained importance especially for countries such as China with a great position in global markets. Iran's transit position and construction of the northern corridor are the main reasons for Iran's approach to the East under a second option in diplomacy. South is important for three countries: Iran, Russia and India. As we know, Russia, in 2001, has transmitted \$700 million goods from the corridor and now due to the capacity of the route, negotiations are underway to increase the utilization. According to economic growth rate, energy is another subject that doubled the importance of Iran for countries such as China and India; other incentive is eastern countries' desire to play with Iran's card. In fact, these countries see Iran as a card game in the interaction, bargaining and getting points from West. But, the main reason for Iran's approach to the East is a secondary option in diplomacy. As a matter of fact, in all the years after the revolution, one of Iran's motives for approaching the East has been dealing with West restrictions. Another issue is fewer problems in political relations with the East (Shahabi, 2007).

Iran's economic and trade relations with countries in East or Southeast Asia in recent years have greatly expanded and Iran has used the facilities in these countries in the areas of technology, marketing, finance and capital. It could be argued that oil has had a significant role in developing relations. It can be expected that gas will play a major complementary role in the future. Certainly, capacity to develop relations in the fields of trade, finance, and technology is broad. But there should be no illusion in the realm of diplomacy, foreign policy and relations with these countries. East as a partner and a major trading party can have a special position in the country's future economic relations and open a wide horizon before us, but in the realm of international relations and political equations might not be

able to make a substantial contribution to solving the problems of foreign relations (Mahdaviyan, 2007).

In this connection, Southeast Asian countries are very important because they have had high rates of economic growth and significant importance in the world in recent years. Among ASEAN members, countries like Malaysia and Indonesia which were dependent to the export of minerals, oil and basic commodities in the past but now are the major exporters of manufacturing products in Asia make the importance of the union double. It is clear that the world is changing at an amazing pace and the loss will be irreparable if falling behind this trend. One way to join the process is to review and identify these changes that can help us in economic developments. In this regard, recognizing developing countries, which are taking steps to develop more successful than the others (including the newly industrialized countries) can be more beneficial than the experience of industrialized countries (Nonejad, 2006). This will be discussed as follows.

Opportunities of Look East approach

Providing security against regional instability and achieving the maximum possible economic, social, political, cultural and security cooperation with neighbors and other nations are key foreign policy objectives of Iran (Tajik, 2002). Thus, the reason to promote regional cooperation with the East can be studied in the following factors:

First: to achieve the top position in the region based on a 20-year outlook; inevitably, there must be a state in 1404 with developments and technological advances to achieve the first position of technology, science and economy in Southeast Asia. To do this, the average economic growth rate must be 8%. It cannot be achieved through regional cooperation.

Second: strengthening of foreign relations through the development of bilateral regional and international relations, efforts for further integration among Islamic countries and turning Islamic and friendly countries into a regional center of Excellence in the areas of economy, science, technology and industry have been emphasized in the fourth 5-year plan.

Third: the new government's policies also emphasize the need for balance and justice in international relations and negating domestic relations. Strengthening the Look East Policy and developing relations with neighbors, Islamic and developing countries are the ninth government's priorities. It also emphasizes priority of regional look in international relations and development of regional organizations and agreements.

Fourth: In the new global and regional context, regional cooperation can guarantee the country's political and economic security. Due to the threats posed by the US

for nuclear issues, it is necessary to use different inhibitors against them (Sheikh and Ali, 2010).

In Asia, in addition to significant cultural and civilization compatibility between Iran and other countries, nowadays, development provides a letter of introduction to the continent. Asia is not the most populous and poorest continent in the world and development in this part and the most populous countries, China and India with their heritage of great civilization has made it different. It is considered with the amazing growth indices and its contribution to global economic growth, global competitiveness and issues like these (www.irdiplacy.ir). With this view, Iran considers Asia as an important strategic partner for development, trade and industry. Asians look to Iran as a strategic partner to provide energy and markets of services. In fact, the economic between Iran and Asian countries is a need for mutual development.

The necessity to make relations with countries in the region is enjoying a kind of regional diplomacy in the median level of international activities which is manifested in the regional organizations. According to Iran's relations with Asian countries especially with vast powers and also the expansion of relations in recent years, it can provide the economic and developmental needs in Look East Policy.

ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS (ASEAN)

ASEAN is an acronym for Association of Southeast Asian Nations established in Southeast Asia in partnership with Malaysia, Thailand and the Philippine in July, 1961 in order to develop economic and cultural cooperation among the members. Joining Brunei Darussalam (8th January, 1984), Vietnam (28th July, 1995), Laos and Myanmar (23rd July, 1997), and Cambodia (30th April, 1999), now ASEAN has 10 members (Introduction to Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), 2002). ASEAN is the fourth powerful trade area in the world after the US, Japan and European Union (Roosta, 2010). Totally, their cooperation is in the fields of industry, trade, joint investment, finance and banking, agriculture, energy, technology, joint research, education social development, tourism, culture, transport and communications. The main goals are:

- 1) To accelerate the development of the region through public participation of member countries
- 2) To ensure regional peace and stability
- 3) To promote active collaboration in the economic field
- 4) To promote cooperation in the field of technology and research
- 5) To increase level of agricultural, transport and

industrial sections in member countries (Nejad, 2009).

Organizations- pillars of the association are:

Summit: it is the highest administrative authority of the association. In 1992, it was agreed that this meeting will be held every year with the heads of governments.

Ministerial meeting: this meeting is attended by foreign ministers of member countries and is held every year in the member states.

Standing committee: it is aired by the host country and is held typically every 2 months by the ministers of foreign affairs and ambassadors of member states in the same country.

Secretariat: ASEAN main secretariat in Jakarta, capital of Indonesia, was established in 1976 which constitutes the main body of activities. The Secretary-General is appointed for 5 years.

Committees and meetings of senior officials: ministerial meeting will be held through three committees of culture and information, science and technology, and social development coordinator. Political cooperation is coordinated at a meeting of senior officials and policy-makers.

Other ASEAN meetings: aside from summit and formal meetings of heads and ministers, other meetings also will be held in ASEAN.

Regional forum: it consists of 27 participants (10 member countries plus Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, China, the USA, European Union, India, Japan, South Korea, North Korea, Mongolia, Pakistan, New Zealand, Russia, Papua New Guinea, Eastern Timor, and Sri Lanka) and has begun since 1994. The goal is to expand multilateral talks at the Asia Pacific Region and cooperation in different fields.

Asia-Europe meeting: it is an informal dialogue process between ASEAN and EU initiated in 1996.

ASEAN plus Three: it is a meeting between officials of member states and three countries, China, Japan, South Korea on the sidelines of the summit in order to improve relations between the member states and these three countries.

ASEAN-Russia summit: it is an annual meeting between leaders of member states and the president in Russia about related issues.

Meeting of East Asia: an Asian Forum that will be held every year by 16 countries in East Asia and ASEAN. Since 2005, Russia has been asked to participate in this meeting as an observer.

ASEAN-Sir Summit: it is a meeting between officials of member states of ASEAN, Australia and New lands (Musa, 2010).

ASEAN's external relations: European Union signed a cooperation agreement in March 1980 between Europe and ASEAN member countries. It aimed to strengthen business relations and increase cooperation in science

and agriculture.

People's Republic of China: attempts to improve consultative relations between ASEAN and China began in 1993 and subsequently, a joint committee on economic and trade cooperation as well as scientific and technical was formed. Relations between the two sides were further strengthened with China's support of ASEAN development.

Japan: ASEAN-Japan summit was held in 1997 to discuss the fields of trade, investment, technology transfer and assistance.

Australia: due to economic cooperation between ASEAN and Australia, Australia supported ASEAN's activities financially and attempted to form joint business council in 1980.

NEW Zealand: relations with this country were based on inter-organizational and increased trade and investment programs. Therefore, financial aids were found in development of forests, dairy manufacturing technology and veterinary. In 1993, management committee of New Zealand and ASEAN started to work in order to monitor the implementation of cooperation projects.

The USA: ASEAN and the US formed a joint group in 1990 aimed at reviewing economic relations between ASEAN and the US and also determining plans in which their economic relations could be strengthened. With assembly of ASEAN regional security, senior American officials in July, 1994 met foreign ministers of member countries and considered it a positive step for stability in Southeast Asia.

Canada: the projects between Canada and ASEAN include fisheries technology, telecommunications, the use of solar energy and a centre for planting forest trees.

South Korea: Korea in July, 1991 was accepted as a partner in dialogue by ASEAN and in December of that year, chamber of commerce was formed. Cooperation projects in relation to human sources development, science and technology, agriculture, trade and investment policies during 1995 were implemented (Aghaiee, 2002).

ASEAN-AFTA Free Trade Agreement: AFTA (ASEAN Free Trade Area) is the agreement between ASEAN member states signed by authorities of member states in Singapore on July 28, 1992 on reducing trade tariffs and customs. At that time, ASEAN had 6 members (Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippine, and Brunei Darussalam) and 4 other members (Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia) joined it in later years. All obligations of the treaty were not fully accepted except a part (Sagafi-Nejad, 2008).

Overall, as international and trans-regional relations, rapid economic growth of member countries, considerable wealth sources and lucrative markets in ASEAN and increase effectiveness of Assembly in international economic processes have created a lot of optimism in

achieving the objectives of ASEAN framework (www.bashgah.nrt/modules). In this context, today, Southeast countries have been considered a lot because in recent years they have had the highest economic growth rates and significant role in the world trade. Among the ASEAN members, countries like Malaysia and Indonesia have been dependent on minerals, primary commodities and oil exports in past, but now are major exporters of manufacturing products in Asia. This makes the importance of the association double. It is clear that the world is changing at an amazing pace and the loss will be irreparable if falling behind the trend. One way to join the process has been the study of developments that can help us in economic development. In this regard, recognizing developing countries which were taking steps more successful than the others, including the newly industrialized countries can be more beneficial than the experience of industrialized countries (Nonejad, 2006).

ASEAN member states economics

In recent years and due to increasing power of Asian countries, cooperation and economic integration in Asia have been important issues. Many regional and sub-regional institutions have been formed with a wide range of activities in their agenda. Cooperation and economic integration have become the most important agenda. As the regional organizations, 38 free trade agreements are operationally active in Asia. Despite such potential and capabilities in Asia, Asian nations have not benefited fully from the advantages of this type of cooperation. Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) with membership of Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Philippine, Brunei Darussalam, Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos and Cambodia has begun extensive activities and deepened regional economic cooperation with free trade area. Furthermore, the heads of ASEAN have agreed to make an economic community and it was expected to achieve further integration in this operational region till 2020 (www.boustan.blogfa.com). In this context, since 1997, ASEAN + 3 was formed to expand economic relations between 10 members and three great economic powers including China, Japan and South Korea. In other words, ASEAN now has become a region for a planned integration with the prospect of global trends. Developing relations and consultations with other regional countries such as Russia, Australia and New Zealand are also a complementary to the trend (Musa, 2010). ASEAN is located in a strategic region with a great economic growth and high potential. It is a great source of capital, too. Trade between East Asian countries makes up 43% of total regional trade. In terms of investment and financial flows, nearly 70% of total investments are provided from East Asian region. Currently, central banks of East Asian countries have over 45% of the world's monetary

reserves and the more important point is that this growth in a very short time without financial arrangements has been documented. ASEAN countries are leading in this context and have financial integration with each other so that problems and political disputes cannot compromise into the assimilation and integration. In other words, any trends in the opposite situation would be irrational. ASEAN countries have had over \$550 billion in trade with one another last year. A figure that none of them cannot devote to capital disputes. ASEAN member states are sure so that they seek to strengthen cooperation within the region and finally have made the policy of "constructive cooperation" as a pattern of integration in the region and attracted three non-member states in Southeast Asia (Shahandeh, 1998). Now Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is the third world trade centre and the largest trading partner of China, countries in Pacific region and EU. ASEAN economic strategy focuses on the integration and enhances the economic competitiveness of the association. The ultimate goal of integration in a landscape of ASEAN in 2020 is an economic community (Khosh, 2009).

ASEAN'S ECONOMIC POSITION IN IRAN'S FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH

Overall, based on the strategic approach to cooperate with Eastern countries, some believe that the expectations of this policy can be divided into two categories: strategic and non-strategic expectations because Asian powers interact with Europe and the US. Hence, Asian powers are not inclined to establish strategic ties with Iran which has a particular status in the international arena in terms of opposing the policies of the US. In fact, Iran based on a certain perspective cannot be expected to achieve strategic ties with the powerful Asian countries like China, India and Russia; however, it has the potential for interaction with Asian countries in non-strategic fields particularly economic like an increasing need for energy. Iran has many advantages in this field to interact with Asian countries and it is out of the US control. Thus, Iran can be as a major energy source for large countries like China, India, and Southeast Asia. According to this view, we should not go to extremes but it must abandon factors that can be found successful and consider the potential for cooperation with Asia especially in the fields of economic and even cultural issues. Therefore, the Look East Policy in this definition will be an oriented economic policy to emphasize on the successful experience of others. The largest union in Asia, that is, ASEAN began its activities in the field of economics and later also took note of the political and security issues. Thus, it is argued that all projects for cooperation with East Asian nations in terms of the Look East Policy will have more chance of success if it is based on economic and trade cooperation

and refrain from challenging the great powers (Dave, 2010) because this policy is not only limited to bilateral relations but is looking to strengthen regional cooperation based on economic conditions. Indeed, it can be said that political and security cooperation cannot guarantee the future of regional and bilateral relations with different countries (Sadeghi and Shafiee, 2011). Now the Islamic Republic of Iran as one of the oldest civilizations of the orient has taken a step to develop and on the other hand, is unable to make institutional relations with the West. It should seize the opportunity resulting from the rise of East. And with a long-term strategic approach to Eastern players and setting a coherent agenda for foreign policy links itself to the rapid development and integration of East. No doubt the common-civilization and historical ties with the east will facilitate our entrance into the integration of Eastern communities. Islamic republic of Iran has valuable resources such as energy reserves (oil and gas) and a privileged geopolitical and geo-economic position on which it will be able to gain a proper place in the regional network of interactions. Iran can mutually take advantage of their capabilities to meet different needs and with their investment in industry, will accelerate the rate of economic development. Naturally our economy is far from advanced economics and this development can be helpful. In this way, Iran's regional position will improve (Adami, 2011). Now Iran has good relations with the countries of Southeast Asia. Totally, Iran non-oil exports to Southeast Asian countries grew by 56% since the beginning of the year and it has been \$981million. Non-oil exports to the region increased from 1 million and 170 thousand ton in 9 months in 2011 to 1 million and 371 thousand tone in the same period last year. Statistics show that the union market has a great potential to sell Iranian products. Therefore Iran's main exports within the region include petroleum products, citrus fruits, carpets, pistachio nuts, food and herbs (www.ehowiran.com).

A SELECTION OF ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN IRAN AND THE COUNTRIES OF SOUTHEAST ASIA (ASEAN)

In all, the economic relations between Iran and the ASEAN countries can be a step toward making a regional economic system. Hence, Iran's relations with Indonesia, Philippine, Malaysia and Thailand are considerable. These countries due to cultural and religious commonalities with Iran have good opportunities for mutual interaction. Malaysia is a gateway for Iran to enter into a 2-billion market in South and East Asia. Statistics on trade over the past 20 years (1987-2007) indicates an increasing trend of trade between two countries so that minimum trading volume in 2007 was \$21 million. But the trade deficit excluding oil and even including oil was not

Table 1. The volume of imports and exports between Iran and Malaysia.

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Sum
Exports	27	36	31	178	68	53	393
Imports	328	368	420	405	398	235	2154
Turnover	355	404	451	583	466	388	2467

Source: Trade Promotion Organization of Iran.

Table 2. The volume of imports and exports between Iran and Thailand.

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Sum
Exports	38	7	33	24	18	46	112	59	53	390
Imports	123	230	354	162	359	480	201	152	134	2195
Turnover	161	237	387	186	377	526	313	211	187	2585

Source: Trade Promotion Organization of Iran.

Table 3. The volume of imports and exports between Iran and the Philippine from 2002-2010.

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	Sum
Exports	1.5	8.10	1.15	37	6.107	221	167	8.562
Imports	12	7.30	7.98	33	64	106	64	4.408
Turnover	1.17	5.41	8.113	60	6.171	327	231	2.971

Source: Trade Promotion Organization of Iran.

in favor of Iran. The lowest and the highest levels are related to 1987(3782) and 2007(\$303763 million) respectively (Table 1).

Relations with Thailand are apart from the parliamentary exchanges between officials. Cultural and economic- trade relations are also noteworthy. More bilateral trade cooperation is in the form of joint economic commission. In recent years, interest in the private sector in Thailand for the Iranian market and barter exchanges and joint investment in free economic areas has been growing. Kerman welcomes expansion of ties with Thailand in the fields of petrochemical, cosmetics, exploration, food and packing. A Thai company is also involved in the manufacture of prefabricated homes for installation in bam (www.thai.ir/foreign-relations) (Table 2).

Other collaborations between Iran and Thailand can be made to expand trade and banking, college, founded business council, cooperation between the Iranian oil company and PTT in Thailand.

Overall, Iran's relations with Thailand and the Philippine are not very satisfying and this communication should be expanded given the common cultural, social and political relations (Table 3).

Relations between Iran and Indonesia have been assessed as positive apart from cooperation in the field of nuclear disarmament, Iran has a lot of capabilities and

potential and Malaysian companies are very eager to invest in Iran. Building refinery in Indonesia by Iran and supplying oil and creating opportunities for work and the use of existing potential in Iran are some agreements between the two countries (Table 4).

With Iran, Indonesia and Malaysia membership, economic and trade cooperation between these countries is growing. This has been associated with elimination of tariff barriers and providing commercial facilities in Iran.

CONCLUSION

Iran has considered that a bridge from north to south and from west to east and in terms of pragmatic approach to Look East Policy can strengthen and deepen bilateral relations with eastern countries and establish long-term links and connections to provide mutual interests. Strengthening relations between Iran and East Asian countries as the regional cooperation is important for the comprehensive and expensive ties with China, India and Russia an deepen economic cooperation with Asian countries on energy and transit. But it should be noted that the Look East Policy is considered in order to balance against the west and more cooperation with the east. It redefines the importance of the policy approaches to Iran's foreign policy as a regional power so that Iran's

Table 4. The volume of imports and exports between Iran and Indonesia from 2002-2010.

Year	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Sum
Exports	58030	1E+07	86952	91938	64442	1E+07
Imports	1E+06	128153	185657	145483	165235	2E+06
Turnover	160763	196296	272609	237421	228678	1E+06

Source: Trade Promotion Organization of Iran

position and capabilities particularly in energy and energy security and transit have provided a good background for cooperation with eastern countries. In this regard, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is a region to flourish these capabilities. ASEAN is a political and economic organization located in this region of Asian continent. Strategic features are such that it has access to a large capacity of 600 million people. It is important to note that 50% of the population are Muslims. Furthermore, this region is a bridge between other countries such as Australia and New Zealand and given the interaction policies, it has maintained close interactions with different countries. The Look East Policy that redefines the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy approaches as a regional power due to changes in global political equations can turn to be non-strategic and will be coordinated with economic developments in this region. In this context, given the cultural-religious affinities with Iran and Muslim-Majority, more cooperation should be prompted. This region is considered as an opportunity to access other markets. In fact, Iran can provide the conditions for participation in this market through commercial agreements signed with several countries in the region and their enforcement plus planning for the physical presence including deployment of business counselors, marketing bodies and holding specialized exhibitions.

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