

## **Beyond the Trilateral Summit in Azerbaijan!**

(Translated)

### **Question:**

On Monday, 08/08/2016 a trilateral summit was held that gathered for the first time presidents of Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan. The final declaration has mentioned several topics that were discussed, such as the relations between the three countries, the economic cooperation and the North-South corridor, as well as the fight against terrorism, the Syrian crisis, Afghanistan, drug trafficking, extremism, cross-border crime, illegal arms trafficking, human trafficking, etc ..., all this in one day! Is this for media propaganda or is there a theme that was focused upon and the rest are just frills? Moreover, Iran and Azerbaijan follow the US policy, does this mean America has a role in this meeting? if so what is its goal in that?.

### **Answer:**

Yes, it is not reasonable to focus on all this broad spectrum of topics in a session or two, and in a day or part of a day! But it seems that the economic issue is the goal of this summit, and in particular the establishment of the economic corridor (North-South transportation corridor) ... and that America has the fundamental role in it, to distance Russia from China, and to economically exhaust it by occupying it in this corridor that extends from Russia to Azerbaijan, Iran, and the Gulf ... To clarify this, we will present the following matters:

First: The other issues that were mentioned in the final declaration are not significant in the summit meeting ... and we will explain this as follows:

1. As for Afghanistan, none of these three countries have any control in Afghanistan, instead the influential actor State there is America, for it dominates the Government of Afghanistan; therefore, mentioning Afghanistan in the declaration is of footnotes ...!

2. As for cross-border crime and human trafficking, these are not the priorities of common interest to the mentioned countries to hold a summit...

3. As to the crisis in Syria, Russia and Iran need to coordinate with each other regarding Syria to avoid defeat. But the fact that Azerbaijan has no role in the Syrian crisis makes the summit not intended for this purpose. Specially that Azerbaijan is the one that called for the summit: "It is remarkable that this trilateral meeting held on Monday, is the first in this format proposed by the President of Azerbaijani during a telephone conversation with his Russian counterpart last February." (Source: i24news, in 08/08/2016). This means that the summit that Azerbaijan called for it will not be on the Syrian crisis, where there is no role of Azerbaijan in it.

4. And as regards to the fight against terrorism, drugs and transit of arms and militants, especially between Azerbaijan and Russia, as a corridor for the Mujahideen to the Caucasus, as it was during the Chechen wars throughout the nineties of the twentieth century ... Despite that Russia mentioned these at the summit, as reported by Russia Today on 08/08/2016: "President Vladimir Putin stressed during a trilateral meeting with his Iranian counterpart, President Hassan Rouhani, and President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, on the need for more efficient efforts to prevent the transit of militants, weapons, drugs through the territories of the three countries. President Putin also called on Monday 8<sup>th</sup> August, to step up information-sharing between the three countries on the activities of terrorist organizations". Still, Russia can resolve such issues bilaterally with Azerbaijan without the need for a summit involving the Iranian president. For the issue of "transit of militants and weapons" is a

Russian Azerbaijani problem, because the passage of "militants" is usually through Azerbaijan ... As to the topic of drugs from Afghanistan through Iran and Azerbaijan, though having an impact, but is not a priority to these countries in the current circumstances to hold a summit ...

Second: Thus, the former issues, though having an impact, are not a reason to hold a summit between the three countries... Therefore, the remaining issue is the economic issue, which is the main purpose for holding this summit, in particular the establishment of the economic corridor (North-South corridor). To illustrate this, we point out what came in the declaration regarding economic matters, as well as the reported remarks on the subject:

1. It was stated in the final declaration "*Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan will take measures on the development of transportation infrastructure, including the "North-South" international transportation corridor. The sides intend to support efforts to integrate regional transportation and communication opportunities aimed at creating an economically profitable and environmentally friendly transportation infrastructure... The parties intend to take effective steps for the development of transportation and communication infrastructure in order to improve the existing passenger and goods transportation capacity along with the "North-South" international transportation corridor ...*" It is also noted that Moscow, Tehran and Baku '*intend to further contribute to the implementation of new projects on the connection of railways as a part of the development and improvement of the North-South international transportation corridor's efficiency...*'" (Russia Today, 09/08/2016)

2. Iranian President Rouhani talked about the purpose of the conference by saying to "promote broad development prospects of these countries." (Al-Alam TV site, 08/08/2016).

3. Russian media reported on the most prominent goals of the conference. On 08/08/2016, Russian Sputnik Agency talked about major Russian Iranian project that will rival the Egyptian Suez Canal. The Russian agency reported, "The key topic on the agenda of the summit is to establish an international corridor linking North and South, this project will compete with the Egyptian Suez Canal, to some extent. The corridor will be 7,200 kilometers long and will link Northern Europe to India, and the Gulf States through Iran, Russia and Azerbaijan. Iranian Foreign Minister announced that this project serves the interests of the peoples of Iran, Azerbaijan and Russia and the interests of the entire region, where the project is going to provide a cost and time-effective alternative to the maritime route across the Suez Canal."

4. As well as, Russia Today stated on 08/08/2016 that the Russian President reiterated before the summit that the trilateral cooperation between Russia, Iran and Azerbaijan will allow the implementation of a number of new projects in the Caspian region. Putin said, "We have a lot to talk about in this trilateral format."

**Thus, the main goal of this conference is the economic cooperation, in particular the North-South corridor, and it is given precedence over the economic projects on the Caspian Sea, because the rest of the countries along this sea were not invited to the Summit. Therefore, the discussion of this topic at the Summit was not for the actual implementation as much it was for future research, and this may be too farfetched, until an understanding with other coastal states of the sea is reached. Whereas, the corridor concerns the three countries, in particular that the Russian media highlighted it and that it will compete with the Suez Canal...**

Third: **As for the US role, it actually exists, and some of it does not require deep thinking to understand, while other needs scrutiny and depth ...** The first category could be easily understood from the fact that these three countries differ in reality. Russia is an independent country and has its own regional and international policies. While Iran and Azerbaijan both follow US policy, and the foreign policies of such states cannot be separated from US policy. In other words, creating a corridor from North to South to the Gulf on the shores of Iran is not separate from the American policies. This is regarding the first category,

which can be easily understood without deep thinking. **The second category**, which requires depth and contemplation, can be understood by taking into account the following matters:

1. America noticed the difficult economic situation of Russia, so it ordered Azerbaijan and Iran to entice Russia with a huge economic project that exhausts the Russian economy. As is the American policy on the China side, preoccupying it with spending on massive projects such as the China's economic corridor through Pakistan, the United States also wants to push Russia to spend on the new "North-South" corridor to strain its economy and force it to the debts of IMF and the World Bank, which America dominates them. And for all that it has ordered Iran and Azerbaijan to also spend on this project, the "Corridor", to encourage Russia to proceed forward and engage in it.

2. While America is intensifying its policies in the Far East to prevent China from becoming a prestigious global force, and is fomenting trouble spots around China, it certainly realizes that the most dangerous thing in the Russian orientation towards Asia is Russia heading towards China. And if the American policy is to isolate China from strengthening by other major countries, then it certainly realizes that Russia is the most serious of those countries on the issue of rapprochement with China. And in the context of distancing Russia from China, America entices Russia with such a "North-South" corridor. In particular, that this economic corridor that crosses Azerbaijan and Russia is a twin-like with the Indian-Iranian economic corridor, which connects India nautically to Iran at the Iranian Chabahar port, as well as linking Iran to Afghanistan by land. This means that the new "North-South" corridor crossing Russia is to give more vitality to Indian economic corridor via cross-linking it to Northern Europe. Thus Russia appears on the side of India, the traditional enemy of China in South Asia, and consequently it divides between them. On the other hand, the integration of Russia in this economic corridor with Iran and Azerbaijan, will certainly limit the integration of Russia with China's plans in the economic corridors, such as the Silk Road corridor ... Overall, America sees a worrying orientation of Russia towards China, accordingly it pushes its followers in Iran and Azerbaijan to entice Russia with joint projects with them so that Russia distances itself from China and China distances itself from it.....

Fourth: In conclusion:

1. The purpose of the trilateral summit held in Baku on 08/08/2016 is an economic one and in particular the North-South corridor.

2. There is a significant role for America in the summit via Azerbaijan and Iran to involve Russia in the North-South Corridor project, in order to exhaust the Russian economy during the current crisis and to push Russia to become preoccupied with projects towards the South-West of Russia to Azerbaijan and Iran, rather than the orientation to the South-East of Russia towards China and then gradually isolating Russia from China...

11<sup>th</sup> Dhul Qi'dah 1437 AH

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