

India-Iran Relations in Post-Cold War Era: Problems and Prospects

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Abstract

This paper aims at providing an understanding of various dimensions of Indo-Iran relations in the post-cold war era. The paper aims to access changing contours of the relationship between the two civilizations. The relations have been affected by a number of factors in the past and continue to be shaky even today with a number of challenges on their way. It investigates the main factors and challenges that influence their relations. This ranges from defense, nuclear, political bilateral, economy, trade and terrorism and including such countries and regions as USA, Pakistan, and Israel, which have bearing upon the relationship between these two nations.

Key Words: Israel, USA, Sanctions, Nuclear Weapon, Chabahar Port, Future Prospects.

Introduction

India and Iran share deep historical, cultural and civilizational linkage. The contact between the people and civilization of these two regions 'go back to the dawn of history'.¹ Centuries of interaction has deeply affected each other's life and mode of thinking. However, as the two cultural civilizations move into the direction of becoming modern nation state, it has brought a different set of problems and challenges of these two cultural entities from civilization in to a nation state is accompanied by cranny, partially

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breakdown and at times rupture in the goodwill relationship between the two. In recent times, both the nations India and Iran, gave their different location in the trajectory of global power politics, are finding it difficult to accommodate concerns of each other. If one set of national interest bring them closer, another set of nation interests move them apart. The shared history, culture and memory appear to be not much fruitful in enhancing cordial relationship between the two old civilizations.

Objectives

- To analysis the impact of USA, Israel and Pakistan on Indo-Iran relations.
- To access future prospects in Indo-Iran relations.

Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study is descriptive, analytical, historical, and empirical. Required information is collected from various journals of political science, books, newspapers and research articles.

Discussion

The discussion will be on India-Iran relation in cold war era problems and prospects in the way of their relationship. As, both the countries were historically closely linked but after Indian got independence and Iran under shahs rule, changed their cordial and friendly ties, due to various international factors , from time to time puts twists and turns, ups and downs in their relations which hamper the progress of friendship between the two states.

Factors affecting Indo-Iran relations

US factor

Ever since India became a strategic partner of the United States, relations with Iran has been a crucial test for New Delhi and in proving its loyalty with the United States through means such as the IPI Pipeline project and the Iran vote in the IAEA. The Bush

administration made it a condition for India to vote against Iran at IAEA in 2006 for the approval of the Indo-US Civil Nuclear deal in the US Congress. This puts Indian foreign policy in dilemma. ²For India, the challenges come from the international pressure, such as those of the US, UN and EU for subverting or at least reserving the healthy course of Indo-Iranian relations. Considering the fact that the powerful states such as the United States or regional powers such as Israel have their own issues with Iran, they may use their engagements with India as an instrument of pressure to affect Indo-Iranian relations. India's last two experience of voting against Iran with the United States on September 24, 2005 on an IAEA resolution finding Iran in non-compliance with its international obligations and again on February 4, 2006 for referring Iranian nuclear case to the Security Council,³ were clear indications of the international pressure for talking anti-Iranian stance. Though it was clear for Iran and many Indian and western analysts ⁴ that India voted under US pressure, but any kind of future similar moves may have adverse effects on their bilateral relations. It is up to India to convince its friends in the West or in the region that they must distinguish between Iran's nuclear crisis and its relation with India.

Israeli factor

While Iran has been indifferent about India's relations with its regional adversary, Israel has always expressed its misgivings over India-Iran ties. Given India's attempts to institute bilateral relations independent of one another, Israel does not figure significantly in Indo-Iranian relations. Iran, regardless of its anti-Israel word craft, has not allowed the 'Israeli factor' to come in the way of its relations with India. Keeping in mind that Iran was the only West Asian country to have expressed displeasure at India's move to normalize relations with Israel in 1992, New Delhi and Tehran have come a long way in developing an understanding of each other strategic importance. While, Pakistan and Egypt continue to make occasional vows about Indo-Israeli ties, Iran has assiduously avoided making references to Israel in its dealings with India.

In the backdrop of its own adversarial relations with Iran and growing Indo-Iranian ties, Israel, from time has expressed grief over the prospect its military equipment or

technology reaching Tehran via New Delhi. The former prime minister of Israel, Ariel Sharon, sought solid trust from India on this issue during his visit to the country in September 2003. Assuring that there was no possibility of 'leakage' of Israeli technology, India spelt out clearly that the deepening strategic ties with the Israel would not dilute new Delhi's relations with Tehran.⁵ Israel raised this issue once again at a meeting of the Indo-Israeli joint working group on counterterrorism in November 2004.⁶ However in recent years, India-Israel strategic relations have occasionally unruffled feathers in Tehran. The launch of the Israeli Polaris satellite in January 2008 waves a political controversy following media reports which suggested that satellite was meant to help Israel monitor developments in its neighborhood. While the Jerusalem post wrote that the 'launch will dramatically increase Israel's intelligence gathering capabilities regarding the Islamic republic's nuclear program since the satellite can submit images in all weather conditions, a capability that Israel's existing satellites lacked, the News Middle East reported Israeli officials confirming that 'TecSAR is of particular interest to their country because it can be used to keep tab on Iran's' nuclear program.⁷ Iran expressed its displeasure over the launch, when it stressed that India should have considered the 'political dimensions' of the deal. Although, Iran reacted with extreme restraint, such events have the potential to drag India into crossfire between Tehran and Tel Aviv and derail its vital interests in the region.

Pakistan factor

Despite the strength of Indo-Iranian cultural and civilizational ties and the mutual tendency of their elites towards each other, it was surprising that Iran was first state which recognized Pakistan as an independent state. Iranian support to Pakistan was clearly seen during the wars of (1965, 1970) fought between India and Pakistan. Iran not only supported orally but physically, by providing military assistance as well financial aid to Pakistan.⁸

While the relations between India and Iran in its different aspects and dimensions have improved positively during the first decade of the 21st century, multifaceted domestic, regional and international factors facing the two nations. On the Iranian side, the

continuation of the neutral policy towards Kashmir issue which has been the traditional policy of the Islamic republic should continue, otherwise any move against in this regard can resent India and distort friendly bilateral relations. Rather than highlighting Kashmir as an Islamic issue, Iran can play more useful and acceptable role as the mediator between India and Pakistan conflicts. Both Iran and India are vulnerable towards the radical extremist Islamic terrorism which has targeted both countries. The Taliban-al-Qaida linked extremist groups who have resorted to confessional violence against India and Iran does not like to see any improvement in Indo-Iranian relations. As before, Iran should distinguish between the moderate and extremist Islamism and condemn any anti-Indian Islamist activity by radical extremist groups. On the international level, it is up to Iran not to confuse Indo-USA or Indo- Israeli ties, as long as they do not harm Iranian national interests.⁹

India votes in IAEA

On September 24, 2005, soon after the signing of the Indo-US framework agreement and Ahmedinejad's assumption of office (August 3, 2005), India voted along with the US in the IAEA for the implementation of the Non-Proliferation safeguards agreement in Iran. In this particular voting at the IAEA meeting of the board of governors, Russia, China abstained while India chose to vote along with US and the West. The US called this support "significant". India said that its vote was meant to avoid a major confrontation between Iran and the international community. India urged that Iran must fulfill its obligations as a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation treaty (NPT) and held that the passage of the resolution could not be the basis of a "renewed punitive approach or new sanctions" against Iran.

Indian stance was regarded by Iran as a turn-around in its approach towards Iran. Iran's reaction was swift and it threatened immediately to cancel the LNG deal stuck between the two countries in June 2005. The media reports said soon after the India vote, the Iranian ambassador in Vienna came up to Indian representative Dr. Sharma and conveyed the message from Iran's top nuclear negotiator, Ali Larijani, that Iran was no longer willing to go ahead with the US \$ 21-billion LNG deal. India voted again against Iran in

February 2006 following which Iran made its displeasure even more apparent in fact' Iran even went to extent of refusing permission to India fighter jet to fly over its territory to take part in red flat air-combat exercise in the US in September 2008.¹⁰

Future prospects

India and Iran are strategically located in the Asian continent and are mutually inevitable to each other. India is the bridge to Iran's look east policy and reverse is the example for India's success towards West Asia's, central Asia and Caspian Sea region. India's strategic setting is perceived in the broader canvas of Indian Ocean and its strategic depth in the west spreads up to the eastern coast of Africa through the strait of Hormuj, and in the east it extends up to the South China Sea including the strait of Malacca, and in the south it expands up to Antarctic.¹¹

India has a significant role in the region looking from its policy of 'extended strategic neighborhood'. The Ministry of Defense, Government of India in the annual report (2005-2006) mentions "slow but steady" development in attaining "a treaty multi-polar world, with India's as one of the poles". Depending upon its economic and political influence, it seeks to play a positive role and deter any threat to maintain peace and stability in the region.

Iran being strategically located in the Persian Gulf region would add to India's advantages to secure its national interest, and Indo-Iranian co-operation in this sphere would accord primacy to India in materializing its objectives in its extended strategic paradigm. Moreover, twenty first century is dubbed as an Asian century. India and Iran being the significant Asian neighbors with immense potentialities can really shape the destiny of Asia opening in other neighbors for common Asian union with common currency plus visa regime. This project would dissipate the differences and realize the strategic think-tank vision of turning 21st century into an Asian century in near future.

The formation of Asian union as a corollary to the European union would promote neo-liberal mode of development linking East with the West or orient with the accident-North-South corridor project in terms of time and space affords better opportunities for both India and Iran to have access with European union and Russia. The corridor links India and Iran with Europe and Russia involving four fold transportation processes, these are:

- Firstly, there would be transshipment of goods from the ports in India to the ports of bandarabas and chabahar in Iran.
- Secondly, there would be transit of goods by the Iranian railways to the ports of Bandar Anjali and Bandar Amirabad of Caspian Sea.
- Thirdly, there would be passage of goods through the Caspian Sea to the port of astrakhan in Russia.
- Fourthly, there would be transit of goods through the road and railway in Russia across Eastern Europe to Central and Western Europe.

An optimistic introspection of the project indicates that it would fetch gains for the parties engaged in it.¹² One major advantage of north south corridor is that it covers 6245 kms, whereas the present maritime transport route across the Mediterranean Sea and Red Sea is 16129 kms. Undoubtedly, the north-south corridor would reduce the cost of transportation by thirty percent and transit period by forty percent. Further, if this is connected with the ongoing south-east Asian transport corridor, it would provide outlet to both India and Iran for better economic groupings such as European Union and association of south East Asian nations. However, the realization of the project hinges upon the political will as well as interest of the international investors and transport bidders to undertake such mega project.¹³

The Iran-India-Pakistan (IPI) gas pipe line is a trilateral project being accorded priority for economic and strategic considerations. Iran thinks through this trilateral venture it can reap economic dividends as well as extend its relation with both India and Pakistan. Of course, the deal of gas pipeline termed as the “peace pipeline” was mooted in 1993. It was projected that the India-Iran-Pakistan(IPI) gas pipeline covering around 2775 kilometers would start from south pars gas field of Iran in the Persian gulf and after

passing through khuzdar city of Pakistan, one branch would reach Karachi and other India by Multan.¹⁴

Iran's President Mohammad Ahmadinejad visited India in July 2008 and reassured Iran's full co-operation for the success of IPI trilateral project and envisaged for quadrilateral agreement including China in this arrangement. Indian political establishment expressed keen interest for carrying out IPI pipeline to meet the growing energy demands. However, New Delhi put forth suggestions to Iran regarding the source, security of the gas pipeline in Pakistan and prospective participation of Indian companies in Pakistan in this joint endeavor.

In May 2009, India officially announced its decision to remain non-committal in IPI project due to combination of factors, including pricing and security issues and fears that Pakistan may pull the plug any time- stopping gas supplies to India. Other factors include anti- Iranian pressure from the United States, and the possibility of less expensive domestic alternatives. In the June of the same year, Iran and Pakistan signed a deal to begin construction without India's participation. As it runs out of time and option, Iran is looking to China as a possible end consumer of the Iran-Pakistan pipeline.¹⁵ India's hesitation in reaching an agreement on the proposed deal is no less influenced by United States opposition to it. The United States publicly oppose it in March 2005, when Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited New Delhi. The IPI came into the shadow of Washington, when India signed nuclear deal with United States on 2005. And it was usually reported that the Washington had warned India against following any energy deal with Iran, if it wanted to secure the nuclear deal.¹⁶ The Bush Administration opposed the project because of the controversial nuclear program crucial revenue it would give to Iran, which is facing punitive economic sanctions for its controversial nuclear program.

Conclusion

Theories of neo-realism argue that behavior of states is defined not only by self-interest but also by structural constraints imposed by changing international environment. The unipolar nature of the post-cold war international system, the united states attempt to

isolate Iran globally, the increasing strategic importance of Central Asian republics, the threat of Sunni Islamic extremism, the imperative to protect the sea lanes and integrity of energy supplies and the prospect of mutual benefits from economic cooperation in a broad range of areas- all created conditions for convergence of strategic and economic interests between India and Iran and led them to refurbish their ties in the context of changed international situation. India's relationship with Iran is likely to grow in the future as New Delhi expects real and substantive gains from the partnership both in terms of material benefits and strategic advantages. At the same time, India like all states, would take measures to strengthen internal balancing. This explain India's vote against Iran in the IAEA. Given its vast developmental needs, India's vote was to secure the India-US nuclear deal that would facilitate building of economic and technological capabilities of the country. Systemic constrains also dictate that India-Iran ties will endure. Both the states complement each other on a number of issues, enabling them to realize internal and external balance in an anarchic international system.

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