

USA as a factor in India -Iran Relations

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Abstract-

Iran is a strong regional power in the Middle East Region. Iran always influences the politics and security situation from Syria and Iraq to Lebanon and Saudi Arab. In July 2016 Iran reached at a deal with P-5(USA, UK, France, Russia, and China) +1 (Germany) countries on nuclear issue. But in recent time USA cancel the deal. This article analyzes future impacts of India's strategic interest with Iran. India and Iran are cooperating in various fields' like-trade sector, oil field, and security area and infrastructure development. This article also contains information related to importance of Chabahar port. India has always differ from USA's Approach of Iran is biggest sponsor of terror. India always supported Iran for reason of maintaining peace, stability and security in Gulf Region. India and Iran are celebrating 70 year of glorious diplomatic relationship.

Key Words- Nuclear Deal, Energy Security, Sanctions, Oil Trade, Chabahar Port, Middle East, USA, Israel.

Introduction-

“Few people have been more closely related in origin and throughout history than the people of India and the people of Iran.”

— Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister.¹

The world is in the transition of power stage. India and Iran share rich historical ties from ancient period. In Mughal Period the ties between both countries were at peak. So many cultural ties on present day relations is often tough to measure. There ties provided a background to better economic and strategic relations in modern times. India's foreign policy is based on such values like peaceful co-existence, non-aggression, respect for sovereignty and non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Those values help to fair and healthy engagements with Iranian leadership.

Bilateral relations seem to be plummeting rapidly between India and Iran as New Delhi shown no sign of resuming oil trade with Tehran. with recent statement by Iranian Foreign minister Javad Zarif condemned the "wave of organised violence against Indian Muslims" and Indian government to "not let senseless thuggery prevail" and moreover Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Khamnei from commenting that recent violence in Delhi, If not prevented could lead to India's isolation from the world of Islam making crack in the India and Iran relations visible.

India seems reluctant to work with Iran after the US withdrawal from the nuclear deal. India not only stopped purchasing Iranian oil in May 2019 but also reduced budget on the investment on Chabahar. Soltaninejad, Assistant professor in, the University of Tehran argues that “Tehran is convinced that India cannot be the partner it needs to counter US sanctions”. India owes its rising power status, in part, to its increasingly close relationship with the United States. No matter how valuable Iran is for India, New Delhi would not endanger its relations with

¹ Jawaharlal Nehru, *Discovery of India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 148; Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), “India Iran Historical Links,” Indian Embassy, 2017, <http://www.indianembassy-tehran.ir/pages.php?id=17#f1>.

Washington for the sake of preserving its friendship with Tehran.

After the independence period, India's relations with Iran were complicated because Iran was the first country who recognized Pakistan. In cold war period Iran under the leadership of shah Pahlavi associated with USA and India was following Non-aligned policy and shah was a factor in Keeping Pakistan with USA. But the relations become soft in 1990's. When both state supported afghan Alliance during civil war in Afghanistan against Pakistan-backed Mujahedeen and after 1990's the relations with Iran becomes normal main reason is oil trade.

In 2001, Tehran declaration and Delhi declaration (2003) enhance the ties between Iran and India, providing base to economic relations. After NDA government came in power, Pm Narendra Modi visited Iran in May 2016 and signed 12 MOU, in many sectors including Chabahar port, mining and infrastructure. Pm Modi and Iran's president Hasan Rouhani discuss the Geo-political situation of the Middle East and ensure that all countries must be able to pursue the aspirations of their people for peace and prosperity in the world.

Security Cooperation

Both India and Iran wants stability in the central Asia region and Zero-tolerance against the terrorism. In order to bring out stability in West Asia, there is need for Iran's cooperation so USA wants to create pressure on Iran by putting sanctions and recently cancel the Nuclear Deal. So India also sees Iran as an important country in its immediate security space with special reference of geo-political situation. Both nations have cooperated on maritime sector special example is Chabahar port. Both nations also agreed on cooperation security, terrorism and organized crime. So defence relations may be qualitatively greater than they seem. Iran always played vital role in India's foreign policy with timely adding new fronts ,earlier sharing cultural historical ties to

energy,geostrategic location,trade,connectivity etc.In 1995,when India was facing diplomatic isolation from Muslim world due to Babri Masjid demolition a state visit by then Iranian president smooth the relationship. Also in, when organisation of the Islamic Conference OIC supported by western nations, was successful in pushing are solution at the UN commission on human rights to condemn India for violations in Kashmir, Iran had abstained from voting ,stopping the OIC from building consensus, Visits by Indian PM Narshimha Rao in 1983 paving

trade in large number of goods." that was an era when there was transparency in policies". Today, that missing today both sides are suspicious of each other" said Bhadrakumar(Ex ambassador). There are few issues crippling the relation i.e "Indo-US proximity" although India claims to be pursuing an independent foreign policy.

The main element of India's interest in Iran is its strategic location. Iran shared border with Turkey, Iraq, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and most important Caspian Sea. So Iran can provide India access to Afghanistan and central Asia without Pakistan's interference. So India can complete china in central Asia region and ensure its energy security. India considers Iran as a significant extended neighbour. Indian pressure in central Asia would minimize Pakistan wants to unilateral control over Afghanistan which is directly connected with central Asia. In India's immediate neighbourhood, both India and Iran share an interest in stabilizing Afghanistan and in ensuring that it does not become the launching pad for terrorists again. Both have shared concerns regarding Pakistan's stability and radicalisation as well as the security of its nuclear weapons. Washington has supported India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.

Chabahar Port-

The most important India's interest in Iran is the Chabahar port, which is an important factor in bilateral relations. This port is located in south eastern Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan region, close to western Indian port Kandala and Mumbai. Chabahar port is also important from strategic point of view because this is only 40 miles away from Pakistan's Gwadar Port, which under the Chinese control. Gwadar Port is seen as "Pearl" in China's string of Pearls policy to encirclement to India. Chabahar port also provides an access to India to connect with international North-south Transport corridor, which connected central Asia and Russia. India has spent 100 million dollar, to built 135 mile Zarang to Delaram highway in Afghanistan near Iran Border. India is also planning to connect this highway with Chabahar port. India agreed to develop this port in 2003. In 2016 a tri-lateral agreement between Iran, India & Afghanistan was signed for transit corridors to Afghanistan for Indian goods.

Figure 1: Chabahar port

Source: India Today

After Chabahar port is operational, Afghanistan's dependency on Pakistan decreased in trade. India and Iran also aimed combating terror groups in Pakistan. Pakistan may also fear India's presence in Iran to monitor port city Gwadar.

The United State's Factor

India's growing relations with USA affects India's ties with Iran on various times, especially in United Nations. India sometimes reduced its oil import from Iran to corporate to USA. In recent times Iran supported to Houti rebels group in ongoing civil-war in Yemen. So USA imposed new sanctions on Iran. USA is putting immigration restrictions on Iranian citizens. In past time also USA puts Iran is evil-axis group including Iraq and north-Korea. USA led by Trump supported to Saudi Arab and Israel in Middles East. Israel was always against any relaxation to Iran in its Nuclear Programme.

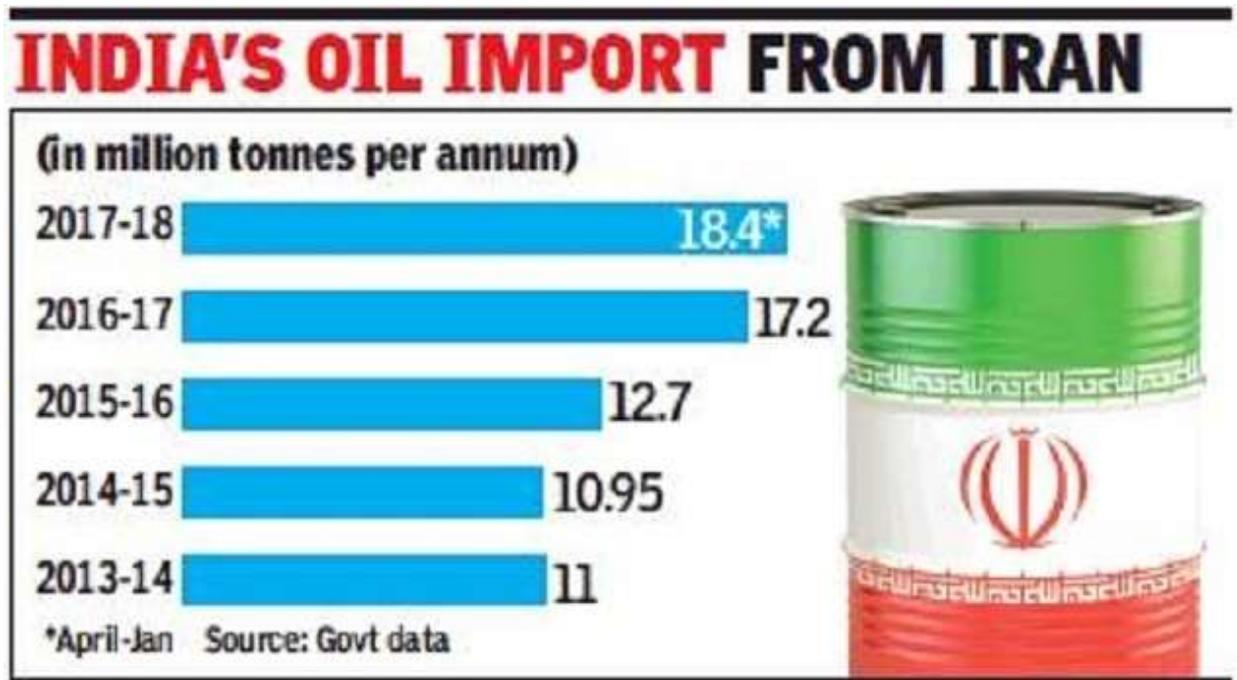
Iran is an oil rich country and sanctions against Iran would result in raising oil prices from Iran. It affects India's current account deficit negatively since oil exports to India would once again be carried out in rupees. In order to reduce effect of sanctions, Iran could move towards China to balance its trade, which would impact India's strategic interest in Iran. So new sanctions by USA on Iran could create an opportunity for China in the Middle East.

The biggest obstacles between USA-Iran relations is Iran's Nuclear programme. USA thinks that with the help of oil and gas reserves Iran is developing Nuclear Weapons, which could be a big threat to its ally Saudi-Arab in the region. USA is determined not to allow Iran to achieve nuclear weapons. So USA with other (P5+1) puts pressure on Iran to stop its nuclear programme. So by moving close to USA in recent times India has therefore come under pressure several times in last decades but under new regime since 2014, India's stand is more clear and India shows that its foreign policy is not under any pressure. India voted against Iran because Iran is party of NPT so they have to follow the NPT so they have to follow the NPT guidelines. This is the reason why India on 24 September 2005 voted against Iran in IAEA and again in February 2006 due to Hyde Act, India supported US resolution IAEA. But India supported Iran's right to peaceful uses of nuclear power, under IAEA safeguards. Perhaps these votes could be explained as part of India's strategy to prove that admitting India into the global non-proliferation regime would strengthen the regime, not weaken it.

Both America and Iran are strategically and economically important for India. India must have to act independent on bilateral issues and would fulfill its strategic and national interest. If USA interferes in oil imports from Iran then relations with USA would suffer, India made its stand clear in recent times. India is not an official ally of USA so India is independent to take its own decisions on Iran. India has so far been forced to conduct a careful balancing act to ensure that its mutually beneficial ties with Iran.

India always maintained a position of 'Strategic Autonomy'. USA will continue wants India's help to check Chinese Power. So recently, USA's former Secretary of state Rex Tillerson said that USA would not want to block business activities between India and Iran. This time after Trump withdrawal from nuclear agreement with Iran, European Union rejects the Trump's move because this could be dangerous for stability in the region.

Iran's exports to India in 2008 was 13.8 Billion Dollar, but in 2015 its drop to 6.2 Billion dollar due to USA's sanctions on Iran and dispute regarding payments issue between both countries. Main exports were Petroleum and its products, organic and inorganic chemicals and fertilizers. In 2017, Iran was second largest oil supplier to India. Which show that trade is boosting in the new regime in India.



Conclusion-

India and Iran have multi-dimensional relations, specially a long history of cultural ties. For India, these ties are also important with geopolitical and economic interests in terms of energy security, infrastructural development activities investment like Chabahar Port and highways and security cooperation because, Iran is a gateway to Central Asia for India. Iran is also suffering from cross border terrorism and drug trafficking activities from Pakistan. So both nations should cooperate to combating with extremist group which are responsible for terror activities. The development of Chabahar Port is multi-dimensional strategy of India to bypass Pakistan to reach Central Asia.

But with so many opportunities with a healthy relationship with Iran, There are also many challenges for India in the Middle East region. India has to balance its engagement and ties

with different countries like-Israel, Saudi Arab, UAE, Iran and others. Israel and Saudi Arab are against Iran's nuclear programme and they want total elimination of Iran's Nuclear Programme, where India is in support of peaceful nuclear programme of Iran for energy purposes. There is another challenge in India-Iran relationship faced in processing payment mechanism in oil trade. India wants pay in rupee, but due to sanctions Iran wants payment in dollar to increase its foreign reserve ratio, so this resulted drop in trade.

India maintains a unique position as a long time friend of Iran and other gulf countries, While a strategic relationship with Israel and United States also. So in future these relations would be more dynamic. A closer look indicates India's foreign policy is not free of the US pressure with the trump administration tightening its noose around Iran, India again finding itself in difficulty. Reducing its oil import under sanctions put by USA on Iran and projects like IPI (India, Pakistan, Iran) gas pipeline could bring peace unfortunately could never realised due to US pressure. Eventually, India tookover operations at Shahid beheshti terminal in Chabahar in December 2018 however, plans to develop a railway link from the port till the Afghan border has not made any progress, which has upset the Iranians along with companies now unwilling to take the risk of in testing in the infrastructure development. Sources say a new set of stringent sanctions coming in as tensions raging between the US and Iran over the assassination of Iran's top military leader **Qassem Soleimani**, Indian firms are unwilling to take interest. All this hesitant Actions by India under influence of USA has lead to suspicion of its credibility for Iran said by Ayatollah Khomeini. At this juncture India seriously needs to relook its diplomatic relations. As India is emerging power its perhaps the time that India start taking decisions independent of US pressure otherwise it may loose vitals stakes in its national interests.

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