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Güç Dengelerindeki Değişimin Uluslararası Sistem Üzerindeki Dönüştürücü Etkisi: ABD ve Çin Rekabeti Üzerine Bir Analiz

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&
Sinem Kocamaz**

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Küresel Siyasetin Gölgesinde Hindistan ve İran İlişkileri: Kısa Tarihsel Bir Bakış

Mukhtar Ahmad Bhat

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İçindekiler / Table of Contents

Araştırma Makaleleri / Research Articles

105

**Güç Dengelerindeki Değişimin Uluslararası Sistem Üzerindeki
Dönüştürücü Etkisi:
ABD ve Çin Rekabeti Üzerine Bir Analiz**

The Transforming Effect of Change in the Balance of Power on the International System:

An Analysis on the US-China Competition

Seda Gözde Tokath & Sinem Kocamaz

143

**India and Iran Relations under the Shadow of Global Politics:
A Brief Historical Overview**

*Küresel Siyasetin Gölgesinde Hindistan ve İran İlişkileri:
Kısa Tarihsel Bir Bakış*

Mukhtar Ahmad BHAT

165

Temel İnsan İhtiyaçları Teorisi ve Şili'deki Mapuçe Çatışması

The Mapuche Conflict in Chile within the Framework of Basic Human Needs Theory

Sedat Taşkiran & Sezai Özçelik

200

Hindistan'da Hindutva Söylemi'nin Ortaya Çıkışı ve Gelişimi

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Mehmet Erkan KILLIOĞLU

ARAŞTIRMA MAKALESİ / RESEARCH ARTICLE

**INDIA AND IRAN RELATIONS UNDER THE
SHADOW OF GLOBAL POLITICS:
A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

Mukhtar Ahmad BHAT*

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Abstract

In contemporary world politics, India and Iran occupy great strategic significance. Both countries have huge convergence of national interests. Collaboration and cooperation between the countries would resolve their respective domestic issues and challenges and play a determining role in strengthening their role in global affairs. For a fast-growing economy and energy deficit country like India, Iran provides access to a huge amount of natural resources and opens up its vast untapped market for Indian finished goods and services. In addition to that, Iran, due to its geographic location can act as a transit route for India to reach strategically important countries in Central Asia and Afghanistan. Being the second-largest Shia populated country in the world after Iran and one of the highest energy importing countries, India occupies an important place in the strategic thinking of Iran. In the past, India was the second-largest oil-exporting destination for Iran and an important trading partner for Iran. Taking the structural realism as a theoretical framework, the article attempts to seek an answer to the questions, why despite belonging to a single-family, living together for many centuries and sharing common social, religious and traditional values, the two countries have been unable to transform their mutual understanding

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into a long term strategic partnership, and how the global events have affected their mutual understanding and replaced it with trust deficit.

Keywords: Global Re-Adjustment, India, Iran, China, USA

Küresel Siyasetin Gölgesinde Hindistan ve İran İlişkileri: Kısa Tarihsel Bir Bakış

Öz

Çağdaş dünya siyasetinde Hindistan ve İran büyük stratejik öneme sahiptir. Her iki ülkenin de ulusal çıkarlar konusunda aralarında büyük bir ortaklık bulunmaktadır. Ülkeler arasındaki işbirliği ve destek, yalnızca kendi iç sorunlarını ve zorluklarını çözmede değil, aynı zamanda küresel ilişkilerdeki rollerini güçlendirmelerinde belirleyici bir rol oynamaktadır. Hindistan gibi hızla büyüyen, ekonomi ve enerji açığı olan bir ülke için İran, yalnızca büyük miktarda doğal kaynağa erişim sağlamakla kalmayıp Hint mamulleri ve hizmetleri için geniş bir pazar sağlamaktadır. Ayrıca İran coğrafi konumu nedeniyle Hindistan'ın Orta Asya ve Afganistan'daki stratejik öneme sahip ülkelere ulaşması için bir geçiş yolu görevi yapabilmektedir. İran'dan sonra dünyanın en büyük Şii nüfusa sahip ikinci ülkesi ve en çok enerji ithal eden ülkelerden biri olan Hindistan, İran'ın stratejik vizyonunda önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Geçmişte Hindistan, İran için sadece ikinci en büyük petrol ihraç noktası değil, aynı zamanda önemli bir ticaret ortağıydı. Bu makale, yapısal realizm kuramından faydalanarak, tek bir aileye ait olmalarına, uzun yüzyıllardır birlikte yaşamalarına ve ortak sosyal, dini ve geleneksel değerleri paylaşmalarına rağmen, iki ülkenin karşılıklı anlayışlarını uzun vadeli stratejik bir ilişkiye neden dönüştüremedikleri sorusuna cevap aramaya çalışmaktadır. Makale küresel olayların iki ülkenin karşılıklı anlayışlarını nasıl etkilediğini ve yerini güven açığına nasıl bıraktığını da incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Küresel Yeniden Ayarlama, Hindistan, İran, Çin, Amerika

Introduction

India and Iran are two ancient civilisations with strong historical and cultural ties. Over the years both have enriched one another's culture, traditions, art, trade and economy, literature and history. The importance and relevance of Iran for India is crucial and lies particularly in Iran's geographic location as a gateway to the countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan as well as its huge energy sources.

In the South, Iran shares its border with the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf, which is the biggest energy-exporting centre of the World. In the North, it borders with Caspian Sea, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. In its East, it shares borders with countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. On its North Western side, Iran has Iraq and Turkey. So, Iran's geographical position had catapulted Iran to play the role of an important power in the Middle East (Hussain and Shahriar, 2013, pp. 260-261).

Iran is in need and search of substantial markets for exporting its immense oil and gas sources. At the same time, Iran also requires huge investments for developing its oil and gas industry, economy, education, health, technology and employment. Iran has been well aware of the importance of cordial relationships with other countries, particularly India, at the juncture of its international isolation and economic sanctions. India provides the third-largest booming market for Iranian crude oil. Access to many necessary commodities food items like rice as well as medicine, iron, steel, fabrics, yarn and tea, organic/inorganic/agrochemicals, rubber manufactured products, modest technology. In addition to these things, India can provide cheap and high-quality educational opportunities for the Iranian middle class. Iran can also get substantial help from India in modernising its defence sector.

The question arises why, despite belonging to a single-family, living together for many centuries and sharing common social, religious, and traditional values, and strong convergence of national interests, the two countries have been unable to transform their mutual understanding into a long term strategic partnership. Instead of bringing the two nations close to each other, the trust deficit has increased immensely.

Making the structural realist theory as the basis of the study, an attempt has been made to study how the global events have affected their mutual understanding and replaced it with trust deficit, a situation in which it becomes difficult to trust the other.

The main emphasis of the theory is the structure of the international system, countries, continuities, and changes of the system. The structural realists prefer to explain international politics within a framework of the anarchic structure of the international system. In anarchic conditions, there is no assurance that one country will not attack another because there is no global authority or government for regulating the behaviour of countries at the global level. Therefore, each country tries to increase its power for maintaining national security. The structural realist theory argues that the leadership

of a country is the hostage of the structure of the state system and its deterministic logic, which dictates what they must do in the conduct of their foreign policy. They held that there is no room for foreign policymaking that is independent of the structure of the system (Baylis and Smith, 2005, p. 169.).

The structural realist approach focuses mainly on the environment in which the countries are carrying their activities for securing respective national interests. As the structural realist like Kenneth N. Waltz believes that it is the changes within the global power structure that initiates the process of policymaking for countries (Waltz, 2000, p 5). The anarchical international system where there is no authority above the countries and sense of insecurity push the countries toward the race of maintaining a substantial amount of power and to make sure no other country shifts the balance of power in its favour. Therefore, the countries are left with no choice but to compete for acquiring power as much as possible for maintaining a favourable balance of power structure (Mearsheimer, n.d., p. 72).

Over the decades, the India-Iran relations have not remained immune from the changes that occurred at the regional and global levels. Keeping in view the transformation of regional politics from geopolitics to geo-economics, both countries are in the process of re-adjusting their alignment for securing a favourable balance in the future power structure. With respect to the interpretation of the India and Iran relationship through the structural perspective, both countries can be considered rising powers of the twenty-first century in their respective regions.

Both countries enjoy a great deal of influence in their regions, particularly because of the changes that the two regions experienced in the post 9/11 era. India, with its vast territory, past experience as the leader of developing countries, rapid economic growth, and developing friendly relations with other countries, particularly with the United States is knocking as a new aspiring power in world politics. India has gone ahead from its participation in G77 to the core group of the G-15 nations and has shifted its focus to global issues like environmental protection, sustainable development, promotion and protection of human rights and democracy.

Iran, on the other hand, has experienced an increase in its strategic significance because of regional instability and deepening its influence in countries like Yemen, Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, as well as in Palestine. Further, Iran, like India, is in search of ways to increase its presence at a global level by expanding its area of influence by developing relations

with other countries, particularly in South Asia, Central Asia and European regions. However, there are many impediments in their way of emerging as new powers at the global level. For India, there are issues like the giant Chinese economy and industrial development, Pakistan and Afghanistan as security challenges, as well as the issues of managing its relations with the US and Iran and rapidly rising energy demands. For Iran, there are issues like Iran's antagonistic relations with the US, Israel and competitive Saudi Arabia on the one hand and the security challenges that Iran faces in the wake of the instability in the region and international isolation due to the imposition of international sanctions on the other hand (Hunter, 2010, p. 9).

Over the years, there have been scholars and analysts — Alam Anwar (India and Iran relations: An Assessment of Contemporary Relations, 2011), Naaz Farah (West Asia and India: Changing Prospective, 2005), Dietl Gulshan (Re-engaging with Iran, 2009), Tennyson K.N. (India-Iran Relations Challenges Ahead, 2012), Alam Mukhtar (India and Iran: Geopolitical and geostrategic Partners, 2008), Zahirinejad Mahnaz (Iran and India Relations: Need for re-engagement, 2013), Balooch Mahmoud (Iran and India's Cooperation in Central Asia, 2009), Sisakht Abdolmajid Yazdanpanah & Mahmoudi Armin (The Role of Energy in Iran and India Relations, 2012)— that carried research work on the India and Iran relations and areas related to it particularly energy, trade and transit routes. However, in this article, an attempt has been made to highlight different phases and study the changing nature and future prospects of India and Iran relations.

The article is divided into different phases specifying ups and downs and how changes in the international power structure shaped their bilateral relations. The first phase discusses the period of mutual interdependence in India-Iran bilateral relations. The second phase discusses the period of distrust and uncertainty. The third phase discusses the process of rapprochement and the fourth phase highlights how the two countries are now pushed by changing regional power structure towards the process of re-alignment process in order to have a favourable balance of power structure.

1) The Golden Era of India and Iran Relations

The people of both countries have been enjoying close historical harmony, since the days of ancient times. Through the ages they interacted and enriched each other in many spheres of life. As such a lot of likeness and similarities developed between these two nations not only in their art, architecture,

customs, traditions, and languages but in attitude towards life as well.

Historians claimed that Indo-Iranians belonged to a single-family and lived together for many centuries in the pasture land of Central Asia or Oxus Valley with a common language and were a member of the great Indo-European family of language. In the course of time got divided into two branches “Indic” and “Iranic”. With the passage of time one developed as Sanskrit in India and another as Avesta in Iran. Avesta then became Pahlavi and ultimately developed as Persian. Professor Firoz Cowasji is of the opinion that “It has now been ascertained that both the Avesta and Vedic Sanskrit are sister languages, astonishingly similar in vocabulary, grammar and syntax. So close is the resemblance that a passage could be read in both languages in parallel column with minor changes” (Indian Embassy in Tehran, n.d.).

The ancestors of the Persian and the Indian people came out from a common homeland, sharing a common linguistic and racial past. The intimate contact between India and Iran in matters of rituals, customs, norms or other ways of life is evident in their holy scriptures Vedas and Avesta, which are termed as their earliest literary monuments. There is much common between Zoroastrianism and the Vedic religion. The name of Hapta Hendu (in Sanskrit Sapta Sindhu seven rivers of Ancient India) is mentioned in Avesta whereas Ariya (name of the ancient name of Iran “Persia”) is mentioned in the Veda. Similarly, both the scriptures agree on the cause which led to the migration of the Aryans from their original homeland (Oxus valley). Veda accounts mention it as a flood of water and Avesta accounts cite it as a flood of snow and frost. The name of the person who escaped this disaster is “Noah”, “Nuh” as in Arabic which is a changed version of “Manuh”. In both Iranian Avesta and Indian Veda versions, he is the son of the same person “Vivasvat or Vivanghat”. Another common thing between the two nations is the sanctity of Fire and belief in its holiness. Its worship was supposed to be of much importance and was considered as a source to get rid of the black magic, impure souls, cleaning and sanitising environment. This tradition is still prevalent in some parts of both countries where people believe in the Zoroastrian religion (Bhargava, 1971, p. 25).

The historical connection between the Indians and the Iranians began from the times of the great Achaemenian King Darius Hystaspes (Dara I), Whose reign represents the climax of Iranian magnificence in the 6th and 5th centuries BC. Darius dispatched his Greek Admiral Scylax to explore the North Indian region. And on the strength of the survey so made,

Darius sent an army and conquered Panjab in 512 BC. In the vast empire of Darius, the Panjab was the richest province, adding nearly a third of the revenue of the whole empire. The name of India does appear recorded on the walls of the royal palaces of Persepolis as well as on the Naqsh-i-Rustam. On the grand staircase of Darius's ruined place at Persepolis carved effigies of persons offering tribute to the Persian monarch from various countries can still be seen. Among others are perceptible the figures of two Indians carrying the gifts to the Emperor in the typical Indian fashion in their peculiar shoulder baskets. Even after the death of Darius, governors continued to be nominated by the Iranian government to rule over certain parts of ancient India (Gorekar, 2002, pp. 100-141).

After Alexander's conquest, Iranian contacts continued, and it is said that the architecture of the buildings of Ashoka was influenced by Iran. The effigies of the four lions on the capitals of the famous column of Ashoka at Sarnath near Benaras and much of their design had been suggested by Iranian architecture. Sir J.H. Marshall recognises the Iranian influence besides the Hellenistic. The magnificence of the Mauryan Court may possibly have been imitation to a certain extent of the Iranian court. There had been a good deal of relations between the two countries in those days. Because when Alexander conquered Iran (330 BC), Iranian artists and craftsmen who were scattered far and wide subsequently arrived at the newly formed Mauryan Empire. Firoze Cowasji Davar has observed the Iranian influence on the Mauryan dynasty and the people in four ways:

- In the "Kharoshthi" script prevalent on the border between Iran and India.
- In the long-continued use of the Iranian word "Kshatrap" (satrap).
- In the familiarity between the Iranian and Ashokan rock-inscriptions.
- In the resemblance between the Iranian and Mauryan architecture (Davar, 1962, p. 57).

The letters exchanged between the Mughal emperors and the Safavid rulers consistently emphasised the formal, spiritual friendship, and accord among the two Emperors. These expressions of mutual friendship and warmth are not only found in the various letters between Abul Fazl and Mir Shafi Amuli but also in the notes that the poets and calligraphists sent to each other. The poems of poets, biographical sketches of men of talents like architects, scholars, painters, calligraphers, musicians, and other artists available in chronicles like the *Ain-i-Akbari*, *Muntakhab-ul Tawarikh*, *Tabaqat-i-Akbari* and

Muzzakkira-i-Ahbab confirm the continuous presence of the Persians at the Mughal court and continuous exchange of ideas, men, and commodities between the two countries. (Haider, 2004, pp. 376 and 380).

The Mughal Kings were kind and large-hearted towards the foreigners particularly the Iranians, who left an indelible stamp on the architectural, administrative, cultural, literature as well as on other spheres of Indian people. The Iranian poetry particularly of Sadi, Rumi, Nizami, and Hafez have played a considerable part in the evolution of Persian literature in India and have left behind an indivisible common heritage. During the Mughal period, India became the second home for Iranian culture, art, architecture, festivals, and art of gardening. Even the Persian language was made a tool of communication not only in official matters but also as a means for the interchange of thoughts, culture and literature between the two countries (Haider, 2004, pp. 376 and 380).

There is a long list of important books related to different aspects of life like astronomy, art, health and hygiene, history, mathematics, Unani-medicine “a system of medicine practised in parts of India”, music, and religion which were translated. Even a full-fledged department was created by Emperor Akbar, where people were constantly engaged in translating valuable books from Sanskrit to Persian and vice-versa. The learned scholars who were engaged in translating Sanskrit works into Persian were Abu'l-Fadl Faidi the great poet, Abdul Qadir Badayuni, the great historian, Naqib Khan the outstanding theologian, Sultan Thansari, a noble philosopher and Mulla Shiri a great thinker. They were also assisted in their work of translation by other Sanskrit scholars well-versed in Indian Philosophy and science. (Gorekar, 2002, pp. 100-135).

Books like Mahabharata was translated into Persian under the title of Razm-i-Nameh, Panchtantra of Vinusarman translated into Persian under the title of the Beast-fables. Kalhana's Rajatarangini well known dynastic history of Kashmir was known in Persian as Bahru'i-Asmar, and Tarikh-i-kashmir. Athharva Veda, a work on rituals, magic, and popular parties was first translated by Abdul'l-Qadir Badayuni with the help of Shaikh Bhawan khan a Brahman convert and later on by Haji Ibrahim Sirhindi and was termed Athar-Ban. Baskarchary's Lalavati a work on arithmetic and geometry were translated into the Persian language by Faidi. Mukamal Khan Gujrati translated Nilkantha's Tajika a work on astronomy under the title of Tajik in into the Persian language. Ramayana, Upanisads, the Bhagavadgita besides other works of importance such as those on medicine, music, mathematics and so on were

rendered into Persian. It is generally believed that the basis of theoretical knowledge in Unani medical art was borrowed by the Indians from the Persian works of experts like Abu Muhammad bin-i-Zakarriya-Ar-Razi and Ibn-i-Sina. Persian contribution in treatment and pharmacy is commonly acknowledged. Humayun's secretary Yusuf Ibn-i-Muhammad of Herat is credited with the compilation of prescriptions and remedies for all diseases. Muhammad Riza of Shiraz dedicated his work on Hygiene and health entitled *Riyaz-i-Alamigiri* to Aurangzeb (Gorekar, 2002, pp. 100 and 138).

In the splendour of Mughal architecture, the pattern is clearly exhibited as distinct from the novel features which characterise Iranian art. Mughal architecture is noticed as a fusion and harmonious synthesis of a conceptual scheme, technique, and ornamentations that bear the imprint of Iranian architectural features. The most astonishing were the underground and underwater structures and the style and design of gardens established by the Mughals. The Iranian influence is clearly visible in the entire ornamental and decorative schemes of Mughal architecture. The prominent architectural monument of the Mughal period inspired by the Iranian art tradition is, the Tomb of Humayun at Delhi, Tomb of Akbar, Taj Mahal, Tomb of Itimad al-Dawla at Agra, Buland Darwaza at Fatehpur Sikri, Jama Masjid Delhi, Forts at Agra, Delhi and Lahore (Haider, 2004, pp. 367, 375 and 380).

The four quartered Garden (Chahar-bagh) of the Mughals is Iranian in essence as well as in detail. Garden craft has been a favourite art in Iran since ancient times. Iranian Gardens are essentially terraced gardens, a garden in descending stages with the life-giving water as one of the principal adornments as well the very life and soul of the garden itself. Tanks were so constructed as to keep the water brimming to the level of the paths on either side. Imbued with these traditions of Iranian garden craft Babur founded Bagh Gul-i-Afshan, now popularly known as Rambagh at Agra in about 1526. He also laid a full-fledged Bagh Hasht- Bihesht at Agra in imitation of its counterpart at Tabriz and a Bagh-i-Nilوفر or Lotus-garden in Dholpur. This way Babur introduced the Iranian garden traditions in India and introduced them extremely well. His descendants carried forward this tradition to magnificent proportions. The famous Mughal Gardens of Kashmir, the Shalimar, the Nishat, the garden of Pinjore, the gardens of the tombs of Humayun, Akbar, Itmad-ud-Daulah, Jehangir and the Taj Mahal and indoor gardens of the Agra Fort and the Red Fort at Delhi all owe their origin to the Iranian tradition of gardening (Haider, 2004, pp. 367, 370 and 378). So Mughal period not

only continued the legacy of ancient Indo-Iranian relations but provided a strong foundation for developing long term relations between the two countries which have their roots deep into the hearts of common people.

2) The Period of Distrust and Uncertainty

With the start of the British rule over India, the ancient cultural, educational, social and large scale interpersonal contacts abruptly disappeared as traditional routes were diverted from North to South. According to the Jawaharlal Nehru British rulers snapped all the ancient lines and routes of India through which India was connected to all her neighbouring countries. By developing sea routes the British brought India closer to Europe particularly to England, which brought an end to the overland contacts between India and Iran (Nehru, n.d., p. 153). Independence of India from British colonialism not only gave birth to the intense necessity of developing diplomatic relations with India's neighbouring and other countries of the world but also brought an end to India's age's old territorial continuity with Iran by the creation of Pakistan. However, the strong historical, political, cultural and economic ties between India and Iran determined their foreign policy perceptions towards each other. Which ultimately led to the formalisation of their bilateral relations by signing the Treaty of Friendship on 5 March 1950. It clearly states that 'there shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the Governments of the two countries and their differences shall be settled through ordinary diplomatic channels, by arbitration and peaceful means as deemed suitable by them.

The changes which occurred in the international structure after the end of WWII gave birth to the qualitative differences in their bilateral relations which ultimately resulted in an increase in mutual misunderstanding and trust deficit. Firstly, on the part of Iran, in 1955 Iran joined the Pro-Western defence alliance by signing the Baghdad Pact (renamed the Central Treaty Organisation, or CENTO) with Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. Secondly Iran is one of the first countries that recognised Pakistan in 1947. In Indian perception, one of Pakistan's motives in joining the alliance was to mobilise the support of the member countries of CENTO on the Kashmir issue at the global level and particularly at the UN. India on the one hand adopted the policy of non-alignment along with the Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser while on the other hand left a soft corner towards USSR. Nehru's support to Gamal Abdel Nasser who campaigned against monarchies and tried to unite the Arab world on the pattern of the United Arab

Republic (UAR) by a combination of Syria and Egypt increased the feeling of insecurity for the Iranian ruler Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi (Naaz, 2008, pp. 1911-1926). These events led to the feeling of mistrust in their bilateral relations. No doubt, in February 1956 the Shah of Iran visited India in order to sort out the differences. In his meetings with Indian leadership and in his public statements Shah did refer to the differences and also highlighted the age old relations. He also tried to assure that Iran's ties with Pakistan were neither directed against India nor it would have any kind of influence on the Indo-Iranian bilateral relationship. In September 1959, Jawaharlal Nehru visited Iran with the same purpose. The visit resulted in a positive impact on Indo-Iran relations, but much remained to be achieved because of the unfolding of various incidents that led to a deterioration of the regional situation (Hussain, 2012, pp. 859, 865 and 868-870).

In the next decade from 1962 to 1971, the South Asian region experienced the worst diplomatic crisis. During these years the main three countries of the region got involved in frequent armed conflict. First India-China war in 1962 and then India-Pakistan wars in 1965 and 1971. Due to these crises Indo-Iran bilateral relations suffered. Iran's full support to India during the 1962 Indo-China war played an important role in wiping out the trust deficit in the Indo-Iran bilateral relationship. But all these efforts could not prevent rupture in their relationship because of the outbreak of the India-Pakistan wars of 1965. In which Iran sided with Pakistan both diplomatically as well as militarily and declared India as the aggressor. This did not go down well with India (Safia, 1969, pp. 51-63).

The 1979 Iranian Revolution diametrically changed the entire structure of Iran's socio-economic and political system. It brought down the decades old monarchy and replaced it with theocracy under the leadership of Ayatollah Khomeini. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 had an all-round impact on the domestic, regional, and international politics of Iran. Iran's polarised domestic policies, its war with Iraq, hostage crisis, breaking off diplomatic and economic relations with the US and imposition of economic sanctions were some of the consequences of the Iranian revolution of 1979 (Sayeed, 1994, p. 6). With respect to India and Iran relations, the establishment of a theocracy, which came with the slogan of supporting the oppressed Muslims around the globe, the Iran-Iraq war and invasion of the USSR in Afghanistan did not allow the two countries to strengthen their bilateral relations as both the countries had different approaches towards the issues. In the

case of Afghanistan, India adopted pro-soviet while Iran adopted an anti-Soviet posture. On the issue of Iraq-Iran, India being the energy-deficient country and its dependence on the oil imports from Iraq tried to remain neutral instead of supporting Iran did not go well to Iran. All these developments both at the domestic, regional and global levels created hurdles and deepened the mistrust and trust deficit between the two countries. (Roy, 1987).

3) The Era of Reconstruction

Iran after the death of Ayatollah Khomeini went through the phases of successive changes at the national as well as at the international level. At the national level on 4 June 1989 the Iranian Assembly of Leadership experts met and chose Sayed Ali Khamenei by 60 out of 74 votes as new Spiritual Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran. All political titles of Khomeini except “Imam” were transferred to Khamenei. On the other hand, on 8 July 1989 the Constitutional Reform Council completed its review of the Iranian constitution and suggested amendments in the constitution of 1979 as per the instructions of the late Ayatollah Khomeini. On July 28, 1989 nearly 50 days after the selection of Khamenei new Supreme Leader, the people of Iran, besides electing Mr Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani as the new President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, approved the amendment of the Constitution. The new constitution established a Presidential form of government by vesting all executive powers of the Prime Minister in the President but with some degree of subordination to the Supreme leader (Arjomand, 2009, pp. 36-38). At the international level the withdrawal of the USSR from Afghanistan, the collapse and disintegration of the USSR and the rise of a unipolar world under the leadership of the US as well as the Iraq-Kuwait war in 1990, were the few important events that changed the whole structure of the international system. On the part of Iran, the new leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei and President Rafsanjani tried to reconstruct the country economically as well as politically. Rafsanjani’s era was denoted as the “Era of Reconstruction.” In order to heal up the wounds of the ten-year-long war and to reconstruct Iran’s economy, Rafsanjani appointed technocrats and graduates as his Cabinet Members who could deal efficiently with the critical period for the survival of the Islamic Republic of Iran internally as well as externally (Takeyh, 2009, pp. 112-113). Further, Iranian President Rafsanjani started re-approaching not only to its neighbouring countries but also to the countries of the South

Asian region particularly China and India with two main objectives:

- a) To end isolation at the international level by developing friendly relations with other countries to counter the Dual Containment policy of the US.
- b) To get access to the technology, experts and market for its natural gas reserves which is a pre-requisite for restructuring the country (Hunter, 2010, p. 117).

India on the other hand with the support of the USSR had developed its economy and defence capabilities to a great degree during the Cold War. Therefore, with the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of the unipolar international system India faced new challenges to re-adjust its position in the new global order by changing its pro-Soviet stand and finding out the new sources for strengthening its economic growth. Keeping in mind the changing global order, India tried to give a new direction to its economic structure and foreign policy by adopting the policy of economic liberalisation and privatisation (Hunter, 2010, p. 117).

However, the war to liberate Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991 led to an abrupt drop in oil supplies to India, due to which India faced energy problems as both the countries Iraq as well as Kuwait supplied two-thirds of oil for India. In addition to that with the disintegration of the USSR, India lost its defence and economic backbone. India also faces problems in getting access to the Central Asian countries because Pakistan didn't allow India to have access to the Central Asian countries through its territory. Therefore, India started looking at Iran not only as an access route to the Central Asian countries but also as a source of energy as well as the market for its furnished goods and services. The changing global scenario and the convergence of their national interests acted as the push and pull factors for both countries which led to serious thinking on both sides to find out the areas of mutual interests and ways of strengthening their mutual cooperation. (Geoffrey, 2010, pp. 52-53).

Over the years particularly in the first decade of the twenty-first century both the countries reached a tremendous closeness in their bilateral cooperation, with the signing of the Tehran and Delhi Declarations in 2001 and 2003. The bilateral relationship touched new heights by not only enhancing economic cooperation but also political understanding on common threats like cross-border terrorism, extremism and drug trafficking to the security of the two countries. The Delhi Declaration stimulated the military relations in the areas (a) Sea-line control and security. (b) Indo-Iran joint naval exercises. (c) Joint working team on counter-terrorism and

counter-narcotics. (Annual Statement, 2003-2004). Further in a move to deepen their economic relations India and Iran agreed to construct transportation and transit routes that link the sub-continent with the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan and Central Asia. India also agreed to help Iran in developing strategically important Chahbahar Port. For increasing the trade and commercial activities between the two, they conferred each other the status of “Most Favoured Nation” as well. (Mohan, 2003, p. 33).

More importantly the importance and relevance of Iran for India increased and became crucial particularly because of Iran’s geographic location, its huge energy sources and as a gateway to the countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan. In the South, Iran shares its border with the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf which is the biggest energy-exporting centre of the World. In the North it borders with Caspian Sea, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. In its east, it shares borders with the Countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. On its North Western side Iran has Iraq and Turkey. So, it is Iran’s geographical position that had catapulted Iran to play the role of an important power in the West Asian region (Mafinezam and Mehrabi, 2008. pp. 77-78). It is more so after the US armed intervention in 2001 in Afghanistan and 2003 in Iraq that weakened the two neighbours of Iran. While Iran on the other hand is not only in need and search of substantial markets for exporting its immense oil and gas sources. But at the same time Iran also requires huge investments for developing its oil and gas industry, economy, education, health, technology, and employment. Iran has been well aware of the importance of a cordial relationship with other countries particularly India at the juncture of its international isolation and economic sanctions. India provides the third-largest booming market for Iranian crude oil. Access to many necessary commodities food items, rice as well as medicine, iron, steel, fabrics, yarn and tea, organic/inorganic/agrochemicals, rubber manufactured products, and modest technology. Also cheap and high-quality educational opportunities for the Iranian middle class is available in India. In the defence sector also Iran can get substantial help from India in modernising its defence sector. India is quite capable of playing a crucial role in the above-mentioned fields (Mohanty, 2012, p. 33). The relationship between India and Iran is based on the interests that are capable of providing a very strong basis for developing a mutual and long term strategic relationship. But with the emergence of the Iranian nuclear issue, the imposition of international economic sanctions on Iran and India’s surrender before the US

pressure are the main events that again derailed the India and Iran relations. No doubt, during the Dr Manmohan Singh led government India showed some resilience against US pressure by adopting different and alternative means for carrying on its trade and economic relations with Iran, even Iran supplied oil to India on different payments but under the Narendra Modi led government, India surrendered before the US pressure and halted all trade and economic relations with Iran.

4) The Era of Global Re-Adjustment

The rapidly changing regional and global geopolitics have a huge impact and will determine not only the future of India and Iran bilateral relationship but also their role at the individual level in the future regional and global power structure. The decline in the US hegemony in world politics has given rise to the emergence of new power centres like China and Russia and has intensified the competition for expanding their areas of influence. The competition has pushed world politics into the phase of global re-alignment in which every country particularly India and Iran is trying to re-adjust their positions by shifting their alignments for securing their national interests.

Both the countries are facing challenges at the domestic and regional. In the case of India, at the domestic level it is going through the phase of slow economic growth, lack of secure and suitable energy resources, lack of market for its goods and services, and so on. While on the regional level India is facing encirclement and isolation because of the increasing Chinese influence under the Belt and Road Initiative (under its “Silk Road Economic Belt” and “21st Century Maritime Silk Road”) that connects countries of different regions, which constitutes sixty per cent of the world population and thirty-three per cent GDP of the global wealth. It would give a new shape to global and regional politics in the coming years. India from the very beginning has been seriously concerned with the Chinese BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) and has expressed its concerns both formally and informally. There are also think tanks and academicians like United States Institute for Peace (USIP), Brig Gurmeet Kanwa (Brig, Indian Army Retd.), former Distinguished Fellow, IDSA, former Director, Centre for Land Warfare Studies, New Delhi), and Joshua T. White (researcher specialising in political stability, Islamic politics, and security in South Asia), Dr Subhash Kapila (former Indian diplomat to Japan and the United States) etc. consider the initiative as a strategic and collective move on the part of China to encircle India and to strengthen and increase Chinese dominance in the global and South Asian regional power structure. India

considers the Chinese investment not only as a soft tool to imperialise the poor and underdeveloped countries but also to wean away vast natural resources, untapped market, huge low-cost manpower and develop the ports for military purposes in the long run. Further the Chinese support and backing to Pakistan make India even more suspicious about the strategies of China. India considers the backing of China to Pakistan both on the domestic and external front by providing military, economic and diplomatic support is sabotaging India's initiatives against Pakistan. The involvement of China in Kashmir through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will make China the third party to the dispute which further internationalises the Kashmir dispute.

To overcome the rising national security concerns due to China's increasing influence and encirclement policy, India started collaborating with the US at bilateral and multinational forums to restrict the Chinese influence. For instance, the establishment of the "Quadrilateral Group" of countries, India, Japan, Australia and the US (the Quad) for the containment of expanding China's influence. The recent Indo-Pacific Strategy report clearly mentions that the main objective of the Indo-Pacific Strategy is to disrupt China's attempts to re-shape and establish favourable regional and global order in which the countries of the Quadrilateral Group would play a very important role. With the objective of providing an alternative to the Chinese BRI and consolidating the US hegemony in the region, the US's Indo-Pacific Strategy is focused on two main points (a) Economic Integration and (b) Defence Cooperation with the countries of the Indo-Pacific region (The Defence Department, 2019). While on the other hand the decades-old strains in the US-Iran relations will not allow India to manoeuvre freely and independently as we witnessed during the Bush Administration and now under the Trump Administration. Even during the Bush Administration India in the beginning did show some resistance by continuing its oil imports from Iran by bypassing the US-dominated money and transport transit facilities. However India under the Modi regime has shown more tilt towards the US, India under the US pressure not only stopped the oil imports from Iran completely but took their cooperation to new levels by signing the defence deals like the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) for providing logistic support to each other, to transfer of technology an agreement on communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) was also signed and to facilitate partnership between Indian private defence manufacturing companies and the US defence manufacturing

industries Industrial Security Annexe to the General Security of Military Information Agreement (ISA-GSOMIA) was also signed. Under the Modi regime, both the countries have agreed to transform their mutual Strategic Partnership into an “Enduring Global Partnership in Twenty-First Century” (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2016).

Bearing in mind the growing India-US cooperation and India’s negligence towards its relationship with Iran, Iran considers partnership with China not only as an alternative and a shield against the US but also as a lifeline for its sanctions ridden economy. Even for China, Iran has huge strategic importance as it does not only have huge untapped energy resources, a vast market and a huge low-cost labour force. Both the countries are working for transforming their bilateral relations into long term strategic partnerships. In addition to that Iran has already expressed its eagerness for joining the Chinese ‘Belt and Road Initiative’. As per reports both the countries have agreed on concluding a 25-year long Bilateral Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. In addition to the mutual cooperation in defence, technology, health, energy, and education, Iran has opened the doors for Chinese investments in numerous sectors particularly in banking, telecommunication, railways, and ports. In return that China which is one of the biggest oil-consuming countries will get oil imports from Iran at a very low price for 25 years (Fassihi & Lee, 2020). Even China extended full support to Iran not only in opposing the imposition of economic sanctions but also rejected the US demand of halting trade and economic relations with Iran.

Despite India’s repeated assurances to strengthen its relations with Iran nothing changed on the ground. Despite getting waver from the US on the development of the strategically important Chabahar Port project, India delayed the project, even under the US pressure completely halted oil imports from Iran. Taking the changing global scenario into consideration Iran has also started to find its valuable options for overcoming the US imposed sanctions and unpredictable Indian behaviour which was Iran’s second-largest market for oil resources a few years back. India’s inconsistent Iran policy, has forced Iran to review the development of the projects assigned to India and pushed Iran to drop India from the development of the Faras-B gas field which was discovered by a consortium of three Indian companies ONGC, Oil India Limited and Indian Oil Corporation in 2008 in the Farsi offshore block of the Persian Gulf and to develop it locally (Tehran Times, 2020). In addition to that, Iran also dropped India from the 628 km long

Chabahar to Zahedan railway project that is connecting Afghanistan with the Chabahar Port. The project was signed by the two countries along with Afghanistan in 2016 and the project was to be financed by India but became the victim of India's delay tactics and slow progress (Financial Express, 2020). The Chabahar Port which has great strategic importance for India and is foreseen as a bridge for India to access Central Asia and Afghanistan is also under the scanner, Iran has invited Pakistan and China for the development of the Port. The signing of the \$ 400 billion investment deal between China and Iran has been seen by India as a new challenge to India and its regional goals as well as the claims of the exclusiveness of the Chabahar Port for India.

Conclusion

India and Iran are two ancient civilisations, and the centuries-old relationship has enriched both countries' culture, traditions, literature, art, architecture, and trade to a large extent. However, the relationship is not immune to the changes that occur in global politics, for instance, the British rule over India, the creation of Pakistan, the emergence of the Cold War, and the wars in both the regions, turned as hurdles in the growth of their mutual relations before and after the Cold War period. Despite the transformation of the global and regional order, the convergence of national interests of both the countries, particularly in energy, trade, infrastructure development and national security that would turn them into natural partners. (As Iran is surplus in natural resources while India is an energy deficit country and in search of secure and suitable energy resources, one is in search of foreign investment and the other is in search of the market for its industries and technology.) Despite the signing of various both countries various agreements over the years, for enhancing their mutual cooperation in numerous areas particularly in energy, trade and investments, education and health, culture and tradition. The governments of the two countries failed to bring the relationship back on track not only because of the external pressure but also because of the absence of a balanced policy for dealing with international issues and maintaining India and Iran relations. The rapidly changing regional and global political scenario, particularly the increasing existential threats to India in the shape of China's policy of isolating India, China-Pakistan joint anti-India collaboration and India's incapability to handle it, pushed India further in the US bloc. While Iran on the other hand is in the process of overcoming the US-sponsored global isolation of Iran both regionally and globally

by strengthening its relations with the anti-US countries like China and Russia, which pushed it away from India which frequently damped Iran under the US pressure and resulted in widening the gap in their mutual relations.

The change in the US administration and Joe Biden's coming to power has raised new hopes for the reduction in the US-Iran tensions. The new President of the US has criticised Trump Administration for the withdrawal from the Iranian Nuclear Deal (JCPOA). He favours and advocates diplomatic means rather than militaristic options for overcoming the issues with Iran. Before and during his election campaigning Joe Biden promised to re-enter the nuclear deal if Iran returned to compliance with the deal. Resumption of dialogue between Iran and the US means ease in the economic sanctions of Iran and ease in pressure on India in carrying out its relations with Iran. In addition to that in the current situation when India is facing the Chinese isolationist policy in and around the region, it cannot effort to lose Iran which has huge strategic importance in India's regional and global view. Iran facilitates India safe, secure and low-cost energy resources, opens its untapped domestic market, and acts as an access route to Central Asia and Afghanistan. Iran due to its strategic location provides India with an alternative for overcoming the Chinese encirclement policy. In addition to that both India and Iran have strong convergence of national interests. There are numerous areas which are having the capacity to act as the foundation for transforming India and Iran relations into long term strategic partnerships. The improvement in the Iran-US relations would provide India with an opportunity to re-engage and bring the relations with Iran back on track. The need of the hour demands from the leadership of both the countries is to adopt and maintain a balanced approach between the global politics and India-Iran relations for strengthening and expanding the bilateral mutual cooperation between the countries.

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