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Mohammad Hassam Dr. Aparna Chaudhary

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Geopolitics as a Foreign Policy Determinant between India and Iran

Mohammad Hassam[1] Dr. Aparna Chaudhary[2]

[1][1]Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Allahabad [2]Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Allahabad (India)

ABSTRACT

Geopolitics has been one of the profound elements in determining relations among countries. India and Iran share close geographical proximity and centuries-old cultural linkages. Their peculiar geographic locations give them privileges and vast areas of cooperation. The changing nature of international politics, including the China factor, is pushing India to reinvent its ties with the West Asian region. The Iranian state is facing challenges at both the domestic and international levels. India needs Iran to reshape its ties with the region, establish feasible and shorter routes to Central Asian Republics and beyond and also to fulfil its energy needs. Iran is keen to find a reliable partner distinct from Western identity. In a way, they both need each other to achieve their respective desired foreign policy objectives. Considering Iran's geopolitical location and the foreign policy preferences of both countries, this research provides a detailed analysis of different factors that affect their bilateral relations and also highlights the consequences and prospects in their relations.

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I. Geopolitics as a Determinant in Foreign Policy Making

Geopolitics, as the name suggests, is the politics of geo, where nations interact with each other or sometimes act unilaterally to gain access to a geographical area to attain certain objectives. Gaining access to or control over drinkable water, arable land, forests, animal life, and mineral resources has been the driving force behind much of geopolitics. The rivers, harbours, islands, navigable straits, waterways, and channels, coastal zones, roads, railways have been the stakes in the game of geopolitics (Dietl, 2008, p. 33). It has been part of foreign policy for a long time, since it provides leverage to a nation to deal with undesirable circumstances that may arise in the international system and ensure their survival. The term 'geopolitics' was coined by a Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén, around the turn of the 20th century.

Nations have interacted with each other to strengthen their position at international level and enhance their security through strategic alliances, cooperation on mutual interests, soft power and diplomacy etc. Such a feature is visible in India-Iran relations as well. Iran's importance is ascribed to its strategic geography that offers great energy resources and a strategic location. Iran's geographical importance can be understood by looking at history itself. It has been an important part of trade routes of ancient times because it provided overland routes to Europe, Central Asia, and West Asia for the Indian subcontinent. Iran is a pivot state 'whose importance is derived not from its power and motivation but rather from its sensitive location.' Iran owes its significance to its geographical positioning, which allows it to play a critical role in providing connectivity or even choking the connectivity through the Strait of Hormuz to disrupt the global supply chain (e.g., energy resources), if Iran is attacked (Brzezinski, 1997).

CONTACT: Mohammad Hassam mhassam8090@gmail.com

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II. India-Iran Relations

From ancient times to the Iranian Revolution: Links between the Indian and Iranian people have been found to date back to 2000-3000 BC. Iranian traders acted as middlemen to transport Indian goods to Europe during the Gupta period (308-651 AD). 'Bam, in south-east Iran, was a major commercial and trading town on the famous Spice Road, a major tributary of the Silk Road, that connected trade routes from India through Iran to Central Asia and China' (Embassy of India, n.d.). Cultural similarity is also found between the two countries, which is discernible by striking similarity in architecture and language, especially during the Mughal period in India. The Urdu language, which originated in India, has a significant influence of the Persian language. The Parsi community, which migrated from Iran around the 8th century due to persecution, is an influential community in India that has significantly contributed to the development of India.

Historical and cultural affinity has helped sustain their relationship despite divergence in their worldview since the time of India's independence. Both countries had a shared border, before the 1947 partition of India, which facilitated easier trade between them in addition to historical and cultural linkages. Iran also served as a strategic conduit for facilitating trade, cultural exchanges, and diplomatic engagement with Europe and West Asia. The linkages have garnered mutual trust and respect, allowing geopolitical interests to be pursued effectively and collaboratively.

During the Second World War, in August 1941, Soviet and British troops marched into Iran to ensure that the Reza Shah Pahlavi doesn't side with Germany since the Shah was strongly influenced by Hitler's autocracy and ultra-nationalism. Reza Shah feared that he might be deposed. With this fear, he abdicated in favour of his 23 years old son Muhammad Reza and left Iran. Muhammad Reza Shah was supported by the US and Britain - the Western bloc - to strengthen his regime, when power was slipping from his hand to the Mussadiq government (Hiro, 1985:29,34-37). Because of the support provided by the Western bloc, he aligned with the Western bloc during the Cold War. In comparison, India had come out of colonial rule of the Britishers after a freedom struggle against them. India adopted a doctrine of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) during the Cold War between the capitalist bloc led by the United States of America (USA) and the communist bloc led by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), and raised its voice for decolonization elsewhere.

India-Iran relations were formalised on March 15, 1950, with the signing of a friendship treaty. Their relationship passed through many strains in the post-independence period. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru endorsed Gamal Abdel Nasser as the leader of the Arab world. Nasser's crusade against the Egyptian monarchy engendered feelings of insecurity in the mind of the Shah. To counter Arab domination, Shah tried to build good relations with Pakistan, since Pakistan is an Islamic country (Mudiam, 1994, pp. 71-72).

Iran's relation with Pakistan was not for countering India. Both - India's and Iran's - head of states had visited each other's countries. The situation started changing in the later period of Shah's rule, when dialogue started and agreements were reached between the USSR and the US in the 1960s to rein in the increasing arms race and tensions. Another significant event was the defeat of Pakistan in the war with India in 1971. Pakistan's defeat, being a member of the West-led Baghdad Pact (also known as Central Treaty Organization - CENTO), to which Iran was also a party, made the Shah realise the limitations of the USA's support. With these changing scenarios in the international realm, Shah started reshaping his foreign policy. He assured the Soviet Union that it would not allow its territory to be used by any foreign powers against them. This redefining of Iran's foreign policy helped enhance understanding between India and Iran, leading to technological and commercial cooperation and the signing of agreements between the two. Yet the relationship could not sustain an upward trajectory, there were ups and downs (Naaz, 2001).

Post-Iranian Revolution to 2014: In 1979, Shah was overthrown through an Islamic revolution (also known as the Iranian revolution) led by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. The Iranian Revolution was seen,

by India, as an expression of Iran's quest for identity and national self-determination and their desire to charter an independent course of action without the interference of the 'Big Powers' (The Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 1980, p. 22). Since the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the relationship between Iran and the US has been on a downward trajectory. The leader of the Iranian revolution, Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini, who became the first supreme leader in Iran, dubbed the US as the 'Great Satan' (AFP, 2015) .

In the 1980s, India-Iran relations did not fare well, because the newly formed Islamic Republic of Iran had prioritized raising muslim causes worldwide, including in India. India at that time was facing disturbances in Kashmir, and communal disharmony was also building up around the Babri Masjid controversy. After the revolution, Iran was also drawn into a prolonged war with Iraq.

The relationship between India and Iran started improving in the 1990s in the backdrop of the declining Cold War and the economic reforms in India. Instability in Afghanistan and the establishment of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 1996 became another area of mutual concern for both countries. On account of Iran being a major oil-producing nation and India emerging as a major consumer market, both nations deepened their cooperation in various other fields as well. Central Asian Republics (CARs), which emerged after the disintegration of the USSR, were also important in terms of regional security for both the countries. Iran's geography offers a suitable access for India to the region, since the region has been cut off from a feasible and cheaper route through Pakistan due to its adversarial relationship with India. There is potential for both nations to contribute to the stability of the region and keep a check on rising extremism from the region. India and Iran boosted their bilateral relations with many official visits taking place between them in the 1990s (Naaz, 2001).

After the 1991 economic reforms spurred economic growth, India needed energy resources to sustain its growth. The need for energy resources made India and Iran complementary to each other. Iran, mired in US sanctions, wanted a stable oil-importing country, and India was an appropriate partner for Iran, because India is one of the major powers in the Asian continent and the Indian Ocean region, along with having a huge population and a big economy. Both countries signed agreements in the energy and connectivity sectors - Iran expecting infrastructure investment and India eying energy security, cheaper trading routes and new markets through Iran. Along with these objectives, Iran sees India as a country that can help stave off economic isolation caused by Western sanctions.

The advent of globalization and India's economic reforms of 1991, made it an important emerging economy, and India-US relations also improved. The US, being the largest economy and dominant power in the current world order, India also needed to build strong relations with the US to access the most advanced technologies and have access to the US market. India voted against Iran in the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), i.e. a UN nuclear watchdog, after Iran's secret nuclear program was revealed by the Mujahedin al-Khalq, an Iranian resistance group in 2002. Yet India pitched for a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis within the framework of the non-proliferation regime. The revelations sparked tensions among the major powers that Iran might be developing nuclear weapons (Ashwarya, 2017, pp. 144-153). The US fears that if Iran develops nuclear weapons it would become much harder for the US to negotiate with Iran and it will try to force the US out of the Gulf region, apart from posing a direct threat to Israel (Pasha, 2010, p. 341).

Whereas, since the time of the revelation, Iran has maintained that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, such as medical research and power generation, not for nuclear weapons. The Iranian Supreme Leader had also issued a religious decree against the development of Nuclear weapons (Security Council 5500th Meeting (AM), 2006). The nuclear issue put India in a tricky situation where, on one hand, Iran was an important country for India, and on the other hand, India did not want nuclear proliferation, especially in its extended neighbourhood. In the late 2000s UN sanctions were imposed on Iran due to non-compliance from Iran. Thereafter, a decline in trade between India and Iran was seen. However, diplomatic engagements were there, which signaled that the relations between them were not broken completely.

The distance between India and Iran was also aided by Iran's antagonistic relations with the US since the time of the Iranian Revolution. The continued antagonistic relationship between the two has led to the imposition of various sanctions on Iran by the US. These sanctions have severely damaged the Iranian economy and isolated it because of US dominance in the international system. Former United States president George W. Bush counted Iran among the 'Axis of Evil' countries that are sponsoring terrorism and pursuing weapons of mass destruction (The White House Archives, 2002).

Post-2014: The 'Look West' policy received new attention in 2014 and 'became a useful component of Modi's foreign policy in advancing India's objectives in West Asia, a multi-layered engagement started'. It has extended India's interactions beyond conventional areas like trade and energy to include strategic and comprehensive alliances. The three primary axes of India's new strategy are the Gulf States, Iran, and Israel (Afzal and Iqbal, 2024, p. 170). The relation between India and Iran got a good momentum after a nuclear deal was signed with Iran. The deal was formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). It was signed by the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), known as P5 countries (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), Germany, and the European Union (EU), with Iran in 2015, that restrained Iran's nuclear program and imposed strict regulations by IAEA in return for sanctions relief.

In 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Iran, and a tripartite agreement was signed between India, Iran, and Afghanistan. Under the agreement, India planned to develop Chabahar port as a transit hub, and through this port, Afghanistan was to be connected via rail and road. Some of the project's parts have already been completed, but the full potential of the agreement has not been realized. 'India pledged $500 million to help build and operate two sections of the Chabahar Port. Additionally, India's Exim Bank provided a $150 million loan to help develop port infrastructure. In 2018, India formally took over operations at one section of the port' (Afzal and Iqbal, 2024, p. 178). The development of the port is also important for India to connect with Central Asian countries, which are also rich in natural resources, for example, Kazakhstan holds one of the world's largest Uranium reserves.

The opportunity of building strong relations with Iran, using its location and energy resources, could not last long due to the US's withdrawal from the JCPOA and imposition of unilateral sanctions on Iran in 2018, under the Donald Trump presidency. After withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal, Trump initiated the 'Maximum Pressure' campaign. Under the campaign, the Trump administration asked all countries to stop importing Iranian oil or face sanctions (Cole and Atwood, 2019). Initially, India had said that it abides by the sanctions that are imposed by the United Nations but not those imposed by any other country, such as those announced by the United States against Iran (Verma, 2018). This showed India's willingness to continue oil imports from Iran. But due to US superiority in the international financial system and its threat of sanctions, importing oil from Iran was not feasible, and India had to ultimately stop the imports in 2019.

'The JCPOA was hailed by the EU as its diplomatic success; it enabled the EU to revitalise its relations with Iran with the idea that trade and political rapprochement would be beneficial to both sides'. Trump's withdrawal from the deal was not supported by any of the parties to the deal. France, Germany, and the UK (collectively known as E3), which were members of the deal, tried to salvage the deal by launching an alternative trade mechanism; for example, the EU established the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) on January 31, 2019 (Dutta, 2019). The mechanism has not been able to overcome the difficulty posed by the US withdrawal from the deal, due to rising tensions between Iran and the US and also because of the autonomy of the private sector and their fear of US sanctions (Therme, 2019).

Saudi Arabia and Israel were not happy with the JCPOA deal (Kaye and Martini, 2015). Israel views Iran's nuclear program as an existential threat. Saudi Arabia also sees Iran as a rival, but its stance -

towards Iran has softened after China mediated a normalization deal between Iran and Saudi Arabia in March 2023 (Wintour, 2023). It is widely argued that Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu may have influenced the US administration's withdrawal from the deal. For example, the Israeli PM has consistently claimed that Iran is developing nuclear weapons (Al Jazeera & Younes, 2018). However, attempts have been made to reach a new deal on the Iran nuclear issue. Negotiation for a new deal was going on through indirect dialogue between the US and Iran, mediated by Oman in April 2025. The negotiations fell apart in June when Israel attacked Iran, followed by the US strikes, to dismantle its nuclear program (Habibiazad, 2025). Following the attacks, Iran suspended cooperation with the IAEA and demanded assurances that Iran will not be attacked again before resuming any negotiations. The E3 countries have triggered a 'snapback' clause in the moribund Iran Nuclear deal that empowers for UN sanctions to be reimposed in the event of non-compliance by Iran (The Hindu, 2025).

'After the Iranian revolution, Iran did not join either of the existing two camps'. According to the Islamic Republic 'East or West was either bigger (USA) or smaller (USSR) satan' (Baidya, 2018, p. 147). This stance has changed in recent years because of continuous harsh sanctions, which have choked the Iranian economy. To counter its isolation, it has strengthened its relations with eastern powers, namely China and Russia. China, being a strong and energy-hungry economy, and Russia, already a sanctioned nation, keep them motivated to engage with Iran, thus providing Iran with much-needed support at international level. Iran has outreached to BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in recent years, which is seen as a platform for Global South cooperation and finding alternative financing mechanisms to the Western-dominated institutions (Mohammadi & Hashemi, 2022).

India enjoys cordial relations with Iran, rooted in deep historical and cultural connections. Nevertheless, the relationship faces constraints from the West while engaging with Iran or in enhancing cooperation between them. India's relation with Israel and the Gulf countries also creates a situation of difficult foreign policy choices for India, considering that India has strong economic and technological ties with them as well. Iran has its importance because of its strategic location, which cannot be changed. Iran provides India an alternative route to connect with Afghanistan, CARs, Russia, and even Eastern Europe which is cheaper and shorter than the existing route through the Suez Canal. Towards this endeavour, an agreement between India, Iran, and Russia was also signed in 2000, known as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). The Chabahar port has emerged as a strategic pillar between India and Iran. Overall, Iran offers deep connectivity in the region, bypassing Pakistan, and it can also help India to counter the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

III. Area of Mutual Cooperation between India and Iran

India and Iran have multiple areas where they can cooperate and benefit from it. Iran ranks fifth at the global level in terms of being the world's most resource-rich country, holding second largest reserves of natural gas and the fourth largest reserves of crude oil, with a total resource value estimated at $27.3 trillion (Ziabari, 2023). Mineral fuels (crude oil, natural gas, etc.), which once formed the backbone of India's imports from Iran, accounting for over 90 percent of the total imports, have witnessed a near-complete collapse. Trade in this category has plummeted by 99 percent since 2019. India's total trade with Iran has contracted by 87 percent since the reimposition of US sanctions in 2019, falling to $2.3 billion in 2024 from $17.6 billion in 2019 (Gera, 2025).

India and Iran have discussed many gas pipeline projects (e.g., Iran-Pakistan-India, Iran-India, Iran-Oman-India) as well, through which Iran can transport natural gas to India. But these projects could not progress because of international sanctions, and especially the US sanctions on Iran, since the US believes that the revenue generated from Iran's mineral fuel's exports is used to invest in its nuclear program and sponsor regional militant groups that cause instability and threaten the security of US allies in the region.

Since India has strong financial and strategic relations with the US, it does not want to jeopardize that for Iran, though Iran has its own importance. If a nuclear deal is agreed between Iran and the US, then there is a possibility that the international sanctions, along with US and EU sanctions, may be lifted, and Iran will be free to export its energy globally.

The infrastructure initiatives like the INSTC and Chabahar port project face delays because the prospective participants hesitate in participating due to the potential risk of secondary sanctions from the US. India and Iran may look for alternate options to enhance their cooperation in different fields through mechanisms like rupee-rial trade or the barter system. India may import oil from Iran, and in return, India can invest in Iran's infrastructure projects. Railway networks may be developed by India with the help of Russia[1], which can boost connectivity in the region, thereby providing access to CARs and beyond. This can herald a new era of strong connectivity between the South Caucasus, the CARs, and the South Asian region primarily. Iran's borders with Afghanistan and Pakistan make it a dynamic part of South Asian geopolitics (Mohan, 2024). 'India has been among Iran's five largest trade partners in recent years. Major Indian exports to Iran include rice, tea, sugar, pharmaceuticals, manmade staple fibres, electrical machinery, artificial jewellery, etc. While major Indian imports from Iran consist of dry fruits, inorganic/organic chemicals, glassware, etc.' (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2025).

Iranian Parliament (Majlis) Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf met and held talks with India's Lok Sabha (Lower House) Speaker Om Birla on the sidelines of the 11th BRICS Parliamentary Forum held from June 3 to 5, 2025, at the National Congress Palace in Brasilia. 'He pointed out that the two countries enjoy high potentials and capabilities to enhance parliamentary cooperation' (Al Hashem, 2025). India and Iran held an annual bilateral political consultation on September 9, 2025, in Tehran. The meeting was co-chaired by Anand Prakash, Joint Secretary (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran division) of the Ministry of External Affairs of India, and Mohammad Reza Bahrami, Director General for South Asia Division in Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This meeting marked the continuation of high-level diplomatic engagement between the two nations. The meeting focused on identifying pragmatic pathways to diversify trade beyond hydrocarbons, focusing on areas such as pharmaceuticals, heavy engineering, agricultural exports, and emerging industrial cooperation. Iran is an important country with regard to India's long term energy security planning, on account of its energy resources and strategic geographic positioning. India has a major consumer market and may become an important technology provider for Iran, making their economic relations stronger (Indian Defence News, 2025).

Both sides emphasised strengthening cooperation at regional and multilateral forums such as the United Nations. The two sides affirmed to continue to support each other's candidatures, initiatives, and shared agendas in these institutions, indicating similarity with regard to global governance reforms, multipolarity, and the strengthening of South-South cooperation. Both nations highlighted the importance of connectivity frameworks like INSTC, energy and trade partnerships, coordination on regional geopolitics, and multilateral cooperation. The consultations underscored the shared and complementary strategic visions of India and Iran. With the next round scheduled in New Delhi in 2026, both sides conveyed their determination to maintain momentum in dialogue and deepen their cooperation in alignment with fast-changing geopolitical dynamics of the region (Indian Defence News, 2025).

India has been consistent in its support for the Iranian government. It has refused to interfere in the internal matters of other countries, whether the treatment of women or minorities. India chose not to comment on the issue of Iran's hijab enforcement that led to the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini. Iran also chose to remain silent over the curbs on hijab in Karnataka classrooms. During a meeting between Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Samarkand on September 16, 2022, PM Modi remarked that India and Iran share deep historical and civilizational linkages along with strong people-to-people contacts (Haidar, 2022).

[1] Russia has a dominant role in the railway infrastructure of the region because of the railway lines that exists since the time of the USSR, especially in CARs. And Russia has expertise as well in the field of railway infrastructure. It also helps India in a way that Russia is less constrained by US sanctions.

An International Food Festival was organised from 25th to 31st October, 2021 in Hyderabad, which was hosted by the Consulate of Iran - Hyderabad, Poland and CD Foundation, and it was preceded by a Women Entrepreneurs Summit with the mission of promoting gender equality through inclusive growth. Ms. Mina Hadian, Vice Consul of the Consulate General of Iran in Hyderabad, present at the Summit, said in her speech that the number of women in Iran in entrepreneurship is continuously rising. Iran has the largest population of women having higher education in the Middle East.[2] According to the United Nations Human Development Index (UNHDI), Iranian women have shown outstanding improvement in education, employment, entrepreneurship, research, and science. Women can play a significant role in enhancing commercial relations between the two nations, which already have deep historical and cultural relations. Discussing different areas of trade and tourism, she described Indian and Iranian economies as supplementary and complementary economies (Hyderabad Desk, 2021).

IV. Challenges in India-Iran Relations

Though India and Iran have deep historical and cultural relations, their relation faces some challenges because of their political structure. The Republic of India is a constitutional democracy, following the principle of secularism, whereas the Islamic Republic of Iran is a theocratic state, with a Supreme Leader who has complete authority over the internal and external affairs of the country and has strong influence over the political system in Iran. The Supreme Leader of Iran is selected by the Assembly of Experts, which is a deliberative body of Islamic jurists that is elected directly. Although the jurists must be first approved by the Guardian Council in order to run for the assembly (Hiro, 1985, p. 121). Given the Islamic identity, Iran has been raising Muslim's issues worldwide, and has strong feelings for the Palestinians and fierce opposition to Israel's establishment in the region. At the same time, India has strong relations with Israel, especially in defence and technology.

Trade between the two countries has been very minimal after the oil embargo, despite their proximity and potential. India-Iran had a trade of USD 17 billion in 2018 - 2019, before the oil embargo. It has declined to USD 1.7 billion in 2024 - 2025. India suffered a huge trade deficit due to energy imports before the oil embargo. However, the trade is now in favour of India but with very minimal trade. The share of India-Iran bilateral trade in India's total trade is just 0.15%, which is lower than Bhutan's share, i.e., 0.16% in the financial year 2024 - 2025 (Department of Commerce, Government of India, 2025).

India needs to develop an alternate mechanism to boost trade with Iran, since the US practices a 'maximum pressure' campaign against Iran to strangulate the Iranian economy and force it to agree to the US terms in order to get relax from the US sanctions. Options that can be explored are trade in local currencies - bypassing transactions in US dollars, and also safeguarding and smoothing payments. The Reserve Bank of India has been taking steps to facilitate international trade in rupees (The Hindu, 2022). Besides this, both countries can enhance trade through a barter system. With regard to the US, India can be more expressive regarding its interest in and through Iran, such as connectivity, stability in the region, and countering China's increasing foothold in the region. India, being the largest democracy and a stable country with the fourth largest economy, presents itself as the best partner to maintain peace and stability in the region.

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, the state has been at odds with Western countries because of exploitative interference from Western countries. This antagonistic view towards the West has strained relations with Western countries. The US placed different sanctions on Iran since the Iranian students took hostage the staff, including diplomats, in the American embassy in Tehran, right after the revolution. These sanctions became more severe after the disclosure of Iran's secret nuclear program. India also, on its part, does not support nuclear (weapons) proliferation. Around 2010, UN sanctions were imposed on Iran. These measures isolated Iran, especially its economy, so that it could not fund the nuclear program. India-Iran trade also declined. India's better relations with Western and Gulf countries, along with Israel, also causes tension in India-Iran relations.

[2] The term 'Middle East' has been used instead of West Asia, because the author has used the term in the source cited.

However, Iran has started enhancing its relations, in recent years, with countries that are looking for an alternative to the US-dominated international system. In these changing dynamics, India needs to be proactive - engaging with each side to secure its interest and reiterate its national interests at international level.

V. India-Iran Relations: Structural Realist Perspective

To explain such a relationship, structural realism provides a good understanding of why different states act in a certain way. According to structural realism (also known as neorealism) - the behavior of a state is shaped by the world power structure and the respective capabilities of states, since the global order is defined by anarchy. While the states are deemed as functionally similar, they are nonetheless distinguished by their relative capabilities for performing the same function (Waltz, 1979 pp. 88, 97).

Waltz's theory has been termed as defensive realism by later scholars, because his theory believes that nations endeavor to ensure their survival and security rather than power maximization, in the anarchic international system, which is also described as a self-help system. The rationale is that any aggressive or expansionist behaviour for power maximization may provoke the security dilemma and counterbalancing behavior from other major powers, and thereby risk the state's security (Lobell, 2017). 'States balance against hegemons' (Layne, 1993, p. 45).

In the given context, that is India-Iran relations, Iran wants to have strong relations with India to counter Western isolation efforts and ensure its survival by diversifying its economy. In contrast, India aims to secure its energy needs, which is critical for India's growing economy, by having strong relations with Iran, which has huge energy resources and a critical location.

VI. Conclusion

India diversified its relations in the West Asian region. Saudi Arabia and Iran had emerged as major oil-producing countries. They were twin pillars for the US in the Middle East for stability, and they emerged as major powers of the region (Baidya, 2018, p. 147). Iran enhanced economic collaborations with India for industries, goods, and services. In the later period of the Shah's rule, both the countries had alignment on major international issues such as disarmament, the West Asian problem and the maintenance of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace' (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 1978, p. 12).

New Delhi's strategic coherence resembles Tehran. Iran pursues realism by balancing between different nations such as Pakistan, China, and India. It manages its foreign policy to enahnce its national interests (Malhotra, 2025). The foreign policy objective of Iran is guided by the survival of the state, in a region where every state sees Iran as a destabilizing force. The region is divided into two camps - anti-Iran and pro-Iran (Baidya, 2018, p. 148). India's engagement in the region is guided by strategic autonomy, where it maintains relations with all the countries in the region, keeping national interest in mind. However, their engagement has been constrained because of various challenges, mainly external factors in their bilateral relation. Yet there are also diplomatic visits from both sides, which exhibit their willingness to enhance cooperation in various fields.

India-Iran relations are mainly affected by third parties, meaning the major challenges between them are not bilateral per se; rather, multilateral issues are there (Baidya, 2018, p. 150). The root cause of these challenges is Iran's antagonistic relations with Western countries that started with the Iranian revolution in 1979. Iran has been a firm supporter of Palestine, and its former President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had called for Israel to be wiped off the map of the earth (MacAskill & McGreal, 2005). Iran and Israel are considered archrivals. India, under PM Modi, built a very strong relationship with Israel and other Gulf countries - boosting trade and increasing cooperation in various fields. Whereas, the relation with Iran has not been so great. Iran, for its survival, has been reaching out to different countries that don't have strategic convergence with the West, especially the US, and these outreaches

of Iran may jeopardize India's strategic calculation and (energy) security. Given Iran's importance, India needs to find ways to engage with Iran. Because Iran is a country in India's extended neighborhood, it also has a strong influence and presence in the region. Its geography offers a gateway to CARs and beyond. India needs new markets which can be accessed through routes via Iran. In other words, India needs to diversify its export market, in the backdrop of the instability caused by the current US administration, which has been the largest export destination for India. India also needs to be present in Iran to counter China's increasing foothold in the region and the Indian Ocean.

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