



# INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY MODI 2.0

Challenges and Opportunities

Editor

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# 1

## Indo–Iran Relationship: Challenges and Opportunities in the Changing Context

*Aaradhana Singh*

*“Among all the nations and races who have come in contact with India none of them has so everlasting influence on our culture and civilisation as that of Iranians.”*

*– Discovery of India by Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru*

The ties between India and Iran date back to the Persian Empire of Cyrus the Great. The nations have long influenced each other in the fields of culture, art, architecture, and language, especially during 1526-1757 when the Mughals ruled India. India and Iran also shared a border until 1947. For many centuries, Persian remained the language of Indian judiciary. The first Persian newspaper “Mirat-ul-Akhbar” that was started by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, an Indian social reformer, tells us about the influence that Persian culture had on our history and society. However, after independence, particularly during Cold War era India’s relation with Iran could not sustain the same warmth due to a gamut of prevailing compulsions. Iran, along with Pakistan and Turkey, joined the American-led capitalist block after the Second World War and in contrast India adopted the dogma of non-alignment and tilted towards the Soviet Union–led socialist block. Pakistan has remained a factor between India and Iran. But after the end of the Cold War, many changes have taken place at the bilateral as well multilateral level and these changes have brought India and Iran closer than ever despite many divergent interests and opinions. In the backdrop of the July 2015 nuclear deal with the Western world, Indo–Iran relationship was getting smoother but President

Donald Trump again clamped sanction against Iran and finally scrapped the nuclear deal. These prevailing aspects will be analysed within the ambit of this chapter.

India and Iran have a lot of issues of convergences and few points where they diverge. It must be mentioned that the Indo-Iran divergences are manageable; therefore, despite many odds India and Iran relations strengthened after the Cold War.

Kautilya had opined that convergences in interests are the basic formulation of the foreign policy. Growing India-Iran bonhomie has vindicated this fact. It has also rejected the traditional notion that religious synergy could be a common bond between co-religious countries. Saudi Arabia is the self-proclaimed harbinger of the global Islam and Iran also considers herself fit for the same role but both never had cordial relations particularly after the Cold War. So is the case with Pakistan and Iran. The fact remains that there are more convergences of interests between Saudi Arabia and Iran than between Iran and Pakistan. Saudi Arabia is a key ally of Pakistan and Iran-Pakistan has huge trust deficit. The systematic elimination of Shias started from General Zia-ul-Haq period and all anti-Shia sectarian militant groups have enjoyed tacit support of the military. This ongoing establishment (Pakistani military in Pakistani context) supported violence against the Shias and that has angered Iran. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia proximity has also accelerated the prevailing trust deficit between Pakistan and Iran.

Imran Khan-led PTI came into power in August 2018. Pakistan is facing unprecedented economic crisis. Saudi Arabia came forward to help and gave \$3 billion support and oil of the same amount with late payment.

A major bone of contention between Saudi Arabia and Iran is treatment of Shia Muslims in Saudi Arabia and elsewhere. In the southern provinces of Saudi Arabia, which is the hub of oil reserves, Shias are in majority and additionally these areas are the important contributors of Saudi oil production. Shias are persecuted in Saudi Arabia because the ruling Saud family of Saudi is basically propagating Wahhabism as their ideology which is Sunni hyperviolent ideology with zero tolerance for the Shias. In the backdrop of Syria and Yemen crisis, sectarian angle is going to be significant within the Arabian world.

Besides, Saudi Arabia has propelled Wahhabism, which perpetuates intolerant Islam and even considers Shias as non-Muslim. Being the richest country of the Muslim world, Saudi Arabia has propagated this ideology of Wahhabism throughout the globe. Iran started protesting export of Wahhabism by Saudi Arabia particularly after 1979 revolution and since then has sustained its protest.

When we go and take a look at the history, General Zia-ul-Haq captured power after overthrowing an elected government led by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto (a Shia), in July 1977. And through implementation of Nizam-e-Mustafa in 1979 (Rule of the Prophet), Zia consolidated his position. Shias of Pakistan took this initiative as the beginning of their marginalization within Pakistani society as had been mooted against Ahmadis by declaring them as non-Islamic. Since then, more than 20,000 Shias have been killed in Pakistan in sectarian violence. Pakistan is a Sunni-majority country but Shias constitute around 20–25% of the overall population. They are educated, wealthy and possess big land holdings as well. There are ample evidences that Pakistani state and particularly army is nurturing Sunni sectarian groups to eliminate the sphere of influence of Shias. It is also due to the fact that Shias prefer to vote PPP, which is led by Bhutto family and has been harbinger of democratic movements. This has not gone well with the army and it has extended tacit support to the Sunni groups to eliminate Shias. 1979 Iranian Revolution has further boosted the moral of Pakistani Shias and they are hell bent to sustain their exclusive position in the power structure of Pakistan. This has accelerated the sectarian violence against the Shias and being the custodian of Shias across the globe, Iran remains upset with Pakistan.

Iran has proclaimed itself as the custodian of the Shias globally whereas Saudi Arabia has taken up the same role, but for the Sunnis. This bitter enmity between these both countries is accelerating violence within their territory where both sects are dominant by all counts. For the last three decades, Pakistan has become a battleground for them to propagate their interests. We are aware of the nexus between the Taliban and Al-Qaeda with Pakistan. The assassination of Osama Bin Laden in May 2011 at Abbottabad (Pakistan) has vindicated the fact that both have been working with tacit understanding. Interestingly, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda both are claiming themselves as the harbinger of global Islamic Ummah but they are killing Shias in Pakistan. Taliban ruled over Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. During this period, they executed thousands of Shias and fiercely tried to divide the ethnic and sectarian mosaic of Afghanistan. In Mazar-e-Sharif, many officers of the Iranian consulates have been killed during the Taliban period (1996–2001) which brought both Afghanistan and Iran at the brink of a war. Due to the mediation by Prime Minister of Pakistan, Nawaz Sharif (1997–99), the tension subsided. Even at this juncture, Shias are under serious threat from the Taliban and their Sunni counterparts, and their sustainable elimination has been going on both in Pakistan and Afghanistan. We are aware that Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are two important countries out of three, who gave recognition to the Taliban

government as required under the provisions of the international law. The third one was UAE.

Since March 2011, violence in Syria is taking place between the government and the opposition forces, and according to the United Nations and other global agencies, till December 2018 around 5,25,000 people have been killed. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (a Sunni militant organisation) had declared in July 2013 that they had dispatched their fighters to wage Jihad against the government forces in Syria. One of the most important motivating factors behind this decision of the TTP is that the President Assad is Shia. Saudi Arabia along with their supporters is with the opposition forces and Iran along with China and Russia is supporting President Assad's government. It exposed the egalitarian claim of the Sunni militant groups that they are fighting for the cause of Islam.

Afghanistan is a matter of utmost concern both for India and Iran. During the Taliban regime, India and Iran along with Russia extended their support to Northern Alliance led by legendary leader Ahmed Shah Masood. By December 2014, NATO forces withdrew themselves from Afghanistan. Since 18 years, Karzai and Ghani regimes, an elected one is ruling the country and has tried to build the strength of Afghan National Army (ANA) but there are apprehensions that after the NATO withdrawal, the ANA would not be able to properly contain Taliban. In this prevailing situation, Taliban may take over and given its previous governance record, it could be detrimental for the national interests of both India and Iran. By the end of 2019, this apprehension rules the roost in Afghanistan. In this situation, they must forge a strong alliance to protect and promote their interests in Afghanistan. Needless to say that Pakistan will not allow this to happen; therefore, India and Iran must formulate a combined strategy to handle this situation. Saudi Arabia, the traditional arch rival of Iran, will also support Pakistani position to export its narrow version of Islam as it had already done during the previous Taliban regime. Needless to say that Taliban has been the harbinger of the conservative version of Islam in Afghanistan.

Iran is traditionally a peaceful country. Iran established a national army only recently, under the Pahlavi dynasty. The country has no martial tradition unlike its western neighbour Turkey. After Iraq war, Tehran has avoided direct military conflict, but its military expenditure is slightly higher than compared to those of smaller Gulf countries.<sup>1</sup> In the case of India and Iran, there are less divergences and more convergences of interests and that makes the case that they should cooperate. The changing security architecture of South and South West Asia has

also pushed both countries on the same platform. There are many critical areas where the national interests of the two countries are converging.

Drug trafficking and terrorism is a major concern for both countries. Since the last three decades more than 5,000 Iranian border guards have been killed while containing drug trafficking. Iran shares a large portion of its border with Afghanistan and Pakistan and therefore is being used as a convenient route by drug traffickers to export drugs to Europe. There are strong inter-linkages between drug trafficking and terror network and India and Iran are the worst affected nations from this menace. Pakistan and Afghanistan are the dens of global drug trafficking and terror network. To prevent these situations from having a spillover effect on India and Iran, they must come together and take adequate steps to cope with the future challenges.

Since independence, Pakistan sees India as its mortal enemy. During Cold War, Iran and Pakistan shared a cordial relation. Iran extended its adequate support to Pakistan during 1965 war. In 1979, the monarchy of Iran was thrown out by an Islamic revolution led by Ayatollah Khomeini. He was considered one of the leading Islamic ideologues along with Maulana Maududi of Pakistan and Sayyid Qutb of Egypt. Iran has been supportive to the right to self-determination of Kashmiri Muslims particularly during the cold war.

Iran-India relationships have grown manifolds due to many compulsions brought by the end of the Cold War. Many converging interests have been the real cementing force of the Indian foreign policy, as was aptly stated by Kautilya. Three Indian Prime Ministers have visited Iran since the end of the Cold War. In 1993, Prime Minister Narsimha Rao visited Tehran and opened new vistas of a deepening relationship. In 2001, Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee visited Tehran. This visit was unique because it initiated cooperation in many areas that were unexplored previously—Central Asia, energy and military matters, cooperation in Afghanistan that began along with strategic security. Iranian leaders had reciprocated these top visits. Many other dignitaries from both countries also visited each other. In 2003, Iranian president visited India and was honoured as the Chief Guest for the Republic Day of India, a very special invitation only reserved for the closest Indian friends. In August 2012, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh visited Iran to participate in the 16<sup>th</sup> Summit of the NAM. During this visit, many rounds of negotiations were held with notable delegations. It was agreed that along with Afghanistan, India and Iran must work together on the areas of common benefits. PM Modi also visited Iran in 2016. PM Modi met

Iranian leaders many a times on other platforms as well; the last time they met was during SCO summit in Bishkek in June 2019.

In April 2013, Foreign Minister Salman Khurshid visited Tehran and it was agreed that Chabahar port facility will be expanded. India and Iran have already connected Central Asia through this port while making Delaram Zaranj highway in western Afghanistan. It has also reduced Afghanistan's dependence over Karachi port for trade and other necessities. During this visit, many bilateral agreements were inked ranging from energy supply to defense cooperation. India by all available calculations will become world's third largest energy consumer by 2020. In April 2015, transport minister Nitin Gadkari visited Tehran and pledged the connectivity of Central Asia and Afghanistan through newly developed Chabahar port jointly built by India and Iran. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and Indian PM Modi met in Ufa (Russia) in July 2015 and had a 90-minute bilateral talk. During this meeting, it was pledged that India and Iran will accelerate their bilateral relations. In July 2015, Iran and the Western world signed a nuclear deal and now gradually, the decade-long sanctions imposed against Iran were supposed to be lifted. In August 2015, Iranian Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, had visited New Delhi and met PM and other ministers. Again it was pledged that cooperation on all fronts will be accelerated. During a one-day visit of Mr. Zarif issues, related to Islamic State threat, energy investments, Afghanistan and development of Chabahar port were discussed. He also stated that India is an important player in West Asia and can play a leading role in the region. PM Modi conveyed India's commitment to work with Iran for development of the Chabahar port that would have far-reaching benefits, not only for the people of India and Iran, but also for Afghanistan and the entire Central Asian region. Mr. Zarif acknowledged India's support during turbulent times. PM Modi visited Iran in May 2016. His delegation included many top brasses including Surface and Shipping Transport Minister, Nitin Gadkari. Many agreements were inked during this visit.<sup>2</sup> Iran has enormous energy reserves and India is today the 5<sup>th</sup> global energy consumer and by 2025 will be 3<sup>rd</sup> largest energy consumer after pushing Japan and Russia. It is also opined by the global economic pundits that India will be representing 23% of global GDP by 2050. For the sustainability of India's growth saga, sustainable and diverse supply of energy is must.

India has more than double the Muslim population of Iran and one fourth among them are Shias. They are peaceful, stay away from any anti-state activities and are contributing enormously in the national development. It is also a big state of satisfaction for Iran because almost all countries where Shias are under

suppression are Islamic countries, but despite the majority of Hindus, Shias are comfortable in India.

The United States and India share a good relationship since the last two decades. The nuclear agreement inked in 2008 and the deepening bonhomie is the testimony. Dr. Manmohan Singh visited Tehran despite a huge protest by U.S.-led block. Tension still prevails between Iran and the Western countries over the nuclear issue despite truce made by President Obama and President Rouhani after their telephonic conversation in the latter part of 2013. In the backdrop of this tension, Dr. Singh's visit was path breaking. Many bilateral treaties were inked during the visit. This visit gave renewed hope to Iran and negated the notion that it has been isolated at the international level. President Donald Trump has discarded previous agreement inked by President Obama with Iran and imposed gamut of sanctions despite the opposition of their NATO allies.

Afghanistan remains a top agenda between India and Iran because of convergence of interests. Iran never supported Taliban and forged a Northern Alliance along with Russia and India. During its five years (1996–2001) of rule, the Taliban executed thousands of Shias in Afghanistan. Being the only Shia-majority country on the globe and an immediate neighbour of Afghanistan, it was a matter of serious concern for Iran. In the recent decades, Iran was compelled to understand that Saudi Arabia has started sharing a much deeper relationship with Pakistan; therefore, it has set a new tone for its relationship with India. Under the Imran Khan-led PTI government which came into power in August 2018, the bonhomie between Saudi and Pakistan has further emboldened.

Kautilya had said that an enemy's enemy is a friend and trust deficit between Iran and Pakistan has provided India an opportunity to cooperate with Iran on a variety of issues. Iran has cooperated with several other regional countries, notably India and Russia, to gain influence in any post-American Afghanistan. During the Afghan civil war in the post-Soviet period, these three countries constituted the bloc that supported the Northern Alliance in opposition to the Pakistani and Saudi-supported Taliban forces.

#### Strategic Imperatives for the Development of Chabahar for India and Iran

In order to address its need to secure energy routes, and to contain the growing Chinese influence in the Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf, and the Indian Ocean, India brought Iran into an economic and strategic alliance. India invested huge resources

for the construction of Iranian Port of Chabahar. It will be easily accessible for Indian imports and exports through road and rail links to Afghanistan and Central Asia. In the last week of February 2019, a Himalayan step was taken in this direction when maiden Afghan goods were uploaded on ships at Chabahar port which is jointly developed by Iran and India.

According to Afghan officials, 23 trucks carrying 57 tonnes of dried fruits, textiles, carpets and mineral products were dispatched from western Afghan city of Zaranj to Iran's Chabahar port. The consignment will be shipped to the Indian city of Mumbai. At the inauguration of the new export route, President Ashraf Ghani said Afghanistan was slowly improving its exports in a bid to reduce its trade deficit. "Chabahar port is the result of healthy cooperation between India, Iran and Afghanistan this will ensure economic growth".<sup>3</sup> Chabahar has provided an easy access to a port to Afghanistan and has ended Afghani dependence over Karachi port of Pakistan for export/import activities. Chabahar port has enabled both countries to engage in trade by passing Pakistan.

Chabahar's geo-strategic location plays an important role in connecting India to Afghanistan and Central Asia both militarily and economically. India perceives Central Asia, Iran, and Afghanistan situated at the crossroads of overland trading routes as a potential consumer market for Indian products. Similarly, Iran wants to get India's cost-effective source of high-technology inputs.<sup>4</sup> India's ultimate objective is to bypass Pakistan, and also cooperate with Iran on a highway and rail system that leads from Chabahar port into Afghanistan and Central Asia. Highway connecting Afghanistan and Central Asia has been in order for many years. Rail system has to be restored. Modi government has inaugurated 1<sup>st</sup> phase of the port and it became operational and has also secured its exemption from the American sanctions against Iran. The first meeting of the follow-up committee for implementation of the trilateral Chabahar agreement between India-Afghanistan and Iran was held in the port city of Chabahar on 21 December 2018 to finalise trade and transit corridors. They agreed on the routes for the trade and transit corridors between the three countries. India Ports Global Limited had opened an office in the port city and taken over operations of the port.

The Chabahar port in the Sistan-Balochistan province on the energy-rich nation's southern coast is easily accessible from India's western coast and is increasingly seen as a counter to Pakistan's Gwadar port, which is being developed with Chinese investment under the ambit of CPEC and is located just 80 km east from Chabahar.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, there is active Chinese cooperation in the Port of Gwadar, since it is the only port which can serve the best interests of both China and Pakistan in the region. The Port will, therefore, enable China to keep a strict watch on India's growing influence in the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea, and Persian Gulf. Hence, the possibility of any future economic and military collaboration between India and the US in the region can be effectively dealt with. Another geographical advantage of the port is that it will reduce the distance for energy imports from Persian Gulf to China. Gwadar also holds a geo-strategic significance for China because of its proximity with the sea lanes between West Asia and China. It is vital for oil trade. As a gateway to the Indian Ocean, Gwadar will provide Beijing with a listening base from where the Chinese may exert surveillance on hyper-strategic sea links. The military activities of the Indian and American navies in the region can also be closely watched by the Chinese. Gwadar port will also provide a strong base for Chinese ships and submarines. Since Gwadar Port can fulfil its political, security and commercial objectives vis-à-vis India, China has spent a huge amount on its construction. It is one of most significant signature projects of the Chinese President Xi Jinping. The port will also help both China and Pakistan to promote trade with Gulf States possessing 63% of world's oil reserves.<sup>6</sup>

China has acknowledged the strategic significance of Gwadar no less than that of the Karakoram Highway.<sup>7</sup> This will further strengthen the relations between China and Pakistan. China is also interested to turn Gwadar into an energy-transport hub by building an oil pipeline from Gwadar into Chinese Province of Xinjiang. The proposed pipeline will carry crude oil from Arab and African states. Gwadar's strategic advantage to China is due to its close proximity with the Strait of Hormuz. The presence of the US forces in the region poses not only a threat to Chinese navy but, also to its commercial interest. Gwadar provides China with a strong base where it can monitor US naval activity in the Persian Gulf and Indian activities in the Arabian Sea. China has already set up electronic posts at Gwadar for monitoring maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz and the Arabian Sea. It seems like a historical irony that Gwadar, which used to belong to the Omani sultan, was offered to India in the 1950s under Nehru. At the time, India refused on the grounds that it would not be able to defend it from Pakistan.<sup>8</sup>

Chabahar is a part of the Indian grand design to apparently develop transportation infrastructure. It is however viewed with suspicion to sabotage Pakistan's future strategy of expanding its influence in Central Asia and beyond. Chabahar provides India easy access to Afghanistan and Central Asia through

Indian Ocean. India's ultimate desire is to connect Chabahar with Central Asian republics through roads and a network of railway system to bypass Pakistan, and to reduce the dependency of Central Asian countries on the Pakistani port of Gwadar. Iran is already enjoying close socio-cultural and economic relations with the Central Asian republics. Iran is working on several projects in Tajikistan including the Anzob tunnel, and has constructed a bridge over the Amu Darya (Oxus River) that connects Chabahar with the Khojent route. In addition, the construction of 218-km-long Zaranj-Delaram highway that now links Afghanistan to the Iranian port of Chabahar and also connects Herat and Kabul via Mazar-e-Sharif in the north and Kandhar in the south—thereby providing easier inroads in Afghanistan and possibly even further, to Central Asia via Iran.<sup>9</sup>

Owing to the fact that Central Asian countries are land-locked, they depend on Iranian ports, especially on Chabahar for trade and commercial relations with the rest of the world. Moreover, Afghanistan is more friendly and close to India than Pakistan. In this regard, with its geo-strategic positioning in Iran, India gets opportunity to have an access to warm waters through this region. The creation of North-South Corridor is the best prospect for Iran to expand its transit corridor to India. The idea of North-South Corridor has multiple purposes and is, therefore, seen as an opening to bypass East-West Silk Road Project.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, India gains more security, political, economic and strategic advantages from Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia as compared to China. Iran is more stable than Pakistan. It has better relations with Afghanistan and the Central Asian states. Bordering Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, Iran has a natural geographical advantage by providing access to Sea for the Central Asian States. However, intensifying competition between India and China in Arabian Sea and Central Asia, and the growing US concerns about China's offensive capabilities made the global and regional security environment more complex and sensitive.

For India and Iran, the stability of Afghanistan, containment of terrorism, containment of drug trafficking, integration of Central Asia with larger world, energy security, pipeline issues and development of commerce and cooperation in energy sector are some of the important cementing factors of their bilateral relationship. The nuclear issue and Western sanctions on Iran and Kashmir issues are issues of contention between both countries.

There are a range of divergences between India and Iran. These divergences need to be narrowed down. The first and most important among them is nuclear issue. Due to the 2008 nuclear treaty, India and United States have been converted

from being Cold War-era Estranged Allies to Engaged Allies in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This development maintains Kautilya's theory that convergences of interests play a decisive role in the realm of international relations. Islamic State has become a serious cause of concern for the countries in the Middle East. Iran is the only country within this region that has shown its willingness to contain Islamic State. The United States is also concerned to contain Islamic State. This is equally true to contain the resurgent Taliban in Afghanistan. The resurgent Taliban and the Islamic State is also a serious security threat for India, Russia and China. This prevailing security architecture in the Middle East and South West Asia has pushed India and Iran to deepen their relationship.

This cooperation will bring durable peace and cooperation in the most volatile part of the globe. India, today, is perhaps the only capable country to convince both of them on this issue. Bringing United States and Iran closer on the same page on diverse conflicting issues is in the larger national interest of India and of regional peace also. It will also provide stability to the security of South West Asia. India must convey to the United States that Iran is mutually beneficial for us. India must also advise Iran that instead of confronting the US, it must cooperate with the Western world to protect Shia Muslims on humanitarian grounds. Iran was trying to free Shia places of worships in Iraq but it yielded no adequate results since it was not vacated due to American military operation. After the death of Saddam Hussain in 2003, global community got to know that two of the most sacred places of Shia worship, Najaf and Karbala are in Iraq and not in Iran. Iran must also shed its mindset of opposition for the sake of opposition to the United States. It is also equally applicable for the United States. India is better positioned today to mediate between two bitter rivals probably first time after the end of the Second World War.

Second most important irritant between India and Iran is the Kashmir issue. Recently, Iran has not extended its support to the cause but previously it had extended its support to independence of Kashmir. Iran must understand with its experience in Iraq war that religion cannot be a promoter of national interests. Since many decades, Iran is competing with Saudi Arabia on a number of issues. Both are harbingers of Islam, so then a question that arises is why are they fighting against each other? Only convergences of interests are the cementing factor in foreign policy. It is an open secret that India and Iran's interests converge on several grounds; therefore, they are cooperating not only for the protection and promotion of their national interests but also for peace and stability in the region.

Iran is yet another point of contention between India and the United States although recently India has been motivated by the US to participate in UN-led Western sanctions against Iran. Global concern over Iran's nuclear weapons development program, and the potential for subsequent proliferation has driven US efforts to coordinate a coercive international sanctions regime. India, however, has a long historical and mutually beneficial relationship with Iran centred on trade, commerce, and cultural diffusion, with India currently importing significant amounts of oil from and facilitating the financing of Iranian energy companies—the targets of Western sanctions. India and Iran are two important old civilizations and have been connected to each other since millennia.

After the end of the Cold War, there has been a shift in the global distribution of power from the West to the East. While the political system globally can still be described as unipolar, Asia is characterized by multipolarity. The powers of Asia compete for power, influence and resources. India is amongst the great powers on the rise. India is the seventh largest country in the world, the second most populous and the world's largest democracy.<sup>11</sup> It is one of the world's most powerful economies and has highly professional armed forces, which have made India emerge as an entity that can help shift the global balance of power.

In this changing political environment, India has struggled to define itself and comprehend its power capabilities as well as the possibilities and limitations of that power. Indian global thinking is characterized by a lack of consensus on a strategic framework that can structure its foreign relations.<sup>12</sup> India could change the game while invoking real spirit of NAM in the context of Iran. Given the pressure by the United States on India in this context, we must take a principle stand and advise both to settle their thorny issues through amicable means of settling disputes. Fortunately, the situation is emerging to help India's ideal line on Iran.

### Concluding Observations

What complicates India's Iran policy is that the US and Iran are adversaries. The US wants to isolate Iran, partly through imposing strict economic sanctions on the country, and it wants its other ally countries, including India, to follow this suit. Under President Donald Trump's administration, this prevailing issue has been further complicated. This forces India to engage in a delicate act of balance between, on the one hand, pursuing its regional goals and beneficial policies towards Iran, and on the other hand ensuring that the relationship with the US does not suffer. The question is how big a part the United States' policy has

played on the Indian foreign policy's decisions that concern Iran. Since President Rouhani's rule, Tehran has perhaps understood realist aspects of the delicacy of its diplomacy particularly towards the West led by the United States.

It is a compulsion also of both the parties to resolve the crisis. Things are going on positively at least till date and one must hope that a win-win situation will be achieved by both the parties. At the outset of 21<sup>st</sup> century, the contours of international system have changed radically. It has provided an opportunity for both the countries. India is growing rapidly and all set to become third global energy consumer by 2022. The sustainable growth of India could not be ensured till the ensuring of energy security. Iran is one of the top five global energy-producing countries and its geographical location also gives India an advantage. Iran could be an excellent energy security guarantor to India. In contrast, it can also provide a sustainable energy consumer to Iran. In Central Asia too, Iran and India have several convergences. They wish to connect Central Asia with the Iranian port of Chabahar. It will give an impetus not only to Central Asian Republics but also to India and Iran. Iran is an energy-producing country and its sustainable growth depends on the sale of its precious natural resource. Due to its growing energy requirements, India is and will be an important buyer of Iranian energy products.

Eminent Indian security analyst, Raja Mohan has rightly stated in November 2013, "Any nuclear deal between Washington and Tehran will immediately bring down oil prices, relieve the current macroeconomic pressures on India, and improve Delhi's energy security calculus over the longer term. US-Iran rapprochement will help to strengthen Afghanistan against the Taliban and Pakistan and expand India's room for regional maneuver after 2014."<sup>13</sup> The deal between Washington and Tehran has already been concluded but new regime of President Trump has changed the contours of United States-Iran relations. President Trump administration is tilted towards Saudi Arabia and set to dent Iran. New sanctions have been clamped against Iran by Trump administration and the United States is expecting that India should do away with oil imports from Iran. United States has deployed its all-powerful navy in the Strait of Hormuz and it is going to be stationed there till 2020 US presidential election.

India-United States bilateral relations have deepened since last two decades. In September 2018, United States gave 2+2 dialogue status to India where foreign and defence secretary came together and had a summit level talk with their Indian counterparts. India has to convince United States that Iran has been a stabilizing

factor in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Iraq and Syria conflict could not be resolved without Iranian cooperation. Iran is an important player and it had been part and parcel of Indian efforts along with Russia and Central Asian Republics to contain Taliban and formation of the Northern Alliance during Taliban rule over Afghanistan (1996-2001). In the backdrop of NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan, this proximity is utmost required and the US interest is also served. Containment of the Islamic State has remained a serious concern for the Western block, Iran, India, Russia and China. The way Islamic State has been executing its captives, it reminds us of the medieval barbarism and through these heinous acts, it has emerged as a threat to global humanity. Iran could be pivotal to contain Islamic State because one of the undeclared objectives of the Islamic State has been to weaken Iranian influence in the Middle East.

India will extremely benefit with its growing bilateral relationship with Iran and vice versa. Both countries have come together on a wide range of interests—be it economic, strategic, or others; therefore, they must minimize the divergences. In August 2013, Vice President of India was present in the swearing-in ceremony of new Iranian President Rouhani. It was an excellent goodwill gesture. Both countries are availing good relationships but to cope up with the emerging challenges, they urgently need to enhance it.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani visited New Delhi in February 2018. President Rouhani and PM Modi had extensive talks and inked nine agreements. It includes easing visa rules and cooperation on medical sector apart from a maritime agreement on Chabahar port development.<sup>14</sup> Trade, investment and regional connectivity between India and Iran received a boost from this visit. Deepening India-Iran bonhomie is quite important for the peace and stability in Southwest Asia. One of the most important obligations for a country is to provide basic human rights and security to its people. Both India and Iran could do it successfully through a deepened relationship. It is of utmost importance to both the countries to promote their bilateral relationship. Modi government has adopted 'Look West Policy'. The mandate of this policy has been to engage countries which are situated west to India. Iran is one of the fulcrums of India's Look West Policy due to its energy reserves and geo-strategic location. Modi government has taken many pro-active steps to accelerate Indo-Iran relationship despite many prevailing issues. The prevailing trust deficit between Iran and the United States has complicated India's option for energy security. India imports 12% of its energy demand from Iran. Due to the US sanctions, India is compelled to stop the imports. If tension between the US and Iran will aggravate further, global oil

prices will go up and that could be detrimental for Indian surging economy because India imports over 90% of its energy requirements. Modi-II government is expected to forward its previous NDA policies led by PM Vajpayee with the timely modifications in the context of Indo-Iran relationship.

## NOTES

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