

III. МИНТАКАВИЙ ЭНЕРГЕТИКА СЕГМЕНТЛАРИ
Региональные энергетические сегменты
Regional Energy Segments

**IRAN-INDIA ENERGY COOPERATION:
DRAWING A BIGGER IMAGE OF THE TWO NATIONS' RELATIONS
(EXCERPTS FROM THE BOOK)¹**

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Abstract: *The paper is devoted to the analysis of Iran-India relations, specifically through the focus on economic cooperation since the Cold War, mainly on energy trade in the past two decades. Based on India's unique position in the global economy, as the world's sixth largest economy and the world's third purchasing power with an official 1.3 billion population and unofficially 1.6 billion population is a great market for Iran. Tehran has never underestimated this significance and has always maintained ties with New Delhi even during the Cold War. This book investigates India and Iran relations, specifically in the energy fields. This exploration incorporates the role of influential extra-regional and regional players' interests in the Tehran-Delhi geopolitical equation to draw a bigger and more accurate picture of the two nation's relations.*

Keywords: *India, Iran, Energy Supply, Regional Cooperation, Geo-economics, Transport Corridors, Central Asia, Belt and Road Initiative, China, West Asia, Chabahar, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India.*

Factors Affecting Future Cooperation

The energy field is certainly one of the most important fields for collaboration between Iran and India; however, it is not all of it. If we try to see the bigger picture and have a better understanding of the upheavals in Tehran and Delhi's relations and can have a rough image of the shape of the future, we need to consider a few other crucial factors that can affect these ties.

India has been pursuing a more colorful presence in West Asia. In other

¹ These excerpts from the book entitled "Iran-India Energy Cooperation: Drawing a Bigger Image of the Two Nations' Relations" is placed in the journal by permission of the Author and published by Tehran International Studies Institute (ISBN: 9789645263469)

words, Delhi felt a need to increase its sphere of influence in West Asia. Of course, Iran's legacy in hydrocarbon reserves is not hidden from India's eyes. So is the case for China, which is a regional rival of India. Prime Minister Modi's visit to Tehran in June 2016 took place right a few months after Chinese President, Xi Jinping to the country in January of the same year, especially since the Chinese President and his Iranian counterpart issued a joint statement on the two nations' determination to improve bilateral ties to a "comprehensive strategic partnership."² In order to create an alternative route to the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, India focused on its own.

India's focus on INSTC is her alternative to BRI. Since INSTC can open doors to the Caucasus, Russia, and Central Asia while bypassing Pakistan, the other regional competitor of India, it is the focal point of India's plans in West Asia, which will affect Delhi's future sphere of influence in this region as well her success or failure in competition with China. India even invested in an infrastructural project to build a 215-km highway between Zaranj and Delaram in Afghanistan that connects the latter to Chabahar port, which was after signing a trilateral agreement with Iran and Afghanistan in 2016.³

Likewise, India and Kazakhstan have planned to create a cargo link from the ports in the West of India to Kazakhstan traversing Iran. The two countries' railway giants, Kazakhstan Railways (KTZ) and India's Adani ports are planning to build a terminal at the Mundra port to support freight traffic to Bandar Abbas port of Iran. In the future, this link is set to be connected to Iran- Turkmenistan-

² "India's Economic Stakes in West Asia," *IAS Parliament*, June 14, 2022, <https://www.iasparliament.com/current-affairs/indias-economic-stakes-in-west-asia>; Suresh Seshadri, "Explained: Why Are India's Economic Stakes High in West Asia," *The Hindu*, June 12, 2022, <https://www.thehindu.com/business/Economy/explained-why-are-indias-economic-stakes-high-in-west-asia/article65517823.ece>; Hirra Khushyboo, "Iran, China Evaluate Strategic Partnership," *The Diplomatic Insight*, June 2, 2022, <https://thediomaticinsight.com/iran-china-evaluate-strategic-partnership/>.

³ Su-Lin Tan, "G-7's Infrastructure Funding Plan Offers Alternative to China's BRI in a Deliberate Way," *CNBC*, June 28, 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/06/28/new-g-7-infrastructure-plan-offers-alternative-to-china-belt-road-.html>; Finian Cunningham, "Is India Playing Double Game to Disrupt China's BRI?" *Strategic Culture Foundation*, June 21, 2022, <https://www.strategic-culture.org/news/2022/06/21/is-india-playing-double-game-to-disrupt-china-bri/>; "How an India-Backed Global Transit Corridor (NSITC) could be An alternative TO THE Suez canal," *Eurasian Times*, June 5, 2021, <https://eurasiantimes.com/how-an-india-backed-global-transit-corridor-instc-could-be-an-alternative-to-the-suez-canal/>.

Kazakhstan railroad.⁴

While keeping all rail link options open, India in addition to Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, is studying multiple alternatives such as a new land-sea route that crosses over Iran or Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline. The Indian desire to connect with central Asia has been also reflected in the country's presenting proposals to invest in Turkmenistan's downstream industries such as refineries, petrochemicals, and fertilizers. Similarly, an agreement to deepen defense cooperation have been signed during PM Modi's visit to Ashgabat in 2015.⁵

India is also exploring the preference of Bandar Abbas-Azerbaijan-Russia link over Bandar- Abbas-Russia's trans-Caspian cargo link to see which one has a higher cost-benefit efficiency.

Of course, it depends on the types of the goods and other factors such as the weather, rail and road conditions, and political stability of each route. Now let's get back to INSTC, which seems the most important option for Delhi as of today.⁶

As it has been explained earlier, Chabahar port in Iran plays as significant part in India's INSTC project. Since Chabahar is exempt from the US sanctions, the current issue surrounding India's work in Chabahar is to raise enough funds to complete the remaining phases of the development project. This also became a serious concern for Delhi since Iran may invite other investors to the project.

⁴ John C. K. Daly, "Kazakhstan Looks to India, Iran for Access to the World's Oceans," *Modern Tokyo Times*, December 17, 2015, <https://moderntokyotimes.com/kazakhstan-looks-to-india-iran-for-access-to-the-worlds-oceans/>; "More by Rail between India and Kazakhstan," *Transport Journal*, July 15, 2015, <https://www.transportjournal.com/home/news/artikeldetail/more-by-rail-between-india-and-kazakhstan.html?L=vsiooxshoanm%2F>; "KTZ and India Signed MoU on Rail Technical Cooperation," *Railway Pro*, July 21, 2015, <https://www.railwaypro.com/wp/ktz-and-india-signed-mou-on-rail-technical-cooperation/>.

⁵ "India, Turkmenistan ink 7 Pacts; Agree to Combat Terrorism together," *The Indian Express*, July 11, 2015, <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/indiaturkmenistan-ink-7-pacts-pm-modi-for-early-operation-of-tapi/>; Elena Kosolapova, "India Re-Negotiating Investment Treaty with Turkmenistan," *Trend News Agency*, July 18, 2017, <https://en.trend.az/casi a/turkmeni stan/2778560.html>.

⁶ "Moscow Eyeing Expansion of Trade through Russia-Azerbaijan-Iran-Pakistan railway," *Tehran Times*, June 25, 2022, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/474017/Moscow-eyeing-expansion-of-trade-through-Russia-Azerbaijan-Iran-Pakistan>; "Iran, Russia, Azerbaijan Discuss Trilateral Co-op in Caspian Sea," *Tehran Times*, September 29, 2021, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/465574/Iran-Russia-Azerbaijan-discuss-trilateral-co-op-in-Caspian>; Elnur Baghishov, "Iran Taking Steps to Develop Trade with Azerbaijan- Deputy Minister," *Trend News Agency*, June 25, 2022, <https://en.trend.az/business/economy/3613949.html>.

Other players in this equation are also concern about the future of the project.

Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are very interested in using Chabahar to connect with India which create for them an opportunity to have access to the Indian Ocean as well as trade with India. Both Nur-Sultan and Tashkent enjoy a good relationship with Russia, which Iran has also good political relationship with and is one the most important places that will be connected to India via INSTC. Having understood the cruciality of the future of such ties and to address the funding issue, India raised the allocated budget from INR 45 crore in 2019/20 financial year to INR 100 crore in 2020/21 financial year.⁷

The other factors that can affect the future of Tehran-Delhi relations is security cooperation in the Persian Gulf as well as the regions beyond. Iran has a strong military presence in the Persian Gulf that has been recently completely eclipsed that of the US Navy. Iran has seized a British tanker in July 2019, has shut down the most expensive US drone (RQ-4 Global Hawk) in June 2019, and seized two Greek tankers in early June 2022 and assert Tehran's strength in the Persian Gulf in response to the US intimidating behaviors. It seems that India is very much aware of this fact and has tried to work with Iran, especially since Delhi has not only an energy client of Arab oil and gas producers in this region but also there are several million Indian human resources working and living in the region.⁸

Moreover, India is also aware of Tehran's influence in Iran, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen as well as Tehran's allied groups and political parties operating in several countries in West Asia.

⁷ "Budget 2022: Rs 200 cr for Development Assistance to Afghanistan, Rs 100 cr for Chabahar Port," *The Indian Express*, February 2, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/business/budget/budget-2022-rs-200-cr-for-development-assistance-to-afghanistan-rs-100-cr-for-chabahar-port/m>; "Iran, India Agree to Increase Investment in Chabahar Port-FM," *MENA FN*, July 11, 2022, <https://menafn.com/1104360280/Iran-India-Agree-To-Increase-Investment-In-Chabahar-Port-FM>.

⁸ "Iran Seizes British Tanker in Strait of Hormuz," *BBC*, July 20 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-49053383>; Tara Law, "Iran Shut Down a \$176 Million U.S. Drone. Here's What to Know About the RQ-4 Global Hawk," *Time*, June 21, 2019, <https://time.com/5611222/rq-4-global-hawk-iran-shot-down/>; Nicholas Paphitis, "Iran Seizes 2 Greek Tankers in Persian Gulf as Tensions Rise," *ABC News*, May 27, 2022, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/us-navy-claim-iran-seized-greek-oil-tankers-85023806>.

Delhi's future expansion of relations with these countries means that India should have a good understanding of these countries socio-political dynamics and the influence of other players, particularly Iran, among these nations. Therefore, Tehran can play a significant role in the security of the region which makes it a weighty player in the region which Delhi cannot ignore while thinking about expansion of trade and economic ties with these nations in West Asia.⁹

On the other hand, a closer relation between Iran and China can affect Delhi's relation with Tehran as well as the Persian Gulf nations. Iran and China have both conflict of interest with the US in the region. Considering India's closer relations with Washington and Tel Aviv, this may have challenges for China and Iran. Additionally, New Delhi wants to maintain a balanced relations with all these parties since they are all important for India but not equally. For instance, Tel Aviv's expertise in and influence on western public relation firms and Tel Aviv's expertise in cinema and media is a great source of help to BJP efforts to remain in power by gaining more votes in India.¹⁰

In a post-Cold War and post-globalization era that multilateralism in international relations become more and more important for non-superpower nations maintaining ties with various countries plays an important part in their foreign policy. Russia and China are no exemption. They pursue a multi-aligned policy in West Asia in which an enhanced tie with Iran is a way to challenge the American hegemony in the region. Iran, China, and Russia's naval drills in the Sea of Oman and north of the Indian Ocean in early 2022 is an example of these nations' challenging the US hegemony in the region. Meanwhile China has been increasing its naval and military presence in the western Indian Ocean. Delhi is concerned that this brings Iran and China to a strategic understanding that helps

⁹ Tanvi Ratna, "India's Syria Venture," *The Hindu*, May 13, 2016, <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/indias-syria-venture/article5623835.ece>; Anil Trigunayat, "India Needs to Become a Player in Syria's Transition and Reconstruction," *Impact and Policy Research Institute*, November 26, 2021, <https://www.impriindia.com/insights/india-player-syria-transition/>.

¹⁰ Andrew Korybko, "China, India, Iran, and Pakistan Just Becomes so Much More Important to Russia," *Astute News*, March 8, 2022, <https://astutenews.com/2022/03/china-india-iran-and-pakistan-just-became-so-much-more-important-to-russia/>; "Iran Wants to Join China, Russia, India, and South Africa in BRICS Club," *Cyprus Mail*, June 28, 2022, <https://cyprus-mail.com/2022/06/28/iran-wants-to-join-china-russia-india-and-s-africa-in-brics-club/>.

Beijing grow its military footprints in the region.¹¹

In the shadow of recent crisis in the world, particularly the new Cold War after eruption of Russia-Ukraine war, India feels a need to obtain energy from a mixed basket of sources including Iran, as the country has been already getting its oil from Kazakhstan, Nigeria, Angola, Mexico, and several other international suppliers. It seems that India is trying to mitigate any risks of disruption in trade and energy supply by diverging her suppliers while engaging with a variety of them either individually or in a multi-nation format such as Middle East to India Deepwater Pipeline with Iran and Oman. More multi-national projects are expected to be realized as a result of Delhi's multilateralist foreign policy. This can also provide Delhi with a new tool to effectively compete with Beijing for economic opportunities, especially by acquiring more developmental projects in the Persian Gulf.¹²

It seems that as it is less likely that the US-imposed sanctions on Iran would be removed, Delhi will maintain Rupee-Rial mechanism of payment. It is also very likely that India expands this method and diversify payment channels to facilitate trade between the two countries, especially since there are various other goods to be traded in different sectors. For example, India has a robust capability in steel, aluminum, mines, metals, railroad construction, software, IT, and technology while Iran is capable in oil and gas industries and products, defense products, especially drones and missiles, as well as agriculture and health sectors. The latter is, in fact, another ground for great cooperation.¹³

It is expected that Delhi and Tehran will sign two MoUs regarding further cooperation I health sector by the end of Summer 2022. One MoU has been discussed to cover the regular medical practices concerning research centers

¹¹ "Trilateral Naval Drills between China, Russia and Iran Start on Friday, *Reuters*, January 20, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-china-iran-hold-joint-naval-drill-friday-isna-2022-01-20/>; "China, Russia and Iran hold Joint Naval Drills in Gulf of Oman," *CNN*, December 27, 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/12/27/asia/china-russia-iran-military-drills-intl-hnk/index.html>.

¹² Reza Yeganehshakib, "Iran-India Energy Cooperation Opens New Horizons," *Al-Monitor*, January 14, 2016, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/01/iran-india-oman-gas-pipeline-meidp-vs-tapi.html>; Reza Yeganehshakib, "Investment Implications of President Rohani's Economic Opening," *Journal of Political Risk*, Vol. II, No. 7 (2014). <http://www.ipolrisk.com/investment-implications-of-president-rohanis-economic-opening/>.

¹³ "Iran is Exploring an Alternative Banking Mechanism to Promote Trade with India," *The Hindu Business Online*, June 9, 2022, <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/iran-is-exploring-an-alternative-banking-mechanism-to-promote-trade-with-india/article65511630.ece>.

‘collaborations in Iran and India. The other is planned to create a ground for the expansion of medicine trade between the two countries by creating the same standards and removing other regulatory impediments. This would pave the way for not only expanding domestically made medical products exportation but also for facilitation manufacturing medical products as a result of mutual investments in each other countries and an exchange of skilled labor and searchers in the other party’s manufacturing plants.¹⁴

Although the two countries’ strategic engagement has been limited due to bilateral suspicion of the other party’s intentions, for instance attitude towards Pakistan or the US or Delhi’s growing ties with Tel Aviv in contrast to Tehran’s getting closer to China, the realities on the ground such India’s need to diversify energy sources, having a diverse freight access to the West, Central Asia, and Russia, as well as expanding influence in West Asia, particularly in the Persian Gulf region, will encourage India to strengthen ties with Iran.

Conclusion

The future of India-Iran energy cooperation is still depended on the new US administration decision to ease the sanctions or keep them as they are. If sanctions are lifted, the post sanction era is a different time for Iran as the country has more flexibility in financial transactions with its energy partners, especially in receiving payments and issuing insurance for cargo. However, it seems that the things are getting more real between not only Iran and India but also between Iran and her other energy clients since Iran is not as desperate as before 2011 to sell oil and gas for a heavily discounted price. The main reason is not external, rather domestic because of the country’s having cut her budget dependency on oil revenue as a part of Tehran’s major policy of “resistive economy” already created to guard the country against the sanctions. On the other hand, India’s demand for natural gas is expected to grow rapidly in the next few years. Hence, India must supply its gas-hungry industries preferably from nearer suppliers such as Iran and the Arab countries in the Persian Gulf region. Moreover, India’s decision to cut

¹⁴ “Envoy Clarifies Iran-India Co-op in Health, Anti-narcotics,” *Tehran Times*, May 31, 2022, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/473209/Envoy-clarifies-Iran-India-co-op-in-health-anti-narcotics>.

Iranian crude import as a result of Donald Trump pressure on New Delhi, is indeed not a permanent halt since there are clear signs for the future of the two countries energy cooperation as the Indian officials announced after Joe Biden has been elected new president of the United States. This shows India's desire, as the third world purchasing power and one of fastest world growing economies, to play a more active role in Iran's energy sector, especially after India will become too big, like China, to be intimidated by the US unilateral sanctions.

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