



Examining Iran-India Relations within the Framework of Major Powers: An Analysis of the United States' Influence in the Post-JCPOA Era

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Abstract

Having deep historical roots, the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of India have been shaped by a multitude of factors, encompassing domestic, regional, and international developments. The influence of major powers on the contemporary ties of these two countries stands out among the international factors. Drawing on the analytical framework developed by Erzsébet N. Rózsa (2021), this paper aims to examine the role of the United States (US) in transforming the dynamics of Iran-India relations. The central argument put forth is that the foreign policy behavior of both countries toward each other in recent years is driven by national strategic interests rather than historical connections. The study employs a three-tiered analysis, examining the bilateral, regional, and global levels. Each level focuses on particular prominent aspects, such as trade flows and the energy market, developments in Southwest Asia, and the nuclear issue, respectively. This article contends that at all three levels, the importance of forging a strong bilateral relationship between India and Iran cannot be overlooked, given their numerous converging interests. However, the US foreign policy toward Tehran, notably through the maximum pressure campaign initiated by former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden's failure to reverse unilateral sanctions, has indeed had a significantly detrimental impact on the ties between the two countries in the post-JCPOA period.

Keywords: Iran-India relations, United States, Iranian foreign policy, Indian foreign policy, national interests.



Introduction

“Few people have been more closely related in origin and throughout history than the people of India and the people of Iran” (Nehru, as cited in Rózsa, 2021, p. 531).

The history of Iran-India relations is a long and rich one, spanning across millennia and encompassing various dimensions of cultural, political, and economic interactions. The two regions, being adjacent geographical entities, have had close contacts since ancient times, influenced by the movements of people, ideas, goods, and religions. The historical ties between Iran and India have been shaped by the changing dynamics of the regional and global contexts, as well as the domestic factors of the two countries. From the ancient civilizations to the contemporary era, the evolution of Iran-India relations highlights the major milestones, challenges, and opportunities that have marked their bilateral relationship. The relations, indeed, reflect the continuity and change, the diversity and unity, and the complexity and simplicity of the historical and contemporary realities of the region and the world.

The colonial era (particularly 18th to early 20th centuries) marked a significant change in the nature and direction of Iran-India relations as Britain sought to secure its commercial and strategic interests in the region and intervened in the internal affairs of the local rulers. However, the post-colonial era witnessed the emergence of the modern states of Iran and India and the transformation of their bilateral relations. It is during this contemporary period that Iran and India both faced the challenges of the partition, nation-building, and regional and global conflicts. With the advent of a multipolar world order, Iran and India looked for new opportunities in their relations while facing the changes and uncertainties of the regional and global contexts. Seeking to diversify and strengthen their bilateral relations, they have both tried to enhance their roles and positions in the arena of international relations.

The relations between Iran and India in the new century are marked by both opportunities and challenges, as the two countries seek to balance their interests and commitments in a changing regional and global context. Iran and India, which share historical, cultural, and civilizational ties, also have common strategic and economic interests, such as energy security, connectivity, counterterrorism, and regional stability. However, they face some constraints and conflicts, requiring them to employ a pragmatic and nuanced approach to improve the bilateral ties. One of the main

efforts to improve the ties has been the development of the Chabahar port, an intended strategic and economic hub in southeastern Iran aimed at connecting India with Afghanistan and Central Asia. The port was assumed as a part of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to link India and Iran with Russia and Europe.

Iran and India have practiced other measures to improve their bilateral relations, such as a defense cooperation agreement signed, aimed at enhancing the military and security ties between the two countries. Furthermore, a cultural cooperation agreement was signed between the two to promote the cultural and educational exchanges. Other measures include the cooperation in the regional and multilateral forums and initiatives, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the BRICS, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and the New Development Bank (NDB) (Ashwarya, 2017; Tisheyar & Noorafkan, 2021). True, the origins of Indo-Iranian relations go back for millennia with respect to ethnic and linguistic common roots and the Indo-Aryan heritage; yet, Iran-India relations, ancient as they may be, are more defined by contemporary interests, strategic perceptions, and a regional and global balance of power than historical or cultural connections (Rózsa, 2021).

The relationship between Iran and India, much like the interactions between any two sovereign nations, is inherently shaped and influenced by a myriad of factors that extend beyond the scope of their direct bilateral engagements, encompassing regional geopolitical dynamics, global economic trends, historical ties, cultural exchanges, and the strategic interests of other influential global powers. The US is among the key factors that impacts the relations between India and Iran, as it exerts its political, economic, and military influence and interests in the region and the world. On the one hand, the US, which has been hostile and antagonistic to Iran since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, has imposed various sanctions and pressures upon Iran and its allies and partners and has sought to isolate and contain Iranian nuclear and regional activities. “Drastically shifting political landscape brought on by the rise of the revolution resulted in ties disruption between Iran and the US so much so that rarely would it be found another instance of such a rancorous relation between Washington and any other country in the past decades” (Asadi, 2015, p. 21). On the other hand, the US, which has been relatively friendly and supportive of India since the end of the Cold War, has established a strategic partnership and

cooperation with India and has sought to enhance and promote Indian role and position in the region and the world. For researchers like M. B. Jain (2016), this relationship is characterized by a mutual trust deficit and punctuated by uncertainties, while the stability of the ties between the two countries is assumed, by scholars such as S. Konwer (2020, p. 19), to be a “strategic requirement which neither can afford to ignore.”.

As V. Suresh and K. Ramesh (2015) state, Iran continues to remain important for India considering reasons such as energy security, access to trade and transport connectivity with Central Asia and Afghanistan, as well as managing the domestic political dynamics. While India is not willing to be a victim of US policy in West Asia, it is also equally important to maintain a strategic partnership with the US. And in the current context, as Suresh and Ramesh (2015) hold, the real test for India and Iran is to maintain and sustain the current momentum in their relations. At any rate, the US impact on the relations is inevitable. For instance, Purushothaman (2012) examines three cases of the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline, India's votes against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency, and the Reserve Bank of India's guidelines of December 2010 to conclude that the US negative impact on Iran-India ties was tremendous. On the contrary, J. Teja (2015) argues that Iran would benefit from a stronger and prosperous India, as the growing convergence of India's interests with those of the US is a good start for expanded cooperation in energy, trade, and expatriate manpower in a stable and peaceful Western Asia.

Building upon the analytical framework articulated by Erzsébet N. Rózsa (2021), this paper endeavors to scrutinize the role of the United States (US) in the evolving dynamics of Iran-India relations. The principal argument posited herein is that the recent foreign policy behaviors of both nations toward one another are predominantly driven by national strategic imperatives rather than historical affiliations. The study adopts a tripartite analytical approach, dissecting the bilateral, regional, and global dimensions. Each dimension is examined with a focus on salient aspects such as trade flows and the energy market, geopolitical developments in Southwest Asia, and the nuclear issue, respectively. This article asserts that across all three dimensions, the imperative of cultivating a robust bilateral relationship between India and Iran is underscored by their numerous converging interests; nevertheless, the US foreign policy toward Tehran, particularly through the maximum pressure campaign initiated by former President Donald Trump and

the subsequent failure of President Joe Biden to rescind unilateral sanctions, has exerted a profoundly adverse impact on the bilateral ties between India and Iran in the post-JCPOA era.

1. Iran-India Energy Cooperation & Bilateral Sphere: Navigating Complex Geopolitical Realities

The strategic alliance between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of India has perpetually been influenced by global hegemonic powers, notably the United States (US), creating a complex web of political, economic, and military pressures in the region. The consequential effects of this influence resonate particularly in key areas such as energy, connectivity, and security, marking a pivotal juncture in bilateral relations. Energy cooperation serves as a cornerstone in the relationship between Iran and India, with Iran serving as a major oil and gas supplier to energy-hungry India. Conversely, India stands as a significant consumer for Iran's energy resources. This symbiotic relationship not only bolsters their energy security but also plays a critical role in the economic development agendas of both nations. The significance of energy cooperation was formally acknowledged in the New Delhi Declaration of 2003, where mutual interests in the energy sector were highlighted as a fundamental pillar for national energy security and economic growth.

Despite the mutual benefits derived from energy cooperation, the relationship between Iran and India has been deeply marred by the pervasive implications of US sanctions targeting Iran's energy sector. The imposition of stringent measures has compelled India to navigate a complex energy sourcing landscape, ultimately leading to a reduction and eventual cessation of oil imports from Iran. The punitive actions taken by the US Treasury against Tibalaji Petrochem Pvt. Ltd., a prominent Mumbai-based petrochemical firm, illustrate the rigorous enforcement of restrictions on procuring Iranian energy products from sanctioned entities. The statistics revealing a dramatic decline in Indian crude oil imports from Iran, plummeting from 23.9 million metric tons in 2018-19 to a mere 2.2 million metric tons in 2019-20, serve as a stark testament to the disruptive impact of US sanctions on the energy dynamics between both nations. The abrupt shift in energy sourcing patterns has thrust India into a delicate balancing act, characterized by the necessity to carefully maneuver between its ties with energy-rich Iran and its engagements with the US, described aptly as "walking a tightrope balancing its relationship with energy-rich Iran and the world's

dominant power, the US" (Hafeez, 2019).

This necessitates astute diplomatic finesse and strategic calibration to navigate the conflicting interests and preserve the delicate equilibrium in bilateral relations amidst the coercive policies of global superpowers. Conclusively, the confluence of geopolitical pressures, energy exigencies, and strategic alliances underscores the intricate tapestry woven between Iran and India, necessitating adaptive responses to ensure mutual prosperity amid the turbulent currents of international relations.

The unilateral withdrawal of the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and the subsequent imposition of secondary sanctions have exacerbated the strain on Iran-India relations, particularly concerning energy cooperation (Hussain Wani, Mir & Ahmad Shah, 2019; Saraswat, 2024). While India initially received a sanction waiver for crude oil imports from Iran, the efficacy of this reprieve was short-lived due to restrictive timelines and exclusions encompassing critical components such as shipping companies and insurance, rendering it insufficient to sustain the flow of Iranian crude oil into India (Keynoush, 2022). These constraints not only impeded the oil trade but also reverberated through other avenues of cooperation such as LNG trade and strategic projects like the Farzad B initiative, adversely impacted by US sanctions on financial institutions and transactions (Omidi & Hafeez, 2023). The confluence of these challenges underscores the intricate interplay between global power dynamics, economic imperatives, and strategic alliances, shaping the contours of Iran-India relations. India, as an emerging global economic power, finds itself at a crucial crossroads, compelled to secure a stable energy supply amid the intricate geopolitical realities influenced by US foreign policy decisions. This enduring pressure highlights the nuanced diplomatic tightrope that India must tread to safeguard its energy interests while balancing the strategic imperatives of maintaining cordial relations with both Iran and the US, underscoring the delicate dance of power politics and economic necessities in the contemporary geopolitical arena.

Sima Baidya (2017) believes that prior to the Iranian nuclear deal, the pressure exerted by the US hindered India from developing an independent policy toward Tehran. This interference from the US has impacted Tehran-Delhi relations, preventing them from establishing a strategic partnership (Soltaninejad, 2017). The US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, along with its unilateralism and comprehensive sanctions

against Iran, has compelled Iran to reassess its foreign policy and conduct, affecting its engagements with India (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021). Moreover, the US has pressured various countries to limit their cooperation with Iran, including in peaceful nuclear-related technology development (Mousavian & Musavian, 2018). This pressure has created challenges for Iran in engaging with India through projects like the Chabahar port, exposing Iran to risks associated with US sanctions and regional power struggles (Jan, 2024). Additionally, the growing strategic partnership between the US and India has mirrored the level of relations previously seen between the US and Iran, indicating a shift in dynamics that could impact Iran-India relations (Siraj & Bakare, 2022). The impact of US sanctions on Iran has had broader repercussions, affecting the country's economy and its ability to engage in international relations, negatively affecting its partnerships, including those with India (Kokabisaghi, 2018). Despite these challenges, Iran has not been isolated regionally; instead, the sanctions have fostered increased cooperation between Iran and countries like Russia, altering the geopolitical landscape and potentially influencing Iran's interactions with India (Fiedler, 2023). Bilateral security cooperation between Iran and India unfolds within a multifaceted geopolitical framework characterized by mutual concerns regarding regional stability and counterterrorism imperatives. Collaborative endeavors aimed at combating extremism and fostering peace in the region underscore a joint resolve to counter common threats, notably the menace of ISIS, while advancing stability in Afghanistan. Notwithstanding these shared objectives, the security dynamics between Iran and India are markedly subject to external influences, chiefly the United States.

The presence of the United States in the region has exerted a substantial impact on the security nexus between Iran and India, engendering discord and circumscribing the breadth of their alliance. American interventions within the Middle East frequently clash with Iran's interests, engendering a strained dynamic that reverberates in their bilateral relations with India. Furthermore, U.S. alliances and security frameworks, exemplified by initiatives like the Quad, have prompted India to draw closer to American strategic goals, thereby introducing complexities into its interactions with Iran.

In a seminal study conducted by Mohammad Soltaninejad (2017, p. 21), the examination of the impediments precluding the realization of a coveted strategic partnership between Iran and India shines light on a pivotal argument: "differences in the direction and

objectives of the relations between Iran and India, that is, balancing the United States for the former and cooperation with Iran besides the United States for the latter, have led to failure of the efforts to establish a strategic partnership." Soltaninejad's scholarly analysis accentuates a fundamental discrepancy in the strategic visions of Iran and India, with the former tilting toward a strategy of equilibrium vis-à-vis the United States and the latter endeavoring to engage with Iran while upholding ties with the U.S. This misalignment in strategic outlook impedes the cultivation of a robust partnership between the two nations, particularly concerning security collaboration.

The inability to cement a more encompassing strategic alliance between Iran and India because of divergent objectives and external pressures epitomizes a squandered prospect for both states. By prioritizing conflicting agendas and affiliations, both nations risk forfeiting the potential dividends of a more fortified security coalition in the region. The constraints imposed by external stakeholders such as the U.S. not only impede security cooperation but also introduce intricacies and skepticism that undermine the efficacy of joint initiatives between Iran and India. Surmounting these hurdles and augmenting bilateral security cooperation mandate that both nations adeptly navigate their strategic disparities with a nuanced appreciation of their shared goals and the disruptive impact of external machinations.

2. Navigating Geopolitical Challenges: The Complexities of Iran-India Relations and the Significance of Chabahar Port

The US also has a significant negative impact on the regional relations between Iran and India, as it shapes and influences the regional order and dynamics in the West and South Asia. As an interventionist actor in West Asia, the US has been involved in regional conflicts and issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Iraq war, the Syria war, the Yemeni crisis, and the Iranian nuclear issue. The US, therefore, has been the main adversary and challenger of Iran and its allies, seeking to counter and contain Iran's influence and interests in the region. In his study, S. Gurjar (2023) introduces two key concepts, namely Iran's role as a geopolitical pivot and India's extended neighborhood. Despite the fact that India was compelled to limit its relations with Tehran due to the US policy of "maximum pressure" under the Trump administration, India is now re-assessing its strategic priorities as the geostrategic environment in Southeast Asia evolves. To him, the

recent developments, such as visits and diplomatic overtures by India in Iran, underscore the enduring strategic significance of Iran in the geopolitics of West Asia (Gurjar, 2023).

The intricate tapestry of Iran-India relations thus unfolds against a backdrop of historical ties and contemporary geopolitical complexities, with the Chabahar Port project emerging as a focal point, symbolizing the challenges and opportunities that characterize this partnership (Srivastava, 2017; Haji-Yousefi & Narouei, 2021). Positioned at a critical juncture in the geostrategic landscape, Iran's role in major initiatives like China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) underscores its significance as a linchpin for regional connectivity and economic integration (Omidi, 2024; Peimani, 2022). Iran's pivotal geostrategic position is accentuated by its participation in ambitious regional projects, yet the execution of India's plans within these frameworks has faced hurdles due to external pressures and uncertainties, particularly influenced by Western sanctions against Iran. This complex interplay of interests and alliances underscores the evolving nature of regional dynamics, where geopolitical imperatives intersect with economic ambitions.

As Rózsa (2021) insightfully points out, "Iran's dissatisfaction with India has been increasing together with the Iranian perception that India was not the independent geopolitical actor it considered itself to be, realizing that for India the U.S. connection is still much more important." This sentiment encapsulates the shifting perceptions within Iran regarding India's strategic priorities and allegiances, highlighting the delicate balance that India must maintain between its ties with Iran and its strategic partnership with the United States.

The delays and complications surrounding the Chabahar Project serve as a microcosm of the broader challenges and tensions that characterize Iran-India relations (Pant & Mehta, 2018; Kupriyanov & Makarevich, 2024). Despite the exemption granted to the Chabahar port from U.S. sanctions, auxiliary projects crucial for its operationalization, such as the Chabahar-Zahedan railway, face significant delays, reflecting the intricate dance of geopolitical pressures on infrastructural initiatives. The significance of the Chabahar Port transcends its physical infrastructure, embodying broader geopolitical implications that resonate across the region and beyond (Haji-Yousefi & Narouei, 2021). Positioned strategically on the Gulf of Oman, the port not only diversifies trade routes but also challenges established maritime corridors, offering opportunities for

enhanced connectivity and economic cooperation.

In the larger tapestry of regional dynamics, the Chabahar Port project embodies the complexities of contemporary geopolitics, where nations must navigate a labyrinth of alliances, rivalries, and strategic imperatives. As Iran forges ahead with independent initiatives in response to delays and uncertainties surrounding the Chabahar Project, the evolving partnership between Iran and India underscores the intricacies of international relations in an era defined by flux and uncertainty. The challenges surrounding the Chabahar Port initiative illuminate the intricacies of power dynamics and strategic recalibrations in the region, where economic interests intersect with geopolitical rivalries, shaping a narrative of cooperation and competition amidst a backdrop of shifting alliances and imperatives. As Iran and India negotiate the complexities of their relationship, the Chabahar Port stands as a symbol of both the opportunities and challenges inherent in navigating the intricate web of regional geopolitics (Srivastava, 2017; Pant, 2018; Keynoush, 2022; Koolaei & Emami, 2024).

The US sanctions have clearly hampered the development and operation of the Chabahar port. This project was considered by some as a chance to be seized for overcoming the hostilities in the US-Iran ties and alleviating the consequent pressures on the Iranian economy; however, the fate of the Chabahar project has been more vulnerable to the hostile dynamics between Iran and the US (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2021). The delay and uncertainty in the development of the Chabahar project happened in the aftermath of US sanctions that deterred many Indian and international companies from participating in the project. MozaffariFalarti et al. (2023) state that the Chabahar port initiative and agreement between India and Iran have often been criticized by the US, and that waivers and exemptions of US sanctions on Chabahar for India are mainly due to Iran's parallel geo-economic stabilizing factor with the US-Indian axis versus the deemed growing threatening Chinese-Pakistani axis in Afghanistan. At the same time, the evolving geopolitical dynamics in the region, influenced by the rise of China, shifting alliances, and superpower rivalries, have further complicated the regional calculations (Shafqat, 2017).

The Indo-US strategic partnership and nuclear deal have overshadowed projects like the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline, which aimed to foster interdependence and peace in the region (Naazer, 2022). Additionally, India's relations with Iran have been perceived by the US as directly proportional to US-Pakistan relations,

signaling the nature of India's alliances with the US (Ramana, 2012). The US influence on India, Pakistan, and Iran cooperation projects has been evident, with the US distracting India from pursuing regional cooperation initiatives through incentives that jeopardized the process of regionalism in South Asia (Naazer, 2022). On the other hand, US regional interventionism may also create a wedge for Iran and India to engage and cooperate on a range of regional issues and interests. For example, the US irresponsible withdrawal from Afghanistan created a security vacuum and humanitarian crisis in the country, causing implications for both Iran and India that require common measures to be taken (Narayanan Kutty, 2023). They have taken various actions in Afghanistan to safeguard their strategic interests, promote stability, and counter regional rivals, and their involvement in the country's affairs has been shaped by historical alliances, economic considerations, and security concerns, reflecting the complex geopolitical landscape of the region.

3. Implications of US Global Policy Shifts on India-Iran Relations: A Confluence of Challenges and Geopolitical Realities

The United States wields a formidable influence on the intricate web of relations between Iran and India, resonating far beyond bilateral interactions to influence the global stage and governance paradigms. This influence was particularly pronounced in light of the US's pivotal role as a leading actor in international affairs. A glaring instance of this sway is exemplified by the Iranian nuclear deal inked in 2015, a landmark agreement that held the promise of unfurling new avenues for Iran's economic and diplomatic engagements with the wider world.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) ushered in a wave of optimism, heralding potential prosperity and progress through enhanced international collaboration for Iran. However, the implementation of the JCPOA was marred by a quagmire of challenges and uncertainties, exacerbated by wavering commitments from participating parties and the seismic shock of US withdrawal under the tenure of President Trump. This abrupt withdrawal by the US heralded a cascade of repercussions, with the re-imposition of punitive sanctions on Iran and entities engaged in business dealings with the nation, thrusting India into a diplomatic tightrope walk.

The aftermath of the JCPOA unraveling precipitated a conundrum for Iran-India relations, pitting the imperatives of

national interests against the juggernaut of global politics and economic exigencies. India found itself ensnared in a delicate dance, compelled to navigate the labyrinthine landscape of conflicting interests between Tehran and Washington. Straddling divergent commitments, India grappled with the onerous burden of sanctions-induced constraints and geopolitical intricacies, prompting a recalibration of its strategic calculus in the region. In essence, the tumultuous trajectory of the JCPOA underscores the intricate tapestry of challenges woven into the fabric of India-Iran relations, emblematic of the complexities engendered by US policy shifts on the global stage. As India endeavors to strike a delicate balance between its historical ties with Iran and the imperatives of its strategic partnership with the US, the overarching influence of US policies looms large, underscoring the multifaceted geostrategic realities that shape the contours of contemporary diplomacy. Navigating these turbulent waters demands a nuanced approach, one that harmonizes national interests with the exigencies of global geopolitics, casting a spotlight on the intricate interplay of power dynamics in the delicate dance of international relations.

India did not welcome the US withdrawal from the deal initially, and Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs Sushma Swaraj stated that the country follows only UN sanctions and not unilateral sanctions by any country (Swaraj, as cited in Rózsa, 2019). India received a waiver for six months from President Trump; nonetheless, the waiver was not extended despite lobbying in Washington by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and other Indian officials. Subsequently, “in spite of Indian misgivings about sanctions in general—they are ineffective, hurting the population instead of making the targeted regime comply—India reluctantly though, but seemed to accept the U.S. dictate and put most of its Iranian relations on hold” (Rózsa, 2021, p. 547). In a broader context, India's stance on the Iranian nuclear program can be defined, as Rózsa (2021) explains, on the basis of four leading determinants.

- Indian experience in the nuclear-related policies of the international community

- The differentiation between nuclear-weapon states and non-nuclear-weapon states, sanctions, rejection of free access to nuclear technology

- Indian self-perception

- An emerging responsible global power

- Indian national interests

- The maintenance of the nuclear capability and deterrence, regional balance of power

- Indian doctrine of "strategic autonomy" and non-alignment

The ramifications of the United States' retreat from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reverberate far beyond the confines of bilateral relations, casting a pall of uncertainty over the security and stability landscape in Asia, particularly in the realm of West Asia. For India, a nation strategically poised at the crossroads of global power dynamics, this shift carries profound implications, redrawing the contours of its regional security calculus and geopolitical sway. Foremost, the unilateral US withdrawal has acted as a catalyst for escalating tensions and conflicts across the region, fueling the specter of military confrontations with ripple effects that transcend national boundaries. These simmering frictions bear the ominous potential to erupt into a broader conflict, imperiling critical arteries of oil supply and trade routes that constitute the lifeblood of India's economic vitality and energy security. The fragile equilibrium upon which India's prosperity hinges stands imperiled, underscoring the imperative of safeguarding regional stability and preserving the integrity of vital economic corridors.

Additionally, the repercussions of the US withdrawal have emboldened Iran to pivot toward alternative alliances, most notably with China and Russia (Pieper, 2019). The burgeoning strategic entente between Tehran and Beijing, epitomized by a far-reaching 25-year partnership agreement encompassing significant investments across key sectors like energy, infrastructure, and defense, signifies a seismic realignment that dilutes India's erstwhile influence in the region (Khanmohammadi & Sun, 2022; Solhdoost, 2021). Iran's forays into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union, under the aegis of China and Russia, respectively, signal a paradigmatic shift toward deeper regional integration and collaboration, further marginalizing India's erstwhile centrality in the geopolitical tapestry (BhboudiNjad, 2021; Sharma, 2023).

These tectonic shifts underscore a recalibration of power dynamics in West Asia, auguring heightened competition and challenges from China and Russia that erode India's traditional advantage and prominence in the region. The emerging strategic landscape necessitates a proactive reassessment of India's regional engagement strategies, pivoting toward a nimble diplomacy that navigates the complex interplay of interests and rivalries that define the contemporary Asian security paradigm. In essence, the US withdrawal from the JCPOA serves as a harbinger of seismic shifts that reverberate across Asia's geopolitical fault lines, underscoring the imperative for India to tread with vigilance amidst the winds of change that redefine the contours of regional security dynamics and shape the trajectory of global power play. As India navigates this crucible of emergent challenges and intensifying rivalry, the imperative of astute diplomacy and strategic foresight looms large, demanding a cohesive and nuanced approach to safeguarding its strategic interests amidst the shifting sands of geopolitical transformation.

Concluding Remarks: Navigating Complexities in Iran-India Relations Amidst Global Power Plays

The intricate tapestry of Iran-India relations, woven with threads of historical legacies, contemporary strategic imperatives, and external influences, offers a compelling narrative of resilience, adaptation, and diplomatic acumen in the face of multifaceted challenges. Rooted in millennia-old connections enriched by cultural, economic, and political exchanges, the bilateral dynamics between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of India reflect a balancing act between historical continuity and present-day

exigencies. This analysis scrutinizes the multifaceted layers of influence that shape the evolving relationship between these nations, underscoring the pivotal role of major powers, notably the United States, in molding the trajectory of their interactions. The historical depth of Iran-India relations, characterized by a symbiosis of cultural, economic, and political exchanges across epochs, serves as a foundational backdrop against which contemporary dynamics unfold. From the ancient civilizations to the complexities of the modern world, the evolution of these ties underscores a narrative weaving continuity with change, unity with diversity, and simplicity with complexity, mirroring the ripples of shifting regional and global landscapes. While historical ties lay the groundwork, the contemporary milieu demands a nuanced understanding of strategic interests, economic imperatives, and regional stability as key drivers shaping the bilateral agenda.

In the postcolonial era marked by the emergence of modern nation-states, Iran and India have navigated a landscape fraught with challenges such as partition, nation-building endeavors, and the complexities of regional and global conflicts. As both nations strive to diversify and fortify their bilateral relations, avenues like the Chabahar port initiative and defense cooperation agreements exemplify efforts to enhance connectivity, security, and cultural exchanges, anchoring a robust framework for sustained engagement. Engagements within regional and multilateral forums signal a shared commitment to leveraging platforms like the SCO, BRICS, AIIB, and NDB to bolster mutual interests and navigate the complexities of a multipolar world order. Amidst these endeavors for collaboration and consolidation, the shadow of major powers, particularly the United States, looms large, exerting a profound impact on the contours of Iran-India relations. The US stance, characterized by a historical antagonism toward Iran juxtaposed with a more amicable approach toward India, underscores the intricate dance between national strategic imperatives and external pressures. The US foreign policy maneuvers, exemplified by the maximum pressure campaign and subsequent sanctions, have cast a tangible shadow on the post-JCPOA era, complicating the bilateral landscape and underscoring the intricate interplay of global power dynamics on regional relationships.

The scholarly examination of these dynamics, articulated through a tripartite analysis focusing on bilateral, regional, and global dimensions, unveils a narrative where national strategic interests trump historical affiliations in shaping foreign policy behaviors. The

confluence of converging interests necessitates a nuanced and pragmatic approach to navigate the complexities of contemporary geopolitics. As highlighted by MozaffariFalarti et al. (2023), while US-India ties burgeon due to shared interests and growing geo-strategic proximity, the enduring impact of US policies on Iran casts a challenging pall over the bilateral rapport, compelling both nations to tread carefully amidst the tumult of global power plays. In conclusion, the saga of Iran-India relations unfolds as a saga of intricate harmonies and discordances, where historical legacies intertwine with contemporary realities and national interests intersect with external pressures. Navigating this landscape demands a delicate balance of diplomatic finesse, strategic acumen, and regional cooperation to forge a resilient alliance poised to weather the ebbs and flows of global power dynamics. As Iran and India chart a course forward, the imperative lies in cultivating a shared vision anchored in mutual benefit, regional stability, and strategic alignment, transcending the shadows cast by external influences, and forging a path toward a prosperous shared future.

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