



Indo-Iranian relations in the Post Cold War Era

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Abstract

India and Iran have a rich Civilisational history going back to several millennia. Despite the fact, that the two countries has shared cultural links from time immemorial. However, Post Cold War witnessed a momentous development in the bilateral relations during early years of 1990s, due to emerging parallelism in political interests. Indo-Iranian relations received a big injury due to external ingredients like US and EU sanction which resulted cold relations between the two civilisations for a while. Nonetheless, various efforts have been put by both the countries to tackle the situation and restore the friendly relations.

Keywords: Republic, foreign, regime, visit, agreement.

Introduction

India and Iran share deep historical, cultural civilisational linkages. The historical linkages between the two civilisation goes back to the 2000 BC. After the dethrone of Shah and the surfacing of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979, under the headship of Ayatollah Khomeini Iran completely changed its foreign policy formation which was earlier infected by Western world especially by United States. The core message of new regimes of foreign policy was 'neither East, nor West, Islam is the Best.'¹ Despite the fact that During the period of Cold war era India adopted the policy of Non-Alignment it is believed that India was supporting Soviet Union and provides her support logistically as well as economically. On the other hand, Iran was under the grab of United States as Iran along with Pakistan signed the Bagdad Pact later known as CENTO. However the end of Cold War era and the breakdown of the USSR witnessed the fall down of the global hierarchical order which was in survival since World War Second and heralded a new epoch characterised by the unipolar world. The sun set of the Cold War and the subsequent appearance of "pan-Americana" in West Asia region and the safety danger perceptions of Delhi and Tehran brought them nearer.

The foreign Minister of Iran Ali Akbar Velayati paid an official visit to New Delhi in November 1992, which was followed by the trip of Indian Prime Minister, Narasimha Rao to Tehran in September 1993, this was the first Prime Ministerial visit to Iran since the advent of Islamic Revolution in 1979. The Iranian President, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, visited India from 17-19 April 1995, and the Indian vice President K.R. Narayanan paid a visit Iran in October 1996. These high-level visits resulted in large improvement of bilateral relations. Iran's invitation to India in October 1996 to attend the Tehran Conference on Afghanistan acted as the turning point in the mutual ties amid two nations. However, the invitation was

highly criticised by the Pakistan but the invitation was extended despite the Pakistan objection.

Indo-Iranian Relations during Mohammad Khatami epoch (1996-2004)

The epoch of Mohammad Khatami (1996-2004), witnessed the outstanding development in indo-Iranian relations. Khatami's thinking was an opportunity for a innovative breakthrough in Indo-Iranian relations. The high profile four-days visit of Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajapayee in April 2001, was cordially welcomed by the Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, who described it as "new chapter in the field of human and international relations"², the visit resulted in the signing of the Tehran Declaration on April 10, 2001³. The two countries arranged to commence a fresh chapter of productive and jointly advantageous collaboration, encapsulating the sectors of energy, transit and transport, industry, agriculture and service sectors.

With the passage of good relations between India and Iran, while the world community was approaching the 21st century with innovative dream, looking forward with optimistic view to a new century, a century of harmony and development. The powerful, impermeable US was attacked Al Qaeda radical militant gang under the headship of Osama bin Laden on September 11, 2001. The United States leadership charged Osama bin Laden's lead Al Qaeda group of masterminding the attack on America and insisted that the Al Qaeda surrender their leader (Osama bin Laden) to US at an earliest. As the Taliban paid a deaf ear towards the request of US and denied to handover their head (Osama bin Laden), the US decided to launch a armed action, operation enduring freedom (OEF) "against Al Qaeda terrorist training camps and military installations of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan" on October 7, 2001⁴. As the US intensified the war against terror, George W. Bush the then President of the US, in his speech to State of

the Union on January 29, 2002, labeled Iran, Iraq and North Korea as members of the "axis of evil" condemning that these nations were "seeking weapons of mass destruction, therefore, these regimes pose a grave and growing danger" to the peace and stability of the world. Nevertheless, India underestimated the US assessments and did not believe that Iran poses threat to the world peace and stability. India continued its dealings with Iran as India was well aware from the fact that "geographically Iran is very important for India. Iran could allow India to have terrestrial move amenities linking Afghanistan and energy hub Central Asian countries. Iran too was keen to develop relations with India for Iran was passing through the US policy of Iran isolation from the rest of the world. Keeping the fact in view Iranian Secretary to the Supreme National Security Council of Iran Hassan Rouhani, visited India in June 2002 and shared his views with Indian policy makers. On the Afghanistan, the two countries "Stressed the need for accelerating the rehabilitation and reconstruction process" in the war-wracked country⁵.

On the eve of President Mohammad Khatami's visit to India in January 2003, India considered Khatami's visit very important and welcomed him as the Chief Guest at the India's Republic Day parade. During Khatami's visit the leaders of the two countries inked the "New Delhi Declaration" on January 25, 2003, and pledged to start a "strategic partnership". This landmark Declaration consists of 16 articles. Both the countries agreed to improve energy cooperation for mutual benefits.

In the post-Taliban Afghan Scenario, the two countries also agreed to give a further push to "the trilateral agreement between the Governments of India, Iran and Afghanistan to develop Chahbhar route through Melak, Zaranj and Delram", which, they held, "would facilitate regional trade and transit, including Afghanistan and Central Asia, contributing thus to enhanced regional economic prosperity"⁶. This route lessens the remoteness from India to Central Asia by 1,500 km. Furthermore India and Iran left no stone unturned in order to cement their bilateral relations and held joint naval exercise in March 2003.

Indo-Iranian Relations since 2005

Bilateral relations in energy arena reached its highest peak when India and Iran inked a multi-billion dollar agreement in June 2005 according to this agreement Iran will supply India with 7.5 million tons of liquefied natural gas (LNG) per annum for twenty five years beginning from 2009. The deal also envisaged Indian participation in the development of Yadavaran and Jufeyr oilfields in Iran. However, it is believed that India has come beneath harsh pressure from several quarters to elucidate its position as well its relation with the Iran due to its three times voting against Iran in the International Atomic energy Agency (IAEA)

The American strategy of suppression has hampered India at large from tying closer energy knot, while clashes over process have deferred several striving plans, US have been against the India's plan for long-standing energy supplies from Iran. Even US has been successful in pressuring India to set out IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) gas pipeline project. The US diplomat in India (New Delhi) even went as far as publically reminding the Indian government of American Sanctions against Iran that prevent any country from investigating more than US\$20 million in the Iranian oil industry⁷. In June 2005, India, keeping in view the National interest, escaped to come out of US pressure to isolate Iran from the rest of world and without any further delay sent an Indian expert delegation to Pakistan and Iran to reassess the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline projected with both the nations. However, India's vote for a resolution sponsored by EU-3 (France, Germany and United Kingdom) on the Iranian nuclear matter at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board Meeting on 24 September 2005 raised apprehensions among the foreign policy. The WikiLeaks publication has thrown up novel confirmation that suggests that India voted against Iran at the IAEA due to its dislike for "another state in the region to become a nuclear power"⁸. Nonetheless, spokesperson of Indian Ministry of External Affairs said "In our explanation of the vote, we have clearly expressed our opposition to Iran being declared as non-compliance with its safeguards agreements"⁹. While Iran is a party to the NPT, India is not. Iran has often called for global acceptance of NPT, much to India's discomfiture¹⁰. India's disagreement to Iran's agenda can be partially examined by its longstanding attitude that countries who are party to the NPT must follow NPT guidelines and open up their facilities for International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections. On the other hand, India also supports Iran's right to pursue peaceful use of nuclear energy.

Indo-Iranian relations were hampered when India voted along with the twenty seven nations at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Board Meeting to transfer the Iran nuclear matter to the United Security Council in February 2006.

In order to overhaul the situation Minister of External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee paid a visit to Tehran in February 2007 to give a fresh impetus to Indo-Iranian relations. During his visit he said that India and Iran have historical links their strength lays over centuries of cooperation, he anticipated that India and Iran explore the opportunities in various spheres for cementing their ties. A return visit was paid by the President Mohammad Ahmaddinejad in April 2008. During his visit he said that India and Iran are ready to strengthen wide-ranging aspects to give new directions to Indo-Iranian relations¹¹. In November 2009, India started Iranian military training programme, provided satellite services, and joint naval manoeuvre in Persian Gulf, first of manoeuvre done in March 2003

The trip of the Indian External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna to Iran in May 2010 in association with the fourteenth G-15 meeting also gave an impetus boost for cementing the affiliation

between the two age old civilisations. The trip of Dr. D. Purandeshwari (Hon'ble Minister of State for Human Resources Development) to Tehran in association with the ninth Asia Cooperation Dialogue Ministerial meeting during 26-27 March 2011 further boosted the relations between the two countries.

Both the countries have also been operational to construct the provincial transport networks- International North South Transport Corridor, which will help in connecting South, Central and West Asia to Europe for trade and industry enlargement. The External Affairs Minister, Salman Khurshid's recent visit was an ingredient to cement the bilateral relations. Furthermore, the Visit of Dr. Manmohan Singh to Tehran on August 28, 2012 to participate in the NAM Summit was a green signal of New Delhi's to foster the bilateral relations.

The recent seventeenth India-Iran Joint Economic Commission summit was held in Tehran on May 4, 2013. The External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid and his corresponding person Ali Akbar Salehi under the banner of joint commission discussed various areas of cooperation and development for the mutual benefit. During the visit four significant areas were recognized which includes regional connectivity, enhancing bilateral trade and economic cooperation, cooperation on regional security issues and enhancing cultural and people-to-people contact. This visit proved fruitful in directing the bilateral relations towards to good future.

Conclusion

India and Iran has a long historical linkage which goes back to the dawn of history. However, in due course, the Indo-Iranian relationship has transferred from being civilisational to economic, in other words, from optimistic to a realistic approach.

The Post Cold War era witnessed the significant improvement in the bilateral relations. Nonetheless, the relations of the two countries suffered but certain external as well as internal factors

especially after the September 2005, the two countries are successful in managing the cordial bilateral relations.

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