

India Iran Relations during UPA 1st and 2nd

(Mutual Cooperation, Constraints and Challenges)

Sajad Ahmad Mir

Research scholar in school of social sciences Department of political science DAVV Indore
(M.P) India

[Email: mirsajad962@gmail.com](mailto:mirsajad962@gmail.com)

Abstract:

India and Iran- the great civilizations of the world had close historical, cultural ties and linguistic and religious links for centuries. The end of the cold war in 1990s had given India a chance and traceableness to carry out its foreign policy in the region. Relations between them have been deepening with respect to the most issues, especially security, energy and transportation. The relations between the two have seen twists and turns in history where they have been close at times and share common interests. Iran holds a particular importance for India as it provides unique access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, but at the same time there are several constraints that restrict India's reach into Iran. This article examines the key areas on which both countries can cooperate to strength their relations but at the same time, examines the factors that hinder their relationship.

Keywords: besieged; Chabahar; consultations; G-15; Gulf Cooperation Council; interest; nuclear; Syria

Introduction:

Since the end of the cold war, India and Iran has been pursuing an active policy to develop a presence and to pursue its interests in western Asia and Middle East Asia based on pragmatic engagement with all the sides I.e. Iran, Israel and Arab States. Relationship between India and Iran is based on mutual cooperation and understanding and both have convergence of interests like cooperation on Afghanistan, IPI gas pipeline, security and Defense relations, economic cooperation, cooperation on regional connectivity etc. However certain contentious issues like India's engagement with United States, Iran's continuous close relations with Pakistan, voting against Iran at the IAEA prevented significant cooperation between the two Asian states during this period.

Objectives of the study:

1. To examine relationship covering major areas and fields between the two.
2. To highlight the bilateral visits between India and Iran during this period.
3. To highlight the efforts for mutual cooperation.

4. To examine and highlight the contentious issues which hampered the relationship.

Methodology:

For the purpose of study both published and unpublished secondary data has been utilized. The data is collected from various Journals of Political science Asian survey, journal of Middle East, Review of International Affairs and Asia program special report Etc, Books, news papers and from Internet.

Discussion:

Political Relations:

In June 2004, New Delhi witnessed a change in the government. The new United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government led by the centrist Congress party mostly retained the foreign policy orientation of its predecessor. In 2005, Iran also witnessed a change in the leadership and the Hard-line President Muhammad Ahmadinejad, known for his conservative views came to power. He reserved the reformist measures adopted by Khatami and adopted a hawkish stance vis-à-vis the US, The United Kingdom and Israel. He rejected the incentives,

financial and otherwise, offered by France, Germany and the UK and restarted Uranium conversion which sparked international suspicions about Iranian nuclear program. On the other hand, India signed a nuclear deal with the United States which gathered momentum during 2005-2008 and the relationship acquired some critical potential and was strained by India's vote at the IAEA in September 2005 and February 2006.¹ Indian Minister of External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee paid a visit to Tehran in February 2007 to give a fresh impetus to Indo-Iranian relations when he said that India and Iran have historical bonds and their strength lies over centuries of cooperation. He anticipated that India and Iran can explore the opportunities in various spheres for cementing their ties.² A MoU was signed in January 2008 between the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) New Delhi and the Iranian Cultural Heritage (ICHHTO) on holding of "Days of Culture" in two countries. To give further boost to their relations, New Delhi and Tehran had signed an agreement in April 2008 to establish a new rail link between Iran and Russia. India offered assistance for technical training of personnel, railroad signaling projects as well as the supply of locomotives and spare parts.³ Again the growing spirit of friendship was marked with the visit of Iranian Foreign Minister Manoucher Mottaki to the New Delhi on November 16-17, 2009. During his sojourn, the agenda for bilateral relations to be pursued by the two governments for the medium term was laid out. During the visit, Mottaki met the Vice-President and the Prime Minister of India and met the external Affairs Minister, Shri S.M Krishna and held discussions on a whole range of issues including economic cooperation, energy security, expansion of bilateral trade, surface transport and regional issues and common concerns about terrorism.⁴ The visit of the Indian External Affairs Minister Shri S.M Krishna to Tehran from 15-18 May 2010 in connection with the G-15 Summit contributed a lot for consolidating the relationship between the two countries and shared his views on bilateral, regional and international developments with the Iranian establishment.⁵ In his address on May 17, Krishna emphasized on creation of an "effective platform not only for the south-south cooperation" but also for policy articulation in the global discourse in the areas of trade, money and finance, equitable development, food and energy

security, climate change etc. Iranian Foreign Minister Dr. Ali Akbar Salehi Visited India in May 2012, as President's special envoy, to invite Prime Minister for the 16th NAM Summit. The acceptance of invitation and the visit of the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh to Iran on August 28, 2012 to participate in the NAM Summit was a clear indication of New Delhi's desire to give new impetus to bilateral relations and enhance economic cooperation.⁶ Prime Minister said that the sanctions imposed on Iran by western countries have created difficulties in Indo-Iran relations, but we should think upon new ways to deepen our relations with Iran as both countries are interested in doing business to a great extent. The visit of the External Affairs Minister, Salman Khurshid on 03-05 May for the 17th India-Iran Joint Commission Meeting was yet another diplomatic push towards strengthening the existing partnership between the two regional actors. He met with President and top Iranian officials. During his visit to Iran both sides signed three Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). They include

- . MoU between Institute of Standards and Industrial Research of Islamic Republic of Iran (ISIRI) and Bureau of Indian Standard (BIS)
- . MoU between the Foreign Service Institute, Ministry of External Affairs, Republic of India and School of International Relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Republic of Iran.
- . MoU on cooperation in the field of water resource management.⁷

The election of the Hassan Rouhani as the President of Iran in June 14, 2013 presidential elections and his return message to the Prime Minister of India that India would be one of the top priority area of his foreign policy agenda.⁸ On the Indian side, Hon'ble vice President of India Shri M. Hamid Ansari graced the swearing in ceremony of the newly elected Iranian President Dr. Rouhani on 04 August 2013. Vice President met Dr. Rouhani and discussed issues of mutual interest in the bilateral, regional and international arena. To deepen the further ties, Mr. Ebrahim Rahimpour, deputy Foreign Minister for Asia and Pacific Affairs visited India for the 11th round of foreign office consultations. Later on 28 February 2014, Foreign Minister of Iran paid an official visit to India.



Energy and Economic Cooperation:

Energy cooperation between India and Iran has been the major incentive for two states to come closer. Bilateral cooperation in energy arena reached its peak when India and Iran signed a multi-billion dollar deal in June 2005 under which Iran will supply India with 7.5 million tons of liquefied natural gas annually for 25 years beginning 2009. The deal also envisaged Indian participation in the development of Yadavaran and Jufeyr oil fields in Iran.⁹ The 16th JCM was held in New Delhi on July 08-09, 2010. A 30 member delegation of Iran led by Shamseddin Hosseini, Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance of Iran attended the meeting. The meeting was also co-chaired by then Indian External Affairs Minister S.M Krishna. The following MoU's / agreements were signed during the meeting:

- A. Air services Agreement;
- B. Agreement on transfer of sentenced persons;
- C. MoU on cooperation in New and Renewable Energy;
- D. MoU on cooperation in Small Scale Industry between National Small Industries Corporation (NSIC) and Iranian Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (IISIPO)
- E. Program of cooperation on Science and Technology and
- F. MoU on cooperation between Central Pulp and Paper Research Institute of India (CPPRI) and Gorgan University of Agricultural Science and Natural Resources (GUASNR).¹⁰ India-Iran trade during the year 2011-12 was more than \$ 14 billion of which the major chunk was petroleum products. Iran's President Mohammad Ahmadinejad visited India in July 2008 and reassured Iran's full cooperation for the success of IPI trilateral project and envisaged for quadrilateral agreement including China in this arrangement. Indian political establishment expressed keen interest for carrying out IPI pipeline to meet the growing energy demands. However, New Delhi put forth suggestions to Iran regarding the source, security of the gas pipeline in Pakistan and prospective participation of Indian companies in Pakistan in this joint endeavor. In May 2009, India officially announced its decision to remain non committal in IPI project. In March 2010, India indicated its willingness to hold talks on the IPI Project. On the sidelines of the 12th International energy forum, India's petroleum

Minister Murli Deora met Iran's deputy Minister of International Affairs H. Noghrehkar Shirazi and proposed bilateral talks in May 2010. During the Foreign Ministers visit in May 2010, it was conveyed to the Iranian officials that India's main concerns on the project relate to the security of the pipeline that will pass through the volatile Baluchistan province in South-Western Pakistan, as well as differences over pricing.¹¹

Cooperation on Defense and Security:

Security constitutes important place in the Indo-Iranian relationship. One of the chief issues of Delhi Declaration was the establishment of strategic defense partnership. Assessing the opportunities available for military cooperation with Iran, it is evident that Tehran is searching for sustained support in modernization of its armed forces which have been suffering from lack of access to Advanced technology, maintenance and spares support. In November 2009, India started Iranian military training program, provide satellite services, and joint naval man oeuvre in Persian Gulf, first of such man oeuvre done in March 2003.¹² During the recent visit of the EAM, developments in Afghanistan and Syria were discussed at the length with a focus on stability and efforts to deal with increasing violence and the challenges that a possible return of Taliban would bring. Iran's concerns over the current crises in Syria were also expressed during Salman Khurshid's interaction with his counterpart, Ali Akbar Salehi and Ali Larijani, the speaker of the Iranian Majlis. On the Syrian crisis, India and Iran would want an end to violence and a peaceful resolution taking into the account the aspirations of the people of Syria.¹³

Cultural and People to People Contacts:

The cultural relations between Iranians and the inhabitants of the Indian sub continent have produced exceptional results, especially in the realm of art and culture. India and Iran maintain regular cultural and educational exchanges. Having many common cultural traits, India observed its "Days of Culture" at the Niyavaran Palace in Tehran and Hafazia in Shiraz from May 10-17, 2011 as was a part of the MoU signed in 2008. In May 2012, Indian Embassy organized an Indian Cultural week in Tehran at the Iran Artists Forum in Tehran which has live Indian Music performance by groups from

India and handicraft exhibition by artisans from India. During 2011-12, various functions were organized throughout Iran to commemorate the 150th birth anniversary of Gurudev Tagore. Gurudev Tagore had visited Iran in 1935 during which he wrote a poem on Iran. India over the years has emerged as one of the favorite tourist destinations for Iranian tourists and every year around 40,000 Iranian's visit India for various purposes. In February 2011, India successfully outscored the tourist visa collection in Tehran to facilitate the visa services for Iranian tourists visiting India. Regular meeting of the joint consular is held to discuss consular and other related issues aimed at facilitate people to people exchanges between the two countries and addressing the concerns of Indian resident in Iran and Iranian residents in India.¹⁴ The latest round of consular committee meeting was held in Tehran in May 2014.

Cooperation on Regional Security:

Regional connectivity was identified as one of the important areas during the 17th India-Iran Joint Economic Commission meeting held at Tehran on May 04, 2013. On regional connectivity both sides agreed to work on a trilateral transit agreement involving Afghanistan. Under the trilateral agreement, Iran has completed 70 percent of work with India's assistance in building and upgrades the Chabahar port in the first phase, with an investment of about \$ 340 million in venture. In the second phase, India is considering several options for the port's expansion with a total investment of \$300-400 million.¹⁵ In the first week of March 2012, Indian ships docked at Chabahar and unloaded a hundred thousand metric tons of wheat headed for Afghanistan, used the Chabahar first time.

Constraints and Challenges:

This period saw both ups and downs in the Indo-Iranian relationship. Certain differences arouse between the two countries in terms of the ways they have chosen to implement their foreign policies. Iran's sensitivity about the quality of relations that India has with the United States and Israel to whom India heavily relies for science and technology and defense supplies.¹⁶ Similarly the growing tensions between the GCC and the Iran on power and influence on the region and growing friendship of India with GCC also posed a challenge to the Indo-

Iran relations. This is evident from the fact when the Saudi King Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz al-Saud visited India in January 2006 and signed an Indo-Saudi "Delhi Declaration" with the Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh which calls for a wide ranging partnership, including putting energy and economic cooperation on overdrive and cooperating against terrorism. The Saudi Kings 2006 visit to India was a signal to the broader Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) community to build a stronger partnership with India.¹⁷ India is looking towards the GCC for huge investment opportunities especially in infrastructure wanted to maintain cordial relations with GCC including Saudi Arabia instead of getting closer with Iran.

It was the nuclear question of Iran which put several constraints and hurdled the relationship between the two. India yet again voted along with twenty five nations in November 2009 in favour of a resolution at the IAEA to send the nuclear issue of Iran to the United Nations Security Council while indicating in the explanation vote that it "cannot be the basis of a renewed punitive approach or new sanctions".¹⁸ New Delhi also reiterated its stand to resolve this matter through dialogue at the IAEA meet. The reaction to the Indian vote at the IAEA meet comes on September 18, 2010, when Iranian Foreign Minister Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast condemned India for killing of 15 Muslim protesters in Kashmir who were protesting the alleged desecration of the Quran in the US.¹⁹ Two months later, on November 15, 2010, Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Khomeini, in his Hajj message to the pilgrims, described "Kashmir as one of the world's besieged regions".²⁰ The Indian government considered the statements of the Iranian supreme leader as interference in India's "Territorial Sovereignty".

India-Iran relationship has been affected by the sanctions imposed by the West on Iran, India's trade especially; import of oil from Iran has been affected by the sanctions, as channel for payments has emerged as a major problem for India. The banks through which India made the payments to Iran have come under sanctions thus creating problems of payments which hinder the smooth conduct of trade. On the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline, India continues to reiterate its interest to take part in the project. Due to technical, security, political and pricing problems, the deal has become on freeze. On the other hand CISADA compelled India to



shelve the much-touted Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) project for transporting gas from Iran to India via Pakistan because of open American opposition to it as the Act of 2010 provide penalties to foreign companies that invest more than \$ 20 million in a single year in Iran's energy sector because it would give crucial revenue to Iran. These laws have complicated India's ability to obtain natural gas from Iran.²¹ A \$22 billion, 25-year LNG deal signed by India's GAIL and NIGEC remain unrealized.

Conclusion:

The two great Asian States India and Iran derive a number of benefits from their emerging relationship and have expressed various levels of interests in various areas such as the Defense cooperation, economic cooperation, space launch and other space related technologies. During this period, both countries exchanged bi-lateral visits from time to time to enhance and strength the relations whereby they hold regular meetings to exchange views and ideas on bilateral and multilateral issues. However this period at the same time saw ups and downs and certain differences arouse like Iran's sensitivity about the quality of relations that India has with the United States and Israel and India's sensitivity about Iran's close ties to China and Pakistan, Iranian nuclear program and Indian opposition to it is emerging as a major bone of contention between the two countries are among the most challenging issue which existed between the two countries during this period. The ways they have chosen to implement their foreign policies and their relationship could not develop to the fullest possible account.

References:

- [1] Anwar Alam, "India and Iran: An assessment of the contemporary Relations" New century publications New Delhi 2011, p 56.
- [2] Anwar Alam, *op.cit.*, p 112 and also see, visit of Hon'ble Minister for External Affairs Mr. Pranab Mukherjee to Tehran , Embassy of India, Tehran available at www.indianembassy-Tehran.ir/press-release.php?id=16
- [3] Meena Singh Roy, "India and Iran Relations: Sustaining The Momentum". Institute for Defense Studies and Analysis. New Delhi May 20, 2013, p 4.
- [4] "India-Iran bilateral relations" Embassy of India Tehran, <http://www.indianembassy-tehran.ir/india-iran-relations.php> Accessed on July 31, 2015.
- [5] <http://www.indianembassy-tehran.ir/india-iran-relations.php>. accessed on August 01, 2015. Meena Singh Roy, *op.cit.*, p 3
- [6] Refer to, "Joint press statement on 17th India-Iran Joint Commission Meeting", Ministry of External Affairs, Govt. of India, on May 04, 2013 at www.mea.gov.in
- [7] FARS News, "Foreign policy Iran's President-Elect Vows to deepen ties with India" Tuesday July 09, 2013.
- [8] Mumtaz, quoting Sudha Ramachandaran, "the glue that binds india, iran at <http://www.atimes.com.pk>.
- [9] The Financial Express, November 14, 2009, also see <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=50044479>. Accessed on August 08, 2015
- [10] Hindustan times (2010), "Krishna Heads to Tehran; Afghanistan, Pipeline on Agenda, Hindustan times at <http://www.m.hindustantimes.com/newdelhi/krishna-heads-to-tehran/article/543191.aspx>. Accessed on August 14, 2015.
- [11] Chansoria, Monika, "India-Iran Defense Cooperation" Indian Defense Review; Vol 25:1, 2010.
- [12] Joint Press Statement on 17th India-Iran Joint Commission Meeting, May 04, 2013 and Atul Aneja, "Iran for bigger Indian role in Syria", at <http://www.Thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-international/iran-for-bigger-india-role-in-syria/article4690795.ece>. Accessed on August 14, 2015.



[13] 14.India-Iran Relations, Embassy of India, Tehran. August 2012 available at <http://www.indianembassy-tehran.ir/india-iran-relations.php>. Accessed online on August 15, 2015.

[14] Deepak K Dash, "India eyeing Iran's Chabahar port for direct access to Central Asia", The Times of India" 26 August 2016 at <http://m.timesofindia.com/india/india-eyeing-iran's-chabahar-portofor-firect-access-to-central-asia/articlehoe/15725553.cms>. Accessed on August 17,2015.

[15] Mahmoud Reza Golshanpanzhoh, "Indo-Iran strategic partnership: Opportunities and Challenges in the 21st Century", Studies on Iran. Foreign Policy Research Centre New Delhi April 2013, p 280.

[16] Harsh V. Pant, "India's Relations with Iran: Much Ado about Nothing" Centre for strategic and international studies. The Washington quarterly 2001, p 66.

[17] Pranab Dhal Samant, "Again, India votes against Iran's nuclear program", Available at <http://www.expressindia.com/latest-news/Again-India-votes-against-Iran's-nuclear-program/547319>. Accessed on August 15,2015.

[18] Ifitikhar Gilani, "Delhi:India's Riposte Against Iran", November 19, 2010 at <http://www.tehelka.com/story-main47.asp?lename=Ws191110INTERNATIONAL.asp>, Accessed on August 04, 2015.

[19] NDTV, Iran's Kashmir Remarks upset India", November 19,2010 at <http://www.ndtv.com/article/india/iran's-kashmir-remarks-upset-india-67367>, Accessed on August 04,2015.

[20] "Comprehensive Iran Sanctions, Accountaibility and Divestment Act of 2010", The library of Congress, June 24,2010, <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/gpoxm/cill/h2194-enr.xml>.

Address for correspondence

Sajad Ahmad Mir

Kulgam Jammu and Kashmir

Research Scholar at DAVV Indore India

Email: mirsajad962@gmail.com