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Iran's Diplomatic Expansion: Transforming Regional Relations and Indo-Iranian Cooperation

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Abstract:

This study analyzes the evolution of Iran's diplomacy and its relations with India. With the help of recent diplomatic efforts, Iran has successfully improved its relations with West Asian countries from the state of isolation to integration. This research article examines Iran's diplomatic expansion in West Asian countries to resolve historical disputes, strengthen economic ties, improve regional security. Among the regional players, Iran stands out as a pivotal partner for India, offering opportunities in energy security, regional connectivity, and counterbalancing competing influences. This partnership supports India's broader goals of expanding trade, promoting regional stability, and maintaining strategic autonomy in an increasingly multipolar world. The research paper stressed on energy security, connectivity projects like the Chabahar Port, counterterrorism, military cooperation and military diplomacy and analyze their role in New Delhi-Tehran partnership. The study examines various agreements, high-level engagements and multilateral interactions between two countries for analyzing the impact of Iran's regional rapprochement on India's foreign policy. It also assesses India's overall strategy for West Asia, looking at important governmental efforts, bilateral interactions, and the regional elements influencing its tactics.

Keywords: Afghanistan and Central Asia, Energy Security, Extended Neighborhood, Geostrategic Pivot, India and Iran, Regional Stability

Introduction:

West Asia has historically been a region of immense strategic significance. For India, it serves as a critical juncture linking South Asia to Europe and Africa. The region is home to a significant Indian diaspora, accounts for a majority of India's energy imports, and offers vast trade and investment opportunities. As India's global aspirations grow, its engagement with West Asia has expanded beyond economic interests to encompass political, security, and strategic dimensions.

Iran is extremely important in West Asia due to its strategic location, vast energy reserves, historical impact, and geopolitical role in regional dynamics. Iran, as a major oil and natural gas

producer, is an important supplier to global energy markets, significantly improving the energy security of many countries. Iran exercises significant regional power, including the stability of Strait of Hormuz (a critical oil transit chokepoint) and Persian Gulf. Iran actively contests the influence of Western nations and regional adversaries, most notably Saudi Arabia and Israel, forming alliances and rivalries across West Asia. Iran is essential to regional connectivity projects, including the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which connects South Asia with Europe and Russia. Iran has historically served as a center of civilization, with its Persian heritage significantly impacting languages, art, and traditions throughout West Asia and beyond.

Amid the ongoing crisis in west Asia such as Gaza war and Syrian crisis, prime minister of India Narendra Modi meets the newly elected Iranian president Masoud Pezeshkian for the bilateral meeting on 22 October 2024, on the sidelines of BRICS summit held in Kazan, Russian. Both sides discussed the regional connectivity and conflicts in west Asia. India urged for dialogue and diplomatic efforts to ease down tensions and offered to help as Foreign Secretary Vikram Misra noted “India’s positive relations with all sides put it in a unique position to advocate for peace”. Mr. Pezeshkian was sworn in on 30 July 2024 after winning election which was carried out following the sad demise of former president Ebrahim Raisi in helicopter crash on 19 May 2024. The helicopter crash incident took place in a very turbulent period in West Asia and specifically in Iran. Indian government declared state mourning for one day, as a mark of respect to the departed dignitaries May 21 throughout India.

The ongoing war in Gaza has every chance of conflict escalations as Iran provides support to Hezbollah. With the coming back of Donald Trump as President of USA, there is high possibility of return of hostility towards Iran which was seen in Trump’s first term as president. US had unilaterally revoked the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, 2015 (JCPOA) which was signed by Iran and several major world powers to ensure exclusive use of nuclear programme for peaceful purposes. For isolating Iran in the region, Trump also helped Israel in formalizing relations with Arab world by mediating the signing of Abraham Accords between Israel and UAE, and Israel and Bahrain in 2020. In the recent past there have been certain favorable developments in the region with respect to Iran. A major diplomatic breakthrough comes when Saudi Arabia and Iran concluded an agreement to restore diplomatic relations which were severed from 2016. The deal was brokered by China and major discussions were held in Beijing. The Iran-Saudi peace deal allows Iran to focus on rebuilding its economy, consolidate its role as a key player in the Middle East and improve its international image. Other major development was inclusion of Iran in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS.

Iran is main pillar in the recent conflicts in region as it attacks its enemies through its proxies in the form of Hamas and Hezbollah. Iran has long aspiration of a regional leader and to enhance its

influence in region, former president Raisi had announced Siyasat-e-hamsayegi (Neighborly policy) in 2021 soon after his election. The policy fundamentally aims to enhance relations with Iran's neighbors, particularly Saudi Arabia. Initiatives to enhance post-revolutionary Iran's relations with neighboring countries are not new, having been a significant focus during the tenures of former presidents such as Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, Mohammad Khatami and Hassan Rouhani. This marks the first occasion on which the Iranian government has officially embraced the good neighbor policy as a formal doctrine. The other important component of this policy is 'look East'. To implement this component, Iran has successfully strategic partnerships with China and Russia. India could be extension to these efforts.

The Importance of Iran:

Iran is very important for India. The relationship between Iran and India go back to the ancient civilizations of the Indus Valley and Mesopotamia. During Indus valley civilization, Harappa traders took grains, cotton goods, spices to Persia in exchange for metal wares, precious stones and pearls. Some Indus seals have been excavated at Ur, Susa and Kish in Iran. Persian and Sanskrit languages have many common words.

During medieval period, we can observe that, Islamic-Iranian influence has left permanent impressions on Indian culture, traditions, language, literature and arts. Diplomatic and cultural contacts between India and Persia became friendly as many Persian travelers, visitors came from Persia to India. In fact, the late Indian Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru wrote that "Among the many people and races who have come in contact with Indians and influenced India's life and culture, the oldest and most persistent are the Iranians". During British rule in India, India's relation with Iran, were basically political in nature. Due to geo-strategic interests of Britishers, Iran and Afghanistan were turned into buffer zones between British India and Russia. Britain and Russia signed a treaty in 1907 according to which Iran was divided into two zones of influence. Britain acknowledged northern and central province of Iran as Russian zone of influence and Russia acknowledged Iran's southern province as British zone of influence.

In New Delhi, Iran also took part in the first Inter-Asia Relations Conference on April 2, 1947. Even though, both countries signed an air transport agreement on 24 November 1948, "The Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship" in 1950, "The Treaty of Commerce and Navigation" in 1954 and Cultural Agreement in 1956 but they lacked the sense of matured understanding towards each other.

After the death of Khomeini in 1989, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the disintegration of the Soviet Union leading to the end of Cold War, the 1990-91 Kuwait crisis and identical security threat, that is, Islamic militancy and spread of narcotics through Afghan border, brought about a phase of renewed engagement between India and Iran. India and Iran supported the

Northern Alliance government in Afghanistan. Iran accepted Kashmir as an integral part of India in 1991. The changed security model compelled Iran to enhance its ties with India. Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's visit to Tehran in 1993 was a turning point in ties between New Delhi and Tehran. In 1995, Rafsanjani paid a reciprocal visit to India. Relationship between the two was further strengthened by Prime Minister Vajpayee's visit to Iran in April 2001. Along with the 'Tehran Declaration', several other important trade and economic cooperation agreements were also signed during the visit. Tehran Declaration includes a North-South Corridor and its maximum utilization. The strategic cooperation between both countries got enhanced during President Khatami's visit in 2003 and resulted in the signing of the 'New Delhi Declaration'. In the Delhi Declaration, each side affirmed that "their growing strategic convergence must be underpinned with a robust economic relationship, including greater trade and investment flows."

The bilateral relations, however, could not sustain momentum primarily due to Western sanctions imposed on Iran regarding its controversial nuclear program. The sanctions imposed stringent global limitations on trade with Iran, including the importation of its crude oil and natural gas. With the exception of a brief interval from January 2016 to May 2018, during which certain sanctions were relaxed following the signing of the Iran nuclear deal in July 2015, the sanctions have persisted indefinitely since December 2006, when they were instituted against Iran through United Nations Security Council Resolution 1737 for its noncompliance in halting its uranium enrichment program.

During the visit of Prime Minister Modi to Iran in 2016, a trilateral agreement was signed to establish the International Transport and Transit Corridor (Chabahar Agreement) by Iran, Afghanistan and India. Prime Minister highlighted the importance of the Chabahar port for India. Chabahar is a deepwater port located in Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province. Modi gifted Kalileh-Wa-Dimneh which is translation of Panchatantra and jatakas in Persian. Iranian president reciprocated the visit in February 2018. Many agreements and MoUs were signed during both visits primarily focusing on trade, regional connectivity and transit to central Asia and Afghanistan. On 13 May 2024, a 10 years contract on operation of Chabahar port was signed between Indian Ports Global Ltd. (IPGL) and Port and Maritime Organization (PMO) of Iran, enabling operation of the Shahid-Behesti terminal. Sonowal informed that, "IPGL will invest approximately \$120 million in equipping the port. India has also offered a credit window equivalent to \$250 million for mutually identified projects aimed at improving Chabahar-related infrastructure". He further said, "It a historic day for the maritime sector and the agreement heralded a new age of trade, marine cooperation, and transshipment while boosting trilateral trade between India, Iran, and Afghanistan".

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a multimodal trade route connecting India, Iran, Russia, and Central Asia to Europe. The foundation of the North-South

transport corridor was laid by an intergovernmental agreement signed between Russia, Iran, and India on September 12, 2000. Later, Azerbaijan joined this agreement in 2005. 13 countries including Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Armenia, India, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Oman, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkey, and Ukraine ratified the agreement. The several components of project are — Northern and Western Europe — the Russian Federation; Caucasus — Persian Gulf (Western route); Central Asia — Persian Gulf (Eastern Route) and the Caspian Sea — Iran Persian Gulf (Central Route). It aims to reduce transportation costs and time by offering a different route than the Suez Canal. The INSTC brings together sea, rail, and road systems, improving connections and making trade easier in the region. This project depends heavily on Tehran and its important Chabahar Port, which avoids Pakistan and links India to Central Asia and Russia. Improving regional cooperation and economic ties among member nations is impossible without the INSTC.

The Global Firepower (GFP) Report 2025 places Iran 16th among 145 countries, showing it has strong military power with a Power Index score of 0.3048. Iran ranks third in the Middle East, following Turkey and Israel, highlighting its regional influence. This ranking comes from Tehran having a large workforce, a variety of ground and naval resources, and its important and strategic location, which helps its attack and defense abilities. Iran has issues like economic sanctions and limited access to advanced military technology, which impact its ability to operate effectively. The GFP report looks at things like people, tools, natural resources, money, and location to give a complete picture of Iran's military strength. The ranking shows how important different regions are and highlights areas where improvements can be made to enhance global military status. Other interesting fact is that Iran has military power beyond what these reports reveals which is distributed among its revolutionary guards, its allies and transnational actors.

The Military Balance 2024 report highlights Iran's growing influence and military strength in the Middle East. Despite facing economic difficulties, Iran raised its defense budget by 21% to \$25.3 billion, showing its focus on improving its military. The country has an advanced drone program, a large number of missiles, and naval resources focused on asymmetric warfare, especially in the Strait of Hormuz. The military cooperation between Russia and Iran has improved Tehran's access to cutting-edge technology. Regional conflict and rising tensions with Israel demonstrate Iran's impact on Middle East security. As per report, Iran is a major regional power that employs unconventional military strategies to deter potential dangers.

Iran significantly influences the Middle East by providing support to various factions. Three of these entities are the Houthis in Yemen, Hamas in Palestine, and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The aim of Iran's regional strategy is to concurrently augment its influence in the area while confronting adversaries including Saudi Arabia, the United States and Israel. These groups perform this function. Iran enables these groups to engage in unconventional warfare and resist conventional military forces

by providing financial assistance, lethal weaponry including armed drones and medium-range missiles, as well as tactical training. Hezbollah is a prominent entity in Lebanon and poses a direct threat to Israel, functioning as both a political party and a militant organization with connections to Tehran. Hezbollah is a militant organization having a sophisticated arsenal. Iran supplies Hamas with financial and military assistance to oppose Israeli policies and sustain its influence in Gaza. Iran has furnished the Houthis in Yemen with significant support, including drones and missiles, to bolster their efforts against the Saudi-led coalition. While these proxies assist Iran in fulfilling its strategic aims, they also intensify regional instability, hindering peace efforts and escalating conflicts.

The nuclear programme of Tehran is also a powerful expression having regional significance. The November 2024 report from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) highlighted significant progress in Iran's nuclear program, raising concerns around the world. The report says that Iran plans to use over 6,000 advanced centrifuges, specifically the IR-6 and IR-9 models, at its Natanz and Fordow sites. This will greatly increase its ability to enrich uranium. Iran has enriched uranium to 60% purity, which is close to the level needed for nuclear weapons (90%). They currently have over 6,000 kilograms of uranium, which is far more than allowed by the 2015 agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). The IAEA report mentioned that inspectors are having trouble accessing important sites, which makes it hard to confirm that Iran's nuclear activities are peaceful. This comes after Iran's earlier decision to reduce its cooperation with the agency, which includes cutting back on the use of monitoring cameras. These events are happening because there have been stalled negotiations, and efforts to revive the JCPOA have faced challenges since mid-2023. Western countries, including the United States and European nations, expressed serious concerns that Iran's nuclear advancements might shorten the time it would take for them to develop weapons to just a few weeks. Tehran has confirmed again that its nuclear program is meant for peaceful purposes, like generating energy and doing medical research. The IAEA's findings highlight the need for new diplomatic efforts and better monitoring to reduce the growing risks of nuclear weapons spread in the area.

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) and State Department reports in 2024 highlighted key aspects of Iran's energy sector and its geopolitical implications. Iran holds the world's fourth-largest proven oil reserves, estimated at 208.6 billion barrels, and the second-largest proven natural gas reserves, approximately 33.7 trillion cubic meters, making it a critical player in global energy markets. Nonetheless, Iran's production capacity is currently constrained, falling short of its potential due to aging infrastructure and restricted foreign investment stemming from a range of sanctions. Before the imposition of sanctions, Iran's production capacity was over 4 million barrels per day; however, the current restrictions have significantly obstructed modernization initiatives. The Department of Energy highlighted the significance of Iran's energy sector in evading sanctions via

gray-market avenues. Before the imposition of sanctions, Iran's production capacity was above 4 million barrels per day; however, the current restrictions have significantly obstructed modernization initiatives. The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) of the Department of Energy (DOE) has raised apprehensions regarding Iran's nuclear activities, associating its energy revenues with potential proliferation risks. Furthermore, the Department of Energy underscored the importance of Iran's energy sector in the circumvention of sanctions through gray-market channels. This emphasizes importance of comprehensive international supervision of Iran's nuclear and energy sectors to prevent misuse and guarantee regional stability. These reports demonstrate Iran's extensive energy resources, its capacity to adjust to external pressure, and the geopolitical obstacles it presents. Iran is a leading entity within the ShiaMuslim world, having its political, ideological and military influence across the region. India also has a notable Shia Muslim population.

Iran's Strategic Outreach:

The peace agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, facilitated by China in 2023, represents a noteworthy advancement in alleviating the longstanding tensions between these two pivotal nations in the Middle East. The accord centered on the reestablishment of diplomatic relations and the augmentation of regional stability, bearing significant ramifications for India. The agreement presents New Delhi with a significant opportunity to enhance its engagement with both nations, thereby securing energy resources and cultivating economic relationships within a stable Gulf region. The agreement has the potential to enhance collaboration between India and Iran by mitigating regional polarization. China is becoming more important in the region, especially with its role in helping to reach agreements. This might lead India to rethink its strategy towards Iran. India will continue to focus on building relationships with both Iran and Saudi Arabia as it navigates the changing situation in the Middle East.

Due to shared efforts to promote regional stability and economic cooperation, recent trends in Iran-UAE bilateral relations shows improvement. High-level diplomatic contacts between the two countries have expanded, promoting discussion on consular, trade, and security issues. Reinstating its ambassador to Tehran and increasing economic contacts demonstrate the UAE's practical approach to settling disputes and fortifying relations. Despite past tensions, both nations seek to strengthen their cooperation in sectors like infrastructure, energy, and maritime security, demonstrating a shared commitment to regional prosperity. Both the countries also took part in Joint Economic Committee to boost economic cooperation. In 2022, trade exchanges between the two nations reached \$34 billion, marking a substantial increase. Additionally, over 122,000 Iranian businesspersons are currently operating in the UAE, reflecting deepening economic ties.

India and China helped Iran join BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), showing their important plans and goals in the region. India supports Iran's membership because it

fits with their goal of a world with multiple powers. This also helps India connect better to Central Asia, especially through projects like Chabahar Port. In view of India, the inclusion of Iran could improve regional stability, secure energy resources, and reduce China's increasing influence in global discussions. China supports Iran because of their strong strategic partnership. Iran plays a crucial role in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and is home to considerable energy resources. China is leveraging BRICS and SCO to diminish U.S. influence and augment its own presence in the region. Both India and China recognize the significance of engaging Iran in these initiatives. India seeks enhanced connectivity and inclusivity, whereas China endeavors to further its political objectives. Their endorsement of Iran underscores the increasing significance of these organizations in shaping the global system.

In the last ten years, Iran and Qatar have built a strong relationship based on working together and having common interests in the region. Both countries share the world's biggest natural gas field, called the South Pars/North Dome field, which helps them work together on energy development. Their relationship grew stronger during the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) crisis from 2017 to 2021, when Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE and Egypt blocked Qatar and getting Qatar expelled from GCC. Iran helped Qatar by giving them airspace, trade routes, and food supplies, which improved their relationship. They have collaborated on economic matters, trade, and regional diplomacy, both advocating for reduced conflict in the Middle East. Their pragmatic collaboration demonstrates a mutual desire to address external challenges and preserve stability in the region. Notwithstanding certain disagreements, such as regarding Syria, both nations have endeavored to align their interests and sustain a cordial relationship. Qatar has been included in GCC and has been attending summits since 2021. Qatar has performed the role of mediator in the Hamas crisis, it has enabled discussions between Hamas and various factions, including the United States, and has allocated substantial financial assistance to Gaza for humanitarian objectives. Qatar and Turkey along with Iran have stood against western pressure in war.

In May 2024, Egypt and Iran improved their relationship when Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry traveled to Tehran for the funeral of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. This was the first time an Egyptian foreign minister visited Iran since Egypt and Iran broke off diplomatic relations in 1980. Shoukry's presence showed that Egypt is serious about reconnecting with Iran, which is part of a wider trend of improving relations between the two countries. Officials from 68 countries attended the funeral, showing Iran's importance in the region. This friendly action, along with important meetings that followed, shows a shared desire to move past old disagreements and work together on local and global problems. In October 2024, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi visited Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi in Cairo. This was the first high-level meeting between the two countries in more than ten

years. This meeting was about keeping peace in the region and reducing conflicts. At the OIC meeting in Jeddah in November 2024, the foreign ministers of Iran and Egypt had productive talks, highlighting the need for unity in tackling common problems. Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian participated in the D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation summit in Egypt in December 2024. This was the first visit of an Iranian president to Egypt in over a decade. These visits show a greater readiness to move past old disagreements and work together more on regional and global issues. These interactions show a shared interest in repairing relationships and improving cooperation, even though there have been long-standing historical and political differences.

The dynamics of the relationship between Iran and Turkey reveal a complex interplay between cases of cooperation and geopolitical concerns. As both nations strive for an incredible \$30 billion in annual trade, their energy cooperation continues to expand. The importance of economic relations is one essential element that never shifts. However, regional conflicts have occasionally jeopardized their collaborative efforts. During the Gaza war in 2024, both countries voiced strong support for Palestine but differed in their methods—Turkey called for multilateral solutions, while Iran emphasized direct support for resistance groups like Hamas. In January 2024, Iranian President Raisi visited Turkey, underscoring a renewed push to strengthen bilateral relations. The visit coincided with discussions on regional crises, including Syria and Palestine, and economic cooperation agreements. Later in November, President Pezeshkian participated in the Arab League's extraordinary meeting in Ankara, focusing on the Gaza crisis, marking a rare Iranian engagement in an Arab-led forum. Despite these engagements, enduring tensions over Syria, Kurdish autonomy, and Turkey's support for Azerbaijan during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict reveal the challenges in reconciling their divergent regional strategies, reflecting the intricate and competitive nature of their relationship.

One more development in the region which has helped Iran to emerged stronger is its ties with Taliban. The relationship between Iran and the Taliban has been complex and dynamic, marked by both collaboration and conflict. Their formerly hostile relations have significantly altered since the Taliban reasserted control over Afghanistan in August 2021. The formal transfer of the Afghan embassy in Tehran to diplomats appointed by the Taliban in February 2023 marked a significant advancement in diplomatic relations between the two nations. Despite this diplomatic initiative, problems remain. Water rights have been a contentious issue, particularly concerning the Helmand River. Tensions escalated in 2023 as a result of conflicts regarding water allocation, leading to border skirmishes between Taliban and Iranian forces. In September 2024, a Taliban delegate at the Islamic Unity Conference in Tehran refused to stand during the Iranian national anthem, underscoring cultural disparities and resulting in diplomatic tensions. In November 2024, explosions and gunfire transpired in Iran's Sistan and Baluchistan province, resulting in the deaths of at least two

Afghans. Security issues have emerged. The Taliban asserted that Afghan nationals were the intended victims of the attacks, but Iranian officials denied this claim. These incidents underscore the intricate dynamics between Iran and the Taliban, marked by diplomatic normalization amid ongoing disputes regarding security matters, cultural principles, and resources.

Iran has become a significant cross-continental trade hub, particularly for Russia and Central Asia, following the completion of the INSTC after years of delay. Iran has fortified its military capabilities by producing lethal and long-range armed drones and exporting them to its regional proxies and Russia. Iran is currently one of the foremost mass manufacturers of armed drones in the region. Additionally, these factors have influenced the perception of Iran in the West Asian region.

In the last ten years, India's relationship with West Asia has undergone significant transformation, propelled by strong economic connections, strategic collaboration, and elevated diplomatic interactions. Bilateral trade between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations attained a remarkable \$161.59 billion in 2023-24, with energy imports comprising a substantial fraction. In 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Saudi Arabia led to the establishment of the Strategic Partnership Council, concentrating on defense, energy, and technology. In 2022, India entered into the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the UAE, which diminished trade barriers and substantially enhanced bilateral trade. The UAE was India's third-largest trading partner in 2023, with bilateral trade totaling approximately \$84 billion. Saudi Arabia, on the other hand, represented \$52 billion, solidifying its status as a significant oil supplier to India. India has strategically strengthened its partnerships throughout the region. Indian prime minister's visits to Qatar (2016), Oman (2018), and Bahrain (2019) showcase India's "Act West" and "Link West" strategies. India's involvement exceeds mere economic considerations. It endorses peace efforts in Yemen and Palestine, participates on food security through agricultural partnerships and takes part in regional security dialogues. These initiatives reflect India's growing influence and a pragmatic approach for fostering economic growth, ensuring energy security, and enhancing regional stability in West Asia.

Possibilities and Prospects:

The split of Iranian presidents into "hardliner" and "reformist" groups—Raisi in the first group and Rouhani in the second—has not significantly affected the course of ties between India and Iran. Due of his great diplomatic efforts, the Chabahar Port and energy cooperation was among the several agreements signed under Rouhani's presidency between 2016 and 2018. These concessions helped the two sides to have much better rapport. Under Raisi's direction, the alliance stayed strong and fruitful negotiations took place in venues like the SCO. Signing just a few days before the sad helicopter crash involving Raisi in May 2024, the Chabahar agreement, crucial for trade and ties between both countries, rising to leadership, Masoud Pezeshkian inspired fresh optimism. President-

elect Pezeshkian underlined in his speech to the world on July 12, 2024, the need of a foreign policy grounded on the values of Iranian pride, smart thinking, and pragmatic actions. Even though, he did not specifically address India but his ideas support cooperative projects grounded on shared interests.

Energy security will remain a cornerstone of India-Iran relations in the future. India is one of the largest importers of Iranian oil, and despite the challenges posed by U.S. sanctions, Iran's vast oil and natural gas reserves remain critical to India's energy needs. In 2023, India imported about 350,000 barrels of oil per day from Iran, accounting for roughly 7% of India's total oil imports. Iran was supplying almost 10 percent of our oil need before 2019. As Iran seeks to expand its oil exports, particularly with the potential easing of sanctions, India has a whole new basket of possibilities such as it could increase its imports, thus securing its energy supply for the long term. India can approach Iran for storing of strategic oil reserves in India. Till date only UAE has offered to India about it. Additionally, India's investments in Iran's energy infrastructure, such as the development of the South Pars gas field, can be expected to deepen as both countries strive for energy security. There is also a possibility of Iran-Oman-India deepwater gas pipeline to make up for failed IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India). Iran and Oman have agreed to develop pipeline between two countries and its extension to India can be a possibility. Given the shared interests in energy cooperation, the development of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) could further facilitate energy trade and enhance India's access to Central Asia's energy resources.

Connectivity between New Delhi and Tehran is poised for significant growth, particularly through initiatives like the Chabahar Port. The Chabahar Port, developed with Indian investment, plays a key role in reducing India's reliance on Pakistan for land-based trade routes. In 2023, trade through Chabahar surpassed \$2 billion, with Indian goods increasingly reaching Afghanistan and Central Asia. the expansion of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is expected to reduce transportation cost and time for goods moving between India and Europe. the growing importance of connectivity in foreign policies of both countries can be highlighted by the projected \$10 billion trade volume by 2026. A railway link between Chabahar and Zahedan city is of 700 km which is fast tracked to connect to Iran's existing railway network. India continues to integrate its connectivity strategy with Iran's, the region will benefit from enhanced trade and infrastructure linkages, which will facilitate more efficient movement of goods, people, and energy.

Indian and Iranian military cooperation will increase as both nations seek to strengthen their defenses and maintain regional stability. Both the countries had signed a defense cooperation agreement in 2001 also. In 2022, India and Iran held "Zarb-e-Momin" naval exercises to promote maritime security and anti-piracy. The two nations share concerns about strategic chokepoints in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea, which ensure global energy supplies. in 2023, India's defense exports

to Iran reached \$100 million indicating growing defense cooperation, particularly in small arms and ammunition. Iran has developed modern weapons such as short and medium range ballistic missiles, hypersonic missiles and armed drones. In 2024, it launched Bavar-373 advance air defense system. Iranian military power and India's defense technology may improve maritime and regional security cooperation. Both nations want to protect vital international shipping routes, and India's growing naval presence in the Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf strategically positions them to improve defense cooperation. India's regional power may strengthen Iran-India strategic alignment as Iran embraces multilateral defense collaboration.

India and Iran have conducted naval exercises, including "Zarb-e-Momin," to secure the Persian Gulf and prevent piracy. This signifies a shared interest in preserving stability and peace along crucial shipping routes for the global energy trade. Iran is pursuing India's sophisticated missile and naval defense systems via defense cooperation agreements. In 2022, an Indian defense delegation visited Tehran to confer on defense modernization and regional security. Both nations have endorsed each other's defense strategies in multilateral platforms concerning terrorism, regional conflicts, and arms control, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Military diplomacy has the potential to fortify defense alliances, augment strategic capabilities, and stabilize the security landscape in South and West Asia in response to evolving security threats.

India-Iran counter-terrorism cooperation is growing due to their shared concerns about extremism in their regions. Iran has faced ISIS and Jundallah, while India has faced separatist movements and foreign terrorism. Both countries want regional stability and extremism reduction. India and Iran shared intelligence on ISIS and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and the Middle East in 2023. India's participation in security dialogues like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which includes China and Iran, enhances counter-terrorism collaboration. Intelligence and counter-terrorism collaboration has increased as Taliban-ruled Afghanistan has become a terrorist hub. India and Iran will strengthen their anti-terrorism partnership to fortify their borders and protect national security from transnational extremist groups.

Greater regional stability and economic growth could be the result of Iran's expanding influence in West Asia, which signifies a significant shift in regional politics. India faces both opportunities and challenges as a result of these changes. When it comes to energy security and projects like the Chabahar Port, India will be able to achieve its goals with the help of Iran's stronger regional ties. To maintain its influence in the region, India will need to reevaluate its strategy in light of the current circumstances. Through cooperation and the pursuit of common interests, India and Iran can establish a mutually beneficial relationship that advances both countries' agendas and contributes to the stabilization of the region.

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