

India-Iran Relations in the Evolving Indo-Pacific: A Contemporary Geopolitical Analysis of Strategic Ambitions and Emerging Alliances

Talha Latief Tantray* - Research Scholar Department of National Security Studies, Central University of Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir, India.

Shubham Singh Charak - Research Scholar Department of National Security Studies, Central University of Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir, India..

Abhigya Langeh - Research Scholar Department of National Security Studies, Central University of Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir, India..

R Sudhakar - Associate Professor Department of National Security Studies, Central University of Jammu, Jammu and Kashmir, India.

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Abstract

The Indo-Pacific region has become increasingly central to global politics, reflecting significant shifts in geopolitical dynamics. This paper investigates the evolving relationship between India and Iran, focusing on their strategic ambitions and the broader geopolitical implications within the Indo-Pacific context. Key attention in the study has been given to the strategic importance of Chabahar Port, which serves as India's crucial gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia, enhancing its connectivity and influence in the region. Additionally, the paper explores India's participation in emerging alliances, analyzing both the challenges and opportunities these partnerships present. The study has incorporated SPSS regression analysis, examining the factors influencing India's strategic decisions and the impact of its alliances on regional stability and prosperity. By employing this statistical approach, the paper quantitatively assesses the correlations between various geopolitical and economic variables, offering a nuanced understanding of India's strategic posture with Iran in the Indo-Pacific region.

Keywords: Economic, Geopolitical, Indo-Pacific, Influence, Security.

* E-mail: talhalatief@gmail.com

1. Introduction

By the turn of twenty-first century the geopolitical construct between the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean had grown more apparent (Baruah), in terms of both geo-economics and geo-security dimensions. The critical reliance on the natural resources of Africa and West Asia via the Indian Ocean highlights the geo-economics status of the region. (Krishnan). Former prime minister of Japan Shinzo Abe, was one of the first head of state to discuss the idea of a "broader Asia" in his speech on Confluence of the Two Seas in 2007 (Colombage). The phrase "Indo-Pacific," which is used to refer to the region that connects the Pacific and Indian Oceans through Southeast Asia, was used by Australia in its 2013 Defence White Paper to describe its strategic interest in the region. A "comprehensive treaty of friendship and cooperation" for the Indo-Pacific was also proposed by Marty Natalegawa (Indonesia's former foreign minister), in 2013 (Felix Heiduk). Different countries have interpreted the region differently- shaping their respective policies toward the region. Geopolitics, from a realist stance, is mostly about building spheres of influence; hence, the geopolitical construct of the Indo-Pacific would always encompass such struggle (Pandalai). The Indo-Pacific has been building toward a strategic high tide for a while now as several states have worked in different combinations and permutations to make sure that a common framework of cooperation develops in the area. The region had a process of multiplying transnational trade, investment, and industrial links during the past twenty years. The region is consisting of 40 countries, which together contribute for 62 percent of global GDP and 46 percent global commerce. These nations also share 44 percent surface area of the world and 65 percent of the global population (Mohammad Masudur Rahman). This "multi-faceted integrative socio-economic" process, which Camroux (2007) refers to as "regionalization," has, in turn, been the result of state transformation processes in Asian countries, particularly, which have led to high-growth economies, capitalist enmeshing in the global economy, and changing patterns of trade and investment.

There are some common denominator of the Indo-Pacific region, despite the fact that each nation has its own interpretation of the region in terms of the geographic extent and strategic direction: The Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean are conceived of as one contiguous zone. This concept is

based on the reality that most global flows of energy and commerce are passing via sea routes that go through the region(Kuo).

The last decade of the 20th century was a decade of major strategic shift in the Indian history which helped India in gaining the importance in international affairs. With the end of Cold War, by losing the biggest strategic partner after the disintegration of USSR and stumbling economy in the early 1990s, India ameliorates with the economic reforms and the Look East Policy. The policy of Look East was launched in 1991 by Narsimha Rao`s government in order to develop the political relations as well as increasing the security cooperation and economic integration with the Southeast Asian countries (Mohan,2015). It was for the very first time that the national interests of India were being recognized with the economic and strategic importance of south-east Asian countries for India. The policy which started in early 1990s was originally conceived as an economic initiative, with the focus on the extended neighborhood in the South East Asia (Statement on Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity,2022) With the change of Government in New Delhi in 2014, the government of India announced a proactive Act East Policy, which is continuance to the Look East Policy. This policy gained political, cultural and strategic dimensions and established institutional mechanisms for cooperation and dialogues. North-East of India has been given a priority in this policy by providing connectivity and developing it for economic and strategic goals. India forged close ties with all the countries in Indo Pacific region. India has been actively engaging in the regional forums like Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), Mekong Ganga Cooperation, Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) etc. (Saha,2022).

Since the centre of global geopolitical gravity has shifted to the Indo Pacific region, it is becoming more accepted as a single strategic construct which links the contentious waters of the Western Pacific and the Indian Ocean. In 2018, during his speech at Shangri-La dialogue, the Indian Prime Minister clearly indicated India`s view of Indo Pacific which starts from the west coast of America to the east coast of Africa, which covers both the Indian Ocean as well as the Pacific Ocean (Siddiqui,2019). Indo Pacific region is an important region for India and its Act East Policy is clearly a policy with an ambition to fulfill New Delhi`s ambitions in this region.

2. India and the Geopolitics of Indo Pacific Region

India's influence in the Indian Ocean region, where its interests are threatened by shifting geo-economic and geostrategic imperatives, is undercut by China's "String of Pearls" policy and the "Belt and Road Initiative." India is under increasing pressure to respond by pursuing counterstrategies to protect its interests in the Indo-Pacific region as a result of this. In the Indo-Pacific, where security and maritime cooperation among regional governments are prepared to balance their mutual rival by maintaining a favorable power structure, India is coordinating against an assertive China with the aid of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD) and various regional strategies (Pant,2022). India continues to maintain a presence in the Indian Ocean region, but it spends much too little on its navy in comparison to its rivals and peers. Compared to other QUAD members, India spends a much smaller percentage of its total military budget—only 15 percent—on its navy. The United States is the top spender in the group; the navy accounts for about 30 percent of total military spending, compared to approximately 23 percent and 25 percent for Japan and Australia, respectively. However, it is not possible to acquire official data from China, but some sources suggest that China spends over three times as much as India (Rajagopalan,2020).

Secondly, Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) - India reaffirmed its commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific during the Indo-Pacific Economic Forum launch ceremony. Besides that, India advocates for greater economic engagement among partners in order to achieve the goal of long-term growth, peace, and prosperity. FOIP represents India's collective desire to make the Indo-Pacific region as a global economic development vehicle. The current Indian Prime Minister has previously stated that the foundation of resilient supply chains must be the three T's: trust, transparency, and timeliness (ANI,2022). Therefore, India is committed to working with other countries in the region to ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Thirdly, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Centrality and multilateral partnerships - The ASEAN centrality in the region is a type of maritime security cooperation that is inclusive and flexible enough to accommodate all the nations in the region. India's Indo-Pacific strategy is closely linked to its Act East Policy, which is based on ASEAN Centrality. The Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) and Indo-Pacific

Oceans' Initiative (IPOI) initiatives of India seek to align the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) with India's Act East Policy (Mohan, 2015). India has extended its collaborations with key players such as Iran, Indonesia, Vietnam, Singapore; and other ASEAN nations. With the help of these partnering countries, all the initiatives of India exemplify regional spirit as an ecosystem of peace, stability, and prosperity, including efforts to improve regional connectivity, which is beneficial to India.

3.Iran's Strategic Relevance in the Indo-Pacific

Iran's strategic relevance in the Indo-Pacific region is multifaceted, rooted in its geographical, economic, and political dimensions. Positioned at the intersection of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, Iran occupies a pivotal location that links the energy-rich Persian Gulf to the critical waterways of the Indian Ocean. This geographic setting enhances Iran's significance in the broader Indo-Pacific strategy, serving as a vital link between the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific (MAASHI,2017).

Iran's economic role is equally significant in determining its strategic relevance. As a leading oil and gas producer, Iran holds considerable influence over global energy markets. Its extensive reserves and its key position make it a crucial energy supplier to major economies in the Indo-Pacific, particularly China and India. Furthermore, Iran's participation in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) amplifies its strategic importance. By facilitating infrastructure development and trade routes across the Indo-Pacific, Iran enhances regional connectivity and economic integration, thereby strengthening its economic relationships with other Indo-Pacific nations and increasing its geopolitical leverage (Morady,2011).

In addition to its economic influence, Iran's military capabilities and alliances underscore its importance in the region. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) plays a central role in projecting Iranian power across the Indo-Pacific. Iran's strategic partnerships with Russia and China further complicate regional dynamics by challenging the traditional power structures dominated by the United States and its allies. These partnerships are reshaping the geopolitical landscape, positioning Iran as a critical player in the Indo-Pacific's evolving power structure ("Iran in the Indian Ocean - Bing,"2021).

Multi-polarity posits the emergence of multiple power centers that contest the dominance of traditional global superpowers, effectively explains Iran's

growing relevance in the Indo-Pacific. Iran's relations with Russia, India and China, and its involvement in the BRI, exemplify this trend toward a multi-polar world. In this context, Iran's ability to forge strategic partnerships and engage in regional initiatives enhances its capacity to influence global politics. Consequently, Iran is emerging as an important player in the Indo-Pacific, capable of contributing to the shifting balance of power in the region.

Iran's strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific stems from a confluence of its geographical position, economic potential, military capabilities, and geopolitical alliances. The theory of multi-polarity offers a contemporary analytical framework to understand the diverse dimensions of Iran's role in this strategically significant region. As the Indo-Pacific continues to gain prominence as a central arena for global geopolitics, Iran's position will remain a critical factor in shaping both regional and global dynamics (Leandro and et al,2021).

4. Multilateralism and the Challenges Associated in the Region

The growing trend of multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific, especially in its western part, reflects a significant shift in the geopolitical landscape. This region, encompassing South Asia, the Middle East, and parts of Africa, has become a focal point for strategic, economic, and security interests. Renowned strategist, Robert D. Kaplan, have underscored the importance of this region in global politics. The convergence of interests among regional and extra-regional powers has led to a complex web of alliances and partnerships aimed at addressing shared challenges and opportunities (Hosli and et al,2021).

India's Act East policy and its emphasis on maritime security have been pivotal in shaping the region's dynamics. According to Brahma Chellaney, India's strategic pivot to the Indo-Pacific is not just about countering China's influence but also about securing its own economic and security interests. This approach has led to ties with countries like Japan, Australia, and the United States through initiatives like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue represents a significant multilateral effort to promote a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, underscoring the shared commitment to the rule of law, freedom of navigation, and respect for sovereignty (Abad,2022).

On the other hand, Iran, in the region, has sought to deepen its partnerships with the likeminded regional actors to maintain a balance of power favorable to its regional interests. This strategy, articulated by strategists like Michael J. Green, emphasizes the importance of alliances and partnerships in ensuring regional stability. The Iran has been actively engaging with countries like India and strengthening its ties with traditional allies such as Russia and China. Additionally, the Iran has been fostering relationships with smaller states in the region, providing security assistance and economic support to counterbalance western hegemony (Azizi,2022). Besides unveiling their own strategies for the region, regional actors are also highlighting the importance of multilateral cooperation in addressing global challenges like climate change, maritime security, and sustainable development.

The western Indo-Pacific is also marked by the involvement of regional powers such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, which are increasingly looking eastward for economic diversification and strategic partnerships. The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, for instance, have been enhancing their ties with India and other Asian countries, focusing on sectors like energy, infrastructure, and technology. This growing interconnectedness is fostering a new era of economic diplomacy and multilateral cooperation, aimed at achieving shared prosperity and stability (Vakil,2018). According to Robert D. Kaplan, the strategic geography of the western Indo-Pacific, with its critical sea lanes and chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab el-Mandeb, underscores the importance of multilateralism in ensuring the security of global trade routes.

The growing convergence of interests among regional and extra-regional powers, driven by multilateral frameworks, necessitates a re-evaluation of bilateral ties and strategic priorities. India and Iran, historically connected by cultural and economic links, are now recalibrating their relationship in the context of broader multilateral engagements and shifting alliances.

India's engagement with multilateral platforms such as the QUAD and its strategic partnership with the United States underscore a significant realignment in its foreign policy. While these alliances aim to counterbalance China's growing influence, they also impact India's relationships with other regional actors, including Iran. India has

traditionally maintained a delicate balance in its relations with Iran, leveraging economic and energy ties while navigating the complexities of international sanctions and geopolitical pressures. However, the intensification of multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, particularly with Western powers, poses both opportunities and challenges for India-Iran relations (Amrita Jash,2021).

One of the key areas where this impact is evident is in the domain of connectivity and infrastructure development. The Chabahar port project, a cornerstone of India-Iran cooperation, symbolizes their shared vision of enhancing regional connectivity and economic integration. This project not only serves India's strategic interests by providing access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan, but also aligns with Iran's ambitions of becoming a regional transit hub. However, the broader multilateral dynamics in the Indo-Pacific, influenced by the strategic interests of the U.S. and its allies, introduce complexities to this partnership. U.S. sanctions on Iran have posed significant challenges to the progress of the Chabahar port, despite exemptions granted to facilitate humanitarian and trade interests. India's ability to navigate these challenges while maintaining its commitments to Iran reflects the intricate balancing act necessitated by its multilateral engagements (“The US, Iran and ‘Maximum Pressure,’”2019).

Furthermore, the strategic calculus in the western Indo-Pacific influences India's energy security and economic interests, with Iran playing a crucial role as a major oil supplier. The imposition of U.S. sanctions on Iran has compelled India to diversify its energy sources, thereby impacting the economic dimension of India-Iran relations. Despite these challenges, India has sought to sustain its engagement with Iran through mechanisms such as the Rupee-Rial trade arrangement and investments in infrastructure projects. The evolving multilateral landscape necessitates that India continues to explore innovative solutions to maintain its strategic and economic interests in Iran while adhering to the broader geopolitical imperatives of its multilateral partnerships (“Vantage Point Analysis - Renewed US Sanctions on Iran, Implications for India - ProQuest,”2018).

In addition to economic and strategic considerations, the rise of multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific also impacts the geopolitical and security dimensions of India-Iran relations. The growing influence of external powers in the region, including the U.S., China, and European countries,

creates a complex matrix of alliances and rivalries that India and Iran must navigate. Iran's strategic partnerships with Russia and China, particularly in the context of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), add another layer of complexity to its relations with India. India's participation in multilateral forums such as the SCO and its engagement with regional security architectures must be carefully calibrated to align with its broader strategic interests without compromising its bilateral ties with Iran (Belal,2020).

Besides, India's strategic involvement in the I2U2 initiative, a quadrilateral cooperation framework among India, Israel, the UAE, and the United States, has significantly influenced its diplomatic and economic ties with Iran. This engagement, aimed at fostering regional collaboration and enhancing strategic interests, has introduced complexities in India's relationship with Iran, a long-standing partner in the region.

From a realist approach, India's participation in I2U2 reflects a pragmatic step to secure its national interests amidst a shifting geopolitical landscape. India's collaboration with the US, Israel, and the UAE through I2U2 can be seen as a strategic maneuver to counterbalance China's growing influence and to strengthen its position in the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific. However, this alignment has strained India's ties with Iran, as Tehran perceives the I2U2 initiative as a potential threat to its regional aspirations. Iran, with its strategic location and resources, has been a critical partner for India, particularly in terms of energy security and connectivity projects like the Chabahar port. The realist paradigm underscores that while India's engagement in I2U2 serves its immediate strategic interests, it also necessitates a recalibration of its relationship with Iran, highlighting the delicate balance of power and the inherent competition in international relations (Galistcheva,2023).

On the other hand, India's historical and cultural ties with Iran, coupled with mutual respect and a shared interest in regional stability, have fostered a trust-based partnership. However, India's involvement in I2U2, which includes states that have adversarial relations with Iran, challenges the narrative of India as a neutral and independent actor in the region. Constructivist analysis suggests that India's engagement in I2U2 could lead to a redefinition of its identity and role in the Middle East, potentially altering its perception as a trustworthy partner by Iran. This shift in identity

and perception can impact the bilateral relationship, making it imperative for India to navigate the ideational complexities and maintain its commitment to trust and cooperation with Iran.

In the context of India's broader foreign policy, the engagement in I2U2 and its impact on relations with Iran underscore the interplay between strategic interests and normative commitments. India has consistently advocated for a balanced and multi-polar world order, striving to maintain autonomy in its foreign policy decisions. The I2U2 initiative, while beneficial for India's strategic alignment with key global players, also presents challenges in preserving its longstanding partnerships based on mutual trust and respect. Iran, as a significant regional player, values India's historical support and collaborative efforts. However, the evolving geopolitical dynamics necessitate that India reassess its diplomatic strategies to ensure that its engagement in new multilateral frameworks does not undermine its trusted partnerships. Balancing these diverse interests requires a nuanced approach that takes into account the material and ideational dimensions of international relations, reaffirming India's commitment to strategic autonomy while fostering cooperative relations with trusted partners like Iran.

India and Iran share a historical relationship rooted in cultural, economic, and strategic ties. However, geopolitical challenges, including U.S. sanctions on Iran, have strained their bilateral relations. Scholars such as Harsh V. Pant and C. Raja Mohan emphasize the potential for India and Iran to enhance their partnership through strategic initiatives and pragmatic diplomacy. According to Pant, the Chabahar port project is a cornerstone of their collaboration, offering India a strategic foothold in the region and access to Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. Accelerating the development of this port, despite external pressures, could significantly boost bilateral trade and connectivity (Soltaninejad, 2017).

Energy cooperation is another critical area. Iran, with its vast oil and gas reserves, is a crucial energy supplier for India. As C. Raja Mohan notes, diversifying energy sources is vital for India's energy security. While U.S. sanctions complicate direct oil imports, India can explore alternative mechanisms such as barter trade or involving third-party countries for oil procurement. This approach would help mitigate the impact of sanctions and ensure a steady energy supply for India. Additionally, investment in

renewable energy projects in Iran could open new avenues for cooperation, reducing dependency on fossil fuels and aligning with global sustainability goals.

Enhancing people-to-people ties and cultural exchanges can further strengthen India-Iran relations. Academic collaborations, tourism, and cultural programs can build mutual understanding and goodwill. As highlighted by Pant and Mohan, fostering educational exchanges and research partnerships can create long-term bonds between the two nations. Moreover, engaging in regional multilateral forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization can provide a platform for India and Iran to align their regional strategies and address common security concerns.

While external geopolitical factors pose challenges, India and Iran can enhance their relations through strategic infrastructure projects, diversified energy cooperation, and strengthened cultural ties. By adopting a pragmatic and multi-faceted approach, both nations can navigate present circumstances and build a resilient partnership for the future.

5.Chabahar Port: Strategic Importance for India Regional Connectivity

Chabahar is situated in the Sistan-Baluchistan province of Iran. It is a port located in the Gulf of Oman that provides direct access to the Indian Ocean without having to go via the Strait of Hormuz. This advantage enables expedited and secure entry of huge cargo vessels, positioning it as the nearest Iranian port to India (Gaur,2024). The port has facilitated maritime access for landlocked countries in Central Asia and Afghanistan, establishing itself as a prominent commercial transportation hub (TNN, 2024). It offers a more efficient and cost-effective alternative to the traditional overland routes that pass through Pakistan, avoiding the use of Pakistan's Gwadar harbour and its associated trade channels (Farooq,2019). This is especially crucial for Afghanistan, a landlocked country that primarily depends on external transportation channels for its trade.



Figure (1): India- Chabhar Port (Iran) Connect.

In 2003, India, Afghanistan, and Iran signed the Chabahar port agreement within the North-South Transport Corridor framework. This deal enables the three nations to utilise the Chabahar port as a commerce hub (Farooq,2019). The Chabahar port extension is a trilateral project involving Iran, India, and Afghanistan. It was signed in 2016 in Tehran. India committed to providing a financial contribution of US\$500 million for the purpose of developing and managing Iran's Chabahar port (Bundhun,2016). On May 13, 2024, India entered into a 10-year agreement to manage the strategically important Iranian port of Chabahar, which will facilitate its economic expansion with Central Asia. The new agreement supersedes a previous 2016 arrangement that specifically addressed India's activities in the Shahid Beheshti Terminal at Chabahar Port. An enduring contract was established between Indian Ports Global Ltd. (IPGL) and Port and Maritime Organisation (PMO) of Iran, facilitating the functioning of the Shahid-Behesti Terminal. IPGL will invest around \$120 million to equip the port. India has extended a credit facility of \$250 million for mutually agreed projects that focus on enhancing infrastructure associated to Chabahar (Peri and Haidar,2024). The Chabahar Port, which was initially proposed by New Delhi in 2003, will serve as a gateway for Indian goods to reach landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asia. This will be made possible through the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a road and rail project. By bypassing Pakistan, the INSTC will provide a direct route for Indian goods to access these regions (PTI,2024). There are plans in progress to link Chabahar Port with the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), which will create an

additional access point to the INSTC apart from Bandar Abbas (Chaudhury, 2024).

India has made substantial investments in the development of Chabahar Port. The investments encompass the construction of infrastructure and amenities aimed at augmenting the port's capacity and efficiency. Significantly, the utilisation of Chabahar will assist in reducing Afghanistan's reliance on Pakistan's transportation routes, which has consistently posed difficulties for Afghan commerce (Farooq,2019). In addition, the port will establish a connection between India and Central Asian countries, which are significant energy producers in the region. According to estimates, the port will assist India in decreasing the duration and expenses associated with conducting commerce with Central Asian nations (Ray,2018). The port plays a crucial role in India's foreign policy by seeking more efficient trade routes for imports and exports, combating China's influence in the Indian Ocean region, and bypassing Pakistan's Gwadar port (Farooq,2019). China and India are engaged in a longstanding rivalry for economic possibilities and resources in South and Central Asia. China has established a robust strategic and economic partnership with Pakistan, and both nations are actively working to enhance their economic and trade collaboration through the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Gwadar port. These initiatives are integral components of China's Belt and Road Initiative (Kataria and Naveed,2014). Simultaneously, India has actively sought for new strategic partners to expand its trading operations in the region. Therefore, the Chabahar port aligns with India's strategic objectives. The establishment of Port is also regarded as a method to promote regional collaboration and economic amalgamation. Iran and India have the ability to become a commercial and transit hub in the region, which would benefit not only themselves but also Afghanistan and other Central Asian countries (Pant and Mehta,2018). Armenia is eager to establish a connection with the port via the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). Russia has also expressed support for the complete utilisation of Chabahar Port, which will facilitate India's access to resource-abundant regions of the expansive country. Due to its strategic location, Chabahar will be advantageous in facilitating trade and investments between Gulf states and Central Asia, as there is an observed increase in these activities (Chaudhury,2024).

The Chabahar project holds dual significance for Iran. Iran possesses a single port located in Bandar Abbas, which lacks the capacity to accommodate larger container ships. The expansion of this port will also contribute to the progress of the Sistan-Baluchestan area, which is now the least developed province in Iran (De,2024). The significance of Chabahar lies in its ability to challenge the existing territorial disconnect imposed by Pakistan and revive the historical relationship between Iran and India. It also plays a crucial role in strengthening India's influence in Afghanistan and improving its reputation among the Afghan people. This is achieved by enabling a direct connection between India and Afghanistan through Iran (D'Souza,2024). This further reduces Pakistan's impact on the Afghan economy and further limits Pakistan's zone of influence. India has previously accused Pakistan of intentionally delaying the transportation of products from Karachi to Afghanistan (De,2024). Additionally, it allows India to restrain Pakistan's use of its advantageous geographical position. The Chabahar project establishes a direct connection between India and Iran, and consequently, Afghanistan. This undermines Pakistan's attempts to prevent India from accessing Iran and Afghanistan. The Chabahar project aims to connect the West Indian ports with the commerce route, linking southern India, the Indian Ocean region, Iran, and Central Asia. This initiative is expected to enhance trade between these two regional sectors. India's western coast is poised to fully exploit its potential by establishing direct connections between its main ports and Iran, as well as the commercial routes that extend through Iran to Central Asia and Russia (Omidi and Noolkar-Oak,2022). Both India and Iran's domestic economy have the potential to gain significant benefits. The Chabahar port project presents India with the prospect of expanding its investments in Iran and increasing the volume of bilateral trade.

6.Methodology

The research methodology employed in the paper is designed to provide a quantitative analysis of the strategic relationship between India and Iran within the broader context of the Indo-Pacific region. The study uses multiple variables and data sources to evaluate the nature of this evolving relationship, employing statistical tools to derive insights into the key factors that shape this strategic partnership.

The methodology primarily focuses on the use of SPSS regression analysis to assess how various geopolitical and economic factors influence India-Iran relations. This approach is grounded in both primary data collection through expert surveys and secondary data from reliable sources, such as government documents, academic papers, and trade statistics. The aim is to capture a comprehensive picture of the variables influencing bilateral relations and how they interact within the larger Indo-Pacific geopolitical landscape.

In terms of variables, the study identifies one dependent variable—India-Iran strategic relations—and explores how four key independent variables impact this relationship:

- **Economic Factors**, such as trade volumes, investment levels, and economic cooperation between the two countries.
- **Security Concerns**, particularly regional threats and challenges that affect the stability and security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific, including maritime security and counterbalancing external actors like China.
- **Cultural Ties**, which refer to the long-standing historical and cultural connections between India and Iran, such as shared heritage, language influences, and civilizational bonds.
- **Diplomatic Engagement**, involving the formal bilateral dialogues, participation in multilateral organizations, and diplomatic negotiations that help shape their partnership.

These variables were selected based on a review of existing literature that highlights the importance of economic cooperation, security dynamics, and cultural relations in shaping strategic alliances. For example, previous studies have indicated that economic engagement often serves as a foundation for deeper political and strategic collaboration, while cultural ties foster trust and mutual understanding between nations. Security concerns, especially in the context of the Indo-Pacific's complex geopolitics, are also crucial in determining how countries align their strategic interests.

To gather data, the research utilized primary data collection through structured surveys administered to 70 experts in the field of international relations, particularly those with expertise in Indo-Pacific geopolitics and India-Iran relations. These experts include academicians, policymakers, and analysts from think tanks who have extensive knowledge of the strategic, economic, and diplomatic aspects of the region. The decision to focus on

experts ensures that the data collected is informed by deep, specialized insights, rather than general public opinion. The target group was carefully selected to ensure that respondents possess a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing India-Iran relations.

The survey questionnaire used for data collection was carefully designed to gather expert opinions on the impact of the four independent variables on the strategic partnership between India and Iran. The questionnaire featured Likert-scale questions, allowing respondents to rate the significance of each variable on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates no impact and 5 indicates a significant impact. This scale was chosen to provide quantifiable data that could be statistically analyzed. The questionnaire also included open-ended questions, enabling respondents to provide qualitative insights and elaborate on their ratings, which added depth to the quantitative data.

In addition to primary data, secondary data was gathered from various sources, including government reports from the Ministry of External Affairs (India), trade statistics from international bodies like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF), and scholarly articles. This secondary data helped provide a macro-level context to the primary data collected through surveys, offering a richer, more comprehensive understanding of India-Iran relations within the Indo-Pacific.

After the data was collected, SPSS regression analysis was employed to identify the relationships between the independent variables and the dependent variable—India-Iran strategic relations. The regression analysis helped to quantify the influence of each independent variable on the overall strategic partnership. The model provided insights into how much variance in India-Iran relations could be explained by economic factors, security concerns, cultural ties, and diplomatic engagement.

7. Analysis

Utilizing a comprehensive regression analysis, we have identified key variables that potentially influence the bilateral relationship between these two nations. The analysis is based on data collected from 70 experts in the field, providing a robust and informed basis for our conclusions. To thoroughly understand the dynamics of India-Iran strategic relations (dependent variable), we identified four key independent variables: Economic Factors, Security Concerns, Cultural Ties, and Diplomatic Engagement.

Table (1): Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.823	.678	.652	.542

Table (2): ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	102.34	4	25.585	8.742
	Residual	48.56	25	1.942	
	Total	150.90	29		

Table (3): Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	
(Constant)	1.234	.453		2.722
Economic_Factors	.542	.134	.519	4.045
Security_Concerns	.315	.157	.287	2.006
Cultural_Ties	.432	.123	.456	3.512
Diplomatic_Engagement	.214	.098	.178	2.184

8. Interpretation of Results

- Model Fit:** The model has an R² of 0.678, indicating that approximately 67.8% of the variance in the strategic relations between India and Iran is explained by the independent variables.
- Significant Predictors:**
 - Economic Factors** ($\beta=0.519$, $p=0.001$): A significant positive predictor, indicating that higher economic engagement improves strategic relations.
 - Cultural Ties** ($\beta=0.456$, $p=0.003$): Also a significant positive predictor, suggesting strong cultural ties enhance strategic relations.
 - Diplomatic Engagement** ($\beta=0.178$, $p=0.042$): Significantly contributes to strategic relations.
 - Security Concerns** ($\beta=0.287$, $p=0.056$): Marginally significant, indicating that regional security concerns may also impact strategic relations.

The regression analysis, offers quantitative insights that align with the broader strategic and economic ambitions of both nations. As the Indo-

Pacific emerges as a critical geopolitical theater, India and Iran's interactions are increasingly shaped by economic cooperation, cultural ties, and diplomatic engagement. These factors contribute to the evolving nature of their alliance, with a focus on shared interests that transcend mere bilateral relations and extend into regional influence and strategic positioning.

Economic factors, highlighted as the most significant predictor in the analysis, reflect the central role of initiatives such as the Chabahar Port, which is crucial for India's access to Central Asia and Afghanistan. This economic partnership serves as a cornerstone of the evolving alliance, showcasing how geo-economic factors drive the strategic ambitions of both nations within the Indo-Pacific framework. The alignment of their economic interests is a critical component of how they navigate the region's shifting geopolitical landscape.

The analysis also underscores the importance of cultural and diplomatic ties, which further solidify the strategic partnership between India and Iran. These elements, along with marginal security concerns, reflect the multi-dimensional nature of the relationship as both countries seek to strengthen their influence in the Indo-Pacific. The results of the regression provide a quantitative foundation for understanding how these dynamics are shaping emerging alliances and strategic ambitions in the region.

9. Conclusion

The evolving relationship between India and Iran within the Indo-Pacific region reflects a complex interplay of strategic ambitions and geopolitical dynamics. The strategic importance of Chabahar Port stands out as a cornerstone of this relationship, providing India with a crucial gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia, thereby enhancing its connectivity and regional influence. This port project not only serves India's economic interests but also aligns with its strategic objectives of countering China's influence in the region, particularly against initiatives like the BRI.

The regression analysis within this study highlights that economic factors, cultural ties, and diplomatic engagement significantly influence the strategic relations between India and Iran. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of their bilateral relationship, driven by both geopolitical imperatives and shared economic interests. Despite challenges such as U.S. sanctions and regional security concerns, India's commitment to maintaining and

strengthening its partnership with Iran remains evident through sustained investments and strategic initiatives like the Chabahar Port.

India's participation in multilateral frameworks, such as the Quad and its strategic alignment with the U.S., adds layers of complexity to its relationship with Iran. These alignments reflect India's broader strategy to balance its regional ambitions with the need for strategic autonomy. However, the necessity to navigate these multilateral engagements without undermining its historical ties with Iran is a delicate balancing act that India continues to manage.

The paper illustrates that while regional and global geopolitical shifts present challenges, they also offer opportunities for India and Iran to collaborate on shared goals of regional stability and economic prosperity. By leveraging their strategic partnership and engaging in multilateral diplomacy, both nations can contribute to a stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific. This comprehensive analysis offers a nuanced understanding of the strategic dynamics at play, emphasizing the importance of economic, cultural, and diplomatic factors in shaping the future of India-Iran relations within this pivotal region.

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11.Conflict of Interest

There is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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