



Geo-Strategic Importance of Iran in India's Act West Policy

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Introduction

The meaning of 'Geo-strategic region, is a region which compasses, perceiving of State's economic, political, and military interests. All these interests are adequate significant for a state which make use of all available means of resources for protecting the national interests. The geo-strategic regions may be differed in their size, location, and the numerical strength. It primary depends upon the national interests at global and region levels. The United States of America, being a world power, have a vested interest in Pacific and Indian Oceans. U.S. has considered a very much strategic significance of both these oceans. Similarly, the Persian Gulf has a strategic significance for the China and India in terms of energy requirement. It is therefore, both of countries have developed a very intimate relations will numerous of these countries, lie within this region.

The meaning of the geo-strategic significance for a country in terms of its geographical location of a country. The geo-political significance is focusing the affecting factors of geographical factors on state power, global context, and the locational advantage. The salient features and geography and the politics or the geo-polities which effect the policy makers in an effective ways and conditions of state in the global affairs. The geo-politics and geo-strategic significance in terms of locational advantage at regional level has numerous of economic, political and strategic locations. Iran, as of its population, size, resources and cultural identity and its location, historic past, economic and spatial link between west and east and position of Iran between Persian Gulf and Caspian Sea, are the oil producing regions has a vital significance of this region.

Figure 1

(Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/1-Map-of-Iran-and-its-neighbouring-countries_fig24_299465397)

At present, the significance of energy resources particularly oil and natural gas is increasing day by day and Iran is a hub of energy resources. This strength increased the importance of Iran and made it a major player not only in this region but also in the World. The West Asia extends from the seashores of the Mediterranean Sea, through the semi-deserts of Afghanistan and Pakistan, over the towering peaks of the Caucasus, to the shores of the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. At the center of this diverse moment is Iran in every sense of the word. Furthermore, Iran has significant impact on every important decision of regional and extra regional states on political and economic interests.

Figure 1



(Source: <https://www.mapsofworld.com/asia/regions/western-asia-map.html>)

Iran with its an area of the 1648 million square KM, which ranks 18th position in the world. The area of Iran is larger than the countries; join together like Germany, France, Netherlands, Spain, Belgium and Portugal. Even, Iran is larger than the countries like Pakistan and Turkey. It has an excessive control on between the fast increasing of South Asian countries and oil rich countries of West Asian region. Similarly, its long coast line has paved the way for not avoiding by keeping isolation of landmass, along with Arabian and Caspian seas which is blocking Iraq. This locational advantage ensures Iran takes him to a position to avoid facilitator for any economic sanctions imposed by the international community.

The worst relationship between India-Pakistan and India-China confirm that Iran is the only state which is providing untapped market of Afghanistan and Central Asian countries for India's products. It has also facilitated for another option to tap the vast energy and mineral resources. Keeping in view its geo-political significance, it is practically unavoidable for India to maintain harmonious relations with Iraq. The role played by Caspian basin, in terms of availability of rich energy resources of these regions. The growing economy of India, not only requires the extensive unexplored market of central Europe, but required additional resources of

energy too.² The following regional characteristics make Iran more strategically significant country in India's Act East Policy:

Geo-Strategic Location of Iran

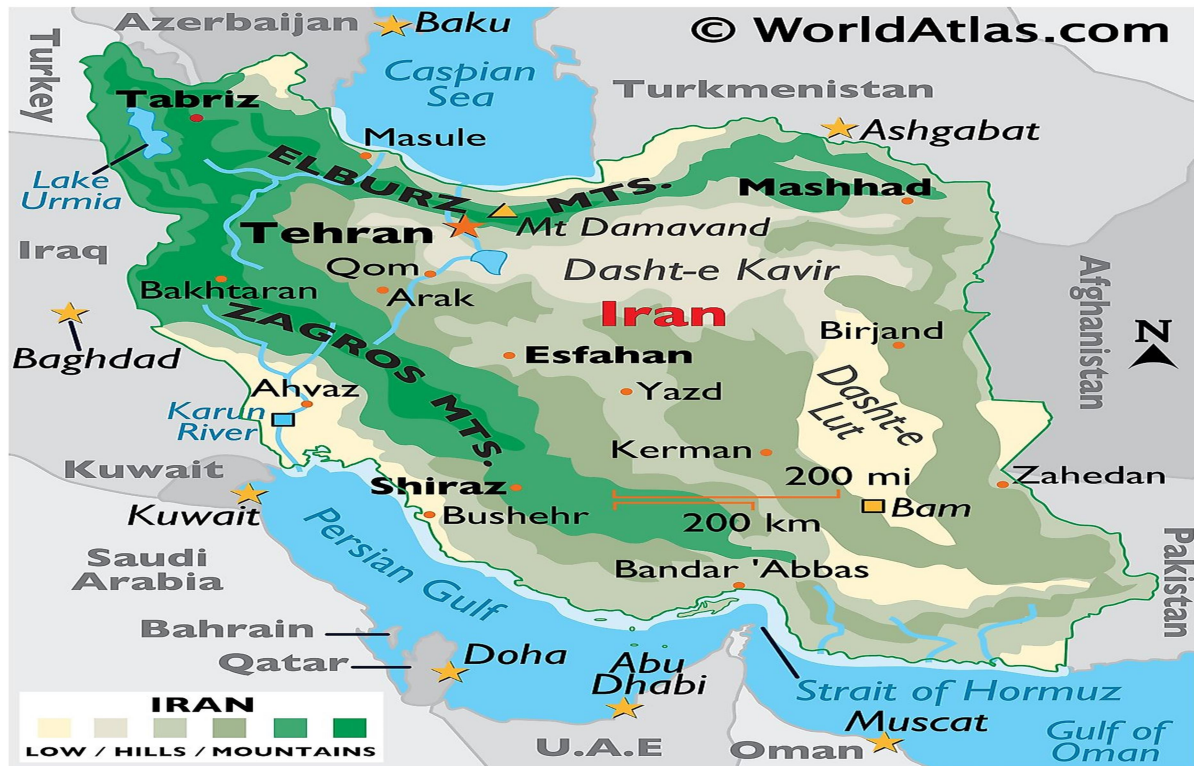
Iran is in the south-west part of Asia and it is bordered by Armenia, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and the Caspian Sea to the north, Turkey and Iraq to the west, the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf to the south, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the East. Iran is a mountainous country. A large area of Iran is covered by desert plateau, which is encircled with the high mountain ranges, which have paved the way for easy access to the interior Iran. This region is characterized by heavily eroded mountain make access through higher interiorly located basin. It became broaden in to 200 KM wide bend of parallel series of mountains, situated within Mesopotamia plain and great central plateau of Iran. The rivers are flow in West by cutting deeply and narrow gorge and fertile valley. The accessibility of land is characterized with very difficult terrene and mainly inhabited by nomad's population.

The Zagros Mountain ranges are wider than that of the *Alburz* Mountain range, but equally for bidding go parallel to *Zagros*, but equally for holding goes parallel to Caspian Sea's southern share, to meet the *Khorasan* Mountain range in the east. In this region, the highest volcanic peak raises with the altitude over 18,000 feet, which is always snow covered, known as Mt. Damavand. On Afghanistan border, the mountains are characterized with sand dunes and barren land. The interior plateau is characterized with arid climate, situated in Central Asia dissected by small ranges; emerges into fertile land towards the hill sides; where the fresh water is available for cultivation. The most salient characteristics of this plateau is the salt waste, which is located with 320 KM length and 160 KM width, known as *Kavir* desert this desert remains unexplored till it has formed by large and marshy salted treacherous crust.

There are large numbers of deserts, situated across Iran plateau; located from the North West direction which is near to Qum and Tehran. At the distance of 600 KM to the South-east and beyond the frontiers, about 1/6 of total area of Iran is desert and barren. There are two largest deserts, which are known as "Dasht-e Kavir and Kavir-e Lut". Jazmurian ranks third in its size, among the deserts. It is often believed that "Dasht-e Kavir and Kavir-e Lut" are too difficult to cross by any means, except the sole route connecting Yazd and Ferdows. However, in recent

years heavy vehicles are now travelled to a long distance, through these deserts. All these deserts are rich in minerals.³

Figure 2



(Source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/iran>)

In view of India’s Act East Policy, Iran is a significant country in this region. It is because of its locational advantage of the country, in terms of geo-political location and the coastline, run along with Persian Gulf and its administrative control on Strait of Hormuz and its energy resources for India. It is therefore, India is interested in exploiting the natural gas of Iran. Iran is second largest country in gas producing country in the world. Thus, Iran has been playing a very significant role for India to expand its energy resource within this West Asian Region and established the relationships with the gulf countries.

Chabahar Port

Chabahar is a deep-sea harbor, which is situated in the Baluchistan-Sistan region of Iran at gateway of the Oman gulf. Chabahar harbor is characterized with its strategic location. It is because of it provide an entrance to the Indian Ocean in a straight way and enabled by bypassing

the Strait of Hormuz; which is a traditional sea-traffic choke point; which has been proved a great constraint in connecting Persian Gulf with Oman gulf and Indian Ocean. Significantly, large amount of oil imported via Strait of Hormuz by many countries.

Chabahar is located on external past of Persian Gulf and easily facilitated to make access from Western Coast of India. In fact, the distance from Kandla Port of India, located on Western Coast to Chabahar, which is less than the distance of New Delhi to Mumbai, Chabahar is situated 45 nautical miles; away from Gwadar port, which has built by China in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan. The *Gwadar* port is the outlet to Indian Ocean; which is from the under-construction project CPEC, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor which is called game changer between both countries. It will be a strategic road, between China and Pakistan; situated in POK, the Pak Occupied Kashmir. The major implication of CPEC projected will be a threat to unchallenging situation of Indian Ocean, which is still retaining in the domain of India. The map explained the importance of Chabahar Port for India.

Figure 3



(Source: <https://www.cbnme.com/analysis/an-alternate-route-chabahar-port-for-india/>)

India has a deep strategic interest in Afghanistan and energy rich coastal Asia. Pakistan is the only overland accessible option for India, but Pakistan is unwilling to permit India to make accessibility to these land locked territories through its territorial jurisdiction. All these efforts, not only obstructed the economic interests of India, but also ensure the security relating matters.

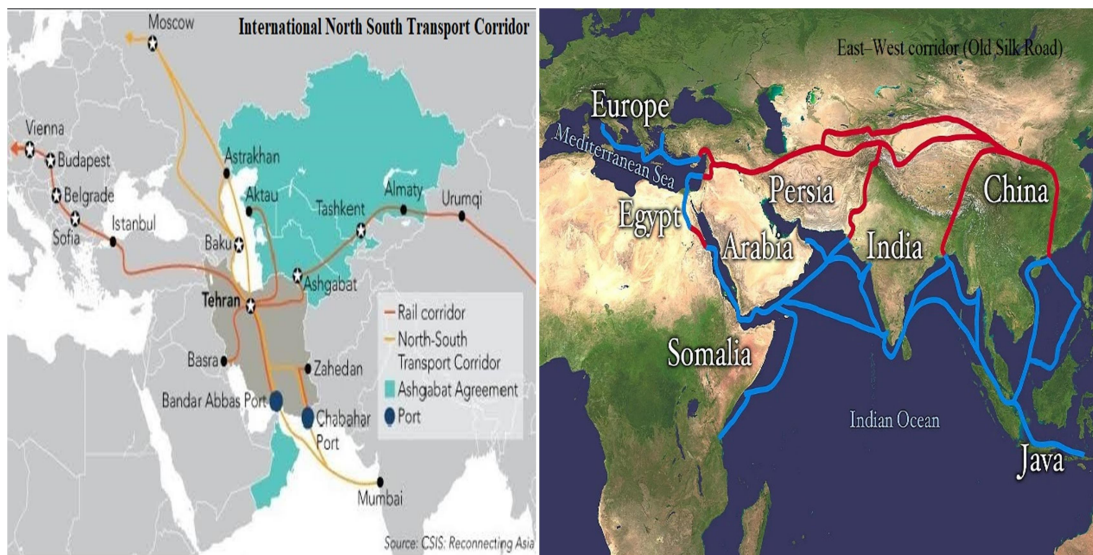
It is because of lack of direct access to terrorism infested countries in this region. Pakistan is in an advantageous position from the strategic view point 'war against terror' in Afghanistan. It is therefore, enjoyed the U.S. donation with its association; not only providing shelters to the hardcore terrorists. Leader, but prepare the terrorist in Asian countries pre-dominantly in India too. It is expected that the *Chabahar* port, will not only serve to India much required access, Afghanistan and boosting up the Central Asian policy, but also expected to take the initiatives from China and Pakistan. It is also expected that it will act as an effective measure to address the string of pearls, the strategy of China in the Indian Ocean. It is because of the locational advantage of *Gwadar*. It is also expected to assist India to fight against the terrorism; with joint venture between India and other regional players to isolate Pakistan.

Pakistan called its policy as *expansive diplomacy* in the region; as a result, become a chronic threat, whereas India, takes as a golden opportunity to tap the furtherance of its strategic and economic interest. In the year 2009, the *Border Road Organisation* of India, has constructed the *Zaranj-Delaram* road, which has facilitated to connect the *Afghanistan Garland Highway* which has connected the major four towns of Afghanistan. These towns are *Kandhar*, *Kabul*, *Herat* and *Mazar-e-Sharif*. Iran has already built a road connecting *Chabahar* and *Milak*, situated in Iraq-Afghan border, as well as *Delaram* and *Zaranj* towns. It is also expected to develop a railway network, as declared by India. It is expected to enable Afghanistan to carry out the foreign trade without dependency on Karachi port of Pakistan. The dependency of Afghanistan on Pakistan is expected to reduce this dependency to a considerable extent, as well as the influence of Pakistan.

In this region, it is expected to play a vital role by *Chabahar* port to increase the influence of India and Iran in Afghanistan. It is therefore, the policy of Pakistan which is known as *Strategic Depth* against India, will be affected adversely to a great extent. The *Chabahar* port is probably play a significant role for developing strategic relation, under International North-South Transport Corridor, despite natural outlet in the Ocean. This corridor is a promising plan, which is expected to be proved conducive to assist to connect Argentina, European and Central African Countries with Afghanistan, Azerbaijan etc. It is also expected to connect India to Central Asian Countries, which was blocked by *Pakistan International North South Transport Corridor* which is significant route for giving the way to access Central Asian Countries, Russian & European market, and enable India to compete with China. The INSTC is aimed at

reducing the transport cost and providing better trade margin to the exporters and importers for stake holders. It is also expected to pave the addressing the problematic areas of uncertainties of “Sea Politics” in the West Asian Countries with an alternative passage. The CPEC project is expected to pave the way for China International Connectivity via Gwadar port which passes through very troublesome territory in POK. This region is prone to various security challenges. The Chabahar-Afghanistan route; via Iran and INSTC passes through relatively stable areas of Afghanistan. Hence, developing Chabahar port, is a natural winner, such as Gwadar which priority wise good port for global trading community and raising a market share in their international trade.

Figure 4



(Source: [International North South Transport Corridor - INSIGHTSIAS \(insightsonindia.com\)](https://www.insightsias.com/international-north-south-transport-corridor) <https://www.worldhistory.org/image/8327/map-of-the-silk-road-routes/>)

India is insistently making effort to its presence in this region through its varied activities in the West Asia. India’s impact in Iran’s port Chabahar could be leveraged in different ways. The energy requirements of India are to be met with an alternative way to bypass Pakistan. Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-India (TAPI) project of oil pipeline has now diverted directly from Afghanistan to India via Chabahar port, so that the petroleum gas may be brought from Iran, Oman, and the Central Asian Countries to the West Coastal located sea port of India. I now, it has enabled to meet the India’s additional energy requirement, for transport and petroleum

industrial growth and development. It has been evidently proved that the government's influence in developing the Chabahar port, which was significantly influenced by China and Pakistan in this region, which was like killing two birds with one stone. However, the entire region had faced a severe competition between India and China for their dominancy. The development of Chabahar port has been proved a strategic and nodal location for India.

India has attained a successful position to a considerable extent in this region, by helping Afghanistan, when the people of Afghanistan are facing very grim situation. In future, India will have a periodic review of the future relations, in term of its strategic benefits and will keep its peace policy intact within this region. Now it, becomes imperative for India toward any civil policy in the strategic interests of India. In this context, a fully sync between India's defence and foreign policy is very essential for regional stability.⁴

Iran Gateway to Central Asia

Iran is situated on the junction, from where so many important international transport corridors pass such as "International North South Corridor, East West Corridor, Europe Caucasus Asia Corridor, Asia Land Transportation Infrastructure Development Corridor." These corridors connect the major cities of Asia and Europe. It makes Iran a significant country for India for its strategic and economic interests in this region. Due to its location Iran is gateway to Central Asia for India. The East-West Corridor connects China to Iran via Uzbekistan. Europe-Caucasus-Asia corridor provides land connectivity to entire Eurasia. In 1993 this corridor was started to develop land connectivity to Asia and Europe. Iran is also a member country of this project. In 1992 Asia Land Transportation Infrastructure Development Project was developed. It includes the Northern Corridor and Central Corridor. The South Asia Corridor connects India to Iran via Pakistan. After that it travels to Europe via Turkey. The purpose of this Corridor is to provide connectivity to East, West and South Asian countries. Iran plays an important role in this corridor. This corridor is very important for India's Act West Policy. Indian strategic and economic policy analysts consider Iran as a key player. Iran is entry point to Central Asia for India. To improve India's connectivity to Central Asia and Europe via Iran, India and Iran are collaborating on several projects involving road, rail, and the sea.⁵

Conclusion

West Asia is currently in a political conversion era. The dynamic security environment on a global and regional scale is shifting power balances and forced the global player for new alliances. Iran, an important regional player, must deal with both domestic and external difficulties. Iran is going through the period of isolation and sanctions due to its nuclear ambitions. Iran has so far been able to handle both difficulties by building solid ties with other countries in the region and abroad, in the hope that these ties will help them sail through difficult times. Iran and India aim to strengthen their bilateral ties as the region reorganizes itself. Both nations are important players whose contributions cannot be underestimated. Today's regional complexities require new strategies for cooperation between Iran and India. Apart from being India's only choice for accessing the energy and mineral resources of the region. Iran also provides to India the route to access Afghanistan and Central Asia. Maintaining good relations with Iran is almost inevitable due to India's own geopolitical requirements. India can access the massive energy resources of the Caucasus and the Caspian Basin most quickly through Iran. Along with the vast untapped markets of the Central Eurasian region, the expanding Indian economy is also in need of a new energy source. The above analysis has proved that Iran is a key player in India's Act West Policy and Indian policy makers cannot ignore Iran if India really wants to achieve the goals of Act West Policy.

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