

The road to peace runs through Tehran

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"The Iranian card could help India enhance its role in stabilising Afghanistan"

Even if an American military pullout from Afghanistan is on the cards, the U.S. will want to leave behind a stable country. And any peace settlement in Afghanistan will stand a better chance of staying on the rails if it is supported by regional powers. In other words, ties between Afghanistan and its neighbours, including Iran, will impact the security of southern and western Asia. Like India, Russia, China and the U.S., Iran would want to see a steady hand at the helm in Afghanistan. While lacking military influence, India can build on its good ties with the U.S. and Iran to secure Afghanistan.

Iranian continuity

Iran is not a newcomer to regional diplomacy in Afghanistan. First and foremost, India should try to dissuade the U.S. from dealing with Iran, Russia and China as enemies. In fact, U.S. President Donald Trump's perception of all three as foes is at odds with America's earlier engagement with them to end its military campaign in Afghanistan. For instance, from 2014 to 2016, Washington and Moscow quietly arranged talks on the Afghan peace process. The meetings, known as the 6+1 group, included representatives from Afghanistan, China, India, Iran, Pakistan, Russia, and the U.S. The 6+1 process assumed that each of these countries was essential to the achievement of a political settlement in Afghanistan. Moreover, last November, the U.S. and the Taliban joined for the first time the Russia-hosted conference in the hope of promoting a negotiated solution to achieve peace and national reconciliation in Afghanistan.



Regional powers could put their weight behind a negotiated settlement that will ensure Afghanistan's stability. Iran, Russia and China — and the Central Asian states with which India and Afghanistan wish to cooperate in counter-terroring terrorism — fear that continued instability in Afghanistan could spill over into their countries. India will also be adversely affected if negotiations break down. In that event, extremist exports from Pakistan to Afghanistan or India would probably increase.

It could be worthwhile for India to explore the Iranian diplomatic options to secure Afghanistan. On good terms with Tehran, New Delhi would gain by developing the Chabahar port in southern Iran. And looking beyond Chabahar, India, Iran and Russia were the founding countries of the International North-South Transport Corridor project — as long ago as 2002. The corridor is intended to increase connectivity between India, Iran, Russia, landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asia — and Europe. It would also advance their trading interests.

India could remind Washington about the past coincidence of American and Iranian interests on Afghanistan. Together with the U.S. and India, Iran supported the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001. In the international negotiations which followed in Bonn that year, Iran supported the installation of Hamid Karzai as President and favoured the exclusion of the Taliban from his government.

Admittedly, U.S.-Iran ties have often been fractious. As the U.S. imposed sanctions on Iran after 2005, Iran saw the Taliban countering American influence on its borders and gave them arms. Iran continues to oppose the U.S.'s presence in Afghanistan, largely because it fears that American troops in Afghanistan could be used against it. To allay Iranian fears, Afghanistan recently said that it would not allow the U.S. to use its bases in the country to conduct any act of aggression against Iran.

Last December, Iran also held talks with the Taliban with the knowledge of the Afghan government. But it should assure Kabul of its good intentions. In recent months Afghan officials have accused Iran, which the U.S. says is trying to extend its influence in western Afghanistan, of providing the Taliban with money, weapons and explosives. Iran denies the charge.

The U.S. and Iran could be advised of the mutual, and regional, advantages of improving ties. Such advantages could range from stability in Afghanistan, and beyond, to increased trade prospects, especially in South and West Asia. Win-win prospects

Iran could gain by strengthening trading ties with a secure Afghanistan. In 2017 it supplanted Pakistan as Afghanistan's largest trading partner. At a time when Iran's economy is weighed down by American sanctions, it would want to build up trade ties with neighbouring states.

The U.S. would also gain. After all, Iran is the geopolitical hub connecting South, Central and West Asia and the Caucasus. The Strait of Hormuz, that crucial conduit, links Iran westwards to the Persian Gulf and Europe, and eastwards to the Gulf of Oman, South and East Asia. Moreover, an improvement in U.S.-Iran relations would be welcomed by America's European allies, who are opposed to Washington's unilateral sanctions on Iran.

The U.S. should not lose the chance to act in concert with Iran to improve Afghanistan's security. And, as the U.S. airs the idea of withdrawal from Afghanistan, now is the right time for India to act as the honest broker between them and to play a larger role in regional security. The status of India and Iran as regional powers as well as the stability of South, Central, and West Asia would simultaneously be enhanced. It is to be hoped that Mr. Trump's display of America's "superpower" in opposition to Iran — and Russia and China — will not block such an opportunity to stabilise Afghanistan.

GS World Team...

Strait of Hormuz

What is it?

- The Hormuz Strait is located in the southern part of Iran, which is a major waterway connecting the 'Persian Gulf' to 'Bay of Oman'.
- About 40 percent of the oil in the world and large quantities of natural gas are transported from this route to various countries and areas.
- The Hormuz Strait is known in Persian as 'Tenge-e-Hormuz'.

Importance

- It is a major strait of West Asia, which connects the 'Gulf of Persian' to 'of Oman Gulf' in the south of Iran.

- In the south United Arab Emirates from the and Oman musndam.
- Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates depend on this narrow path for supply of their crude oil.
- Nearly 30 percent of the world's marine trading crude goes through the straits of Hormuz.
- There are many mountains and rocks all around the straits that form many islands like Salamah wa Bintiha Island, Musandam Island and Bird Island.
- At the most least mide point of this strait, there is a distance of 39 kilometers in both the shores.

Commercial and strategic importance of the strait

- Commercial ship Transport for Marine Trade
- Important oil production area
- Key role in geo-politics

List of world's main straits

1. Strait of Malacca
Middle: Andaman Sea and South China Sea
Location: Indonesia - Malaysia
2. Palk Strait
Middle: Gulf of Pak and Bay of Bengal
Location: India-Sri Lanka
3. Sunda Strait
Central: Java Sea and Indian Ocean
Location: Indonesia
4. Yucatan Strait
Central: Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea
Location: Mexico-Cuba
5. Massina Strait
Central: Mediterranean Sea
Location: Italy-Sicily
6. The Strait of Otterto
Middle: Adriatic Sea and Ionian Sea
Location: Italy-Albania
7. Bab al-Mandbe Strait
Central: Gulf of Red Sea and Aden
Location: Yemen-Djibouti
8. Cook Strait
Central: South Pacific Ocean
Location: New Zealand (North and South Island)
9. Mozambique Strait
Central: Indian Ocean
Location: Mozambique -Malagasi
10. North channel
Middle: Irish Sea and Atlantic Ocean
Location: Ireland-England
11. Toores Strait
Central: Arafura Sea and Gulf of Papua
Location: Papua New Guinea - Australia
12. Bass Strait
Middle: Tasman Sea and South Sea
Location: Australia
13. Bering Strait
Central: Bering Sea and Chukchi Sea
Location: Alaska-Russia
14. Strait of Bonifacio
Central: Mediterranean Sea
Location: Corsica - Sardinia
15. Bosphorus Strait
Central: Black Sea and Marmara Sea
Location: Turkey
16. Dardanelles Strait
Middle: Marmara Sea and Aegean Sea
Location: Turkey
17. Davis Strait
Central: Bafin Bay and the Atlantic Ocean
Location: Greenland-Canada
18. Denmark Strait
Middle: North Atlantic and Arctic Ocean
Location: Greenland-Iceland0
19. of Dover Strait
Middle: English Channel and North Sea
Location: England-France
20. Strait of Florida
Central: Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean
Location: United States-Cuba
21. Hormuz Strait
Central: Persian Gulf and Oman Gulf
Location: Oman-Iran
22. Hudson Strait
Middle: Gulf of Hudson and the Atlantic Ocean
Location: Canada
23. Gibraltar Strait
Central: Mediterranean Sea & Atlantic Ocean
Location: Spain-Morocco
24. Strait of Magellan
Middle: Pacific and South Atlantic Ocean
Location: Chile
25. Strait Makassar
Central: Java Sea and Celebges Sea
Location: Indonesia
26. Tsugaru Strait
Central: Japan Sea and Pacific Ocean
Location: Japan (Hokkaido-Honsu Island)
27. Strait on Tartary
Central: Japan Sea and Okhotsk Sea
Location: Russia (Eastern Russia-Sakhalin Island)
28. Foveaux Strait
Central: South Pacific Ocean
Location: New Zealand (South Island-Stewart Island)
29. Formosa Strait (Taiwan strait)
Middle: South China Sea and Eastern China Sea
Location: China-Taiwan

Expected Questions (Prelims Exams)

1. Consider the following statements regarding Hormuz strait-

1. It joins Persian Gulf with Europe in the west of Iran.
2. It joins the Gulf of Oman in east with South and East Asia.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) Only 1
- (b) Only 2
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1 nor 2

Expected Questions (Mains Exams)

Q. What roles can Iran play in making the efforts made by India to stabilize Afghanistan successful?

(250 Words)

Note: Answer of Prelims Expected Question given on 7 Feb. is 1(d)

