

September 2012



India-Iran Relations

Past, Present and Future

H.E. Mr. Seyed Mehdi Nabizadeh

Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to India

Transcript of the Special Address, delivered on IPCS Ambassador Lecture Series, 6 September 2012

Centre for Internal and Regional Security (IReS)



Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies

B-7/3, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi 110029

www.ipcs.org

India-Iran Relations: Past, Present, and Future

*Transcript of the address delivered by H.E. Mr. Seyed Mehdi Nabizadeh
Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to India*

The meaning of the Past, Present and Future is difficult to define in absolute terms as it can be regarded from different perspectives. The relations between India and Iran go back thousands of years, while the relations between Iran and America go back not more than 200 years. Two major events influenced India-Iran relations in the Past: the Independence of India in 1947; and the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. Before 1979, the ties between the two countries experienced some variations, but never got severed, despite their opposite alignment in the Cold War. In contrast, Iran-US relations started under the Shah regime and got immediately disconnected after 1979.



The first contacts between Iranians and Indians can be traced back to the Indo-Aryan migration from Iran to India in 1250 or even 2000 BC. During that time, the exchange was not only between the people, but also between the governments. These exchanges are reflected by the common proto-language shared by Sanskrit and Persian. More recent history saw the diffusion of Persian-language newspapers in India, especially on the eve of Indian press, when English was not yet widely spoken. Moreover, the work of Iranian writers and scholars on India and vice versa had assured a constant exchange between the two countries. Like India, Iran experienced interference of British colonialism.

The British forces controlled Southern Iran, an oil-rich region, with the help of both Indian and Iranian soldiers. The establishment of the Islamic Republic shows similarities to India's Independence struggle. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Imam Khomeini, Founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, was a great man who changed the history, while the Islamic Revolution in Iran was intended as a non-violent movement like Indian Independence. The Revolution was democratic as it was carried out by the people and not by the elites, a fact that was supported and confirmed by the referendum that approved the Islamic Republic and by the elections that followed, as well as by the support showed by the population during the Iran-Iraq War.

The challenges that Iran-India Relations face today are dependent on several factors. The US has tried to undermine them by pressuring India to curb its ties with Iran. Also, Iran's relationship with Pakistan as a neighbour and a Muslim country has created some misunderstandings in the past. Israel is also a complicating factor, because Iran considers it as an illegitimate entity and racial regime. Despite these obstacles, however, Iran and India share strong cultural ties which cannot be erased as in the case of political and

economic relations. Also, both Iran and India are committed to anti-colonialism and non-alignment, principles that have to be reaffirmed today and generally guide Asian countries in dealing with the current multi-polar constellation. In this respect, the Non-Aligned Movement summit recently held in Teheran proved a great success – despite efforts to boycott it. Iran has been strongly looking at Asia after the Revolution, and continues to do so recognizing that the Asian Century lies ahead and that organizations and bodies like the NAM can be employed to exert influence within the UN. Although the current Iranian mission to India was able to deepen the relations, there is still room for further expansion, especially in areas beyond the energy sector. A roadmap for India-Iran relations can be drawn for the next decades, as opposed to relations between Iran and the US, which has an evolving ethnic composition and thus cannot be considered as a reliable partner.

Discussion

What is Iran's position on Kashmir? Although India considers it as a bilateral issue, it has been discussed within the OIC. Will Iran support India in its opposition to a multilateral approach?

Kashmir should be solved according to the people's will. As Iran is concerned with the well-being of Muslims in Kashmir, it believes that the state should be further developed. As the matter is bilateral, Iran does not support outside intervention or mediation. As an example, India signed security agreements with both the Mossad and the FBI after India's 26/11. Such contracts do not advance peace, but rather expand Western influence. Within the OIC, Iran has engaged in promoting peace between India and Pakistan.

How does Iran define its relations with the US? How is it trying to improve these relations, if at all?

After establishing the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini declared that Iran would entertain relations with all countries except Israel and South Africa, which both were ruled by the racist and Apartheid regimes. Iran is not opposed to relations with the US in principle, but current US hegemonic and double-standard policies are unacceptable to Iran. Nevertheless, business and social ties are existing even today.

Was the NAM summit successful? And how has the US tried to isolate Iran? Is China trying to take the USSR's place in a new bipolar constellation? How has Iran's nuclear program the capacity to bring stability to the region?

After the end of the Cold War there was much discussion about the need of NAM within the new international constellation. US policies in the last ten years have shown, however, how NAM is still important as an organization or conference equal and parallel to the UN. Despite the sanctions, Iran was able to develop further. In fields such as telecommunications and energy, Iran has now the capacity to own production. Also, it has advanced on renewable energy production. Especially the latter should be included in further cooperation between Iran and India.

The fact that the US blackmails Indian companies with the withdrawal of their contracts in America in case of their investment in Iran has been an obstacle to stronger business ties between Iran and India.

Should Iran and India commit themselves to a deeper educational exchange?

Many Iranian public figures have been educated in India. Since the Revolution, the number of university students in Iran has increased greatly. University exchange is currently present, but it can be developed further. The problem lies in regulations that do not ease the process; nevertheless, Iran hopes that in the future these complications can be lifted.

Are there any differences between the perspectives of Iran and India vis à vis NAM?

Iran and India share many common views about NAM, as shown in the Teheran Declaration. Until the next summit in three years, Iran and India have to discuss how to further progress NAM's development.

What are the obstacles to increased cooperation in the Greater South Asian Region? How do events like the Arab Spring affect the region?

No foreign intervention will have a positive impact on the region, as shown by Afghanistan and Iraq. As a result of foreign misinformation divisions have been created between communities in South Asia. Iran believes that all the groups can live peacefully with each other, as long as this coexistence is not undermined by outside intervention. The American mission to Afghanistan has not only failed to solve problems, but worsened them, as in the case of opium production. If a country becomes dangerous for others, the problem should be solved first within the neighborhood and the region.

When is the port at Chahbahar going to take off?

The port is an asset for trade across the Indian Ocean and Central Asia and has to be expanded. There was an issue with including the port in the Chahbahar free-trade zone, because the investing companies were opposed. Now, however, the port has been declared a free-trade zone. It should be finalized before the joint committee meeting in November in Tehran.

The Deccan Chronicle has reported that Iran is trying to inhibit Indian investigations on the attack on Israeli diplomats in Delhi. How much freedom of investigation will be allotted to the Indian police in this regard?

Iran has neither tried to put pressure on the Indian police nor has it attempted to murder diplomats. Iran has no reason to jeopardize its good relations with India through this kind of actions. Also, it is questionable how the Israeli foreign minister knew about an Iranian responsibility only minutes after the attack. The allegations against Iran are part of a misinformation campaign.