



IRAN TASK FORCE BY FATEMEH AMAN AND BARBARA SLAVIN

Iran, Afghanistan, and South Asia: Resolving Regional Sources of Instability

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When compared to its often rocky relations with Arab countries to the west, the Islamic Republic of Iran has managed to retain largely cordial ties with its neighbors to the east. Historic linguistic, religious, and cultural connections have helped Iran keep its influence in South Asia and become a key trading partner despite US-led sanctions. Because of its strategic location on the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea, Iran provides India with access to Afghanistan and Central Asia that does not require transit through Pakistan. However, Iran and its neighbors, including Pakistan, face acute challenges such as scarce and poorly managed water resources, ethnic insurgencies, energy imbalances, and drug trafficking that require regional solutions.

The United States can promote stability in the region by supporting agreements and programs that increase the capacity of Iran and South Asian nations to deal with these problems. There is a need to devise a better arrangement for sharing the waters of the Helmand River, improving water management in Iran and Afghanistan, mending the contentious Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship, and easing the Indo-Pakistani rivalry within Afghanistan. Progress in these areas is necessary to help ensure that Afghanistan does not revert to factional and sectarian warfare or once again become a haven for terrorists after the United States and its NATO allies withdraw most of their forces in 2014.

Atlantic Council Iran Task Force

The Iran Task Force, launched in 2010 and chaired by Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat, seeks to perform a comprehensive analysis of Iran's internal political landscape, as well as its role in the region and the world, to answer the question of whether there are elements within the country and region that can build the basis for an improved relationship with the West and how these elements, if they exist, could be utilized by US policymakers.

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Iran and Pakistan

Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan in 1947, a gesture that Pakistan reciprocated thirty-two years later by becoming the first country to recognize the Islamic Republic of Iran. During the Shah's reign, Pakistan, as a non-Arab Muslim country at odds with the communist bloc, was a natural ally for Iran. The Shah was the first head of state to visit Pakistan in 1949. Both countries were founding members of the Baghdad Pact, the 1955 pro-Western defense alliance that was renamed the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) after Iraq's withdrawal in 1959. Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey also established a regional development cooperation organization in 1964.

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In contrast, India was a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement and tilted toward the Soviet Union. In keeping with its Cold War alignment, the Iranian monarchy supported Pakistan in its wars with India in 1947, 1965, and 1971 and did not recognize Bangladesh initially when it split away from Pakistan. Pakistan, in turn, backed Iran when it occupied three small islands—the Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa—in the Persian Gulf in 1971. However, Iran began to shift attention to India in the early 1970s, while Pakistan, weakened by its defeat in 1971, began cultivating a relationship with China to balance India. At the same time, the rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt and the withdrawal of British forces from the Persian Gulf enhanced the geopolitical significance of Saudi Arabia, an Iranian rival, as a US and Pakistani ally.

Iran has generally put security interests above ideology when dealing with its Sunni Muslim majority neighbor. After 1979, Iran largely subordinated its desire to support oppressed Shiite Muslims and to export its Islamic revolution to Pakistan.¹ Iranian efforts to cultivate followers in Pakistan were also hampered by the fact that Pakistani Shiites have not been great fans of Iran's theocratic model. In 1979, the majority of Pakistani Shiites were followers of Grand Ayatollah Mohammad Kazem Shariatmadari, known for his liberal views, rather than Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the leader of the Iranian revolution. Some major Pakistani Shiite clerics, such as Allama Akhtar Abbas Najafi, were students of Shariatmadari.² While Khomeini and later his successor, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, made some efforts to attract more followers by authorizing their representatives in Pakistan to use religious taxes to establish new seminaries,³ many influential Shiite clerics called on Iran to limit itself to “cultural approaches” such as building sports stadiums and providing welfare services.⁴ Recognizing the diversity of Pakistani Shiites and their lack of admiration for Iran's political model, Tehran largely refrained from using the Shiite card to meddle in Pakistan's internal affairs.

1 Fatemeh Aman, “Iran's Shia Policy Keeps Pakistan on Side,” *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst*, November 13, 2009.

2 Hassan Shariatmadari, Grand Ayatollah Shariatmadari's son, telephone interview with author, September 2013.

3 Ibid and <http://www.jamaran.ir/fa/BooksahifeBody.aspx?id=3049>.

4 <http://www.ebtekarnews.com/Ebtekar/Article.aspx?AID=9658>.

Pakistan returned the favor as one of very few countries to support Iran during the 1980-88 Iran-Iraq war. However, tensions rose with the growth of Sunni Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistan following the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Major low points in relations included the killing of Sadeq Ganji, Iran's counsel general in the Pakistani city of Lahore in 1990, the rise of the Pakistan-supported Taliban to power in Afghanistan in the 1990s, and the Taliban attack on the Iranian consulate in the Afghan city of Mazar-e Sharif in August 1998 that killed eight Iranian diplomats and a journalist. The incident nearly led Iran to go to war with Afghanistan. At the same time, however, Pakistani nuclear scientist A.Q. Khan was providing Iran with nuclear technology. In 2004, Khan admitted to transferring nuclear technology to several countries including Iran. He claimed to have supplied Iran as a result of pressure from an advisor to Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto and further suggested involvement by the then commander of Pakistan's Army, Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg. In 2008, Khan retracted his confession, accusing Pakistani security officials of responsibility for the technology transfers, a claim dismissed by the spokesman for then president Pervez Musharraf.

Iran has been careful to avoid prolonged confrontations with Pakistan for fear of encouraging Pakistani support for the chronic insurgency in Iran's poor Sunni province of Sistan-Baluchistan.⁵ In the 1970s, Iran helped the Pakistani military suppress an uprising on the Pakistani side of the border. Both countries have shied away from playing sectarian cards against each other, but some Iranians faulted the new Pakistani government of Nawaz Sharif for failing to prevent a recent attack by Baluch insurgents that killed 14 Iranian border guards.

Pakistan and Iran would benefit enormously from closer energy ties, but US sanctions have so far inhibited completion of a pipeline that would ship Iranian natural gas to Pakistan and India.⁶

5 Alex Vatanka and Fatemeh Aman, “The Making of an Insurgency in Iran's Baluchistan Province,” *Jane's Intelligence Review*, June 1, 2006.

6 Barbara Slavin, “‘Strategically Lonely’ Iran Exploits Opportunities for Regional Influence,” Atlantic Council, March 25, 2011, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/issue-briefs/strategically-lonely-iran-exploits-opportunities-for-regional-influence>.

Iran and Afghanistan

Iran and Afghanistan have long-standing connections due to their inclusion in successive Persian empires until the late nineteenth century. The two countries retain important linguistic, cultural, and religious links, with many Afghans speaking Dari, a version of Farsi, and about 20 percent of Afghans practicing Shiite Islam. Since 2001, Iran has invested heavily in Afghan economic projects, including cement production, highways, communications and the extension of electrical lines.⁷ Iran also promotes its port at Chabahar on the Gulf of Oman as a more convenient and reliable outlet for trade to and from Afghanistan, Central Asia and India than Pakistani routes. Iran exerts soft power in Afghanistan as a result of serving as a haven for Afghan refugees, religious leaders and militant factional leaders over the past three decades. This soft power is exemplified by the activities of Ayatollah Asif Mohseni, who founded the Afghanistan Islamic movement in the Iranian theological center of Qom, and is now the owner of the Tamadon television channel modeled on Iranian state TV.

However, Iran has actively contributed to the insecurity and instability of Afghanistan at times, supporting Taliban elements to counter the US presence. Iran would prefer an unstable Afghanistan to a country that is a base for attacks on Iran. Iran has also sought to build influence at the highest ranks of the Afghan government and parliament, in part through cash payments.⁸ According to Mohsen Milani, executive director of the Center for Strategic and Diplomatic Studies at the University of South Florida, Iran's goals are "to pressure the Afghan government to distance itself from Washington and for Iran to become the hub for the transit of goods and services between the Persian Gulf and Afghanistan, Central Asia, India and China."⁹

While Iran does not want to risk jeopardizing its relationship with Pakistan over Afghanistan, it would

like to limit the influence of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan. If, for example, next year's Afghan presidential elections produce a president seen as exclusively pro-Pakistan and pro-Saudi, Iran may feel cornered and resort to asymmetric means to safeguard its influence and interests. Iran could use its ties with warlords, whom it supported during the 1990s, and could also make use of agents within the two million Afghan refugees still living in Iran. Pakistan, on the other hand, espouses a pro-Pashtun stance and is loath to give up its influence with Afghanistan's majority ethnic group.¹⁰ The more security conditions in Afghanistan deteriorate, the easier it will be for Pakistan to justify its continued interference in the country. That, in turn, may push India to cooperate more with Iran to counterbalance Pakistani influence.

It is important to encourage Afghanistan's neighbors to cooperate on Afghan security by concluding a long-term strategic agreement pledging to try to prevent the country from returning to sectarian warfare. The United States should include Iran in multilateral talks about Afghanistan's post-2014 future. Economic projects that encourage India-Pakistan cooperation would also be beneficial for Afghanistan. The so-called "peace pipeline" to send Iranian natural gas to Pakistan and India was first proposed in 1994. The pipeline, whose Iranian portion has been completed, starts at Iran's South Pars field in Asalouyeh and runs through Iranshahr and Iranian Baluchistan. It is intended to continue through Pakistani Baluchistan, Sindh, Khuzar and Multan where it could be extended to both Karachi and New Delhi. The United States, however, has pushed for the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline, and India pulled back from the peace pipeline project under US pressure. If US-Iran relations improve, Washington could give a green light to Pakistan and India to complete this project. Iran and Pakistan have also discussed a 100MW power supply project for the Pakistani port of Gwadar.¹¹

7 Fatemeh Aman, "Iran fears losing investment in Afghanistan," *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst*, May 2010.

8 Dexter Filkins, "Iran Is Said to Give Top Karzai Aide Cash by the Bagful," *New York Times*, October 23, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/24/world/asia/24afghan.html?_r=1&.

9 Mohsen M. Milani, "Iran's Policy Towards Afghanistan," *Middle East Journal*, Spring 2006, http://works.bepress.com/mohsen_milani/1.

10 Shuja Nawaz, "Wikileaks Aftermath," Atlantic Council, August 6, 2010, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/wikileaks-aftermath>.

11 "Pakistan, Iran Vow to Jointly Pursue Major Projects," *Dawn.com*, October 16, 2012, <http://beta.dawn.com/news/757341/pakistan-iran-vow-to-jointly-pursue-major-projects>.

One of the oldest and most serious disputes between Iran and Afghanistan involves the Helmand or Hirmand (in Farsi) river basin. The issue, which has grown more acute in recent years due to climate change, has its origins in the 1870s when Afghanistan was a British protectorate and a British officer drew the Iran-Afghan border along the main branch of the river. Stretching 1,150 kilometers, the Helmand is the longest river in Afghanistan. Helmand's waters are used for irrigation in Afghanistan's Kandahar, Helmand, and Nimruz provinces and in Iran's province of Sistan-Baluchistan.¹² In 1939, the governments of Reza Shah and Mohammad Zahir Shah signed a treaty to share the water, but the Afghans did not ratify it. In 1950, with US assistance, the Afghan and Iranian governments established the Helmand River Delta Commission, with US assistance. The commission, made up of US, Chilean and Canadian experts, issued recommendations in 1951, but they were rejected by both Iran and Afghanistan.¹³ In 1973, then Iranian Prime Minister Amir Abbas Hoveyda and Afghan Prime Minister Mohammad Musa Shafiq signed an accord under which twenty-two cubic meters per second of Helmand water would flow into Iran, with an option for Iran to purchase an additional four cubic meters. In return, Iran would provide Afghanistan with access to ports at Bandar Abbas and Chabahar. However, this agreement was also not ratified and subsequent events—a 1973 coup in Afghanistan, the 1979 Iranian revolution, the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, and the rise of the Taliban in 1995—impeded resolution of the dispute.

Following the crisis caused by the Taliban killing of Afghan Shiites and Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e Sharif in 1998, the Taliban government closed the sluices to the Kajaki dam on the Helmand, choking off water to Iran until 2002, a period that coincided with one of the worst droughts in the world.¹⁴ Fish and bird populations were decimated and hundreds of thousands of livestock also perished.¹⁵ The issue

was raised on the sidelines of the Bonn Conference in 2001 that created a post-Taliban government but those discussions and subsequent efforts by Iran's Foreign Ministry, including an Iranian-Afghan meeting in Tehran in 2004, have not resulted in a breakthrough.¹⁶ Iranians complain that Iran receives water only when there is a surplus in Afghanistan.¹⁷ Iranians have also blamed the United States for preventing the Afghan government from abiding by the 1973 agreement, arguing that is the result of the lack of good relations between the US and Iran.¹⁸

Afghans counter that 95 percent of the river flows in Afghanistan. Soltan Ahmad Behin, a former Afghan Foreign Ministry spokesman, argued that water can't be sent to Iran when Afghans in Nimruz province are facing water shortages and complained that many of Iran's wells "in the border area aimed at storing water are in violation to all existing agreements between the two countries."¹⁹ There have occasionally been demonstrations in Afghanistan urging the government to better control Afghan waters.

Failure to resolve the issue has contributed to a growing environmental disaster. According to the latest climate projections, water shortages will become more widespread in southeast Iran and southwest Afghanistan.²⁰ The situation has been devastating for the Hamoun basin, a complex of wetlands, lakes, and lagoons that are a haven for wildlife. In recent years, the Helmand River waters have failed to reach the area.²¹ Mohammad Bagher Sadough, former deputy head for natural environment in Iran's Department of the Environment, has accused Afghans of depriving Iran of Helmand water in order to irrigate Afghanistan's poppy crop.²² Meanwhile, the dried up

12 Laura Jean Palmer-Moloney and Kea U. Duckenfield, "A Matter of Regional Water Security: The Collision of Supply and Demand in the Sistan Basin of Afghanistan and Iran" (2013 white paper submitted to the *Journal of Military Geography* for publication).

13 Ibid.

14 <http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Features/hamoun/>.

15 Pirouz Mojtabeh-Zadeh, "Lake Hamun, a Disaster in the Making," United Nations Environment Programme, March 1995, <http://www.unep.or.jp/etc/publications/techpublications/TechPub-4/lake1-7.asp>.

16 Fatemeh Aman, "Helmand Waters Fires Iran-Afghan dispute," *Jane's Islamic Affairs Analyst*, October 2010.

17 <http://www.khorasannews.com/News.aspx?type=1&year=1390&month=5&day=11&id=2879264>.

18 <http://hamshahrionline.ir/details/94876>.

19 http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/afghanistan/2009/01/090126_a-afghan-iran-hirmand.shtml.

20 Palmer-Moloney and Duckenfield, "A Matter of Regional Water Security."

21 Barbara Slavin, "Iran Faces Environmental Crisis," *Al-Monitor*, August 16, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/08/environment-pollution-iran-water.html>.

22 Fatemeh Aman, "Afghan Water Infrastructure Threatens Iran, Regional Stability," *Al-Monitor*, January 7, 2013, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/contents/articles/opinion/2013/01/afghanwatershortageiranpakistan.html>.

Hamoun lake has contributed to so-called 120-day winds, the devastating dust storms that are spreading infectious diseases, according to Hossein-Ali Shahriari, a member of the health and human services committee of Iran's parliament.²³ A representative from the cities of Zabol and Hirmand (Helmand) warned that drought is causing massive migration from the region.²⁴

There is growing concern that without a new agreement on sharing Helmand River water, instability in Afghanistan will increase as the US and NATO withdraw forces.²⁵ A failure to resolve the issue will also further impoverish Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan province. US researchers Laura Jean Palmer-Moloney and Kea U. Duckenfield recommend creating a trans-boundary commission to manage water issues and expanding an existing "Water Sector Group" that includes US, European, and UN development agencies to help Afghanistan boost its expertise in measuring water flows and using water more sustainably. Palmer-Moloney and Duckenfield suggest that "competent handling of water concerns in the Sistan Basin could encourage closer cooperation with Iran on stability and development in Afghanistan and potentially create a framework for US cooperation with Iran."²⁶

Iran and India: New Old Friends

While historically closer to Pakistan, Iran developed good relations with India particularly after the 1979 revolution.²⁷ India was pleased to see Iran quit CENTO and join the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).²⁸ India was neutral during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s and stayed on the sidelines of the Afghan conflict after the Soviet invasion. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan, however, Iran, India, and Russia worked together to support the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. The liberalization of the Indian economy that began in 1991 with the prime ministership of P.V. Narasimha Rao and the subsequent spike in India's economic growth made Iran more valuable as a reliable source of oil. Iran also

sought to increase military cooperation with India; Ali Shamkhani, then Iran's chief of naval staff and current secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, requested Indian help in 1994 in adapting batteries for Russian submarines for use in the warm waters of the Persian Gulf.²⁹ Security cooperation increased under the government of Manmohan Singh with the visit of two Iranian naval ships and the participation of more than 200 Iranian sailors in a training exercise in southern India in March 2006.³⁰

However, the Iranian nuclear program has cast a shadow over the relationship in recent years. Iran was shocked when India voted against Iran in September 2005 at a meeting of the Governing Board of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and again in February 2006 to refer Iran to the UN Security Council for violating its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).³¹ India, which developed nuclear weapons from a civilian program but never joined the NPT, has also complied with US sanctions requiring it to reduce imports of Iranian oil and to pay Iran in nonconvertible currency. Nevertheless, the volume of Iran-India trade has grown, reaching \$15 billion in the Iranian calendar year 1390 (March 2011-March 2012), a 27 percent increase.³² This compares to Iranian trade of barely over \$1 billion annually with Pakistan.³³

India and Iran value each other's roles in reconstructing Afghanistan and building roads and railroads that link Afghanistan to Chabahar. India constructed a highway that connects the Afghan ring road at Delaram with the Afghan-Iranian border post at Zaranj. Iran provided raw materials and port and transit facilities to enable India's Border Roads Organization to construct the highway.³⁴ India and Iran also have a mutual interest in promoting a North-South Transport Corridor that envisions 4,500 km of railroad between St. Petersburg in Russia and the Iranian port

23 <http://zahedan.ir/ib.ir>.

24 <http://sistanpress.ir/>.

25 Palmer-Moloney and Duckenfield, "A Matter of Regional Water Security."

26 Ibid.

27 Sumitha Narayanan Kutty, "Testing Axelrod: Indo-Iranian Relations and Security Cooperation (1979-2009)," Social Science Research Network, May 3, 2013, http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2293227.

28 Ibid.

29 Ibid.

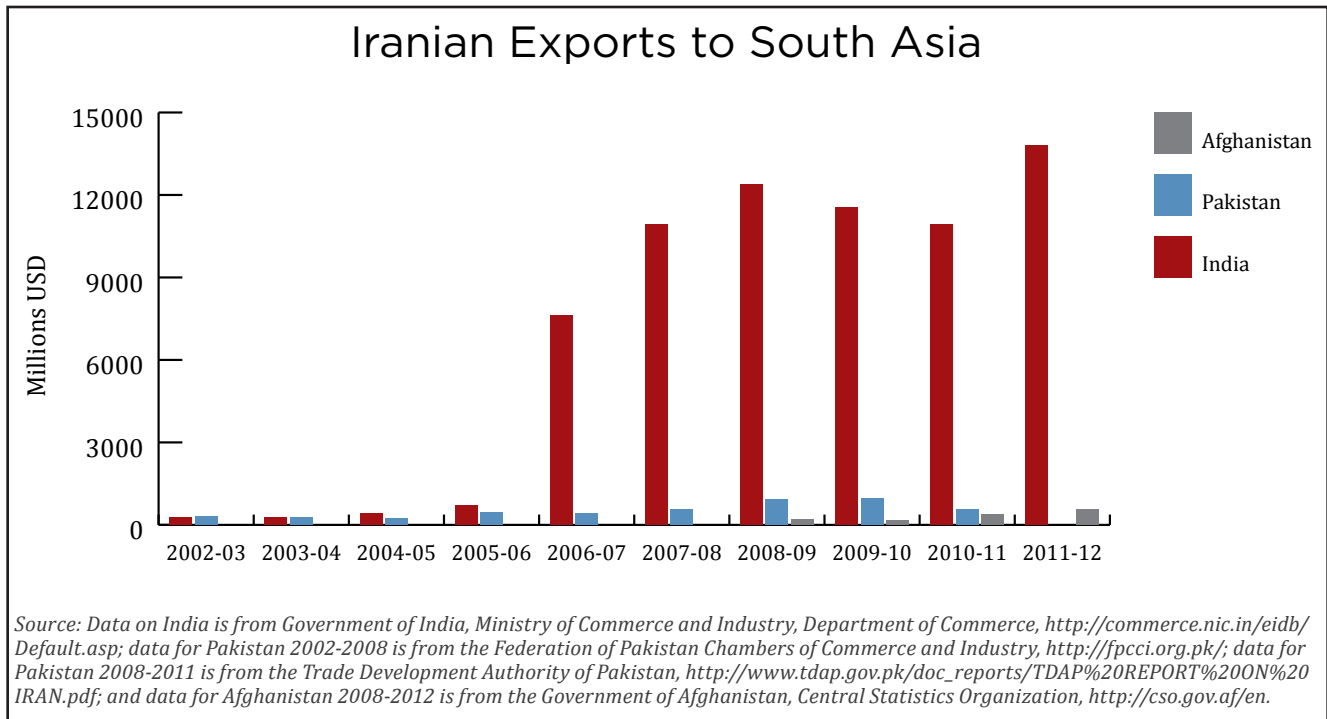
30 Ibid.

31 Asif Ahmed, "Time to Strengthen Indo-Iran Relations," Peace and Collaborative Development Network, February 10, 2011, <http://www.internationalpeaceandconflict.org/profiles/blogs/time-to-strengthen-indoiranian>.

32 <http://www.jamnews.ir/detail/News/106974>.

33 <http://www.ireconomy.ir>.

34 Kutty, "Testing Axelrod."



of Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf. This corridor would open up enormous markets for India in Central Asia and Europe.³⁵

Sanctions and Iran's Asia Trade

Sanctions have pushed Iran to shift trade from Europe to Asia, which now accounts for about 80 percent of Iran's foreign commerce.³⁶ China has been the major beneficiary. Over the past thirteen years, the volume of trade with China jumped twenty-two fold, making China Iran's top trading partner. While Iranians complain about the poor quality of Chinese goods,³⁷ Iran has few alternatives but to barter its oil for them.³⁸ China has reduced its oil imports to avoid violating US sanctions, but the decline has been more pronounced in the case of India.

In 2012, India imported 7.2 percent of its oil needs from Iran, a 10.5 percent reduction from the prior year. So far this year, India has cut oil imports from Iran by another 27 percent to qualify for a new 180-day exemption from

US sanctions.³⁹ Until July 2011, India paid for oil mostly in euros through Turkey's Halkbank, with 45 percent in rupees. As of February 2013, all payments were switched to rupees to avoid falling afoul of other US sanctions.

Sanctions on the oil industry and on businesses owned by Iran's Revolutionary Guards have pushed Iran to look for other products to export, including iron ore to China and sponge iron, a cheaper steelmaking alternative, to India. For China, Iran's raw iron is an alternative to ore from Brazil and Australia. With India, Iran is taking advantage of a decrease in Indian iron production. The export of sponge iron from Iran to India doubled from April-July 2013 and brought Iran \$200 million.⁴⁰

India has managed to retain trade ties with Iran while intensifying a relationship with Israel that blossomed in 1992 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At present, Israel is India's third largest supplier of weaponry while India accounts for

35 *Inter-governmental Agreement on International North-South Transport Corridor*, September 12, 2000, http://www.unescap.org/ttdw/Publications/TIS_pubs/pub_2182/tarns_annex2.pdf.

36 <http://www.bazarkhabar.ir/News.aspx?ID=46853>.

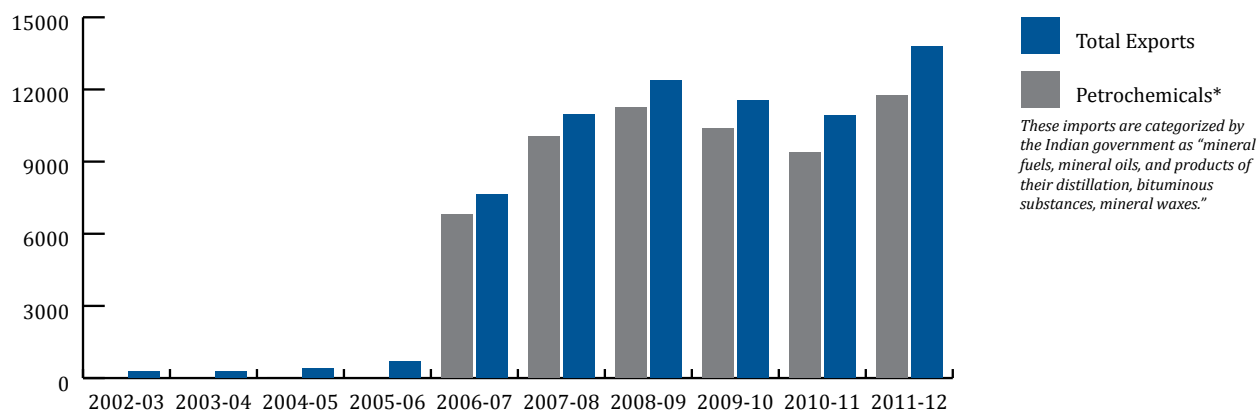
37 <http://ebrat.ir/?part=news&inc=news&id=56239>.

38 Barbara Slavina, "Iran Turns to China, Barter, to Survive Sanctions," Atlantic Council, November, 2011, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/publications/issue-briefs/iran-turns-to-china-barter-to-survive-sanctions-1>.

39 Nidhi Verma and Meeyoung Cho, "India Leads Asian Cuts in Iran Oil Imports Ahead of Waiver Review," Reuters, May 21, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/05/21/iran-sanctions-waiver-idUSL3N0DQ2N520130521>.

40 Krishna N. Das and Silvia Antonioli, "Iran Boosts Iron Exports to China, India as Oil Sales Slump," Reuters, August 23, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/08/26/iran-iron-asia-idUSL4N0GR0L820130826>.

Iranian Exports to India



Source: Government of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Department of Commerce, <http://commerce.nic.in/eidb/Default.asp>.

almost half of Israel's arms exports.⁴¹ In 2008, India launched an Israeli satellite into orbit; the two countries increasingly cooperate on intelligence and counterterrorism, especially after the 2008 Mumbai massacre; and Israel is providing India with border monitoring equipment and surveillance systems. At the same time, India does not want to jeopardize its relationship with Iran, which could prove crucial if Afghanistan falls back into Taliban hands. As analyst Harsh Pant has said, "India would not like to lose Iran. India is preparing for the worst case if the US completely withdraws from Afghanistan."⁴²

The Scourge of Drug Trafficking

Iranian territory has been used for decades as the favored route for transit of narcotics from Afghanistan and Pakistan to Europe. However, the primary threat to Iran is domestic; with some two million drug addicts, most aged eighteen to twenty-five, the problem goes to the heart of the country's social instability and economic underperformance. According to the United Nations, Iran has one of the most severe addiction problems in the world.⁴³ Farid Barati, the deputy head

of Iran's State Welfare Organization, estimates that Iran annually spends \$5.7 billion on prevention and treatment of addiction.⁴⁴

Besides the adverse socioeconomic impact, drug trafficking has been the major source of financing insurgencies and supporting extremists. According to the UN, 30 percent of Afghanistan's heroin is trafficked each year into or through Iran.⁴⁵ Thus the drug problem is a serious security issue. Fighting drug trafficking requires regional cooperation and provides a unique convergence of interests between Iran, its neighbors, the United States and its European allies.

The drug issue and the water issue are related. Afghanistan once had a global reputation for agricultural products including pomegranates, pistachios, raisins, apricots, and almonds. Because of decades of war and displacement, Afghans switched to short-duration and high-yield crops. This is a major reason for the decline in production of fruit in favor of poppy, which also requires less water. Poppy has dominated agricultural activity in Helmand, the major source of heroin produced in Afghanistan during the

41 Jean-Loup Samaan, "The Pakistani Test of the Israel-India Partnership," *Al-Monitor*, June 23, 2013, <http://www.almonitor.com/pulse/tr/contents/articles/opinion/2013/06/pakistantest-israel-india.html>.

42 Slavin, "Iran Turns to China, Barter to Survive Sanctions."

43 "UN Agency Foresees Increased Collaboration with Iran in Fight Against Drugs," *UN News Centre*, July 21, 2011, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=39101&Cr=unodc&Cr1>.

44 <http://www.mehrnews.com/detail/News/2085246>.

45 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Addiction, Crime and Insurgency: The Transnational Threat of Afghan Opium* (Vienna: UNODC, October 2009), http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Afghanistan/Afghan_Opium_Trade_2009_web.pdf.

last ten to fifteen years.⁴⁶ Experts assert that the goal of many water-related construction projects should be recharging the underground water table by capturing flood water that runs eight feet deep during spring rains.⁴⁷ This would enable Afghan farmers to switch out of poppy.

Despite extensive foreign aid, Afghanistan has failed to develop an effective system of water storage and management in part because of corruption and poor managerial skills. Regional cooperation and international cooperation to implement efficient water management would benefit Afghanistan and its neighbors.

Conclusion

Iran has managed to retain and even enhance its historic ties with South Asia despite war, ethnic rivalry, and US-led sanctions. With Afghanistan about to elect a new president in 2014 as the US prepares to further reduce its forces in the region, it is especially important that the United States work with the international community and regional partners to address pressing regional challenges.

After the enormous sacrifices the US has made in ten years of conflict in Afghanistan, both in soldiers killed and wounded and tens of billions of dollars in expenditures, it is crucial for the US to help assure a stable, prosperous Afghanistan that is able to defend itself against the Taliban. Iran, India and Pakistan have important roles to play. The US can be a catalyst to help them deal with Afghanistan's challenges in a constructive manner.

In particular, the US, the UN, and development organizations should focus on helping Afghanistan and Iran agree on sharing water from the Helmand River and improving water management and agricultural practices in the entire region. Countering drug trafficking should also be a major priority because of its adverse impact on local populations as well as its role in supporting extremists and insurgents.

If the United States and Iran make progress in resolving the nuclear standoff, one element the Obama administration should also consider is ending its opposition to the supply of Iranian natural gas to India and Pakistan, where energy shortages contribute to a dire lack of electricity. The US should also encourage India and Pakistan to work together to stabilize Afghanistan instead of continuing to view their efforts there as part of a zero-sum proxy war for influence. Afghanistan could become a passage to peace between Pakistan and India with increasing economic cooperation among South Asian countries, especially with regard to energy and water.

⁴⁶ <http://www.undp.org.af/Publications/RRERS/Helmand%20Provincial%20Profile.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Paul Giblin, "Corps of Engineers Assesses Ways to Bring Water to Afghan People," US Army, April 14, 2010, <http://www.army.mil/article/37336/>.

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