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Q7(c)

What are the challenges and limitations in India - Iran relations?

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2023 · PSIR GS 2 · 15 marks · Comparative Politics

Comparative Politics: Nature and major approaches; political economy and political sociology perspectives; limitations of the comparative method.

Core demand of the question

- Discuss the challenges in India-Iran relations
- Write at 15-mark length

Revision summary

Sanctions after the **JCPOA** crisis cut India's Iranian oil and complicated Chabahar contractors.

INSTC is a map still waiting on regional stability.

I2U2 and Israel ties sit poorly with Tehran's regional map.

Afghanistan 2021 is both a shared file and a source of different bets.

The challenge is to keep a working corridor without a sanctions-proof or all-weather pact.

Introduction

India and Iran share civilisational contact, a stake in Afghanistan, and the Chabahar-**INSTC** connectivity idea. The relationship is repeatedly strained by United States sanctions, energy payment problems, Israel policy, and slow project delivery. Challenges are structural, not only diplomatic mood.

Body**Sanctions and energy**

- Iran was a major crude supplier to India. US withdrawal from the **JCPOA** and secondary sanctions cut that trade for long stretches.
- Payment, insurance, and shipping became the daily challenge. Rupee and third-country mechanisms were incomplete substitutes.
- After 2022 India also had discounted Russian oil, which further reduced Iran's share.

Connectivity that moves slowly

- Chabahar is the flagship. It competes with time, with **Gwadar**'s China-Pakistan story, and with US sanctions risk for firms.
- **INSTC** needs Russian, Iranian, and Caucasian stability. War in Ukraine and Caucasus shocks delay a corridor sold as geopolitics.

Regional politics

- India deepened ties with Israel, the UAE, and the United States, including **I2U2**, while Iran remains in a hostile set toward Israel and often toward Washington.

- Afghanistan after August 2021 is a shared interest against some militant groups and a divergence on who holds legitimate power.
- Iran-Saudi and Iran-Gulf cycles pull Indian labour, energy, and Hajj-related diplomacy in two directions.

Domestic and identity files

- Shia pilgrimage, Chabahar workers, and occasional statements on Kashmir or on minorities can irritate either capital.
- Neither side treats the other as an enemy. Neither can offer a full strategic cover against the other's main threat.

Reading

- Keohane's complex interdependence is thin here because finance and insurance are weaponised by a third State.
- Pragmatic foreign policy keeps Chabahar alive as a hedge. It has not produced a sanctions-proof partnership.

Flow diagram

US sanctions JCPOA end -> Energy payment cut
US sanctions JCPOA end -> Chabahar delay
I2U2 Israel UAE US -> Diplomatic divergence
Energy payment cut -> Limited partnership
Chabahar delay -> Limited partnership
Diplomatic divergence -> Limited partnership

Conclusion

India-Iran challenges are US sanctions on energy and firms, slow corridors, and India's simultaneous West Asia partnerships with Iran's rivals. The relationship survives as a limited connectivity and regional-security file, not as an all-weather alliance.

Facts & figures

JCPOA

2015 Iran nuclear deal; US withdrawal in 2018 restored secondary sanctions that hit third-country trade.

Chabahar Port

Iranian port with Indian investment aimed at Afghanistan and Central Asia bypassing Pakistan.

INSTC

Multi-modal corridor concept from India via Iran toward Russia.

I2U2

India, Israel, UAE, United States grouping that Iran reads as a hostile regional geometry.

Gwadar

Pakistan port in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the competing Arabian Sea story.

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