



**INSTITUTE OF
STRATEGIC STUDIES**

web: www.issi.org.pk
phone: +92-920-4423, 24
fax: +92-920-4658

Issue Brief

Growing Indo-Iran-Afghan Nexus

Sarah Akram, Research Fellow, ISSI

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Pakistan's uneasy relations with India, Iran and Afghanistan hold back military and economic cooperation with these neighbouring countries and has often lead to difficulties and obstacles to development and progress on many counts. The reshaping of relationships in the region holds vast implications for Pakistan and in this context; the growing Indo-Iran-Afghan nexus is likely to be a very huge impediment in the way of improving ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan's bilateral ties with Iran, India and Afghanistan have time and again experienced difficulties; therefore it is pertinent to note that any alliance between the three countries is likely to be viewed by Pakistan with some degree of cautiousness, and, is likely to have repercussions in the future. With the regional alliances being reshaped in the region, any development detrimental to Pakistan's security is likely to hamper its economic development and create hurdles for a conducive neighbourhood. Meanwhile, arch rival India's coercive diplomacy in the region leaves so much for Pakistan to do as the growing Indo-Iran-Afghan nexus is an effort to isolate Pakistan and sabotage any effort on the part of Islamabad to improve relations with Afghanistan and Iran.

Pakistan's bilateral difficulties with Afghanistan stem from a number of issues like the current border issue, the traditional enmity revolving around subversive activities by non-state actors and the resultant blame game, which have all marred relations between the neighbourly countries. Similarly, Pakistan has not enjoyed very cordial relations with Iran and both countries have often borne difficulties, and irritants continue to bedevil their relations. Although, Iran and Pakistan have both signed numerous MoUs for energy, economic, military and cultural cooperation since the 1980s, but very few have seen the light of the day. However, irritants continue to ruin their relations.

The recent deal between India and Iran to develop the Chabahar Port has enormous potential to kick off a transport-and-trade corridor linking India to Afghanistan via Iran, thus developing a persuasive economic feature, and has the potential for a new security paradigm to bring about a geopolitical shift in the region. For all the participants, the economic rewards of this pact are huge. The development of Chabahar Port and the connecting transport-and-trade corridor has the potential to unlock the untapped energy and mineral riches of Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia for export toward India. The primary impact of this deal is on Pakistan. India, Iran, and Afghanistan constitute over 95 per cent of Pakistan's territorial borders. A deal of such scale among Pakistan's bordering states, aimed at excluding Pakistan, is a huge effort to isolate the country. This is likely to result in excluding Pakistan from the advantage that it has enjoyed due to its strategic location. Mainly, the envisioned trade corridor is likely

to usurp all the economic fruits that appropriately belong to Pakistan as the likely transit route between India, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. This influence over Afghanistan, built due to Pakistan's monopoly on land routes to Afghanistan, is likely to diminish. Connectivity introduces new players to the game: India and Iran. Afghanistan is likely to secure a second sustenance, one with economic advantages. This growing Indo-Iran-Afghan nexus has the potential of creating new challenges for Pakistan, which if not adequately addressed can lead to Pakistan's likely economic isolation.