Indo-Pak and West Asian Geopolitics

What is the issue?

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- The bilateral relationship and cooperation between India and Iran have been fairly good.
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- But despite the well crafted diplomacy, Iran’s equations vis-à-vis Pakistan could be an irritant for India in the long run.
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How is Indo-Iran relationship shaping up?

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- **Positives -** For New Delhi, Iran is the gateway to connect with Central Asian countries.
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- India is investing in port and rail-road projects in the country.
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- Iran is also a key partner for cooperation in the energy sector.
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- India also shares centuries-old cultural ties with it.
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- **Irritants -** US is clearly on a confrontational path with Iran.
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- Iran is thus not comfortable with India because of its strategic partnership with the US.
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- Notably, Trump is currently undoing the Iranian nuclear deal and Iran has also disapproved the new Afghan policy of the US.
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- Similarly, the blossoming India-Israel bonhomie and a growing sympathy for Kashmiri separatists among Iranian politicians are concerns.
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- These are probably the reasons why the Fazad B gas-field that India discovered is yet to be allocated to India for exploitation.

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How is Pak-Iran relationship shaping up?

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- **Strategic situation -** Iran continues to have strong ties with Pakistan despite Pakistan's aggression against India which is a point of concern.
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- Such an outlook is partly due to Pakistan's effort to sustain a cordial equation with Iran for strategic reasons as it shares a 900 km border with it.
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- Notably, the border runs along Pakistan's Baluchistan province, which is a disturbed area that is seeing insurgencies and foreign meddling.
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- There have also been occasional border skirmishes with the Iranian military, which if builds up could open a third confrontational front for Pakistan (the others being Indian and Afghan borders).
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- Additionally, Pakistan sees a partner in Iran for its activities in Afghanistan and there is also immense mutual economic benefit in Iran's Gas.
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- **Recent Developments -** Pakistan's army chief Gen Bajwa paid a three-day visit to Tehran last year, which was the first such engagement in 20 years.
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- There was considerable enthusiasm as Gen Bajwa offered cooperation in missile technology and also discussed about a gas pipeline as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
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- Notably, while BRI is shunned by India, Iran sees it as an opportunity and even desires to get Chabahar connected to it (which India is developing).
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- Additionally, Iran has even invited China to invest partly in Chabahar, which would smash any strategic significance that India associates with it as a counter to Gwadhar.
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- Iran has also thanked Pakistan for its help in countering Sunni extremists on its soil, which is in direct contract to India's view on Pakistan.
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How does the future look?

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- The strength of the Pak-Iran equation will hinge largely on how Pakistan’s approach to Saudi Arabia shapes up.
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- While Iran and Saudi are oppositely placed in the West Asian geo-political grid, Pakistan is closely aligned with Saudi in many international forums.
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- Pakistan is in fact standing by Saudi’s side in Yemeni and Syrian conflict, which pits it opposed to Iran, which is Saudi’s chief regional contender.
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- Notably, even the Riyadh based Islamic Military Alliance is headed by Pakistan’s ex-military chief Rahel Sheriff.
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- Pakistan has tried hard to not take sides in the Saudi-Iran dichotomy, but this approach might prove hard at all times.
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- Also, while India maintains cordial relationships with all powers, it is not clear if Pakistani fallout with any of them would benefit India in any way.
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Source: Indian Express

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