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China-Iran Strategic Cooperation Pact

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Why in News

China and Iran have signed a **25-year "strategic cooperation pact"** which includes "political economic and strategic components".

The agreement **comes amid a major push from China to back Iran to deal with the continuing weight of sanctions reinstated by the US** after its withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal.

Key Points

- **About the Pact:**
 - It will deepen relations between Iran and China and would establish a blueprint for "reciprocal investments in the fields of transport, ports, energy, industry and services."
 - It forms **a part of China's trillion-dollar Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, a plan to fund infrastructure projects and increase its influence overseas.

- **China's Growing Role in the Middle East:**



- Iran relies on China as its largest trading partner.
- Chinese foreign minister, in his recent visit to West Asian nations, proposed a **five-point initiative** for achieving security and stability in the Middle East, advocating "mutual respect, upholding equity and justice, achieving non-proliferation, jointly fostering collective security, and accelerating development cooperation."
- Earlier, China and Russia called for the US to unconditionally return to the **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)** as soon as possible and revoke the unilateral sanctions against Iran.

In this context, they proposed "the establishment of a regional security dialogue platform to converge a new consensus on resolving the security concerns of countries in the region."

- **India's Concerns:**

- **Military Partnership:** China is also concluding a security and military partnership with Iran.

- China calls for “joint training and exercises, joint research and weapons development and intelligence sharing” to fight “the lopsided battle with terrorism, drug and human trafficking and cross-border crimes”.

- The sizable Chinese investments in Iranian ports development **may eventually be turned into permanent military access arrangements** with Iran.

- **Strategic Stakes Around the Chabahar Port:** With a growing Chinese presence in Iran, India is concerned about its strategic stakes around the **Chabahar port** project that it has been developing.

- The port is close to Gwadar port in Pakistan, which is being developed by China as part of its China-Pakistan Economic Corridor that links it to the Indian Ocean through BRI.

- **Geopolitical Rivalry:** India finds itself caught in the geopolitical rivalry between the US & China over Iran.

- India’s dilemma also stems from the fact that robust support from the US is essential when it is locked in a border stand-off with China.

- **Impact on Relationship with Other Countries:** Growing Chinese footsteps in Iran will have a long-lasting impact on India’s relationship with not only Iran but also on Afghanistan and Central Asian nations.

Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

- In 2015, Iran with the P5+1 group of world powers - the USA, UK, France, China, Russia, and Germany agreed on a long-term deal on its nuclear programme.

- The deal was named as **Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)** and in common parlance as **Iran Nuclear Deal**.

- Under the deal, Iran agreed to curb its nuclear activity in return for the lifting of sanctions and access to global trade.

- The agreement allowed Iran to accumulate small amounts of uranium for research but it banned the **enrichment of uranium**, which is used to make reactor fuel and nuclear weapons.

- Iran was also required to redesign a heavy-water reactor being built, whose spent fuel could contain plutonium suitable for a bomb and to allow international inspections.

- In 2018, the **United States declared its withdrawal from JCPOA** and imposed unilateral sanction on Iran.

- Iran has pulled away from restrictions imposed under the deal in order to put pressure on the other signatories — Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China — to provide new economic incentives to offset US sanctions.

Source: TH