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Applicability of UNCLOS for Landlocked states: The case of Chabahar port and Afghanistan

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ABSTRACT

As a landlocked country, Afghanistan has been given special privileges by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to access seaports through transit states. Pakistan, as a transit state to Afghanistan, has violated such provisions of international treaties on many counts by blocking transit routes for trade with India and by denying access to its Karachi Port. India's Chabahar Port project in Iran acts as an alternative for Afghanistan to trade and aims to reduce its vulnerability of being dependent on Pakistan. This article attempts to highlight the India–Iran–Afghanistan trilateral understanding in Chabahar as an example of multilateral cooperation in fulfilling commitments made to international regimes, such as the UNCLOS, while bringing out the geopolitical challenges that India faces to complete the Chabahar project. In this context, the aim is to study the applicability of UNCLOS for rights of landlocked states and the importance of the Chabahar Port in protecting Afghanistan's commercial freedom. The article also highlights India's role in the region as it is responsible for implementing the Chabahar Port project.

KEYWORDS

UNCLOS; Afghanistan;
chabahar; India; Pakistan;
Iran

Introduction

Afghanistan is a landlocked South Asian state that also borders Central and West Asia. As a landlocked state, it needs the cooperation of its neighbours to access the ocean waters for trade. Pakistan is its immediate neighbour in the south, which has direct access to the Arabian Gulf. It also has ports in Karachi and Gwadar on the Arabian Sea coast that can accommodate Afghan trade, making Afghanistan reliant on Pakistan for its commercial activities. According to a 2018 report published by the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), Afghanistan depends on Pakistan for the transit of 55 per cent of its trade.¹ In the fiscal year 2018–19, a total of 125,000 containers of Afghan goods valued at \$5.5 billion had transited through Pakistan, which further emphasises the dependent nature of Afghanistan on Pakistan for its commercial activities with the rest of the world.²

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Historically, Pakistan has been hostile to its northern neighbour and has served as a primary source of support for insurgent groups, including the Taliban. From the days of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Pakistan has funded, trained and sheltered militant organisations in the border areas of Afghanistan to safeguard its own interests in the region.³ It is due to Afghanistan's high dependency on Pakistan to access seaports, and the consequential vulnerability, that it has constantly been under pressure for an alternate trade route. Additionally, Pakistan continues to deny India access to Afghanistan and Central Asia through its borders for trade and connectivity. India's growing economy has increased the demand for its industries to gain market access in Afghanistan and Central Asia. With vast energy reserves, Central Asia is also critical for India to address its energy security. All these reasons have paved the path for India to initiate a port project in Chabahar, Iran. The Chabahar Port is also poised to reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan by acting as an alternate transit port for Afghan trade. Since the Chabahar Port project was announced in 2003, it has gone on to become a key geostrategic component of India's foreign policy in the region.

In this milieu, the aim of this article is to examine the applicability of international legal regimes, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982), which have special provisions for landlocked states like Afghanistan. As per the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (1969), countries party to the regime are legally bound to uphold its principles.⁴ Pakistan and India are parties to the UNCLOS as their respective governments have ratified the treaty after signing it, whereas Iran and Afghanistan are only signatories to the treaty. However, there is no difference in the special provisions pertaining to landlocked states for parties versus signatories.⁵ The Chabahar Port is an opportunity for India, Iran and Afghanistan to uphold international norms that are observed through the UNCLOS. These countries can draw leverage from the port project as it projects them in a positive light in the international community for upholding the rules-based system of global maritime activity. The project, thus, is a source of goodwill for the three nations as it allows landlocked Afghanistan gain access to a seaport, thereby enabling its right to engage in commercial activities. In addition, the project is of geopolitical importance for India to balance Chinese manoeuvres in Pakistan and in the region. The article further aims to bring out the significance of India's Chabahar project in Iran considering the UNCLOS provisions for landlocked countries vis-à-vis Afghanistan.

UNCLOS and rights of landlocked states

UNCLOS, which entered into force in 1994, is an international treaty which regulates maritime affairs of nations. This includes protecting the rights of states to access the sea and its resources, defining the duties of such states, establishing rules for commercial activities and ensuring that the marine ecosystem is safeguarded. It has 168 parties and 157 signatories to date.⁶ Part X of the UNCLOS comprises provisions to protect the rights of landlocked states to access the sea. These provisions include the freedom of transit through a transit state by all modes of transport (road, rail, air and energy pipelines). It also exempts landlocked states from tariffs and duties for transit, with an exclusion from the most-favoured-nation (MFN) clause due to the special geographic position. It also lays the general norms for facilitating customs during transit.⁷ The nine articles

of Part X of the UNCLOS underline the importance of the transit state in providing the landlocked state access to the sea.⁸ In the case of Afghanistan, Pakistan is the transit state that the former is heavily reliant on.

Placing Afghanistan in context

Afghanistan is often referred to as the “Heart of Asia” due to its geographic location and the strategic significance it holds for the entire region.⁹ It shares borders with the Central Asian republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan in the north, Iran to its west, Pakistan in the south and China in the east. India also shares a border with Afghanistan, which can only be accessed through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).¹⁰ Scholars have recognised Afghanistan as a land bridge that connects the energy-rich Central and West Asia with South Asia, which comprises energy-deficient countries such as India and Pakistan in its immediate neighbourhood.¹¹ Figure 1 shows the geographic location of Afghanistan vis-à-vis its immediate neighbourhood.

This geographic proximity has historically enabled the country to be a transit hub for trade and commerce between the East, the West and the South. An example of this is the ancient Silk Road through which trade took place between China, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Europe for millennia. Indeed, Afghanistan was central to this ancient trade route.¹² Afghanistan also has a long history of such exchanges with the Indian subcontinent, with Afghan traders travelling as far as southern India to sell their goods until India’s partition.¹³

Afghanistan’s geographic centrality has been a cause for many attempts of invasion, violence and conflict. With a landmass that borders diverse regions with different



Figure 1. Afghanistan and its Immediate Neighbourhood Source: Available at <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Afghanistan/@27.8975362,68.74578,4z/data=!4m5!3m4!1s0x38d16eb6f8ff026d:0xf3b5460dbe96da78!8m2!3d33.83392!4d64.9951172>.

ethnic compositions, there has always been a competition for control and power of the Afghan land amongst such groups. The Mongols, Mughals, Turks, Uzbeks and Tajiks have all laid claim to the vast peripheral regions of Afghanistan at different points of times in history. This continues to shape the country's political set-up and governance even today, with regional heads and warlords exercising more control of their respective regions than the central government in Kabul.¹⁴

Presently, with the discovery of the energy potential of the Central Asian republics and West Asia, Afghanistan has the potential to become a major transit point for gas pipelines to India and Pakistan. Article 124 from Part X of the UNCLOS states that transit shall be provided to landlocked states by the transit state upon agreement between them for the transport of energy pipelines.¹⁵ The Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) gas pipeline project, which has been discussed at length over the past two decades, is an example which highlights the importance of Afghanistan's location and the applicability of international laws such as the UNCLOS. From being a thriving trade centre in the past, Afghanistan can become a major energy corridor in the future.¹⁶

Geography: A bane?

Much of Afghanistan's unstable situation today is attributed to its geography. Apart from its location being a cause for foreign powers to invade the country, its landlocked feature has severely crippled its economic potential, particularly since the advent of sea trade in the sixteenth century. In ancient times, trade took place mainly over land, which tied economic significance to Afghanistan. The beginning of the colonial era witnessed a major spurt in maritime trade and the land route across Afghanistan lost its significance. The olden silk roads were reduced to dirt tracks as maritime trade proved to be more lucrative, leading foreign powers to divert their attention towards the sea. Thus, being a landlocked state, Afghanistan's role in global trade began to diminish in the colonial era.¹⁷ Rather, it suffered from the imperialistic expansionist attitudes of British India to its south and Tsarist Russia to its north, which led to the Great Game.¹⁸

Currently, as a landlocked state, it depends on its neighbours for gaining access to sea-ports to participate in international trade. In other words, Afghanistan has to depend on Pakistan and Iran to facilitate maritime trade via the Arabian Gulf. Both Pakistan and Iran share a long border with Afghanistan and have provided transit for Afghan goods to pass through for trade. Yet, the nature of the relationship that Afghanistan shares with Pakistan and the poor connectivity it has with Iran have been detrimental to the Afghan economy.¹⁹

Pakistan

Centuries of rivalry between the southern Pashtuns and other ethnicities from the north have kept Pakistan and Afghanistan's relations in a state of constant conflict.²⁰ The border between the two countries, known as the Durand Line, remains porous with both sides placing claims over each other's territory.²¹ Till date, the Afghans accuse Pakistan of perpetrating insurgent groups, such as the Taliban, and causing widespread insecurity and instability within Afghanistan.²² At times of heightened tension between the two countries, Pakistan has denied Afghanistan access to its Karachi Port for trade. Such

instances have occurred multiple times over the last few decades.²³ Pakistan also denies Afghanistan land access to engage in trade with India via Attari and Wagah border points whenever its ties with India (or Afghanistan) become tense.²⁴ Plagued by a complex set of issues, such as militancy, border dispute and the Indo-Pak rivalry, Pakistan has historically been an unreliable neighbour for Afghanistan to competitively participate in international trade.

Afghanistan and Pakistan signed the Afghanistan–Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) in 2010. The objective of the APTTA was for Pakistan to be a transit state to Afghanistan for trade. Afghanistan was to reciprocate by enabling Pakistan access to Central Asia, as per the provisions of the agreement. One of the important provisions of the APTTA was that Afghanistan can gain access to India through land crossing points in Pakistan.²⁵ On paper, the APTTA is in the spirit of the UNCLOS provisions for landlocked states. However, despite such a mechanism in place to facilitate trade in the region, Pakistan has on several occasions dishonored its commitment by denying Afghanistan land access to India and by closing the border transit points whenever its bilateral ties with India or with its northern neighbour are tense.²⁶ Regardless of being a party to the UNCLOS, such decisions by Pakistan have placed Afghanistan in a vulnerable position as a landlocked state.

Iran

Iran is challenged by poor land transport connection with Afghanistan in order to ship Afghan goods to the Iranian ports of Bandar Abbas and Chabahar.²⁷ As mentioned earlier, the Chabahar Port project has been undertaken by India to access Afghanistan and Central Asia via Iran by bypassing Pakistan. It not only serves Afghanistan as an alternative trade route to Pakistan's Karachi Port²⁸ but also promises to develop transport infrastructure across the Iran–Afghan border region.²⁹ However, the Chabahar Port project faces several hurdles due to the United States' (US) policy towards Iran and the economic sanctions that have been imposed on Iran by it. This is a major cause of concern for the stakeholders in the region to support, invest and develop regional infrastructure to facilitate Afghan trade. The US' decision under former President Donald Trump's leadership to withdraw from the Iranian nuclear deal and the subsequent economic sanctions have raised doubts about conducting regular business transactions with Iran.³⁰ However, in December 2019, India gained some concessions from the US under the Iran Freedom and Counter-Proliferation Act of 2012 for developing the Chabahar Port and to construct a railway link between the port and the Afghan border.³¹

Despite getting a waiver from the US in 2019, India had halted development activities until the end of 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impending U.S elections.³² In July 2020, Iran dropped India from the construction of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway line as Tehran decided to build it using its own financial resources.³³ Delays in execution of contractual commitments made by India has also been a factor for Iran to exclude New Delhi from the railway project. This decision by Iran had raised questions over continued bilateral cooperation between the two countries in the long run to develop the port. Following these developments, India's Minister of External Affairs, S. Jaishankar, visited Iran in September 2020 to reassure cooperation with Iran on the Chabahar port.³⁴ Soon after the visit, Iran raised an official request to India in November 2020 seeking

help to procure the necessary equipment to complete the railway line construction.³⁵ The request was viewed as a reassurance that cooperation between Tehran and New Delhi on the port project was not affected after the former had dropped India from the construction of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway line.

Since the beginning of 2021, India has restarted and accelerated the development of the port. Iran's state news agency, IRNA, had reported the arrival of two 100-tonne cranes worth US\$ 7.5 million at the port from India in March 2021.³⁶ Reports suggest that the Chabahar port is expected to be fully operational by May 2021.³⁷ India continues to make use of the waiver it has received from the US while a decision on JCPOA under the Joe Biden administration is yet to be formulated by Washington D.C.

Chabahar

The idea to invest in the development of the Chabahar Port was first conceived by India in 2003. The Indian government, led by Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, had proposed to build two ports – Shahid Kalentari and Shahid Beheshti – with five berths in each port at Chabahar.³⁸ The port is located off the Makran coast in the Sistan and Baluchistan province in Iran, providing direct access to the Indian Ocean, and is at a safe distance from the tense Persian Gulf.³⁹ It is situated 790 nautical miles (nm) off Mumbai and acts as a bypass for India to reach Iran, Afghanistan and further into Central Asia, without having to go via Pakistan (see Figure 2).⁴⁰

For Afghanistan, the Chabahar Port acts as an alternate port for it to access the Indian Ocean and conduct trade. A document, “Afghanistan and Regional Trade Agreements”,



Figure 2. Maritime Route to Chabahar from Mumbai and the Land Route to Kabul from Chabahar
 Source: Available at <https://www.indiatoday.in/education-today/gk-current-affairs/story/india-takes-over-operations-chabahar-port-iran-importance-1426057-2019-01-08>.

which the Afghan government's Ministry of Commerce and Industries had presented to the World Trade Organization (WTO), highlights the importance of Chabahar as an alternate to Pakistani ports.⁴¹ In the document, the Afghan government also mentions the difficulties faced by it due to political fallouts with Pakistan. The document specifies the undependable methods of border management by Pakistan which shuts the border during such situations, thus denying Afghanistan its freedom to trade as per the provisions of UNCLOS. These factors make the Chabahar Port critical to Afghanistan's commercial interests as it could function as an alternate to Pakistan's Karachi and Gwadar Ports, reducing its dependence on Pakistan.⁴²

The distance between Chabahar Port and the Iran–Afghan border post is 800 kilometres (km) closer than the distance between the Karachi Port and the Af-Pak Torkham border post. Apart from the distance, Afghan traders have also often raised concerns about the harassment they encounter at the Karachi Port by the Pakistani officials. These are additional reasons for the Chabahar Port to be more preferable for Afghanistan than the Karachi Port.⁴³ In 2016, India, Afghanistan and Iran signed a tri-lateral transit and trade agreement in Tehran to facilitate the Afghan trade via Chabahar. Under this, India agreed to invest US\$ 85 million for the development of the port and committed to construct a railway line worth US\$ 400 million to connect Chabahar with Afghanistan's Bamiyan province via Zaranj.⁴⁴ India has already built a 215 km highway in Afghanistan that connects Zaranj and Delaram.⁴⁵ The railway project, however, has been taken over by the Iranian government in July 2020. Iran has cited delays from its Indian counterpart to fund the project as a reason for it to leave New Delhi out of the railway line construction. Despite dropping India from the railway project, Tehran has asserted that the doors are always open for India to be part of it in future and that there are no limits for its ties with New Delhi.⁴⁶ India's delay in supporting the project has been because of the difficulty in procuring materials due to the US sanctions, in spite of the waiver obtained by India.⁴⁷ Iran's reassurance and the successful operation of Chabahar Port by India signifies that the change of hands in the railway project will not affect India's engagement in the region. In November 2020, Iran had sought India's help to procure some equipment needed to complete the railway line, which once again reaffirms India's role in Chabahar.⁴⁸

The India–Iran–Uzbekistan trilateral dialogue took place in December 2020 where the three countries spoke about using the port for transit trade. As proposed by India, “Chabahar Day” was celebrated on the sidelines of the “Maritime India Summit 2021” in March 2021.⁴⁹ The Chabahar Port was also effectively used by India for humanitarian assistance during the COVID-19 pandemic, which was recognised and appreciated by all the stakeholders.⁵⁰ These are clear indications of India's commitment to the project and of New Delhi's regional aspirations, which include Afghanistan.

A brief timeline of Chabahar

The Chabahar project was stalled in 2006 due to the sanctions imposed by the US on Iran to prevent the latter from securing nuclear weapons.⁵¹ Despite the challenging geopolitical environment, the Chabahar Port project progressed, albeit at a slow pace. In 2015, a historic agreement, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was signed by the US, the United Kingdom (UK), France, Germany, China and Russia

with Iran to restrict its development of nuclear weapons and the economic sanctions were lifted subsequently.⁵² The JCPOA enabled India to fast track the Chabahar Port project and the first consignment of wheat was delivered to Afghanistan through the port in October 2017.⁵³ Part of the Shahid Beheshti port was handed over to the Government of India for operations in December 2018 during a trilateral meeting comprising delegates from India, Iran and Afghanistan. The delegates also inaugurated the India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone, while the functioning was handed over to India.⁵⁴ Similarly, the first consignment of goods from Afghanistan was shipped through this route to India in February 2019 under the Transports Internationaux Routiers (TIR) Convention.⁵⁵ This was a landmark achievement as it was the first time the alternate route had facilitated Afghan exports to India.⁵⁶

US–Iran dilemma

The Trump administration in the US withdrew from the JCPOA in 2018 and, once again, imposed economic sanctions on Iran, which created uncertainties over the project.⁵⁷ The US law, however, permits exemptions to projects like the Chabahar Port that serves the reconstruction efforts of Afghanistan's economy. Though the US government had given oral assurance for waiver from its sanctions to Chabahar Port, international banks were reluctant to provide financial support to India Ports Global for procuring port equipment. This further delayed the progress of the project as India Ports Global could not place the necessary orders from international companies that manufacture port equipment. By December 2019, the US government finally gave written guarantees to exempt Chabahar Port from the sanctions, giving the thrust that was desperately needed to speed up the construction.⁵⁸

The new administration in the US under Joe Biden has begun talks with Iran to renegotiate the JCPOA, which aims to bring both the US and Iran back into complying with the nuclear deal that was signed in 2015. The outcome of the dialogue between Washington, DC and Tehran will determine the future of economic sanctions on Iran and an agreement between the two sides could further ease operations at Chabahar Port.⁵⁹

The China factor

Another major power with significant influence in the region is China. It maintains good relations with Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan, with the latter being of special importance as an “all-weather friend” of China. Pakistan is central to China's geopolitical interests in South, Central and West Asia. Further, China has invested over US\$ 60 billion in the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC),⁶⁰ which is a major component of a larger strategic ambition of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).⁶¹ The CPEC connects China's western province of Xinjiang with Gwadar Port in Pakistan, developed by the China Overseas Port Holding Company, a Chinese state-owned enterprise.⁶² Gwadar Port is also off the Makran coast, 72 km from Chabahar, and gives the Chinese direct access to the Indian Ocean (see [Figure 3](#)).⁶³

The Chabahar Port is viewed as competition to Gwadar, though Iran has stated that it welcomes both China and Pakistan to invest in Chabahar Port alongside India.⁶⁴



Figure 3. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor *Source:* Available at <https://www.globalsecurity.org/jhtml/jframe.html#https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/pakistan/images/map-cp-rr-2.jpg>|| China-Pakistan%20Economic%20Corridor%20(CPEC).

China has also invited Afghanistan to join the CPEC by proposing to extend the Karakoram highway into Afghanistan.⁶⁵ The country is part of the larger framework of BRI, though it does not pass through Afghan territory in the current format.⁶⁶ Yet, it has been cautious about joining the CPEC due to multiple concerns. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani had stated in a speech delivered in October 2017 at a New Delhi-based think tank that Pakistan must facilitate smooth transit via Wagah and Attari border points for trade with India if Afghanistan has to join the CPEC.⁶⁷ The unstable and unreliable nature of relationship that Afghanistan shares with Pakistan is a reason for Kabul to be apprehensive about joining the CPEC. India has consistently opposed the CPEC due to its route through PoK, which is a direct infringement of India's sovereignty. The Afghan government could hence take a balanced position and exercise caution to ensure it does not undermine Indian interests by participating in the CPEC. In this context, the Chabahar Port is certainly a competitor to the Gwadar Port as it bypasses Pakistan in providing India access to Afghanistan.

Conclusion

The UNCLOS clearly defines the rights of the landlocked states to access the oceans. As a party to the UNCLOS and having a bilateral agreement for transit and trade with Afghanistan, Pakistan has violated its commitment to international treaty laws by sporadically denying Afghanistan access to its ports by shutting its borders to Afghans. It is in the interest of the greater South Asian region that Pakistan must cease its indifference towards the aspirations and economic rights of the Afghan people and become a reliable neighbour for transit trade. Economic welfare is significant for Afghanistan to achieve

socio-political stability.⁶⁸ Centuries of conflict has primarily been due to outside powers wanting to connect Afghanistan with the international market by means that could only benefit such invaders.⁶⁹ With poor transport infrastructure and geographic disadvantages, it is highly challenging for Afghanistan to connect with the rest of the world on its own terms. Indeed, for a war-torn nation such as Afghanistan to develop its economy, it is essential for it to have multiple trade routes and access to seaports as per the UNCLOS.

Apart from security issues and insurgency, the difficulty to access Afghanistan is a factor for investors to not view it as a destination of economic opportunity.⁷⁰ Regional actors have failed to integrate Afghanistan into the economic activities of the region by denying Afghanistan the opportunity to connect with the rest of the world for trade. To keep Afghanistan in a constant state of economic uncertainty is against the interests of the “Heart of Asia” region, as the economic vulnerability of the Afghan people is one of the main reasons for continuing instability in the country. If militant groups are to be neutralised and for South–Central Asia to be secure, economic prosperity of Afghanistan must be prioritised as it will benefit all the stakeholders, including Pakistan. Regional actors, especially Pakistan, must act in accordance with the provisions of the UNCLOS to enable transport of energy through landlocked states. For energy projects such as TAPI to become a reality, a safe passage through Afghanistan is a necessity. To secure a safe route through Afghanistan, a conducive environment must be created for economic prosperity by providing connectivity for trade. The Chabahar Port gains relevance in this aspect and is geopolitically important to support Afghan trade and economic development.

A quick solution under the Biden administration to resolve the differences over the Iranian nuclear deal is critical as the present US sanctions continue to place roadblocks for international financial institutions to support investment in Iran. International banks which deal in US dollar and Euro currencies require absolute guarantees to support any project in Iran. India must draw greater leverage from the US foreign policy’s transactional nature by pressing for harder bargains to acquire timely waivers for strategically sensitive projects like Chabahar. This was conveyed by India’s Minister for External Affairs, S. Jaishankar, during his visit to the US in December 2019, when he secured a written assurance from the US government to exclude the Chabahar project from the sanctions.⁷¹ This could have been achieved at a greater pace as time is a critical factor in such high-profile projects. The delay in getting a written assurance has been a cause for the Chabahar project to stall as necessary equipment could not be procured in time. India must also take cognisance of Iran’s overtures to Pakistan and China to invest in Chabahar alongside India, as the geostrategic competition between India, China and Pakistan could spill over into this region, which could prove detrimental to both Indian and Afghan interests. India stands in good stead to obtain exemptions from the US sanctions and therefore, the Iranian government may consider exclusivity for India in Chabahar. New Delhi, on its part, must capitalise the grant of waiver by the US to deliver its contractual obligations efficiently. It must also seek to limit other bottlenecks as past delays by India have proven to bear a strategic cost, most recently witnessed in the Chabahar-Zahedan railway line project.

The adherence to the UNCLOS provisions for landlocked states would build a positive reputation for the Chabahar Port in Iran as it acts as a transit port for Afghan trade and

empowers Afghanistan to exercise its right to engage in commercial activities with the outside world. Though India is not obliged to act as a transit state for Afghanistan, its initiative of developing and operating the Chabahar Port highlights its commitment to the principles of UNCLOS vis-à-vis landlocked states. By acting as a transit state in the spirit of the UNCLOS, Iran stands to gain as Chabahar promises to develop regional infrastructure and connectivity. Chabahar Port is an opportunity for India and Iran to fill the void created by Pakistan in the enforceability of UNCLOS. India, Iran and Afghanistan are at a greater position of strength to facilitate regional trade with the Chabahar Port in operation, and mutually benefit each other by committing to the project in the spirit of UNCLOS.

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