

Determinants Moulding Pakistan-Iran Relations; Past, Present, and Possibilities for Future

Ehsan Ali^{1,2}, Dr. Kiran Sami^{2*}, Karamat Hussain³

¹Visiting Lecturer, Humanities and Social Sciences Department at Khwaja Fareed University of engineering and information technology, RYK,64200 (Punjab)

²Ph.D Scholar (Pol-Science),Department of Political Science, at University of Sindh, Jamshoro

^{2*}Chairperson, professor, Department of Political Science,at University of Sindh, Jamshoro

³Ph.D Scholar (Pol-Science),Department of Political Science, at IUB Bahawal Pur,Punjab

Corresponding Author: kiran.sami@usindh.edu.pk

Abstract:

Before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Iran, Iraq War and the USSR, Iran and Pakistan enjoyed cordial ties. Today both countries are not at a time of daggering, but their relationships are marked at times by suspicion, rivalry and even animosity. This is due to divergent interests in the area between Pakistan and Iran, cross-border terrorism, sectarianism, different economic interests and competing foreign partners. The area and the foreign scenario continue to affect the future of Pakistan's relations with Iran. Relations between the two neighbors can be further strengthened and strengthened if Pakistan is trying to balance its relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran because both countries are still most important to Pakistan. In this, an attempt by Pakistan should be made to refrain from the conflicts that these rival countries have started and sponsored. Trade and energy cooperation has the ability to boost Pakistan-Iran relations. Their geographical proximity, their cultural and their religious values are likely to increase Iran and Pakistan ties in future

Introduction

The relationship between Pakistan and Iran was established in 1947, when Pakistan was first accepted by the Muslim world. Pakistan immediately formed friendly ties with Iran, strengthening economic, political and technological ties. The US and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 significantly improved ties between Pakistan and Iran. An important factor in developing these linkages was Pakistan's perception that it had renounced its support for the Taliban regime. As the relationship between Pakistan and the USA deteriorated dramatically in 2010 and 2011, with a number of meeting on topics and problems such as terrorism, trade links and drug control, the relationship between Pakistan and Iran was significantly improved. The trade relations between Pakistan and Iran have strengthened as well. Since 1990, Pakistan and Iran have worked to strengthen energy exchange and cooperation. Pakistan is now one of Iran's biggest goods importers

(AzerNews, 2018; IRNA, 2010)

The gas pipeline connecting Iran, Pakistan, and India was signed by these countries but has yet to be fully implemented due to US sanctions. Iran, despite having the second largest natural gas reserves in the world, lacks the capability to become an industrialized country in the region as a result of these sanctions. The Iran, India, and Pakistan gas pipeline is advantageous to Pakistan because it can provide significant revenue in the form of transit fees while also solving Pakistan's energy issue (Ahmad, 2014).

Because of competing interests in Afghanistan, relations between Iran and Pakistan deteriorated after 1977. Iran has accused terrorist groups and international intelligence agencies of carrying out aggressive activities against it from across the border on several occasions.

Even now, the two countries do not agree on Afghanistan's future and continue to follow opposing policies. In response to these accusations, Pakistan has requested that Iran provide concrete evidence to back up its claims. In addition, Pakistan has suggested that Iran seek the assistance of the two countries' border management committees in investigating such allegations. Iran has also accused Pakistan of weakening Iran's Sistan-Balochistan area by using its frontier (Dawn, 2014). Security officials in Pakistan, on the other hand, have responded to such criticism by pointing out that Iran is also interfering in Baluchistan and southern Afghanistan.

The conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran has had a significant effect on Pakistan, as it has resulted in the creation of militant sectarian groups in Pakistan that have engaged in deadly acts of violence against one another. Despite the fact that Pakistan has largely neutralized these sectarian groups, they continue to cast a shadow over the country.

Iran's repeated attacks in Pakistan's Balochistan province, ostensibly targeting terrorists, smugglers, and drug traffickers, have strained ties between the two countries. Despite Iran's repeated accusations that Pakistan is tolerating the existence of anti-Iran militants in Balochistan, Pakistan, Pakistan has always denied Iran's accusations.

It has dismissed Iran's accusations as unfounded because Iran has failed to provide Pakistan with any substantial proof of the existence of anti-Iran militants in the country. The construction of India's Chabahar port in Iran has increased Pakistan's concerns because it is likely to increase India's presence in Central Asia, Iran, and Afghanistan, potentially affecting Pakistan-Iran relations (Khan, 2012; Siddiq, 2005)

Iran and Pakistan have not reaped enough benefits from each other, despite their geographical proximity and cultural similarities. Despite the fact that they have signed a number of trade agreements, cultural exchange projects, and cooperation agreements in a variety of fields, there is still space for improvement in their relations. There have been many ups and downs in the relationship between these two nations.

Soon after Pakistan was established, Iran and Pakistan began a relationship. Both countries stayed in mutual defense treaties like Seato and Cento. Iran provided technical assistance to Pakistan during the 1965 and 1971 wars. Pakistan immediately accepted Iran's revolutionary regime after it came to power in 1979. After 1977, however, relations between Pakistan and Iran deteriorated due to a divergence of interests in Afghanistan, hostility between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the rise of sectarian violence in Pakistan, Jundullah attacks in Iran and cross-border attacks launched by Iran in Pakistan, rising competition between Gawader and Chabahar ports,

and India's desire to increase its inbound trade. The aim of this article is to look into these and other minor issues that continue to cloud Pakistan-Iran relations

Research Methodology

This statement is supposed to deliver readers knowledge of the modern day discussed about two Muslim neighbor countries Pakistan-Iran's relations past, present and future.

The assessment of this article mainly comprises on qualitative data approach, utilizing a case study methodology. Data must be gathered through secondary sources on the basis of assessment. This published information or data related to any search may be gathered from newspapers, books, articles. Main data has been acquired through news reports and foreign think tanks reports.

Iran-Iraq War

Iran-Iraq war was a tragic event which shocked the entire region. Hostilities on both side intensified and after several attempts for ending the conflict, both countries remained at war for a decade. Out of the war came incalculable loss for both countries in terms of the casualties and wealth. Moreover, the war fragmented Middle East along Sectarian lines.

Though there was a lot of pressure on Pakistan to take a unilateral stand in the war, but Pakistan resisted such demands. In fact, Pakistan repeatedly urged ceasefire between Iran and Iraq. During Iran- Iraq war, Pakistan never tilted in favor of any one side. Though United States and Saudi Arabia tried to win the support of Pakistan solely for Iraq but they failed. Pakistan supported Iran financially during the Iran- Iraq war (Alam, 2004).

Nonetheless, there was a huge difference between Pakistan and Iran's stance towards the Gulf. Pakistan aimed at retaining peace in the Gulf while Iran was in search of revolutionary reforms. This policy of Iran was evident form aggressive oratory against the rulers of Gulf (Hussain, 1993).

Divergence of Interests Over Post-Soviet Afghanistan

Divergence of interests in Afghanistan turned Pakistan and Iran into competitors where they tried to gain maximum advantage through the groups backed and armed by them. Alam (2004) argues that Post-Soviet Afghanistan became a war field for different factions of feuding groups who were vying for control and influence. These groups were funded by other countries that wanted to ensure the full influence for their groups. The Taliban were supported by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan while the Hazara were supported by Iran. The success of Taliban to set up their governmental system after capturing Kabul embittered Iran.

Pakistan and Iran valued dominance in Afghanistan because they saw it as a way to expand their influence in Central Asia. Another source of concern for Iran was the fact that the Taliban regime in Kabul was friendly to Saudi Arabia.

In Iran, the Taliban regime's power was regarded with great concern. Iran began supporting the Northern Alliance and Shiite groups in Afghanistan to counter the Taliban's strength. Iran benefited from the cooperation of other countries such as India, Russia, and Central Asian countries in these efforts. (Alam, 2004).

In Pakistan, the insurgent warfare against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan had spawned opposing and feuding sectarian factions. Armed with weapons, these groups carried out sectarian killings that harmed Pakistan's social harmony. In 1998, the collapse of Mazar e Sharif sent shockwaves across Iran. The Taliban killed a large number of Hazara Shiites in their attempt to take Mazar e Sharif. In addition, Taliban killed Iranian diplomats on this occasion. As a result of these conditions, sectarian violence that erupted in Pakistan as a result of the Iran-Iraq war received a boost. Pakistan-Iran relations have suffered greatly as a result of Pakistan's sectarian conflicts.

Sectarianism and Its Effect on Pakistan-Iran Relations

One of the main reasons for the ineffective and ambiguous ties between Iran and Pakistan is sectarianism. In Pakistan, Sunni Muslims is the majority, while Shia Muslims are the majority in Iran. Relations between these two countries were not previously dominated by their sectarian identities, but that is no longer the case following Zia Ul Haq's religious policies in Pakistan and the Islamic revolution in Iran. After Iran's Islamic revolution in 1979, Saudi Arabia and Iran became bitter rivals. (Haqqani, 2006; Zahab, 2002).

Saudi Arabia and Iran backed like-minded groups in Pakistan that tainted the country's social unity in their zeal to spread their sectarian ideologies. Saudi Arabia and Iran's sectarian proxy war spawned sectarian militant groups that wreaked havoc in Pakistan. These developments paved the way for Sunni and Shia Muslims in Pakistan to be persecuted on sectarian grounds. (Haqqani, 2006; Zahab, 2002). Pakistan and Iran have struggled to establish a relationship based on confidence and cooperation as a result of Iran's sectarian policies in Pakistan and Pakistan's growing tilt toward Saudi Arabia.

Conflicting Policies of Pakistan And Iran In Central Asia

Iran and Pakistan are looking to expand their trading relations with Central Asian countries. Central Asian countries have an abundance of untapped resources that have piqued the interest of various countries. Pakistan and Iran are busy building various ports in order to link to Central Asia. Divergent interests in gaining access to Central Asian countries have placed Pakistan and Iran on a competitive path. The rivalry for access to Central Asia has been heightened by India's desire to visit Central Asian countries. India has sought a reliable partner in Iran to enter Central Asia because of the uncertain and ever-changing ties between India and Pakistan. As a result, India has thrown its entire weight behind the construction of Iran's Chabahar port.

Iran has a strategic geographic position that gives it a lot of weight. Iran's geographical significance can be gauged by its proximity to Central Asia, the Persian Gulf, and the Oman Sea. Iran's geographical position makes it a perfect export route for Central Asia's rich natural resources. Iran's geographic position makes it more important to India because it connects India to Central Asia, which can serve as a market for Indian goods (Ebel & Menon, 2000). Iran and Pakistan have built two separate ports to enter resource-rich Central Asian countries, which has been seen as a search of two different ways to generate more benefit for them. Furthermore, since both countries are attempting to reap maximum benefits from the development of their respective ports, potential bitter rivalry cannot be ruled out.

Pakistan and Iran are constructing two different ports which have boosted economic competition between these countries. In its bid to be connected with Central Asia, Iran is constructing Chabahar port with the help of India in Eastern Iran. On the other hand, Pakistan is constructing Gawader port with the same objective. By helping Iran in building Chabahar port, India wants to decrease the importance of Gawader port for Central Asian States (Bleuer, 2007; Ramachandran, 2002). India aims to build a proper infrastructure that could link Chabahar ports with Central Asian States. Iran is actively working in Tajakistan by funding many transportation projects such as the Aznob Tunnel. India's interests in Chabahar port have rapidly increased the pace of its construction. Moreover, India wants to obstruct the better prospects for Gawader port by presenting Chabahar port as a better avenue of trade and transportation for other countries.

Gawader port, on the other hand, holds enormous promise for the growth of Central Asian countries as well as Pakistan. It may be used to link Afghanistan, Central Asia, and China. Pakistan wants to link with Central Asian countries by completing the Gawader port in Balochistan. The Chinese are assisting in the construction of the Gawader port. Gawader is beneficial to Central Asian countries because it connects these landlocked countries to the rest of the country (Haider, 2005). The port is advantageous to Pakistan because it has the potential to attract significant investment. The significance of Gawader port for other countries stems from its position, which is 250 miles from the Strait of Hormuz, making it a significant shipping location. Furthermore, the port will ensure Afghanistan's, Central Asian states', and China's access to the Arabian Sea. The fact that the under-construction road from Gawader to Saindak is the shortest route linking South Asia and Central Asian states demonstrates the benefits that Gawader offers to Central Asian countries.

Prospects for Improvement in Pakistan-Iran Relations

Despite the fact that ties between Iran and Pakistan are strained due to a variety of factors, there are sufficient reasons to believe that the two countries' prospects for better and friendly relations are improving. This is due to the fact that both countries share a border and a willingness to develop stable and better ties. Furthermore, shared faith and culture serve as a unifying and cooperative power. Other reasons for cooperation include the fact that both countries recognize their mutual value. Cooperation on trade, defense, and other issues of mutual interest will benefit both countries significantly. The advantages of collaboration between the two countries are much more powerful than the problems that lead to aggression, malice, and animosity. Furthermore, these advantages are strong enough to inspire them to seek out ways to reduce the severity of the problems that lead to hostile ties between them.

Expansion of trade between Pakistan and Iran would be extremely beneficial to both countries. Despite the fact that both countries value the concept of expanding trade, Pakistan has been hesitant to do so due to US sanctions against Iran (Minhas, 2014).

Though Pakistan has refrained from increasing trade with Iran for fear of antagonizing the US, other countries such as Russia, India, and China have ignored US sanctions and continue to do business with Iran. Despite signing the preferential trade agreement in 2004, trade between the two countries has not increased significantly due to US sanctions. Improved trade ties between the two countries are urgently needed. The only way to improve their ties is for both countries to have more effective and increased trade links.

Iran's cross-border attacks in Pakistan have been a significant source of friction in Pakistan-Iran relations. Iran claims that the attacks are being carried out to protect its provinces of Sistan and Balochistan from anti-Iran militant groups based in Pakistan's Balochistan province. Iran's resentment has grown as a result of ongoing militant attacks. Pakistan, Iran claims, is harboring these groups in order to cause harm to Iran. Iran's claims against Pakistan have been refuted by Pakistan. The crossing of Iranian border guards into Pakistani territory has been viewed as a breach of Pakistani territorial sovereignty on numerous occasions, but Pakistan has not responded with violence. Instead, Pakistan has attempted to reach a diplomatic resolution with Iran. Despite the fact that certain problems have strained ties between the two countries, both countries' attitudes show a desire to resolve the issues peacefully.

Iran and Pakistan have both kept a close watch on the developments in Afghanistan. Because of their vital interests in Afghanistan, neither country can afford to leave it alone. Afghanistan shares a border with Iran and Pakistan, so its fate is critical to Iran's and Pakistan's futures. Iran and Pakistan have previously funded their own proxies in Afghanistan in order to retain control. Certainly, their pursuit of divergent interests in Afghanistan resulted in a great deal of animosity. However, Iran and Pakistan are now prepared to assist in getting Afghanistan's feuding factions to the negotiation table. Despite their divergent interests in Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan share a desire to see the country return to peace and stability.

Despite US President Donald Trump's sanctions on Iran, Pakistan's current government has stated its intention to strengthen trade relations with the country. In doing so, Pakistan has shown that it is committed to pursuing its commercial and economic goals within the framework of international law. However, President Trump has promised to place sanctions on countries that want to foster economic relations with Iran, making the resumption and strengthening of trade ties with Iran a challenge for Pakistan's current government (Express Tribune, 2018; Dawn, 2018).

Pakistan's deteriorating ties with the Trump administration have also played a role in Pakistan's support for Iran on the question of the Nuclear Deal with Western Countries and the United States, which the US has since abandoned. As a result, Iran appears to be burdened by the sanctions levied by President Trump's regime. The first visit to Pakistan by Iranian Foreign Minister Jawed Zarif since Imran Khan's election as Prime Minister has reignited hopes for improved ties between the two neighbors. Pakistan has thanked Iran for supporting Kashmir's fight for independence and for publicly celebrating Pakistan's Independence Day in Iran.

Pakistan has expressed the expectation that, unlike the United States, other signatories to the Iran Nuclear Agreement would not abandon it. The regional and international environment will continue to affect Pakistan's relationship with Iran.

If the United States' sanctions against Iran are lifted, ties between the two neighbors will deepen and solidify. Furthermore, Pakistan must strike a balance in its relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran, as both countries remain vital to Pakistan. In doing so, Pakistan should make a concerted effort to avoid getting involved in conflicts that these rival countries have started and sponsored. Pakistan's withdrawal from neutrality may have significant consequences for its internal stability.

Both countries have on different occasions made significant efforts to prioritize economic engagement. However, Iran-Pakistan bilateral relationship has largely been inconsistent and despite a huge potential to widen the economic engagement the bilateral trade remains to be

hindered primarily by the US pressure on Pakistan. The US decision to withdraw from JCPOA and the killing of General Qassem Suleimani also adds to the tension in the Pakistan-Iran ties. Pakistan faces a severe dilemma as it can neither overtly side with the US nor can support Iran as both the options will lead to far-reaching consequences for its security and economic growth.

Furthermore, Pakistan faces serious challenges in advancing maturity with Iran especially when Pakistan has to try balance the relation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The security situation in Balochistan and Pakistan's military assistance to Saudi Arabia amid Iran-Saudi Arabia proxy wars in the region makes it a tough situation for Pakistan and Iran to widen the prospects of their engagement or diversify it to other domains. In the current context, Pakistan is also pushed to a difficult position as for Pakistan the engagement with Iran should not potentially hinder its relations with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates since Pakistan remains to be dependent on these regional rivals of Iran to keep its economy afloat.

CONCLUSION

Historically, Pakistan and Iran relations have been inconsistent; with many twists and turns over the years. Currently, there are remarkable challenges ahead to Pakistan's sustainable relations with Iran. Moreover, Pakistan and Iran, despite being the immediate neighbors, have fallen short of harvesting full economic potential. However, both countries fully realize the importance of each other in the region and are striving to improve strained relations. Negotiations and agreements, whether operational or in progress, reveal determination from both sides to move forward. To broaden the economic ties between the two countries, the long-standing the IP gas pipeline project needs to be achieved on a priority basis. This project is in the best interest of an energy deficient country like Pakistan. Moreover, initiatives taken to overcome the problems of high tariffs, the absence of banking channels, and improved infrastructure connectivity need to be materialized for fully attaining the trade potential. Furthermore, trade can be the defining features of Pak-Iran relations. In wake of sanctions on Iran, trade ties grievously suffered and fell below \$50 million. Both countries need to explore other workable payment mechanisms, such as trade in local currencies, to mitigate the effects of sanctions by the US. Moreover, the US attitude towards Iran repeatedly hindered Pakistan-Iran economic engagements. Pakistan's newly formed government will face hard challenges in advancing ongoing cooperation with Iran. Pakistan needs to minimize its losses after the US withdrawal from the JCPOA by looking at alternative solutions. China's factor can play a major role in this regard. With the growing importance of China in the region and the implementation of CPEC, ultimately this will reduce US influence in the region and help bring the two countries together. Moreover, integrating Iran into CPEC would improve security and economic ties. However, balancing the relation between Iran and Saudi Arabia remains a big challenge for Pakistan's new government.

References:

- [1] Ahmad, B.M. (2014). America and Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) Gas Pipeline, African Journal of Political Science and International Relations. DOI:10.5897/AJPSIR2014.0696
- [2] Alam, S. (2004). Iran-Pakistan Relations: Political and Strategic Dimensions, Strategic Analysis 28(4), pp. 526-545.

- [3] AzerNews. (2018, March 29). Iron's top 20 non-oil export destinations. Retrieved from <https://www.azernews.az/region/129427.html>
- [4] Bleuer, C. (2007, August 20). Central Asia's seaport: Gwadar or Chabahar? Retrieved from <http://registan.net/2007/08/20/central-asias-seaport-gwadaror-chabahar/>
- [5] Dawn Editorial (2014, October 22). Retrieved from <http://www.dawn.com/news/1139502>
- [6] Dawn. (2018, September 1). Pakistan backs Iran over US nuclear deal row. Retrieved from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1430289>
- [7] Ebel, R. E., & Menon, R. (2000). Energy and conflict in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- [8] Express Tribune. (2018, August 9). Pakistan to pursue economic ties with Iran despite US sanctions. Retrieved from: <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1777060/1-pakistan-pursue-economic-ties-iran-despite-us-sanctions/>
- [9] Haider, Z. (2005). Baluchis, Beijing, and Pakistan's Gwadar Port. *Geo. J. Int'l Aff.*, 6, 95.
- [10] Haqqani, H. (2006). Weeding out the Heretics: Sectarianism in Pakistan, Hudson Institute. Retrieved from: <http://www.hudson.org/research/9769-weeding-out-the-heretics-sectarianism-in-pakistan>
- [11] Hussain, M. (1993). Pakistan- Iran relations in the changing world scenario: Challenges and responses. In T. Jan (Eds.), *Pakistan Foreign Policy Debate: The years ahead* (pp. 211-222). Islamabad: Institute of policy studies.
- [12] IRNA (2010, May). Iran, Pakistan to Support Peace, Stability in Afghanistan.
- [13] Khan, Z.A. (2012). Balochistan Factor in Pak-Iran Relations: Opportunities and Constraints, *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies* 27(1), pp. 121-140. *Factors Shaping Pakistan-Iran Relations: Past, Present and Prospects for Future* 79
- [14] Minhas, K. (2014, December 12). Time to revisit Pakistan-Iran economic relations. *Daily Times*. Retrieved From <http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/opinion/12-Dec-2014/time-to-revisit-pakistan-iran-economic-relations>
- [15] Ramachandran, S. (2002, June 29). India, Iran, Russia map out trade route. *Asia Times*. Retrieved from: <http://www.atimes.com/indpak/DF29Df02.html>
- [16] Siddiqua, A. (2005). Pakistan-Iran-Afghanistan Relations: Looking Beyond the Troubled Triangle, Middle East Programs' Occasional Paper Series. Retrieved from <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/mepopspring051.pdf>
- [17] Zahab, A.M (2002). The Regional Dimension of Sectarian Conflict in Pakistan. In Christophe Jaffrelot (Eds.) *Pakistan: Nationalism without nation* (pp. 115-128). New Delhi: Manohar