

Pakistan – Iran Relations 2008 – 2022: Challenges and Opportunities



| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Muhammad Asif Jan | MS international Relations Graduate, COMSATS University Islamabad, Pakistan asif99jan@gmail.com |
| Dr. Sohail Ahmad | Associate Professor (International Relations), Department of Humanities, COMSATS University Islamabad, Pakistan |
| Saman Ehsan | M.Phil. Scholar at “School of International and Public Affairs” (SIPA), Jilin University, Changchun, China. |

Abstract: *Pakistan and Iran are part of strategically most significant geography of the world. Both countries share historic cultural-religious ties, yet, the true potential of bilateral relations hasn't been achieved at a strategic level due to multiple domestic regional, and global issues. This paper focuses on these issues, which have been dominating foreign policy choices both in Islamabad and Tehran for 14 years. To comprehend the current situation, complex dynamics of these relations and a way forward this historic appraisal will help understand future prospects of revival of these bilateral relations at the strategic level.*

Keywords: Pak-Iran relations, Economic integration, Greater Middle East, CPEC, China

Introduction

Iran is an important player in regional geopolitics. Its location on the South Western border of Pakistan makes it one of the most relevant regions for Pakistan. Though in ancient history, both countries remained distinct territories for each other due to their respective political dominions current both counties have strong cultural and religious ties. Modern-day Iran was part of the old Persian Empire while present-day Pakistan remained part of various dynastic empires of the Indian sub-continent.

The global order is in a state of flux. Many new players are emerging, older ones are resurging and existing ones are diminishing at the same time. The existing superpower is desperate to retain its global political influence while the emerging centers of powers are challenging the status quo. These dynamics are defining present chaos in the global order where regionalism has also emerged as well. This chaos in the global

order is presenting opportunities and challenges to nation-states to safeguard their strategic interests, either individually or collectively.

Pakistan and Iran are no exception in this regard. Aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent US withdrawal from the region, the rise of China as an economic and military player at the global level, and the resurgence of Russia have created a new environment filled with opportunities and challenges for both these countries who hitherto have seen ups and downs in their bilateral relations. The real extent of these changes at the global strategic chessboard is yet to be determined but clear signs are visible about the shift of global power centers. Russian assertiveness in Syria and Ukraine, Chinese becoming 2nd most powerful economy and maritime power, and US withdrawal from Afghanistan are the harbingers of the global strategic shift in power and political influence.

Keeping this in fore, this paper attempts to

examine the strategic landscape formed by policy choices from both sides and the factors which triggered those choices along with the impact of these choices on bilateral relations and regional geostrategic calculus, so that recommendations for a realistic framework of mutual trust at the strategic level can be charted. In this regard, it would be prudent to analyze the history of bilateral relations briefly. The foreign policy writer Harsh, V. Pant has noted that Iran was a natural Ally and model for Pakistan.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

From a purely historical perspective, there are 3 distinct phases of Pakistan Iran relations. These phases not only talk about the evolution of bilateral relations but also highlight important regional and global dynamics affecting these relations despite strong cultural and religious ties between the two nations. Below is a brief snapshot of this evolution across these 3 phases of bilateral relations between Islamabad and Tehran.

Pre 1979: Before Iranian Revolution

Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan as a new sovereign after 14 August 1947. In 1950, the Treaty of friendship was signed by Liaqat Ali Khan, the former prime minister of Pakistan, and Reza Pahlavi, the Iranian ruler at that time. Initial convergence was mainly due to security and economic relations which both nations wanted to build upon historic religious and cultural ties (Husain & Husain, 2016). Often 1950s treaty both countries gave each other the most favored nation status for trade and commerce. The initial warming of bilateral ties was the outcome of the convergence of strategic objectives as both countries were part of the Anglo-American alliance during the Cold War.

By 1955, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey all became part of CENTO (Central Treaty Organization), this cooperation later on led to the creation of Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) which was later on converted into the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in 1985 (Bhattacharjee, 2017). Bilateral relations pass the test of strategic partnership during the 1965 war between India and Pakistan when Iran openly supported Pakistan on military and

diplomatic fronts. Tehran sent nurses, 5000 tons of oil, and medical supplies to help Pakistan along with some 90 F-86 Sabre fighter aircraft. Iran once again supported Pakistan during the 1971 war. Shah of Iran declared the Indian attack on (East) Pakistan as blatant interference in Pakistan's internal matters.

Post-1979: Beginning of Challenging Era

Usually, it's believed that the Iranian revolution was a watershed event in bilateral relations after which both countries went to two opposite sides on diplomatic and geostrategic fronts but the mistrust between the two had begun soon after the 1971 war when both Iran and Pakistan were looking to ensure territorial integrity and security by providing sea-port to the US. Pakistan wanted to host US ships in the region at Gawadar while Iran was pitching her Chabahar port for the same purpose (Vatanka, 2015). Before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Tehran and Islamabad enjoyed cordial ties for many years as both countries were part of many regional and global alliances like CENTO, RCD, etc.

It's an interesting study that how these cordial relations were changed from magnanimous to the current situation of mistrust, discord, and strategic estrangement? Divergent strategic interests at the regional level, issues like cross-border terrorism from Iranian soil to Baluchistan, sectarianism, opposing economic interests, and competing foreign partners are a few key reasons behind the meltdown of bilateral relations. Despite these problems, today both countries are not at a time of daggering, but their relationships are marked at times by suspicion, rivalry, and even animosity (Vatanka, 2015). Iranian revolution proved to be a catalyst in the deterioration of ties. Iranian revolution affected bilateral relations negatively due to the social composition of both countries and the sectarian nature of the Iranian revolution.

During the 1980's Pakistan, a predominantly Sunni state became estranged from predominantly Shia Iran after both countries underwent Islamization processes under opposing schools of thought (Hunter, 2010). The Iranian revolution was a Shia uprising while in

Pakistan, Gen Zia's reforms in the country were based on the Sunni school of thought. USA and Afghanistan were other important factors as Iranian policies regarding both of these nations diverged from Islamabad's foreign policy. Iranian revolutionary regime instigated animosity with Washington and the anti-US assertiveness of the revolution further changed the foreign policy outlook of Iran (Hunter, 2010).

Despite this growing discord between Iran and the rest of the world after the Iranian revolution, Pakistan was the first country to recognize the new revolutionary regime in Tehran. Despite growing sectarian strife between the security establishments of both countries, Pakistan allied with Iran in 10 years-long the Iran-Iraq war. All GCC countries, the US, and the West were allied with Iraq including Saudi Arabia. This was seen as a balancing attempt by Pakistan regarding its relations with Post-revolution Iran (Shah, 1997). The violent outcome of this war led to spread the of sectarian tensions across Pakistan and Iran. Iran began to influence the Shia population of Pakistan while Saudi Arabian funding also began pouring in. Both in. Many local groups joined this conflict turning local lands into Battlefield on a sectarian axis.(Shah, 1997)

Another point of convergence was support for Afghan Mujahideen during the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan. But here too, sectarian and ethnic divergence in strategy harmed the bilateral relations as Islamabad was supporting Pashtun factions while Tehran was aiding Hazaras, Tajik Shia fighters.

Once USSR was ousted from Afghanistan, differences in dealing with Afghanistan in the 1990s were another key reason for the degeneration of bilateral ties (Husain & Husain, 2016). During the infighting between various Afghan militant factions, the Taliban captured Mazar-e-Sharif and executed hundreds of males belonging to opposing ethnic and sectarian factions (Hazaras, Tajik, and Uzbek) among those killed were eight Iranian officials at the Iranian consulate in the city and an Iranian journalist (Watch, 1998). As Pakistan was among only 3 countries that have accepted the Taliban regime (along with Saudi Arabia and

UAE), Iran blamed Pakistan for approving such incidents.

Post 9-11: Relations amid Regional Chaos

The tragic event of 9/11 changed the politics in both countries. Pakistan became a major non-NATO ally in the global war on terror whereas Iran was included in the Axis of Evil by the then US President. This US policy towards Iran took away impetus from Tehran and Islamabad to warm up relations once again in a post-Taliban era in Afghanistan. Hence, the US factor that had once brought these two neighbors together was now widening the gulf between them (Heradstveit & Bonham, 2007).

The American invasion of Afghanistan's emphasis on transformative democracy alarmed Iranian leadership and Iran tried to get its strategic interests in Afghanistan aligned with the US interests. US presence in Afghanistan and subsequent ouster of Taliban from Kabul was welcomed by Tehran, but soon Iran found herself encircled by the US forces after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Pant, 2009). Iranian foreign policy in the context of regional geopolitics took a very different strategic outlook after the US invasion of Iraq. Albeit the US-Iran relations continued to carry animosity bilaterally but they become partners in the greater Middle East region. Below is a snapshot of regional geopolitics post-US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq;

Iran cooperated during the initial invasion of US forces in Afghanistan in October 2001. But the then US President G.W Bush included Iran in the "Axis of Evil" in 2002. This sowed seeds of great mistrust between the two nations. Iran-US Cooperation even afterward as the US had realized and continued with the policy of balancing the power equation in Afghanistan, Iraq, and across the region (Barzegar, 2010).

The US and Iran cooperated to bring a new Iraqi government after Saddam's death. This cooperation embolden Tehran and it aggressively began supporting many Shia uprisings in GCC countries. Growing Iranian role was not seen pleasantly by many Arab countries. Jordan and Egypt infamously warned against the creation of a "Shi'a crescent" with

Iran in a leading role in the region (Barzegar, 2008). Iran-Egyptian discord in mutual relations dates back to 1979 when Iran severed ties with Egypt over a peace deal with Iran.

In Syria, the US and Iran are on opposing sides. Iran helped Bashar al Asad while the US wanted to topple the Syrian regime amid the Syrian civil war and anarchy after the rise of ISIS. It's worth noticing that Syria was the first Arab country to recognize the revolutionary regime of Iran. Turkey and Saudi Arabia became active in Syria and Iraq respectively, after growing Iranian overtures in these countries.

Relations between Pakistan and Iran began to plunge further after Iran accused Pakistan of interference in Sistan-Baluchistan and terrorist outfit like Junadullah carried out suicide bombings from Pakistani Baluchistan. Iran accused Jundullah was trained and armed by the US / Britain (Sial, 2015). Iran along with Russia and India began to support elements of former Northern Alliance members; a move seen with suspicion by Islamabad.

The proposal of the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline was strategically the most promising impetus for both countries to undertake a project that can lead to the economic integration of the 3 countries by aligning their energy security means. India backed off from the deal after the US ensured strategically a more lucrative alternative in the form of a civilian nuclear energy deal also known as the 123 Agreement between the US and India signed in 2005.

Taking impetus from the changed Afghan situation, Iran began to engage with Pakistan for economic relations. In this regard, President Khatami visited Pakistan in 2003 and this visit was reciprocated by his Pakistani counterpart PM Jamali next year. Both countries made fresh developments in the economic sphere by signing a Preferential Trade Agreement to help trading bodies of both sides to run their operation in close coordination to enhance trade opportunities for both countries (Moonakal, 2020). Pak-Iran bilateral trade continue to grow till 2008-09 when Iran was put under strict sanctions over her nuclear ambitions by the UN, US, and western countries.

Pakistan Iran Relations 2008-Present

Iran has been governed by two different political parties during this era. President Ahmadinejad led the country from 2005-to 2013. He belonged to the "Alliance of Builders of Islamic Iran". From 2016 -to 2021, Iran was reigned by President Hassan Rohani belonging to Moderation and Development Party. While in Pakistan, the country transitioned from the military rule of Gen. Musharraf to democratically elected governments of 3 different parties PPP (2008-2013), PMLN (2013-2018), and PTI (2018-2022) respectively. A harsh reality is that amid all these political changes, in both countries, bilateral relations remained closely linked with geopolitical dynamics instead of economic cooperation, regional interconnectedness, and mutual progress. Some progress was made but eventually regional and global geopolitical dynamics compelled Islamabad to limit its economic interaction with Iran.

During this time, Pakistan and Iran also decided to pursue the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline deal bilaterally. In 2010 both Iran and Pakistan finalized a multibillion-dollar project. The 7.5-billion-dollar project allowed Iran to supply Pakistan with up to 750 million cubic feet of gas daily (Moonakal, 2020). Many global and regional factors impact Pak-Iran bilateral ties such as the troubling dynamics of US-Iran relations; Europe and India's careful balancing act between Iran and the US, and the ensuing chaos in the Middle East.

REGIONAL AND GLOBAL DYNAMICS

Regional dynamics

Since 9/11, the Middle East has been in the eye of the storm due to extremely volatile political developments, ensuing conflicts, the resurgence of extremist militant outfits, and post COVID-19 fragile economic outlook in many counties leaving very limited space for nation-states to adopt long term foreign policy strategies. In such a complex strategic milieu, Pakistan and Iran maintained cordial relations in multiple spheres of diplomacy yet due to the security situation of the region, security establishments, from both sides, displayed disinclination to warming up

strategic ties in the security sphere that contributed to the mutual distrust (Husain, 2016), which was the outcome of divergence and convergence of security interests of varying actors in different theaters across the region on difference axis (i.e. sectarian, ethnic, linguistic).

Terrorism remained a menace in the post-9/11 world and it affected both the countries. Iran and Pakistan accused each other of the perceived failure of others to take measures to uproot the bastion of terrorism across the Pak-Iran border. Iran warned Pakistan over the inaction against state-sponsored terror activities emanating from Pakistan (Moonakal, 2020).

Global Dynamics

The rise of China as a global player and second-largest economy in the world was yet another watershed event. China emerged on the global stage during the 2010s with her Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which promised the world an alternative global order based on mutual progress as opposed to the prevailing global order based primarily on the US.

Chinese model revolves around big investments in allied counties to maintain their advanced infrastructure while the US and many western analysts consider this investment as a debt trap. Iran and China signed a 400 billion USD deal (Hurley et al., 2019). Around 68 countries across Asia, Europe and Africa have become part of the BRI initiative in China.

International sanctions on Iran over its nuclear program are the most challenging global dynamics of Pak-Iran relations. These strict sanctions have been imposed over the years in multiple episodes by the US and UN. But these sanctions are not uniform and the US herself has created exceptions. For example, in June 2012, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced Iran sanctions exceptions for India, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Turkey, and Taiwan.

OPPORTUNITIES

In this section, the paper will examine various areas where Islamabad and Tehran can boost their bilateral ties to further their interests mutually.

Trade and Commerce

There are ample economic and trade opportunities between the two countries. Iran, due to its geographical proximity to Pakistan, can become an energy hub of Islamabad in very economic terms. Iran can fulfill Pakistan's growing oil and gas demands. Pakistan and Iran had a bilateral understanding to build multi-billion dollars Iran – Pakistan gas pipeline after India was acquitted of the project.

Another area where both countries can boost their bilateral relations is the management of mutual trade which stands at around US\$ 6.25 billion but unfortunately, out of this volume, there is very little documented and formal trade. As per Iranian sources, only US\$1.26 billion in trade takes place through well-documented channels while the rest remains through informal channels (Raza, 2020). Pakistan's strategy toward trade with Iran remains skeptical. A number of policy decisions taken by Islamabad, ostensibly under the US pressure, dented trade diplomacy between the two countries. For example, the decision not to build a gas pipeline on the Pakistani side after signing an agreement with Iran. On this Iran even threatened to take Pakistan to an international court to impose a fine. Similarly, despite signing The Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) in 2004, Islamabad couldn't conclude Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Iran as was agreed during meetings of political leadership from both sides.

Energy Sector

Iran is already providing Pakistan with 100 MW of electricity for border districts in Baluchistan. Pakistan is keen to get more Iranian energy which is cheap and there are very minimal requirements for building transmission infrastructure on the Pakistani side.

CPEC & China's rise as a global player

Both China and Pakistan are keen to extend CPEC to Iran to revive the historic route via Iran from the Indian sub-continent to Europe and Africa. CPEC is the flagship project of the BRI initiative. China can become an integrating source for the region through her BRI initiative.

China and Iran are already big trading partners. Iran has energy supplies while Beijing needs these supplies to maintain its rate of growth. Pakistan is also among the largest populations in the world, with growing energy demands. The economic integration of these 3 countries is paramount for realizing the dream of regional progress and mutual prosperity.

CHALLENGES

Balancing relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia

Sectarian divergence in Saudi Arabia and Iran has emerged as the biggest challenge for all pan-Islamic movements across the Muslim world. This divide has grown into a violent polarization of Muslim youth across the Middle East. Incidents of sectarian violence in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, and parts of Pakistan are the outcome of this Iran-Saudi rivalry. The most prominent challenge this conflict poses for other countries is how to balance foreign policy between the two. The Islamization campaign of General Zia-ul-Haq's regime during the 1980s in Pakistan shifted the balance away from Iran (Zahid, 2011).

Apart from the US pressure, balancing relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia is the biggest challenge for Islamabad to boost strategic ties with Iran. On the other hand, Islamabad had critically important relations with Saudi Arabia and UAE for economic reasons.

US factor

The biggest hindrance in bilateral economic and strategic relations between Iran and Pakistan is US pressure on Islamabad. Critical bilateral projects like the IP gas pipeline and FTA agreement remain in the doldrums. The evidence of the US pressure on the IPI gas pipeline came from the President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce & Industry (ICCI), Zafar Bakhtawari who while talking about the US pressure stated, "It was unfortunate that due to the influence of the US, India has opted out of IPI project while the US was also pressuring Pakistan to shun this important project "(Pak hints India 'pulled out' of IPI because of US Pressure, 2010).

Sanctions over Iran in pursuance of nuclear ambitions have added another layer of complexity to the entire geostrategic equation in the greater Middle East. After Iran and the US along with Western countries reached an agreement on the Iranian nuclear program, it was hoped that now Pakistan will also be able to pursue the trade and economic overtures with Iran but the Trump administration withdrew from JCPOA and ongoing covert conflict between Iran and the US in Syria, has complicated the entire equation once again diminishing the prospects strong Iran-Pakistan economic and strategic ties.

Iran – India relations and impact on Pak-Iran relations

India has always been a critical factor in Pakistan's foreign policy strategy. India has been pursuing a strategy of isolating Pakistan in the world and for this strategy to work, India has put special focus on Afghanistan and Iran and her efforts have met considerable extent of success due to inconsistent and often myopic foreign policy choices made by Islamabad.

India and Iran grew closer to each other during 2003-04 when Iran-Pakistan's overtures of reviving warm relations of the past once again got bulldozed by the US policy in the region and Pakistan backed off from pursuing bilateral relations with Tehran aggressively after reaching understanding between the political leadership of both countries.

For example, in 2003 Pakistan couldn't capitalize on the growing closeness between Iran and the US (on Afghanistan and Iraq) while on the other hand, India signed the New Delhi Declaration with Iran which contained the following words:

"The two sides recognise that their growing strategic convergence needs to be underpinned with a strong economic relationship. Energy sector has been identified as a strategic area of their future relationship in which interests of India and Iran complement each other. India and Iran also agreed to explore opportunities for cooperation in defence in agreed areas, including training and exchange of visit."(Alam, 2004).

For India, this agreement was a key to opening a land bridge between Central Asia and Russia through a Russian initiative known as International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). India envisioned this route as a means to connect Russia through the Central Asian states to India and even the Southeast Asian region (Spector, 2002). This makes Iran a major link in this transit and energy-rich corridor which completely nullify Pakistan's geographic advantage.

Terrorism and Security Dynamics

Baluch insurgency in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan and unrest in Sistan-Baluchistan in Iran is yet another challenge for bilateral ties. 900 Kilometer long shared border is often exploited by the foreign-sponsored elements of chaos that have grouped under different terrorist organizations on both sides of the border. Cross-border terrorism and cross-border clashes between border security forces simultaneously keep disrupting local peace. According to Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there have been increased incidents of firing and shelling from Iran into Pakistani territory in the past years (*Pakistan protests border violations from Iran* 2019).

Similarly, Iran has its share of complaints. The activities of Jaish al Adal, a Sunni Muslim militant outfit, which is an offshoot of Jundullah have added to the border unrest such as their abdication of 12 Iranian border guards from the Mirjaveh town in Iran (Notezai, 2016). Some were recovered with Pakistan Army's efforts while others are still missing (Gul, 2018).

Apart from that, 6 Pakistani soldiers lost their lives when their convoy was ambushed in Ketch district, bordering Iran, during a routine patrol. The most prominent security-related incident between the 2 nations was the arrest of Indian terror mastermind and spy Kulbushan Jadev, who have been using Iranian soil to launch and handle terrorist attacks within Pakistan from the Chahbahar (Hussain & Jamali, 2019).

Iran's Nuclear Ambitions

Though there is no direct threat to Pakistan from the Iranian nuclear program yet this program and

the sanctions put on Iran have a direct impact on bilateral relations between the two nations. Pakistan and Iran cooperated during the 1970s and 1980s for a peaceful Iranian nuclear program. After Abdul Qadeer Khan's Episode, Pakistan was accused of helping Iran to build a nuclear weapon but in 2015, IAEA's evidence-based investigations exonerated Pakistan from this accusation (Mustafa, 2017).

Iranian nuclear program is not only a hindrance to more in-depth bilateral relations between Islamabad and Tehran it also poses a threat to regional stability. Israel has expressed her disdain and hostility towards the Iranian nuclear program in no unequivocal manner. Now, the Israeli air force is conducting exercises for a mock attack on the Iranian nuclear program, in response, Iran has threatened Israel with dire consequences if Tel Aviv tries to repeat the 1981's Operation Opera in Iran. Any flare-up in the region over Iran's nuclear program will push the entire region into a fresh round of instability, chaos, and an uncertain future.

Boosting diplomatic, economic, and strategic relations with Iran in the presence of this nuclear program is a dangerous gambit for Islamabad. The best possible outcome from a Pakistani perspective would be a negotiated solution to this issue and Iran would be benefited from the same.

Recommendations

- Build diplomacy around economic integration of the region

Regional progress and prosperity hold center stage in Pakistan's National Security Policy document. Throughout its national history, Pakistan's predicament has always carried a permanent feature that is deep dependence on the support of the US and global financial institutes under its influence like IMF, World Bank, etc. For a country that has remained financially dependent on the powers bigger than itself, the only option was to comply with the pressures that the US put on it. Though this appeasement strategy worked for Pakistan in the economic sphere and fiscal management, it limited Pakistan's option to look for sustained growth outside the clutches of international

monetary institutions at the same time as well. Islamabad needs to work aggressively on diplomatic innovation as far as the realization of geoeconomics-based security architecture is concerned.

- **Enhance cultural Ties**

Cultural exchanges can play a pivotal role in spreading general awareness about the historic ties between two countries. As cultural outlooks in both societies are conservative, so translated media productions in both countries will find acceptance paving the way forward for openness in public diplomacy by both Iran and Pakistan. This will also help eliminate many stereotypes about each other which prevail otherwise due to the sectarian outlook of each society.

- **Announce Energy Roadmap**

To avoid any diplomatic crises with traditional allies in GCC and the US, Pakistan must chart out a clear energy security roadmap depicting that for its demands, Pakistan will pursue every possible avenue to secure its energy needs. A recent visit by a former Pakistani PM to Russia caused a loud uproar in the certain echelon of global power and it was misunderstood as Pakistan's approval and support of Russian actions in Ukraine whereas Pakistan had no idea what Russian forces were about to unleash in Ukraine while Pakistani PM was in Moscow. So, in the future, it would be wise to have a clear energy security roadmap and let the world know it loud and clear.

- **Engage the US for a waiver in Iran's nuclear program-related Sanctions**

Islamabad needs to engage with the US state department to seek a waiver in sanctions related to Iran's nuclear program. India, for example, is included in the group of the country that has been included in the list of countries not affected by these sanctions. Resultantly, these countries are fulfilling their energy demands from Iran. Pakistan has a 900-kilometer border with Iran and is in dire need of cheap energy (gas and oil) which Iran can provide at the cheapest rate. Pakistan must build a strong case in this regard.

CONCLUSION

Pakistan and Iran are part of the strategically most important geography in the entire Eurasian landmass. The majority of global energy trade takes place through their waters. Both countries share a history of rich bilateral cultural and religious ties. After the independence of Pakistan, Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan and both began the journey of bilateral foreign relations with warmth but after the Iranian revolution and Russian invasion of Afghanistan, sectarian discord hijacked these warm relations and seeds of mistrust were sown. Pakistan and Iran in recent history tried to develop closer ties in the economic sphere as well but due to various regional and global dynamics hitherto have prevented both Islamabad and Iran from taking these ties to new heights. Pakistan, being a close US ally, will have to be innovative in diplomatic overtures to seek a way forward to develop close economic ties with Iran amid complex issues like the Iranian nuclear program and subsequent sanctions over Iran preventing this much-needed close cooperation in economic and other spheres of statecraft. There are opportunities to enhance bilateral relations and take them to strategic levels but for that Pakistan requires some innovation in diplomacy in the US/ West.

References

- Alam, S. (2004). Iran-Pakistan relations: Political and strategic dimensions. *Strategic Analysis*, 28(4), 526-545.
- Barzegar, K. (2008). Iran and the Shiite Crescent: Myths and realities. *Brown J. World Aff.*, 15, 87.
- Barzegar, K. (2010). Iran's foreign policy strategy after Saddam. *The Washington Quarterly*, 33(1), 173-189.
- Bhattacharjee, D. (2017). Pakistan and Iran—Changing Dynamics and Challenges.
- Gul, A. (2018). *Pakistan Rescues Kidnapped Iranian Border Guards* Voice of America. <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-rescues-kidnapped-iranian-border-guards/4660113.html>

- Heradstveit, D., & Bonham, M. G. (2007). What the axis of evil metaphor did to Iran. *The Middle East Journal*, 61(3), 421-440.
- Hunter, S. T. (2010). *Iran's foreign policy in the post-Soviet era: resisting the new international order*. Bloomsbury Publishing USA.
- Hurley, J., Morris, S., & Portelance, G. (2019). Examining the debt implications of the Belt and Road Initiative from a policy perspective. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*, 3(1), 139-175.
- Husain, J. (2016). *Pakistan and a world in disorder: A grand strategy for the twenty-first century*. Springer.
- Husain, J., & Husain, J. (2016). Iran: An estranged friend. *Pakistan and a World in Disorder: A Grand Strategy for the Twenty-First Century*, 105-125.
- Hussain, M., & Jamali, A. B. (2019). Geopolitical dynamics of the China-Pakistan economic corridor: a new great game in South Asia. *Chinese Political Science Review*, 4(3), 303-326.
- Moonakal, N. A. (2020). The Challenges and Inconsistencies of the Iran-Pakistan Relationship. *e-international relations*, 31.
- Mustafa, M. Q. (2017). Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons Programme. *Strategic Studies*, 37(4), 39-64.
- Notezai, M. A. (2016). *Can ISIS Gain a Foothold in Balochistan?*. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/01/can-isis-gain-a-foothold-in-balochistan/>
- Pak hints India 'pulled out' of IPI because of US Pressure*. (2010). The Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/industry/energy/oil-gas/pak-hints-india-pulled-out-of-ipi-because-of-us-pressure/articleshow/6115164.cms?from=mdr>
- Pakistan protests border violations from Iran* (2019). Dawn. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1495875>
- Pant, H. V. (2009). Pakistan and Iran's dysfunctional relationship. *Middle East Quarterly*.
- Raza, F. (2020). Pakistan-Iran Relations in the Evolving International Environment. *Strategic Studies*, 40(2), 79-97.
- Shah, M. A. (1997). The foreign policy of Pakistan: ethnic impacts on diplomacy, 1971-1994. (*No Title*).
- Sial, S. (2015). *An analysis of emerging Pakistani-Iranian ties*. Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre.
- Spector, R. A. (2002). The North-South Transport Corridor. *The Analyst*, 3.
- Vatanka, A. (2015). *Iran and Pakistan: Security, diplomacy and American influence*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Watch, H. R. (1998). *Afghanistan: The Massacre in Mazar-I Sharif*. Human Rights Watch.
- Zahid, M. A. (2011). Dictatorship in Pakistan: A Study of the Zia Era (1977-88). *Pakistan Journal of History and Culture*, 32(1), 1-27.