

***An Analytical Discourse of US-Iran Politico-economic Conflict Post Islamic
Revolution period: Effects and Way-forward for Pakistan***

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Abstract

Iran is an immediate neighbour of Pakistan whereas US is one of the giant economic power and has been a strong economic donor for Pakistan. Therefore, maintaining a balanced relationship between these two nations has been extremely mandatory for Pakistan.

Problem Statement: *The study examines the US-Iran strained relations in the post Islamic Revolution period and its implications on Pakistan. The research also tries to highlight the weak policy options of Pakistan which remained hindrance for the neutral stance of Pakistan in Iran-US political dispute.*

Methodology: *The paper is qualitative in nature and is based on investigation and exploration of different facts to find out the causes of the ambiguities in Pak-US-Iran triangle.*

Findings: *It concludes that the conflicting relations between US and Iran would greatly affect Pakistan. Furthermore, this research suggests that Pakistan needs to neutralize its relation between Iran-US or prefer Iran for the promotion of its national interest since Iran is an immediate neighbour and can benefit Pakistan geo-strategically, geo-politically and socio-culturally.*

Recommendations: *Pakistan must prioritize Iran in the process of forging*

cordial and meaningful ties with the US since Iran is the immediate neighbour, an Islamic country and there are so many areas of convergence in Pak-Iranian relations which benefit Pakistan in many ways.

Keywords: *US, Iran, Revolution, Taliban, Pakistan*

Introduction

US-Iranian relations were extremely cordial and well-developed prior to the Islamic Revolution of 1979 as Iran complemented and protected the US regional objectives and interests in the Persian Gulf. In addition to this, the US believed that Iran was the most crucial nation in the area to achieve its Cold War goals (Alvandi, 2016). Furthermore, Iran remained one of the crucial nations for US in containing the spread of communism in West Asia, South Asia and the Middle East. However, in exchange, the US secured Iran's national security, supported domestic growth, maintained financial aid, reinforced the political system, and improved Tehran's reputation and stance at international fora. Therefore, Iran joined allies like Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) which was supported and sponsored by the US and Britain without any condition. In the entire tenure of Reza Shah Pahlavi, US-Iran ties remained positive and friendly (Rajaei, 2004).

However, the outbreak of the Islamic Revolution of 1979 in Iran, put an end to the US and Iran's three decades of cordial relations. It is commonly held that the US and Iran's previously amicable alliance turned into hostile after the Islamic Revolution, which is often viewed as the pivotal event in US-Iran relations. Furthermore, the Islamic Revolution not only turned their amicable relations into hostile ones, but made them the regional foes of one another (Little, 2008; Rajaei, 2004). Iran adopted a pro-Shia policy shortly after the Islamic Revolution, which not only alarmed Pakistan, but it also shocked the Arab world because Shias make-up was the second-largest religious community in the region and that could equally effect Pakistan in the region. The Arab countries, especially Saudi Arabia, actively participated in the US-USSR cold war to prevent Iran's Shi'ism doctrine from spreading further throughout the regio (Neo, 2020). Thus, ideological differences of Iran and Saudi Arabia created political tension for Pakistan as well because Pakistan has been a trust-friend of Saudi Arabia and an immediate neighbour of Iran. Therefore, Pakistan wished to find amicable relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. On the other hand, US and other anti-Iranian regional entities began a campaign to isolate Iran politically and economically on a global scale, the region witnessed even more political and ideological turmoil.

Political tension further continued to jeopardize Pak-Iran relations in 1979 as the region witnessed the siege of Mecca and Soviet military engagement in Afghanistan and meanwhile Pakistan decided to establish strategic partnership with US in Afghanistan as it was the demand of international peace and security. Pakistan support to US was meant to ensure regional peace and security. However, the very decision of Pakistan hurt Iran severally since Iran was against the US presence in the region and considered US the Great Satan (Alikhani, 2014). Iran believed that the US presence in Afghanistan would accelerate the sectarian violence. US equipped and trained the Mujahedeen

against the Soviet forces in Afghanistan that really disturbed Iran badly (Sial, 2013). Iran viewed that the equipment of Mujahedeen in term of weapon training in Afghanistan would be ultimately used to contain the spread of Shi'ism in the region. No doubt, Pak-US strategic partnership was intended to oust the Soviet forces from Afghanistan, Nonetheless, Iran expressed grave concerns about the Mujahedeen factor's exploitation in Afghanistan since it thought Mujahedeen would harm Iran's regional interests and national security (Tarhan, 2019). The US-Iran amicable nexus was diverted by Ayatollah Khomeini, the newly appointed spiritual leader of Iran, who referred US as the "Great Devil" (Rezaei, 2019). Iran could not, therefore, risk to find the US presence in the region anytime soon.

On the other hand, it needs to be learnt that it was the economic dependency, the political instability and international community demand that drove Pakistan to give strategic support to the US's proxy war in Afghanistan throughout the 1980s (Hilali, 2017). As a result, Pak-Iran ties were affected. Comparative studies of US-Iran relations for Pakistan are extremely complex since Iran and US represent contradictory regional policies whose impact are directly felt on the economy and politics of Pakistan. Iran is an immediate neighbour of Pakistan whereas US has been the largest economic donor for Pakistan since its birth. Therefore, maintaining a balanced relationship between these two have been extremely tough for Pakistan.

The paper explores the areas of divergence between US-Iran in South Asia and Middle East and their possible implications on Pakistan. Additionally, during the post-Islamic era, Pakistan began to lean toward the United States in Afghanistan in the 1980s and after the 9/11 attacks, which are the primary reasons for the strained relations between Iran and Pakistan. The paper also aims to address the questions why Pakistan has been unable to maintain either neutrality over Iran-US political conflict or establish a resulted oriented stance over US-Iran difference. Additionally, suggestions have been made to further strengthen the Iran-Pakistan relations.

Problem Statement

Iran is a regional power because of its robust economy and stable political system, whereas the US, as the only superpower in the world with a strong foreign policy, dominates global affairs. Furthermore, Iran's geographical location and the US's geopolitical standing have increased their prominence on the global stage. The US, one of the world's economic giants and the only superpower, has a significant political and economic influence in South Asia whereas Iran borders the Middle East on the northwest, which is an oil-rich region; it borders Central Asian countries on the north, which are known for their mineral and natural resources; it borders the Gulf on the south, which is also an oil-rich region; and it borders South Asia on the east, which is known for its strategic location, nuclear confrontation, and ethnic conflicts. Consequently, it is crucial to thoroughly examine the US-Iranian relationship and the ramifications it has for the region and the world. Since any dispute between the US and Iran will directly impact Pakistan, it is crucial to examine and research their bilateral connections.

A direct confrontation between the United States and Iran would have had an impact not just on their bilateral relationship but also on the global community and Pakistan in particular. Therefore, the paper intends to study and analyze US-Iran-Pakistan triangle relationship in the region.

Literature Review

Prior to the Islamic Revolution, ties between the United States and Iran were quite friendly, constructive, and cordial. Iran was seen as the US's ally in West Asia, acting as its policeman while simultaneously compromising its cultural, religious, and spiritual standards to further US objectives in the region. Furthermore, the United States of America provided Iran with many forms of political, social, and economic assistance.

However, the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution in Iran changed the convergence of the two states' interests into a divergence. Furthermore, the sudden U-turn in Iran's foreign policy not only led to strained ties between the US and Iran but also created problem for regional states including Pakistan. Moreover, Pak-US strategic partnership against Soviet intervention in Afghanistan further confused Pak-Iran relations. Alam (2004) writes in his paper that that a new game began in the region as the US lost Iran and the Soviet Union acquired Afghanistan as a result of the simultaneous events of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and Soviet forces' intervention in Afghanistan in 1979. The Iran-Pakistan relationship saw significant alterations as a result of these two events. Shah & Ismail (2023) Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the Iranian Revolution altered regional dynamics. Iran consequently became a revolutionary state that endangered US interests in the Middle East as well as regional security. Pakistan's alignment with Iran was negatively impacted by the geostrategic development.

The US and Iran's nuclear standoff has been another unsettling aspect of the US-Iranian relationship that has severely strained relations between Pakistan and Iran. US also blamed Pakistan in supporting Iran to go nuclear. Ahmad & Shah (2017) write in their paper that Iran was supported by the some officials of Pakistan to go nuclear. However, the international community never found any evidence of the allegations.

Theoretical Framework

It is often claimed that in international relations, national interest is the only thing that never changes. Realists hold that controlling and commanding international politics is the ultimate source of power. The states of the international community are motivated to participate in power politics by their national interests. The realist view of the international system—which they see as anarchical—is the source of this emphasis on relative power rather than absolute power. To protect their interests, uphold whatever agreements they may have made with other states, or preserve a desirable domestic and international order, all states are forced to rely solely on their own resources. The nation-state has no authority over it to restrain its strength.

Similar to this, the US has been depending on power politics to preserve its hegemonic status in international politics, making it the only superpower in a world where governments act independently. Small nations which depend on the US for both political and economic stability, cannot afford to sour their relations with the US. Since the US is the only superpower and has a dominant role in world politics. Therefore, the

paper has been studied within the framework of classical realism in which the US has been acting to ensure its relations strong with any state of South Asia with the command of its power.

Research Methodology

In essence, the entire study was qualitative in nature, with the researcher investigating novel concepts. In order to find fresh trends and concepts for the Pakistan-US-Iran triangle, the investigation also looked into the perspectives and ideas of many associated figures. To assert the pertinent information and facts about the suggested issue, the research, however, employed the descriptive strategy, historical approach, and analytical technique within the framework of qualitative research.

The primary and secondary sources were studied using triangulation and thematic analysis techniques in order to summarize, interpret, and ascertain the topic of the data that was gathered for the purpose of validating the outcome. To further guarantee the validity of the study, the triangulation method was applied to compare the sources' current knowledge. To further substantiate the central hypothesis of the investigation, every point was corroborated by the body of existing literature and contrasted with the study's finding.

Result and Discussion

The Islamic Revolution of Iran: Impacts on Pak-Iran Relations:

Pakistan has maintained friendly relations with Iran and the United States simultaneously after the Islamic Revolution since to ensure peace the region. Moreover, Iran and Pakistan have been the founding members of US sponsored Alliance, known as CENTO. Under the banner of Regional Cooperation Development (RCD), Iran and Pakistan continued to maintain economic connections (Zaidi, & Nirmal, 2022). Iran supported Pakistan during the Indo-Pak War of 1965. Furthermore, Iran gave Pakistan jet aircraft during the conflict, as well as fuel, nurses, and medical supplies (Alam, 2004). Furthermore, Iran was crucial to the 1971 Indo-Pak war against India because it supported Pakistan militarily and diplomatically. Reza Shah even described India's interference in Pakistan's internal affairs as a breach of international law (Ramana, 2012). Furthermore, Iran conveyed grave worries on the division of West Pakistan in December 1971 (Alam, 2004). Despite their differing Sunni and Shia ideologies, both nations worked together politically and economically during the Cold War to reduce the differences. However; The largest province of Pakistan, Balochistan, which borders Iran on the west by 909 kilometers, has remained the source of the greatest conflict between Iran and Pakistan (Khan, 2012). when Baloch nationalists went into hiding to press for the creation of a separate Balochistan in 1973, Pakistan and Iran were both equally affected by the insurgency (Khan, 2009). As a result, Iran's government gave Pakistan financial and military help in order to put an end to the insurgency (Bansal, 2006).

However, the Islamic Revolution of 1979 altered not just Iran's domestic affairs but also those of most of the neighboring countries, including Pakistan, as Iran pursued a policy of promoting Shi'ism, which alarmed the Sunni-dominated states in the region. The Iranian government dominated by Shias got further isolated as the Iran decided to

withdraw from CENTO and RCD. Despite Iran's isolation, differences with Arab world, Pakistan was the first state to recognize the newly Shia dominated administration of Ayatollah Khomeini. No doubt, there were serious pressure from the US and Arab World (Alam, 2004). The then Pakistan's Foreign Minister Agha Shahi made a significant trip to Iran on March 10, 1979, in order to establish historic diplomatic and religious ties in an effort to fortify the relationship between Iran Pakistan (Alam, 2004). Regretfully, a deep rift appeared in the relationship between Pakistan and Iran when Pakistan chose to support the US war against Soviet forces in Afghanistan, kept soft corner with the Gulf Cooperation Council, (Mehmood, 2012). and kept a neutral position during the eight-year Iraq-Iran conflict . Pakistan-Iranian ties thus reached at their lowest point. Undoubtedly, the Islamic Revolution was primarily an Iranian national matter; yet, Pakistan had significant social, cultural, economic, and religious ramifications from it. It broadly divided and activated the Sunni-Shia sects in Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan which became the main causes of sectarian violence in the region (Zaman, 1998). Most regrettably, A rift in Pak-Iranian relations was observed as Iran viewed the Pak-US strategic partnership a security threat for Iran.

The Post-Soviet Withdrawal Period from Afghanistan: Impacts on Pak-Iran Relations

The withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan and the departure of US from South Asia created a political vacuum in Afghanistan which became the bone of contention among regional powers. Pakistan and Iran raced towards Afghanistan to fill the vacuum, which sparked rivalry between them on the political, economic, and ideological fronts. Pakistan intended to settle down the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan and access the market of Central Asian Republics via Afghanistan whereas Iran aimed to protect Shia community in Northern Afghanistan and maintain economic activities with Central Asian States. Thus, the conflicting interest of Pakistan and Iran became the main hurdle between Pak-Iranian relations. Moreover, Pakistan's recognition to Taliban's regime and Pak-Saudi understanding in Afghanistan further confused Pak-Iranian relations as Iran looked the Pak-Taliban ties a politico-religious containment against Iranian policy in the region (Khan, 2012). Actually, Pakistan wanted the proper settlement of Mujaheddin in Afghanistan and peace in the region.

When the Taliban took control of Mazar-e-Sharif in August 1998, not only did they massacre a huge number of Iranian diplomats, but they also began the slaughter of thousands of Hazara Shias in Afghanistan, thus, Iran became more serious over Taliban issue (Rashid, 2008). Iran, therefore; attributed the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan onto Saudi Arabia and Pakistan (Khan, 2012). Analysts in Pakistan, however, felt that Iran had falsely accused Pakistan in an attempt to associate Pakistan with the terrorist organizations in Afghanistan which Pakistan had nothing to do with (Khan, 2012). In contrast, Pakistan had repeatedly asked Taliban elements to abstain from and put an end to sectarian violence; however, the requests were politely denied (Behuria, 2004). For example, Pakistan forbade the Taliban regime through diplomatic channels to demolish the Bamiyan Buddha statues when the Taliban administration

stated its intention to do so. However, the Taliban regime disregarded Pakistan's request (Chiovenda, 2014).

Later, Iran became involved in the Afghan conflict and began supporting the anti-Taliban forces in Afghanistan with assistance from Russia, India, and the Central Asian Republics (Milani, 2006). As a result, a conflict-ridden atmosphere developed in Afghanistan, severely harming relations between Pakistan and Iran.

Relations between Pakistan and Iran became more complex as sectarian warfare spread throughout Afghanistan and took numerous Shia's lives inside Pakistani territory. The most significant instance that can be brought up in this context is assassination of Iranian Consul General Sadiq Ganji in 1990 in Lahore, Pakistan (Grare, 2007). Additionally, the five significant Iranian Air Force officers that were killed in Rawalpindi in 1997 (Shah et al., 2015). Relations between Pakistan and Iran were severely strained by the sectarian killings of Iranian leaders in the region. Thus, there is no doubt that Afghanistan has been a problematic factor in Pak-Iran relations.

US-Iran Relations Post 9/11: Impacts on Pakistan

The unfortunate catastrophic incident of 9/11 brought a U-turn shift in the foreign policies of most of regional and international powers as they decided to be part of US-led coalition on War against terror. Unfortunately, terrorists were alleged to have operated on the soil of Afghanistan while attacking World Trade Centre (Ahmed, 2002). Consequently, because of Pakistan's strategic depth, the forces of the US-led coalition were stationed at various airbases in the area to target Taliban and guarantee the total elimination of the Taliban (Khawaja & Mahmood 2020) Thus, Pakistan's decision in parting with US-led coalition against war on terror in Afghanistan confused Pak-Iran relations. Iran was afraid that the US's presence in the area would encourage the escalation of sectarian bloodshed because of the past occurrences. Contrary the fact, Iran continued its support to US-led coalition for the sake of regional peace, however, Iran was well-informed about the fact that any failure of the mission would promote the pace of sectarianism and extremism in the region (Bahgat, 2003). But, Iran remained extremely cautious and limited of its political, economic and logistic support to US in the mission of war against terror. However, Iran wanted Pakistan to part away from the same mission which was not possible for Pakistan as a responsible member of international community. The strategic depth of Pakistan was another factor which drove Pakistan to be in the mission of war on terror after 9/11 incident.

Meanwhile, cordial bilateral Pak-Iran relations was the need of time in order to stop the spread of sectarianism in the region. In order to combat terrorism, reduce drug and human trafficking, put an end to sectarian violence, and stop the smuggling of weapons, Pakistan and Iran jointly established "The Pak-Iran Joint Ministerial Commission" in 2001 (Khan, 2012). There is no doubting that the post-9/11 era had a negative impact on Pakistan's socio-political institutions and complicated ties between Pakistan and Iran. This was due to the US military's presence in the region which Iran felt serious threat from US (Bashir & Jan, 2014). In addition, Iran even voiced grave worries over US policies in the region, claiming that US presence in in the region would serve the long term strategies of US which are intended to thwart Iran's future political and economic

expansion (Alam, 2004). However, Iranian claim soon was emerged to have come true when President George W. Bush's declared Iran as the part of his doctrine, Axis of Evil in January 2002.

Unfortunately, Pak-US strategic partnership in Afghanistan after 9/11 once against created enough space for India to strengthen its relations with Iran (Ramana, 2012). Following 9/11 incident, Iran and India both demonstrated a strong desire to work together in the areas of economy and defense in Afghanistan. Pakistan was deeply shaken by Indo-Iranian defense and security cooperation over the Afghan issue for two key reasons:

- i. In order to suffice and entertain its politico-economic needs, Pakistan has found that Iran is the most suitable state in the region because of its socio-cultural affinities, geographical proximity and strategic location.
- ii. Indo-Iran alliance might jeopardize Pakistan's national security, sabotage CPEC project and support Baloch Separatist Movement by establishing itself in Iran and Afghanistan.

Therefore, Pakistan has never adopted any anti-Iranian policy despite of US pressure on Pakistan to part away in supporting Iran in Iran-Iraq war (1980-88), Iran nuclear program, and to be the part of Iran Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project etc (Alam, 2004).

The US Factor in Pak-Iran Trade Relations

The geographical proximity, cultural affiliation, historical trade relations, the common religious beliefs and legacy of faith between Iran and Pakistan are certain areas of convergence which made their bilateral relations encircled in the theory of non-zero-sum game since 1947. Both nations have remained allies under the banner of Organization OIC, UNO, NAM, CENTO, RCD, and ECO. The historical friendship and geographical proximity of Iran and Pakistan paved the road to establish strong trade relations. Initially, under the system of Barter Trade, both countries developed strong trade relations (Zeb & Javaid, 2020). The trade relations between them further grew up under the umbrella of RCD as both countries established, initiated and materialized many projects (Zeb & Javaid, 2020). Furthermore, the trade relations between them continued under ECO as well. The ECO was established to replace RCD which turned to be greater in context of scope and strength which aided in the institutionalization of bilateral trade connections between the two nations with the natural-blessed Republicans of Central Asia in 1992.

The ECO remains tremendously essential for Pakistan in the context of the development of economy for the below listed reasons.

- i. To overcome its own energy crisis, Pakistan can import energy from the most powerful nations in the world through the ECO.
- ii. Pakistan is the only nation among all of the members with the most developed and robust political system and the sole acknowledged nuclear power.
- iii. Every member state has cordial ties with Pakistan.

It is disappointing to learn that despite Pakistan cordial relations with the all member states, it remained unable to strengthen its trade with Iran due to international economic

and political sanctions on Iran (Lal & Saeed, 2014). It is believed that the external factor of US has never been in favour of Pak-Iran trade ties (Alam, 2004). Additionally, Pakistan experienced a trade imbalance from 1996 to 2005 as a result of its inability to balance its trade with Iran, particularly with regard to import and export (Khan, 2012). However, the nominal trade relations continued with Iran from time to time.

However, because of its pursuit of nuclear enrichment, Iran has been subject to severe political and economic sanctions imposed by the US, the UN, and the European Union. In addition, Iran was cut off from international politics throughout the post-Islamic Revolution era. Iran has undoubtedly been in hot water due to its isolation from the international community and the imposition of harsh economic sanctions, but it has always attempted to maintain its trading links with Pakistan (Alam, 2004). The clearest illustration of Iran and Pakistan's trade partnership can be seen in the establishment of the Economic Community of East Asia in 1985 under the banner of ECO. The Iranian government suggested creating a Common Border Market (CBM) at Mirjaveh to curb smuggling between Iran and Pakistan (Khan, 2012). Without a doubt, the implementation of CBM in Pakistan's border region was ineffective because to the region's great roughness, lack of connectivity gaps, dispersed population, and tall, inaccessible mountains. The projected market did, however, continue to strengthen Pakistan-Iranian commercial ties (Khan, 2012).

Given that many residents of Pakistan's Taftan and Makran Districts in Balochistan depend on Iran for their daily income, Pakistan has benefited greatly from Iran's close vicinity. Iran's border connectivity has made it easier for Pakistan to meet its energy needs. Iran has been supplying electricity to the Makran region of Balochistan for quite some time (Khan, 2012). The western Balochistan, specially Makran division of Balochistan suffice their daily needs via Iranian goods and other commodities.

The US Factor in Pak-Iran Defence Relations

In addition to their diplomatic and cultural ties, Pakistan and Iran have had friendly defense ties since 1947. Due to territorial issues and border separatist movements, both sides have benefited from bilateral collaboration for national security. Since the Greater Freedom Movement of Balochistan was intended to free Balochistan from Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan have also been noted for upholding their shared security interest in the matter which is a common issue for the both nations (Rehman, 2014).

Historically, Iran and Pakistan have been close allies of US in the region. Moreover, Iran acted as policeman for US to protect and promoted the regional interest of US during cold war (Wise, 2012). In returned, Iran was guaranteed political and economic supports by US. The most interesting fact was that during the said period, the mature bilateral relations of US and Iran never harmed Pakistan. The best example can be cited in this context was the amicable membership of Pakistan and Iran under the banner of CENTO to address their security issues with collective efforts against external threats.

However, Pak-Iran relations took another drive in the eve of outburst of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 due to strained relations of Iran and US. Pakistan suffered greatly from the US-Iranian antagonism after the Islamic Revolution since Iran was unhappy

for Pakistan as it supported US in Afghanistan against Soviet intervention (Khan, 2014). Meanwhile, Pakistan tried its best to maintain good relations with Iran after the Islamic Revolution. Without a doubt, Zia-Ul-Haq first made an effort to change the spiritual leader of Iran's unfavourable attitude, but his rigidity prevented him from succeeding. Consequently, over the whole 1980s decade, the defense ties between Pakistan and Iran were severely disrupted. Furthermore, Iran was greatly displeased with the decade's events, which included sectarian bloodshed and the murder of Shias in the region. During the post-Islamic era, Saudi Arabia-sponsored Wahabism emerged in the region which irked Iran as well (Ramsey, 2017).

Inheriting common geographical issues, Pakistan and Iran quickly realized to come up with collective efforts to deal timely. In this regard, The Pak-Iran Defence Agreement was signed by in 1989. Iran and Pakistan have worked together to produce a wide range of military hardware, including tanks and helicopters (Zehra, 2003). Furthermore, one of the main examples of the two countries' cooperation for security objectives is the conclusion of the Pak-Iranian Joint Ministerial Commission in November 2001, which was intended to address all security challenges, including terrorism, drugs, extremism, sectarian conflict, and smuggling. But when Pakistan closeness with United States in the global fight against terrorism, the post-9/11 era caused hostility between Pakistan and Iran since Iran thought that Pakistan's engagement would lead to regional conflict similar to what happened in the 1980s (Bahgat, 2003).

Despite their timely differences, nobody can deny the fact that Iran could never afford to disturb its relations with Pakistan since defence ties between them have been in the greater political and military interests of both states. According to reports, Pakistan assisted Iran in the process of nuclear technologies (Alam, 2004).

Non-State Actors in Iran and Pakistan: Impacts on Pak-Iran Relations

Pakistan and Iran are located at the most important region of the world. Therefore, both states have been the centre of focus for politico-economic enhancement of regional and international powers. In order to entertain their political motive and attain economic needs, the regional and international powers have been involved in sponsoring and supporting non-state actors such as Jundullah, Taliban, Al-Qaeda, Baloch Liberation Movement, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Muhammad in the region (Khan, 2012). In addition to cause socio-political and ethno-economic issues for Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan, the aforementioned non-state entities' actions have seriously caused strained ties between Pakistan and Iran.

Calling itself the defender of Sunni Muslims' rights in Iran, Jundullah has been claimed to operate in the region (Khan, 2012). It has been alleged that Jundullah has been involved in killing Shias in Iran (Khan, 2012). In addition, reports suggests that for the protection of Sunni Muslims' rights in Iran, Abdolmalek Rigi created Jundullah, which may have received assistance from Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Tareek-e-Taliban (Bhattacharjee, 2015). However, Iran has described the group as a terrorist organization supported by the US in the region with possible regional supports that targets Shia Muslims in the area (Mazhar et al., 2012). Iran-Pakistan relations continue to be unsettled by the factor of Jundullah.

Furthermore, Iran has claimed that the US has been supporting Jundullah in the region with potential assistance from certain regional actors in an effort to undermine Iran's authority in the Persian Gulf and destabilize the country (Khan, 2012).

As a result, the tense relations between Iran and Pakistan have a negative impact on those relations. For example, Iran deployed several Revolutionary Guards of Iran and Baseej soldiers at the Sistan border line, which connects the Pakistani region of Balochistan (Khan, 2012). Trade and business ties between the two countries were severely hampered by Iran's strict border security.

Conclusion:

Balancing its relations with US and Iran has been an uphill task for Pakistan since the Islamic Revolution of Iran since Pakistan has been linked with both of them politically and economically. US has been a strong financial donor for Pakistan whereas Iran has had geographical proximity, socio-ideological affiliation and economic ties with Pakistan since 1979. Therefore, contradictory approaches between US and Iran, have created political tension and economic difficulties for Pakistan in respect to US-Iran ties. There is no doubt that US has been a great problematic factor in Pak-Iran relations since the Islamic Revolution of Iran, but Pakistan needs to realize the fact that the friendship of US has given Pakistan less and snatched more and most importantly created rift in Pak-Iran bilateral relations. The extremism, terrorism and sectarianism which affected Pak-Iran relations have been created and sponsored by US' proxy and covert activities in South Asia. Therefore, it is high time that Iran and Pakistan realize the geo-political importance and geo-economic necessities of region and ensure strong bilateral relations in order to deal with their common issues like extremism, terrorism, Balochistan Liberation Movement and regional proxies war with collective efforts and mutual cooperation.

Recommendation for the development of Pakistan-Iran Relations

The significance of Pak-Iran relations cannot be denied since both have geographical proximity, socio-cultural affiliation and interdependent economic ties. Unfortunately, their relations have been affected badly by the external factors, like US, Saudi Arabia and India. It has been further disappointing to learn that both Pakistan and Iran inherited territorial disputes, tradition rivals and insurgencies.

Iran is Pakistan's immediate neighbor, has shown its genuine friendship in times of need, and has acknowledged Pakistan in international fora. Based on these and other considerations, Pakistan must prioritize Iran in the process of forging cordial and meaningful ties with the US. Therefore, Pakistan needs to strengthen its ties with Iran to eradicate extremism, sectarianism and terrorism with collective efforts since these are the common issues for both . Furthermore, the Balochistan Separatist Movement, advocating for a larger Balochistan, also asserts that it is entitled to liberate Sistan and Balochistan in order to establish an independent Balochistan. Both sides' Baloch nationalists assert that Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan have taken over Balochistan. Therefore, Balochistan is a factor to bridge Pak-Iran political differences.

Apart from other bilateral issues, Pakistan has been direly facing energy crisis. In addition to disrupting people's daily routines generally, the severe load shedding of gas and electricity has had a detrimental impact on domestic manufacturers and enterprises. However, given that Iran is Pakistan's immediate neighbour and has abundant oil and gas reserves, it is the best alternative for Pakistan to meet its energy needs. The western portion of Balochistan currently receives 75 MW of power from Iran (Rafique, 2016). Still, Iran is able to provide all of Balochistan, including the Southwestern region of Sindh, with gas and electricity. In addition to this, the people of Makran, Kharan and Taftan earn their livelihood from Iran which has eased the economic burden of Pakistan. Therefore, keeping the Balochistan factor, Pakistan needs to strengthen its ties with Iran. Despite heavy economic sanctions, Iran can be the most appropriate option for Pakistan to maintain its trade activities, ensure political stability and bridge ideological gulf.

China will now have access to warm water through the recently established agreement, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is hailed as a "fate changer." Gwadar Port is located just 72 miles from Iran's Chabahar Port (Rafee, 2017). To combat the opponents of the CPEC in the area, Iran's assistance and collaboration with Pakistan are unavoidable. Pakistan and Iran are closely linked due to their shared socio-cultural and ideological linkages, which extend beyond their political and economic differences. Pakistan should never jeopardize its ties with Iran at the expense of the United States.

Recommendations for Pak-US Relation

Pakistan has consistently and unwaveringly supported US regional policy. But rather than the reality that Pakistan was accused of using policies with double standards. Furthermore, Pakistan supported the US war against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s, and as a result, Pakistan was gifted with a never-ending wave of sectarian violence that has become a destabilizing factor in relations between Pakistan and Iran. Furthermore, in spite of domestic opposition, Pakistan once more demonstrated its strength as a US partner following the awful events of 9/11. Even though Pakistan's political, social, and economic landscape was severely disrupted by the so-called war on terror, the United States has never been happy with Pakistan's efforts to carry out this objective and has instead maintained its position to do more. There is no denying that Pakistan's involvement in the War on Terror increased the risk to relations between Iran and Pakistan. What wounded Pakistan the most was that, despite Pakistan being an extraordinary and unwavering ally of the United States in the region, the United States never provided assistance or support to Pakistan at its worst moments. Therefore, Pakistan needs to realize the fact that the relations with Iran should never be at risk in supporting regional policies.

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