

Pakistan-Iran Geo-Political Environment and the Discourse of Relations (1947-2017): A Reappraisal

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ABSTRACT

This research paper seeks to explore the history of Pak-Iran relations from the independence of Pakistan till the beginning of 21st Century. It provides a historical survey about geo-political and socio-economic developments of both the countries. Further, exploring the areas of important developments from both the sides, it highlights as to how brotherly relations between Pakistan and Iran became friendly and, later on, how both the countries became mere acquaintances. This study conveys to the reader a detailed discussion about the cooperation; challenges and opportunities availed by both the countries. It also sheds light upon all the important ties such as CENTO, RCD, ECO etc., and serious issues including Indo-Pak War of 1965 and 1971, Afghanistan Issue, transfer of nuclear technology, Pak-Iran gas-pipeline agreement, and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This article goes a long way in explaining the implications of internal and external forces, international trade system, role of neighbouring countries and the interference of the USA in Pak-Iran relations.

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Moreover, the research paper delineates that Iran is not only Pakistan's neighbour, but also enjoys its time-tested and close friendship, based on mutual trust and confidence, with Pakistan. At the outset of 21st Century, both Pakistan and Iran intend to further build up their cooperation and fortify their relations which are going into the positive direction.

Introduction

Relations between Pakistan and Iran have existed since the ancient times when the regions of present Pakistan were part of the Persian Empire.¹ In 1907, the Muslims of India got outraged at the partition of India and their feeling of loyalty towards the British rulers seemed to be over. After the Independence of Pakistan, the ties between both the countries improved.² The Persian language is still taken as the cultural language of Pakistan and its national anthem serves as a proof of it. Both the countries are bound together in centuries-old ethnic and cultural bonds.³

There is a long history of relations between both the countries, with part of the Pakistani culture, directly adopted from the Iranian cultures. The people of Pakistan and Iran, having common culture, religion, language and geography, possess long history of cultural heritage.⁴ Influence of art, literature and social customs of Iran was very strong in Pakistan due to common ethnic origin and relations to the same Aryan stock⁵ but this historic connection did not let them put their national interests aside. Pakistan is facing belligerent attitudes from its eastern border with India and

1 A.L. Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (London: Sedgwick & Jackson: 1987), 276.

2 Khalida Qureshi, "Pakistan and Iran: A Study in Neighbouring Diplomacy", *Pakistan Horizon* (Third Quarter, 1968): 34.

3 Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, 276; Tara Chand, *Indo-Iranian Relations* (New Delhi: Information Service of India, Embassy of India, 1964), 5.

4 Chand, *Indo-Iranian Relations*, 5.

5 Chand, *Indo-Iranian Relations*, 5; Tariq Rahman, *Language and Politics in Pakistan* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 27.

the north-western border with Afghanistan.⁶ It is worth noting that changing regional and global scenario has always left deep impact on Pak-Iran relations as well, which instigated them to pursue their own geo-political interests.

Pakistan's policy of aligning with the USA and Iran's inclination towards India on the other hand did not allow them to continue cordial relations with each other.⁷ Certain other factors like Iran's reservation about the sanctions from the USA, Afghanistan and Iraq's changing situation, the necessity to create balance of power between Iraq and Saudi Arabia and its concerns regarding sectarian violence also created hindrance in creating cordial relations between the two countries.⁸

Pak-Iran relations reached at the highest point during 1960s and 70s when Iran was being ruled by Shah.⁹ The relations between them were confronted with a fissure in 1980s; on the issue of Afghan conflict.¹⁰ Iranian President Ahmadinejad's support to Afghanistan's blame on the ISI for supporting insurgencies and contributing to make Afghanistan unstable widened the gulf between both the countries. Both Iran and Pakistan, owing to their geo-strategic connectivity and everlasting political, cultural and religious ties, are facing the direct economic interests and security challenges in the region.¹¹

6 Horward Wriggins, "Changing Power Relations between the Middle East and South Asia", *Survival* no. 4 (1976): 787; Basham, *The Wonder That Was India*, 276; Chand, *Indo-Iranian Relations*, 5; Sofia S. Mohammadaly, "Pakistan-Iran Relations: 1947-1979", *Pakistan Horizon* xxxii, no. 4(1979): 51-52.

7 Nasim Zahra, "Pakistan-Iran Relations: Compulsions and Conditions for a Strategic Relationship", *The Institute of Strategic Studies*, 2003, Islamabad; Joseph Frankel, *International Relations* (London: University Press, 1969), 71-72.

8 Zahra, "Pakistan-Iran Relations".

9 Shah Alam, "Iran-Pakistan Relations: Political and Strategic Dimensions", *Strategic Analysis* 28, no. 4(2004): 526.

10 Hafeez Malik, ed., *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan* (London: The Macmillan Press, LTD, 1987), 96.

11 Malik, *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan*, 96.

Pak-Iran Relations (1947-59)

Pakistan's political inclination towards Iran commenced with its emergence as an independent state in 1947, with Iran firstly acknowledging Pakistan's freedom on August 22, 1947 as a sovereign country. Muhammad Reza Shah of Iran was also the first king who visited Pakistan. Both the countries' top leadership exchanged visits to establish cordial relationship and signing treaties. This scenario also divided India's contiguity with Iran, making Pakistan the determining force in interaction between Iran and India.¹² Pakistan, having Iran as its neighbour and other eastern and north-western countries as its opponents, looked towards the Shah of Iran for support and brotherhood since its coming into being. Iran, unlike the role of Afghanistan, tried to develop strong ties with the Muslim countries of the region. For financial benefits and opportunities, Iran seemed a potential source of development for Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan's relations towards the Middle Eastern countries for the sake of oil supplies made Iran a useful associate. Pakistan received highly privileged treatment regarding the prices of petroleum, and as a result, it braced the administration of the Shah of Iran. The alliance between Pakistan and Iran paved the way for its support to Arab governments especially the Gulf States and Jordan.¹³ Liaquat Ali Khan announced that Pakistan's aim was to endorse cooperation among the Muslim countries for the sake of creating harmony and unity among them. During his period, the treaty of friendship was signed between Iran and Pakistan.¹⁴

The national security interests held immense importance for both the countries which led them to develop brotherly relations with each other during aforementioned period. After August 1953, in the changing geo-political scenario, Iran got importance in the region when the Shah of Iran came back

12 Retrieved from: www.jworldtimes.com/JWT-January2017.

13 Alam, "Iran-Pakistan Relations", 526.

14 Malik, *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan*, 96; For details see, "Pakistan's Relations with Islamic States: A Review by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs", *Government of Pakistan* (February 21, 1997): 217-36.

to his throne after a short exile.¹⁵ After coming back to power, Muhammad Reza Shah of Iran got popularity among the peasants and the agriculturalist class by bestowing them with the crown land and other benefits. The Shah also nationalized the oil industry. During this time period, the USA helped Iran to manage its economic crisis by giving it large sum of loans.¹⁶

By and large, the small powers use the trait of having relations with the supreme powers in order to safeguard its interests. Similarly, Raymond Aron argued, that small powers limit their ambitions for the purpose of their physical existence and to retain their solidarity, territorial integrity and independence.¹⁷ It seems convincing that Iran and Pakistan would have tried to cultivate friendship because of the adjacency of the Soviet Union to both of them. Having viewed this scenario with a critical outlook, the USA tried its best to provoke Pakistan to tilt towards its side, showing the economic and technical advancement in the early fifties.¹⁸

The Baghdad Pact and the Pak-Iran Ties

During cold war era, when the USA was manoeuvring to win the developing countries on its side, ultimately Pakistan and Iran favoured it. Having support of Iran and Pakistan, the USA led Baghdad Pact included Iraq, Turkey and Britain in 1955 as well.¹⁹ After the withdrawal of Iraq, it was renamed as Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1958.²⁰ Pakistan joined CENTO just owing to the insistence of Iran. Iranian

15 S.M. Burke, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1973), 65.

16 Kermit Roosevelt, *Countercoup: The Struggle for Control of Iran* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1980), 48-56.

17 Rouhollah K. Ramazani, "Emerging Pattern of Regional Relations in Iranian Foreign Policy", 1050; Marvin Weinbaum, and Gautam Sen, "Pakistan Enters the Middle East", *Orbis* 22, no. 3 (Fall, 1978): 595-612.

18 Ramazani, "Emerging Pattern of Regional Relations in Iranian Foreign Policy, 1050.

19 W.C. Eveland, *Ropes of Sand: American's Failure in the Middle East* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980), 22-27.

20 Muhammad Ayub Khan, *Friends Not Masters* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 130.

scholar Mujtaba Razvi pointed out that Pakistan would not have joined CENTO, had Iran not decided to do so. This makes it clear that Islamabad and Tehran's convergent security objectives in the region compelled them to collaborate with each other.²¹ It all happened on account of economic gains, as confirmed by Ayub Khan.²²

Pakistan and Iran also asserted the imposition of consolidated structure of the CENTO army because the other member countries were also associated to other defense alliances, but this was not the case with Pakistan and Iran and they were devoid of defense power. So, both the countries continued to collaborate under the patronage of CENTO till Iran left after the fall of Shah of Iran in 1979.²³ One can assess that under these dire circumstances, how Iran and Pakistan cooperated in the form of common approaches to various matters under the US sponsored alliance system such as CENTO.²⁴ Thus, the CENTO was conceived as a bridge or a chain of link between the allies anchored by NATO in the West (Europe). Pakistan became the member of both the SEATO and CENTO, whereas Iran did not become an ally to the members of SEATO.²⁵ Moreover, Pakistan and Iran were the crucial players on the edge of Asia. The problems of Pakistan were more complicated as compared to those of Iran.²⁶

Later, the Shah of Iran, being a great admirer of Pakistan, improved the relations in form of the appointment of boundary commission which was completed by 1959, and finally the government of Pakistan ratified the boundary agreement in 1960.²⁷ Later the resentment and conflicts emerged between both the countries and the brotherhood

21 Para Din, "Pak-Iran Relation since 1947", *Iran Embassy*, 2010.

22 Retrieved from: www.jworldtimes.com/JWT-January2017.

23 Malik, *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan*, 97.

24 Burke, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy*, 171.

25 Burke, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy*, 171; Eveland, *Ropes of Sand*.

26 Eveland, *Ropes of Sand*, 25-26.

27 Malik, *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan*, 96-97.

that started after Pakistan's inception did not continue for long.

Pak-Iran Relations (1960-78): As Friends

In the early sixties, the warm relations between Pakistan and Iran started to lose their strength of brotherhood at a steady pace. The natural forces of geo-strategic environment turned the tide of their alliances towards deterioration. The instinctive spirit of the US dictatorship played a very significant role in the region that affected the relations of Pakistan and Iran, by creating cleavage between both the countries. While remaining as the pact's active partner, the USA never formally joined the alliance which compelled Iran to think about its national interests.²⁸ During the economic crisis, American aid to India against the wishes of Pakistan created gap between Pakistan and America because, in this way America, in an effort to disrupt the relations of India and Russia, was supporting Pakistan's arch enemy.²⁹ On the one hand, the USA wanted to suppress the influence of Communism in the region; on the other, it was not ready to entangle itself in Pakistan's dispute with India.³⁰

Having been betrayed by the USA, Ayub Khan tried to diversify his relations with the Communist bloc and favoured Pakistan's relations with China and the Soviet Union in 1962.³¹ Thus both Pakistan and Iran began to cultivate a regional outlook in dealing with their respective problems.³² President Ayub Khan himself suggested collaboration between Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan at a public meeting in Quetta in August 1962.³³ However,

28 Ehsanullah Saqib, *Pakistan Affairs* (Lahore: Dogars Publishers, 2003-04).

29 Safdar Mahmood, *A Political Study of Pakistan* (Lahore: Mohammed Ashraf, 1972), 272.

30 Christopher Jaffrelot, ed., *A History of Pakistan and its Origins* (London: Anthem Press, 2002), 101.

31 Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan: 1947-2000* (Washington D.C. Woodrow Winson Centre Press, 2001), 74.

32 R.K. Ramazani, "Iran and the Arab Israeli Conflict", *Middle East Journal*, Washington D.C., (Autumn, 1978): 416.

33 *Pakistan Horizon* (First Quarter, 1962): 78.

throughout the 1960s, the gap between performance and promise remained piteously unabridged. China became a chosen partner of Pakistan because of the Sino-Soviet problem and changed geo-political situation as indicated by Sino-India conflict of 1962.³⁴ During his presidency, Ayub Khan also visited Soviet Union and promoted Pak-Soviet and Pak-China relations.

As far as Iran was concerned, the 1960s started with the growth of diplomatic ties with Egypt and propaganda against the Shah of Iran by Arab nationalists; its relations with Iraq also deteriorated in the same decade.³⁵ During this decade, both Iran and Pakistan yearned for deeper relations with the Arab states on account of implicit personal gains, i.e. the Shah's secret aim for establishing relationship with the Arab countries was to counter the emerging power and desires of Arabs' revolutionary leaders. While, Pakistan's closeness with the Arab states aimed at seeking support of the Arab states against India especially on Kashmir issue.³⁶ The US government had no intention, of either proposing a solution or forcing India to accept United Nations resolutions on Kashmir issue, while Iran supported Pakistan's entry in the UN and its stand on the Kashmir problem.³⁷

The Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) and the Formation of ECO

For regional collaboration and expansion of trade, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey formed an organization named the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) in July 1964 and its headquarter was established in Tehran. Later on, in January 1985, the RCD was transformed into a larger cluster known as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).³⁸ The

34 *Pakistan Horizon* (First Quarter, 1962): 78.

35 Jaffrelot, *A History of Pakistan and its Origins*, 101; Khan, *Friends Not Masters*, 22.

36 For details see, Chubin Shahram and Zabih Sepehr, *The Foreign Relations of Iran: 1974* (Berkeley: University of California Press), Chapter III & IV.

37 Weinbaum and Sen, "Pakistan Enters the Middle East".

38 Altaf Gauhar, *Ayub Khan: Pakistan's First Military Ruler* (Lahore: Sang-e-Meel, 1993), 229.

objective of RCD was to promote cultural and socio-economic purposes in the region. This organization was an example of socio-economic regional alliance whereas the CENTO was an international military alliance. Moreover, both the organizations bolstered each other because the headquarters of CENTO was housed in the Turkish capital city Ankara; both Tehran and Ankara were well-connected with each other.³⁹ The projects of both the organizations tended to intertwine each other. Nevertheless, the RCD continued to sustain its objective but the CENTO with the passage of time started to lose its charm.⁴⁰ It is a natural phenomenon that in the world of interdependence and globalization, poor nations usually endeavour to save their own interests by aligning themselves with strong regional alliances. So, the regional cooperation for development was framed just to stop the instinctive spirit of the USA's dictatorship.⁴¹ It proved enormously significant for the Shah of Iran and Ayub Khan of Pakistan for winning support to their respective governments at home. The liberation from the USA was welcomed by opposition in both the countries. Yusuf Khatak, a Pakistani opposition leader, called it a move towards the right direction.⁴² Similarly, another member of the Assembly said that RCD members will be able to get rid of the curse of CENTO.⁴³

The formation of RCD was also warmly welcomed in Iran. Senate president, Jafar Sharif Emami, described the Union as a political master stroke, but perhaps emphasizing the non-political content of the agreement added that he believed that there was a better place in the union for Afghanistan.⁴⁴ The establishment of RCD was an

39 Sangat Singh, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: An Appraisal* (New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1970), 100; Ehsanullah Saqib, *Pakistan Affairs* (Lahore: Dogars Publishers, 2003-04).

40 Malik, *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan*, 97.

41 Malik, *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan*, 97.

42 *Dawn*, July 24, 1964. For details see, Khan, *Friends Not Masters*, 22.

43 *Pakistan, National Assembly Debates* Vol. 3, Part 2 (1964): 1212.

44 *Pakistan, National Assembly Debates* Vol. 3. Part. 2(1964): 1245.

independent decision on the part of Pakistani and Iranian governments, because before that, both the countries were under the influence of American sponsored alliance.⁴⁵

Though, this bloc did not make significant socio-economic strides, mainly due to lack of interest, it had somehow helped these three nations to come closer in terms of cultural exchange and extending of diplomatic and political support to one another, whenever they needed. Thus, the relations between Iran and Pakistan remained unaffected on informal grounds.⁴⁶ Later on, Pakistan, despite the changes of government, tried to build relationships of mutual confidence through contacts at all levels. Iran, Pakistan and Turkey were dissatisfied with the CENTO on different issues.⁴⁷ During this period, Pakistan was assisted diplomatically and materially by Iran.⁴⁸ Meanwhile, the CENTO was unable to assist Pakistan which gave out the signal of the demise of both; CENTO and RCD Organizations.⁴⁹ However, RCD never developed into an organization exploiting its potential. The Islamic revolution in Iran made RCD non-functional in 1979, but in 1985 it was reshaped and renamed as Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO).⁵⁰

45 Dawn, July 29, 1964.

46 Brigadier Saeed Ahmad, *Indo-Pak Clash in Ran of Kutch* (Rawalpindi: Army Education Press, GHQ, 1973), 117-18.

47 Malik, *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan*, 97.

48 Rouhollah Ramazani, *Iran's Foreign Policy: 1941-1973* (Virginia: University Press, 1975), 354.

49 Lawrence Ziring, ed., *Pakistan: The Long View* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1977) 301-303 also cited by, W. Howard Wriggins, "The Balancing Process in Pakistan's Foreign Policy".

50 Pakistan was dismayed by CENTO's failure to lend assistance in time of need, the organization survived until the Shah of Iran was forced to yield to revolutionary forces. By contrast, Pakistan abandoned SEATO after the loss of East Pakistan), while SEATO itself was disbanded in 1977, and a security pact remains operational through the Manila Pact of 1954. Pakistan's mutual assistance agreements with the United States began in 1953-1954 and reinforced in 1959. For details see, "The Military Balance 1984-1985", (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, October 1984): 94-95.

Iranian Response to the War of 1971

Although, the aggressive factions in Iran challenged the policies of the Shah, yet the threats to his preeminence seemed defunct. On the other hand, Pakistan was facing many internal and external crises as well as threats. In 1971, the civil war provided India with an opportunity to revenge upon Pakistan and as a result, Pakistan was dismembered.⁵¹In the Indo-Pak war of 1971, Pakistan experienced widespread economic upheaval.⁵² During this period, Iran supported Pakistan morally and diplomatically, however, Pakistan was also given the military support. During this phase Iran adopted a dual policy; on the one hand, it showed a very positive response towards Pakistan and on the other hand it also maintained the oil supply policy with India.⁵³Eventually, Iran called this Indian intervention as an aggression and interference in Pakistan's domestic affairs because it was aware of the fact that if Pakistan is destabilized, Iran would also lose its stability.⁵⁴During an interview to the Paris paper, the Shah openly stated, "We oppose to all interference in its (Pakistan's) internal affairs, and we are hundred percent behind Pakistan."⁵⁵ To the Prime Minister of Iran, "Pakistan was being subjected to violence and force."⁵⁶As a matter of fact, Iran's support to Pakistan was for securing its own internal structure that was expected to be disintegrated by the rise of Kurds.⁵⁷

In April 1973, he told New York Times' columnist C.L. Sulzberger stated: "if Pakistan disintegrates, another Vietnam situation could develop. We want to see that Pakistan should not fall into pieces."⁵⁸The Shah of Iran

51 Saqib, *Pakistan Affairs*, 411.

52 Lawrence Ziring, "Pakistan: The Yahya Khan Interregnum", *Asian Affairs*1, no. 6(1974): 402-420.

53 Ziring, "Pakistan: The Yahya Khan Interregnum", 402-420.

54 *The Statesman*, January 15, 1974.

55 *The Statesman*, January 15, 1974.

56 *The Statesman*, January 15, 1974.

57 *Dawn*, December 15, 1971.

58 *The Statesman*, January 15, 1974.

reinforced that if any move is designed to destabilize Pakistan, Iran would surely intervene. During the dire circumstances in Pakistan, Iran, having achieved the measures of political and economic stability, was in a better position to play more active role in the world affairs. The prime concern of Iran was its internal survival and there was a little space for an active and coherent foreign policy.⁵⁹ In the subsequent years, 1960s and 1970s their friendship began widely divergent on various issues because of Iran, emerging as a dominating economic power, considered itself as a key player in the region.⁶⁰ The Arab states turned against Iran because of its total dependence on the USA. The Muslim states including Pakistan wanted to boycott Israel at the time when the Mosque Al-Aqsa was burnt on August 21, 1969 but Turkey and Iran rejected to do so.⁶¹ Furthermore, Colonel Qaddafi of Libya was invited to participate in Islamic Summit of Lahore, Iran's Shah refused to join the conference because of his differences with Qaddafi.⁶² Before the dethronement of Bhutto, it was reported that he had visited Iran for the sake of winning Iranian support for the nuclear projects of Pakistan. Although the Iranian response was ambiguous, yet there were signals that the Shah refused to fulfill Bhutto's demands.⁶³ Both the countries also supported each other to counter insurgent movements across the borders. During the era of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, when arms and ammunition had been discovered in Islamabad in the Iraqi Embassy, Z.A. Bhutto claimed that these weapons were for the support of Baloch rebels. Furthermore, when Bhutto started a military operation in Baluchistan in 1973, once again Iran helped and facilitated

59 C.L. Sulzberger, "Belief in Crude Reality", *New York Times*, April 22, 1973.

60 Shirin Tahir Kheli, "Iran and Pakistan: Cooperation in an Area of Conflict", *Asian Survey* 17, no. 5 (1977): 477.

61 Dewan Berindernath, "No Noise about Bhutto's Visit to Iran", *The Patriot*, January 17, 1977.

62 Berindernath, "No Noise about Bhutto's Visit to Iran".

63 Malik, *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan*, 99.

Pakistan's military, shared intelligence and gave \$200 million aid to suppress the insurgency in Balochistan.⁶⁴

However, a series of events such as Z.A. Bhutto's tilt towards the Arab world, the Russian intervention in Afghanistan, the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and the US support to Pakistan put the Pak-Iran relations on a downward trajectory. Besides this, the climate of interests, nevertheless, continued to prevail between both the countries. Moreover, Z.A. Bhutto borrowed some of the techniques of the Shah of Iran because he was impressed by his most powerful neighbour and the Shah himself. Some of Bhutto's decisions like emphasis on the socialist reconstruction and referring it to Maoism increased the gulf between the two countries. Bhutto also showed an overt anti-American attitude which was a painful reminder that his political philosophy was going under change. He wanted to become the leading spokesman of the Third World Countries and was determined to win friends in North Korea and China as well as the Soviet Union.⁶⁵ The Islamic Summit of 1974 of Lahore was presided over by Z.A. Bhutto in which the Shah did not participate; there were two factors for his absence. Firstly, he did not come because the Muammar Qaddafi of Libya was present in Lahore. Secondly, the Shah had his own reservations towards Bhutto's efforts to adopt the role of the leader of the entire Muslim World. Although he did not comprehend how the Islamic Summit would impact on Iran and the far-fetched countries, yet he was more concerned that the Islamic Summit would legitimize the revival of religious and political forces.⁶⁶

The above-mentioned factors affected the brotherly relations between Iran and Pakistan and ambivalence prevailed in the relations between both the countries; sometimes they had same interests but on many occasions, they experienced divergent interests. Despite

64 Malik, *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan*, 99. Also cited by, Berindernath, "No Noise about Bhutto's Visit to Iran".

65 Malik, *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan*, 98.

66 Malik, *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan*, 99.

these oscillating circumstances, both the sides continued to work for maintaining friendly relations.

Pak-Iran Relations (1979-99): As Acquaintances

The cohesive spirit of brotherhood between Iran and Pakistan started losing its hold. At last, they remained even no more as friends and turned into mere acquaintances. Their relations deteriorated due to the hostile policies and influence of the USA particularly at a time when Pakistan was trying to open a gateway of relations with the USA which caused suspicion and hostility between the two neighbours i.e. Pakistan and Iran.⁶⁷

The revolution gave birth to many internal and external enemies in Iran. The USA's Gulf policy, in which Iran was being isolated, created more troubles.⁶⁸ Iran was imagined to be a major threat to the interests of the US in the Persian Gulf for having an incompatible Gulf policy with that of the USA and Pakistan.⁶⁹ Both the countries had divergent opinions regarding the Gulf States. Pakistan endeavoured to maintain the *status quo* whereas Iran sought to bring changes in the region. At this juncture, Pakistan provided support to the Gulf States while Iran was going against them using aggressive language.⁷⁰ The USA and Pakistan were close to each other because the USA's interests became similar to those of Pakistan especially in the case of Gulf States and their rulers. Furthermore, they followed the same policies on Afghanistan crisis and had same views.

There was a devoid in public opinion with reference to the Iranian Revolution because Sunnis supported Imam Khomeini and Shias strengthened the administration of the Shah.⁷¹ The post of 'Shah of Iran' received moral and

67 Malik, *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan*, 99.

68 Thomas Hamond, *Red Flag over Afghanistan* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1984), 138; Kux, *The United States and Pakistan*, 236.

69 Kux, *The United States and Pakistan*, 236.

70 Shirin Tahir Kheli, and Staudenmaier, William, "Saudi-Pakistan Military Relations", *Orbis* 26, no. 1, (Spring 1982): 155-71.

71 Alam, "Iran-Pakistan Relations", 531.

political support from Pakistan as it was the first country to acknowledge the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which was a very difficult decision for the government as well as the whole nation.⁷²

After the Islamic Revolution, Pakistan continued its support to Iran and during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988), it never openly supported Iraq despite having enormous pressure from Saudi Arabia and the USA. Pakistan also assisted Iran morally, financially and politically.⁷³ Due to Saudi pressure on Pakistan, Pak-Iran relations started shattering which created much anxiety for Islamabad. However, Pakistan thought of Iran as its strategic partner with whom relations needed to be bolstered. In February 1986, President Khomeini made an official visit to Pakistan which further boosted their relations.⁷⁴

Pak-Iran Relations (2000-2017): Revival of Friendship

The Pak-Iran relations have been changed with the dynamic patterns of the geo-strategic environment because new alliances and coalition partners started to emerge after 9/11 incident. This incident not only changed the course of history but also put great impact on the regional and global politics. Both the countries; Pakistan and Iran took a new shift and set their political dimensions according to their national interests in the future course of their lives. In the post 9/11 scenario, both Pakistan and Iran agreed to set their disparities and clashes aside and decided to support a government in Afghanistan under the United Nation's patronage. The growing unity between India-Iran relations in the following years ostensibly marked a shift in their relationship. Both the countries have shown their interests

72 Mushahid Hussain, "Pakistan-Iran Relations in the Changing World Scenario: Challenges and Response", in Tariq Jan, *et al*, ed., *Foreign Policy Debate: The Years Ahead* (Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies, 1993), 216. Also cited by, Riaz Hassan, "Islamization: An analysis of Religious, Political and Social Change in Pakistan", *Middle Eastern Studies* (July 21, 1985): 263-84.

73 Hussain, "Pakistan-Iran Relations in the Changing World Scenario", 216.

74 Hussain, "Pakistan-Iran Relations in the Changing World Scenario", 224.

for close and deeper cooperation in the fields of defense and economy.⁷⁵

Pakistan's foreign policy took a new shift making Pakistan a friend and close ally of the USA. Pakistan has been granted the status of major non-NATO ally whereas Iran is still viewed by America as an opponent. The other factors such as the rise of Taliban, the Afghan conflict, the rise of two nuclear countries in South Asian region also created the gap between Pakistan and Iran. In order to counter terrorism, the USA initiated the 'war on terror' which changed the regional scenario of South Asian politics. The increasing influence of the US forces in the Persian Gulf in 1990s for containment of Iran changed Iran's outlook in the region. In January 2002, President Bush's proclamation of Iran as an 'axis of evil' and the war against 'Islamic Terrorism' was a major concern to Iran. When Pakistan sided with the USA, Iran considered it a deliberate move of Pakistan to destabilize Iran.⁷⁶ Regarding the Afghanistan issue, India's cooperation with Iran created tension among Pakistani policy-makers. Iran wanted to establish a friendly government in Afghanistan that would be in Iran's national and strategic interest, which would also help strengthen Iran's positions in Central Asia and Afghanistan. This policy was also a part of Iran's attempt to lessen its isolation which was marked by the USA.⁷⁷

Since late 1990s, Iran has been trying to mend its relations with Gulf States especially with Saudi Arabia which were deteriorating since the Islamic Revolution in Iran. The betterment in relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran would have positive consequences for the Pak-Iran ties as well as for the whole region, because Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had cordial relations. In December 2002, President of Iran, Mohammad Khatami visited Pakistan for three days after the decline of Taliban government; the visit was

75 *BBC, Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB), Third Series ME (December 10, 1999): 3714.*

76 Alam, "Iran-Pakistan Relations", 536-37.

77 Alam, "Iran-Pakistan Relations", 535.

considered as betterment in the relationship between Pakistan and Iran. During this visit, both the countries signed an MoU and a Trade Agreement.⁷⁸ Pakistan and Iran also signed a pact about economy, political matter, security, defense cooperation and exchange of intelligence reports.⁷⁹ In 2003, 'The New Delhi Declaration' was a landmark in this regard.⁸⁰

Transfer of Nuclear Technology

In 2003, International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) sources provided the information that Pakistan gave the Uranium to Iran which amounted up to 54 percent.⁸¹ During the investigation in Iran, the IAEA found extensive transfer of materials and technology. Actually, in 1987, it came to know that nuclear technology was transferred by Pakistan to Iran with the motive of obtaining an advanced centrifuge called p-2, which Iran had agreed upon.⁸² This information proved true after the confession of Abdul Qadeer Khan. These events disturbed the relations between Iran and Pakistan to some extent because the government of Pakistan was not willing to accept any involvement in this transfer of technology. The reason behind this was that Pakistan was a major ally of the USA in the war to counter terrorism and it did not want to annoy the USA, as a result, all the blame was put on Dr. A.Q. Khan.⁸³ However, Iran adopted such a nuclear policy that sometimes worked and sometimes ceased to work. In October 2003, the IAEA made Iran to sign an agreement not to continue its nuclear project. On November 22, 2004, under the European and the USA pressure, Iran adjourned

78 Alam, "Iran-Pakistan Relations", 538.

79 Murlidhar B. Reddy, "Pakistan, Iran Oppose Unilateral Action Against Iraq", *Hindu*, New Delhi, December 27, 2003, 12.

80 Reddy, "Pakistan, Iran Oppose Unilateral Action Against Iraq", 12.

81 Alam, "Iran-Pakistan Relations", 536-37.

82 Koch Andrew, "Iran Uranium Source Revealed", *Jane's Defense Weekly* 41, no. 32 (August 11, 2004): 5.

83 Retrieved From: <http://www.observerindia.com/analysis>, 11/5/2004, 1 John Wilson, "Iran-Pakistan, and Nukes".

its uranium enrichment project.⁸⁴The USA, under the supervision of UNO, imposed sanctions on Iran but it could not minimize the efforts of Iran to enrich uranium. The blame game continued and both the sides remained part of discussion. Pakistan avoided giving any support to Iran because it did not want to spoil its relations with the USA. On the other hand, Iran felt this neutrality of Pakistan and started getting more close to Russia and India to avoid being completely isolated.⁸⁵

IPI Gas-Pipeline: India, Pakistan and Iran

The economic outlook and modernity of national life of every country is totally based on the quality of existing energy of that country. No doubt, Pakistan is endowed with the natural gas resources at many places but it is not capable enough to explore these natural sources on account of the absence of strategic foresight and minimum investment in energy fields. Insufficient discovery of these gas resources led Pakistan into an acute shortage of natural gas. The demand of gas by the people of Pakistan rises almost from 40 to 50 million meter cubic feet (mmcft) per day during summer and round about 80 to 100 mmcft during winter, which is very difficult to fulfil through the available resources in Pakistan. In these dire conditions, Pakistan can fulfil its needs of energy by bringing the project of Pak-Iran gas pipeline into practice, because Iran is more enriched with natural gas reserves as compared to Pakistan, and Iran is eager to provide gas to Pakistan after the uplifting of sanctions of America on Iran and lessening of pressure by the USA and Saudi Arabia on Pakistan.⁸⁶

Despite the sanctions on Iran by America and Saudi's pressure on Pakistan, both the countries signed a gas-pipeline agreement on March 11, 2013. This agreement was

84 Retrieved From: <http://www.observerindia.com/analysis>, 11/5/2004, 1 John Wilson, "Iran-Pakistan, and Nukes".

85 Alam, "Iran-Pakistan Relations", 542.

86 Retrieved From: <https://www.thenews.com.pk/archive/print/265486-queeshi-on-iran>.

signed by Pakistani president, Asif Ali Zardari and Iranian president Mahmud Ahmadinejad. It was a feasible and most viable energy project provided by Iran to enhance peace, security and progress of both the countries. It aimed at helping Pakistan to overcome its growing energy needs at a time when the state was facing immense energy crisis.⁸⁷

Gawadar and Chabahar Projects

Old loyalties are changing and new alliances are being framed among nations on the regional as well as global level, befitting their economic, political and other interests in the post-cold war era. Gawadar is located about 700km from Karachi and 75km from Iranian port Chabahar. Iran with the Chabahar Agreement with India is facilitating Indian access to the gas and oil resources of Iran and Central Asia. Gawadar holds an edge over Chabahar for its utility and geographic location to dominate the Maritime Water and its proximity with China due to road link.⁸⁸

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Iran (Regional Opportunities)

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), having the enormous amount of geo-strategic significance, is going to facilitate not only the neighbours but also whole of the region, in every sphere of life such as industry, education and job opportunities. There are expectations that the CPEC would be the 'game changer' of the future of regional politics. It has great importance for Pakistan, because its internal door starts from Khunjrab which leads towards the external door to Gawadar. This mega project would boost Pakistan's economy. On account of this project, Pakistan is going to the second commanding character not only in the world trade economy but also in the international politics, besides, the equal development in Pakistan's internal areas.⁸⁹

87 Retrieved From: <http://www.challengetime.net> 84.

88 *Dawn*, March 11, 2013.

89 *The Nation*, June 29, 2016.

So far as the case of Iran is concerned, the CPEC and gas pipeline are supposed to bring both the countries closer to each other in future. According to the international energy association, sanctions-free Iran is going to ramp up oil production to 800,000 barrel a day within a few months. This is a golden opportunity for Pakistan to meet its energy crises with the collaboration of Iran, if they agree to establish gas-pipeline. Their collaboration will enhance Iran's revenue and help Pakistan to fulfil its energy needs. Iran having the 1,187.3 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves can sell gas at competitive prices to China and Pakistan, who are in a dire need of gas to materialize the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Iran lags far behind the world in terms of technology and innovation, therefore Iran's technology market is expected to grow upto sixteen billion. Pakistan can enormously benefit from this by providing Iran a large number of technology graduates and experts who are jobless in Pakistan. In this way, Pakistan can develop its field of technology and provide jobs to its skilled youth which will help Iran to expand its market of information technology. Considering the effectiveness of the CPEC, Iran has showed its intention to join it. If the CPEC is converted to China Pakistan-Iran Economic Corridor, it will make the corridor a greater and more efficient game-changer in terms of regional trade and connectivity. The CPEC will help Pakistan and Iran make the Gawadar and Chabahar ports complementary to each other rather than competitors. Iran's inclusion in the corridor will also assist in the better security of CPEC. The burgeoning cross-border smuggling and the menace of non-state actors promoting terrorism with their evil designs can be brought to an end by a mutual collaboration of both the countries. Having the mutual understanding, Iran will impede Taliban leaders to use its border areas to enter into Pakistan and will put pressure on Afghanistan to take robust action against the TTP who are promoting terrorism in Pakistan.⁹⁰ Having visited Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the presence of Iran

90 The Daily *Jang*, February 3, 2017.

seems to be the final destination in the foreign policy of China because of the oil and gas resources in Iran.

In a new environment, Pak-Iran gas-pipeline is very much beneficial for the development of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. It can be linked with the CPEC to transfer gas to China, making Pakistan an economic hub in the new race of international political economy. So the CPEC can bring Pakistan and Iran close to each other, to enhance bilateral trade development projects.⁹¹ There is improvement in Pak-Iran relations on account of changing circumstances on the international map. Pakistan needs huge fuel-energy for the functioning of Silk Road that is being expected from Iran. Now Pakistan is working as a mediator between Iran and Saudi Arabia, just to improve its relations with Iran and to save itself from Sunni-Shia conflict, and for achieving economic interest.⁹²

Iran's President, Hassan Rouhani's visit was an effort for the renovation of relations that were shattered badly during 1990s on account of clash on the Afghan Issue but now, the peace and stability will continue hopefully at a steady pace. The bitter memories between both the countries on various issues during the past history are converted into friendship. The credit of this improved situation goes to the mainstream leaderships of both the countries who worked tirelessly to come closer to each other. There are also promising opportunities for strengthening bilateral cooperation in technical, commercial, economical and cultural fields. The US, EU and the UN Security Council have paved the way for the development of closer commercial and economic ties between Pakistan and Iran. In this regard, they made a deal on Iran's nuclear program and lifting of the nuclear-related sanctions.⁹³

91 Retrieved From: www.jworldtimes.com/JWT-January2017.

92 Retrieved From: www.jworldtimes.com/JWT-January2017.

93 *The Nation*, March 29, 2016.

Conclusion

It can be observed that the national interests of both the countries compelled them to choose different directions during different periods. Concluding the whole debate of Pak-Iran relations, it can be argued that their relations have not always been brotherly or friendly but they changed with the changing patterns and circumstances. However, both the countries are still enjoying cooperation in educational and cultural fields but politically and economically they are coalition partners in various fields.

Pak-Iran economic and political relationship would improve only if the measures are taken to make better border management in the coming years. Both the countries' geo-strategic locations make them crucial for one another's mutual interests and other major forces of the South Asian region as well. Pakistan and Iran seem to have concluded that a stable, independent, and economically strong Afghanistan is desirable to secure their own interests as well as peace and stability in the region. A number of challenges and opportunities came in their way which gave tough time to their foreign policies but the relationship continued at a steady pace. Summing up, it is anticipated that Pakistan and Iran will be on the same page against the multiple challenges imperilling their bilateral relations.