

Citation: Qadir, A., Kasi, M., & Kasi, A. Z. (2021). Iran Pakistan Relations between Cooperation and Distrust from 2001 to 2015. *Global Strategic & Security Studies Review*, V(II), 55-65.
[https://doi.org/10.31703/gsssr.2021\(VI-II\).06](https://doi.org/10.31703/gsssr.2021(VI-II).06)

DOI: 10.31703/gsssr.2021(VI-I).06

p- ISSN: 2708-2121

e-ISSN: 2708-3616

L- ISSN: 2708-2121



Iran Pakistan Relations between Cooperation and Distrust from 2001 to 2015

Pages: 55 – 65

Vol. VI, No. II (Spring 2021)

URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsssr.2021\(VI-II\).06](http://dx.doi.org/10.31703/gsssr.2021(VI-II).06)

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Abstract

This study is qualitative research and is descriptive in nature. It starts with the cataclysmic events of 9/11 and the influence of US War on Terror on Iran and Pakistan. The war was realized by Iran and Pakistan with awe and shock. Initially, Iran cooperated the US, but soon President George Bush's fiery speech estranged Iran. While Pakistan, under duress became a front lien State in the War on Terror. Therefore, the two countries took different directions, and their relations were somewhat strained. There were also many other reasons such as Jundallah factor, controversial Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, US sanctions, and Iranian nuclear deal, border trade issue, Saudi-Phenomenon, competing Gwadar cs Chabahar ports, Indo-Iranian collaboration, which impacted the relations between the two countries. All this indicates that there was no warmth in relations between the two countries, and there was an element of mistrust.

Key Words: Iran. Pakistan, Relations, Rivalry, Terrorism, Trade, WAR

Introduction

There have been some studies highlighting the historical relations between Iran and Pakistan? but very little has been authored about the relations between the two countries particularly after 9/11. The incident enraged the US, and President Bush clamored for strong retribution against al-Qaeda and others. Bush coerced Pakistan, scolded Iran, and ultimately when Afghanistan became a theatre of war, Pakistan became a US ally while Iran supported US tacitly for her own interests in Afghanistan. But American mistrust against Iran remained. In case of Pakistan, terrorism spilled over into Pakistan's tribal areas, but it is alleged that Pakistan didn't completely detach itself from the Taliban. Jundallah, which was a religious/ethnic group and operated from Pakistan, created fissures between Pakistan

and Iran relations but Jundallah soon died down and lost its efficacy. Pakistan is also an energy starved country, but the gas pipeline project between Pakistan and Iran couldn't materialize because of US and Saudi pressure and Pakistan's financial constraints. This was quite contrary with the terms and references of the contract made between Pakistan and Iran. The landmark nuclear deal between Iran and P(5+1) was a blessing for the region and Pakistan as there was the threat of war and Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear installations. It is a matter of concern that the low level of border trade between Iran and Pakistan is alarming despite the fact that Iran could glut the Pakistani market with oil and gas. The Saudi-Iranian rivalry has been definite, which shows that it is a bane for Pakistan and have

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put Pakistan in a difficult position. Because of the weak economy Pakistan is compelled to tilt towards Saudi Arabia as Pakistan gets Saudi aid and largesse. Gwadar and Chabahar, could be friendly trading posts between Pakistan and Iran if there is a will to do. The Indo-Iranian collaboration and Iran's ambiguous stance on Kashmir seem to be no more valid and can be dispelled. The position is different from that of 2001 to 2015, as the Taliban's rise to power in 2021 has completely changed the scenario and geopolitics in the region.

9/11 : A Human Tragedy

September 11, 2001, changed the world in many ways, and the great human tragedy that befell people in different parts of the world is still continuing with varying characteristics. Terrorism had been a common feature of twentieth century, and even before that tyrannical governments, insurgents, and terrorist groups had used terror to justify and curb the voice of dissent and free speech. However, no one could fathom the hijacking of planes and the scale of attacks on the World Trade Centre, Pentagon, and another plane that fell in Pennsylvania. It was New York City which was hit and, more importantly the sole superpower in the world, which had the most advanced and powerful armed forces on the face of the earth. It shocked the world as people watched in horror the planes hitting the twin towers and the debris and destruction that unfolded. Edward Said, the renowned Palestinian writer at Columbia University shortly after the 9/11 attacks, said in an interview, " It was an implacable desire to do harm to innocent people. It was aimed at symbols: the World Trade Center, the heart of American Capitalism, and the Pentagon, the headquarters of the American military establishment. But it was not meant to be argued with. It wasn't part of any negotiation. No message was intended with it.... There was a kind of cosmic, demonic quality of mind at work here, which refused to have any interest in dialogue and political organization and persuasion. This was bloody-minded destruction for no other reason than to do it" ([Barsamian, 2004, p.500](#)).

The Republican government of George Bush was quick to pinpoint al-Qaeda

and Osama bin Laden as the architect of the heinous crime. Everybody knew America would retaliate, and the enraged Americans demanded justice as the Western media outlets had a field day stocking up round the clock commentary and revenge to the alleged perpetrators. The Neo-conservatives in President Bush's administration were clamoring for retribution against al-Qaeda and beyond. The countries of the world condemned the attacks, and NATO members pledged to join in a coalition to punish the terrorists. In Pakistan, people watched in shock at the tragedy of the twin towers and began to predict that the region would be once again entangled in a global war. The term War on Terror was used by George W. Bush in his speech to Congress on September 16, 2001.

Pakistan under duress on 9/11, that fateful day, Pakistan faced the worst dilemma of its life. It did not know which way to go and which way not to (Ahmad, S., 2013, p.99). On September 12, 2001, American Secretary of State Colin Powell called General Pervez Musharraf and apparently said to him, 'either you are with us or with the terrorists. This became the mantra of the Bush administration as countries were pushed hard with the slogan either you are with us or with the terrorists and with no middle ground in between. DG ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) General Mahmoud had been on a visit to Washington when 9/11 happened, he was apparently told by Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage in much more insulting terms, " Either you are with us or you're against us and we'll bomb you into the Stone Age " ([Ali, 2009, p.145](#)). Although, later, both Richard Armitage and General Mahmud denied the choice of words.

Powell had told Bush that whatever action he took, it could not be done without Pakistan's support. So, the Pakistanis had to be put on notice ([Balz & Woodward, 2002](#)). Pakistan was handed over a seven-point agenda by the Americans, which they termed as non-negotiable. It included air force landing and over flight rights, access to information and intelligence on al-Qaeda, curb support for domestic terrorism and the Taliban. Pakistan, which had supported the Taliban for seven years for the purpose of strategic depth, was suddenly asked to take U-turn on its policy in

Afghanistan. Musharraf had a lot of convincing to do to the Pakistani armed forces and the people that Pakistan had no option but to support the coalition forces in Afghanistan against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. In his book 'The Line of Fire', Musharraf later summarized the dilemma facing Pakistan by reasoning that if Pakistan had refused to help the Americans, Pakistan would have suffered, India was willing to help the NATO forces, and Pakistan would have been declared a terrorist state with its nuclear programme in jeopardy. He asserted that in the national interest of Pakistan, he decided to join the coalition forces against the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

In his address to the Congress shortly after the September 11 attacks. Bush warned that any government found to be providing aid or safe haven to terrorists would be regarded as an enemy, irrespective of whether or not they had been involved in the attacks on America ([Couglin, 2009, p.289](#)). In the charged-up atmosphere after 9/11, the us versus them mentality clearly perturbed the Iranians.

Tenuous Iran-Pakistan Relations

The Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini found himself in a difficult position of condemning the 9/11 attacks. However, initially Iran cooperated with the United States in the war in Afghanistan to defeat the Taliban and al-Qaeda. The Bush administration sent Tehran a message via the Swiss asking to join the War on Terror and provide information on al-Qaeda and the Taliban ([Pollack, 2005, p.346](#)). Iran allowed the use of its airspace and agreed to rescue downed US pilots ([Takeyh, 2011, p.212](#)). Iran also allowed access to its ports to supply Afghanistan with basic food items. However, despite all these positive overtures, the basic lingering mistrust between United States and Iran continued. There were officials in President Bush's administration who wanted a more pragmatic and compromising attitude towards Iran. However, the neo-conservatives like Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz, and others were much more prone to hawkish and aggressive policies and wanted the US to take a much more combative approach to States like Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and others. The Bush administration's logic concerning Iran was that only hard power was

appropriate. This was because of characterization of Iran as an irrational actor ([Zweiri & Staffel, 2009, p.65](#)).

In his State of Union address in 2002, President George Bush labeled Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as the 'Axis of Evil'. Bush rebuked Iran as "major sponsor of terrorism" and condemned its unelected leadership for oppressing the citizenry. In another more direct threat, he stressed that in the Post 9/11 environment, the United States "would not permit the world's most dangerous regimes to threaten us with the world's most dangerous weapons" ([Takeyh, 2011, p.214](#)). The lumping of Iran in the 'axis of evil' came as a great shock to the Iranians moderates who were genuinely looking for mending of fences with the West after September 11 attacks. Iran had made sincere attempts to help the US against the Taliban. "Iran provided intelligence to the US and leveraged its cultural ties with Afghanistan's Dari-speaking population to help win their support for the presidency of Hamid Karzai. Iran also influenced the Bonn Agreement, which produced an interim government exclusive of the Taliban that resulted from talks between key anti-Taliban stakeholders" ([Weinstein, 2019](#)). The Iranians began to fear that the United States would embark on regime change in Iran. Bush's pointed denunciation came as a personal blow for Khatami and the forces of moderation which had been advocating better ties with the USA ([Parchami, 2014, p.316](#)).

Pakistan's commitment with the US and its position was precarious, and the fall of the Taliban government in Kabul didn't mean the end of extremism of terrorism in the region. Many of the Taliban and al-Qaeda leaders and fighters found refuge in the tribal areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa of Pakistan. The Pakistanis had a commitment with the United States to go after the al-Qaeda, but the Taliban were allowed to operate freely in the troubled tribal areas of Pakistan. They went after al-Qaeda operatives and other Arab and Central Asian militants but spared the Afghan Taliban conglomerate and Pakistani groups ([Yusuf, 2014, p.28](#)). The Pakistanis suspected that the United States would quickly abandon them just as she had done after the Soviet Union left Afghanistan. Musharraf began to play a

delicate double game. He helped the American war effort, but he did not abandon the Taliban. World reality had changed, but he could not overlook domestic pressures and Pakistan's long-term interests in Kabul (Munoz, 2014, p.109)

The war in Afghanistan spilled over into Pakistan as the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and Pakistani extremist groups began to make their presence known with devastating attacks. In 2002, Musharraf went to Washington and was warmly received by President Bush who called Musharraf a 'close friend' and appreciated Pakistan's effort in the War on Terror. The United States pledged huge amount as economic and military assistance. No questions were asked to Musharraf about the fate of democracy in Pakistan as Washington didn't want to upset its own interests in the region. The White House did not like the ambivalent Pakistani attitude in the war on terror, but it was patient, believing that pushing Musharraf too hard would be counterproductive. Led by Vice President Dick Cheney, the US government believed that Musharraf was the best option available in the strategy to fight Al-Qaida (Munoz, 2014, p.113).

The Relations between Iran-Pakistan and Jundallah Factor

Pakistan and Iran tried to improve their relations after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan. For Pakistan, the fall of Taliban regime came as a blow because Pakistan had supported and nurtured the regime since its inception in 1994 in Kandahar. For Iran the government of Northern Alliance came as welcome relief from the open hostility that existed between Iran and the Taliban. The President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai visited Iran soon after assuming power, and Iran began to support the Kabul government with construction projects and building of roads. In December 2002, Iran signed the Kabul Declaration on Good Neighborly Relations along with Pakistan and other regional States. In December 2002, President Khatami also visited Pakistan to talk on issues of Afghanistan, trade, and bilateral relations. It was the first Iranian President's visit since Rafsanjani visited Pakistan in 1992. Iranian leadership was badly shaken by Bush's speech

on 'Axis of Evil', and Iran badly needed foreign support as against the Neo-conservative agenda.

In 2002 another Sunni extremist group named Jundallah (Arabic meaning Soldiers of God) was formed, which proved troublesome for both Pakistanis and Iranians and tested their deep-rooted relationship. The founder of the Jundallah was Abdul Malek Rigi, who claimed to be fighting for the rights of ethnic Balochs in Siestan-Baluchistan province of Iran. The ethnic tension and insurgencies had been a common problem of developing countries like Iran and Pakistan as with the competition for a limited amount of resources, interference of outside powers in the proxy games, and common problems of poverty and underdevelopment had led to tension between the peripheral areas and the central authority. However, Jundallah was slightly different from other entho-nationalist groups because it was initially purely religious in character.

Jundallah's stance against the Islamic regime in Iran led to a series of attacks by the group on Iranian revolutionary guards and civilians in which hundreds of Iranians were killed. Jundallah posted gruesome videos of people being killed, and its increasingly came into the spotlight of international media. The Iranians blamed United States, Israel, and even Pakistan for the subversive activities of the group for destabilizing the Islamic regime in Tehran. The accusations of Tehran particularly hurt Islamabad as the people of Pakistan had borne the brunt of extremist groups and suicide bombings since the 9/11 attacks.

The Jundallah attacks continued on Iranian guards and installations and clearly rattled the regime in Tehran. One of the deadliest attacks came in 2009 when the deputy commander of corps ground forces, General Noor Ali Shoostari was killed by a suicide attack in Pishin near the Pakistan border. This angered the Iranians as General Noor Ali was personally known to Supreme Leader Ali Khomeini.

In 2010 the United States declared Jundallah a terrorist organization which brought some cautious approval from authorities in Tehran. The big breakthrough for the Iranian came in February 2010, when two F-16 jets forced a civilian plane bound from Dubai to Kyrgyzstan to land on Iranian territory.

Aboard the plane was leader of Jundallah, Abdul Malek Rigi. "After his arrest, Rigi said on state-run TV that Iranian authorities had detained him on his way to a meeting with a high-ranking American person in Kyrgyzstan. US officials described the allegations as baseless propaganda" ([Jundallah 2010](#)). The arrest of Malek Rigi pleased the Iranians, but the attacks of Jundallah became even more violent and intensified over the years. Jundallah then turned its anger to the Pakistanis for their supposedly help to the Iranians in the arrest of several of the group members. Jundallah carried out deadly attacks of Hazara Shia in Baluchistan province of Pakistan especially in the capital city of Quetta.

The Case of a Gas Pipeline Between Iran And Pakistan

The Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project is one of the most prominent and controversial programmes that had several starts and stops for the past few decades. The idea of the Iran-Pakistan –India gas pipeline project was initially published by Malik Aftab Ahmed Khan, an army engineer in the 1950s ([Baloch, 2012, p.120](#)). The project was later extended to reach India in the 1990's, but it never seemed to be a reality despite the attention of the local media to the project. The pipeline is estimated to cost about US\$7 billion extending over 2750 kms from the South Pars oil fields in Iran through Pakistan and extending till New Delhi.

Several Pakistani governments had attempted to solve the country's power and gas shortages and their crippling impact on the economy but without any success. Therefore, it was all smiles when President Zardari of Pakistan met Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmedinejad in March 2009 at the Iranian port city of Chabahar to revive the postponed Iran-Pakistan gas project. For Pakistan the gas project was deemed as a lifeline to the country's economy while for Iran, it was an attempt to bring the country out of international isolation and counter the crippling Western sanctions imposed on Iran because of her nuclear weapons programme. The United States put enormous pressure on Pakistan not to proceed with the project with Iran while India had already opted out of the project in 2008 because of rivalry with Pakistan

as the pipeline is planned to pass through Pakistan. US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton supposedly warned the Pakistan government that if Pakistan went ahead with the gas pipeline project with Iran, it could be very damaging to the country's interests. "Addressing the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Foreign Operations in Washington, Secretary Clinton said that they supported the alternative of a pipeline via Turkmenistan" ([Imtiaz, 2012](#)). The United States had suggested to Pakistan rather forcibly that the TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) gas pipeline project is more much feasible and preferable. However, the security situation in Afghanistan was still anarchic and with the weekly spate of suicide bombings in Kabul and other major cities. Any hope of gas pipeline from Turkmenistan into Afghanistan and Pakistan seemed farfetched.

Saudi Arabia also asked Pakistan to concentrate on the TAPI project instead of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project. According to Western officials, "Saudi Arabia pressed its ally Pakistan to step back from importing Iranian gas to deny additional revenue for the beleaguered economy of its foe Iran" ([Bokhari, 2016](#)). Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif who took over as Prime Minister of Pakistan in 2013, was on much more friendly terms with Saudi Arabia, and therefore, the gas pipeline project couldn't jumpstart during his tenure. "Government of Pakistan approved IP project deal with Iran on January 30, 2013. According to the bilateral agreement, if Islamabad does not complete its part of the project by end of 2014, it would have to pay a daily penalty of one million dollars to Iran until its completion" ([Munir et. al. p-162](#)). Iran had completed the construction of pipeline on her side up to the Pakistani border, but the 800km section of the pipeline which has to pass through Pakistan has not been constructed by Pakistan. The cash strapped Pakistani governments have also, over the years, pleaded for lack of international investment in the gas pipeline project and Pakistan's financial inability to build the pipeline on her own. The low-level insurgency in Balochistan province of Pakistan had also been a cause of concern for investors and governments.

So far successive Iranian and Pakistan governments have repeatedly met, discussed, and issued statements pledging their keen interest in bringing to fruition the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, but the project is still a dream instead of a reality. Iran in February 2018, according to the official, threatened to move to arbitration court against Pakistan for unilaterally shelving IP gas line project invoking penalty clause of the Gas Sales Purchase Agreement (GSPA) ([Mustafa, 2019](#)). Unless the Pakistani government takes drastic steps against the geostrategic desires of United States and Saudi Arabia or the energy shortage really disturbs the people and the economy, it seems very unlikely that the project will be completed in the near future.

The Iranian Nuclear Deal and its impacts on Pakistan

The July 2015 Nuclear deal between Iran and P (5+1), i.e., Five permanent members of UN security council and Germany was termed an 'historic step' or a landmark deal by analysts. The Nuclear deal was named as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Under the nuclear deal, Iran agreed on "suspending of Uranium enriched to 20 percent U-235 (a significant way to the 90 percent required for a weapon), eliminating its existing 20 percent stock, and capping any further uranium enrichment at the 5 percent level (suitable for fueling a nuclear power reactor). In addition, Iran pledged neither to construct any new uranium enrichment sites and promised to halt construction of a heavy-water reactor at Arak" ([Litwak, 2015, p.31](#)). Under the Presidency of Donald Trump US pulled out of the Nuclear Deal unilaterally while China, Russia, Germany, France, and Britain tried to rescue the deal. US reimposed the sanctions on Iran after the braking of the deal. However, indirect talks on the deal are expected in November 2021.

For Pakistan, the Iranian Nuclear deal came as a relief because a neighboring country (Iran) had suffered extensively from the sanctions on her nuclear program. Iran also faced the real possibility of strikes on her nuclear sites by Israel, which could lead to turmoil, war, and instability in the region. Pakistan hoped that with the successful nuclear deal Iran could enhance its economic cooperation with

Pakistan, and hurdles in trade between Pakistan and Iran would be removed. However, despite elapse of considerable time since the Iranian nuclear deal, which was signed (July 2015) there had been no fruitful developments on trade and most wanted gas pipeline between the two countries. In fact the row over the gas pipeline intensified to the degree of Iran threatening to go to the international arbitration court.

Dismal Trade

The cooperation in the trade and energy sector between Iran and Pakistan is mutually beneficial as Pakistan is in dire need of gas, oil, and electricity supplies to satisfy the demands of rising population, and Iran could have an outlet for the sale of its surplus oil/gas. Pakistan and Iran have also been working on an electricity sharing project. "Iran is already providing 74MW of electricity to Pakistan's border towns — a figure that is planned to be increased to 100MW" ([Haider, 2015](#)). Iran could glut Pakistan's market with oil and gas, which Pakistan badly needs. However, trade between Iran and Pakistan is far from satisfactory and dismal. It is quite perplexing that two countries with vast resources and populations have very little trade going on between them. Alex Vatanka writes, "Even before international sanctions took serious effect on Iran in 2011-12, Tehran's trade with Pakistan amounted to US\$300-400 million per year out of Tehran's US\$100 billion international trade.... Even impoverished Afghanistan does more business with Iran (about 15 billion per year) than does Pakistan" ([Vatanka, 2017, p.261](#)). However, the silver lining is that both countries have agreed to remove the obstacles in their trade and have set \$5bn trade target in their meeting in November 2021. Despite rickety rail and road links, both the countries can have border trade because of the common border.

The Shia Crescent and Saudi-Iranian Rivalry: a dilemma for Pakistan:

Mabon in the book 'Iran and Saudi Arabia: Power and rivalry in the Middle East' put across the Iran-Saudi phenomena as:

" Since the Iranian revolution of 1979, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran has been characterized as belligerent with Riyadh

and Tehran suspicious of others actions and intentions within the Persian Gulf and across the wider Middle East”.

In Iran-Saudi rivalry, both the ideology and Geo-politics complement each other. Race, language, culture, and history differentiate, and they are also adversaries on ideological grounds. According to Vali Nasr, "Persians have absorbed the deepest elements of their ancient history, and present Islamic culture has not discarded it ([Molavi, 2002, p.26](#)). Interplay of Geographical, economic and political factors (geo-politics) in the Gulf region are also potential reasons for their conflict. Internal and external security dilemmas in both the countries and regional power struggles have pushed Saudi Arabia more towards the USA and tacitly even to Israel.

Pakistan has always shown solidarity with both Iran and Saudi Arabia for its shared history, cultural-affinity, Islamic faith, and national interest. Pragmatism and realpolitik have been their dominant consideration in relation to Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, Pakistan is faced with a difficult choice to maintain a balance in its policy towards both the countries. Pakistan couldn't afford to alienate Iran and Saudi Arabia when its close neighbors- India and Afghanistan were hostile to it. Although Pakistan is a Sunni majority country, it has a fairly good population of Shias. One the other hand, Pakistan has been receiving much financial help from Saudi Arabia. Sana Haroon describes the Pakistanis monetary dependence on Saudi Arabia as follows: "... moneyed Sheikhs and the oil industry of Saudi Arabia and the United Araba Emirates have acted as patrons of Pakistani's Sunni worshippers, students, Ulema, politicians and professionals. Largesse distributed through personal and diplomatic gestures of friendship has simultaneously incubated a Sunni identity and oil dependency in Pakistan" ([Haroon, 2016, p.325](#)).

Saudi Arabia sees Pakistan through the lens of 'Us and them'. Its foreign policy in the case of Pakistan seems to be based on the saying, "He who is not with me is against me". Saudi Arabia also sees Pakistan as a source of nuclear technology when Iran has the capability to become nuclear. But Pakistan has been put to a difficult foreign policy dilemma on the issue of Shia-Sunni rivalry. The noted

Pakistani journalist and scholar Ahmed Rashid apprehends: "If Pakistan does rent out its regular forces to any State, the Iran backlash will be fierce. Pakistan will be dragged into an Iran-Arab rivalry in the region, a sectarian war in the Middle East, that would inflame sectarian tendencies in Pakistan " ([Rashid, 2009, p.204](#)).

Since Pakistan's political structure is weak and it has a fragile economy, therefore, it is obliged to tilt towards Saudi Arabia as it gets most of the financial support from Saudi Arabia. The national interest of a country generally pre-dominates its foreign relations, but there are also many other factors that affect the relationship. In addition, sacred places of Mecca and Medina and the concept of Haj swarms Sunni and Shiite from Pakistan to Saudi Arabia.

In 2015 Pakistan was put in a difficult position when Saudi Arabia asked Pakistan to join a coalition to fight the Houthi rebels in Yemen. The Pakistani parliament decided that the country would remain neutral in the proxy war between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Yemen. It did not go down well with the Saudis and other GCC countries as they expected Pakistan to contribute military forces to fight the Houthis. The Saudi request came at a time when Iran-Saudi rivalry was at all-time high, complicating Pakistan's attempts to forge closer ties with Iran ([Ahmed, Z. 2018, p.10](#)). Iran's involvement in Shia Crescent could be attributed to avoiding a siege and keeping the enemy at bay. Amin Saikal defines this phenomenon as: "The Islamic Republic has nevertheless achieved a level of defensive capability that provides extensive protection against vulnerability to foreign aggression... It has also achieved an ability to engage in a forward defensive policy, involving offensive actions for defensive objectives..." ([Saikal, 2019, p.244](#)). Pakistan has to adopt a balancing policy between Iran and Saudi-Arabia and has to walk on a tight rope. There is hope that the rift between Iran and Saudi Arabia may dissipate as the saying goes that there are no permanent friends or foes in foreign relations.

Gwadar vs Chabahar: A Tale of Two Ports

Iranians and Pakistanis had repeatedly denied that there is a rivalry between Gwadar and Chabahar. The Iranian ambassador to Pakistan,

Mehdi Honerdoost, in May 2016 said, "We are ready for any rapprochement between regional countries which directly impact the interests of the people of our countries. Trade and business are business, and politics is politics. We should separate them" ([Haider & Bari, 2017](#)). Pakistanis also have also reiterated that both Gwadar and Chabahar are 'sister ports', and being so close and contiguous, they strengthen rather than diminish each other. Chinese Foreign Minister stated that Gwadar-Chabahar sea route could be beneficial for the region as a whole.

It seems that only time would tell whether Gwadar and Chabahar have the real potential to be world-renowned ports competing with Dubai and Singapore. The United States has strong reservations on the issues of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the developments at Gwadar. "The US broadly shares India's concerns over Chinese naval presence and activities in Gwadar and the threat that it could pose to the Strait of Hormuz and shipping lines in the Arabian Sea. But unlike Delhi, which sees an immediate threat, Washington looks to China's actions in Gwadar as a long-term threat" ([Husseinbor, 2016](#)).

Indo-Iranian Collaboration and Pakistan's Dilemma

There was a perception circulating among strategists and thinkers that a new alignment is being formed in South-West Asia between two competing groups of countries i.e, India, Iran, and Afghanistan, on one side while China and Pakistani on the other side. In May 2016, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Iran and pledged US\$500 million to build the Chabahar port and invest in infrastructure in Iran. This visit was followed by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani visit to India in February 2018, in which Tehran leased the port of Chabahar to India for eighteen months and agreed to the construction of Chabahar to Zahedan railway and discussed the peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan was concerned about Indo-Iranian economic ties, even if Iran insisted that its growing cooperation with India was not being directed against Pakistan and China ([Shirmohammadi & Rahn, 2017](#)). The contrast in Rouhani's visit to Pakistan in March 2016 was quite visible, the Pakistani media didn't give it an extensive coverage and Rouhani's visit was

marred by the Khulbushan Jadhav (Indian Spy caught by Pakistanis) story.

The Iranians clearly understand that Pakistani has very close links with Saudi Arabia but still want to maintain normal ties with Pakistan. In November, 217 Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Bajwa, visited Iran to calm down the nerves of the Iranian establishment and assure them that Pakistan wants stable relations with Iran and Pakistani troops stationed in Saudi Arabia are not in any way working against the interests of Iran. Sikander Ahmed Shah writes, "The dilemma facing Pakistan-Iran ties is that both countries currently operate under a trust deficit, with virtually no history of serious mutual confidence building. Instead, they often take half measures or indulge in tokenism in order to improve ties that do not have a major impact on trust building in real terms" ([Shah, 2018](#)).

The Indian growing influence in Afghanistan was also quite troubling for Pakistan. Pakistan asserted that a number of Indian consulates had sprang up in Afghanistan's cities such as Kabul, Kandahar, and Jalalabad, and through these consulates, the Indians were engaged in subversive activities against the State of Pakistan. They see the consulate, and three others in Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Herat, as fronts for anti-Pakistani activities, including support for Baluch insurgents inside Pakistan (Pakistan's role in Afghanistan, 2010, p.42). Pakistan feared that the Indian government was committed to isolation and encirclement of Pakistan by expanding ties with Iran and Afghanistan, which were previously aligned with Pakistan. The Pakistanis were flabbergasted by Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani's allegations of blaming Pakistan for suicide attacks by insurgents in Afghanistan. The scenario has completely changed after Taliban's took power in Afghanistan in August 2021.

Iran's ambiguous stance on Kashmir

About 90% of Kashmiris are Muslims who want independence from Indian occupation. During Shah's time, Iran was supporting Pakistan on the Kashmir issue, which is in fact longstanding disputed area between Pakistan and India. Iran helped Pakistan to succeed on Kashmir issue

and supported it on international forums. Now the situation has changed, and Kashmir is not that important for Iran. The growing relations with India, Shia killings in Pakistan, and Pakistan's tilt towards Saudi Arabia have led Iran not to vehemently support Pakistan on Kashmir cause. Therefore, distrusts have developed between Pakistan and Iran, and Fred Halliday writes: "Iran does not support the Pakistan or Mujahideen claim to Kashmir. There is no Iranian protest about Kashmir: this is because of Tehran's good relations with India and because of the Pakistanis have a bomb and Iranians deeply suspect them" ([Halliday, 2003, p.204](#)). India helped Iran in the construction of 'Chahbahar' port which is in contest to the 'Gwadar Port' developed by China. India had established links to Afghanistan and Central Asia via Iran, and trade ties have increased between India and Iran. Therefore, Iran doesn't want to antagonize India as its interests lie much with India.

Although Iran's Supreme leader Khomeini on different occasions issued statements in support for Kashmiris as a whole Iran's stance has been cautious. Bilgrami, in his paper 'Iran's conflicting stand on the Kashmir issue very well analysis the recent history of Iranian stance on Kashmir, and here is an excerpt from the paper:

Apart from the extracts of Khomeini's statements made in 2010 and 2017 on Kashmir, Iran remained exclusive while playing it safe for both the Indian and Pakistani sides – relatively stark dilution in rhetoric and harsh statements from 1989 to 2001. There is a clear contradiction in Supreme leader Khomeini's various statements on Kashmir, ranging from a harsh criticism against India to a middle path. ([Bilgrami, 2018](#))

Iran is fully engaged in the Middle East, and Kashmir is a peripheral matter for her. For Pakistan, Kashmir is a core issue, and its rivers mostly flow from Kashmir. Iran's lukewarm approach on Kashmir doesn't fit into the interests of Pakistan. But Pakistan shouldn't look at India-Iran relations as a challenge to Pakistan. Iran is not an adversary and enemy to

Pakistan, and it should not be viewed through an Indian lens.

Conclusion

The study attempts to answer the research question that what were the main difficulties faced by Iran and Pakistan after 9/11 and why the relations remained estranged during the years that followed. The US started the War on Terror, it put enormous pressure on Iran and Pakistan and put both the countries in a very precarious position to survive under adverse conditions. The relations between the countries deteriorated because of attacks by Jundallah on Shias in Iran and Pakistan. The trade between Iran and Pakistan remained minimal because of US sanctions on Iran, and the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline failed to be completed. The Iranian Nuclear Deal between Iran and P(5+1) was welcomed by Pakistan, but the economic relations between the two countries didn't improve significantly. Pakistan's close relations with Saudi Arabia created disharmony between Iran and Pakistan as the Iran-Saudi rivalry heightened the tensions. Saudi Arabia's aid and Pakistan's subsequent role due to its vulnerable economy have also marred the good relations between Iran and Pakistan. The competition between Gwadar port in Pakistan being built by the Chinese and Chabahar port in Iran funded by India created friction between Iran and Pakistan. Pakistan disapproved of growing Indian ties with Iran and led to an erosion of trust between the two countries. Iran and Pakistan faced immense internal and external challenges after 9/11, and many factors (as discussed above) made sure that the relations between the two countries remained far from cordial. One positive aspect of the relations was that despite many bitter differences, the two countries continued to rectify the situation, and relations were never completely cut off. The two countries could settle their differences on major issues by having regular talks and increasing the volume of trade, which could help them to come out of the strenuous position that both countries are currently grappling with.

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