



Saudi – Iran Strife: Complexities for Pakistan

Vol. 2, No. I (2017) | Page: 119 – 134 | DOI: 10.31703/grr.2017(II-I).09

p- ISSN: 2616-955X | e-ISSN: 2663-7030 | L-ISSN: 2616-955X

Muhammad Muzaffar* Robina Khan† Zahid Yaseen‡

Abstract

This qualitative research analyzes the complexities for Pakistan regarding Saudi-Iran relationships. Saudi Arabia has serious reservations regarding asymmetric power and regional ambitions of Iran along with its alleged pursuit of nuclear weapons. A particular concern founded in Riyadh is the challenge to the legitimacy of the Al-Saud family in the face of regional and domestic audiences by upstaging it on Pan-Arab issues especially after 1979. Pakistan has a long history of close relationship with Iran as an immediate neighbor and Saudi Arabia as an extremely crucial strategic partner. These extremely poor bilateral relations between the two regional rivals left limited choices for Islamabad. Though Pakistan tried hard to create a balance between both, yet Pakistan found it very difficult to maintain that balance, as both the rivals are stuck in a security dilemma and zero sum game, where victory or benefit of one is the loss for the other and a friend of one is perceived an enemy by the other.

Key Words: Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, Rivalry, Strategic Partner, OPEC, Security Dilemma

Background

Saudi Arabia and Iran are the two most powerful and significant political entities who played a crucial and vital role in the historical developments of the regional theatre. Iran has a great pride not only being a remaining part of one of the world's ancient and greatest Persian Empire but also that western powers failed to colonize Iran (Sadjadpour, 2011, p. 34). On the other hand, The Al-Saud dynasty (ruling dynasty of Saudi Arabia) was established in 1928 (presently followed by over one billion Muslims across the globe) and consider themselves as custodians of holy cities of Makkah and Medina. The two Middle Eastern nations are separated by

* Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science & IR, GC University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: muzaffarrps@gcwus.edu.pk

† Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, GC Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

‡ Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, GC Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan.

Iraq on the Western and Persian Gulf on the Eastern side; proudly represent their distinct ethnic identities, Saudi Arabia as Arab and Iran as Persian.

Diplomatic relations were established between the two countries in 1932 (Brook, 2006), but generally an uneasy bilateral relationship has been observed specially after 1979 Iranian Islamic revolution. Geo-strategic location of the two countries on the same and important waterway, a desperate longing for leadership of the Muslim world, conflicting interpretation of Islam, regional hegemonic designs, result in both oil enriched nations having a clash of interest on control of oil-export policy in OPEC and Saudi Arabia's approval over U.S presence in the Middle east region, which has added fuel to the geopolitical uneasiness. Both view authority and power in the region as a zero-sum game (Muasher & Sadjadpour, 2011).

Though the exact figure of Shite followers is unknown, estimates suggest that around 200 million people are Shiite out of 1.6 billion world Muslim population (constitute 12-16%). Having awareness of the population fact and figures, Iran has not been interested in fixing its regional objectives and appetites in a sectarian framework. Iran always waved a Pan-Islamic banner, not just a "Shia banner" (Muasher & Sadjadpour, 2011, September). Leaders on both the sides often seem in the contest. The antagonism with each other covers all over the Islamic world from Lebanon to Pakistan. The relationship deteriorated after the World War II and reached its lowest ebb after the Islamic revolution of Iran in 1979 (Chubin, 2012). According to Valliley (2014), "the rift between the two great Islamic denominations runs like a tectonic fault-line" These clashing requisitions are tearing the Middle East apart, and divided the Islamic world into two groups on sectarian basis.

Even in the presence of this unprecedented divide, there are a few common friends of Tehran and Riyadh who are gripped in an extremely complex situation, as any friendly gesture towards one is seen with a suspicious eye by other and Pakistan is the one, badly captured between this rift. Pakistani policy makers, military and civilian alike, have acted pragmatically both in relation to current and to former global powers, including the Soviet Union, the U.S. and China. Yet this is perhaps best evidenced in Pakistan's historical balancing act between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In other words, Pakistani foreign policy makers have diligently followed a balanced approach between the dictates of geography that draw it to neighboring Iran and a sentimental appeal in its relations with Saudi Arabia.

Pakistan's Historical Relationship with Iran

Beside geographical proximity, relations between Islamabad and Tehran are shaped by religious affinity and cultural harmony. Pakistan's founding leader, Quaid-i Azam (the Great Leader) Muhammad Ali Jinnah, thought of Iran as a friend and brother, saying that bonds of geography were of great importance in

relations with neighbors (Sattar, 2013, pg. 15). After independence shah of Iran was the first ever head of state who paid an official visit to Pakistan, although Saudi Arabia also expressed a desire that the new Muslim state should experience great prosperity and progress (Sattar, 2013, pg. 20)

In regional affairs, geopolitical imperatives, a common western alliance, and ideological overlap helped the case of Pakistan-Iran relations. Pakistan and Iran were both members of CENTO and Regional Cooperation and Development (RCD) organization along with Turkey, helped in bringing both the countries even more closer (Ghani, 2010, pg. 225-227). Iran not only helped Pakistan in modernizing its military during 1960s but also supported Pakistan in its wars against India in 1965 and 1971 (Baxter, 2013, pg. 20).

Though Pakistan maintained cordial relations with shah of Iran yet Pakistan was the first country who recognized the new system resulted from 1979 Islamic revolution. In the same year an unfortunate incident occurred, when the 300 – 600 Iranian militants tried to seize BAIT-ULLAH (holy place for all Muslims). Pakistan SSG commandos participated in the action (on request of Saudi government) against the militants and successfully liberated the holy site. It turned the Iranian top leadership against Pakistan though Islamabad tried to remain calm and composed even when Iranian revolutionary leader Ayatollah Khomeini reportedly issued a fatwa instructing his country to help the Shia of Pakistan (Mehr, pg. 7). Pakistan handled this very complex phase with great delicacy however, relations did not improve positively and remained uncertain due to the Iranian designs to export the revolution to the neighbors and US-Iran bitter hostility (U.S was a close and crucial strategic as well as military ally of Pakistan in Afghan – USSR war).

In a long Iran –Iraq war (1980-88), Pakistan refused to help Iraq against Iran and provided some material aid to Iran in the war, yet they could not do anything more for fear of provoking opposition by Arab states such as Saudi Arabia. Pakistan walked on the tight rope and faced challenge from all sides, feared the threat of sectarian violence on domestic front backed by Iran, kept a balance with the Arab friends especially Saudi Arabia and U.S who was the close ally of Pakistan in containing USSR in Afghanistan and historical rival India on the eastern border.

The withdrawal of red army from Afghanistan (with the conclusion of Geneva accord in 1988), opened new challenges for Iran and Pakistan due to their different perceptions and varying approaches towards the establishment of a new Afghan government and led to misunderstanding, tensions and confusions in Pakistan-Iran relations.

Pakistan's former foreign minister Gohar Ayub (1997-1998), who was President Ayub Khan's son, pointed out, "Iran must figure prominently in our strategic thought process, being our next door neighbor and relief zone" whereas

“Pak-Saudi relations are embedded in their indelible history and the Islamic ideology” (Ayub, 2009, Pg. 74. 75).

Pak-Saudi Relations

There was always a positive sentiment for Saudi Arabia among the Pakistanis because the Saudis were considered as the custodians of the holy places of Islam (Khattak, 2004, pg. 231), but it is only relatively recently that Saudi Arabia has begun to occupy a significant role in Pakistani foreign affairs. Though Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were both in the western camp in the 1950s and 1960s, Saudi Arabia was under the influence of Egyptian-sponsored Arab nationalism, and formally protested Pakistan’s participation in the Baghdad Pact (When Indian Prime Minister Nehru made an official visit to Saudi Arabia in September 1956), the news was received coolly in Pakistan. It is true that President Ayub Khan visited Saudi Arabia in 1960 and Pakistan’s skilled workers gradually started pouring into Saudi Arabia for work (Rizvi, 1998, pg. 81-83). From the early 1970s onwards, particularly after the 1973 oil crisis, that Saudi Arabia came more forcefully into the Pakistani foreign policy picture. Pakistan managed to host the second Islamic Summit Conference in Lahore in 1974, while the Shah of Iran did not attend the summit due to friction with the Saudis at the time (Arif, 1995, pg. 105).

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia came even more closer to each other during 1980s and onwards and became most important strategic, political and economic partners in the region. Although traditionally, strong ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia were based on reciprocity, whereby the Saudis’ oil and their heavy material aids have helped Pakistan in times of need, in return Pakistan provided its military capabilities to help the custodians of the two Holy Mosques achieve their military objectives. This affinity has usually been perceived negatively by Iranian camp and added complexity in Pak-Iran relations.

Saudi-Iran Rift, Complexities for Pakistan

Though Pakistan worked really hard to maintain a balance and steady relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran but it didn’t mean that everything always went well. Let’s discuss one by one how Pakistan has been badly captured in the Saudi-Iran rift in last decades. As on almost every single issue in the region both Tehran and Riyadh remained on the conflicting positions and it became a walk on a tight rope for Pakistan to create a balance between its both important partners.

Sectarianism

The second largest Islamic country of the world Pakistan, with mostly Sunni population, is also home to the second largest Shia population in the world. It

placed Pakistan in a unique dilemma and is caught in a Saudi –Iran tug of war. Sectarianism found a breeding ground in Pakistan, where Shias constitute 15–20 percent of the population (Rathore, 2017). One dataset covering a time period from 1989 to 2017 puts the number of people killed in sectarian violence in Pakistan at 5,681 while over 11,110 people have been injured as a result of sectarian attacks. Militants began to attack Pakistani Shias in the 1990s. They killed Shiite officials including diplomats, engineers, and cadets in the years 1997–1998. Because Pakistan was one out of three countries (included Saudi Arabia and U.A.E) that recognized the Taliban regime in Kabul after 1996, it was implicitly associated with the regime’s attacks against Iranian diplomats in Afghanistan in 1998. This created a serious problem for Pakistan-Iran relations (Ayub, 2009, pg. 14). In return, Iran supported militant Shia elements in Pakistan in retaliation (Ziring, 1997, pg.468). Although Iran and Pakistan did not break off relations, an American Ambassador to Islamabad William Milam (1998-2001) observed, Pakistan-Iran relations were “correct”. “They had diplomatic relations, but they didn’t seem particularly warm to me” (Milan, 2013, pg.11). Saudi backed militant group Jaish-ul-Adl, killed 10 Iranian border guards in 2017, as the shots were fired from inside Pakistani, so head of Iranian army warned Pakistan that Tehran would hit bases inside Pakistan, if the government does not confront militants (Dawn, 2017). Same tension erupted in 2014 when Jaish-ul-Adl (Saudi backed militant organization) kidnapped five Iranian border guards and in 2015 and 2013 when eight and fourteen border guards killed by same militant group respectively.

As a result of the state’s Sunni-centric Islamization policies during the 1980s to 1990s (Shia Sunni identity created in Pakistan), violence between Shias and Sunni sectarian militants started and further nourished by state patronage given to such outfits both by Tehran and Riyadh. There are strong allegations that Saudi Arabia as well as Iran both are funding and supporting different militant organizations and nourishing sectarianism in Pakistan and Islamabad seems to become a sandwich between both the rivals and facing lot of difficulties on domestic and international fronts (Rathore, 2017).

Afghanistan

Afghanistan became a major area of concern for Pakistan due to its long, complex and undefined border with it. Saudi-Iranian normative divergence of foreign policy related to the durability of regional security found its turf in the battlefield of Afghanistan. Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 coincided with Islamic revolution of Iran. Khomeini, ruptured with the U.S over hostage crisis of Iran and their war against Iraq entwined Iran in a multitude of regional, domestic and international problems. So Iran was vigilant not to provoke the Moscow, although it did condemn the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and demanded its immediate withdrawal.

Eventually, when the Cold War between the U.S and Soviet Union reached the Afghan borders, Khomeini tried hard to maintain relations with both its own satellite regimes in Kabul as well as in the Soviet Union. Iran viewed the Soviet Union as a counterweight to American authority in the region. Furthermore, in juxtaposition with its own goal and longing to counteract Saudi Arabia's desires of spreading 'Wahhabism' in the region, Iran strengthened and promoted the Hazara Shi'ites (20 % of the total Afghan population) in Afghanistan against the Saudi Arabia-U.S-Pakistan axis who were financing and managing the so called "Afghan Jihad" against the Russians. By the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union was pulled out of Afghanistan in 1989, U.S left the region after achieving its desired goals and the war-torn Afghanistan became a battlefield for a proxy war between Saudi Arabia, Iran added further complexities for Pakistan. After an exhausting long battle against Iraq, Iran was urgently in need of friends and allies in the Middle Eastern region and thus desperately wanted to set up a friendly government in Afghanistan.

Iran and Saudi Arabia continuously propelled the Shi'ite groups and Pashtuns by providing them with weapons, training and financial aids, to continue their fighting against each other. Furthermore, while Saudi Arabia and Iran were fighting for dominance on the Afghan territory, so were doing the warlords of Afghanistan who rose to supremacy and eminence during their war against the Russia. As the civil war was in their interest because they created their own fiefdoms, formed fleeting coalitions with high bidders.

However, the prevailing conditions were extremely alarming as well as dangerous for Pakistan who was already hosting more than five million Afghan refugees and were facing worst impacts domestically in the form of drugs, gun culture and smuggling. In order to avoid further losses ultimately, a young Pashtun's movement named 'Taliban' with Wahhabi religious identity rose to power (Pakistan & Saudi backing). They overthrew President Rabbani in 1996, which marked a monumental victory for Saudi Arabia and perceived as a strategic defeat on Iranian part, on political, economic, strategic, ideological and security levels. Unwilling to give up the contest, Iran promoted the establishment of an anti-Taliban alliance composed of Uzbek, Tajik, and Hazara factions.

Saudi-Taliban relationship deteriorated swiftly after 9/11 terrorist attacks and due to close involvement of Usama. Bin. Laden with Taliban. Elimination of the Taliban regime by U.S led coalition forces in 2001 was a matter of great relief for Iran as it paid the Iranian interests, but Bush harsh rhetoric created an anxiety in Tehran as he called Iran as "axis of evil". On the other hand news regarding Iran's secret nuclear program in Aug, 2002 further complicated the regional security concerns. Later, conservative hardliner's victory in 2004 parliamentary elections and Ahmadinejad in office as a result of 2005 presidential elections, further deepened and strengthened Saudi Arabia's suspicions about Iran's hegemonic designs for the influence in the Middle Eastern region and beyond. Riyadh stopped

Taliban support, kept chasing low profile approach by silently backing Hamid Karzai's new interim government in Afghanistan and gave direct foreign aid in the reconstruction process of the country. The increased activity in Riyadh's foreign policy towards Afghanistan resumed when kingdom mediated secret talks in 2008-09 at the direct request of the Afghan government (due to its legacy in Afghan Jihad in 1980s). But it further led to escalation of competition between Tehran and Riyadh as non-Pashtun, Shia groups (Northern Alliance) along with many Taliban groups, (who turned against Saudi Arabia due to Saudi betrayal in 2001 invasion of Afghanistan) ruled out any chance of Saudi contribution in any possible political solution of the Afghan crisis. This development made the conditions more favorable for Iran (Chubin, 2009).

Both Tehran and Riyadh have adopted a persistent policy not to surrender the competition in the region, and kept on pursuing this zero sum battle against each other on the soil of Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia in 2012 built gigantic mosque and Islamic center in Kabul as an ideological counter –initiative to Islamic university and “Khatm-a-Nabiyin” mosque built by the Iranian government of Ahmadinejad in 2006 (Wehray. et al, 2009).

Iran and Afghanistan not only share ethnic - linguistic bond, but is also hosting around 2 million refugees from Afghanistan. According to Al-Jazeera, Kabul look towards Iran for its economic development to minimize its dependence on Pakistan for trade and transit routes. Iran has developed a cordial relationship with Afghan Taliban in last one and half decade due to their common enmity with U.S.& Saudi Arabia (as Taliban considers that Saudis betray them in 2001 for U.S). U.S has been continuously blaming Iran for providing training, weapons and material support to Taliban in the recent years. At the same time president Ashraf Ghani knew that Saudi Arabia can still play a vital role in the peace process. These prevailing conditions give clear indication that both Tehran and Riyadh still have much to contest in coming times on the turf of Afghanistan and complications for Pakistan are still not over on Afghan front where Pakistan is in desperate need of peace, stability and Pakistan friendly government as soon as possible.

Yemen

Yemen became a naked struggle for hegemony and supremacy, for both Iran and Saudi Arabia especially during and after the Arab Spring (Butt, 2015). It may be considered as the proof that both the regional powers suspect each other intentions, lacks trust and continuously posing potential threat to each other's national interests. Saudi Arabia shares 700 miles border and very protective of Yemen due the Iranian designs and motives in the region and for the sake of domination over the Shiite crescent. Located in the backyard of the kingdom, Yemen has a great importance for Riyadh and maintained close relations with Yemen's President Ali Abdullah Saleh (for the last almost two decades) which remained under its

influence, politically as well as financially (Jamshidi, 2013). Whereas Iran seeks to counter the Saudi influence by providing money, military assistance, training and weapons to Houthi rebels (Houthis belong to “Zaidi”, a sect of Shiite ideology) when Riyadh led an Arab-coalition bloody intrusion with U.S backing, to provide assistance and defense to the government of President Mansur Hadi (who was vice president during Abdullah Saleh regime and became president when Ali Abdullah Saleh stepped down in 2012 as a result of popular upheaval).

Houthis were struggling peacefully for their civil rights against Ali Abdullah Saleh’s government during 1990s, but later the struggle turned into violent resistance especially after 2007. Popular Arab upheaval provided an opportunity to both Saudi Arabia and Iran to flex their muscles on the turf of Yemen in a most dreadful way (el-Nawawy, 2015). Analysts think that the only certain thing about this crisis is that Riyadh – Tehran enmity will extend the misery of Yemen as both are keen to gain leverage. Majin analyzed that “the importance of Islam, particularly used as a legitimizing tool by both the regimes to resolve internal security dilemmas and to demonstrate external legitimacy and vitality” that leads “a soft power, security dilemma guiding the rivalry” between Riyadh and Tehran (Majin, 2016).

Saudi Arabia requested the government of Pakistan to send its troops in Yemen crisis to support the Saudi led coalition forces however, keeping in view the fragile regional security conditions Islamabad can’t afford to disrupt their relationship with Iran as they are already engaged and are hardly managing tough, insecure and long borders with the India on the East and with the Afghanistan (7400 km) on the West. Due to this consciousness Pakistani parliament refused to send its troops to Yemen in 2015 to support Saudi backed Government of Ali Abdullah Saleh who were fighting against Iran backed Houthis rebels. Pakistan faced worst reaction by Saudi Arabia and other Arab states on this refusal. U.A.E threatened Pakistan for sending its Arab diaspora back to Pakistan which are in millions and a backbone for Pakistan economy (Dawn, 2015).

Saudi – Iran Stance over U.S Presence in the Region and Pakistan

According to the analysts U.S has primarily looked for a military solution of political issues in the region and focused more on arming Iranian neighbors as the military budget of Saudi Arabia has been increased many times from 2008 to 2013 and onwards as Saudi Arabia is afraid that if U.S would decide to leave the region, the task of containing and restricting Iran will solely fall on Riyadh’s shoulders.

U.S. President Donald Trump’s May 2017 trip to Saudi Arabia has further fuel Sunni-Shia tensions in the region (Washington Post, 2017), and in Pakistan in particular. Not only did Trump commit to a \$110 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia but he vilified Iran by calling it a nation that “fuelled the fires of sectarian conflict and terror” (The New York Times, 2017). Trump’s recent visit to Saudi

Arabia and arms deal indicates that U.S is interested more in taking a side in this regional rivalry for hegemony and seems least concerned about its dangerous outcomes and consequences. Taking explicit side of Sunni states means dismissing Shia Islam or fueling more sectarian violence.

So much so even the U.S presence or departure became a zero sum battle for Riyadh and Tehran. Iran seeks a regional order in which outside powers are excluded and in which it plays a leading role in the Caucasus, Persian Gulf and broader Middle East, and parts of South Asia. As a starting point, this strategy entails a reduction of the U.S. presence and influence in the region. Iranian leaders seem very clear in the zero sum competition with Saudi Arabia for regional influence under way.

Iranian Nuclear Program and Saudi Expectations from Pakistan

The ceaseless quest for regional hegemony due to the uncertain political and security conditions, fluctuating over the entire Middle East for last many decades, have made Iranian nuclear issue even more sensitive and brought it under immense spotlight in international arena. Though Iranian nuclear program captured world's attention generally, since its inception and particularly for last two decades. It is mainly due to the fact that Tehran occupies a major geopolitical location and massive involvement in crucial Middle Eastern affairs. Although its nuclear program was launched in 1950's as 'Atoms for Peace' program with the support of U.S (Chicago Tribune, 2009, July 1). Series of historical and unending clashes led to strong mistrust between both regional rivals and nuclear Iran has been assumed as a matter of unprecedented threat for Saudi Arabia and its Arab allies. As Riyadh believes that nuclear power will be sufficient enough to further embolden Tehran's ferociousness in the ongoing proxies against it, as both are violently engaged across the region for leverage and supremacy.

Post 2003 era has particularly aggravated the sectarian stiffness and intensified Saudi reservations regarding Iranian nuclear program. King Abdullah cautioned on many occasions that if Iran will develop nuclear warheads "everyone in the region would do the same, including Saudi Arabia" (Black & Tisdall, 2010).

Though Iran kept on claiming that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes and somehow cooperated with IAEA when M. Khatimi was in office as president, but IAEA claimed that they gathered sufficient proofs that to create nuclear weapons were actually the long term aspirations of Tehran (IAEA sources). As the BBC reported that "the IAEA was unable to confirm Iran's assertions that its nuclear program was exclusively for peaceful purposes and that it had not sought to develop nuclear weapons" (Khaitous, 2007, December). M. Khatimi suspended uranium enrichment and allowed international inspection team after agreement with "EU 3" voluntarily, due to severe "international pressure" and "deteriorating economic conditions".

Saudi Arabian apprehension was that nuclear power will not only swing the balance of power in favor of Iran but it will also start an endless nuclear arms race in the entire region. Moreover, it may enable Iran to interfere in the matters of comparatively smaller Arab states according to its own vested interests and finally, it will motivate or arouse Shiite communities of Sunni Arab monarchies for regime change through vicious means.

In September 2003, The Guardian reported, that government of Riyadh had initiated a strategic security review that included the possible procurement of nuclear weapons and finally three choices came under consideration.

- To procure a nuclear capability for deterrence.
- For security in case of any aggression, enter into an alliance (with nuclear power).
- To struggle to reach out a regional pact or agreement on having a nuclear-free region

(Macaskill & Traynor, The Guardian, 2003, September 18).

Saudi government swiftly reacted the report and ruled out any plan for purchasing nuclear program or its entrance in any alliance for nuclear umbrella. However, “Cicero” a German magazine claimed satellite evidences that in 2004-05 under the hajj pilgrim cover, few Pakistani nuclear scientists visited Saudi Arabia and fair chances are there that Riyadh may purchase nuclear weapons from Pakistan in coming times.

The discussion indicates that Pakistan once again is gripped in the issue of ‘nuclear weapons’ between Tehran and Riyadh as Islamabad has been facing tough allegations on international front for transferring nuclear technology to Iran, on the other hand according to reports Riyadh has been heavily financing Pakistan’s nuclear program for last many decades and supported the nuclear program in the belief that what they perceived as a nuclear armed client state could provide the ultimate insurance for the Kingdom. The choices for Pakistan are hard-hitting as well as inadequate as Pakistan needs Saudi economic support due to its fragile economic realities and may not be able to ignore the demands by Saudi government at any critical situation, which may antagonize Tehran. The antagonism from Tehran can add difficulties and definitely have serious disadvantages for Pakistan especially when India is trying hard to increase its ties with Iran.

IPI AND TAPI Gas Pipelines

Pakistan is an energy starved country and facing worst ever energy crisis for last almost two decades and is in desperate need to come out of it. India, Pakistan and Iran gas pipeline (IPI) signed between the three countries more than two and a half decades back and later the project was left by India due to U.S pressure. Same pressure Pakistan is facing as well by U.S and Saudi Arabia (due to their enmity with Iran). Whereas Iran has shown lot of commitment regarding the project and

have completed the ground work relevant to them. The reluctance on Pakistan side has created a natural anger and anxiety in Tehran and recently the government of Tehran has warned that if Pakistan will break or delay the agreement they have all rights reserved to bring the matter in the international court of justice. If situation will not be handled proactively by the Islamabad otherwise Pakistan may face tougher situation in the near future.

In order to compensate the IPI, Saudi Arabia (secretly) and U.S (openly) has facilitated the TAPI gas pipeline which has been inaugurated in recent months. However according to the political analysts, prospects of IP are not wholly diminished as TAPI has to go through war trodden Afghanistan where U.S and NATO forces are still unable to create stability whereas IP has no such strategic and political threats. Secondly Iran has developed cordial relations with Afghan Taliban and U.S has been continuously and strongly alleging Iran for supporting, funding and training Taliban, who are controlling more than 60 % of the area of Afghanistan. Ironically TAPI gas pipeline has to move through the areas under Taliban control. So there are fair chances that Iran may use their leverage over Afghan Taliban to sabotage TAPI in coming times under special circumstances. In both the cases, either Iran take the matter of IP in international court of justice against Pakistan or involve itself in sabotaging TAPI, Pakistan is going to suffer the most domestically and internationally due to the vested interests of regional rivals.

X-Army Chief's Appointment as a Head of IMAFT

Pakistan X-army chief Raheel Sharif's appointment as a head of 41 countries led coalition army, initiated by Saudi Arabia were not perceived positively by Iranian camp. Pakistan made it very clear to Tehran that coalition is neither against Iran nor Raheel Sharif or Pakistan will be a part of any anti- Iran activity. Islamabad knew the fact that they can't afford to disrupt their relationship with Iran as they are already engaged and are hardly managing tough, insecure and long borders with the India on the east and with the Afghanistan on the west. Yet the exclusion of Iran from Islamic Military Alliance to Fight against Terrorism (IMAFAT) faced criticism that the alliance is actually a 'sectarian alliance' due to dominance of states with majority Sunni population. Although friends of Iran like Oman and Lebanon have also joined the alliance yet absence of Iraq (under Iranian influence) and Iran from the alliance put many question marks on the nature and objectives of the alliance. Especially it has exerted tremendous pressure on Pakistan due to Raheel Sharif's appointment as a head of alliance. Similarly, Islamabad will be kept under firm check more than any other coalition partner and will face critical challenges in case of any misadventure against Iranian national interests.

Balochistan

The issue of Baluchistan continues to be a problem area as well. Shortly before General Raheel Sharif retired, during President Rouhani's visit in March 2016, Pakistan accused Iran of allowing the Indian spy agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), to operate from Iranian soil in the Baluchistan area (Dawn, 2016). As Kulbushan Yadav'san Indian naval officer captured from Mashkel area of Balochistan by Pakistan security agencies in a counter-intelligence operation, who confessed that he entered in Pakistan illegally through Iran. He was tasked by RAW to plan, coordinate and organize espionage aiming to destabilize Pakistan. In turn, Iran complains of Pakistani negligence in stopping anti-Iranian groups such as Jaish al-Adl, Jandullah, and Lashkar.e.Jhangvi (claimed to be backed by Saudi government) to operate in Baluch areas inside Pakistan against Iran (Dawn, 2016).

Conclusion

For decades, domestic dynamics and external limitations have made a tough balance in relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as in intra-Arab conflicts for Pakistan, as a necessity, not a choice. It is still the case, that "Saudi Arabia is a very important relationship, while Iran is a neighbor." In several crises in the past such as the invasion of Afghanistan, the Iran-Iraq War, the First Gulf War, the Iranian nuclear program and current manifestations of Iran-Saudi rivalry, Pakistan has carefully managed its relations with all sides. Though in the 1990s, Pakistan and Iran were at odds, with differing policies over the fate of Afghanistan, but when Iran was designated as one of the three countries in the "axis of evil" by the Bush government and its nuclear program came under heavy criticism and sanctions. Pakistan appealed to the west not to attack Iran. Pakistan had two main worries: its own domestic situation with a significant number of Shia community and the fear of having another unstable neighbor at its door, with the possibility of tens of thousands of new refugees.

Similarly, due to its weak economic conditions, Pakistan can't afford to annoy its crucial Arab friends especially Saudi Arabia who not only support Pakistan with heavy aids in the form of oil and money but also home to millions of Pakistani diasporas. This Pakistani diaspora is one of the biggest source of stability for not only their families but also proves a backbone to Pakistan's economy. In view of these internal and external constraints and a clear history of refusing to choose between Saudi Arabia and Iran at the expense of either, Pakistan's long-standing foreign policy continues. Whether it is the Saudi war in Yemen tensions over Saudi Arabia's execution of Nimr al-Nimr, a Shia cleric residing in the Kingdom, or Iran's participation in the Syrian Civil War, Pakistan called for calm, try to mediate, and may even do things that may rankle with one side or the other, but is

unlikely to do anything radical. It is no surprise therefore that Pakistani diplomats were lately quick to clarify that Pakistan's participation in the Arab-Islamic-American summit in Riyadh in May 2017, which turned into a therapeutic session of Iran-bashing, did not mean they agreed with the spirit and content of the summit: "Pakistan's participation in the Saudi Arabia Summit did not mean Pakistan was supporting Riyadh against Tehran. 'If Iran also holds such a meeting, we will definite attend it. We cannot have relations with one country at the cost of the other. It is a fact that we are struggling to win over Iran these days but we will be able to do that in the coming weeks.'" Judging from detailed historical accounts of Pakistani behavior over the years, we can say that Pakistan will keep on facing the tough situations regarding their relationship with Iran and Saudi Arabia in the coming times and the choices may become even more limited. As the Chubin observed, 'Iranian- Saudi relations will continue to be turbulent' (Chubin, 2012, 74)

References

- Arif, K.M. (1995). *Working with Zia: Pakistan Power Politics, 1977-1988*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, p.285.
- Ayub, G. K. (2009). *Testing Times as Foreign Minister*, Islamabad, Lahore & Karachi: Dost Publications, p.5, p.15, p.74, p.75.
- Basit, A. (2015). "Pakistan & the Yemen War: Perils of Joining the Saudi-led Coalition," *RSIS Commentary*.
- Baxter, C. (Ed.). (2013). *Diaries of field marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan 1966-1972*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, p. 20.
- Black, I., & Tisdall, S. (2010). Saudi Arabia urges US attack on Iran to stop nuclear programme. *The Guardian*, 28.
- Butt, Y. (2015). How Saudi wahhabism is the fountainhead of Islamist terrorism. *Online Blog Post*.
- Chubin, S. (2009). Iran's power in context. *Survival*, 51(1), 165-190.
- Chubin, S., & Litwak, R. S. (2003). Debating Iran's nuclear aspirations. *Washington Quarterly*, 26(4), 99-114.
- Chubin, S. (2012). Iran and the Arab Spring: Ascendancy Frustrated. *GRC Gulf Papers*, 21-27.
- Dawn*, (2015). UAE minister warns Pakistan of 'heavy price for ambiguous stand' on Yemen.
- Dawn*, (2016). Rouhani denies discussing 'RAW's involvement in Balochistan' with Pakistani leadership.
- el-Nawawy, M., & Elmasry, M. H. (2015). Revolution or crisis? Framing the 2011 Tahrir Square protests in two pan-Arab satellite news networks. *Journal of Applied Journalism & Media Studies*, 4(2), 239-258.
- Fahim, K., & Cunningham, E. (2017). "By backing Saudi Arabia's vision of the Middle East, Trump may be sowing the seeds of conflict," *The Washington Post*.

- Ghani, N. (Ed.). (2010). *Field Marshal Mohammad Ayub Khan: A selection of talks and interviews, 1964-1967*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, p. 205.
- Jamshidi, M. (2013). *The future of the Arab spring: Civic entrepreneurship in politics, art, and technology startups*. Elsevier.
- Khaitous, T. (2009). Arab reactions to a nuclear-armed Iran. *Policy Focus*, 94(7).
- Leiken, R. S. & Brooke, S. (2006). The quantitative analysis of terrorism and immigration: an initial exploration. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 18(4), 503-521.
- MacAskill, E. & Traynor, I. (2003). Saudis consider nuclear bomb. *The Guardian*, 18.
- Majin, S. K. (2016). Iranian and Saudi Cultural and Religious Identities: Constructivist Perspective. *Open Journal of Political Science*, 7(01), 65.
- Muasher, M., & Sadjadpour, K. (2011). Christopher Boucek 1973-2011. *Review of Middle East Studies*, 293-295.
- Rathore, S, A. (2017). The Saudi-Iran Factor in Pakistan’s Sunni-Shia conflicts. *Middle East Institute*.
- Razvi, M. (1981). “Pak-Saudi Arabian Relations: An Example of Entente Cordiale”, *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol. 34, No. 1, The Inter-Relation of Muslim States and Pakistan, First Quarter, pp. 81-92, p.83.
- Sadjadpour, K. (2011). *The Battle of Dubai*. MIDDLE EAST.
- The Express Tribune*, (2017), ‘Iran warns will hit militant ‘safe havens’ inside Pakistan’,
- Tocha, M. (2009). The EU and Iran’s Nuclear Programme: Testing the Limits of Coercive Diplomacy. College of Europe EU Diplomacy Paper 1/2009. *EU Diplomacy Paper*. Vatanka, A. (2012). The guardian of Pakistan's Shia. *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, 13, 5.
- Wehrey, F., Karasik, T. W., Nader, A., Ghez, J. J., & Hansell, L. (2009). *Saudi-Iranian relations since the fall of Saddam: Rivalry, cooperation, and implications for US Policy*. Rand Corporation.

Ziring, L. (1997). *Pakistan in the twentieth century: A political history*. Karachi: Oxford University Press, p. 468