

PAKISTAN-IRAN GROWING'S RELATIONS IN THE CHANGING DYNAMICS SINCE 9/11

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Abstract:

Pakistan and Iran are allies on the basis of common history and culture. They are important states geo-strategically in world affairs not only due to economic importance but also for having a distinct geo-strategic location, which makes them vital in regional and world geo-politics. Despite having many commonalties in culture, history, religion and geostrategic environment, they could not develop a sustainable multidimensional relationship. In the beginning, they were able to develop a geo-economic and strategic partnership. However, a number of external factors, including the cold-war power politics, Soviet-Afghan war and Iran-Saudi estranged relations, created structural constraints in their relations. After 9/11, the dynamics of regional and international political environment changed that impacted the Pak-Iran bilateral relationship and gave new dimensions to their relations. This study examines the evolving nature of Pak-Iran relations since 9/11 with a focus on opportunities. This study finds that Pak-Iran relationship still faces various challenges, however, a number of developments, particularly China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), both states' partnership with China and reconciliation process in Afghanistan, offer opportunities for the development of closer relationship. Further, the study concludes that the two countries can overcome the challenges *and issues if they move forward to realize the full potential of the opportunities.*

Keywords: CPEC, SCO, Indo-Iran strategic relationship, Afghanistan, Indo-US strategic partnership.

Introduction

Pakistan-Iran relationship is based on ideational and materialistic factors which are the foundation of their cooperation and cordiality. There exist complex interdependence between Pakistan and Iran. Complex interdependence is different form Interdependence; in which there is merely political-economic and military interdependence. Complex interdependence refers to *a situation among a number of countries in which multiple channels of contact connect societies (that is, states do not monopolize these contacts); there is no hierarchy of issues; and military force is not used by governments towards one another.*¹ Pakistan and Iran are interlinked through multiple channels as well as both have never involved into use of military force for resolving disputes. Therefore, both countries can strengthen and maintain their cordial relationship through realizing the full potential of the opportunities.

Pakistan and Iran have diverse relationship due to multiple channels of interaction such as socio-cultural and religious bonds. Both are closed through multiple channels of interaction such trans-governmental and transnational channels. The ideological closeness creates interdependence between both states. Ideational factors comprise of ideology, thought, culture and values which play significant role in driving the decisions. These factors provide identity and unity states and nations. Pakistan and Iran have not only geographical closeness but also have ideational linkages in their norms, culture and values. The ethno-religious similarities and socio-cultural linkages are the opportunities for enhancing cooperation and bilateralism. Furthermore, the changing dynamics of the South Asia and developments in Afghanistan are important for Pakistan-Iran relations. All these ideational and geopolitical factors which shape shared positions for both states. All these factors will be discussed in the article

Ethno-Religious Similarities and Socio-Cultural Linkages

Pakistan-Iran relationship is primarily basis upon ethno-religious linkages. Both are adjacent with Baluchistan region that is not only frontier region but also provides as ground of cultural and social commonality between both states. The common ethno-cultural history and geographical proximity interlink both states with each other. The line of Goldsmith divides not only borders of Pakistan and Iran but also divides the Baluchistan region and ethnic groups of the region in two different states. It starts form Koh-i-Malik Siah to Gwadar coastline on the Arabian Sea and separates two regions, namely South Asia and Middle East. On 31 August 1960, accord of border management agreement was signed. It is significantly important agreement for improving bilateral relations. The region of Baluchistan is a gateway and exists between South Asia and Middle East as well as Baloch community is common ethnic group which is scattered between two states. In addition, common ethnicities also exist in two different states and people of common ethnicities maintain social contacts with each other that are important for improving bilateralism. Moreover, Baluchistan has geo-strategical important for Pakistan because it comprises 44 percent of Pakistan territorially.²

The demography of Iran comprises of different ethnic groups whereas Persians comprise half of the population and others are Azairis, Gilaki, Kurds, Mizarri and Balochi. Likewise, Punjabi is the dominated ethnic group in Pakistan that is closer to Persians in Iran.³ In addition, Pakistan and Iran share tri-junctional border which is connected with the provinces of Kharbar Pakhtununkha (KPK) and Baluchistan to Makran coast in Sindh and Sistan of Iran on the Afghanistan side. A long history of cooperation has been existed among tribes and ethnic groups of this land since many centuries ago.⁴ These ethno-religious interlinkages are crucial that bounds Pakistan and Iran as well as provide an opportunity for improving bilateralism.

The people of Pakistan and Iran are closed on the basis of similar social norms, values and cultural affinities. The culture is underlying element that provides identity and distinguishes one group of the people to other. Nations are separated through border but the genesis of separation of the group comes from the distinguish culture and identity. Historically, both states were also closed in the ancient times as well as had good relations. The Indus valley civilization and civilization of Mesopotamia were interlinked through cooperation and mutual pacts. Similarly, trade linkages existed and silver, copper and other goods were imported from Persia during the Harappan civilization of Pakistan. Moreover, when Aryans came into South Asia they made special contacts with Persians. It had impacted the south Asia society in the religion and believes.⁵

Their relationship is based on cultural, social and spiritual linkages. Iran has history of ancient Persian civilization as well as having rich in culture. Pakistan shares not only long border of 909 km with Iran rather both have common cultural norms and history.⁶ The area, where Pakistan and Iran are located, has remained common hub for Indo-Persian civilization in terms of producing arts and poetry. The Iranian culture has significant impacts over society, norms and social values of Pakistan and particularly has socio-cultural influence in the western areas.⁷ The Persian culture influenced the society of Pakistan into two aspects material and non-material.

Pakistan and Iran formal interactions

Pakistan and Iran have greater opportunities in the field of socio-economic developments. In addition, both have signed different bilateral agreements which provide common way for strengthening bilateralism. For instance, both have agreed on trade and commerce bilateralism, energy cooperation and security related agreements.

Trade and Economic Relations

There are vast opportunities in economic domain between both states. Iran, being second largest country in natural gas reserves, provides Pakistan energy opportunity to overcome energy crisis. In March 2004, both agreed for the relaxation over duties on commodities through signing Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA). Pakistan gave concession on 338 items and in return Tehran gave duty concession on 309 items. Eventually this agreement was significant development for reaching Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Such kind of economic and Trade liberalization is conducive for cordial relationship. Pakistan-Iran trade balance remained in favor of Iran during the fiscal year of 2003-2004. In next year during 2009, Pakistan was the fifth trade partner of Iran with 1 billion dollars annually.⁸ Pakistan imported mineral commodities, steel and oil and in return Iran imported rice, meal, paper and fruit.

Trade and Economic relations are important for enhancing economic interdependence and cordial relationship. Currently, trade volume is low between two states. Pakistan is placed 11th largest trade partner of Iran by International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the year 2013. The trade volume with neighboring states Iraq and Turkey stood at \$12 billion and \$22 billion respectively. China is the biggest trade partner with the trade volume of \$40billion while has not shared border.⁹In addition, both are trying to boost their economic relations. They have established Joint Economic Commission (JEC) and signed Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) for ultimately to reach Free Trade Zone (FTZ).

Both are working for enhancing the trade and economic relations. In the visit of the vice president of Iran for International Affairs, Ali Seedlou signed three agreements as a Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs) for the promotion of trade and economic relations. Both agreed to promote trade volume worth of five billion US dollar and announced assistance for the construction of Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline.¹⁰

CPEC is the best opportunity for energy rich Iran as well as it provides chance for the promotion of economic ties. In March 2016, Iran's President Hassan Rohani visited Pakistan and met with Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Both agreed for boosting economic and trade ties which are necessary for regional development.¹¹ Both agreed to enhance bilateral trade volume of \$5billion by 2021.¹² However, it is difficult to boost economic ties with Iran due to the US pressure and economic sanctions. The diplomacy tools should be used for taking relaxation in promoting trade.

Agreements in Energy Sector

Energy is considered an important element in maximization of state's economy as well as energy security has become foremost agenda for state's survival and stability. Now it has become the part of geopolitics. The oil and gas named as hydrocarbons are the main sources for energy needs. Pakistan-Iran cooperation in energy sector is not only beneficial for its crippling economy rather it has positive implications for whole south Asia. Pakistan's geographical location as well as her geographical proximity with energy rich Iran provides opportunities where Energy transformation can help for crippling economy of Pakistan as well as it diminishes Iran's isolationism. Pakistan is facing great shortage of electricity which affected the country's economic growth rate and humans' life as well. Both states have agreed on different energy related agreements such Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline (IP) as well as having agreements of electricity transformations in the frontier region. In 2014, Iran gave 1174ME electricity to Pakistan which includes 174MWpower for Makran Division, Gwadar and 1000MW of electricity for Baluchistan and national grid.¹³

During the fiscal year of 2016-17, Iran has exported total 482 million kilowatt-hours electricity to Pakistan which is equal to 5% of total Iran's electricity exports with the.¹⁴ In addition, Iran is exporting electricity to Afghanistan and Turkey and working on the project of energy supplier hub for

regional countries. Furthermore, Iran's ambassador to Pakistan Mehdi Honardoost proclaimed that Iran is ready to enhance electricity supply to Pakistan for reaching 3000MW.¹⁵

Energy is the key element for country's growth. The per capita energy consumption rate is low in Pakistan which is standing at approximately 456 kilo watt hour (KWh). The other Asian countries' per capita energy growth rate is 646 KWh which is greater than 30% of Pakistan.¹⁶ Eventually such shortage has implications on state's economic growth and compels it to fulfill from energy rich Iran. Pakistan fulfils its energy needs by importing oil and gas from Middle Eastern states primarily from Saudi Arabia. South Asia is important region in global politics but the disagreement over energy pipeline routes is greater problem. India is growing economic, and her demand will be doubled in next decade similarly with other regional countries. Therefore, energy routes have become major concerns for US-India relations. For instance, in 2005, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice raised concerns over Tehran-New Delhi discussions over gas pipeline project.¹⁷

The global oil reserves are depleting and now these are for more 42 years. Similarly, gas reserves will remain 61 years more. Pakistan is facing seriously energy crisis which will be great problem for state life in long run. The geographical disposition of energy rich states such Central Asian States (CARs) and Iran provide a great chance for Pakistan to overcome the energy crisis. The gas pipeline (IP) is essential project to overcome the crisis without searching other alternative route. Historically, the project conceptualized by both states in 1989 and next year India joined the project. In 1999, India became partner officially after removing her apprehensions over the use of territory of Pakistan for reaching to India.¹⁸

The pipeline starts from the South Perls gas field, passing through Bandar-Abbas, Iranshahr and Khuzdar for reaching Sui to Multan. In 2009, India quitted from the project and the partners remained were National Iranian Oil Company,

Sui Northern Gas Pipeline Limited, and Sui Southern Gas Company Limited. The total length of the pipeline is 2,775 kilometers which exists From Iran side 1100 Km (730 miles), and Pakistan 1000 Km. The cost is US \$ 7.5 billion and gas exports 22 billion cubic meters per year.¹⁹

The project would be useful to other stakeholders Russia, India and US. The use of effective diplomatic for convincing all stakeholders and realization of benefit of project will provide a chance for the completion of IP. Furthermore, the economic and socio-politically importance of IP compels Pakistan to implementation of the IP agreement even with some delay. However, IP got immense important after joining China and proposed to invest \$2 billion by connecting this project to Gwadar port.²⁰

Security Agreements

The security of both states closely interlinked with each other due to geographical proximity, convergence of regional security environment as well as having ethno-religious linkages. Historically, both states remained closed for neutralization of security constraints through dependency over other territory on the idea of strategic leverage during cold-war period under the Shah of Iran. Pakistan and Iran share frontier region through the province of Baluchistan which itself is poorest and vulnerable due to unrest and volatile security situation. The frontier region terrain is mountainous, and desert oriented which is attractive place for terrorists. On the other hand, the region has become hub for drug smuggling and illicit activities for different terrorist groups. Furthermore, the fragile situation of Afghanistan as well as rise of terrorism after 9/11 heightened the volatile situation and cross border terrorism. To address all these challenges, both states have been signed different security related agreements.

Different insurgent groups are operating in Baluchistan region and they change their location between two states. The insurgent Baloch group Jundullah which is based in Iran's province of sistan-Baluchistan along with two branches JaishulAdl and Jaishul Nasr. They have developed substantial linkages in the

Baluchistan province. The judullah's founding Father Abdul Malik Rigi was executed by Iran in June 2010. Similarly, his brother Abdul Rauf Rigi was arrested by Pakistan authorities in 2010 and later in 2014 shot dead in Quetta, both state agreed for elimination of terrorist groups and illicit activities by initiating joint operations.²¹

In February 2013, both countries signed a comprehensive bilateral agreement for cut down all illicit activities, drug and narcotics smuggling as well as for the total elimination of cross border terrorism. In 2014, there signed nine bilateral security agreements in the visit of Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to Iran. These were the inclusion of counter terrorism agreements as well boarder security measurements. A High Border Commission was established for the prevention of money laundering and financial support to terrorist groups. In addition, two more agreements were signed for information sharing related to money laundering and one other agreement for the prison exchange.²²

Geographical and Strategic Linkages

Further, the primary reason of shared security environment is related to geopolitical factors such as geographical proximity with each other and with common neighbor Afghanistan. The turmoil and instability in Afghanistan raises security concerns for both Pakistan and Iran while former is also facing security tensions on eastern border with India.. All these factors make shared security calculus. Both states cannot neutralize security tension unless developing coordination in security issues. Therefore, both have signed different security agreements for curbing cross border terrorism and controlling illicit activities. However, multilateral cooperation is prerequisite for ensuring security particularly in Pakistan.

Pakistan and Iran have geographical and strategic linkages that adjacent both states such as shared security concerns, geographical and oceanic proximity. Pakistan and Iran are not only geographical, historical and cultural close states

rather they comprise the common security regional environment. They have neither involved in any dispute over the territorial issue nor have disputed borders. The ideological factor plays significant role in making the foreign policy. The attitudes of individual shape policies of the government. It is important to know for the policy makers that how people do think differently.²³ The ideology plays significant role in shaping attitudes of the individuals. Both states have common religion Islam and it is a dominant theory in decision making which lead towards both into mutual junctures against anti-Islamic forces. The religious intimacy is underlying factor for giving status to Iran as brother country. In addition, common religion also gives shared response against anti-Islam and to some extent shapes common security challenges.

Pakistan's Strategic Relationship with China and Russia

Pakistan's strategic relationship with both China and Russia has positive implications for cordiality between Pakistan and Iran. China always comes to rescues through extending support via diplomatically, economically, politically and strategically. It also extended support on international forums in the times of international pressure over Pakistan and sided diplomatically such as Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the G-20 etc.²⁴ In return, Pakistan always stood with China's stance over different issues such as Taiwan or Xinjiang crisis as well as provided support in the geopolitical affairs of South Asia.

China is emerging global economic player economically as well as having geopolitical influence worldwide and South Asia particularly. China is a dynamic state, containing border with fourteen states and has established economic relationship with these states on the basis of peace promotion and economic liberalization. It is growing fast economy and contributing regional politics through using soft power strategies. China is on the strategy "going west" and investing in Pakistan's Gwadar as well as establishing gas pipeline that will run

through Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan toward Iran.²⁵ The international political fate is shifting from Europe to Asia due to rise of dynamic Asian actors such as China, and India etc. Accordingly, it is considered Asia century due to geopolitical developments across the globe.

China is maintaining its rise by projecting peaceful rise as well as establishing relationships through economic engagement with different states. China is investing in Pakistan for developing infrastructure. Meanwhile, US is increasing the role in global and Asian affairs through agreeing pacts with Australia, South Korea, Japan, India and ASEAN states. These motives are for the increasing pressure and containing China's rise in the region of Asia Pacific and India-Pacific regions. For the containment of China's economic rise, US with its allies signed Trans-Pacific agreement on 6 October 2015 for enhancing trade and economic opportunities with the regional countries as well as for curtailing China's trade with ASEAN states.²⁶

Historically, Sino-Russian intimacy formed in the beginning of cold war against anti-communism bloc. The relationship could not maintain cordial due to Soviet's divergent approach in Tibet crisis, Cuban missile crisis as well as support to India during China-India in 1962. The post cold period set the US global hegemony as well as US-China relations started to worsen due to respective geopolitical orientations. After cold war, the strategic and geopolitical changes in international system led towards China-Russia rapprochement the relationship which culminated with strategic partnership in short times. Consequently, both became strategic partners in 1996 as well as their relations enhanced paramount level with the signing the treaty of cooperation and friendship in 2001.²⁷

Later on, Sino-Russia bilateralism enhanced with the visits of highly official form both sides which resulted economic, political, cultural and strategic linkages. Furthermore, Sino-Russia bilateralism enhanced at significant level in the Chinese premier Xi Jinping high level official visit to Russia in 2013. The mutual gestures have not only diminished bitter history

animosity of cold rather it restored mutual interest at global level. Consequently, both states support each other on regional and international level. China supports Russia in the volatile situation in Middle East as well as later push back on issue of South-China Sea.

Moreover, Russia intended to cooperate with China on the matters of South Asia. In February 2012, Putin described Russia's foreign policy over south Asia in his article "Russia and the Changing World". He outlined the perceptions over China in detail as well as discussed possible mutual gestures for resolving geopolitical issues.²⁸

Pakistan-Russian bilateralism is new regional development which has profound implications for the regional environment as well as has positive implications on Pakistan-Iran relations. The US policy of "Asia's Pivot" and "Chain's string of pearl" has implications for regional countries in emerging power balancing equations. Consequently, the triangular relationship among three nuclear powers China, Russia and Pakistan might pose serious challenge to US domination.²⁹

The Indo-US strategic cooperation and China-Russia intimacy generated a policy shift in the Russian's approach to Pakistan. There are underlying factors which leads towards new geopolitical alliances in South Asia. Pakistan-Iran Relationship is extremity independent on external factors and geopolitical environment of South Asia..

CONCLUSION

Pakistan and Iran are natural allies on the basis of cultural and historical linkages. Their relationship is deep-rooted, based on socio-cultural and ideological factors. Peoples of both states consider very closer to each other. Moreover, both states are located shared geopolitical and strategic environment and they never involve in any territorial conflict. Persian language has greater impact on Urdu as well as it has influenced the poetic tradition of sub-continent.

Prior to independence of Pakistan, Persian language remained official language under the Mughal emperors and the frontier region was a common place. The region Baluchistan was scattered into Iran and peoples of that region were freely moves.

Both came closer in the initial phase of Pakistan's independence and established strategic relationship as well. The regional developments in terms of cold-war politics in South Asia and shared security challenges shaped interdependence for containing communism and countering sociopolitical and security challenges. They joined strategic pact of CENTO (1955-1979) with USA. In addition, they also formed an organizational body of ECO for enhancing economic regionalism. Both states remained in cordial relationship and enjoyed multi-dimensional relationship in first phase of 1947-1979.

The first phase of cordiality (1947-1979) changed towards limited cooperation after regional developments. The structural changes and geopolitical developments at both, regional and state level influenced bilateral relationship. Despite of issues and challenges, both states have opportunities at state, regional and global level and relations can be developed after realization of full potential of opportunities. By taking the advantages opportunities, bilateralism and mutual enthusiasm would be enhanced after undermining challenges and issues between both states.

Pakistan- Iran relations are characterized by number of common factors such as shared history and culture, common religion, geographical proximity as well as the peoples of both states consider closeness with each other. In addition, structural developments also favor common interest. Both states have common friend China as well as they have developed socio-economic relations with her. Further, China's rising influence in South Asia and Middle East by using soft-power politics ensure possible cooperation among three states on common objectives and will prospectively shape triangular relationship among China, Pakistan and Iran as well..

The futuristic prospects of the relations between both states can be assessed on the basis of understanding challenges and opportunities. The challenges and opportunities explain convergences and divergences at state, regional and international level between both states. The structural convergences will ensure prospectively cooperation.

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