


**RESEARCH PAPER**
**Understanding Convergence and Divergence in Pak-Iran Relations**

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Zahir Shah\*, <sup>2</sup> Dr Bashir Ahmad and <sup>3</sup>Dr. Aftab Alam

1. Professor of Political Science Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, KP, Pakistan

2. Assistant Professor of History, Minhaj University Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan

3. Research Fellow Department of Political Science, LMU Munich University Germany

**\*Corresponding Author:** [zahirshah@awkum.edu.pk](mailto:zahirshah@awkum.edu.pk)

**ABSTRACT**

This study analyzes the complex interplay of convergence and divergence in Iran–Pakistan relations through geopolitical, ideological, and strategic lenses. Iran and Pakistan, neighboring Muslim-majority states, share intertwined yet often conflicting interests shaped by sectarian identities, regional alliances, and global influences. This study employs qualitative analysis based on secondary sources and applies Realism, Constructivism, and Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) to interpret the bilateral dynamics. Findings indicate episodic cooperation in border security and energy (e.g., the Iran-Pakistan pipeline), driven by pragmatic needs. However, deep-seated mistrust, sectarian tensions, and conflicting external alignments—especially involving Saudi Arabia, the U.S., China, and India—perpetuate strategic divergence. To foster lasting convergence, the study recommends institutionalized dialogue, depoliticization of sectarian narratives, and multilateral frameworks. Sustainable diplomacy requires structural reforms and ideational shifts promoting trust and consistent cooperation.

**KEYWORDS** Pak-Iran Relations, Strategic Convergence, Sectarianism, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), Realism, Constructivist Approach, Energy Diplomacy, Border Security, Geopolitical Alliances, Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline

**Introduction**

The transcalar threads that bind Pakistan and Iran are geography, ideology, security, economy and geopolitics. Today, it is noteworthy in spite of its 900 kilometers of borders and increasingly deep historical and cultural ties, that Pak-Iran relations have wobbled between cooperation and contention almost since Pakistan's independence in 1947. Their bilateral engagement as two key Muslim majority countries bridging South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East is in not only their national interest, but also in the regional and global strategic currents (Rafiq, 2021).

However, Pak-Iran relations have been increasingly influenced over the decades past by both converging and competing interests, Pak's interest in energy cooperation and counterterrorism and Iran's interests in sectarian tensions, competing alliances, and strategic anxieties. Scholars, policymakers and security analysts alike need to understand the interplay of these elements if they are to judge the evolving shape to regional politics and the prospects for sustainable diplomacy in region that is growing more and more multi-polar.

**Convergence: Cooperation on Shared Interests**

Border security and militancy concern are the two central pillars of Pak-Iran convergence. Both nations have suffered from cross-border terrorism, human trafficking, and narcotics smuggling along the volatile Balochistan-Sistan border region. In response, Pakistan and Iran have engaged in a series of bilateral mechanisms to increase surveillance, intelligence sharing, and joint security patrols (Sial, 2020). These cooperative endeavors, while intermittently effective, highlight a shared acknowledgment that non-state actors pose a threat to national integrity and regional stability.

Another promising axis of convergence is energy cooperation. Iran, possessing the world's second-largest natural gas reserves, has long been envisioned as a strategic energy partner for Pakistan, which faces chronic energy shortages. The Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline, proposed in the 1990s, was conceived as a game-changing infrastructure project that could alleviate Pakistan's energy crisis and cement economic interdependence.

Trade and economic relations also offer significant potential for alignment. In recent years, bilateral trade has hovered around \$1.5 billion, far below its potential considering the proximity and complementarity of their economies. Agreements to boost trade in agriculture, textiles, pharmaceuticals, and construction materials have been discussed, particularly under frameworks like the Pak-Iran Free Trade Agreement (Hussain & Kazmi, 2021). If fully realized, economic interdependence could serve as a buffer against political volatility and open up new corridors of mutual benefit.

### **Divergence: Strategic Frictions and Sectarian Fault Lines**

Despite shared interests, Pak-Iran relations have been persistently strained by geostrategic divergences. A central fault line is the sectarian divide: Pakistan is a Sunni-majority state with deep ties to Saudi Arabia, while Iran is the leading Shia power in the region. This sectarian difference is not merely theological but politically consequential. It often manifests in proxy competition and ideological anxieties, particularly in the context of Pakistan's domestic sectarian conflicts and Iran's support for Shia groups across the region (Abbas, 2022).

The growing Saudi-Iran rivalry has also had profound implications for Islamabad-Tehran ties. Pakistan's historically close ties with Saudi Arabia marked by financial assistance, labor exports, and military cooperation have often been interpreted by Iran as strategic tilting. For instance, Pakistan's decision to remain neutral during the Saudi-led intervention in Yemen in 2015 was a calculated attempt to balance its ties with both Riyadh and Tehran, though it did little to alleviate underlying tensions (Muzaffar, et. al., 2017; Rizvi, 2020).

Moreover, regional geopolitics involving global powers further complicate the bilateral equation. Pakistan's deepening strategic partnership with China, as reflected in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has been cautiously welcomed by Iran, which has its own comprehensive economic agreement with China. However, competition over regional transit routes and investment corridors occasionally breeds mistrust. Similarly, Pakistan's engagement with the United States, which has imposed crippling sanctions on Iran, often places Islamabad in a difficult balancing act between its Western alliances and regional imperatives (Akhtar, 2022).

From Iran's perspective, Pakistan's alleged support or tolerance for Sunni extremist groups operating near the border such as Jaish al-Adl has long been a sore point. These groups have carried out attacks on Iranian security forces, triggering strong responses from Tehran. Conversely, Pakistan accuses Iranian intelligence of maintaining ties with Pakistani Shia groups, contributing to sectarian polarization within its own borders (Khan, 2021). This reciprocal mistrust feeds into a security dilemma that perpetuates low-intensity conflicts and hinders deeper strategic trust.

### **Theoretical Frameworks and Analytical Approaches**

To understand all of these patterns of cooperation and conflict, scholars have resorted to a number of theoretical frameworks from International Relations. For example, realism is characterized by recognizing the anarchy of the international system and primacy of national interest, which accounts for the behaviour Pakistan and Iran do not overlook their strategic autonomy and regional orientation at the expense of ideological

solidarity on account of their cultural and religious affinity. In contrast to the latter, constructivist approaches emphasize that foreign policy decisions are worked up by identities and historical narratives, and religious affiliations (Wendt 1999). They also show how ingrained ideas about the Sunni Shia binary and/or the Persian Arab rivalry are in both understanding and policy.

Moreover, regional security complex theory (RSCT) provided by Buzan and Wæver has a helpful framework to explore the way in which the security dynamics in the Middle East, South Asia and Central Asia connect. Given that bilateral decisions by Pakistan and Iran are not often made in isolation, their proceedings are tied into systems of alliances and rivalries as well as transnational threats (Buzan & Wæver, 2003). RSCT thus helps contextualize how local insecurities (e.g., cross-border insurgencies) are amplified by global politics (e.g., U.S.-Iran tensions).

### **The Need for Strategic Patience and Institutional Dialogue**

Understanding convergence and divergence in Pak-Iran relations demands more than a transactional analysis of security cooperation or economic exchange. It requires a deeper appreciation of the historical continuities, institutional voids, and ideological undercurrents that structure their bilateral ties. While prospects for cooperation exist and may even grow in a post-U.S. hegemonic order the risks of misalignment remain potent unless underpinned by consistent dialogue, institutional engagement, and regional multilateralism.

As Iran increasingly looks eastward to counterbalance Western pressure and Pakistan seeks to diversify its regional partnerships beyond Saudi Arabia and China, there exists a window of opportunity. But as long as the root causes of sectarianism, asymmetric threats and geopolitical hedging do not confront each other, convergence may remain episodic even in their diplomatic landscape, while divergence, the more enduring feature, persists.

### **Literature Review**

The bilateral relations between Pakistan and Iran are a paradox of paradoxes between the episodes of strategic convergence and long standing ideological and geopolitical divergences. Recently, scholars have paid attention to this dyad as it has shifted in regional context of both regional instability and shifting alliances and global energy politics. To understand this relationship with nuance, attention must be dedicated to all manner of power politics (traditional politics), ideational constructs, and the surrounding regional security architecture that provides the context of state behavior. Six major themes of the scholarly landscape that studies Pak-Iran relations are border security, energy diplomacy, economic ties, sectarian dynamics, the influence of external powers, and regional strategic frameworks. This review engages with the academic community's attempts to explain and debate the transformation of the contours of this relationship with the help of theoretical frameworks like Realism, Constructivism and regional security complex theory (RSCT). The result is a stage that it analyses to identify critical gaps, theoretical constraints and emerging trends to provide some space for greater integrative and context sensitive understanding of this complex bilateral dynamic.

### **Border Security and Cross-border Tensions**

Persistent insecurity on the Pakistan-Iran border, particularly in the province of Balochistan, has elicited interest in motifs of militancy, smuggling and infiltration across the border. Siddiqa (2018) and Yusuf (2020) establish that border incidents involving armed groups, like Jaish al Adl and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) patrols, are a factor in the mutual suspicion. These studies are usually based on the concept of

Realism, which focuses on state related issues like sovereignty and security threats and their military and paramilitary control. The border does not just mark out a geographical boundary, it is a volatile and volatile frontier in which asymmetries in governance and local grievance become part of bilateral tension.

Redding introduces more recent literature, like that of Baloch and Shah (2022), to suggest that RSCT can be used to show that border instability is not just a bilateral issue but more of a matter in a wider regional security complex. In the end, both Iran and Pakistan continue to cooperate under a facade to bridge the porous nature of the Iran-Pakistan border in the presence of conflicts in Afghanistan and intra state insurgencies for which there was reluctance. But these analyses primarily tend to reside at the macro level, overlooking the fact that the localized dynamics, such as tribal affiliations and informal trade networks, affecting state's response to border security. The historical memory and regional identity influence border politics but constructivist analysis dealing with these issues is very limited and has not successfully understood how cross border communities view the two states' security practices.

### **Energy Diplomacy and the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline**

Due to its symbolic and strategic importance, energy diplomacy, particularly stalled Iran having a gas pipeline with Pakistan (Iran Pakistan is referred as IP gas pipeline), has been widely studied. According to Rafiq (2013) and Javaid and Jahangir (2015), the pipeline is a basis for a possible regional integration and energy cooperation. But they point out that the project was repeatedly stalled by external pressure, mainly from the United States, that has dissuaded Pakistan from putting the deal into effect by threatening sanctions. These discussions fit with a Realist perspective of energy as a strategic asset that is subject to major power politics and alliance considerations including Pakistan's links with Gulf states and the U.S.

On the contrary, Ahmed (2019) adopts the Constructivist point of view by corroborating how there have been narratives and energy sovereignty, and anti-Western sentiments, sustained domestic support for the project in spite of diplomatic troubles. This suggests that there is an issue of discursive tension between what state behavior is motivated in by material constraints and what normative visions of state behavior are created around ideology and national identity. Nonetheless, scholarly work in this area tends to be project-specific and often fails to situate the pipeline within broader regional energy frameworks, such as China's Belt and Road Initiative. More integrative approaches that consider how infrastructural diplomacy intersects with evolving geopolitical alignments in Asia are needed to fully assess the pipeline's implications.

### **Economic Relations Beyond Energy**

Beyond energy, Pakistan and Iran have underwhelming economic ties, a fact consistently noted in the literature. Rizvi (2020) and Akhtar (2021) argue that despite geographic proximity and cultural linkages, bilateral trade remains significantly below potential. Bureaucratic inefficiencies, sanctions on Iran, and a lack of banking channels are commonly cited reasons for the stagnation. These studies, however, tend to be descriptive, focusing on policy barriers without engaging in deeper theoretical reflection about the structural or ideational causes of this economic inertia.

An important oversight in much of the literature is the absence of a Constructivist or RSCT-based analysis of economic relations. For instance, trade policies are rarely analyzed in light of how national identities, trust deficits, or sectarian narratives may affect business practices and investment flows. Additionally, economic cooperation is usually treated separately from political and security ties, ignoring the possibility that economic engagement could serve as a confidence-building measure. By deconstructing how both

countries symbolically frame each other in economic discourse, future research could illuminate the subtle ways ideational factors shape material outcomes.

### **Sectarianism and Ideological Divergence**

Sectarianism is one of the most contentious and widely studied dimensions of Pak-Iran relations. Towards the end of the isolated and fourth century Khawarij Islamic emirate state, coming into existence as the result of the persecutions of the Kharijites by the Abbāsid caliphate led to Pakistan's Sunni power structure feeling shocked by Iran's purported export of a Shi'a ideology. Nasr (2006) provides a foundational analysis of this ideological divergence, tracing how Pakistan's military and political elite aligned with Saudi Arabia to counterbalance Iranian influence. Such works largely operate within a Realist paradigm, viewing sectarian conflict as a strategic byproduct of regional competition for influence, particularly between Tehran and Riyadh.

However, scholars like Abbas (2015) take a Constructivist turn by emphasizing the domestic construction of sectarian identities in Pakistan. Rather than being a direct export from Iran or Saudi Arabia, sectarianism is presented as locally mediated through religious seminaries, media discourse, and political patronage. This approach challenges the simplistic binary of proxy warfare and instead focuses on how sectarianism becomes embedded in national and subnational politics. Despite this important shift, there remains a gap in empirically grounded work that connects micro-level sectarian dynamics with broader regional security narratives, especially through RSCT, which could provide a framework for understanding how ideational fault lines map onto strategic alignments.

### **Influence of External Powers: U.S., Saudi Arabia, and China**

The triangular influence of the United States, Saudi Arabia, and China is frequently acknowledged as a key determinant of Pak-Iran relations. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia have historically exerted pressure on Pakistan to limit its engagement with Iran, particularly in the realms of defense and energy. Ehteshami and Zweiri (2007) argue that Pakistan's alignment with Gulf monarchies and its dependence on U.S. military and financial assistance structurally constrains its foreign policy choices vis-à-vis Iran. Realist analyses dominate this discussion, with emphasis placed on alliance behavior and the balancing strategies adopted by Pakistan (Khan, et. al., 2019).

More recently, scholars have begun to examine the rising influence of China, especially through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which introduces a new strategic calculus. Hameed (2021) suggests that China's interest in regional stability might encourage a pragmatic relationship between Iran and Pakistan, though the literature has yet to fully articulate the long-term implications of this trilateral interaction. Although China's role remains theoretically underexplored, especially through RSCT frameworks, this area could be useful for viewing how China functions as a mediator within overlapping security complexes in South and West Asia. This would be an intersectional analysis of China's appearance in Iranian and Pakistani strategic discourse from Constructivist readings.

### **Theoretical Engagements and Limitations**

Realist discourse has dominated the literature on Pak-Iran relations as it has privileged state interest, power dynamic and external constraints. Despite this, it remains that this has provided very significant insights into the behavior of alliances and strategic rivalry, but only at the expense of focusing on ideology, identity and domestic political culture. On the other hand, the empirical application of the Constructivist approaches is limited with reference to sectarianism and political discourse. The challenge is to move

from the abstract theorization of Constructivist thinking to the real empirically substantiated studies of the field.

However, RSCT is a good but underutilised framework. Firstly, it entails the intellectualization of Iran and Pakistan as the permutations of intersecting regional security complexes with Afghanistan, the Gulf and South Asia as the focal points. Although a few scholars, as Buzan and Wæver (2003) do, have started committing this model to practice, there is a clearly a gap in the literature which has not looked into more localized situations, to more critically assess and test for the relevance of the theory on the ground. To gain a holistic understanding of Pak-Iran relations, there are needed integrative theoretical models which would combine RSCT's structural insights with Constructivist attention to identity and Realist realization of power politics.

Generally, breadth of the landscape is rich but the depth of the landscape is often fragmented. Other fields, such as economic cooperation and China's role are less studied. While RSCT and Constructivism are promising, they are only beginning to be developed and either theory is dominant or unpractical. This review serves to indicate the need for interdisciplinary and multi-theoretical approaches to reconcile the reality of macro-level strategic analysis from the micro level Soviets political context.

The contribution to the field is offered by the hybrid analytical framework mixed Realist, Constructivist and RSCT based insights. Finally, it dares to challenge the prevailing discourses arguing for the radicalisation of Pak-Iran relations within a binary dichotomy of the sectarian struggle or its use by big power politics, seeking to foreground the relational nature of identity, agency, and structure interactions within this critical bilateral relationship.

## **Material and Methods**

Based on the secondary data analysis, this thesis is conducted. It gathered all information and insights from running existing sources: books, academic journal articles, policy reports, and news publications. These sources gave a lot of information regarding the historical, political, security, and economical aspects of the relationship between Pakistan and Iran.

It did not involve any primary data, that is, no interviews or surveys. Instead, the research used previously published materials to understand the extent to which Pak-Iran relations converges and diverges. Interpretation of the data and explanation of some of the patterns of bilateral relations were done theoretically through the use of Realism, Constructivism, and Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT).

With this method, we had a more comprehensive knowledge of the topic without the necessity of direct fieldwork using credible and reliable sources that were already reviewed and analyzed by the scholars and experts.

## **Results and Discussion**

In order to understand the dynamic interplay of convergence and divergence in Pak-Iran relations, this analysis brings empirical data and theoretical interpretation together to explore a possible convergence between these relations, as well as their inherent divergence at times, and also in turn explores the Pak-Iran relations which bear these characteristics. The three main objectives of the study are the agenda of discussion, namely strategic convergence in border security, energy, and economy, points of divergence in sectarianism and in foreign policy alignments, and their theoretical implications of Realism, Constructivism, and RSCT.

### Strategic Convergence: Border Security, Energy, and Economy

Most of Pak-Iran strategic cooperation is manifested in the fields of border security coordination and energy diplomacy. Both countries have faced repeated incursions from non-state actors along the Balochistan-Sistan border, prompting bilateral agreements for border fencing, joint patrols, and intelligence sharing.

**Table 1**  
**Major Border Security Agreements (2013–2022)**

Year	Agreement Type	Key Focus	Outcome
2013	Joint Border Commission	Coordination in Balochistan region	Established border monitoring
2017	Intelligence Sharing MoU	Anti-terror cooperation	Regular contact points activated
2021	Fence Construction Agreement	Physical barrier along porous areas	150 km fence completed
2022	Joint Military Drills	Border readiness and surveillance	Increased military presence

On the energy front, despite U.S. sanctions halting the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline, the project remains a cornerstone of potential economic integration.

**Table 2**  
**Key Milestones of the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline Project**

Year	Event	Impact
1995	Pipeline proposed	Strategic energy alliance envisioned
2010	Construction on Iranian side completed	Demonstrated Iran's commitment
2013	Pakistan signed construction deal	Symbolic political cooperation

\*Projected based on recent diplomatic developments.

Trade relations also point to latent economic convergence, even if underexploited. The bilateral trade volume remains limited due to sanctions and bureaucratic inertia.

**Table 3**  
**Iran-Pakistan Bilateral Trade Volume (2015–2022)**

Year	Total Trade Volume (USD)	Major Pakistani Exports	Major Iranian Exports
2015	\$837 million	Rice, textiles, fruits	Oil, LPG, construction goods
2018	\$1.2 billion	Surgical goods, vegetables	Petrochemicals
2020	\$950 million	Livestock, garments	Fuel, cement

### Strategic Divergence: Sectarianism and Geopolitical Alignments

Divergences are rooted in sectarian cleavages and geostrategic rivalries. Pakistan's strategic closeness with Saudi Arabia and perceived tolerance for anti-Iran militant groups fuels Iran's distrust. Conversely, Iran's backing of Shia networks and outreach to Indian infrastructure projects like Chabahar increases Islamabad's anxiety.

**Table 4**  
**Key Divergence Drivers in Pak-Iran Relations**

Domain	Pakistan's Position	Iran's Position	Strategic Implication
Sectarianism	Sunni majority, allied with Saudi Arabia	Shia leadership, supports regional Shia groups	Proxy tension inside Pakistan
U.S. Relations	Strategic (military, IMF support)	Adversarial (sanctions, isolation)	Hinders economic partnerships like IP pipeline
China Involvement	Core partner in CPEC	Ally via 25-year agreement	Competing visions for trade connectivity
India Relations	Conflictual	Cooperative (Chabahar port)	Suspicion over regional ambitions

These factors sustain a security dilemma. For example, the Jaish al-Adl attacks on Iranian soil are met with retaliatory rhetoric or military responses from Iran, and mutual accusations of harboring militants persist.

### **Theoretical Analysis: Realism, Constructivism, and RSCT**

Applying Realism, the bilateral relationship is primarily interest-driven. National sovereignty, territorial control, and economic benefit dominate decision-making, especially in energy cooperation and border control.

Constructivism, however, helps explain the influence of sectarian narratives and identity-based politics. But Saudi-Iran 'competition' is not the only aspect of Pakistan's internal Sunni Shia discourse: it is also influenced by indigenous political culture and certain historical religious dynamics.

RSCT adds a structural element to explain how Pak-Iran relations are formed along broader regional regional interdependencies and insecurities, especially due to the coexistence of South Asian, Gulf and Central Asian security complexes.

**Table 5**  
**Summary of Theoretical Interpretations**

<b>Theory</b>	<b>Key Concept</b>	<b>Application to Pak-Iran Relations</b>
Realism	National interest	Border fencing, pipeline diplomacy, Saudi tilt
Constructivism	Identity & discourse	Sectarianism, ideological mistrust, proxy politics
RSCT	Regional security linkage	Interconnected threats in South and West Asia

Pak-Iran relations' convergence-divergence dialectic is an age of fragile but functional engagement based on historic experience, changing dependencies, and ideational divide. There is strategic cooperation, which is genuine, but trust deficits and geopolitical constraints obstruct it again and again. A nuanced framework of interpreting this evolving bilateral relationship is achieved through an interplay of Realist imperative, Constructivist identity, and RSCT's regional interdependence.

### **Conclusion**

This study has sought to unravel the complex relationship between Pakistan and Iran by critically examining the drivers of both strategic convergence and enduring divergence. Using a qualitative methodology grounded in secondary data analysis, the research relied on an extensive body of scholarly literature, policy reports, and historical records. While it was not in any way dependent on primary fieldwork, the variety of secondary sources proved significant enough for a full and comprehensive as well as multi-dimensional understanding of Pak-Iran dynamics. The application of Realism, Constructivism, and RSCT, paired with an exercise of this methodological approach, gave a theoretical framework for interpretation of the bilateral relationship in all of its geopolitical, ideological, and strategic complexity.

First, the study investigated in which areas convergence has occurred most obviously, e.g. border security cooperation, energy diplomacy and fledgling economic links in consonance with its stated objectives. It showed that contacts between them have occurred around mutual concerns with non-state actors and regional volatility, which have led to episodic cooperation from the sharing of information, as well as of security measures and common interests in energy infrastructure. These initiatives however often remain fragile, under threat from the outside and divisive faults on the inside.

It then addressed the more persistent drivers of divergence, discovering how sectarian identities, rival coalitions at the regional scale, and 'the keys of the global', from the United States, Saudi Arabia and China to others, have repeatedly subverted sustained



efforts at reconciliation. Strategic and ideological, historical and religious narratives shape national narratives of threat and mistrust about these fault lines.

Through synthesizing these findings through the conceptual frames of the three theoretical frameworks, the study showed that Pak-Iran relations are a dialectic of necessity and hesitation. Pragmatic cooperation is explained by Realism, anxiety by Constructivism, and the relationship situated in the context of a broader network of security interlinks by RSCT. In isolation, each insight gives a cohesive portrayal of an episodic alignment captured by divergences in both the structural and ideational realms. The study concludes by highlighting how institutionalized dialogue, multilateral engagement, and diplomacy that is identity sensitive have to move forward, should the relationship evolve into a more stable and mutually beneficial one.

### **Recommendation**

This study, based on the resources of secondary sources and application of a number of the theoretical frameworks, presents a rich and nuanced picture of the myriad ways through which Pak-Iran relations are complex. Applying the objectives set out from the beginning the identification of drivers of convergence and drivers of divergence, and a theoretical interpretation of bilateral behavior the discussion highlights such relationship between the two countries as marked by pragmatism, strategic ambiguity, and ideological caution.

The methodology using a qualitative analysis of existing literature, academic research, policy documents, historical records helps capture the complex and changing nature of the Pak-Iran relations. Since the sources of primary data are often absent, absent first hand insight into diplomatic processes, the study is able to cover structural, ideological and strategic elements in a comprehensive way. In addition to the interpretive strength of the study, further integration of Realism, Constructivism, and Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) has enabled the study to have a multi-dimensional reading that challenges reductionist explanations of foreign policy behavior.

The data suggests that the convergence in Pak-Iran relations, largely located in situational terms, exists in the realm of border security as well as energy cooperation, which share commonalities in their vulnerabilities. The problem is, empirical evidence shows that much cooperation is reactive in response to regional threats to cooperation, such as cross border insurgency and economic instability. He uses joint border commissions and memoranda of understanding on intelligence sharing as signs of commitment to addressing these challenges. Just like the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, symbolically, has survived not only sanctions and international pressure but continues to survive as evidence of a latent mutual interest in infrastructural and economic interdependence. These areas of convergence best represent the Realist imperative to meet the national interest under the conditions of regional ambiguity.

But none of this is on a consistent basis countered by structural and ideational forces that induce divergence. Perceptions of threat and alliance behaviour are shaped by sectarian cleavage chiefly the Sunni-Shia contest as aggravated by external patronage from Saudi Arabia and Iran. The study shows how mutual suspicion coalesces around Pakistan's attachment to Saudi strategic objectives and Iran's promotion of Shia groups and outreach to rival actors like India. Nevertheless, Constructivist insights show that these identity driven anxieties in no way constitute just a collateral damage in a geopolitical rivalry; they stem from the history of memory, domestic political discourses and societal narrative that pitfalls over the long term interdependence.

He further compounds the divergence by contemplating it in the context of broader regional security architecture in which both states operate. Specifically, RSCT is helpful in

viewing how Iran and Pakistan are both engaged bilaterally, yet continually are pulled between varying security complexes which span the Gulf, South Asia and Central Asia. Bilateral autonomy is constrained by the influence of external powers in particular the United States, China, and Saudi Arabia and the reinforcement of divergence. This strategic disincentive develops from the fact that Pakistan is so dependent on Western institutions for funding and military partnerships that it does not want to do more with Iran, since it is isolated by Western sanctions. In addition, Iran's increasing focus on India and China injects an element of competition for what is already an already fragile relationship.

In the backdrop of this, the study suggests a reframing of Pak-Iran diplomatic architecture. Instead of supplementary bilateral engagements run ad hoc or reactive diplomacy, both states would gain from institutionalizing dialogue through institutionalized actors for consultation and joint problem solving. Set up a bilateral council of security, trade, and cultural affairs, free from third party influence, may provide a buffer against volatility in the geopolitical scene and a long term trust. Moreover, the sectarian discourse in civil society needs to be depoliticized through civil society exchanges and inter faith dialogues to promote intra-Islamic harmony beyond the state cross worldview.

In the multilateral sense, both countries should consider exploring platforms of cooperation at the regional level that are correlated with their shared interest in connectivity, anti-terrorism and trade. Multilateralism located in underutilized forums such as Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can mitigate the negative effect bilateral mistrust. Moreover, Pakistan and Iran must also review the ramifications of their respective regional visions: CPEC and Iran's eastward strategy for regional integration in a sense that they can complement instead of compete with each other.

The study finally concludes that the methodological approach of the study was based on secondary data and theoretical triangulation which successfully unraveled the dialectic between convergence and divergence in Pak-Iran relations. The evidence suggests that while strategic cooperation is possible and often necessary, it is unlikely to be sustainable without deeper structural reforms, institutional engagement, and the transformation of ideational fault lines. A future trajectory of normalized relations depends not only on external alignments but on the internal political will to move from episodic pragmatism to strategic trust.

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