



RESEARCH PAPER

Pakistan Relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran: Comparative Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to comparatively analyze Pakistan's bilateral relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia, focusing on diplomatic, economic, and security dimensions. Pakistan's foreign policy is shaped by the necessity to balance two ideologically divergent yet regionally significant powers—Iran and Saudi Arabia. Historical, religious, and economic ties influence its relations with both countries, complicating its foreign policy decisions. A qualitative approach is used, relying solely on secondary sources including academic publications, policy papers, and official records. Content analysis identifies recurring themes and patterns in diplomatic strategies. Findings reveal Pakistan's policy of strategic neutrality and mediation, shaped by geopolitical compulsions, economic dependence on Saudi Arabia, and border security cooperation with Iran. Despite sectarian tensions and competing regional influences, Pakistan continues to pursue a pragmatic foreign policy that seeks equilibrium between Tehran and Riyadh. To sustain this balance, Pakistan must institutionalize neutrality, strengthen regional diplomacy, and diversify energy and economic partnerships.

KEYWORDS Bilateralism, Iran-Pakistan Ties, Pak-Saudi Relations

Introduction

Pakistan's geopolitical position between the Middle East and South Asia situates it at the crossroads of two powerful and often competing regional actors—Iran and Saudi Arabia. Both nations exert profound influence on Pakistan's foreign policy decisions, presenting a complex dynamic shaped by religious, economic, and strategic imperatives. While Iran and Saudi Arabia are embroiled in a long-standing sectarian and political rivalry, Pakistan maintains significant yet distinct bilateral relationships with each, making the management of these ties both crucial and challenging. Iran, Pakistan's western neighbor, shares a 900-kilometer-long border and a history rooted in cultural, linguistic, and religious commonalities. Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan after its independence, and both nations collaborated closely during the Cold War through regional alliances. However, the 1979 Iranian Revolution marked a turning point, introducing ideological differences that complicated bilateral relations. Despite these challenges, Iran remains a vital partner in border security cooperation and energy agreements such as the proposed Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia holds a unique and influential position in Pakistan's foreign policy due to its economic assistance, military cooperation, and the religious significance it holds for the Muslim world. With over a million Pakistani expatriates residing in the Kingdom and contributing substantial remittances, Saudi Arabia serves as both a financial benefactor and a spiritual epicenter. The strategic alliance is further solidified through joint military exercises, defense agreements, and infrastructural investments, underlining the depth of Pakistan-Saudi ties. The ongoing rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia places Pakistan in a precarious position, as overt alignment with either side risks internal sectarian tensions or diplomatic fallout. Domestically, Pakistan comprises both Sunni and Shia communities, necessitating a foreign policy approach that avoids

inflaming sectarian divisions. Thus, Pakistan pursues a strategy of neutrality and mediation, often offering to broker peace between the two rivals, as seen during the Yemen crisis. This research aims to dissect Pakistan's dual relationships with Iran and Saudi Arabia, examining how Islamabad's foreign policy is shaped by external pressures and internal compulsions. It seeks to identify the underlying principles guiding Pakistan's diplomatic balancing act and assess the long-term sustainability of this approach. By analyzing diplomatic, economic, and security interactions, the study provides a holistic view of the intricacies of Pakistan's foreign policy and its efforts to maintain regional stability while safeguarding national interests.

Literature Review

The scholarly literature predominantly characterizes Pakistan's relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia as a complex balancing act. Secondary sources stress historical affinity with Iran, especially through shared cultural and linguistic bonds, and pragmatic cooperation in energy and border security. Iran's involvement in regional conflicts and support for Shia militias, however, poses challenges to bilateral ties, especially given Pakistan's delicate sectarian composition. In contrast, literature on Pakistan-Saudi relations emphasizes religious affiliation, strategic alliance, and substantial economic aid, particularly in the form of remittances and military cooperation. Scholars frequently note Pakistan's economic dependence on Saudi Arabia, which influences Islamabad's cautious foreign policy stance. Multiple studies highlight Pakistan's diplomatic neutrality during the Yemen conflict and its mediation offers as a case of strategic non-alignment. Analysts also draw attention to the internal sectarian equilibrium Pakistan must maintain, influenced by foreign funding and regional politics. Overall, the literature underscores Pakistan's adaptive, pragmatic foreign policy rooted in secondary pressures and regional realpolitik. A Critical Analysis of Pakistan's Relations With Iran In 21st Century by Muhammad Waqas Anwar , Dr. Ghulam Mustafa and Muhammad Taimoor (Muzaffar, Khan& Yaseen, 2017; Anwar, Mustafa, & Taimoor, 2025). Focusing on political, economic, and security dimensions, this article critically analyzes Pakistan's relations with Iran in the 21st century. It examines the challenges and opportunities shaping their bilateral ties within a rapidly changing regional and global landscape. An Analysis of Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Relations in the 21st Century (Anwar, Mustafa, Taimoor, & Akram, An Analysis of Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Relations in the 21st Century, 2025), The authors elucidates that Pakistan and Saudi Arabia maintain a unique and long-standing bilateral relationship, forged by historical, religious, economic, and strategic connections. Deeply anchored in shared Islamic values and mutual geopolitical interests, this partnership has transformed over time. Since 1947, Saudi Arabia has been a crucial ally, offering Pakistan economic, political, and military support. Military collaboration, financial aid, and a joint focus on regional stability define their ties. While challenges—such as Pakistan's neutral stance in the Saudi-Iran rivalry and Saudi Arabia's deepening ties with India—have emerged, the relationship has demonstrated resilience amid changing global and regional dynamics. Pakistan's Exertions of Reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia: Challenges and Opportunities (Khan, Muzaffar & Khan, 2019; Zehraa, Imtiaz, & Ahmed, 2020), The Middle East is undergoing a transformative phase, compelling regional states to reassess their foreign policy strategies. In this evolving geopolitical landscape, both opportunities and challenges arise, allowing regional and global powers to advance their national interests while countering rival influence. At the heart of this strategic competition lies the Saudi-Iran rivalry, a defining conflict shaping the Middle East's power dynamics. While Saudi Arabia and Iran have long vied for dominance, Pakistan—a partner to both—seeks to mediate tensions and promote regional stability.

Material and Methods

This article adopts a qualitative methodology grounded in the analysis of secondary sources. The primary data comprises scholarly articles, historical accounts, policy papers, and think tank reports that document Pakistan's foreign relations with Iran and Saudi

Arabia. These sources offer a foundation for understanding the historical trajectory, economic engagements, and security collaborations between Pakistan and the two Middle Eastern nations. Content analysis is used to interpret themes of neutrality, mediation, and strategic balancing. Key academic references and government policy documents are reviewed to extract patterns and assess the implications of Pakistan's diplomatic choices. The methodology emphasizes triangulating different perspectives to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the geopolitical complexities influencing Pakistan's foreign policy.

Comparative Analysis of Pakistan's Relations with Iran & Saudi Arabia

Pak-Iran Diplomatic Ties

The relationship can be described as a complex one since relations between the two countries are marked by cultural, religious and geographical similarities that have been existing for centuries. Before the partition of Pakistan in 1947 the areas now forming Pakistan is rooted with Persian culture and inspiration. The subcontinent witnessed several centuries into Persian as the language of the administration and scholarship and its imprint is found deeply in Urdu, Pakistan's national language (Guha, 2024). Such historical and cultural contacts paved the way for the co-operative relationship between the two countries of Pakistan and Iran soon after the later's independence. Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan from the outside and this early sign of support was personal as both countries would come to find in the years that followed while both entities tried to work out their places in the supra regional and international systems. Yet not a problem free partnership and the dynamics of Pakistan-Iran relations have been vastly defined by purposes, conflicts, and realignments to serve each neighbors' interests in a precarious neighborhood.

The rivalry between Pakistan and Iran has emerged from time to time especially Iranian expansionist policies in the region. Iran's allies with Shia militias and political factions in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen are issues of concern in Pakistan because of the possibility of Iranian policies generating blowback in the region. Currently, Iran has a very active presence in these countries; it supports elements in the region such as Hezbollah this shows Iran's plans to increase its domineering influence across the region (Khazaeli, 2022). This situation has thrown the Pakistan into a fix particularly because it is an ally of Saudi Arabia which is Iran's main competitor in the region. The conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia is political, structural and religious where Iran has been backing the Shia political agenda, and Saudi Arabia supports the Sunni agenda. Thus, Pakistan has been trapped in the uncomfortable situation to maintain friendship with both participating and non-participating countries, but to avoid getting involved in multi-dimensions of competition between them.

Pakistan-Iran relations are complicated which can be explained on the grounds of historical relationship and common threats and aggression from outside world along with rivalry over some issues. The policy of neutrality and mediation much aligns with the broader interest of Pakistan but tends to negotiate between these poles to prevent conflict within its region. The collaboration between Pakistan and Iran in aspects including security, trade and common resources show much of the prospect of a healthy partnership but this does not conquer the paradox of how to control Iran's influence in the region and at the same time meet powers, liabilities and duties of other significant ally like Saudi Arabia (Karim, The Pakistan-Iran relationship and the changing nature of regional and domestic security and strategic interests, 2022). Thus, where both the actors move through the evolutionary process in the regional constellation of the Middle East and South Asia, the manner in which this balance is sustained will dictate the variable dynamics of the national and regional security of Pakistan.

Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Diplomatic Relations

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia share a wide range of dynamics of interaction which are religious, economic and strategic that have been established long time ago. This alliance is not only based on the political and economic relations but is very much traditional religious and cultural motive that connect the two countries population. Saudi Arabia is recognized due to its guardianship of the two holiest sites of Muslims – Mecca and Medina; Pakistan is an Islamic Republic that follows Islamic tenets in its politics as well as public administration. This religious link makes Saudi Arabia powerful and able to control Pakistan as the latter's population turns to the former Kingdom for spiritual, economic and security assistance (Bajwa & Ansari, 2018). That in one way or another faith and diplomacy are intertwined and has become an important factor in determining Pakistan's foreign policy diplomacy where Saudi Arabia remains as one of the most crucial partners in Pakistan's diplomatic partnership.

The Pakistan leadership ever since its formation in 1947 has considered Saudi Arabia an important ally in the Islamic world. This treasured partnership was based on religion interest in creating bonds extending to uniting of Islamic nations. The importance of this relationship was underpinned again from Pakistan's participation in the formation of Islamic Grouping of Countries also known as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation where KSA has always been in the forefront. The two countries have both sustained supporting the Islamic causes and Pakistan's being in line with the religious and political issues with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has afforded it a legitimacy and support within the broader Muslim Ummah (Ahmed & Karim, Saudi Arabia's soft power in Pakistan, 2024). Certainly, to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan is an essential strategic partner within the South Asian region and a gateway to central Asia. Given the turbulence in the regions its strategic location at the interface of south Asia, Central Asia, and Middle East adds to the strategic value of Pakistan for Saudi Arabia especially in terms of military and economic cooperation.

The main economic link between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia concerns Pakistani expatriates living in Saudi Arabia because this number is among the highest in the gulf area. Pakistani workers that migrate to the Kingdom make up millions who are employed in construction and service industry. The money which these expatriates' remit to their home country, Pakistan is another vital source of foreign exchange for Pakistan i.e., in terms of billions of US dollars. Such remittances not only sustain millions of families in Pakistan but also add the stability of the country's balance of payments due to constant inflow of foreign currency. Therefore, the position of Saudi Arabia that receives many Pakistan workers has direct impact in determining the policies of economical ventures of Pakistan and even the diplomatic stand of Pakistan towards the Kingdom. Pakistan's government has consistently tried to bolster this relationship for as long as it may take to guarantee job openings for Pakistani nationals given birthed by this immigration.

However, often because of the extensive investment and military support which Riyadh provides to Islamabad, Pakistan remains impartial is in a precarious position. Large investments in the Pakistani economy and active SA support for Pakistan and for Pakistanis abroad all ensure that Pakistan will remain on the Saudi side of important questions. This alignment has sometime forced the Pakistan to make unprecedented diplomatic decision like joining the Saudi led Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (Rafique & Khawar, 2023). What Saudi Arabia calls a united coalition against terrorism is viewed as a block opposing Iran's influence in the Middle East. Pakistan's decision to join the coalition was not while silent at home for some faction saw it as allying into the Saudi-Iran conflict with Tehran relations at risk. But in Pakistan, the leadership of the country wrapped its participation in the war in terms of counterterrorism and supporting unity among Muslims, showing that Pakistan has a delicate tale to tell to balance its foreign policy.

Pakistan-Iran Economic Cooperation

Bilateral commercial relations between Pakistan and Iran have always had a diplomatic touch in context of energy sector. These connections are mainly due to the acute shortage of energy supplies in Pakistan and an abundance of natural gas and oil in Iran which can be viewed as the promising basis for cooperation between the two developing neighbors. The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project that was also referred to as the Peace Pipeline is a plus to the nature of the economic relations between these two countries (Rafique & Zafar, Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline Conundrum and Options for Pakistan, 2024). Most of topics in economic relations of Iran and Pakistan are centered on the pipeline project which was originally intended to supply Pakistan's never-ending energy needs by importing natural gas from Iran. Nonetheless, a number of potentially appreciated features of such a project that both states can enjoy has been witnessing some opposing international sanctions, geopolitical situation, and regional tensions, which time and again has thwarted the Pakistan-Iran relations of trade.

The Iran Pakistan gas pipeline scheme was first contemplated in 1990s within framework of a strategic energy partnership in South Asian region. Iran being rich in natural gas wanted the pipeline to seal economic relations with its neighbors and wanted to expand its influence through energy diplomacy. In the case of Pakistan, the pipeline provided a golden chance to win over its energy hungry leadership which has remained a severe bottleneck since time immemorial in its economical and development orientation (Nasir, 2024). The electric power of Pakistan's energy sector has remained imbalanced and inadequate to fulfill the needs of the country's increasing population and industrial demands. The import of Iranian gas was considered as a possible shift in energy supply and management to decrease Pakistan's reliance on far more costly supplies of LNG from other states. However, the pipeline was capable of not only exporting energy and nourishing Pakistan, but also spread reach to India, this made it a multilateral economic corridor with increased possibilities of connectivity and trading.

The regional dimension of this approach Pakistan has taken towards the Iranian economy is further complicated by historical relations and economic partnership that this country Iran has. Despite the many obstacles in the pipeline project, both Pakistan and Iran have endeavored to seek the other's cooperation in other fields, such as trade and development contextual border markets (Rafique & Zafar, 2024). Both countries have shown concern in deepening the trade relations; Iran has proposed exporting electricity to the energy starved Pakistan including the province of Balochistan and Sindh. These areas are immediately adjacent to the country of Iran and as such represent the most obvious area for economic interdependence. Pakistan and Iran have also entered into agreements to establish border market for improving the local economy affected by the ongoing smuggling problem in the areas of the two countries. Such initiatives though indicates that for other sectors which go hand in hand in economic cooperation, Pakistan and Iran are ready to face external pressures.

However, there are some issues in even these efforts. These include the actual border markets which are intended in helping legitimate business prosper and add to national development, have been slowed down by insecurity because of the activities of militants in the regions. More so, the spilled of insurgency by the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and Jaish al-Adl has weakened the chances of stabilizing and securing the regions to enable the two governments execute their economic agendas as planned (Wolf, 2021). Also, the black market and smuggling networks, which have prevailed because of the absence of economic amenities in the border regions, are a problem to the formation of authorized trade. Pakistan and Iran both have deployed security forces to handle these threats, but changing security situation still affects their economic relations.

Domestic politics in Pakistan also plays a major role in its economic relations with Iran. As with many countries, there are opposing views in Pakistan with regards to its relations with Iran; this includes; some of these factions, especially those with close links to Saudi Arabia, or those that receive support from organizations funded by the kingdom, may prefer a less provocative relationship with Iran, for fear of upsetting sectarian balance in Pakistan (Ahmed & Akbarzadeh, 2020). Other groups, the parties of the Shia community in Pakistan, have demanded improving the economic and political cooperation with Iran on the basis of historical and cultural relations. The fact that, these internal dynamics also need to be in balance adds another facet to Pakistan's economic interaction with Iran since being able to deal with these interests are a matter of coherence in the government's policy formulation.

Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Economic Ties

Economic cooperation, in particular Saudi Arabia's help for Pakistan financially, has been among the most important features of the relations between the two states over the years. This help encompasses out-right capital grants on infrastructure projects, soft loans in periods of global meltdown and, significantly, the huge KSA-Pakistan remittances originating from the millions of Pakistanis working in the Kingdom. These remittances are part of Pakistan's economy; so therefore, Saudi Arabia not only possess economic power over Pakistan but also impacts its economic stability (Abbas, Masood, & Sakhawat, 2017). Saudi aid to Pakistan cuts across a broad spectrum – from capital investment and infrastructure development to guarantees, resource endowments and investment in power and agriculture. The said robust financial interaction clearly proves the extent of two countries' intertwined partnership and reveals Pakistan's dependence on the Saudis' help that strongly affects Pakistan's foreign politics.

The money from Pakistanis living in Saudi Arabia have for many years been considered as the major source of earning foreign exchange for the country. Looking at the discourses on Pakistan's skilled and unskilled migrant workers in the KSA and other sectors including construction, service, health, engineers etc. the remittances of the Pakistanis in millions of Saudi Arabia make a large part of GDP of Pakistan. These remittances not only benefit the families of these workers but also supplemented the foreign exchange reserves pot that strengthens the balance of payments situation in Pakistan (Abbas, Masood, & Sakhawat, 2017). In a country where foreign exchange reserves are always under strain owing to trade deficits and debt-servicing, these remittances are income that makes a direct difference to the stability of the economy. Precisely, since Saudi Arabia remains one of the largest employers of Pakistan's manpower; this explains why Riyadh has significant economic muscle in the relationship with Pakistan. Therefore, sustaining a correct standing with the Saudi Arabian authorities is important for Pakistani authorities, who perceive any instability within the bilateral relationship as a risk for the number of remittances which, in flip, shapes the overall well-being of the Pakistani economic system.

The economic relation between both countries is concretized in also social aspects, especially the millions of Pakistan living and working in the Saudi Arabia. The role of expatriate labor force is as significant component of the economic relations between the Kingdom of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia because these people remit money for their families, contributing to the overall economy of Pakistan. Due to its excessive dependence on remittances, the Pakistani government has to remain in frequent contact with Saudi authorities to negotiate proper treatment and opportunities for employment, legal rights and welfare of Pakistani expatriates (Babar, 2021). Such policies have given direction to the diplomatic relation between Pakistan and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia especially when the change in any policy is going to affect the expatriate people living in Saudi Arabia including Pakistani people's interests which are pretty crucial for the living of economy in Pakistan. This dynamic shows the economic relations not only in terms of investment but the social and financial connection that exists between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia.

The financial aid Pakistan receives from Saudi Arabia is not doubted, but it has negative impacts because Saudi investments make it almost impossible for Pakistan to follow an independent foreign policy. This dependency implies that Pakistani foreign policy respects the Saudi preferences on regional as well as international issues even those issues do not suit Pakistan. For instance, Pakistan's participation in the Saudi-led Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition was influenced by domestic and regional considerations; nonetheless, one must understand that Saudi economic assistance plays an incredible part in shaping the strategic potentials of the Pakistan state. The coalition which is believed to be a block to check Iranian influence put Pakistan in a conflicting situation as on one hand it enjoyed deep and strategic relation with Saudi Arabia while on the other hand Pakistan required to have good relations with Iran also (Ahmed & Akbarzadeh, 2020). This decision shows how much the financial condition of Pakistan owes to Saudi Arabia in this regard and how in consonance with its economic benefactor's interest the surrounding international politics have dictated the Pakistani foreign policy to make comparatively complex decisions for it.

Security relations with Iran

Pakistan and Iran are adjacent neighbors with a border over 900 kilometers long and that brings certain prospects in cooperation and some challenges, such as counterterrorism and anti-insurgency cooperation. It comprises an assortment of topographical barriers and has low state capacity, and hence becomes a preferred theatre for cross-border militant attacks, smuggling and other unlawful activities. Tribal noises such as the Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) and the Sunni militant group Jaish al-Adl are present in this border area, who due to the frontline's openness often carry out insurgent actions against both states (Wolf, 2021). These groups not only destabilize the security in the region but also the relationship between Pakistan and Iran where both countries have an issue of handling with probes of insurgency and militant emerging from these borders' areas. In order to reduce these security threats, both, Pakistan and Iran have adopted a number of security cooperation measures like joint border patrols besides sharing of intelligence to reign in militant activities. Cooperation of this kind is evidence of states recognizing that security of the border between them as a part of their national interest (Cozine, 2016). Pakistan Iran border especially of Balochistan province of Pakistan and Sistan-Balochestan province of Iran has always witnessed cooperation in combating insurgency and ensuring security on borders. That's why these actions reflect a utilitarian element of the relations between Pakistan and Iran as intertwined security threats and shared threats give them something to lean on while also having many other reasons to be distant.

There is always an element of strain in Pakistan Iran relationship because Iran's involvement in the wider Middle East region and supporting Shia militias in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen. This is something that has always raised eyebrows when Iran is involved in these conflicts as seen by both the Saudi and the Pakistan authorities as a strategy in the bid to cement the countries influence in the region. For Pakistan, to retain relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia they have to stay neutral always which is not always possible (Ahmed & Akbarzadeh, 2020). Iran has sectarian aspect in its foreign and regional policy, and this affects sectarian balance in Pakistan as Pakistan also has Shias in its allotment. Balancing on this tight rope is diplomatically sensitive because Pakistan does not want to enrage sectarian strife in its own country while at the same wanting to keep good relations with both Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Security relations with Saudi Arabia

Different to Iran, Pakistan has strong military cooperation with another regional powerful actor – Saudi Arabia. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are strategic partners in defense; they have signed several defense deals and defense accords; there are, military exercises;

Pakistan's armed forces provide training and advice to the Saudi military (Karim, 2023). The cooperation is of a strategic partnership that has developed over the years, based on which Pakistan has been strengthening Saudi Arabia's defense capacity. It is the manifestation of Pakistan and KSA bilateral relationship along with Pakistan's strategic orientation towards retaining its military relationship with a regional powerhouse that is financially and politically supportive for its growth and development.

Military cooperation has been more evident in relation to Saudi inspired activity such as the coalition to the Houthi rebels in the Yemen situation (Hokayem & Roberts, 2023). Yemen war that Saudi Arabia has articulated as a counterterrorism mission as well as a mission to reinstate a legitimate government and to curb Iran influence, has benefited from military assistance from Pakistan included. Although Pakistan has tried to stay out of the Yemen conflict to ensure that it remains as non-partisans, it remains loyal to Saudi Arabia by offering military training as well as training personnel. This has prepared the Pakistani forces to deal with internal security and for the protection of strategic assets where they have deployed their forces in Saudi Arabia military basically, the military relations between these two countries are astoundingly strong. This support to Saudi Arabia shows Pakistan's consistent strategic relationship with the Kingdom that despite direct involvement in Saudi lead wars may be Himalayan.

Apart from defense cooperation, there are defense pacts and agreements that cement both states' ties and provide for future cooperation on a military front. Military Training and advisory support has been a part of relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, Pakistani military officials usually hold high ranks in Saudi Arabia's hierarchy of military organizational structure. This cooperation goes beyond basic military interloper and encompasses a much higher level of coordination of a particular set of defense policies and assets with an objective of making sure that Riyadh can count on Islamabad in the event of war or other forms of turmoil. The continuation of these military ties corroborates the significance of the relation to Saudi as well as to Pakistan because it supplies the former with a backup to enhance its defense front, and in the return, the latter acquires a strategic and economically helpful relation (Yaseen, Muzaffar & Tariq, 2023; Karim, 2023).

The military cooperation enjoys friendly relations with Saudi Arabia that too came with some consequences for Pakistan. This has the effect of often coloring Pakistan's dealings with Iran, as the two countries remain bitter regional rivals, with Saudi Arabia strongly backing the other side. Pakistan's involvement in Saudi driven military operations like the Yemen intervention, has not times been dismissed by Iran as a part of Saudi Arabia's over arched plan to check Iranian influence in the region. The problem that Pakistan faces regarding these alliances is not to provoke Iran or face sectarian conflict at home. Day by day the management of the strategic relations and the degree of conflicts in which Pakistan can be engaged is seen – from the decision not to intervene the Yemeni crisis directly and supply Saudi Arabia with necessities that do not make Pakistan look like an opponent of Iran. Still, this alliance has had its toll on Pakistan, however, it has not let go off the relationship because it would be financially and militarily benefiting from the relation with KSA. Saudi Arabia's deep-rooted military relations not only offer Pakistan the much-needed economic support but grants Pakistan a prestige in international political matters concerning regional security. Saudi Arabia plays dominant roles in Islamic body like OIC so Pakistan's obedience to Saudi's military policies and objectives also provides Pakistan a diplomatic advantage in these organizations. Hence by supporting the initiatives of Saudi Arabia and cementing its military alliance with Riyadh, Pakistan is also cementing its role as a prominent actor in the Islamic world and as a crucial actor in the region (Zainab & Reza, 2022).

Balancing Act: Neutrality and Mediation

The primary and most significant aspect of the Pakistan's foreign policy analysis is its attempts to establish it in a mandatory middleman zone between two outstanding powers of the Middle Eastern region, namely, Iran and Saudi Arabia. This is explained by the fact that the country understands the geopolitical and domestic challenges that come with cozying up to either side. Middle Eastern region is defined by rivalry, sectarian and geopolitical, between Saudi Arabia a Sunni dominated state in the region and Iran a Shia dominated state in the region, this rivalry often leads to proxy wars in the region (Gul, 2021). In the case of Pakistan, a predominantly Islamic state with studied population strength of Sunni and Shia sects it becomes pertinent for the state to balance these enmities for both internal and external stability. Pakistan's foreign policy of neutrality not only aims but the task of these regional players, but also, aiming to become a mediator in conflicts, using diplomatic relations with both powers. That, however, is not without complicating factors owing to which Pakistan has to navigate tensions emanating from both Iran and Saudi Arabia as well as the internal sectarianism that these external affiliations tend to fuel.

Pakistan being geographically and culturally very close to both Iran and Saudia holds a very special interest in the political affairs of Middle East. In its relationship with Riyadh, Pakistan has been traditionally an ally, owing to its strong religious, commercial and military connection with KSA. Saudi Arabia has offered economic assistance, investments and foreign exchange receipts from millions of Pakistani expatriate workers in the kingdom (Siddiqi, 2019). These relations are important for Pakistan because Saudi money has often been pledged during the Pakistan's financial turmoil. Moreover, its positions of hosting Islam's two holy cities of Makah and Medina religious tone to the bilateral relation because millions of Pakistani Muslims go for Hajj every year. The religious and economic bond outlined in this paper guarantees that Pakistan will always be an important ally to Saudi Arabia to the extent of being insolvable in its foreign policy equations (Brown 2024). However, this relationship is not one of intimacy so as to provoke Iran to retaliate while at the same time, Pakistan must keep a healthy working relation with Iran as the two countries are neighbors, and share a long border, and strong business links.

Another significant factor of its foreign policy is Iran, which is not only a geographically neighbors' country, but also an important sign of Pakistan's foreign policy. It also important to note that based on historical, linguistic and cultural relations the countries are connected for centuries as they had common border of over 900 kilometers. Iran was one of the first countries to recognize the newborn country Pakistan and since then the two countries enjoyed diplomatic relations in fields including trade, security along the border and cultural exchange. The vast resources of natural gas and oil in Iran equally offer Pakistan strategic opportunities to meet its energy requirements primarily through the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project planned and proposed for long time to overcome the energy crises in Pakistan. In addition, both nations have been working together to counterterrorism and insurgency around the border especially in Baluchistan province of Pakistan that is being attacked by militants from both sides (Basit, 2018). These fields of cooperation explain situating of Iran in the vision of the Pakistani regional policy and explain why Islamabad cannot risk turning against Tehran despite the close cooperation with Riyadh.

Pakistani neutrality in the conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia also enable the country to act as a middleman in any regional conflicts, this due to the good relationship between Pakistan and the two warring nations. Pakistan's neutrality has been most evident in the case of the Yemen civil war in which Saudi Arabia leads a coalition against the Iran-backed Houthi movement (Naz, 2023). Although Saudi Arabia asked Pakistan formally to get involved in the coalition directly Pakistan responded negatively in Pakistan's parliament although it endorsed a diplomatic and non-aligned policy. Instead of joining the conflict, Pakistan's government said it was willing to act as a mediator between the two sides proving its desire to remain neutral despite the urging by its ally Saudi Arabia. This decision was important in all of the following ways: As it showed that Pakistan was willing, and capable of pleasing Riyadh without having to anger Tehran. Thus, by maintaining this neutral

position Pakistan tried to avoid the situation where it wouldn't be able to avoid a conflict that not only would most likely deteriorate their relations with Iran even further but also fueled sectarian conflict within Pakistan itself.

Pakistan is very much keen to remain non-aligned not only for global diplomacy, but they also in fact also do not want to provoke sectarian conflicts within Pakistan. Pakistan has a big Shia community second only to Iran, and a large Sunni majority. Such sectarian balance requires prudential foreign policy behavior and avoiding alignment towards House of Saud or towards Iran since any allegiance to one may fuel sectarian war in the country. The sectarian divide of Sunni and Shia is a very touchy spot in Pakistan and Iran along with Saudi Arabia have been trying to take advantage of the sectarian organizations in Pakistan for their own regional gains. Al Arabiya pointed out that Saudi Arabia has funded Sunni religious bodies and individuals in Pakistan, while the latter has helped the Shia bodies. All these external factors play role in internal sectarian process which Pakistan government has to manage in order to ensure no civil strife in Pakistan.

Pakistan's foreign policy decision of NIC between Iran and Saudi Arabia is due to transit Pakistani relationships between the regional nations and internal factors. This way, Pakistan can participate in regional conflicts or disputes, including the Saudi-Iranian proxy civil wars, and at the same time consider itself as sensible and inviting for other nations in the Muslim world to seek help in maintaining stability. Nonetheless, it seems that Pakistan has problems of its own because the internal Sunni/Shiite conflict is fueled by the Iranian/Saudi competition on its soil. Balancing these internal sectarian dynamics and at the same time responding to the influence of its regional and global allies to achieve such a change, is a virtue and a necessity. Pakistan's performance in sustaining this equilibrium shall be imperative for stabilizing its diplomacy and continued capability to be a significant player in the region's political dynamics that at times can be rather unstable of the Middle East and South Asia.

Conclusion

Due to trying to serve the interests of both Iran and Saudi Arabia at the same time, Pakistan's diplomacy strategy in this regard is different for both of them to minimize adverse effects and avail the good points.... In case of Iran, the issues focus on the bilateral relation specifically on the border control and regional cooperation along the border and business cooperation. Due to the volatile relations and due to the emerging security threats in the border areas of both Pakistan and Iran such as insurgency, cross-border smuggling and other such issues Pakistan benefits from closer cooperation with Iran in terms of border control and joint counter-terrorism co-operation. Further, Pakistan regards Iran as a significant economic partner in energy sector especially as a planned IP (Iran Pakistan) gas pipeline project that may solve the energy crisis of Pakistan. Nonetheless, for Pakistan economic prospects of dealing with Iran are equal to the opportunity costs of the closer economic and diplomatic linkages to Saudi Arabia due to the huge aid and investment that comes with Saudi connection. This aspect vests Saudi Arabia significance into Pakistan's economy since the emergency funds and deferred oil payments negate the various business interactions with Iran.

This economic dependency affects the security relations of Pakistan whose depth of military entanglement with Saudi Arabia is far deeper than its minimal military interaction with Iran. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia enjoy close military ties since the inception of military cooperation, defense ties, military exercise, and advisory services to the Saudi Arabian kingdom through Pakistan troops. This is a very sound military cum defense relationship base on Pakistan need of finding fund for its defense and its strategic location in the Middle East in which it has closely associate itself with Saudi interest and gain vital military and economic support from the Kingdom. On the other hand, although Pakistan engages Iran in border security, it is reluctant to take affiliation to deeper military level because the

consequences could incite its alliance with Saudi Arabia. This cautious and pragmatic attitude stresses the fact how Pakistan tries to play cautiously and chooses the sides in the contest skillfully so as not to harm its every relation with both powers while profiting from both the relations.

Recommendations

- Institutionalize neutrality as a core tenet of Pakistan's Middle East policy.
- Expand multilateral dialogue platforms involving both Iran and Saudi Arabia.
- Strengthen border security mechanisms with Iran to counter insurgency.
- Diversify energy sources to reduce dependency on any single country.
- Encourage diplomatic mediation roles to enhance regional credibility.
- Balance religious affiliations with strategic imperatives in foreign policy.
- Promote economic self-reliance to decrease overreliance on Gulf aid.
- Ensure sectarian harmony at home to avoid foreign policy vulnerabilities.

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