

Snooping into the Saga of Bilateral Ties - Iran and Pakistan in Historical and Future Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This article is an attempt to illustrate the tale of historical, current and future course of bilateral relations between Iran and Pakistan. It explores the geo-political and geo-strategic factors; transforming the nature, pattern and posture of Iran and Pakistan relations in different phases since 1947. Both countries, geographically adjacent culturally linked, religiously associated; have developed socio-economic ties; sometimes, enjoyed mutual intimacy. Further, both have adopted the policy of non-intervention, silence or behaved like a mere acquaintance to each other. In short, the paper will also delve various geo-political determinants between Iran and Pakistan; while making a snooping exposure to various changes bilaterally; particularly in historical perspective. It will also expound thoughtful and thought provoking combination of analysis; regarding current regional political transformation; particularly in context of Afghan Issue and new policy of US towards South Asia and Afghanistan. The paper will examine a way forward, for bilateral relations of Pakistan and Iran; to usher a new era of mutually strong, cordial and interest based relations in coming decades.

Keywords:*Iran, Pakistan, Bilateral, Ties, Geo-political, Geo-strategic, Regional, Cooperation, Competition, Conflicts, Cordiality, Opportunities.*

Introduction

It is observed that in a postmodern world, interstate mutual relations are marked by three type of relations like cooperation, competition and conflict. Bilateral relations among various states are shaped by National interests and connections in the field of trade, economic cooperation and connectivity. (Frankdel, 1969, p.71). Keeping in view these realities, the Pak-Iran relations, sometimes, have been vibrated through competition as well as a steady undertone which was shaped by cordiality and cooperation. In other words, the volume of cordiality was helplessly originated by the common heritage, faith and religious affinities and regional political changes. Iran and Pakistan have been associated closely since latter became independent country in 1947. Alongside this, geographical location of Pak-Iran, historical connections, geo-strategic interests and regional alliances; worked as pull and pushed factors to shape the tone, emotionalism and rationalism of Iran and Pakistan bilateral relationship.

Horward Wriggins said, “the models for political structures and processes, as well as religious inspiration and cultural influences, for South Asia, came from Iran and the Arab Middle East”.² (Wriggin, 1976, p. 1976) This statement of Horward Wriggins is also of demonstrative of this fact that Iran inspired the Pakistani people in religious and cultural contexts. Furthermore, Iran and Pakistan relations have been postured and shaped by regional and global alliances as well as political and strategic interests connected with the foreign outlook of both countries. However, various efforts have been exercised, from both countries, to improve

Snooping into the Saga of Bilateral Ties - Iran and Pakistan in Historical and Future Perspective

bilateral relations and certain regional as well as political events; dashed all the efforts to the ground. On the other hand, Pakistan's one sided alliance foreign policy also minimized mutual cordiality and deep friendship. In regional context, Pakistan's alliance with US, brotherly relations with Saudi Arabia and other Middle East countries, also enhanced mutual distance, and minimized cordiality between Iran and Pakistan. (Alam, 2004, p.526) Infact, strategic interests and some political changes influenced the relationship of Iran-Pakistan which was based on divergence of outlook of both countries, because of different perceptual approach towards regional and global issues.⁵ (Alam, 2004, p.526)

In other words, all these motives and situations which are related to strategy as well as geo-politics worked as a compulsive factor to engage Pakistan and Iran like constant regional partners. Furthermore, these political calculations have put Pakistan and Iran into the complex vortex which was resulted from super powers' ideological rivalry and expansion designs. In this conflicting scenario of International politics, Nixon doctrine explains, perfectly, that Iran bids for regional leadership. On the flipside of the coin, Pakistan possessed a cardinal need regarding the guarantee of its own territorial integrity.⁶ (Ramzani, 1975)

Basically, Pakistan was formed on Islamic ideology and after its independence in 1947; it tilted towards Muslim world particularly towards the Muslim Middle Eastern Countries for understanding, friendship as well as support.⁷ (Qureshi, 1968, p.34) Keeping in view the global conflicting political environment, mutual interests; based foreign diplomacy and priorities influenced deeply to determine the nature, pattern and tone of mutual ties between Iran and Pakistan. Initially, Pakistan and Iran enjoyed bilateral cordiality, friendship and diplomatic support of each other when Pakistan became an independent state. In this context, the relationship between Iran and Pakistan in the first decades after the independence of Pakistan can be assessed in the following headings.

DELVING THE ERA OF BILATERAL INTIMACY (1947-1959)

After the emergence of Pakistan, as a newly born state, in 1947, on political map of the world, Iran recognized political as well as strategic significance of Pakistan. Therefore, Iran developed diplomatic ties and recognized Pakistan as a new state in the world. After the establishment of diplomatic relations with Iran in May 1948, Liaqat Ali Khan, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan travelled to Iran in May 1949. Reciprocally, in March 1950, the Shah of Iran became the first Head of any state to visit Pakistan and signed a treaty of friendship with Pakistan. As the emergence of Pakistan as a newly political state, territorial contiguity of Iran with India was lost. Pakistan, at that juncture, geographically became a determining factor which also reshaped Iran and India relations as well.⁸ (Alam, 2004, p.526)

Raza Shah Pehlvi, an eminent Iranian politician, ushered the era of cordiality and relationship of constructive engagement between Iran and Pakistan. Later on, in August 1950, a boundary commission was appointed to mark boundaries between Pakistan and India. Hence, in 1960, the Govt. of Pakistan signed the boundary agreement between Iran and Pakistan to deal with the problems regarding administration in respective borders territories of both countries. (Saqib, 2004)

BAGHDAD PACT

During this era, the global politics was in full swing in context of US and USSR rivalry to expand their area of influence against each other. For this reason, US was involved to shape different alliances and Baghdad Pact was one of these alliances which was signed in 1955. In this US led Baghdad Pact, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Iraq and Britain entered as members. Later on, when Iraq withdrew from Baghdad Pact, in 1958, it was renamed as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). Meanwhile, in 1956, Suez Crisis emerged and Muslim member countries of Baghdad Pact, including Iran and Pakistan, condemned jointly to British, French and Israeli aggression against Egypt. (Qureshi, 1968, p. 36) Further, in 1959, Pakistan and Iran became the signatory of Mutual Defence Agreement, on bilateral basis, with US. On the other hand, Soviet Union offered to Iran a 50 years Non-aggression Pact. However, Iranian leadership rejected this offer and choose to stand by its allies because of direct appeal by the leadership of Turkey, Pakistan and Britain.¹¹ (Ramzani, 1975, p. 282) In these global political changes, Pakistan and Iran expressed to have a unified command structure which was to be imposed on the CENTO army. The major reason behind this demand was based on Iran-Pakistan weak defence mechanism and willingness to sort the strength of its defence under the umbrella of CENTO. Pakistan and Iran, in this era, have common diplomatic stances and interests which strengthened their ties. Both countries continued their mutual collaboration under the auspices existence of CENTO till the departure of Shah in 1979. (Burke, 1990, p.171) In this way, during the era of 50s, Iran and Pakistan enjoyed mutual cordiality, common friendship and unified diplomatic stance on regional and global challenges. Further, both countries, specifically, in US sponsored alliances system such as CENTO, possessed common political outlook and foreign policy approach on various important issues.

In a nutshell, the decade of 50s, was marked by reciprocal visits of heads of state of both countries, ratification of border agreement and exposition of common political and diplomatic approach regarding the Baghdad Pact, Suez Crisis and other matters of security interests in global politics. In spite of these warmer ties, cordiality and diplomatic uniformity, Iran and Pakistan experienced another era of friendship in their mutual relations after 1960.

EXPLORING BILATERAL RELATIONS DURING 1960-78

Although the early 60s mutual ties of both countries were based upon warm cordiality and brotherhood yet this intimacy, to some extent, faded because of steadily changing the geo-political and geo-strategic environment. In this connection, the following glimpses can help to investigate; this transformation from brotherhood to typical friendship between Iran and Pakistan.

In early 60s, Pakistan was a growing industrial nation and an viable led regime since 1950s which has made Pakistan as a dynamic country to become active in foreign policy. (Kheli, 1977, p.477) On the other hand, Iran was fighting with interval survival, social repression and there was absence of coherent as well as active foreign policy posture. (Harmondsworth, 1979, p. 250-251)

Snooping into the Saga of Bilateral Ties - Iran and Pakistan in Historical and Future Perspective

However, in mid 60s, Iran started to intervene and to respond diplomatically in world affairs. In the meanwhile, Pakistan was experiencing some domestic upheavals which finally led towards the culmination of the crisis in the form of separation of East Pakistan in 1971. In this situation, the dismemberment of Pakistan has made it a weak country. On the other hand, Iran achieved political as well as economic stability and was in a better position to formulate its foreign policy to respond accordingly to world affairs. Besides this, Britain withdrew from Suez Canal, Arabian Peninsula and Gulf which brought about some major changes in Iran's outlook towards Gulf region. In this changing political environment, Pakistan's foreign policy was tilted towards West Asian Muslim state as well as towards the Middle East. After 1971, Iran Pakistan friendly relations became, to some extent, invaluable and were shaped into cornerstone because of security needs of Pakistan. (Kheli, 1976, p. 733-759) Besides this, Iran showed some concern regarding territorial integrity of Pakistan and assured to help Pakistan's for its safety and security. Iran also wanted to focus on its relations with Arabian countries and to ensure the safety of its sea lanes. (Zubaida, 1975, p.2)

In 1962, when China demonstrated aggression against India, US provided military aid to India which was opposite to the Pakistan wishes. In Pakistan, General Ayub Khan, was dominating the corridor of power and Pakistani Government, considered US Aid to strengthen its foe by Pakistan's closest ally. (Burke & Ziring, 1994, 241)

Pakistan, after realizing this fact, that US is doing betrayal to Pakistan and the then President of Pakistan, General Ayub Khan diversified Pakistan's relations towards communist block. For this purpose, in April 1965, Ayub Khan visited Soviet Union and also focused to develop relations with China. In this background Sino-Indian conflict and Sino-Soviet problems, China emerged as a chosen geo political partner of Pakistan. (Christopher, P. 101)

On the other hand, Iran in 1960s, tried to expand its diplomatic relations towards Egypt and a friction of its bilateral relation with Iraq emerged. Further, Arab nationalists increased Anti-Shah propaganda which created some sort of political misunderstanding among Iran and rest of Arabian countries. (Shahram & Zahib, 1974)

Iran also showed support morally, politically as well as materially when Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 emerged. However, Iran kept the policy of non-intervention in already volatile South Asian politics. (Safdar, 1972, p. 272) Both Iran and Pakistan was also trying to develop broader as well as deeper relations with Arabian countries. Shah's primary objective was based on to counter the growing power of Arabian leaders in Persian Gulf whereas Pakistan also preferred to close relationship with Arabian States to secure their support against India.

In a nutshell, all these factors remained as a dominating force to reshape the bilateral ties, foreign policy postures and diplomatic priorities between Iran and Pakistan. However, in these challenging circumstances, Iran and Pakistan kept alive their friendly engagements and maintained their relations, to some extent, in constraint frame work.

REGIONAL COOPERATION FOR DEVELOPMENT

In the age of globalization and politics of regionalism, various states get involved in regional alliances to protect their national interests. Keeping in view the global political conflicts, a tripartite agreement among Iran, Pakistan and Turkey occurred in 1964 and the regional cooperation for development came into existence, Ayub Khan, was the staunch supporter of it and he was outspokenly critical while saying US is acting as a 'Master' rather than demonstrating the attitude as a 'friend'.²¹ Ayub Khan and Shah of Iran received a reasonable support from their respective Governments and people appreciated liberation from the US. The Pakistan opposition leader Yousaf Khattak declared the establishment of RCD as 'Step in the Right Direction'. (Ayub, 1967, p.22)

The RCD was hailed by Iranian leadership as well and Senate President Jaffer Sharif Imami stated that it is a political master stroke while emphasizing that agreement was non-political in nature. He also demonstrated that this union has a good place for Afghanistan as well. (Dawn, 29 July 1964) It was a courageous political stunt to run the message of self reliance and establishment of RCD was the symbolic of political maturity and response when both countries; Iran and Pakistan were joining security alliances, under the umbrella of US, against communism. Later on, in 1979, Islamic revolution in Iran put this organization as non-functional. Pakistan and Iran, under the umbrella of RCD, cooperated in different fields like transport, commerce, insurance, banking and culture. During this period, Pakistan and Iran earned the deepest gratitude of each other by rendering help in various fields. However, in January 1985, RCD was renamed as (ECO) Economic Cooperation Organization and neighbouring Central Asian Republican States (CARS) were also included in this organization.

INDIAN AGGRESSION OF 1971 AND IRAN'S SUPPORT

In 1971, when India imposed War on Pakistan while showing aggression, in these circumstances, Iran extended diplomatic and military support of Pakistan and termed Indian interference in internal affairs of Pakistan as an aggression. In Paris, Shah of Iran, during in his interview to a famous Paris Paper, remarked; that Iran opposes all kinds of interferences in Pakistan's internal affairs and showed 100% solidarity with Pakistan. (Weekly India, 10 Oct. 1971)

Furthermore, Iranian Prime Minister also followed his ruler and stated that 'Violence and force was being imposed on Pakistan'.(Dawn, 15 December 1971) In those days, Iran also continued the supply of arms to Pakistan under the justification that it could fall into Chinese lap. On the other hand, Iran also did not stop or even slow down the oil supplies to India. Even, during the oil crisis, Iran did not impose any financial strain on India. (The Statesman, 15 January 1974) Although, in different regional matters, Iran and Pakistan never remained hostile to each other yet both countries have demonstrated divergence of political stances on various issues. To explain this concept further, Iran used to consider itself in 60s and 70s as a medium range of power. On the other hand, Pakistan was or acted as a small regional power. Later on, Islamic Conference in Lahore was not attended by Iran because the presence of Gaddafi of Lybia was not liked by Iran. After few months, Bhutto visited Iran while sorting Iran support on Pakistan's

Snooping into the Saga of Bilateral Ties - Iran and Pakistan in Historical and Future Perspective

nuclearization. Although, Iranian reaction was not exactly demonstrated yet it was observed by the attitude of Shah that he wanted to refuse Bhutto. (Brindernath, 1977)

CONFLICTING TIES IN CHANGING GEO-POLITICAL AND GEO-STRATEGIC REGIONAL ENVIRONMENT (1979-1999)

In 1979, Iranian revolution transformed the policy, stances and diplomatic ties among Pakistan, Iran and Arab countries. Similarly, Soviet Union attacked on Afghanistan which necessitated US response to counter the Communism expansion towards hot water. Keeping in view, these aforementioned major Geo-strategic responses, Pakistan had to make choices to determine the parameters of its foreign policy. Iranian revolution posed a cardinal challenge to the status quo to the Persian Gulf. On the other hand, Pakistan emerged as the frontline ally for the United States led coalition to counter Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. (Hamond, 1984, p.138) In this context, US and Iran relations were deteriorated whereas Pakistan was becoming closer to USA. Iran perceived this intimacy between Pakistan and US with suspicious eye and hostile disposition which increased the gulf between Iran and Pakistan. The revolution of Iran created many hostilities for Iran in the region as well as internally and externally. Iran paid a very heavy price for the revolution and its friendship with US was vanished. US policymakers considered Iran as the biggest threat to its interest in Persian Gulf. On the flipside of the coin, Iran's perception and approach was marginally different from Pakistan as well as the US. Therefore, the relations between Iran and Pakistan were not as cordial as it used to be in previous decades. (Alam, 2004, p.531)

However, Islamic revolution of Iran was firstly, recognized by Pakistan and it continued its support despite the tremendous pressure which was extended by Saudi Arabia and US. Even, Pakistan contributed with financial support as well as with operation help to Iran. (Mushahid, 1993, P.224) President Khamini carried out an official visit of Pakistan in February 1986, which marked the new era of close relations between Iran and Pakistan. However, both Iran as well as Pakistan possessed divergence of views and different foreign policy approaches regarding the Persian Gulf regimes. Pakistan assisted a status quo whereas Iran was looking for various major changes. Iran used to express bellicose rhetoric against Gulf Ruler and Pakistan supported them. (Kheli, p.155-71)

As far as Gulf regimes were concerned, Pakistan supported Islamic revolution in Iran, sought status quo in other Arabian states and allied with US against Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. In this context of Pakistan foreign policy, Iran became suspicious and friendly relations were replaced by conflicting and hostile attitude bilaterally. Furthermore, Saudi's assistance for Mujahidin in Afghanistan also created some suspicion in Iran's mind and relations between Pakistan and Iran were deteriorated in this era. (Alam, 532)

PEEPING INTO AFGHAN FACTOR IN BILATERAL RELATIONS

After the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan relations were affected and several conflicting points led towards some contentions. To investigate the mutual rivalry of Iran and Pakistan, both countries focused to safeguard their respective interests and national priorities in changing

regional political apparatus. For this purpose, during the 1990s, Iran expanded its regional policies to enlarge its influence in Afghanistan. To explain this fact, Iran tried its level best to increase its influence in Afghanistan as well as in Central Asian states. Iran not only assisted but also supported Hazara Shiites to become stakeholder in Afghanistan Government. On the other hand, Pakistan supported Taliban with the support of Saudi Arabia and US. Infact, Pashtun dominated Taliban rule, in Afghanistan, was the concerning point for Irani Government. (Alam, 532) At this juncture, Pakistan was supporting Taliban Government in order to achieve its goal of strategic depth and Iran disliked Taliban led rule in Afghanistan which created the environment of mistrust and deterioration of mutual ties between Iran and Pakistan. Furthermore, Iran and Pakistan tried to expand their strategic influence, political ties and economic relations with Central Asian states as well as Afghanistan. Unfortunately, Iran did not favoured the regime in Kabul because it was supported by Saudi Arabia. Infact, massive efforts of Iran to get involved in Afghanistan conflict always collided with Pakistan's interests and mutual ties of both countries were jeopardized during Taliban regimes in Kabul. (Nazir, 57)

It is pertinent to mention here that the Mazar-i-Sharif incident rapidly deteriorated Iran-Pak relations as well. This incident was happened under the Taliban led regime, in August 1998, assassinated Iranian diplomats and killed hundreds of Hazara Shiites. Further, sectarian violence were erupted in Pakistan and many Iranian nationals and diplomats were killed. (Alam, Shah, 532) Even, during the era of Iran-Iraq war, Pakistan and Iran relations experienced a serious blow and sectarian conflicts emerged in Pakistan and a number of Iranian nationals were killed in 1990s. This kind of violence based on sectarian association with Iran; was the most undesirable as well as contentious in bilateral relations of Iran and Pakistan. (Alam, Shah, 532)

In 1999, Gen. Parvez Musharraf toppled the then politically elected Government of Nawaz Sharif and visited Iran in order to secure the legitimacy of his regime and to discussed bilateral ties with Iran. At that juncture, Iranian President Khatami remarked about mutual relations of Iran and Pakistan 'as profound and unbreakable, noting the two countries, common culture and Islamic foundations'. President Khatami showed his concerns about sectarian violence in Pakistan and emphasized the Pakistan authorities to utilize various social and political divisive conspiracies. He also asked the Pakistan Government to ensure the security and safety of several envoys belonging to Islamic republic of Iran in Pakistan. (BBC, December 10, 1999)

This era of bilateral relations has experienced some conflicting ties and sectarian violence which increased engulf between two countries. However, President Musharraf's visit, to some extent, removed the clouds of misunderstanding and conflicts between two countries.

SNOOPING THE ERA OF BILATERAL TIES (2000 TO 2017)

At the dawn of 21st Century, geo-strategic political environment and events in global politics minimized mutual cordiality and friendship. This era is considered neither warm nor cold and there was a static posture in bilateral relations. The 9/11 terrorist attacks on United States transformed the foreign policy options and priorities of Pakistan and Iran.

Snooping into the Saga of Bilateral Ties - Iran and Pakistan in Historical and Future Perspective

In the aftermath of 9/11, US toppled Taliban Government in the Afghanistan. Infact, Iranian officials welcomed US move against Taliban which eradicated Taliban's role in Afghanistan. On the other hand, President Bush remarked against Islamic Republic of Iran as an 'Axis of Evil' and threatened it for next regime changed which raised eye brows of Iranian leadership.³⁹ Pakistan supported US policies on Afghanistan and Iran perceived it as its encirclement because of presence of US-Military in Pakistan and Afghanistan territory. As a result of the presence of US forces, in Pakistan and Afghanistan, Tehran exhibited cold and suspicious attitude towards Pakistan relations and jeopardized mutual stability of bilateral relations with Pakistan. (Pant, 2009)

Muhammad Khatami, the then President of Iran visited Pakistan for three days from 23 to 25 December 2002. Since 1992, it was first visit of head of Government of Iran which was consisted of Iranian Cabinet as well as Parliamentarian members including Iranian Vice-President and President Khatmai. This visit was considered as a new beginning of Iran Pak relations because several high level discussions were allowed to probe the possibility of the Iran-Pakistan and India Pipeline Project. (Alam,535) Iran cooperation with India also raised eye brow in Islamabad for policy makers. Iran was focusing to establish a friendly Government in Afghanistan that can safeguard Iran's strategic interests. In this effort, Iran was willing to eradicate its isolation from Central Asian state in the region which is imposed by the US. (Khatami, 2002)

BILATERAL TRADE AGREEMENT 2002

After 9/11, regional politics experienced various changes and Pakistan stood with the US in the war against terrorism. In this regional political scenario, bilateral relations became under some restraint and constraints. However, the end of Taliban regime, in Afghanistan, in 2001, to some extent, brought Tehran and Islamabad closer to each other and they signed agreement for economic prosperity of both countries. For this purpose, President Muhammad Khatamai visited Pakistan for three days officially in December 2002 and fall of Taliban Government, to some extent, improved Tehran and Islamabad relations. During his visit, Iran and Pakistan signed a bilateral trade agreement as well as MOU. (Mulidhar, 2003, p.12)

Before this, both countries had signed an agreement on security, defense cooperation, sharing of intelligence, as well as on political differences.

IAEA'S FINDINGS REGARDING TRANSFER OF NUCLEAR TECHNOLOGY

According to IAEA reports, it was observed in 2003 that in one Iranian uranium enrichment site, there was almost 55 percent samples came from Pakistani equipment. (Andrew, 2004, p. 5) Later on, Dr. Abdul Qadeer confessed his role in transferring of nuclear technology because Pakistani Government did not want any involvement which can annoy US. In fact, Pakistan was a frontline ally of the United State in the War against terrorism. During the investigation of IAEA in Iran, it was observed that advance technological designs were found which was similar to Pakistani nuclear technology designs which Iran has obtained in 1987.

During this era, Iran kept on its policy of suspending and starting the uranium enrichment till 2003. However, on 22nd November 2004, Iran suspended its uranium enrichment because of excessive pressure. (Alam, 542)

Infact, in Iranian nuclear issue, Pakistan kept itself aloof from any direct involvement and avoided the policy which can support Iran because Pakistan did not want to disturb its relations with US.

PROPOSED PROJECT OF IRAN-PAKISTAN GAS PIPELINE

Although the discussions of this Iran Pakistan Gas Pipeline were ushered in 1994 yet it was primarily signed by Prime Minister Benazir Bhutt in 1995; to ensure energy needs and security. Later on, Iran floated a new plan which was extended from Pakistan to India. In this connection, a primarily agreement between India and Iran was also signed in 1999.

Unfortunately, the proposed Iran-Pakistan and India Gas Pipe Line could not be finalized because of political reasons and US pressures as well as sanctions on Iran. For this reason, India quitted the project in 2008 and even Pakistan and Iran could not materialize this project because of geo-political environment and some fault lines in bilateral ties. In 2010, India again suggested for trilateral talks between Iran-Pakistan and India in Tehran to finalize the project. After the withdrawal of India from the project, Iran demonstrated its interests to invite people republic of China to participate in this project. Sadly enough, regional changing geo-political interests and pressure from Super power could not let to finalize this project even bilaterally. (Zeeshan Haider, 2010)

Infact, there is a historical trend in which US tries to bully Pakistan to stay strictly under the US orbit of political influence. In the light of this political pressure Iran-Pakistan Gas pipeline was severely opposed by US inspite of existence of acute shortage of Gas in Pakistan. On the other hand, Pipeline was Pakistan's right and clearly demonstrate its strategic interest. US kept Pakistan away from aforesaid Gas pipeline project and it also, now, seems, that CPEC is in America's cross hairs. (Dawn, 10/10/2017)

Regardless of US interest and pressure, Pakistan should look its own interest and economic benefits rather than becoming regional bully to look after US interest in this region. It is the indispensable need of the hour, for Pakistan, to launch an era of cordial bilateral ties, intimacy and mutually beneficial relations with Iran.

CURRENT GLIMPSES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF BILATERAL RELATIONS

It is fact that war against terrorism has its regional impacts and there were some terrorist activities across the borders of both countries. Volatile security dilemma in Afghanistan and strain mutual relations between Iran and Pakistan has led towards some misgivings and doubts in both countries. In order to redress this emerging challenge, in May 2014, both countries agreed to launch a joint operation against terrorist as well as drug traffickers in border regions of both countries.

More recently, on 26th April 2017, almost 10 Iranian boarder guards became the victim of deadly terrorist attack which was carried out by a Sunni militant group; namely Jash Al-Adal at Mirjaveh near Pakistan border. The Iranian Foreign Ministry protested with Pakistani ambassador and also considered Pakistani Government accountable for this terrorist attack. This Iranian President Hassan Rohani wrote a letter to Nawaz Sharif and expressed his hope that responsible for this terrorist attack would be arrested and prosecuted. Rohani also noted that the safety, growth as well as progress of Pakistan are the top agenda of Iran's relation with its neighbouring countries. However, one can observe that neighbourly countries must focus to usher an era of friendly relations between Pakistan and Iran. Regrettably enough, the current strain between Tehran and Islamabad must be handled with vital bilateral engagements; to promote mutually beneficial economic, political and security relations. It is also the need of the hour that both countries should deal their differences with understanding and accommodative behavior. Further, Javed Zarif, Iranian Foreign Minister, recently visited Pakistan which is a welcome move to remove doubts, misgivings and misunderstandings of between both countries for strong and prospective bilateral ties while resolving their differences amicably. (The Nation, 9th May 2017)

IRAN PAKISTAN RELATIONS AND CPEC

After the proposed project of CEPEC which will link Gwadar Port while; providing a direct access to China in the Arabian Sea, the 52 billion project can link up to Iran, Pakistan and China which is a significant development for the region. The former US Ambassador Cameron Munter remarked on 29th August 2015:

“CPEC would increase the importance of Pakistan in the region and not just it but the entire the region would gain from the corridor.”

(The News International, August, 29, 2015)

The above statement of Cameron Munter has envisaged the productive, constructive and bilaterally beneficial relationship with neighbouring countries are essential and indispensable to transform this region into economic hub to facilitate the entire region. For this reason, Iran and Pakistan should come forward to get benefits from the future prospects of this gigantic project of CPEC. The cordial, mutually understanding based and beneficial relations of Iran and Pakistan can work wonder for the prosperity of the region and Iran can also become the part of CPEC project while getting maximum benefits from the future economic hub of the region; Gwadar Port achieve fruitful benefit from the CPEC.

On 11 September 2017, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, Foreign Minister of Pakistan visited Iran to discuss bilateral relations particularly in the wake of new policy of the United States towards Afghanistan under Trump administration. Furthermore, Khawaja Muhammad Asif and Iranian President Hassan Rohani, exchanged views and pondered on the current geo-political and geo-strategic winds of change and reiterated their determination to seek political solution of Afghan issue. Further, both leaders expressed their willingness to promote mutual

trade, to develop connectivity and to exercise proper border management system to avoid any kind of terrorist activities across the border. (Dawn, 12 Sept. 2017)

In the recent political scenario of the world, winds of change are blowing and Donald Trump's rebukes against Pakistan; blaming that later supports and assists non-state actors to destabilize Afghanistan and to prolong Afghan conflict. Ironically, United States itself supports armed Militias in Syria. However, after Donald Trump's blames on Pakistan, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Bahram Ghasemi criticized US for its allegations against Pakistan regarding the support to non-state actors in Afghanistan

Pakistan Foreign Policy decision makers and experts should come forward to devise a course of cooperation, interaction and coordination for strengthen bilateral ties because Pakistan cannot alienate with Iran. Furthermore, after reevaluating, re-evaluating and redefining its geostrategic space in the region, Pakistan should develop its political, economic, social and cultural interactions with Iran.

The aforementioned geo-strategic changes and political paradigms' shift in this region; signifies that Iran and Pakistan should also develop their cooperation on CPEC and should work together for the betterment, prosperity and welfare of its people. Even, both countries can get benefits through mutual trades, unified regional political strategy; particularly on Afghan issue by finding its political solution for regional peace, stability and peaceful co-existence. (Dawn, 14/9/2017)

CONCLUSION

Pakistan and Iran are geographically connected and culturally linked two neighbouring countries which have enjoyed good relations since 1947. However, changing regional geo-politics and role of super powers in Afghanistan, Middle East and South Asia, to some extent, transformed the nature and postures of Pakistan and Iran's foreign policy towards each other. It is also acknowledged that in the post modern world, interstate mutual relations are shaped by competition, cooperation and conflict of interests. In this scenario, Pakistan and Iran relations, sometimes, have been gone through competitions as well as mutual cooperation. On the other hand, geo-strategic interests, historical connections and religious associations of people of both countries influenced the emotional and rational tone of bilateral ties. Even after independence in 1947, Iran was the first country who recognized Pakistan, as a newly born state, on the political map of the world. In 1979, the Iranian revolution was also recognized by Pakistan despite the Saudi Arabia and US pressure. During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan relations also experienced some conflicting points and contentious approach because of clash of mutual interests and national priorities in changing regional political environment. In 21st Century, geo-strategic and political environment also minimized the cordial tone and mutual intimacy in bilateral ties, of Iran and Pakistan, particularly after 9/11. Pakistan sided with the US policies on Afghanistan and Iran does not like US Military presence in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, Iran-Pakistan Gas pipeline project was postponed because of US pressure on Pakistan. During the last few years, tumultuous security situation in Afghanistan and mutual strains, in Pakistan and Iran, bilateral ties have also created some misgivings and apprehensions from both sides. CPEC is considered

Snooping into the Saga of Bilateral Ties - Iran and Pakistan in Historical and Future Perspective

as a real game changer for this whole region economically and socially. At this juncture, Iran and Pakistan should come forward to get maximum benefits for really transforming Gwadar Port as a hub for regional economic activities. Further, Donald Trump new policy towards Afghanistan and South Asia also necessitates coordinated and mutually unified response, from Pakistan and Iran, towards Afghanistan, for finding a political and diplomatic solution for Afghanistan crisis. Iran-Pakistan should also expand their mutual trade, to respond collectively towards the emerging threat of regional terrorism and should usher a new era of mutual relations for promoting their national interests in Middle East and South Asia.

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Snooping into the Saga of Bilateral Ties - Iran and Pakistan in Historical and Future Perspective

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