

## **Shifting Alliances: Iran-Pakistan Relations in the Aftermath of the Islamic Revolution and Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan**

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the multifaceted relationships that have emerged between Iran and Pakistan in the years following the Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980. This article sheds light on the profound geopolitical transformations that have occurred in the region, highlighting how the United States' loss of Iran and the Soviet Union's conquest of Afghanistan significantly affected the balance of power in the region. The study is centered on the developing relationship between Iran and Pakistan, and it takes a journey through historical events such as Iran's backing for the Afghan Mujahideen, the effects of the Iran-Iraq conflict, and the difficulties that arise from different perspectives on Afghanistan. Furthermore, it investigates the socio-cultural components that form the connection between the two countries, particularly in the region of Balochistan. The economic components are subjected to a careful evaluation in this article, which also investigates trade trends and the blocked gas pipeline between Iran and Pakistan. The research comes to a conclusion with strategic recommendations for both countries to improve their bilateral relations in a world that is fast changing. These proposals are discussed in light of the current geopolitical circumstances.

**Key Words:** Islamic Revolution, Soviet invasion, Mujahideen, Geopolitical Circumstances

### **Introduction**

After Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980, geopolitics was permanently altered, ushering in an entirely new age in a region where the United States had lost Iran and the Soviet Union had gained Afghanistan. These two incidents had a significant impact on Iran-Pakistan ties and changed the dynamic significantly. Iran, with US assistance, emerged as a key foe in the Persian Gulf, while Pakistan, as the frontline state in the American-led coalition against Soviet penetration, emerged as a major adversary in the Persian Gulf. Despite Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev's assertion that Soviet involvement in Afghanistan was "not a simple decision," the United States viewed Soviet involvement in Afghanistan as part of a larger strategy to secure Moscow's southwest border while also projecting power and increasing influence in the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. In response to the Soviet Union's intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States were able to align their strategic objectives in a manner that was favorable to both countries. During the years after the killings of Yahya and Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's proximity to Afghanistan played a significant role in bringing the two countries back together. (Kux, 2001)

With Iran's demise as a regional ally of the United States, Pakistan's strategic significance in the eyes of the United States has increased. Zia ul Haq's most prominent success was the restoration of military cooperation with the United States, which was one of his most significant achievements. Iran's relations with the United States were severely damaged as a result of the hostage crisis that occurred in 1979. It served to inflame relations between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The United States Gulf policy, which included its strategy and posture in the Iran-Iraq war, only helped to exacerbate tensions. Iran was considered the greatest threat to the Persian Gulf by the United States in order to preserve its interests. Iran approached the Persian Gulf in a manner distinct from that of either Pakistan or the United States of America. Khurshid Ahmed, a cabinet minister under Gen. Zia ul Haq, openly supported the Iranian revolution as far back as September 1978 amid objections from the Pakistani establishment. (Rafique, 2016)

After being authorized to meet with Imam Khomeini in Paris in late December 1978, when the situation in Iran was rapidly worsening, Khurshid Ahmed traveled to Paris to do so. Ahmed and Imam Khomeini met in Paris on January 14, 1979. For the first time, Pakistan's visit with the new leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran was intended to indicate Pakistan's desire to forge a relationship with him and his government. First and foremost, Pakistan recognized the Islamic Revolution in Iran, which was a difficult decision. When it came to the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Pakistan's people were divided along ethnic lines. During the Iranian Revolution, Shias in Pakistan first supported the Shah, whilst Sunnis initially supported Imam Khomeini.

Despite tremendous international criticism, the Iranian government, after the death of the Shah, enjoyed moral and political support from Pakistan. In 1984, during his visit to Pakistan, Vice President George Bush presented Gen. Zia with a plan in which the United States would aid Pakistan in training Afghan Mujaheddin in Baluchistan in order to destabilize Iran at the Murree official house. Bush's proposal was met with vehement opposition by Zia. Before leaving, I interacted with reporters during a press conference in Lahore.

Bush's expression conveyed his anguish. In spite of intense pressure from the United States and Saudi Arabia on Pakistan to support the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Pakistan did not openly support Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War. Pakistan also offered Iran operational help as well as financial assistance. To put it gently, Saudi Arabian's pressure on Iran and Pakistan has strained relations between the two countries. While the United States and the United Kingdom saw Iran as a potential foe, Pakistan viewed it as a valuable strategic partner with significant implications. President Khamenei conducted an official visit to Pakistan in February 1986, strengthening the already strong relations between the two nations. Iranian and Pakistani attitudes on the Gulf regimes, on the other hand, were vastly different.

Both Pakistan and Iran were keen for the status quo to be maintained as long as possible. Iran's bellicose posture was a source of concern for the Gulf monarchs, but Pakistan stood by them. Even when it comes to the Persian Gulf, American views are transformed into Pakistani ones. They did not agree, however, on the matter of Afghanistan and Pakistan.<sup>44</sup>

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a source of anxiety for both men, notwithstanding their divergent political objectives. Iranians were in the midst of an Islamic Revolution and were primarily concerned with the Iraq War. There is a possibility that Afghanistan may be able to get some material help from Iran. Following the Soviets' departure, regional and international disputes emerged about who would have sovereignty over Afghanistan. Relations between Iran and Pakistan began to deteriorate as a consequence of Tehran's increasing skepticism over Saudi involvement in Afghanistan's Mujahedin (insurgents). (Campbell & Dann, 1988)

## **Problem Statement**

The study focuses on the complex difficulties and changes in Iran-Pakistan relations after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980. The main issue is understanding the

complex geopolitical changes that took place after these crucial events, which ultimately influenced the relationship between Iran and Pakistan. The United States losing Iran and the Soviet Union gaining strategic advantage in Afghanistan had a substantial impact on the regional power balance, leading to a series of consequences for both countries. The core issue lies in comprehending how historical events shaped Iran's significance in the Persian Gulf and Pakistan's position as a vital ally in the American-led coalition.

The study examines how Iran's Islamic Revolution affected its relationship with Pakistan, focusing on the differing reactions of Shia and Sunni populations in Pakistan during that time. The paper examines how Iran's fragile relationship with the United States influenced the larger Gulf strategy and increased tensions in the region. The paper also analyzes the economic implications of the relationship, focusing on trade patterns, the halted Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, and the prospective competition between the Gwadar and Chabahar ports.

The problem statement focuses on understanding the complex historical, geopolitical, and socio-cultural factors that affect Iran-Pakistan relations. It aims to provide a basis for understanding their current situation and to offer strategic guidance for dealing with the changing regional environment.

## **Methodology**

This research's methodology utilizes a thorough and interdisciplinary approach to examine the intricacies of Iran-Pakistan relations after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1980. Qualitative and historical research methodologies are used to gain a detailed understanding of the geopolitical changes, socio-cultural interactions, and economic aspects that have influenced the relationship between the two countries.

Qualitative content analysis is used to examine government declarations, speeches, and media coverage from Iranian and Pakistani sources. This method aids in recognizing rhetoric, official narratives, and policy positions, allowing for a more thorough examination of the verbal aspects of the connection.

The project intends to combine knowledge from political science, history, economics, and cultural studies to develop a comprehensive understanding of Iran-Pakistan relations, highlighting the interplay of geopolitical, cultural, and economic elements. The research aims to analyze the complex connection between Iran and Pakistan using a diverse approach, providing a detailed and thorough examination of the changing dynamics.

## **Balochistan as a Gateway for Social and Cultural Relations between Pakistan and Iran**

Pakistan's continuing affinity for Iran, according to Dr. S.M. Burke, stems from the fact that Iran is the mother of Pakistani culture, and Persian is the mother language of Urdu, and Iran is the mother of Persian culture. In 1973, Burke published an article on the topic of adversity. A common frontier region is also inhabited by the Baloch tribe, which is similar in terms of linguistics, culture, and tradition to other tribes in the region. In Pakistani Balochistan and Iran Seistan Balochistan, there are Baloch people who live. (Alam, 2004).

The socio-cultural and economic aspects of interaction between the two communities are the primary goals of the interaction. The presence of a boundary usually results in fewer interactions between the people who live on either side of the line. It is true that the border between Pakistan and Iran is not particularly soft, but it is also not particularly restricted when compared to the Iranian border that connects Turkey with Iraq and Afghanistan. (Sheikh, F., at all., 2001). The establishment of customs posts or other checkpoints, on the other hand, has the effect of restricting and scrutinizing the genuineness of arriving and departing passengers.

It is possible to enter through regular and irregular points, the most important of which is near Taftan and Panjgur. There are a number of towns and villages where houses can be found on both sides of the border, which is unusual. For example the towns of Ridee and Batu in Turbat are two such examples. There are five border districts in Pakistan, with the majority of the population being Baloch. Panjgur, Chagai, Wasuk, Turbat, and Gwadar are the names of the tribes. Previously, Kharan was a significant and large district in terms of land area, and it shared a border with Iran. However, since the introduction of three additional districts in Balochistan, there has been a delineation of the state's borders. (Ahmad, 2017)

The Baloch people who live on the other side of the border have dual nationality. People on both sides of the border cross the border on a regular basis for a variety of reasons, some of which are listed below.

- Visits to see relatives, dependents, and family members.
- Social visits to friends, vacations, and tourism.
- Cultural visits, such as attendance at weddings, funerals, and naming ceremonies.
- Visits to look for work.
- Visits to trade and commercial establishments.

Sightseeing, catching up with friends, and spending vacation time are all part of the social trips there. These get-togethers are widespread among the members of the family. Friends of the family **members** often accompany them on their travels. In border towns, there is a high frequency of social **visits**. This has an impact on commercial, social, and cultural interactions in both countries.

### **Change in the Regions: The Facts of the Matter**

While Iran and Pakistan have significant historical connections, relations between the two countries are riddled with stumbling blocks. Foreign and security policy in Iran has been significantly impacted by both the rising presence of US military forces in the Persian Gulf and the acrimonious bilateral ties between Tehran and the United States of America. Since the terrorist events of September 11, 2001, the United States military's presence in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other regions of Central Asia has grown.

All three of these developments -the dual containment policy under President Clinton and President Bush's "axis of evil" labeling of Iran in January 2002, as well as the war on "Islamic terrorists" - are very concerning to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Amid concerns over Pakistan's support for the United States military operations in Afghanistan, as well as the presence of the US troops on Pakistani soil, Teheran started to express reservations about the prospects for peaceful relations between Pakistan and Iran.

As seen by the growing Indian-Iranian alliance, Iran's stance toward India has shifted considerably in recent years. In both economic and military issues, there is a mutual willingness to collaborate. The 'New Delhi Declaration,' signed on January 25, 2003, by President Khatami and Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, said that "the two sides recognize that their growing strategic convergence must be strengthened by a powerful economic relationship."

For the time being, the future of India-Iran relations will be dominated by collaboration in the energy sector. India and Iran also agreed to investigate previously agreed-upon areas of defense cooperation, such as training and guest exchanges, which may be explored further. Pakistani authorities are worried about India's participation with Iran in the Afghanistan war, which they see as a source of instability. Pakistanis are jittery as a consequence of these two factors together. Because of their mutual support for the Taliban rule, India and Iran joined forces to combat the Taliban as a united front against the terrorist organization. India's

increasing involvement in Afghanistan, as well as its close links to the Karzai leadership, have alarmed Pakistan for the second time.

In Pakistan, the ruling elites, who have come to see Afghanistan as an "exclusive zone under their control," are concerned by India's participation in the country. Having a stable Afghan government that is supportive of Iran's interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia would be beneficial to the Iranian interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia. A policy like this is also a part of the country's endeavor to end its isolation from the rest of the world.

### **The Establishment of Bilateral Relations**

Iranian-West Asian relations deteriorated precipitously after the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which altered the geopolitical equilibrium in the area and skewed the balance of power in the region. Iranian officials acknowledged that the country had to lose its status as a competitor in the 1990s, but they also acknowledged that the country had to rebuild trust with West Asian countries, notably the Persian Gulf governments. This success may be attributed to Iran's readiness to compromise as well as its re-engagement with Gulf countries, notably Saudi Arabia.

During their travels to other countries, the leaders of Iran and Saudi Arabia met and signed agreements on economic, political, and security issues, among other things. As relations between Saudi Arabia and the United States deteriorate, bilateral connections between the two nations will only get stronger. Iran continues to be seen as a threat by the United States. Given the positive connection that exists between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, any improvement in ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia will have a significant influence on the area as a whole, as well as on relations between Iran and Pakistan. (Ahmad 2018)

It was widely believed that relations between Tehran and Islamabad had improved as a consequence of President Mohammad Khatami's three-day official visit to Pakistan in December 2002. On the occasion of his visit, agreements on bilateral commerce, plant protection, quarantine, and the 13th Joint Economic Commission were signed between the Iranian and Pakistani governments, as well as an agreement on defense cooperation between the two countries.

The two countries had previously signed an agreement on a variety of areas, including defense cooperation, security economy, information sharing, and political affairs, among others. It was notable that the President traveled to Islamabad and signed the deals, given the fact that the Taliban crisis had previously impeded relations between the two countries. Compared to other countries' economic links, the amount of business between Iran and Pakistan is very small.

Pakistani exports to the United States were \$265 million, while imports from the country totaled \$92 million in the 2003-04 fiscal year. During this time period, the amount of trade between Iran and Iraq was far more than it is currently. Among the most frequently traded items between Iran and Pakistan are cotton, fruits, and iron ore (among other things). Recently, Pakistan became the first country to begin importing Iranian iron ore, having done so a few years ago. Iron ore supplier Iran has notified Pakistan that it would meet its contractual obligations to furnish iron ore and will assist Pakistan Steel Corporation in Karachi in the search for new steel-making opportunities as well as the expansion and modernization of existing steel-making facilities. Aside from making direct investments in Pakistan's mining and industrial sectors, Iran has also shown a strong desire to do so in the future. Following Iran's reintroduction of wheat and rice export restrictions in 1996, Pakistani wheat and rice shipments to Iran came to a standstill. Since then, these crops have remained beyond reach for Pakistani farmers. During a visit to Tehran in October 2003, Pakistani Prime

Minister Mir Zafarullah Jamali lodged an official request with the Iranian government to lift quarantine restrictions on rice and wheat.

Iran Due to the country's ever-increasing population, Pakistan's energy consumption is also ever-increasing, putting strain on the country's finite energy resources. In 1994, Bhutto and Rafsanjani signed an agreement to build a pipeline from Iran to Pakistan; in 1999, Rafsanjani lobbied for the pipeline to be extended farther into India, claiming that the concept for the pipeline was originally conceived by an Indian scientist.

When it was initially proposed, the length of this pipeline was scheduled to be 2775 kilometers long. Iran agreed to provide a \$500 million loan for the building of this pipeline, which would be repaid over the course of twenty years. The United States and Saudi Arabia exerted pressure on Pakistan to coordinate the project. Immediately after the 2008 terrorist assault in Mumbai, India made the decision to forgo this project in favor of a nuclear accord with the United States. Due to pressure from the United States and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan signed a new deal in 2009 that would see the project through to completion. India, which has re-entered the project, is also looking at the possibility of exporting energy to countries like China and Bangladesh. While the Iranian half of the pipeline *is* complete, progress on the Pakistani portion of the pipeline has been sluggish to non-existent, and the project is now on hold.

The significance of seaports, both historically and now, cannot be emphasized. For example, the Karachi port generates 50% of Pakistan's GDP, which is reliant on foreign trade, industry, and local commerce in order to function effectively.

The cultural, informational, and conventional imports that pass through a city's ports of entry have a significant impact on the urban life of that city in a major way. Afghanistan, India, and Iran signed a Tripartite Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) on May 23, 2016, which includes the construction of Gwadar Port in Pakistan and the construction of Chabahar Port in Iran, which is 75 kilometers away.

Both seaports are strategically placed at the intersection of the energy route, which transports about 70% of all crude oil by ship. Through these ports, natural resources from Pakistan's Baluchistan and Iran's Sistan-Baluchistan regions may be exported, as well as manufactured goods. It was anticipated that the two ports would compete against one another as a result of India's involvement. Iran and Pakistan have said that they want to work rather than compete with one another via these ports, notwithstanding the competition between Pakistan and China.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a multi-billion-dollar cooperative enterprise between China and Pakistan. Pakistan may be able to promote trade between South Asia and the Middle East. And Central Asia in the future. As a first step, Iran entered into agreements with India to construct Chabahar, a port on the Persian Gulf, in response to the CPEC's expansion. Since the United States lifted sanctions on Iran in 2016, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the port of Chabahar have been a major focus of Iranian President Hasan Rouhani's attention. With Iran's involvement in the CPEC gas pipeline project, the project may profit.

### **Pakistan and Iran have a Thriving Trade Relationship.**

The quantity of business that takes place between the two countries has been steadily decreasing. Between 2008 and 2010, their yearly bilateral trade volume surpassed the \$1 billion dollar level on a consistent basis. During the year 2018, Pakistan's part of the \$392.08 million in trade with Iran amounted to \$22.86 million, while Iran's share was \$369.23 million.<sup>49</sup> Iran imports petroleum and petrochemical products from Pakistan,

as well as iron ores, raw hides, fruits, nuts, and carpets. Here, Pakistan sends rice, cattle, paper, chemicals, and textiles to the Islamic Republic of Iran. This is a designation that has been conferred onto each other by the two countries involved in the conflict (MFN).<sup>50</sup>

In terms of both population density and the size of the country's total GDP, the country's economic and natural resource advantages exceed the country's smaller population. The country's natural gas reserves are second only to those of Russia in the globe, and it is the world's fourth largest producer of crude oil, according to the International Energy Agency. Pakistan purchases electricity from Iran on a regular basis. During the year 2009, the Iranian government invested over \$60 million in a transmission line that would provide electricity to Pakistan. An Iranian area with Balochistan will be connected by a motorway., according to a commitment made by Iran to Pakistan in 2010. It is evident from the following table that trade between the two countries is well below its full potential (in dollars). (Alam, 2004). (Imtiaz 2019)

### **Illegal Actions that Take Place Across International Borders**

The availability and cheap cost of petroleum in Iran have made gasoline smuggling a common practice for many years. The importation of other products, such as blankets and dried fruits, is free from duty and tax. Illegal immigrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh go via Pakistani Baluchistan to Iran before arriving in Turkey.

As a consequence of this adventure, a large number of young men have been killed or kidnapped in the border areas of Iran and Turkey. Afghanistan is a major producer of heroin, as well as a significant source of money for the government of the nation. They slipped into Iran via Pakistan's Baluchistan region in order to reach The border. It might then be transported to Europe or the Middle East from there. Some Afghan regimes aided smugglers who carried weapons and drugs across international borders without permission.

### **Terrorism and Sectarianism are on the Rise**

On-state actors were active in Iran-Pakistan ties both under the Zia administration and during the Iranian Islamic Revolution, according to the Iranian Foreign Ministry. As part of the Afghan war effort, a substantial number of foreign jihadis of Arab ancestry landed in Pakistan to fight. Saudi Arabia has given financial assistance to religious organizations affiliated with the Taliban.

The Iranian situation resulted in the formation of a Shin-hating organization in Pakistan as a consequence. A precedented number of terrorist attacks targeted Shia and Sunni Muslims on the basis of their respective sects throughout the 1990s, resulting in the deaths of a huge number of defenseless. Topics discussed during the meeting included dealing with religious radicals as well as the illicit trafficking of drugs and firearms. It was agreed upon by both countries that a High-Level Border Commission would be created with the goal of combating terrorism by preventing money laundering.

Iran has announced intentions to construct 120 more checkpoints along the border with Pakistan in order to better defend the border between the countries. It has been decided that a hotline would be established between the Pakistani Frontier Corps and Iranian border security troops in order to fight cross-border militancy. (Hussain 2004) (Zahab 2002)

### **Recommendations for Pakistan**

It has been proposed that all regional and international components that might be utilized to benefit Pakistan and Iran be included in a list of ideas for a more promising future for both countries.

A strong legal argument for an exemption from US sanctions on the IP gas pipeline should be made by Pakistan during this window of opportunity, which could pave the way for a more balanced Pakistani foreign policy in the future. b) Pakistan should use this window of opportunity to provide a strong legal argument to the United States for an exemption from US sanctions on the IP gas pipeline issue.

The Afghan factor has harmed ties between Iran and Pakistan, and as a result, the two countries now favor a regional peaceful solution to the issue, and they should collaborate to bring about peace in Afghanistan. It is important that Pakistan should not get disheartened by India's engagement with Iran in order to improve ties with its Western neighbor. The United States should take note of the connection between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which is similar to theirs.

## **Conclusion**

This research has explored the convoluted topography of Iran-Pakistan ties, covering historical events, geopolitical changes, and socio-cultural dynamics. The period following the Islamic Revolution, characterized by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, brought about a significant change in the regional power dynamics, impacting both countries in lasting ways. An in-depth examination of historical events, such as the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war, has shown the different paths Iran and Pakistan have followed in reaction to external influences and internal factors.

The paper highlights the crucial significance of Afghanistan in influencing the strategic relationship between Iran and Pakistan. Both nations experienced fear and challenges due to the Soviet invasion and regional tensions, although having different political goals. Geopolitical factors and differing perspectives on Afghanistan have significantly influenced the shifting nature of their relationship.

Examining economic aspects such as trade patterns and blocked projects like the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline reveals untapped potential and wasted opportunities for enhancing economic relations. The research also highlights the socio-cultural dimensions, focusing on the historical and cultural connections between the Baloch groups residing on both sides of the border.

Iran and Pakistan must reevaluate their strategic priorities and make use of their shared historical, cultural, and economic similarities in today's global environment. The preceding recommendations aim to steer both nations towards a future marked by more cooperation, acknowledging the changing global circumstances and the necessity for regional stability. Amid changing power dynamics and flexible alliances, it is crucial for Iran and Pakistan to engage constructively and collaborate effectively.



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