

Pakistan's Potential Role vis-à-vis Arabian and Persian Flanks of the Gulf

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Abstract

In the Gulf region, the contention between the two flanks; Arabian and Persian is a result of their diverse historical experiences and civilizational differences. The two flanks, led by Saudi Arabia and Iran, have close relationship with Pakistan that at the popular level is viewed as the product of multiple factors: shared civilizational experience, faith system, common aspirations and interests, and therefore, hopes for a common destiny. All these factors converge to make a composite picture, therefore, tensions between the two flanks also impact Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan's erstwhile strong position vis-à-vis Gulf region to play a constructive role has been impaired due to changing regional dynamics and Pakistan's internal weaknesses. In this backdrop, the paper aims to study and identify Pakistan's role and potential to decrease intra-Gulf contentions or transform their conflict for mutual economic and strategic benefits. The study recapitulates the history of Pakistan-Gulf relations and intra-Gulf divergences. While discussing Iran and Saudi Arab as key players, the paper provides contours of this rivalry and deliberates the questions: how intra-Gulf rivalry impacts Pakistan? and, what role can Pakistan play to bring the two flanks of the Gulf together? The

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paper also carries some foreign policy recommendations for Pakistan. The study concludes that though Pakistan has the potential to play a constructive role in defusing intra-Gulf tensions, but it cannot succeed in this endeavor, unless its domestic situation is improved.

Key Words: *Persian-Gulf, regional-dynamics, common-civilization, cooperation, transformation*

1. Introduction

Shared civilizational experience, faith system, geographic proximity, common aspirations and interests, and hopes for a common destiny are the factors that help define contours of the relationship between Gulf region and Pakistan. Within this region, the contention between the two flanks; Arabian and Persian is a result of their diverse historical experiences and civilizational differences. Pakistan's erstwhile strong position vis-à-vis Gulf region to play a constructive role, has been impaired due to changing regional dynamics and Pakistan's internal weaknesses. In this backdrop, the paper aims to study and identify Pakistan's role and potential to decrease intra-Gulf contentions or transform their conflict for mutual economic and strategic benefits.

The study argues that in the changing world order, Pakistan and Gulf region need to come out of their recent past and dependency upon super-powers. However, the efficacy for Pakistan to play a role with regard to this region has to be re-assessed. The study concludes that though Pakistan has the potential to play a constructive role in defusing intra-Gulf tensions, but it cannot succeed in this endeavor, unless its domestic situation is improved.

The study recapitulates the history of Pakistan Gulf relations and intra-Gulf divergences. While discussing Iran and Saudi Arab, as key players, the paper provides contours of this rivalry and deliberates the questions; how intra-Gulf rivalry impacts Pakistan? and, what role can Pakistan play to bring the two flanks of the gulf together? The paper also carries some foreign policy recommendations for Pakistan.

2. Three-way Matrix of Pakistan Gulf Relations: A Historical Recapitulation

Religious affinity, cultural ties and geographic proximity are the key terms that join Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran in a three-way matrix. Despite Arabian-Persian tensions in the Gulf, Pakistan has held good relationship with both, because it is neither Arabian nor Persian and did not become a party to their internal conflicts. Therefore, to understand the present, it is pertinent to briefly recapitulate the strengths and weaknesses of the two and review their past, along with their relationship with Pakistan. This will provide a basis for concrete policy options.

The Persian side of the Gulf has Shia Iran, the world's third largest oil-rich country and custodian of Strait of Hormuz. On the Arabian flank of the Gulf contains Saudi Arabia, the birth place of Islam, whose monarchy (the Al-Saud family), espouses Sunni Islam and owns world's second largest oil reservoirs and is Iran's traditional rival, apart from its strategic location on the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Iran with a population of over 80 million is more than a match for Saudi Arabia, whose population is around 29 million. Additionally, Iran in the fields of education and technology is quite a bit ahead of Saudi Arabia. In the military domain, although Iran has dominance in numbers, but what Saudi Arabia lacks in numbers makes up with superior weaponry and US support.¹ Moreover, Iran has also suffered from US-led sanctions regime for more than three decades.

¹ "Military: Iran and Saudi Arabia compared", Nation Master. Accessed on 19 Sep 2014, from: <http://www.nationmaster.com/country-info/compare/Iran/Saudi-Arabia/Military>

The conflict between Persians and Arabs is not the product of the recent hegemonic ambitions of any state in the region, but has its roots in history that goes to the early period of Islam. However, in the twentieth century, official diplomatic relations between the two key players in the region, Iran and Saudi Arabia were established in 1928, when the Saud dynasty came to power, but the diplomatic exchanges began in mid-1960s.² From the 1960s till the Islamic Revolution, Iran-Saudi relationship was normal without Sunni-Shia divide, but the Arab-non-Arab friction dominated Middle Eastern politics; the division was between the Conservatives and Radicals. Both the dynasties (Pahlavi in Iran and Saud; in Saudi Arabia) cooperated over a number of domestic and international issues. Nonetheless, with the fall of the Shah, Iran-Saudi relations suffered severe set-backs because the Islamic Republic of Iran not only questioned the legitimacy of the Saudi regime, but also sought to change the status-quo.³ Saudi Arabia has been one of the major Arab competitors of Iran in the post-Revolutionary era. Among other things, it has been competing with Iran for leverage in Pakistan and Afghanistan.⁴

Over the years, Pakistan with a few hot and cold seasons, has succeeded to keep a balanced relationship between the two flanks of the Gulf. However, confronted by the world of realism, changing demands of national interests in response to domestic changes, and

² Reza Ekhtiari Amiri, Fakhreddin Soltani, "Iraqi Invasion of Kuwait as Turning Point in Iran-Saudi Relationship", *Journal of Politics and Law* 4.1 Mar-2011, pp-188-194.

³ Ariel Jaaner, "Saudi Arabia and Iran: the Struggle for Power and Influence in the Gulf", *International Affairs Review*, Vol. XX, No. 3, 2012, p.39.

⁴ Shireen T. Hunter, *Iran's Foreign Policy in the Post-Soviet Era: Resisting the New International Order*, Praeger Publishers, 2010, p.189.

transformations in their external environment questions the adequacy of the idealist prism in explaining Pakistan-Gulf ties.⁵ More than six and a half decade of bilateral ties have experienced gradual deterioration with every passing decade.

The relationship of Pakistan and Arabian Gulf has been multi-dimensional; significant Gulf assistance to Pakistani economy and Pakistani support to Arab dynasties in the military and security domains. Almost all military doctrines in the Gulf provide eloquent manifestations of Pakistan's profile in military terms and nuclear capability, which is consistently seen as a bulwark against any encroachment from the East to the Gulf.⁶ The Gulf States also host a large Pakistani workforce in the region, numbering more than three million. It is the second largest expatriate community after India and includes professionals, businessmen, skilled and semi-skilled laborers. Major concentrations are in Saudi Arabia (1.5 million) and U.A.E (1.25 million), while the others are spread over.⁷ Moreover, about sixty-one percent of Pakistan's remittances come from the Gulf region.⁸

Since independence, Iran has been a natural ally and model for Pakistan. Both had majority Muslim populations but remained secular, centralized, and Western-oriented in practice. Both countries granted the other most-favored nation status for trade purposes and the Iranian and Pakistani armies cooperated to

⁵ Muhammad Nawaz Khan, "Trilateral Summit: Hopes and Realities", Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2013. Retrieved from: www.ipripak.org/pa/tshr.pdf.

⁶ Amb Arif Kamal, *Pakistan's Interface with the GCC Region: A Perspective*, Center for Pakistan and Gulf Cooperation, 2013.

⁷ Data retrieved from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs-Middle East Division.

⁸ *Ibid.*

suppress the rebel movement in Baluchistan.⁹ Nevertheless, due to the Iranian Islamic Revolution in 1979 and with the emergence of a Shia state that aimed at 'exporting Revolution', the situation was complicated. Consequently, Pakistan's ties with Iran did not remain as productive as they were before the Revolution. Among the many factors, the deterioration of Riyadh's ties with Tehran and the former's increasing strong relationship with Islamabad, played a significant role.¹⁰

It is worth noting that during the early decades of its existence, Pakistan was equally accepted in Arabian and Persian both flanks of the Gulf. It was due to this acceptance that Pakistan, during the lowest time in its history after having lost its Eastern Wing, was able to hold the second OIC summit in Lahore. Moreover, almost all of the GCC states depended heavily on Pakistan's assistance in raising their defense and security forces. The recent Arab spring and subsequent incidents and their basic motives have given a chance to Gulf countries to come further close to Pakistan. Pakistan through its military and bilateral cooperation has always tried to shield these countries from various external and internal threats. It has also been providing scientific and technological assistance to Gulf countries along with providing its trained manpower in various fields.¹¹

⁹ Shahram Chubin and Sepehr Zabin, "The Foreign Relations of Iran", (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 140-69.

¹⁰ M. Salman Khan, "Pakistan-Iran Relations: Dynamics, Challenges and Prospects. Unpublished Thesis, Department Of Political Science, University of Peshawar, 2013, pp. 17-29.

¹¹ Muhammad Shabbir, "Emerging Middle East: Interplay of the New Power Centers", ISSRA Papers, National Defence University Islamabad, Vol-5, Issue-I, 2013, p-17.

It was, however, the over-throw of Bhutto in 1977, the Islamization process of president Zia, the Islamic Revolution of Iran in February 1979, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan that made Saudi Arabia a critical player in Pakistan and Afghanistan.¹² Also, defence cooperation of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia includes training of Saudi pilots by the Pakistan Air Force and the deployment of Pakistani troops to Saudi Arabia to provide training. During Gulf crisis, upon Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991, Pakistan sent thousands of troops to defend the Saudi Kingdom against possible Iraqi assault. This Saudi assistance later was to become the major cause of tensions between Iran and Pakistan.

3. Contours of Intra-Gulf Rivalry and Implications for Pakistan

Intra-Gulf rivalry is driven by competition for energy markets, the nuclear challenge, the Middle East or Persian Gulf, sectarian issue, territorial dispute and Afghanistan. Pakistan, on a number of subjects concerning Iran and Saudi Arabia, struggles to manage the balance in its ties with both Riyadh and Tehran. The zero-sum dynamics of Saudi-Iran relations impinge on their ties with the third country in the region.¹³ Since the peak of the Sunni-Shiite civil war in Iraq (2006-07), the geo-political rivalries in the Middle East have been acquiring an increasingly sectarian tone. With Iran firmly embedded among the Shiite Islamists in Lebanon

¹² Khalid Ahmad, *Sectarian War-Pakistan's Sunni-Shia Violence and its Links to the Middle East*, Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2011, pp.12-13.

¹³ Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, "The Persian Gulf and Afghanistan: Iran's and Saudi Arabia's Rivalry Projected", Peace Research Institute of Oslo, April 25, 2013. retrieved on 01 July 2014, from, [www.file.prio.no/.../Tadjbakhsh,%20S%20\(2013\)%20The%20Persian%20Gu](http://www.file.prio.no/.../Tadjbakhsh,%20S%20(2013)%20The%20Persian%20Gu).

and Iraq, Saudi Arabia poses as the protector of Sunnis. Never before has religious identity in the region been so polarized.

The territorial and maritime disputes between the two flanks of the Gulf include the islands of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb, over which UAE puts a claim, but these islands are under the control of Iran. Iran contends that these islands were handed over to it by the British, acting on behalf of Sharjah and Ras al Khayma.¹⁴ In addition to that Iran's erection of a port on Abu Musa and its opening of two administrative offices there in 2008, increases GCC's worries. The GCC's fears stem from the fact that this will give Iran greater control of shipping traffic through the Strait of Hormuz.¹⁵

Iran and Saudi Arabia are also involved in a series of seemingly intractable disputes, which have the potential to destabilize the entire region: first, Iranian blister is primarily aimed at Israel, but Saudis believe that nuclear capability would give Iran a crucial strategic edge in the Persian Gulf. Saudi royals have privately egged on the US for military action against Iran. Second, Saudis have long accused Iran of fueling discontent among Shiite communities in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, who are demanding equal political and cultural rights. Third, in Lebanon, while Iran backs Hezbollah, a Shiite party that commands the strongest armed force in Lebanon, Saudis support Lebanese Sunnis. This proxy battle is a major driver of instability in the country. Fourth, Saudi Arabia has frosty relations with Iraq's ruling Shiites, and has in the

¹⁴ Pirouz Mojtahed-Zadeh, "The Issue of the UAE Claims to Tunbs and Abu Musa vis-à-vis Arab-Iranian Relationships in the Persian Gulf", *Iranian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1996, pp. 601-26.

¹⁵ "Iran's island offices condemned", *BBC News*, 3 September 2008. accessed on 20 Sep. 2014, from: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7596339.stm>

past been accused by Iraqi government of backing the Sunni Islamist rebels. Fifth, the regime of Bashar Al-Assad in Syria is Iran's key Arab ally, and a conduit for support that flows from Iran to Hezbollah via Damascus.

Afghanistan presents one of the most vivid examples, as Iran's rise as an interlocutor in mediations with the Taliban has included another complex dimension to the problem.¹⁶ Ironically, it is the US regional endeavors for the past decade or so, that have unintentionally led upto greater fruits for Iran. While US policy was to clip Iranian wings, the entities that caused threat to Iran have been vanquished. One, being Iraq's Baathist power, which vanished opening flood-gates of Iranian influence into Iraq and, second, being the Salfi-driven Taliban who were thrown out, neutralizing Afghanistan in as much as it posed a potential threat to Iran.

The Iranian confident posture towards Arabs is the outcome of the country's accumulated historical experience, enforced by coupling of the oil reserves with commanding position at the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) and its continuous resilience towards US. Ingredients of Iranian mindset are central to understanding the country's defiance, its nuclear program and its interplay with regional and international stakeholders. The drivers of the Iranian confidence include: first, civilization continuity in Iranian socio-political make-up; second, as opposed to Arabs, Iran not being exposed to a long-term colonial occupation and the consequent fragmentation; third, 'martyrdom syndrome', deeply entrenched in the theological makeup of the Iranian society; fourth,

¹⁶ Bruce Koepke, *Iran's Policy on Afghanistan: the Evolution of Strategic Pragmatism*, SIPRI, Wider Central Asia Initiative Paper, 2013.

possession of oil and gas reservoirs; and fifth, geo-political disposition that gives Iran a commanding position on energy corridors.¹⁷

Additionally, the current, although interim, nuclear agreement between Iran and the P-5+1, conveys an implicit recognition of Iran as a regional power; implies acceptance of Iran's right to enrich uranium; and it opens up significant dimensions in the re-mapping of the region. The deal first of all puts a larger question mark on the set-up of regional balance of power. Therefore, not only Israel, but Saudi Arabia and the Arab allies of the US in the region have also been deeply unsettled. Their worry is that Washington might be willing now to accommodate Iran's regional interests in the Middle East at the cost of old allies. This is true because the post-Arab Spring turmoil in the region plunged US-Arab relations into a state of uncertainty, turning the autocratic regimes into unreliable partners. For South Asia, the deal adds a worth watching new dimension, of possible Iran-India-US realignment. This may also impact the post-2014 situation in Afghanistan, considering Iran's erstwhile ties with Northern Alliance as well as giving India more influence to impact Pakistan through Iran also.

4. Implications for Pakistan

The foregoing discussion sheds light on the complicated dynamics of intra-Gulf conflict. This conflict not only carries the potential for greater fragmentation and sectarian divisions in the region, but also holds direct socio-economic and security

¹⁷ Amb Arif Kamal, 'Iran in Regional and Global Perspective', 2012.

implications for Pakistan. These implications may be viewed with a seven-fold focus:

Firstly, while on the one hand Pakistan is supported by KSA through energy and economic means, on the other, it is geographically linked with Iran. Pakistan obtains about 61 percent of its remittances from the Middle East and maintains there a large number of its expatriates. Even if the Pakistani government's stress on the 'economic dimension of Pakistan's foreign policy'¹⁸ is accepted, the challenges seem difficult for the administration to confront.

Secondly, another key challenge for the current Pakistani Government, one which has the potential to become more frightening after the ISAF withdrawal from Afghanistan, is to balance its relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran, without irritating one for the sake of the other. Riyadh, as Tajbaqsh argues, has the policy of containing Iran in Afghanistan since the soviet withdrawal in 1989, and most of its financial aid to Taliban groups till 2010 has been channeled through Pakistan.¹⁹ On the other hand, Iran's participation in the stabilizing process of Afghanistan is also essential. This situation of Afghanistan, becoming a play-ground for two states, will be detrimental to Pakistan's policy of stable, peaceful and friendly to all Afghanistan.

Thirdly, Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline (which is now Iran-Pakistan pipeline) is also an interesting subject. Attracting the interest of regional and international players, the pipeline invites

¹⁸ Maqbool Malik, "Nawaz Unveils Foreign Policy Roadmap", *The Nations*, June 7, 2013.

¹⁹ Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, "The Persian Gulf and Afghanistan". 2013, p.43.

fury from US and its allies, who expect Islamabad to dump the deal with Iran. The luke-warm response from Islamabad on the progress of IPI had frustrated Tehran till the recent past. Although Pakistan faces immense energy deficiency and the IPI is a natural answer to fulfill some of the energy requirements, the project suffers delays due to, among other reasons, international pressure. Pakistan must realize that not only has its energy deficiency been aggravated, but the delay in IPI project has cost Pakistan-Iran goodwill.²⁰

Fourthly, while diversification of energy suppliers may be explored with time, in the immediate terms Pakistan has no other energy sources. For instance, there is no doubt that the IPI is an undeniable fix to Pakistan's huge gas shortages, but still the current Government is irritating Iran with its attitude towards the pipeline. If in the worst case scenario for the future of the IPI, the pipeline with Iran is not constructed, or Iran or Pakistan revise the deal, Pakistan's energy crisis will reach the point of no return. This is due to the fact that Iran has the potential to destabilize Afghanistan, which will impair any possibility of importing the gas from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan. Thus, intra-Gulf tensions and clear support by Pakistan to either, hit directly to country's energy and economic supply-lines.

Fifthly, both Shia and Sunni communities living in Pakistan view the holiest shrines and sites in Iran, Iraq and KSA with respect and reverence. Saudi Arab is dominated by Sunni philosophy, while Iran is a declared Shia Islamic state. The infighting between the custodians of these also fuels the sectarian tensions in Pakistani

²⁰ "Iran, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia Makes a Difficult Triangle", Defence.pk, July 30, 2012. retrieved from, www.defence.pk on November 20, 2013.

society. Moreover, the situation in Middle East may also serve as role model to domestic sub-nationalists as well as religio-militant organizations which may give impetus to domestic terrorism.

Sixthly, Islamabad's neutrality on the Syrian question, regardless of the reasons, has prevented a possible dent in Pakistan-Iran ties that could have occurred after the recent developments in the Syrian crisis. Nevertheless, the impending draw-down of ISAF and NATO forces from Afghanistan, along with the reinvigorated debate over Pakistan-Saudi nuclear understanding, especially at the time when Washington-Riyadh relations are getting somewhat tense and US-Iran rapprochement is gaining ground, has put Pakistan once again at the crossroads between Saudi Arab and Iran.

Seventhly, it is true that Pakistan currently is faced with a multitude of internal and external challenges such as terrorism, weak economy, rickety political system, Taliban phenomena, frail institutions, image dilemma and regional and international politics. In view of the above, it cannot exert its influence in its foreign relations vis-à-vis Arabian and Persian flanks of the Gulf. Even two years after 1971 crisis, the most difficult time in its history, Pakistan was able to muster support to gather the Islamic world in Lahore. But today, that kind of influence has not only vanished, but also Pakistanis are seen with suspicion.

5. Intra-Gulf Relations: Ingredients of a Rapprochement and Role of Pakistan

The ingredients of a rapprochement between the two flanks of the Gulf are largely central to the desire of both countries to end the current conflict for mutual economic and strategic gains. In this context, example of EU model exists. If after five hundred years of infighting, EU nations can come to an understanding of mutual co-

existence for mutual gains, there is no reason that Arabian and Persian flanks of the Gulf cannot come to an understanding of sorts. Now there is an increasing realization that economic and security interests of 'regional stake-holders', rooted in the need for uninterrupted oil flow, are very much similar if not the same. A growing space is now available for assuming regional responsibility as the region awaits the first signals of diminishing uni-polarity.²¹ For starters, like EU, the two flanks can converge on minimum commonalities such as oil prices and oil supply.

Pakistan's strategic location in relation to the Middle East, Central Asia, China and India, coupled with its standing as only Muslim nuclear power, has added a significant dimension to its ties with the Gulf. From Gulf's perspective, Pakistan's military strength is appraised as a factor complementing the Gulf security system, as it is seen as a decisive factor in assuring the defense of the area.²²

In this context, Pakistan's ability to take up constructive roles in reducing trust deficit between the West and Iran and between the Arab and the Persian flanks of the Gulf will be enhanced in the post-GWOT phase. Moreover, due to extra-regional presence and terrorists elements, shared threat perception of Gulf region and Pakistan has been accentuated. If these two regions succeed in bringing down the existing tensions and agree to cooperate with each other, these threats can be countered through Pakistan's military profile and acquisition of nuclear power along with economic support from the Gulf side.

²¹ Arif Kamal, "Dynamics of Peace and Stability In the Middle East Arena: Identifying the Contemporary Challenges and Options For Response", *Margalla Papers*, 2009, p. 103.

²² Amb Arif Kamal, *Pakistan's Interface with the GCC Region: A Perspective*, Center for Pakistan and Gulf Cooperation, 2013.

Ethno-sectarian overlaps and religion-based posturing is one more ingredient in the topography of bilateral relations. Pakistan and Iran are Islamic Republics, while Iranians make an exclusive focus on Shia theology as a source of law. The varying emphasis does not ipso facto generate any conflict. For example, inter sectarian tensions had emerged in the wake of Iran-Iraq war and the funding from abroad that came in its wake. However, “the fact remains that despite Shia-Sunni divisions, Islamic identity remains an overriding factor in shaping the course of Muslims countries’ relationship, and the irritants unfold, as a phenomenon that is transient”.²³ Hopefully, greater economic activity in the broader intra-regional frame in the coming years will positively impact on all ethnic and sectarian irritants.

Economy is another sector, where the two regions can cooperate. GCC markets are already interwoven with Pakistani economy and human resources. However, as Pakistani PM and Iranian supreme leader stated during their last meeting that Pak-Iran economic ties never not satisfactory and needed to be enhanced.²⁴ Both countries need to reinvigorate Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) as a platform for mutual economic gains.

6. The Way Forward for Pakistan

Pakistan has significant strategic interest in encouraging reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It is a part of the region; it is not from far away. Pakistan should advocate the settlement of differences between the two brotherly countries. In

²³ Amb Arif Kamal, “Iran in Regional and Global Perspective”, 2012.

²⁴ "Level of economic ties between Iran and Pakistan not satisfactory: Leader", Tehran Times, 14 May 2014.

this context, a two-pronged approach will be required: first bring the own house in order; and second, carry the ladder to draw the two flanks of the Gulf closer. In view of this, following measures are recommended:

- Foreign policy is an extension of a country's domestic policy, therefore, without internal stability, Pakistan will not be able to pursue its foreign policy. For this, institution building and institutional strength will be the right course to follow. There is no reason that, if Pakistan is internally stabilized and reputedly, its economy is strengthened, it should not succeed in gaining its erstwhile position in the Muslim world.
- Pakistan should clearly devise a policy of discouraging the sectarian based strategy both at home front as well in bilateral relations with friendly states. In this context, it first needs to carve a national narrative to the effect and then educate the masses about it. Moreover, in the Middle East, Pakistan should at least make an effort aimed at toning down the situation between Iran and KSA, if not achieving a rapprochement and advocating peace and satiability.
- Boosting relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran can help bring peace and halt unrests in some regional countries and prevent spread of sectarian violence in the region. Iran should be motivated to expand relations with neighboring Muslim countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, should be priority in Iran's foreign policy.
- Pakistan and Gulf countries should focus more on regional approach to regional problems rather than looking towards international players. In this regard, the institutions such as GCC and ECO should be mobilized.

- In the upcoming regional situation, where US is going to withdraw from Afghanistan, Pak-Gulf strategic cooperation is much needed on priority bases. Saudi Arab can play a crucial role for prolific peace between Pakistan and Taliban due to its spiritual influence on Taliban and political influence in Pakistan.
- Pakistan's foreign policy elites also need to deliberate the interests versus ideologies in their discussions and bring a balance between the two, while formulating the foreign policy, particularly with Gulf States.
- Previously, Pakistan's foreign policy has been influenced by some international powers or incidents due to its domestic and regional compulsions. It is high time for Pakistan to ensure that the expansion of its relations with other countries will not be on the account of bilateral relations with other friendly States.

Conclusion

To sum-up, as in international relations, not friendships but interests are permanent, the above discussion leads one to a conclusion that for this whole region to progress, old contentions will have to be resolved. World's strategic environment is moving towards regionalism. Therefore, it is high time for the two flanks of the Gulf to come closer and Pakistan has a vital role to play in it. The current developments in the realm of Pakistan's foreign policy offer a litmus test of an eminent challenge for Islamabad's ability to balance its ties with Riyadh and Tehran. However, the commitment at home is significantly demanding, heavy and tiring. For a successful and sustainable role in the Gulf region that Pakistan aspires to attain could only be possible through strong internal dynamics.