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Revisiting Pakistan–Iran Relations in a Changing Middle East: Continuities, Challenges, and Emerging Opportunities Since 2013

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the evolving dynamics of Pakistan–Iran relations since 2013, with a focus on identifying continuities, key challenges, and emerging opportunities within a changing Middle Eastern and regional context. Historically, Pakistan and Iran have maintained relations rooted in shared cultural, religious, and geographic ties; however, these relations have often been shaped by external pressures, regional rivalries, and shifting geopolitical alignments, resulting in a pattern of both cooperation and constraint. The study adopts a qualitative and analytical methodology based on secondary sources, including academic literature, policy reports, and official statements, to examine political, economic, and security dimensions of bilateral engagement. The findings indicate that despite geopolitical pressures, security challenges, and economic limitations—particularly those linked to sanctions and regional instability—the relationship remains resilient, characterized by sustained diplomatic engagement, selective cooperation, and strategic balancing. At the same time, developments such as regional connectivity initiatives, energy cooperation, and evolving multilateral engagement present new opportunities for strengthening bilateral ties. The study concludes that while Pakistan–Iran relations remain stable but constrained, their future trajectory depends on effective management of external pressures and internal policy choices. It is therefore recommended that both countries adopt a more proactive and balanced approach by enhancing economic collaboration, strengthening border and security coordination, and leveraging regional platforms to maximize shared strategic interests and long-term cooperation.

Keywords: Strategic Balancing, Regional Connectivity, Geopolitical Rivalry, Energy Cooperation, Border Security

1. Introduction

The Pakistani and Iranian countries have a very rich history, culture and geographical closeness. Iran was one of the first nations to recognize Pakistan as an independent state when it was formed in 1947, which provided the premise of relations of cooperation and regular tension (Iran Pakistan relations, n. d.). This bilateral relationship has been developed over the decades in a bigger regional framework in terms of various geopolitical frames, ideological shifts, and strategic interests.

The relationships between Iran and Pakistan are not merely diplomatic ones in history. Cultural and civilization connections have contributed to the development of mutual perceptions to a large extent. The socio-cultural life of the Indian subcontinent has been significantly shaped by Persian language and culture, especially in parts of the region that are present-day Pakistan (Qadir, Kasi, and Kasi, 2022). The feeling of shared identity has also been based on religious affinity even in the face of sectarian differences. The two countries are also geographically close neighbors, with a border that does not only enhance interaction, but it also brings interdependence in security to both countries, especially when it comes to insurgency and smuggling across the borders (Iran Pakistan relations, n.d.).

Irrespective of such long-term relationships, relations between Pakistan and Iran have never been purely linear. Both states joined forces with the West during the Cold War and worked together in the structures of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). The 1979 Iranian revolution however changed this as it initiated ideological divergence and changed regional alliances. Pakistan ended up having new complexities in its bilateral relations due to its closer ties with Saudi Arabia and the United States, as opposed to the anti-Western posture of Iran (Karim, 2022). This association has ever since been typified by both collaboration and rivalry as well as by careful involvement.

The years after 2013 are the time when the relations between Pakistan and Iran may be analyzed as a very important stage. This period overlaps with crucial events in the region and the world at large, such as the change of leadership in both nations, the changing Middle East dynamics, the escalation and the softening of global sanctions against Iran, and the changing security situation in Afghanistan. The election of President Hassan Rouhani in Iran and reinstatement of Nawaz Sharif to power in Pakistan in 2013 was a fresh start in terms of diplomatic engagement, an effort to revive bilateral relations (Yusuf, 2013). Meanwhile, the wider geopolitical developments, including the Saudi-Iran conflict, the increase in Chinese influence in the region in the form of the Belt and Road Initiative, and the ultimate withdrawal of the U.S. troops out of Afghanistan have altered the strategic environment both of the countries are operating in.

In this respect, it is timely and necessary to retrace the relations between Pakistan and Iran since 2013. Although the historical development of the relationship has been widely studied in the literature, the relative gap is that there is little research on the impact that the recent changes of the region had on bilateral relationships. After 2013 provides a particular perspective in which to gauge the possibility that traditional modes of interaction remained the same or evidence of the potential emergence of new trends in reaction to the new geopolitical realities.

There are three research questions that guide this study. To start with, what are the major developments in the Pakistan-Iran relations, since 2013? This includes analyzing changes in diplomatic interaction, economic collaboration and security relations. Second, what aspects of the relationship have been maintained in spite of the regional conditions changing? It is possible to identify these continuities to comprehend the structural underpinnings of bilateral ties. Third, what are the new possibilities of partnership between the countries of Pakistan and Iran in the modern region? This involves venturing into opportunities associated with regional connectivity, energy partnership and multilateral interaction.

The article will answer these questions to offer a thorough analysis of the Pakistani Iran relations in the emerging Middle Eastern geopolitical setting in South Asia. Its arguments are that the relationship,

even under all the hardships, and external pressures, still shows some measure of resiliency, due to common interests, and geographical realities. Simultaneously, new prospects open up possibilities of more mutually beneficial and cooperative relationship though both nations will have to negotiate their way through the regional complexities.

2. Research Objectives

1. To analyze the evolution of Pakistan–Iran relations since 2013 by examining the impact of regional geopolitical changes, including Middle Eastern transformations and developments in South Asia.
2. To assess the continuity, challenges, and emerging opportunities in bilateral relations, with a focus on strategic cooperation, economic engagement, and the influence of external actors.

3. Literature Review

The Pakistan Iran relations has received a significant scholarly interest especially in the context of geopolitical issues in the region, security issues and economic collaboration. The current literature is mostly devoted to the historical development of bilateral relations and influence of major geopolitical events primarily the post-9/11 condition. Nevertheless, upon critical analysis of this literature, there is a significant number of informative points as well as several shortcomings, especially in terms of the relative lack of focus on the regional changes that occurred after 2013.

3.1 Pre-2013 Dynamics: The Post-9/11 Phase

A significant part of the literature looks into the Pakistan-Iran relations in the context of the post-9/11 geopolitical environment. The attacks of the 11 th of September changed the world politics and the regional politics fundamentally as Pakistan was forced to be close to the United States in the War on Terror. Such alignment impacted the relations with Iran greatly, as it presented new strategic restraints and tensions (Haider, Ahmad, and Khurshid, 2021). According to scholars, U.S. pressure on Pakistan established a delicate diplomatic situation where Islamabad needed to navigate between its relationship with Tehran closely and maintaining its strategic relationship with Washington.

A study of the years between 2001 to 2012 indicates that there had been a general stability of the relations between Pakistan and Iran although there was an underlying divergence. Among the prominent sources of conflict, there were the nuclear program of Iran, postponements in the Iran Pakistan gas pipeline project and low economic activity of the Iran sanctions imposed by other countries (Haider et al., 2021). Simultaneously, both nations kept up the relationship on the diplomatic level and attempted to maintain the working relationship irrespective of external forces. According to other studies, the post-9/11 period led to a new era of reserved interaction based on a combination of co-operation, as well as restraint. Examples of bilateral relations were often high-level diplomatic contacts, energy cooperation agreements, and attempts to improve trade (Majeed & Rashid, 2024). Nonetheless, these efforts were usually hindered by the geopolitics, especially the strategic positioning of Pakistan with the Gulf states and the United States.

Moreover, researchers place relations between Pakistan and Iran into the context of the wider regional processes, in particular the heightened Saudi-Iranese rivalry since 2003. This action of eliminating Iraq as a balancing power in the Middle East resulted in increased competition among Saudi Arabia and Iran which consequently influenced the foreign policy decision of Pakistan (Rizwana & Saima, 2025). The relationship with Saudi Arabia was a thorn in the flesh of its relationship with Iran as Pakistan related closely with this country and this aspect has contributed to a trend of balancing strategies which have been a hallmark of the relationship.

3.2 Cooperation versus Rivalry: Competing Perspectives in the Literature

One of the main controversies in the literature is whether to define the Pakistan-Iran relations as the ones of cooperation or rivalry. One side of scholarship also focuses on the collaborative aspects of the relationship by focusing on common cultural, religious, and geographical connections. These researchers believe that even during times of tension, the two countries have always been interested in ensuring good relations, especially in fields like trade, energy relations, and stability of the region (Anwar, Mustafa, and Taimoor, 2025). This relationship is often referred to as the concept of pragmatic cooperation where the mutual interest tends to supersede the difference.

Conversely, there is another literature body, which emphasizes on competitive and warlike Pakistan-Iran relations. According to scholars in this camp, they are the differences in their sectarian mindset, geopolitical differences, and conflicting foreign policy orientations. The examples include cross-border militancy, different strategies toward Afghanistan, and alignment with rival regional blocs other matters frequently are mentioned as the evidence of hidden rivalry (Haider et al., 2021). In this respect, the relationship is considered to be intrinsically weak, being formed by distrust and conflicting strategic interests.

A less obvious treatment that is taken by certain scholars is trying to balance these two opposing views making Pakistan relations with Iran seem to be a mixture of cooperation and competition. This mediocre interpretation holds that the relationship cannot be construed in binary terms but has to be examined in a wider framework of regional and global processes. It puts into focus the notion that cooperation and rivalry do not eliminate each other but instead vary with the influence of external factors and internal factors (Majeed & Rashid, 2024).

3.3 Identified Gaps in the Literature

Even though the current scholarship is quite dense, some gaps can be observed. To begin with, a significant portion of the literature is strongly focused on the post-9/11 era, and comparatively little is dedicated to the processes that have taken place after the early 2010s. Although this emphasis has given the important information on the influence of the U.S. intervention in the area, it has also led to the under-research of the more recent geopolitical changes.

Second, the impact of the evolving Middle East dynamics since 2013 and their effect on the Pakistan-Iran relations is not adequately analyzed. The changing strategic environment in Afghanistan is greatly influenced by such developments as the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA), the Saudi-Iran rivalry, the increasing role of China in the region, as well as the changing security environment. Nonetheless, these aspects are usually addressed separately, without necessarily being put together in a systematic manner when evaluating bilateral relations.

Third, the literature does focus more on either cooperation or conflict, with less effort to inculcate a comprehensive framework of the relationship to reflect the dynamics and multifaceted character of relationship in the modern era. This drawback is one of the reasons why a more integrated approach is required to consider continuity as well as change in the relationship between Pakistan and Iran.

Against these gaps, this piece of work aims to fill in the existing literature by offering a narrow scope on the issue of Pakistan-Iran relations since 2013. The interest of the study by placing the bilateral ties into the framework of developing regional rates is to provide a more subtle insight into the relationship between continuity, challenges, and emerging opportunities.

3.4 Theoretical Lens: Realism (Strategic Balancing)

The theoretical background that will be used to expound this study is the theoretical tenet of realism, especially the notion of strategic balancing, to be used to explain the dynamics of the Pakistan-Iran relations. On the one hand, realism focuses on the existence of states as rational actors who act inside an anarchic international system where input of survival, security, and national interest is the primary motivators of foreign policy (Morgenthau, 1948). In this context, one may interpret the attitude of Pakistan towards Iran as a manner of balancing the conflicting external forces and regional tensions. Pakistan wants to hold positive relations with Iran and at the same time not to lose healthy relations with Saudi Arabia and the United States, this is a calculated attempt of not relying on a single player. In the same way, Iran interacts with Pakistan in achieving its wider regional policy of reducing isolation and increase its influence. In this way, their bilateral relationship is not guided by the ideological and cultural like-mindedness only but is mostly the result of those practical arithmetic whereby the two states are constantly changing their policies to balance threats, gain maximum interests, and preserve strategic independence.

4. Methodology

The present research has conducted a qualitative and analytical research design to observe the development of the Pakistan-Iran relations in a shifting regional environment since 2013. Since bilateral relations are multidimensional, meaning that they involve political, economic, and security factors, the complexity of state activity, political interaction, and the formulation of strategies can be best addressed with the help of a qualitative framework. The study will be based on the secondary sources such as policy papers, academic literature that is peer reviewed and official positions that have been taken by the governments of Pakistan and Iran. These works of literature offer both factual findings and theoretical insights into the priorities, limitations, and discourses that define bilateral relations. In order to increase the validity of the analysis, triangulation process is used to enable the cross-checking of information among various forms of sources (Bowen, 2009). Moreover, a thematic method of analysis is applied to establish some patterns including strategic balancing, economic collaboration, and security issues, which allows interpreting the fluctuating relationship in a structure but flexible manner.

The timeframe used in the selection of 2013 to the present day is not random but is also analytical. Both countries experienced significant leadership changes during the year 2013 with the election of President Hassan Rouhani in Iran and the restoration of civilian leadership under Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in Pakistan that led to the resurgence of diplomatic activity (Katzman, 2015). This is also the time of significant regional events like the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) negotiation, intensifying Saudi Iran rivalry, U.S. withdrawal in Afghanistan and increased Chinese power through initiatives, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). All these have greatly altered the geopolitical landscape within which both Pakistan and Iran exist. Even though the work is restricted in the way it uses secondary sources and has limited access to confidential diplomatic information, it has given a comprehensive and analytically based evaluation based on a few broad materials.

5. Historical Continuities in Pakistan–Iran Relations

The relationship between Pakistan and Iran is anchored on the same civilizational, cultural and religious ties that existed before the establishment of Pakistan in 1947. The history of interaction of the Persian civilization and South Asian culture resulted in an indelible mark on the language,

literature, and norms of social life, which forms a solid basis of mutual understanding. Iran was the first, to be recognized by Pakistan once it had obtained independence, and the gesture is the sign of the initial diplomatic goodwill and mutual strategic orientation (Khan, 2022;). Besides the cultural affinity, the two nations have a long and sensitive border that increases their geo-strategic interdependence. This border does not only make trade and people to people contact easy, but it also creates the need to cooperate on security matters like cross border militancy and smuggling. According to scholars, historical factors that led to a continuity and resilient relationship between the two countries include geographical proximity and religious identity, although there are sectarian divisions among them (Karim, 2016;).

Other structural underpinnings have seen the Pakistan and Iran have continued to have a certain degree of cooperation in the major fields of trade, energy, and diplomatic alignment. The economic cooperation especially proposed Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline is a display of the understanding of the mutuality in the solution of energy and development requirements although the external factors have delayed its application. Equally, the two nations have periodically been involved in bilateral diplomatic activities and policies on regional matters, such as Afghanistan and the Middle Eastern dynamics, in general (Safdar, 2024;). Nevertheless, these collaborative factors are parallel to periodic tensions due to geopolitical orientation, sectarian agenda, and shortcomings. This makes the relationship continue to be said as being cooperative but competitive as it is where cooperation is constant but with a sense of strategy (Jamil, 2023). This two-sidedness highlights the continuity in the Pakistan-Iran relations, where the long time-running relations have always influenced the engagement despite the fluctuations in the regional relations.

6. Changing Regional Context Since 2013

6.1 Middle East Transformations

Middle East is facing major geopolitical changes since the year 2013 and these changes have had a direct effect on Pakistan Iran relations. Among the most remarkable ones, there has been the growing role of Iran in the region, especially its aspirations in Syria and Iraq, as well as in Yemen. This growth has had the effect of enhancing the strategic value of Iran, but also of escalating its competition with Saudi Arabia, which makes the foreign policy decisions of Pakistan even more complex. Being a nation with close relations with Saudi Arabia, Pakistan has had to walk the thin line in most cases, trying to be as friendly as possible with Tehran, without losing its Gulf allies (Ehteshami and Zweiri, 2017). This competition has also polarized the region besides limiting the level of Pakistan-Iran cooperation especially in the field of security as well as diplomacy.

Simultaneously, American relations with Iran have been one of the seminal variables influencing the situation in the region. The signing and enactment of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015 first brought a sense of hope onto the economic reintegration of Iran into the international system, and it could be possible to establish greater financial links between Pakistan and Iran. Nevertheless, all these opportunities were curtailed by the effective withdrawal of the U.S. of the agreement in 2018 and the reinstatement of sanctions (Katzman, 2020). Such unstable regimes of sanctions have directly affected bilateral projects like the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, and it shows how foreign pressures still influence the direction of relations. Therefore, the dynamic Middle East situation since 2013 has strengthened the opportunities and limitations of Pakistan–Iran interaction.

6.2 South Asian & Afghan Factor

Similar to the Middle East, the South Asian changes, especially Afghanistan, have been very instrumental in the Pakistan-Iran relations. The slow pullout of the U.S. troops, which ended in 2021, and the consequent re-establishment of the Taliban into power have radically changed the geopolitical landscape in the region. The security of both Iran and Pakistan is also concerned with the stability of Afghanistan and its vulnerability to terrorism, refugees and sectarian violence. Although the two nations have long been aligned with various camps in Afghanistan, the necessity to become pragmatic in handling the Taliban regime due to the need to secure the borders and the stability of the region has been realized by the two nations (Shah & Amin, 2022). The convergence of interests has resulted in new possibilities of limited cooperation and the mistrust is hidden.

Besides this China, which is increasingly playing a bigger role in the region has also brought a new dimension to the relations between Pakistan and Iran. With projects like the ChinaPakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in place, Pakistan has become a major partner in the Belt and Road Initiative of China, and Iran has been striving to develop its relationship with Beijing. This changing geo-economic situation offers some prospects of regional connectivity, the potential connection of Pakistan Gwadar Port with Iran Chabahar Port (Wolf, 2021). These developments might make the region a trading zone and energy transit that would be beneficial to the two countries. The achievement of these opportunities however lies in the capacity of Pakistan and Iran to overcome geopolitical differences and harmonize their strategic interests in a quickly evolving regional structure.

Key Challenges in Bilateral Relations

7.1 Geopolitical Pressures

The geopolitical pressure due to the necessity of having a fine balance between the regional and global players is one of the most enduring issues in PakistanIran relations. Pakistan has a long history of close political, economic and military relations with Saudi Arabia, and it concurrently aims at establishing stable relations with Iran. The escalation of Saudi-Iran tensions has complicated this balancing process, and in most cases, it limits Pakistan to engage Tehran fully. Moreover, the strategic alliance between Pakistan and the United States and, in particular, the security guidance and economic support has complicated its interactions with Iran, especially at the time of the higher U.S. sanctions and diplomatic isolation of Tehran (Khan, 2020). Consequently, the foreign policy of Pakistan towards Iran has been marked by a careful approach in that sometimes it had been influenced by outside factors, and was not based on bilateral interests.

7.2 Security Issues

Another key issue in Pakistan-Iran relations is security issues especially in the Balochistan region which shares the border with Pakistan. The nature of the border has been porous and underdeveloped which has exposed it to unlawful activities, such as smuggling, human trafficking, and trafficking of militant groups. The two nations have at different times blamed one another of not preventing cross-border attacks which has fueled tensions in the countries every now and then (Ahmed & Baloch, 2021). Security cooperation has also been complicated by the fact that the insurgent groups which operate in the border areas exist because they take advantage of poor governance and rough terrains. Another interesting presence of heightened tensions can be seen in 2024 when both sides initiated cross-border missile strikes pointing to the weakness of mutual trust and the need to have better

coordinated border management tools. The relationship is not without security weaknesses as such incidents indicate although diplomacy softened the situation.

7.3 Economic Constraints

Although the economies of Pakistan and Iran have a high geographical proximity and face complementary needs, the relation between the two has not been developed adequately and it has been highly constrained by the structure and external factors. This has been in the face of international sanctions against Iran especially by the United States which have seriously limited official trade routes and discouraged mass economic collaboration. Important projects like the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline have been repeatedly postponed because of money, technical, and political issues with sanctions (Katzman, 2020). Also, there are insufficiency in infrastructures, regulations, and institutional mechanisms that have impeded the growth of bilateral trade, which is way much below its potential. Although both nations have occasionally shown an interest in the improvement of economic relations in terms of the barter trade and the border markets, the improvement has not been rush, and it is also indicative of the overall effect of the geopolitical and economical constraints.

7.4 Sectarian Dimensions

The sectarian relations, especially the Sunni-Shia difference is the delicate yet powerful force in the relations between Pakistan and Iran. Although the relations between the two states have been formal on the basis of Islamic unity and cooperation, sectarian tensions in the country have at times influenced relations between Iran and Pakistan. Being a Shia-majority country, Iran has been sensitive to how the Shia groups are treated in Pakistan, whereas Pakistan is also sensitive to any form of perceived foreign intervention in its domestic sectarian environment (Nasr, 2016). The wider regional situation further complicates these dynamics as sectarian identities are more likely to be politicized especially in the Saudi-Iran conflict. Sectarian considerations have not brought down the bilateral relations to their core, but they form part of the mistrust that is found underlining the bilateral relations and must be carefully addressed both in domestic policy and foreign policy.

8. Sectors of Cooperation and Continuity.

8.1 Political and Diplomatic involvement.

The Pakistani and Iranian bilateral relationship has continued to be marked with political and diplomatic involvement, even during times of tension. Regular high-level contacts have been practiced by the two countries, such as by heads of state, foreign ministers and other senior officials, which displays a desire to maintain dialogue and avoid overheating of conflicts. These activities tend to be a platform through which shared interests are renewed and areas of concern are dealt with. Also, Pakistan and Iran have shown to be in touch on a number of regional and international issues especially in how they support the Palestinian cause and the bigger picture of stability of the region. Their foreign policies are characterized by joint planning in multilateral conferences and on major geopolitical issues and concerns, which highlight the need to achieve peace and oppose outside forces in the region (Rizvi, 2021).

8.2 Economic Cooperation

Pakistan-Iran Economic cooperation in spite of external forces being limiting is still a significant foundation of bilateral relations between both countries. The two nations have experimented with the different methods to further trade relations such as formal agreements and barter deals that seek to circumvent the financial limitations that come with international sanctions on Iran. There are also

border markets and localized trade programs that have been implemented to help in economic interaction on the regional level. Another important element of the economic cooperation is energy cooperation, specifically the Iran–Pakistan gas pipeline project, which is supposed to fill the energy shortages in Pakistan and Iran with a stable export market (Katzman, 2020). Although the project has been slowed down by geopolitical and financial factors, it still represents the economic interdependence of the two countries in the long term.

8.3 Security Collaboration

The security cooperation between Pakistan and Iran has acquired greater significance in the recent years, especially following similar interests of the two countries in terrorism, insurgency, and border crimes. The two nations have made an effort to improve intelligence exchange and counter-terrorism activities particularly in the border areas where militants have traditionally acted. Joint border commissions and communication systems have been put in place to enhance better coordination and elimination of misunderstandings that come due to security incidents. Moreover, both states understand the need to have stability in the adjacent Afghanistan and have been having talks to curb common security threats that are proven to originate in the area (Shah & Amin, 2022). Despite the lack of trust, these joint activities suggest an increase in the awareness of the necessity of joint security policies.

8.4 Multilateral Platforms

There is also cooperation on other multilateral platforms involving Pakistan and Iran, this also gives a platform where they can engage and coordinate. Both states belong to regional, and global organizations like Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Through these forums, they are able to cooperate in matters touching on economic growth and integration to security and free flow of politics. The involvement in these platforms not only enhances the bilateral relations but also enables the two countries to converge on more global and regional matters. With the help of such multilateral interactions, Pakistan and Iran are trying to increase the level of their diplomacy and facilitate the development of common solutions to common problems (Hussain, 2022).

9. Discussion

The relations between Pakistan and Iran represent a significant level of sustainability through the context of recurring tensions that can be explained by the presence of structural and strategic determinants. The relationship is tied down by geographic proximity, cultural connective factors, and collective security issues, in particular, in terms of border stability and events in Afghanistan. Although the history of strains has been caused by geopolitical conflicts and external demands, the states always evaded long-term confrontational situations and focused on diplomatic interaction and conflict management. This trend is indicative of the fact that the relationship is maintained in the context of practical need when cooperation is not maintained by the fact that the parties agree on all aspects, but because there is a zone of interest that none of them can afford to take negligence (Karim, 2016). Thus, the relations between Pakistan and Iran may be interpreted in accordance with the idea of the managed rivalry with strategic cooperation in which the rivalry and mistrust should be combined with selective cooperation in the main spheres of work such as security, energy, and regional politics.

A critical assessment of this relationship shows that outside forces especially Saudi Arabia, the United States and more and more China have a great impact on the course of bilateral relations. Pakistan has been dependent on its strategic relations with Saudi Arabia and the United States which have usually inhibited its coordination with Iran particularly during periods of increased polarization in the region or sanction regimes. Meanwhile, there are more complexities that have been introduced by the regional ambitions and conflicts of Iran with the western powers. Nevertheless, one would be simplifying the Pakistan-Iran relations to the outside influence alone. The socially welcome signs of bilateral agency displayed by the two countries include the dialogue between them, cooperative efforts and crisis management without the role of the other. The ever-increasing focus on regional connectivity and economic pragmatism, especially in the light of the expanding role of China, is another pointer that internal policy decisions are becoming increasingly influential as regards relationship. Therefore, even though external stakeholders are still a force, the stability of Pakistan-Iran relations is the ultimate indication of the balance between the external restraints and the intentional bilateral relations.

Conclusion

In this paper, it has been argued that relations between Pakistan and Iran have been shaped by various issues and tensions; however, structural, geographical, and strategic factors have contributed to their overall stability. The analysis demonstrates that despite geopolitical pressures, security concerns, and economic constraints, both countries have maintained a functional relationship based on shared interests and pragmatic engagement. The continuation of diplomatic dialogue, cooperation in selective areas, and efforts to manage crises indicate a relationship that is both resilient and constrained. External factors, particularly regional rivalries and global power dynamics, continue to limit the full potential of bilateral ties, reinforcing a pattern in which cooperation is carefully managed rather than fully realized.

At the same time, the paper highlights that emerging opportunities in regional connectivity, energy cooperation, and multilateral engagement provide avenues for strengthening Pakistan–Iran relations in the future. If effectively managed, these opportunities have the potential to outweigh existing challenges and transform the relationship into a more robust and mutually beneficial partnership. Achieving this will require both countries to adopt a more proactive and balanced approach, with a greater emphasis on economic collaboration, enhanced security coordination, and reduced dependence on external influences. In an evolving regional landscape, the future of Pakistan–Iran relations will depend on their ability to navigate existing constraints while capitalizing on shared strategic interests.

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