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“From Diplomacy to Maximum Pressure: Comparative Analysis of US Iran Policy under Obama and Trump and Its Influence on Pakistani Foreign Policy Strategy”

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ABSTRACT

The United States and Iran's relations still considered as major conflict in the international politics because of nuclear program of the Iran, and its influence in the region, and the security of the Middle East. The study compares the policy which imposed by the f the Barack Obama and Donald Trump and highlight its effect on the foreign policy of Pakistan. the policy of the Barack Obama was diplomatic engagement by following the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015. Its target was to overcome the nuclear program of the Iran and its influence in the region through multilateral cooperation and negotiation. In the opposite of it. Donald Trump withdraws from this policy in 2018. And introduced the maximum pressure. This policy was based on economic sanctions and political pressure. The research, through a qualitative and analytical methodology based on the realism approach, concludes that despite having almost the same goals, the two administrations had different impacts in the region. Obama's policy helped maintain temporary peace in the region, while the policy by Trump fueled regional tension and rivalry. Another point of interest in this research is how changes in the US-Iran relationship influenced Pakistani foreign policy, prompting Pakistan to seek balance in its relationship with Iran and other regional powers. changes in great powers' strategies have a significant impact on regional stability and the foreign policies of smaller nations. This study also highlights the importance of diplomacy and strategic balancing in coping with geopolitical issues in modern times

Keywords: US-Iran relation, JCPOA, Maximum pressure, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, Pakistan Foreign Policy, Realism, Middle East Politics.

Introduction:

In the international politics Middle East regions has remain most important due to its strategic location, natural resources including oil, gas, and for current political conflicts (Byman, 2019). In the region there is one of the longest and most important conflict between United states and Iran. After the revolution of Iran 1979, and the hostage instability, created the strain relationship between both countries. Which based on lack of trust, conflicting ideologies, economic sanctions, and competition in the region (Takeyh,2011). After that, in the Middle east Iranian

nuclear program affecting the security, increasing influence in the global politics, and relations among world powers. According to United State or its allies, the nuclear activities of the Iran could be threatening to the region or international security if they enabling nuclear development. While, Iran again and again stated that their nuclear is just for peaceful purpose not for the threatens others. It is for energy production or scientific research (Katzman,2020). Due to this nuclear disagreement, both countries have much tensions like diplomatic, economic, and political challenges. however, to overcome the Iranian regional influence or nuclear activities, American administrations adopted different policies and strategies in different time periods.

The major changes can be seen in the polices of the United State towards the Iran in the time periods of Barack Obama and Donald Trump. Barack Obama's policy was based on multilateralism, diplomacy, and political engagement. However, this policy led to the signing Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015 between P5+1 countries and Iran. The main focus of the agreement was to limited the nuclear activities of the Iran in the return remove sanctions of economy in the intranational integration. (Katman,2020). The policy of Barack Obama believed that diplomacy is better to overcome tensions. insist of military conflict, and improve international cooperation (Parsi,2017). The policy has been changed in the Donald trump's regime. In 2018, He had withdrawn by Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. And bring new policy of maximum pressure. It was based on economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and introduced tough polices aimed to target Iran and weakening it economically and politically (Nephew,2018). Trump said that, the policy of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action did not work properly to overcome the Iran's nuclear development process, or the regional influence like, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen (Byman,2019). Because of these sanctions created tensions among both countries and increasing instability in the Middle East.

This shift was not only change in policy. It also reflected the American thinking to use the diplomacy and put pressure in the international relations. In the realistic point of view, both used different methods but same goals to save the interest of America. In the regime of Barack Obama used the diplomacy, compromise, and cooperation with other countries. Whereas in the time period of Donald trump, focused unliteral polices, deterrence, and economic pressure (Mearsheimer, 2021, Waltz, 1979). Due to these different approaches, there were different impacts such as instability in region, global diplomacy, and international alliances. The change of policy did not just affect the Middle East but its influence also in the region like Pakistan. Pakistan has significant location. It shares its boarder to the Iran. Pakistan has long relationship with the United State, and as well as strategic partnership with China (Rizvi, 2019). However, after the tensions increase among the Washington and Tehran, Pakistan faced diplomatic and security challenges. in this situation Pakistan does not want to make the relationship weak with United States due to economic, diplomatic or military interests. While another way Pakistan have to maintain good relations with the neighboring Iran because of boarder security, energy cooperation, and reginal trade. However, in this situation Pakistan adopted a save policy of balancing did not openly support any one of them. In the rivalry of United State and Iran, it has big geopolitical effects which forced to the major powers to involve in it like China and Russia.

China mostly depending on the Middle Eastern energy resources. And it invested in project such as China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) for the regional connectivity (Rolland, 2020). And Russia is also trying its influence in the Middle East by supporting in diplomatic and strategic way to Iran (Ternin, 2019). That's why, the changing policy of US should be understood in the broader way of competition between the major powers and global alliances.

Many scholars discussed about the US Iranian issue and US foreign policy. Many scholars focused on Barack Obama policy, or the Donald Trump's sanctions-based policy. But there is limited focused on combine policies of both or its impacts on the regional countries such as Pakistan. This study aims to address the impacts on regional countries of both policies. And its impacts on Pakistan's foreign policy. The study also addresses the question, how did the shift from diplomatic engagement of Barack Obama to maximum pressure strategy towards Iran affect regional stability of Donald Trump policy, change the relations of Iran and US, and what did this change have affected the foreign policy of Pakistan? study discusses how the pressure increased regional instability due to this change of policy, intensified geopolitical competition, and how Pakistan adopted save strategic balancing policy to address these changing regional conditions. This study is very important because it helps to understand how the changes in strategies of the major powers and how they have influence in regional stability or affect the foreign policy decisions of smaller countries. Study also examines the competition between the major powers often creates the security or political challenges in the regional states and forces smaller countries for adopting balance strategies to save their national interest. By comparing the policies of US towards the Iran along Pakistan strategic calculations. This study examines a broader understanding interconnected nature contemporary international politics.

Research Question:

1. How was the transition from Obama's policy of engagement to Trump's policy of maximum pressure against Iran impactful in terms of regional stability and Pakistan's foreign policy?

Research Objective:

1. The main objectives that can be used for discussing how the shift from Obama's diplomacy to Trump's pressure towards Iran changed US-Iranian relations, impacted regional stability, and led to the change in foreign policy decisions of Pakistan will be mentioned below.

Methodology:

This study employs qualitative research methods and comparative analysis to explore the impact of the Iran policies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump on the foreign policy of Pakistan. Secondary data sources have been used extensively in this study, which include books, scholarly research articles, policy papers, and journal publications about US-Iran relations, JCPOA, sanctions policies, and regional geopolitics. In addition, comparative analysis has been employed to assess the contrast between the Iran policies of President Obama and President Trump. Moreover, the study makes use of the realism school of thought to investigate how countries act upon national interest, security, and regional power in international politics. Moreover, a

historical-analytical perspective has been adopted to understand the changes in US–Iran relations and the geopolitical impact of changes in US foreign policy towards Iran.

Literature Review:

Existing studies mostly focused the nuclear issue of Iran, economic sanctions, and the changing of American policies, on the relation between United State and Iran. Most of the Scholars accepted that strategic competition, political power of the region, and concern for the nuclear proliferation have been influenced the rivalry among the Washington and Tehran. There are also some scholars who disagreed about the effectiveness of diplomacy and forcefully manage this conflict.

There is major debate among the scholars some in the favor of Barack Obama's diplomatic engagement. They support the policy of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). They argued this plan was an important diplomatic success, by this US overcome the nuclear tensions through the negotiations and international monitoring mechanisms (Parsi, 2017, Katzman, 2020). They believe that for the peaceful conflict management, or stability in the region these opportunities could be created by the diplomacy and cooperation with other countries. Some scholars criticized the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), did not properly overcome the regional ambitions and missile program of the Iran. Scholar Daniel Byman (2019), argued that after the relief of the sanctions the influence of Iran has been increased in the Middle East without resolving the strategic rivalry among US and Iran. That's why some scholars see the policy of Obama as source of regional stability, or some consider it as limited or temporary.

The current literature on the policy of Donald Trump towards Iran, also shows some division between the scholars. Some scholars defend the policy of maximum pressure strategy, they argued that it is necessary of the economic sanctions to control the influence in the region of the Iran and force renegotiation agreement (Nephew, 2018). Some scholars argued that these sanctions are harmful for the economy of the Iran, and did not get political goals. Scholars also argued about the withdrawal of Donald Trump from the policy of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), it increased the regional instability and increased the tensions in the Middle east.

There are also important debates in the literature about the effectiveness of sanctions and the diplomacy. As liberal scholars support the idea to solve the problems in peaceful way, by negotiation, dialogue, and international cooperation. While, in the context of the realist scholars who prefer the coercion, and power politics is necessary for protecting or achieving the national interest (Mearsheimer, 2017, Waltz, 1979). These debates are important because both policies had been used in different strategies but their purpose was same to protect the interest of America.

Research Gape:

The exiting literature mostly focused on the US and Iran conflicts on the regional countries, like Pakistan. the present studies said about the foreign policy of Pakistan, such as it has been tried to solve the conflict between US and Iran and showing balance policy to resolve the issue due to its strategic and geopolitical, economic interest. But there is limited focused on the combine comparison of the policies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump in relation to the behavior of

Pakistan foreign policy. Because of this, study fills the gaps in the literature by comparing the policy of diplomacy to the maximum pressure and highlights its impact on the foreign policy of Pakistan strategy regional balancing and decision making.

Theoretical Frame Work:

The based of this study is theory of Realism. Kentz Walt developed the structural Realism. And Johan Mearsheimer highlighted the concept of power. In the concept of Realism there is no central power above the state to control their behavior such as anarchic in the international system. State just focused on their survival, protection of the security, and national interest in this type of system. In the realistic perspective, foreign policy mostly created by strategic calculations not based on the moral values or the ideological perspective. states try to gain power and protect the positions in the international system (Mearsheimer, 2001). Due to this there is temporary cooperation among the states and mostly relied on strategic interest.

These realistic ideas can be seen in the relationship among the United State and Iran. In the regime of Barack Obama and Donald Trump both have the same goals to limit the Iran's influence in the region and prevailing the nuclear proliferation. The objective was same but the strategies were different. Obama followed the diplomacy multilateral alliance through the Comprehensive Joint Plan of Action, whereas, trump used the maximum pressure and economic pressure strategy. These policies were different but the aim was same to protect the American interest in the Middle East.

To understand the behavior of the Iran the realism is very important. In the concept of realistic, the nuclear program of the Iran and its alliances shape the efforts to protect national security, and overcome the threats. Mostly scholars said that, the nuclear policy is important for the survival of regime, security of the region, and deterrence against powerful threats. Same like Pakistan followed the realistic strategy of balancing relation with the United State and Iran to protect geopolitics and economic interest. Because of this, to understand that how major powers follow their strategic interest and how the regional states responses to changing geopolitical outcomes, Realism is very important to cover it.

Historical Background:

The issues of the America and Iran started in the time period of cold war, mostly 1953 CIA backed coup the Prime Minister of Iran Muhammad Mossadegh had been dismissed and the rule of shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi restored. Due to this many Iranians considered it foreign influence in the internal affairs of the Iran, which created Anti- American feelings in Iran (takeyh,2011). Relations of both countries more opposite after the revolution of Iran in 1979. In which the shah was removed from the power and the Islamic republic was created under the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. At that time, the diplomatic between two countries had been suspension due to the Iran hostage crises and damaged the relationship among both countries (Byman,2019).

During this time, there was disagreement of influence of Iran in the region, its support to militant groups, and the nuclear program of the Iran has increased most tensions between Iran and the United States. United States claimed that, the nuclear of Iran could developed the nuclear weapons, while the Iran continuously said it was just for the peaceful purpose like energy production and scientific research (Katzman,2020). However, the major changing came in the

regime of the Barack Obama, who adopted the diplomatic policy which resulted the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015. But in the time period of Donald Trump, who withdrew by this agreement and introduced the Maximum Pressure policy, which was based on economic sanctions and political pressure. After this shift the tensions between Iran and United State became weak and it also effect the regional politics.

The Iran Policy of Barack Obama: Diplomacy and Engagement:

In the time period of the Barack Obama's regime adopted the strategy of the diplomatic engagement with Iran. The main aim of this policy was to reduce the nuclear sanctions and overcome the military conflicts. Obama used to cooperate and multilateral negotiation with the powerful states to concern the nuclear program of the Iran. By this Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was led in 2015 among the Iran and P5+1 country. By this agreement the uranium enrichment of the Iran was limited. And the monitoring of the international mechanism was introduced in the return the economic sanctions were removed from Iran (Katzman,2020).

Some scholars support the policy of the Obama, they believed that Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), was most important policy because it reduced the danger of nuclear proliferation and maintained the regional stability. But some criticized it, the policy did not completely overcome the nuclear missile program, and the influence of the Iran in the Middle East. Regardless of criticism, the policy of the Obama clearly shaped the choice for the diplomacy, cooperation with the powerful countries, and manage the conflict peacefully rather than confrontation (Parsi,2017).

The Iran Policy of Donald Trump: Maximum pressure:

In the Donald Trump's regime, he withdrew the policy of Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPA) in 2018. Adopted the policy of Maximum pressure toward Iran. In this policy Iran was limited by the nuclear program and regional influenced. Iran faced strict economic sanctions, diplomatic isolation or political pressure (Nephew,2018). United State again imposed the sanctions on the banking, oil, trade of the Iran, the purpose was to weaken the Iran economically and forced to renegotiation of the nuclear program. The scholars who believed that, the sanctions are good way to pressure Iran for changing its behavior. While this policy also criticized because according to some scholars after withdrawing the policy Iran restarted the nuclear program, and it also increased the instability in the region. United State did not achieve their political goals (Byman,2019).

The Comparative Analysis of Obama and Trump's Policies:

In the context of comparative both policies of Obama and Trump there were two different strategies used to gain the same target of American objective in the Middle East. Even though, both of the strategies aimed to overcome the nuclear program of the Iran and limited the influence of the Iran from region. Though both used different methods. Like Barack Obama's strategy was based on Diplomacy, multilateral cooperation, and Negotiations by Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). And Donald Trump used the policy of unilateral actions, coercion, and economic pressure (Katzman,2020, Nphew,2018).

Barack Obama's Policy determined on participation and managing the conflict. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). It shows the belief of Obama in the diplomacy and

cooperation, because of this Iran nuclear program temporary reduced by international monitoring and sanction was removed. But in 2018, Donald Trump withdraws by this policy and argued that, this policy was not effective to control the Iran, for this he introduced the strategy of the maximum pressure. This policy was based on economic sanctions, political pressure to weaken the economy of Iran.

The outcome of both policies was very different. Engagement policy of the Obama stables the relative diplomatic and cooperation with powerful countries. Yet the scholars argued that by this policy Iran did not control in the regional influence. In the same way, the policy of the Trump seriously weakened the economy of the Iran. But it increased tensions in the regional politics and Iran restarted their nuclear program (Byman,2019). In the realistic perspective. both policies used as a different kind of strategies but the goal was same to protecting the interest of America.

The Geopolitical Implications:

The shift in United States policy toward Iran had major the both the Middle East and the broader international political system. Obama's administration the policy diplomacy engagement with Iran helped reduce nuclear tensions and created a period of relative regional stability. It's also encouraged cooperation among world powers. On the other hand, Donald Trumps adopted a (Maximum pressure) strategy which increased uncertainly and strengthen regional conflicts and rivalries.

The changing in US policy also influenced strategic of major powers like China and Russia. China remained worried about instability in the Middle East because of it depends heavily on the region for energy resource and investments connected to the Belt and Road Initiative (Rolland, 2020). Similarly, Russia Meanwhile, gained strategic advantage from rising tensions between the US and Iran by increasing its diplomatic and security role in the region (Trenin, 2019).

Countries in the Middle East Such as Saudi Arabia and Israel mostly supported Trump's stricter approach toward Iran, viewing growing regional influence a serious security challenge. However, increased tensions also created fears of possible military conflict, unstable oil prices greater insecurity in the region. Overall, the growing rivalry between US–Iran rivalry showed how changes in the policies of powerful countries can strongly influence regional and global geopolitics.

The Implication for Pakistan:

Pakistan suffered due to this changing in the policies of United States towards Iran. It influenced on Pakistan foreign policy. Because of instability in the region, Pakistan was forced to manage the balancing policy towards this challenge. because Pakistan shared boarder with Iran and it also had long term relations with United State. The tensions between United state and Iran created instability in the region, such as economic cooperation, and boarder security.

Pakistan faced further more complication due to the strategic partnership with china, like China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). When the region is in instability position there could be threaten to the projects of the China. And with that Pakistan tried to avoid hostile with the United States due to economic and diplomatic interest. For that, Pakistan focused on careful balancing policy to maintain the peace in the region. (Rizvi,2019).

The increasing tension because of Donald Trump strategy of maximum pressure it also raised anxiety of the energy and sectarian stability in the region. However, Pakistan is trying to maintain the stability of the region and diplomatic relations towards Washington and Tehran. In this situation it clearly shows that how the change in the policies of the powerful countries effected the foreign policy of the small countries.

Critical Analysis:

In the comparison of both regimes such as Barack Obama, and Donald Trump they used the different policies but the aim was same to save American interest. The engagement or the diplomatic policy of Obama played great role to reduced the pressure of nuclear by multilateral cooperation and negotiation. But in the policy of Trump it was maximum pressure, to reduce the influence of Iran in the region or nuclear program. Depended on the sanctions to weakened the economy of Iran.

The Barack Obama brought temporary changed in the diplomatic stability and strong cooperation between the major powers through the policy of engagement by signing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. There is also critics on this policy, that it did not completely overcome the issue of Iran. While in the contrast of Donald Trump Policy based on the sanctions. And it could be increased military confederation. (Nephew,2018).

In the context of the realistic the compression of both polices show the effort of the United States for the protection of their interest, and maintain regional influence. The shift of the polices from diplomacy to coercion it limited the unilateral pressure to solving the geopolitical conflicts. The relationships among the United state and Iran more shows that, in which way the strong power can directly affected the stability in the region. And influence of the foreign policy toward the smaller countries such as Pakistan.

Major Finding and Recommendation:

The study highlights that Barack Obama's diplomatic strategy helped ease nuclear tensions for a certain period and promoted cooperation among global powers through the joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. In comparison, Donald Trumps' maximum pressure policy placed stronger economic sanctions on Iran, but it also led to greater regional uncertainty and diplomatic disputes. The research also notes that Pakistan maintained a strategic balancing approach to manage evolving regional politics and global power competition.

The United States should focus more on diplomatic efforts together with economic policies to help lower tensions and instability in the region. Countries in the region need to promote dialogue and collective cooperation to avoid further conflict in the Middle East. Pakistan should maintain its balanced diplomatic approach to preserve stable ties with both Iran and the United State. Stronger regional collaboration is important for improving energy security and supporting economic stability in both South Asia and the Middle East.

Conclusion:

The Policy of the Barack Obama's diplomatic engagement and the Donald Trump's Policy maximum pressure it was a big shift in the United States, which greatly affect the relations among the Iran and United States and as well as influence in the regional geopolitics. United state under the Obama focused on the cooperation, negotiations, and the management of the conflicts by

the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. Trumped was opposite to it, focused on the economic sanctions and political pressure to limited the Iran influenced in the region, and its nuclear program. The comparison shows that diplomacy create the stability and good international cooperation. But pressure and sanctions increased the tensions or regional uncertainty. Although the government had same goals their policies produced different political and regional results. This article also shows that the effect of US-Iran rivalry on country like Pakistan tried maintain the balance between Iran and United States. While protecting regional peace and economic interests. Realist point of view the case of powerful countries follow their national interest through different strategies. The study concludes that changes in the policies of major power can strongly affect regional security, international relation and the foreign policy of smaller countries.

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