

Ups and Downs in Iran-Pakistan Ties

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Abstract

Iran was the first state that recognized Pakistan following its independence in August 1947. The Pakistani government reciprocated the act in February 1979, when Islamabad pioneered in recognizing the Islamic Republic of Iran subsequent to the victory of the Islamic Revolution. However, despite the aforementioned, bilateral ties between the two neighbors have undergone immense ups and downs during the past six decades. The victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 put an end to the relations between Iran and Pakistan under the Pahlavi regime, opening a new chapter in Islamabad-Tehran ties that featured a vast spectrum of competition and cooperation. Studying the ties between the two states during the past three decades, this essay discusses and explains the five fixed elements of ideology and religion; identity based on ethnicity; religious extremism; developments in Afghanistan, and the nature of ties between India and Pakistan with a special focus on Kashmir and U.S. policies as principal and invariant variables influencing Iran-Pakistan ties. This article aims at identifying and explaining principle and fixed variables influencing the bilateral ties between Iran and Pakistan at the domestic, regional and international levels. The objective of this research is thus to bring about a better and more comprehensive understanding of existing ups and downs in the links between the two states within the framework of the Southwest Asian sub-system.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Iran, Regional Sub-System, Southwest Asia, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan

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Introduction

Although the Iranian civilization's historical and cultural bonds with the Indian sub-continent goes back thousands of years, the record of Iranian political ties with the relatively newly founded states of the region like Pakistan and Bangladesh has a much shorter precedence. The starting point of the political ties goes back to the time when Pakistan became independent from India on August 14th 1947. Iran was the first country to recognize the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi was the most significant head of state in the world to visit Pakistan in 1949, following its independence. Due to the proximity of the Pahlavi regime's policies and the government of Pakistan with regard to bilateral issues, regional problems including those related to India and Afghanistan, and alignment with U.S. policies - especially in the framework of CENTO - relations between the two countries went on a desirable path till the Islamic Revolution in Iran.

The victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 triggered fundamental changes in the political elites as well as domestic and foreign policy discourses. Consequently, the Islamic Revolution had a considerable impact on the ties between the Islamic Republic of Iran and many other countries in the world, including Pakistan. Although the Pakistani government was the first state to recognize the Islamic Republic of Iran in February 1979, the prevalence of ideological discourse based on Islam, Iranian departure from the circle of Washington's allies (realized by its withdrawal from CENTO and joining of the NAM) and opposition to the secular



and pragmatic policies of Pakistan, put an end to the solid relations of the past. The abovementioned developments started a new chapter in the bilateral relations between Tehran and Islamabad, which encompassed a vast spectrum of competition and cooperation. Over the past three decades, various internal, regional and international developments have affected the trend of bilateral ties between the two states in various ways. Recognition of these developments and the variables involved could help provide a more comprehensive understanding of Iran-Pakistan ties.

Such an understanding is based on whether the research has extracted and explained principal, fixed and influential variables from a body of various developments and variables capable of making a realistic analysis of developments in the bilateral ties between the two states possible. It is aimed at identifying and explaining principle and fixed variables influencing the bilateral ties between the two states at the domestic, regional and international levels. On this basis, the primary questions are: What are the important and fixed components of Iran-Pakistan ties during the past three decades? And how have these components, in conjunction with components and circumstances governing the two countries, the region and the international system, affected the bilateral relations? To answer these questions, this article examines important and fixed components influencing Tehran-Islamabad ties. Although emphasis is put on the relations between the two states in the post-Islamic Revolution era, it is necessary to shortly review aspects of the abovementioned in the pre-revolutionary period to gain a more comprehensive appreciation of bilateral relations between the two states within the framework of the southwest Asian sub-system during the past three decades.

I- Cooperation and Competition

Competition and cooperation have been the stable components of six decades of Iran-Pakistan relations. This is a reminder of the two



faces of Janus, the Roman mythological god that symbolizes coexistence between two conflicting elements. In the study of relations between the two countries during the past three decades, five fixed and sustained elements are observed that in conjunction with variables like the attitude of political elites leading the two countries and developments in southwest Asia as well as the international system have determined the fate of ties between Iran and Pakistan; in other words, the quality of competition and cooperation between the two. These fixed elements are ideology and religion; identity based on ethnicity; religious extremism; developments in Afghanistan, as well as the nature of Indo-Pakistani relations with the centrality of Kashmir and U.S. policies. Therefore, recognition of these components, given the dual and Janus-faced function of them, could help one gain a better and more comprehensive understanding of the ups and downs in ties between Iran and Pakistan.

Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan, was of the belief that one of the cornerstones of the country were laid when the first non-Muslim in its territory converted to Islam. This is since immediately after the conversion of a Hindu follower of Jinnah, Hindus and Muslims could not co-exist; an issue ultimately leading to the creation of Pakistan (Burke and Ziring, 1998). Zulfikar Bhutto also held that Pakistan is a Middle Eastern state, a nation that has derived its identity from the sands of the Arabian Peninsula and not the jungles of the Indian sub-continent (Zamanian, 1996). This statement clearly indicates the role played by Islam in the formation of the identity of Pakistani society. However, despite the important role played by religion in Pakistani society, one cannot use the attribute “ideological” to describe the foreign or domestic policies of Pakistan, since Islamabad's policies have also been influenced by political pragmatism and intelligently benefiting from regional and international situations and events. (Nasr, 2004) In fact, one of Mohammad Ali Jinnah's statements is a criteria for how the



Pakistani state looks at religion: “You may belong to any religion, caste, faith or creed. This has nothing to do with the function of the government. I think we would rather keep this principle before our eyes as our belief”. Benefiting from religious emotions and capacities versus India and putting “Islamic Pakistan” against “Hindu India” was and still is the main political position assumed by Pakistani leaders in terms of religion. (Nozar Shafiei, A, 2010).

Keeping the aforementioned in mind, one could distinguish between two different states of Iran-Pakistan ties before and after the 1979 Islamic revolution. Due to the secular nature of the political system in Pakistan and pre-revolutionary Iran, religion did not create disputes between the two states. In fact, it did not play a major part. Instead, mainly geopolitical, security and political observations in the framework of the two sides' national security as well as political groupings during the Cold War era affected the quality of the bilateral ties between the two states. This was clearly seen in the viewpoints of the head of the Pahlavi regime. For example, following the assistance extended by Iran to Pakistan to suppress the secessionist riots in Pakistani Balochistan in 1973, then Pakistani Premier Zulfikar Ali Bhutto paid an official visit to Tehran. During the visit, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi stated that “Once again, I reiterate that we will always be with you. We are obliged to say that whatever happens to our eastern neighbor is of vital significance for us and if any other incident occurs, it is not tolerated by us. The reason is not merely fraternal emotions towards you as a Muslim nation, but it are also for Iranian interests that we cannot bear more unrest in Pakistan” (Bill & Roger Louis, 1987: 82).

The role and influence of the religious and ideological element emerged in Tehran-Islamabad ties at a time when the 1979 Islamic revolution broke out in Iran (Alam, 2004: 526), an event that challenged the modern, secular political systems of the late twentieth century through the establishment of an unbreakable bond between Shi'a Islam and politics in the framework of the ruling system of the



Islamic Republic and formation of Islamist revolutionary discourse. “Although the discourse amounts to disregarding of the realities of the foreign policy and international relations arena, being based on Islamic-revolutionary principles and ideals makes this discourse distinct from idealist and pragmatic paradigms in international relations” (Dehghani, 2009: 206). As a result, the adoption of idealist, ideological policies by the revolutionary leaders of Iran led the Islamic Republic on a confrontational path not only towards the Western world but also conservative and secular governments in the Muslim world, including Pakistan. As a result, although Article 152 of the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran - which is similar to Article 40 of the Pakistani constitution - considers the expansion of ties with Islamic and neighboring countries as the priority of Iranian foreign policy, the introduction of revisionist and Shi’a elements into Iranian foreign policy (Barzegar, 2007) had two important domestic and foreign impacts on Pakistan. At the domestic level, it increased the presence of Islamist forces when General Zia-ul-Haq was in power in Pakistan (1977-1988) (Burki and Baxter, 1991), a unique period exemplary of the systematic promotion of Islamism from above (Ziring, 1984). The latter led to the birth of tens of extremist and fundamentalist Sunni currents with anti-Shi’a tendencies.

At a lower level, this confrontation had an ideational aspect as well. As all identities are formed by placing the “self” against the “other”, Pakistani fundamentalist Sunni identity defined “itself” as opposite to Shi’a, revolutionary Iran which became the “other”. The more this confrontation grew, such identities became more prevalent and hardened, resulting in the active nature of a wide spectrum of fundamentalist groups during the past three decades in Pakistani society which has left a severely destructive impact on its bilateral ties with Iran.

At the foreign level, however, the introduction of revisionist and Shi’a elements into Iranian foreign policy led Iran to be placed



opposite Pakistan which, with a Sunni majority, sought to keep the status quo in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf (Tahir-Kheli and Staudemaier, 1982). This stance was welcomed by the Arab states of the Middle East and especially Saudi Arabia, who were deeply fearful of the Iranian government's adoption of ideological policies based on political Shi'a Islam throughout the Persian Gulf region and Afghanistan. As a result of this alignment, close relations were established between Pakistan and Arab states on the southern coasts of the Persian Gulf, and especially Saudi Arabia; the outcome of which would be displayed in developments in Afghanistan. With the support of Sunni groups - mainly Pashtuns - during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan started countering the USSR Red Army on the one hand, while confronting the political Shi'a-revolutionary Islam of Iran on the other. Islamabad-Riyadh cooperation was pursued more seriously in the 1990s, and an extremist Sunni current with radical Salafi and Wahhabi teachings in the form of the Taliban emerged from this cooperation; one of the most important goals of which was to counter and contain Shi'a Islamism throughout the region. The impact of this on Iran-Pakistan ties was crystal clear: the worst era of relations between the two states was when the Taliban were in power in Afghanistan. Regardless of developments in the 1980s and 1990s, a recent instance of the conflict between the Pakistani policy of preserving the status quo and revisionist policy of Iran could be seen in the support extended by Islamabad to the Al Khalifah in Bahrain, and policies adopted by the GCC which clearly opposed Iranian policies.

In sum, the element of Ideology and religion has always played an influential role in regulating Tehran-Islamabad ties as a fixed but dual-faced and dual-function factor. Alignment between Iran and Pakistan as two members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) on the one hand paved the way and created the capacity for cooperation in so many spheres and important issues of



the Islamic world such as Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and crisis of Kashmir. On the other hand, the context of Sunni domination with political pragmatism in Pakistan versus Shi'a domination with revolutionary idealism in Iran has caused a divergence and gap between the two states in various areas, one of the most prominent instances of which is the formation of religious fundamentalist currents inside Pakistan as well as the Taliban. This vividly indicates the dual role and function of the religious and ideological element as one of the important aspects of Janus-faced relations between Iran and Pakistan, which, in conjunction with other fixed components and regional and international variable circumstances, has played an important part in divergence and convergence between the two states at different junctures.

The two elements of ethnicism and religious extremism are among the most important factors of instability throughout the Southwest Asian region. The heavy human and material costs of terrorism on states' shoulders is a way of exerting pressure by terrorist groups to make governments completely or at least partly meet their demands. The main reasons behind the emergence of terrorism in the region, and Afghanistan and Pakistan in particular, are ethnicism and religious fundamentalism. Hence, we will examine the two elements as independent variables and the phenomenon of terrorism as a dependent one. It is also noteworthy that there is a considerable overlap between the two independent variables of ethnicism and fundamentalism. This is since there is commonly a type of overlap as well as coherence between beliefs and ethnic borders, leading to the strengthening of these currents. The Taliban should be considered as a symbol of this overlap. According to Vali Nasr, following the Talibanization of Pashtun policy along with the Islamization of Pashtun nationalism (Naser, 2004: 203), the Taliban movement had the two independent variables at its disposal at the same time and used the means of terrorism in an effective way to attain its goals. The outcome of these terrorist acts with ethnic and



religious fundamentalist origins, however, has left considerable consequences for Iran-Pakistan ties in a vast spectrum of convergence and divergence in which the divergence, unfortunately, has much more weight.

The impact of the first factor can be seen in the ethnic and tribal context governing the region. The existence of more than 5 million Baluch in the southwest of Pakistan and southeastern Iran, many of whom share bonds, is among the important challenges the two states face (Harrison, 1981). Although the ethnic challenge between Iran and Pakistan has never been comparable with that of Afghanistan and Pakistan over the Pashtun and the Durand Line, this factor has always been impacting bilateral ties between Tehran and Islamabad. At the macro level, the two states have always been opposed to ethnic secessionist movements and this has constituted a fixed element and the most important reason for the cooperation between the two countries; a vivid example of which was the assistance extended by the former Shah of Iran to the Pakistani government to suppress the Baluch Liberation Front in 1973. In post-revolutionary Iran too, despite the existence of several differences of opinion between the two states, countering the secessionist threat has always been considered as an important part of Iran-Pakistan security cooperation.

On the other side of the coin, however, the emergence of various disputes and misunderstandings between the two states is due to ethnic dynamics, especially in the region of Baluchistan in Iran which is rooted in the heterogeneity between political borders and the ethnic, racial and religious ones. In recent years, several groups from inside Iran and Pakistan, claiming adjudication of Baluch rights, have chosen to fight central governments, among which the so-called Jundallah was the most prominent one and the hottest point of dispute between Iran and Pakistan. The group created a very serious ethnic-oriented and separatist dynamic in southeastern Iran based on the demands of the Baluch and has



effectively used religious extremism (a radical interpretation of Sunni Islam based on Salafi teachings) as well as terrorist acts (two variables indicated above) to attain their goals. The climax of their acts was the assassination of tens of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps officers, including General Shushtari, Deputy of the Ground Forces of this important Iranian military entity. The incident in October 2009 left a very negative impact on Iran-Pakistan ties. Subsequent to this incident, Iranian media and officials immediately took positions against the government of Pakistan, and in the harshest language, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad accused Pakistani officials of being involved in the terrorist attack (CBS News, October 19, 2009). He called for the arrest and extradition of Abdol Malek Rigi, the head of the terrorist group Jundallah, to Iran (Press Trust of India, October 23, 2009). Mostafa Mohammad Najjar, the Iranian Minister of the Interior, also charged the Pakistani government with financially supporting Jundallah (Dawn Media Group, October 23, 2009). Although Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari called the perpetrators of the attack enemies of the two states, bent on undermining Iran-Pakistan ties (CBS News, October 27, 2009), it was only after periods of tension ending in the capture of Rigi by Iranian intelligence agents on February 23rd2010 and his execution on June 20th2010 that the strained situation became somewhat calm.

This showed that the infiltration of radical elements in the Baluch ethnic movements could lead to the securitization and politicization of ethnic religious identities, ultimately leading to collusion between terrorist groups, organized crimes networks, radical nationalist parties and religious fundamentalists; thus gradually opening up a politico-military front against the Islamic Republic of Iran in neighboring eastern provinces (Hadian, 2006: 1). The impact of these acts on Iran-Pakistan relations was quite tangible. Pressure exerted by Iranian MPs to shrink interaction with Pakistan following the Rigi group's sabotage operations in Sistan



and Baluchistan province, repeated hesitations by Iranian officials to sign the contract on constructing a gas pipeline transmitting Iranian gas to Pakistan, and severe attacks by the Iranian press against Pakistani officials for their inaction vis-a-vis extremists who act against Shi'a Muslims, are all among the instances of the negative impacts of the expansion of extremism in Pakistan on bilateral ties between Iran and Pakistan (Nozar Shafiei, A, 2009).

However, there is a second element; that is to say, an independent variable, which is the effective and powerful current of religious extremism. Religious and intellectual developments in Pakistani society subsequent to its independence from India, the coming into power of the Wahhabi Salafi thinking in Saudi Arabia, the Kashmir problem, the occupation of Afghanistan, the presence of Afghan refugees in the tribal regions of Pakistan, the abject material and spiritual deprivation of these refugees, Zia ul Haq's policies and the support extended by Saudi Arabia, caused the shaping of tens of extremist currents in Pakistan; especially since the 1980s. Up until 1988, more than 8,000 formal religious schools and 25,000 informal ones were established in Pakistan (Synnott, 2009: 32), out of which radical groups like Lashkar-e-Toiba (LeT), Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Jamaat al-Dawa (JAD) rose. What led the activities of these groups to impact bilateral relations between Iran and Pakistan is their anti-Iranian/anti-Shi'a orientation, which is based on superficial and radical perceptions of Sunni teachings. This has been clearly reflected in the teachings of the SSP; the main symbol of religious extremism in Pakistan. In a pamphlet on Iran entitled "Revealing the real face of the Islamic Revolution", disseminated by the group, it is asserted that: "The Islamic Revolution in Iran is a world conspiracy against Islam. The revolution of [Imam] Khomeini is the first major attempt by the Shi'as to spread Shi'ism throughout Europe via Turkey and to Russia through the Muslim countries of Central Asia, and to Sri Lanka via Pakistan. The Sunnis in Iran are under torture and



persecution. Sunni students at Iranian universities are forced to study Shi'a texts. Hence, the Pakistani government should declare the country a Sunni state and Shi'as as non-Muslims" (NozarShafiei, A, 2009).

Parallel with propaganda and religious acts attached to these anti-Iranian/anti-Shi'a currents throughout the religious schools of Pakistan, these movements also use the lever of terrorism to attain their goals; including ethnicism. The outcome of this has been several terrorist attacks against Iranian and Pakistani Shi'as during the two past decades. The martyrdom of Sadegh Ganji, head of the Iranian Cultural House in Lahore in 1990, the SSP's torching of the library of the Iranian Cultural House in Lahore on January 19th1997, and the same group's attack on the Iranian Cultural House in Multan and the assassination of seven members of the center on February 30th1997 are among the most important examples of the incidents caused by the amalgamation of religious fundamentalism and terrorism which have left a deeply negative impact on the bilateral links between Iran and Pakistan. For instance, these incidents led to the closure of the three Iranian cultural centers in Rawalpindi, Hyderabad and Multan for years. It also led to a decline in Iranian diplomats' presence at some representative offices in Pakistan. However, as mentioned above, the shaping of a radical current called the Taliban should be seen as a result of the mixing of ethnicism and religious extremism, which widely uses the means of terrorism to promote its goals. The ethnic-oriented beliefs of the Taliban was based on the ethnic-tribal values of the Pashtuns, who threaten Afghanistan and Pakistan with the risk of separatism and have directed their extremism beliefs - rooted in Salafi and Wahhabi teachings – against Shi'a Iran. The impact of Taliban activities on Iran-Pakistan relations should be seen as one of the most influential elements in bilateral ties between Iran and Pakistan during the past three decades. The Taliban's activities have posed a threat against Iran due to various reasons. "The Taliban, from a religious aspect,



with a Wahhabi outlook and blatant enmity against Shi'a thinking as well as presenting a perverted version of Islam and Islamic governance, is in clear conflict with Iranian national interests and foreign policy, as is the case with the political and security aspect of the issue, which implies the creation of insecurity and threatening the eastern borders of Iran as well as ethnic and racial purges within Afghanistan resulting in a wave of emigration towards neighboring countries, especially Iran, assassination of Iranian nationals in Pakistan and Afghanistan, drug trafficking, destabilization of the region and paving the way for big powers' presence and boosting their interference in the region" (Mohammadi, 2010).

Given the fundamental role played by Pakistan in the shaping and strengthening of this current, any anti Iranian/Shi'a move by the Taliban would naturally and directly impact ties between Iran and Pakistan. The murder of 2,000 to 5,000 Shi'as by the Taliban in Afghanistan at the juncture of its seizing of power (Cooper, 1998) evoked the emotions of the Iranian people. This was followed by the assassination of eight Iranian diplomats and a correspondent in Mazar-e-Sharif. That event led to the deployment of 70,000 Iranian troops along Iran's eastern borders (Rashid, 2000: 204) as the Islamic Republic held the Pakistani government responsible for the protection of the assassinated diplomats (Tehran Times, February 24, 1998). The aggravation of instability in Afghanistan, the futility of the Iranian policy of returning Afghan refugees and the annual transiting of more than 900 tons of opium and 375 tons of heroin (Saghafi Ameri, 2010: 217) through Iranian borders severely impacted ties between Iran and Pakistan. Despite the efforts made by the two sides' officials, including Iranian President Khatami's visit with Nawaz Sharif in September 1998 on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly to resolve misunderstandings, the dark shadow of mistrust was cast over the bilateral ties between the two countries. These issues dragged on, even after the Taliban were ousted from power in late 2001. The vast and effective presence of



Afghan and Pakistani Taliban in anti-Iranian/Shi'a movements and their creation of insecurity and instability continue to be a serious threat to Iranian security and interests.

In conclusion, challenging factors like ethnicism, religious extremism and terrorism have caused the formation of a certain level of security and political cooperation between Iran and Pakistan. Pakistan has sought to maintain control over some of the abovementioned extremist groups as a trump card against India and Afghanistan, while maintaining its friendly ties with Iran. This paradox has imposed heavy costs on the shoulders of the Iran-Pakistan relationship in recent years.

II- Afghanistan Issue

Developments in Afghanistan are amazingly intertwined with the state of ties between Iran and Pakistan. During the past six decades, developments in Afghanistan have influenced bilateral relations between Tehran and Islamabad. Since the formation of the independent state of Pakistan, developments in Afghanistan at different junctures have caused disputes and rivalry, or cooperation between Tehran and Islamabad. Afghanistan has a more than 936 kilometer-long border with Iran, and a 2450-kilometer long border with Pakistan. Parallel with religious, historical and civilizational bonds; territorial, ethnic and security challenges among Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan cause developments within the countries to become intertwined. Till the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, the policies of Iran and Pakistan vis-a-vis Afghanistan had experienced a similar trend, and this was a reason behind the cooperation in Tehran-Islamabad ties. The Shah's mediation in the Afghan-Pakistani dispute over the issue of Pashtunistan (when the ties between the two resumed by issuing the May 28th 1963 Declaration) and both Tehran and Islamabad's opposition to any separatist act - especially in Iranian and Pakistani Baluchistan - led to greater proximity between Iran and Pakistan. Davood Khan's coup,



the permeation of leftist and communist forces in 1973, and ultimately the Communist coup by Noor Mohammad in 1978 supported and directed by the USSR, brought Iran and Pakistan - which were politically and ideologically opposed to the new government in Kabul - closer together.

The place and role of developments in Afghanistan in the ties between Iran and Pakistan increasingly displayed its importance following the victory of the Islamic Revolution. One could firmly say that when ties between the two states were cold, developments in Afghanistan – and especially the Soviet occupation of the country - served as a factor facilitating cooperation to a great extent (Alam, 2004: 532). Iran openly defied the Red Army's occupation of a Muslim state, and during the decade-long Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic's foreign policy was based on idealistic revolutionary principles such as "Neither East nor West". It was also built on principles such as a refusal to submit to foreign powers as well as support for Muslim and suppressed states; not to mention an insistence on countering "arrogant powers". Thus, Iran offered full political, military and financial support for anti-occupation groups.

On the other hand, although Pakistan did not share Iran's geopolitical views on Afghanistan, the clear conflict between the pro-Western policies of Zia ul-Haq's government and the communist government in Kabul led to Pakistani opposition to the prevailing situation in Afghanistan. Iran and the United States' disapproval of these circumstances put all three states in one single front vis-a-vis developments in Afghanistan. However, it should be noted that despite this unsought, strategic macro-alignment, differences between Iran and Pakistan at the tactical, micro-level continued. Iran's support for the Mujahideen and Hazara Shi'a groups versus Pakistani, American and some Arab states' backing of Sunni Pashtun groups was the main source of disagreement between Iran and Pakistan in the arena of Afghan developments during the



1980s. That disagreement flared like fire under the ashes in the 1990s, with the retreat of the USSR from Afghanistan, the toppling of the communist government in Kabul and the demise of the bipolar system; including the unsought, strategic macro-alignment of the 1980s.

Following the withdrawal of the USSR army and amidst the flames of civil war in Afghanistan, rivalry among various regional and international actors over Afghanistan heightened (Dims, 2000). At this juncture, the tactical and micro-level differences of the 1980s were exacerbated into a strategic level. The Iranian support extended to the Mujahideen and Hazara groups, and the Pakistani-Arab-American backing of Sunni Pashtuns entered a new phase; the latter effectively leading to the emergence and coming to power of the Taliban in 1997. In fact, Pakistan assumed this posture to improve its position during the civil war and in Afghanistan's political arena (Rashid, 2001). These conditions led Iran to face great frustration when it came to the development of Afghanistan.

With the Taliban taking power, Tehran-Islamabad links were more strained. Pakistan, accompanied by Saudi Arabia and the UAE, were the only states who had recognized the Taliban regime. "Iran construed these circumstances as a threat to its national security and interests, and in line with the macro-level policies of the U.S. to contain the Islamic Revolution throughout the region. To counter this situation, Iran backed groups, including forces loyal to Burhanuddin Rabbani as well as Northern Alliance commanders - particularly Ahmad Shah Massoud - fighting against the Taliban during the civil war in Afghanistan. In this manner, Iran, moved along with the policies of Russian, India and Central Asian states to be able to reverse the increasing Pakistani influence in Afghanistan through the Taliban; an issue that left a direct negative impact on Iran-Pakistan ties" (Hussain, 2002: 57). These circumstances culminated in the ousting of Nawaz Sharif from power in Pakistan and the coming to power of General Pervez Musharraf in August



1998. The assassination of eight Iranian diplomats and a correspondent in the Iranian consulate in Mazar-e-Sharif as well as murder of thousands of Afghan and Pakistani Shi'as by the Taliban and other radical currents took place at this juncture; in all cases, Iran held Pakistan directly responsible. Overall, the period of the Taliban reign between 1997 and 2001 should be seen as the culmination of the conflict between the interests and goals of Iran and Pakistan in Afghanistan. Thus, it should be seen as the worst period of ties between the two states since the inception of Pakistan. Even bilateral trade exchanges between Iran and Pakistan dropped to \$166 million in 2001, compared to \$394 million in 2000 (Saghafi&Ahadi, 2008: 102).

The 9/11 attacks and the U.S.-led invasion of Afghanistan, which led to the toppling of the Taliban regime, amounted to the elimination of one of the major obstacles in Iran-Pakistan ties. Once more, the unsought, strategic macro-alignment among the U.S., Iran and Pakistan, like that of the 1980s, was formed vis-a-vis Afghan developments and the Taliban. In this equation, "Iran played a key role in ousting the Taliban regime as well as in the war against al-Qaeda at domestic, regional and international levels" (Zarif, 2007: 75); regarding the political future of Afghanistan, Iran pushed for an inclusive government formed of all racial, ethnic, religious and Jihadi Afghan groups leading to a relative stable, responsible, trustworthy and predictable state in Afghanistan through the modulation of geopolitical as well as cultural-civilizational discourse (Dehghani, 2009: 489). Scarifying the Taliban under Musharraf, Pakistan - which received extensive advantages from the U.S. as a reward - had no other choice but to back the shaping of the new political system in Afghanistan to preserve its regional place and stabilizing its traditional influence in the Afghan equations. "Hence, the power balance shaped during the formation of the new political structure in Afghanistan between the Pashtuns and other political groups could be interpreted as the result of an unwritten agreement between the



two regional counterbalances, i.e. Iran and Pakistan, that encouraged the two to move towards security cooperation and help the formation of an Afghan political future” (Siddiqi, 2009). Finally, the government that arose from the Bonn Conference was the outcome of this threefold consensus at the domestic, regional and international levels (Dehghani, 2009: 489). Though the new government of Afghanistan was not assuring the maximum goals and interests of Iran and Pakistan, the two countries - despite what they had been through in the past and continued tactical differences - demonstrated some cases of cooperation such as the signing of the Kabul Declaration on Good Neighborly Relations. Moreover, Iranian support of Hamid Karzai’s government (despite Karzai’s Pashtun and Sunni origin), persuading of Shi’a and Hazara groups to participate in the process of nation-state building in Afghanistan (Weinbaum, 2006) and assistance to the social and economic reconstruction of the country led Iran-Afghanistan ties as well as Iran-Pakistan relations to become closer. In this relation, the statement of Abdul Sattar, the then Pakistani Foreign Minister, in November 2002 is noteworthy: “the clouds are moving away and the sun is shining in the sky of Iran-Pakistan relations, meaning the onset of new political developments between the two” (Ali Khan and Ahmad, 2009). The outcome of this recovery could be seen in President Khatami’s visit to Islamabad in December 2002, the first visit by an Iranian head of government since 1992. Despite these positive developments, the history of bilateral ties between the two is seemingly repeating constantly. Once more, the unsought, strategic macro-alignment among the two and the United States gradually attenuated following the collapse of the Taliban, and tactical and minor differences recurred. On the one hand, despite a clear and official u-turn in Islamabad’s stance towards the Taliban and other fundamentalist currents, Pakistan could not stop its support due to the need for a pressure lever vis-a-vis Afghanistan and India. This impacted the process of Afghan peace talks. The



restoration of the Taliban's power under the aegis of the overt and clandestine support of Pakistan, the frustration of the coalition forces and the Afghan central government's inability to assert control gradually resulted in the idea of recognizing the Taliban as well as its presence and participation in the Afghan peace process. The figurative division of the Taliban into two groups, good and bad, was also done within this framework. This, parallel with Pakistani association with coalition troops in Afghanistan - particularly in the framework of the Obama administration's new strategy with regard to Afghanistan and Pakistan - the tenacity of extremist groups' activities and terrorist actions against Shi'as and Iranian nationals, the increase of the production and transit of narcotics, and the rivalry between the two states in Afghanistan to penetrate Central Asia are among the important challenges Iran and Pakistan face on the Afghan stage.

Apart from the above, there is another issue of interest: India. In fact, one important factor attaching significance to Afghanistan in the eyes of Pakistan is the creation of strategic balance against India. This significant issue would only come true through a puppet state or an influenced/dependent one (Hassan Khan, 2003). On the contrary, the Indian approach to Afghanistan is to prevent full Pakistani dominance over the country (Rifaat, 2002). This has put appropriate leverage at Iran's disposal to take action through India in case Islamabad starts a zero-sum game, ignoring the legitimate interests of other actors in the scene. A clear example of this was witnessed when the Taliban regime was in power. The common and coordinated positions of Iran and India vis-a-vis Afghan developments led to multiple concerns among Pakistani politicians (Alam, 2004: 537). At this juncture, Pakistanis are concerned that if this trend goes on, a type of a regional alliance would gradually form among Iran, India and Russia which would not only have negative consequences for Pakistan, but also make the U.S. strategy of retreat from Afghanistan more complicated (Pant, 2011: 31). Hence, one



reason behind why Pakistan changed its mind about its policy of overt backing of the Taliban is its concerns over possible Iran-India alignment in the Afghan arena, which could deter Pakistan from practicing its special policies regarding Afghanistan. Above all, though Afghan developments have led to bilateral and multilateral cooperation between Iran and Pakistan (particularly tripartite meetings among Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan as well as the formulation of a joint plan to combat narcotics), its extent and volume in comparison with challenges, misunderstandings and rivalries is too small and requires immense endeavors and the passing through of a difficult process of confidence building. Recent circumstances in Afghanistan and its equations become more complicated day by day; while the number of actors in the "big game" of the 19th century was small, today the number has grown considerably, its complications have risen and the range of its threats has impacted the global environment (Rubin and Rashid, 2008). These complicated conditions have made the influence of the Afghan factor on bilateral ties between Iran and Pakistan more formidable and complicated. The lesson Iran and Pakistan should learn from several decades of conflict and harmony in the arena of Afghan developments is that they must not let minor and tactical differences rise to a strategic macro-level as in the 1990s and repeat the bitter experience; especially after having witnessed the loss of the two sides' as well as the region's interests.

III- Indian Issue

With the emergence of Pakistan as an independent state, not only was the geographical contact between India and Iran cut for first time in history, but India also became an important and influential factor in Iran-Pakistan ties (Alam, 2004: 526). Prior to the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the Pahlavi regime openly backed Pakistani stances against India. Iranian support for the Pakistani position in the Kashmir crisis, criticism of the conclusion of the friendship and



alliance treaty between India and the USSR, and opposition to the division of Pakistan and independence of Bangladesh are among the most important instances playing a considerable role in bringing Islamabad closer to Tehran till 1979 (Mahmood, 1972: 272).

Parallel to fundamental changes in Iranian foreign policy in 1979, Iranian ties with India and Pakistan entered a new phase. The withdrawal of Iran from the circle of Western allies, particularly CENTO, and joining of NAM on the one hand pushed Iran closer to India and on the other hand distanced it from Pakistan. These circumstances, however, were not constant and sustained, and have changed during the past three decades due to the impact of different elements. From the mid-1980s to the early 1990s, Iran-Pakistan relations improved due to the positive stances of Pakistan towards Iran with regard to the Iran-Iraq war, abstaining from joining Western sanctions against Iran and alignment between the two states' positions vis-a-vis the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan; all of which in turn limited Indo-Iranian ties. However, parallel to the aggravation of differences between Iran and Pakistan in the mid-1990s, particularly due to their conflicting stances regarding the Afghan civil war and rise of fundamentalist and terrorist groups – including the Taliban - the links between the two started to decline and instead, Indo-Iranian ties expanded. The common anxieties and goals of Tehran and New Delhi vis-a-vis the unprecedented expansion of Pakistani influence in Afghanistan through the radical current of the Taliban and al-Qaeda, which are considered as serious threats against the security and national interests of both Iran and India, are among the main reasons for the improved ties between Tehran and New Delhi at this juncture.

However, what changed this equation in the short run was the issue of nuclear tests by India and Pakistan. In a crisis which almost led to nuclear, just as in the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 (Key, 2006: 127), Iran backed Pakistani positions in an unprecedented and overt way. Tehran held that the tests would change geostrategic



conditions and the balance of power in the south Asian region. Hence, Kamal Kharrazi, the then foreign minister of Iran, was the first official from Tehran who visited Islamabad in June 1998 and announced Iranian support of Pakistan's stance and received a reciprocal response. In his visit, Kharrazi stated: "Now, Muslims have a feeling of confidence and honor since a Muslim nation knows how to attain nuclear weapons" (Asian Recorder, 1998: 274). Iran continued supporting Pakistan within the OIC framework, and in the final declaration of the organization at the Jeddah summit of June 1998, once more, Iran supported Pakistan's position which in the short term led to an improvement in Tehran-Islamabad relations.

However, the 9/11 events and post-Taliban developments in Afghanistan resulted in considerable changes throughout the region. A noteworthy point was the increasing occurrence of India adopting coordinated policies against Iran in international forums, which naturally pushed Iran closer to Pakistan; a traditional rival of India. Severely concerned and displeased with the enhancement of the regional and international role of India and the unprecedented approach taken by Washington vis-a-vis India (advancing the level of relations to strategic partnership and the nuclear agreement between the two in 2005), Islamabad chose to become closer to Iran. What has considerably helped in the strengthening of this process is the developments in Kashmir in recent years. However, before dealing with recent developments, it is necessary to point out that the Iranian positions vis-a-vis the Kashmir crisis during the past three decades was influenced by changing Iranian ties with India and Pakistan, which have not been on a fixed and constant track. In fact, the Kashmir crisis, as a dependent variable, was gravely influenced by the independent variables of Iranian ties with India and Pakistan. Moreover, Iranian foreign policy has been fluctuating between ideological stances (extending support to Pakistani and Kashmiri Muslims) and pragmatic considerations during the past three



decades. In fact, Iran, through this political game, has tried to maintain the balance in its macro-level policy and change its level of support according to the conditions on the ground to pressure India or Pakistan. “This led to the formation of the notion in South Asia that the Iranian view of the Kashmir crisis is instrumental”. That is to say, Iran tries to use the crisis of Kashmir as an element or mechanism to adjust its relations with South Asian states, particularly India and Pakistan. Despite this perception, Iran maintains that the Kashmiri people must decide their fate themselves. Iran calls for the peaceful settlement of this crisis and is prepared to mediate among all three sides (Nozar Shafiei, B, 2009). In recent decades, we have witnessed several instances of Iran adopting such a policy, each of which led to either cooperation or competition between Iran and Pakistan. For instance, alongside the improvement of ties between the two in the late 1980s, Iranian positions in support of Pakistan were highlighted and Iran openly backed the right to self-determination of Kashmiri Muslims (Pasha, 2000). At this juncture, Iran voted for a resolution on Kashmir in support of Pakistan during the Dakar summit of the OIC in 1991 (FarzinNia, 2001: 276). However, besides improvement in Indo-Iranian relations, Tehran, by distancing itself from its previous open support, emphasized a bilateral solution to end the Kashmir crisis (Pasha, 2000) and proposed mediation between India and Pakistan during the UN human rights conference in 1994 to peacefully settle the Kashmiri problem, though the proposal was never put into practice.

For more than two decades, this situation governed Iranian foreign policy vis-a-vis Kashmir, and the only thing that changed the scene to the benefit of Pakistan was the outbreak of violence in the Kashmiri region and blasphemy against the Holy Quran by some radical Hindus. The simultaneity of such incidents with the burning of the Quran by an American priest on the anniversary of 9/11 led to the outbreak of a wave of protests throughout the Islamic world,



and especially in Kashmir. Here, what had a tangible impact on Indo-Iranian relations was the backing of Kashmiri Muslims by Iran's Supreme Leader in his annual message on the occasion of the Hajj ceremony in 2010. In his Hajj message, Ayatollah Khamene'i stated: "Today, aiding the Palestinian nation and the besieged people of Gaza, sympathizing with and showing solidarity with the nations of Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Kashmir, struggle and resistance against the U.S. and the Zionist regime's aggression, guarding the unity among Muslims, combating contaminated hands and hired tongues damaging this unity, spreading awareness, the feeling of commitment and responsibility among Muslim youths all around the Islamic world, are great tasks on the shoulders of the selected in our Ummah" (Keyhan, 16 November, 2010). This declaration was highly welcomed by Pakistani officials on the one hand and caused widespread criticism by Indian officials on the other, indicating to what extent the Kashmiri element could impact the quality of Iranian ties with the sub-continent. Following the dissemination of Ayatollah Khamene'i's message, Abdel Basset, spokesman for the Pakistani foreign ministry, considered the clear and categorical support by the Supreme Leader to be in line with the Kashmiri people's rights. Moreover, Sardar Atiq Ahmed Khan, Prime Minister of Azad Jammu Kashmir (under Pakistani control), appreciated the support extended by Ayatollah Khamene'i to the people of Kashmir (Rahbord News, 14 December, 2010). On the contrary, however, New Delhi reacted severely to the message. Banning the Iranian television channel Press TV in Kashmir, summoning the Iranian charge d'affaires in New Delhi, conveying a formal objection to the Iranian Supreme Leader's Hajj message, casting an abstention vote on the critical UN draft resolution on the situation of human rights in Iran (beforehand, India had always voted in favor of Iran), and favoring the US more, especially in sanctions against Iran, were among the most important acts of the Indian government in response to the announced Iranian policy towards Kashmir. This,



while in fact, the Iranian stance vis-a-vis Kashmir was totally different from that of Pakistan, and the Iranian Supreme Leader's announcement of support for Kashmir did not amount to getting Iran involved in issues related to the territorial integrity of India. Rather, the support was merely an expression of the ideological and humanitarian observations behind Iran's policies.

The developments of the past three decades indicate that no fixed trajectory could be distinguished and defined in Iranian policies vis-a-vis India and Pakistan. Regional and international developments, particularly those in Afghanistan and U.S. policies, have severely impacted Iranian ties with these two states. Whenever Indian or Pakistani policies are directed against Iranian interests, Tehran inclines to move closer towards one of these two sides to restore the balance and symmetry to its own benefit. The recent trend of developments indicates that Iranian proximity with Pakistan and its support of Islamabad's stances towards the Kashmir crisis is aimed at stopping India's confrontational approach against Iran and at least switch it back to the quality of the past years' balance.

IV- U.S. Element

The U.S. policies vis-a-vis Iran and Pakistan have always been a key and influential element in bilateral relations between the two states (Kumar, 2008). During the Cold War era and till the victory of the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, both states were among the close allies of Washington in the region. Thus, the alignment between the policies of Islamabad and Tehran, and those of Washington played an important role in the strengthening of ties between Iran and Pakistan during the Cold War up until the Islamic Revolution; the outcome of which was membership of both CENTO and RCD as politico-military as well as economic arms of the U.S. in the framework of the American communism containment policy.

These conditions went through dramatic changes with the



Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. The U.S. was called "The Great Satan" by Imam Khomeini, and via a unilateral annulment of its bilateral treaty with the U.S., Iran withdrew from all multilateral treaties siding with American policies such as CENTO in favor of NAM. On the other side, parallel to the Iranian withdrawal from the group of Washington allies and military intervention by the Red Army in Afghanistan, the geopolitical position of Pakistan was promoted in the last decade of the Cold War. "In fact, this period should be called the first period of geopolitics of Pakistan. In this period, Islamabad turned into Washington's front line against Moscow and Tehran to contain the Islamic Revolution, and the U.S. drowned Pakistan in a flow of economic and military aid (Seraj, 2008)." The negative impact of these circumstances on Iran-Pakistan ties is clearly tangible. Elements like the rule of value-based or idealist sub-discourses in Iranian foreign policy, alongside widespread criticism of Zia-ul-Haq's siding with American policies by the revolutionary leaders and media of Iran led to the decline of diplomatic relations.

However, despite these problems, "Afghan developments ironically resulted in arraying Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan in a unitary front" (Pant, 2009: 44). In fact, as pointed out in the Afghanistan section, despite some tactical and minor differences between Iran, Pakistan, U.S. and even Saudi Arabia at this juncture, there was some sort of an unsought, strategic macro-level alignment vis-a-vis the occupation of Afghanistan. Though the situation did not lead to official and direct cooperation among Iran, Pakistan and the U.S., it has constituted an important cause for the improvement of ties between Iran and Pakistan since 1982. At this juncture, though there were disputes between the two over how to back groups inside Afghanistan, the unsought, strategic macro-level alignment they enjoyed regarding Afghan developments and the U.S. satisfaction with the approaches taken by Iran and Pakistan left a positive impact on the ties between the two countries between



1982 and 1989.

With the conclusion of the Geneva Pact and the withdrawal of the USSR's troops from Afghanistan, the geopolitical significance of Pakistan gradually declined in Washington's strategic calculations. "This juncture is the start of the second geopolitics period of Pakistan which includes the post-Cold War era. With the elimination of the risk of communist influence in this period, and transformation of international and regional relations, the strategic importance of Pakistan for the U.S. declined and, consequently, Washington's military and economic aid to Islamabad decreased" (Seraj, 2008). Here, the "dual containment" policy was adopted and implemented by the Clinton administration to control Iran in the region. These conditions naturally brought Iran and Pakistan closer together in the early 1990s when Benazir Bhutto was the prime minister of Pakistan. In fact, by getting closer to Pakistan, especially through the expansion of membership and activities of ECO, Iran sought to combat the U.S. policy of sanctions and dual containment. Thus, Pakistan, by approaching Iran, sent the signal to Washington that putting Pakistan aside in its strategic policies could impose some costs on America, while resistance against the Iranian presence in the newly formed states of Central Asia adjoined Pakistan and the U.S. for a short period (Kumar, 2008: 775). This situation, however, did not last. Meanwhile, Islamabad backed the radical current of the Taliban with a view to fully attain the strategic depth of Afghanistan through the restoration of a positive U.S. attitude towards the already lost Pakistani place. These conditions played an important part in the shaping of the cold and fragile ties between Iran and Pakistan between 1997 and 2001 (during the Taliban reign in Afghanistan).

With the 9/11 attacks and the announcement of the new American doctrine (Jervis, 2003), the tradition of liberalism and the promotion of democracy became an important aspect of American foreign policy (Desch. 2007-2008: 19). "With the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan, the third stage of Pakistani geopolitics began. Within



this period, Washington strengthened its ties with Islamabad and used Pakistan as an alpha point to carry out its military operation against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. In response to the collaboration shown by Pervez Musharaf in the 'War on Terror', the U.S. extended considerable economic and military assistance to Pakistan, so that since 2001 till early 2011 the U.S. extended more than 13 billion U.S. dollars of military and 6.6 billion dollar of economic aid to Pakistan" (Nawaz, 2011). Here, by adopting a dual policy to preserve its geostrategic and geopolitical place, Pakistan tried to act as a U.S. ally in the "War on Terror" and, at the same time, use the Taliban as a trump card and balance weight between Washington and Delhi, and Washington and Islamabad" (Seraj, 2008). Under these circumstances, the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan and overthrow of the Taliban - an ideological rival and an apparent security threat against the Islamic Republic - secured Iranian national interests. This amounted to common Iran-U.S. interests and the existence of a type of natural alliance between the two (Dehghani FiruzAbadi, 2009: 486). However, though these geopolitical changes caused the enhancement of the regional role of Iran, at the same time, new challenges were posed against Iranian national security (Barzegar,2010: 175). Despite having no role in the 9/11 terrorist attacks and having played a constructive part in ousting the Taliban, Iran was placed on Washington's list of the "Axis of Evil" (Sariolghalam, 2003: 69). As a result, although the impact of the natural alliance and, in other words, unsought, strategic macro-level alignment resulted in the improvement of bilateral ties between Iran and Pakistan for a short period of time, the continuity of the occupation of Afghanistan and the endurance of Pakistani support extended to radical currents as well as incline towards American policies continued to negatively impact bilateral relations between Iran and Pakistan.

With the announcement of a new strategy by the Obama administration vis-a-vis Afghanistan and Pakistan on 27 March,



2009, Islamabad's place in the macro-policies of the U.S. entered a new phase (Kashyap, 2009: 1). The announcement of this strategy amounts to a continuation and intensification of the contradictory aims of Pakistan. Islamabad, on the one hand, deeply depends on the U.S. to keep the power balance against India and also receive financial aid from Washington. Meanwhile, on the other hand, maintaining the commitments to the U.S. to combat extremism amounts to the elimination of Pakistan's trump card and counter-balance weight in the region, especially against India and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, allowing the presence of Americans on Pakistani soil would have very negative impacts on bilateral ties between Iran and Pakistan, since Iran holds that this is behind many of the terrorist operations along its eastern borders (especially in the Sistan and Baluchistan province) (Kumar, 2008: 783); an issue with a destructive impact on Tehran-Islamabad ties in recent years.

However, apart from the said developments related to Iran-Pakistan ties, there are also other issues severely influenced by U.S. policies, the most vivid of which may be seen in developments connected to the peace pipeline. Since Iran, Pakistan and India reached an agreement in 2000 on the construction of a gas pipeline transiting Iranian gas from Assaluyeh in the Persian Gulf to Multan in Pakistan and then to India, American opposition to the plan has undermined its progress. The Americans maintained that not only does the project make efforts to isolate Iran politically and economically fruitless, but it could also make an effective contribution to the Iranian economy (Kronstadt, 2007: 19). In this relation, Samuel Bodman, the then US Minister of Energy, blatantly expressed dismay and objection over the implementation of the peace pipeline project during his visit to Islamabad in March 2005 (Khaleej Times, March 13, 2006). Contrary to these disagreements, Washington tries to supply Pakistan's energy requirements through a pipeline passing through Central Asia to Afghanistan and then to Pakistan, and the energy needed by India



through the Persian Gulf states and also by building new nuclear reactors. Therefore, through such promises to India and Pakistan, Washington called upon these two states to refrain from getting involved in energy cooperation with Iran as this cooperation (especially in connection with India) undermined gas and oil sanctions imposed by the U.S. against Iran.

However, in recent years, despite the relatively close cooperation between Pakistan and the U.S. in the “War on Terror”, and Obama’s declaration of a new strategy vis-a-vis Pakistan, the developments went on a track in which we witnessed the distancing of Pakistan from the U.S. and its approaching of Iran. Important developments, like a clear change in American foreign policy towards India promoting bilateral ties to a strategic level in 2000 and the conclusion of a nuclear cooperation agreement in 2005, Indian harmony with the U.S. over the IAEA resolutions against Iran in 2005 and 2006, U.S. pressure against Pakistan over the transfer of nuclear technology to Iran by Abdul Qadeer Khan, the support extended by Pakistan to the Iranian nuclear program and opposition to the imposition of international sanctions against Iran all led to the gradual distancing of Pakistan from the U.S. and consequently Iranian proximity with Pakistan, although Pakistan is not in a position to choose between Iran and the United States. Thus, Islamabad continues to try to balance this complex equation through distinction between problems. Assertions by the Pakistani ambassador to Iran clearly define the situation: “Our links with Iran would not be influenced by the U.S.; our friendly relations with Iran are different from our amity with the U.S.”. Overall, what has resulted from a review of developments in past three decades is that there is a type of “negative solidarity” in Iran and Pakistan’s ties vis-a-vis the US, so that when the U.S. and Pakistan become closer, Iran and Pakistan become distanced from each other, and whenever U.S.-Pakistan ties have undergone some tensions, Iran-Pakistan ties have naturally been placed on a more positive track.



Conclusion

The foreign policy arena is the objective embodiment of the Janus-faced nature of competition and cooperation; an attitude which solely considers dimensions of rivalry, dispute and struggle or vice versa; mere implications of cooperation and participation dimensions are valued and are not consistent with reality. In the same vein, the existence of rivalry, dispute and struggle should be accepted together with the concepts of cooperation and partnership in the links between the two Muslim neighboring states as a fact at the first step. This is a fact evident in all states' ties and Iran-Pakistan relations are not an exception. However, what causes negative impacts on ties between the two is the extension of these differences and rivalries to the strategic and macro levels. Afghan developments in the 1990s and the Taliban's coming to power are clear instances of the Iran-Pakistan rivalries and disputes at a strategic level and what constituted the worst chapter in the 60-year history of ties between the two states. Hence, efforts by Iranian and Pakistani politicians should focus on preventing natural differences, and increasing cooperation from a minor and tactical level to a major strategic one.

What is put before Iran by historical experience is the positive impacts of it being introduced to the regional developments as a positive balancing power and refraining from adopting policies disturbing the balance. Hence, observing the principle of neutrality on the Kashmir issue and making mediation efforts such as in the 1990s, or supporting the idea of the presence of all Afghan groups in the power structure of Afghanistan subsequent to the overthrow of the Taliban regime are among the desirable approaches taken by Iran based on positive balancing. On the contrary, siding with India or Pakistan concerning the Kashmir issue or backing a certain ethnic or religious current in Afghanistan (which took place in the 1980s and 1990s) are among the costly implications of a negative balancing



approach. In the same vein, the “Islamic Republic of Iran should try to play the part of a balancing power and a goodwill mediator. Therefore, the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran should be based on maintaining peace and tranquility in South Asia and playing a constructive role to settle regional disputes from one side, and on the other, make due use of the existing opportunity in practice to promote its regional position and secure its national interests” (Nozar Shafiei, B, 2009). The importance of this issue, given the stress put by the 20 year Vision Plan of the Islamic Republic of Iran at the 2025 horizon on the strategic importance of the Southwest Asian region, is greater than ever. The said costly historical experience vis-a-vis Iran is true of the other regional actors. Defining conflicting goals and interests based on a zero sum equation and choosing friends among regional actors, as Iran did based on a costly rule game, has had no result but to drag on challenges and disputes for the past six decades.

Thus, Iran and Pakistan should lay the cornerstones for mutual understanding based on what they have learned from six decades of ups and downs in their bilateral ties. This would only be possible under the auspices of getting away from provisional and uni-dimensional policies as well as zero-sum political games. The trajectory of historical developments and recent conditions clearly indicate that the quality of Iran-Pakistan relations is deeply influenced by fixed and sustained elements which leave dual (both negative and positive) impacts on the ties between the two. Strengthening the cooperative and positive aspects of these influential and fixed elements could play an important part in easing rivalries and disputes (especially preventing the promotion thereof to major strategic levels). Issues like maintaining security and stability in the region, and erecting due economic and social infrastructure to render a radical and sustainable struggle against phenomena like ethnicism, radicalism, terrorism as well as production and trafficking of narcotics could be appropriate points



for the definition and shaping of cooperative approaches between Iran and Pakistan in their interaction with other regional and international actors. It should be admitted that security is not a divisible issue, but a joint one and it is only in this event that we could be hopeful of an improvement in ties between Iran and Pakistan; an issue which, in the case of its realization, would substantially contribute to the expansion of security, stability and sustainable development in the Southwest Asian sub-system.

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