



Pakistan-Iran and the Trump Administration from 2016 to 2020

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Vol. VI, No. II (Spring 2023)

Pages: 64 – 75

DOI: 10.31703/gfpr.2023(VI-II).06

Citation: Qadir, A., & Kasi, M. (2023). Pakistan-Iran and the Trump Administration from 2016 to 2020. *Global Foreign Policies Review*, VI(II), 64-75. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2023\(VI-II\).06](https://doi.org/10.31703/gfpr.2023(VI-II).06)

Abstract: Donald Trump and his phenomenon of populism in the Western world are explained in this study. His blistering attack on Pakistan in a speech for receiving a massive amount in coalition support program but not doing enough against the Taliban, particularly against the Haqqani network is discussed. Ultimately the US did cut off and stopped the support fund but Pakistan didn't go against the Taliban for its own reasons. With the advent of Imran Khan's Populist government, the relations between US and Pakistan turned sour US didn't completely disengage itself from Pakistan, however, Pakistan's economic woes increased. Trump also unilaterally withdrew from the landmark Iranian nuclear deal to the utter dismay of its European allies. Pakistan's President Imran Khan tried to have better relations between Iran and Pakistan but the Saudi factor has impinged upon the relations between the two countries. The role of leadership has also delved into which steers the relations in a certain direction and impacts the policies of a country.

Key Words: Iran, Pakistan, Nuclear, Populism, Sanctions, Trump

Introduction

Donald Trump and Pakistan: Uncertainty and Hope

The rise of Donald Trump in the 2016 US Presidential elections came as a shock to the world. All the pre-poll predictions and surveys had projected Hillary Clinton as the Winner of the US Presidential elections. The world watched in awe and disbelief as Trump's Republican party swept through the heartland of America. On the television screens, people watched as the United States

map showed a sea of red (Republican party) with few blots of blue (Democrats) on the fringes. The elections of Donald Trump were particularly worrisome to countries such as Iran and Pakistan. During his election campaign, Donald Trump had spoken against the Iranian Nuclear deal. Even though Pakistan was not mentioned during Donald Trump's campaign, Pakistanis knew that the war in Afghanistan and the previous American regime's insistence on 'do more' against the terrorists will be intensified by Donald Trump.

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Donald Trump's Populism

At that moment it seemed that the world was in the grip of a political creed known as Populism. The financial difficulties and refugees from war-torn countries scared and galvanized people in the host countries who felt left out and feared that their way of life was in danger. The problem was acute in the heartland of the U.S. and in Europe where people had seen their earnings drop and jobs vanished. The exit polls during the elections revealed that the passionate support for Trump was inspired primarily by the belief that he represented change, while Clinton was perceived as the candidate who would favour the status quo. In Europe, the hundreds and thousands of refugees from Africa and Asia had alarmed the people that their culture and jobs were being taken away. The refugees leaving their homes behind and travelling thousands of miles to Europe had their own predicaments and problems. Angela Merkel's open-door policy of taking hundreds and thousands of refugees had led to a growth of a far-right movement in Germany that had resulted in people coming out in the streets against refugees. The European Union was facing its biggest challenge of coping with millions of refugees and some analysts were even questioning the survival of the European Union because of the refugee problem.

Populist leaders pledge to tackle the issues facing the people and promise quick and easy answers to complex problems. "Populism in politics generally involves making statements and policies that appeal to a wide audience. Typically, they take a problem experienced by many people, escalate it to a primary priority, and then promise to solve it" (Butt, 2016, p.59). Donald Trump promised to build a wall on the Mexican border, stop the inflow of refugees into the United States, create more jobs and put America first above all else. The people in the heartland of America who felt disenfranchised and disillusioned

(especially the middle class) were against the system that had left them struggling financially. They welcomed Trump's promise of change and America first. Donald Trump also invigorated the far-right elements in American society and emboldened the issues such as race and class divide. It was blamed that the White supremacists got their cure from (Trump's) harsh rhetoric against the Mexicans and this resulted in mayhem in many places in America against foreigners/immigrants. It seems all over the Western world liberalism was in retreat while the populist forces were gaining ground. In Italy, France, Sweden, Hungary and Germany the populist or far-right elements had come out in huge numbers and were winning key constituencies in elections. The post-World war-II decades that brought global prosperity to millions was checked by the surge in populism all over the world and as a result, the global issues such as climate change, wars and refugees were deemed as individual problems instead of collective ones. However, once the populists gain power then they find that there are no easy solutions to problems facing the States and they begin to give up on many of the promises they had made to the people.

Trump's Speech about Pakistan

In January [2018](#), Donald Trump outlined his regime's policy on Afghanistan and Pakistan. In his speech, Mr Trump gave a blistering attack on Pakistan for receiving over US\$30 billion in coalition support funds since 9/11 while playing a double game of helping the Taliban that threaten US forces in Afghanistan. Mr Trump threatened that Pakistan had much to gain by helping the US while a lot to lose if it continues on the same path of aiding the Taliban. It was not the first time that Pakistan had been pressurized by a US regime. President Obama gave authorization for the Abbottabad operation in 2011 that killed

Osama bin Laden. The US-Pakistan relations had steadily gone downhill since the end of the Obama administration, but the open rebuke of the Pakistani State and its policies grew wide condemnation in Pakistan. Television news anchors and analysts reminded the public about the sacrifices of Pakistani soldiers and ordinary people in the war on terror. Pakistanis reminded the international community that more than 60,000 Pakistanis had lost their lives and Pakistan had incurred over US\$70 billion in material losses since the war on terror began in 2002. Pakistanis remained flabbergasted that the US instead of acknowledging the country's sacrifices in war on terror, blamed Pakistan for its failure to defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan. "Former US Presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush also pressed Pakistan to take action against the Taliban and Pakistan's Haqqani comrades but stopped short of a full-blown confrontation. Under previous administrations, officials were reluctant to push too far, fearing Pakistan could sabotage any peace negotiation in Afghanistan, and cut supply lines to US-led forces there" (Luce, [2018](#)).

The main disconnect between US and Pakistan in Afghanistan was that the Pakistanis still considered the Afghan Taliban as an ally. Pakistan feared the increasing influence of India in Afghanistan. Pakistan had always been the dominant power in Afghanistan due to the close historical, cultural and linguistic links between the people of both countries. The Indian influence in Afghanistan was anathema to Pakistan and they feared that India was trying to encircle Pakistan. Further Pakistan asserted that India was involved in terrorism inside the restive province of Balochistan. Michael Kugelman, the deputy director of the Asia program at the Wilson Centre, contends: "Pakistan had deep immutable strategic interests that entail maintaining ties to the Taliban". (Calamur, [2017](#)).

The Haqqani Network

President Trump cut military aid to Pakistan for allegedly supporting groups like the Haqqani network to carry out attacks inside Afghanistan. The Haqqani militants based in the Waziristan (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan) fought against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and after 9/11 had carried out deadly attacks against the Afghan forces in Afghanistan. The US had for a long time been putting pressure on Pakistan to carry out military operations against the Haqqani network or stop assisting the militants. Pakistan denied supporting the Haqqani network and asserted that no credible evidence had been given by the US against the Haqqanis.

US cut off US\$1.3 b of military aid to Pakistan in January 2018 and later in the year US\$50m and US\$300m aid were also cut off. "In addition to the unilateral steps against Pakistan, Washington successfully lobbied an international money laundering watchdog to place Pakistan on a terrorist financing watch list. That set off alarm bells in Islamabad which had counted on China and Saudi Arabia to defeat the measures" (Luce, 2018). However, despite the aid being cut off, it was known that there would be unlikely any change in Pakistan's strategy towards Afghanistan as Pakistan considers the Indian existence in Afghanistan as an existential threat. "The US adopted a strategy of triadic coercion in response to Islamabad's inconsistent cooperation in which it uses diplomatic threats and withholds aid to compel Pakistan to abandon support for certain militant groups. However, this strategy failed to radically alter Islamabad's calculation inside Afghanistan even though the Pakistan Army dealt a successful blow to the Pakistani Taliban" (Weinstein, [2019](#)).

Peace and Financial Woes

The US and her allies knew that for peace in Afghanistan, they had to talk to Pakistan.

The Pakistanis maintained that their influence over Afghan Taliban was not as pronounced as the US believed it to be. The US administration wanted a way out of the longest war in US history and was putting pressure on Pakistan to use her influence over the Afghan Taliban and bring them to the negotiating table. The Taliban controlled the majority of Afghanistan's countryside, they either wanted unconditional withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan or a greater say in the post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The government of President Ashraf Ghani blamed Pakistan for the spate of attacks by the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The expected but controversial victory of Imran Khan in July 2018 put his PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) party at the helm of affairs in Pakistan. Imran Khan who had campaigned to wipe out corruption from the country and bring law and order quickly found out the deep financial problems of the country. The dwindling foreign reserves and soaring external debt (US\$91b in May 2018) left the newly elected populist leader clamouring for funds from allies (Saudi Arabia and China) and international financial institutions (IMF, ADB).

At the U.N, Donald Trump expressed resolutely the view that the United States would give foreign aid to 'friends' who respect US. Imran Khan had spoken against drone strikes in FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) and the War in Afghanistan. With Donald Trump unwilling to be as generous to Pakistan as President Bush and Obama and the clout of the US in institutions like the IMF, the government of Imran Khan found itself in a deep quagmire to get out of the financial mess. The Economist Magazine in the January edition of 2019 wrote, " There has been a fall in the Pakistani rupee in the past years (2017) of nearly 30%. The economy which a year ago was growing at 5.8% annually has slowed sharply. The cost of food, electricity and

clean drinking water has shot up" (Why Imran Khan is unlikely to., 2019). However, Donald Trump's administration knew that Pakistan had been a useful but difficult ally of the United States and they couldn't push Pakistan too much because of the war in Afghanistan in which Pakistan had leverage over the Taliban. They could neither go to war with Pakistan nor could they completely disengage. The Economist magazine wrote in the December 2018 issue, 'Trump and Pakistan', 'On Pakistan that would mean not war but disengagement. America has already tried that, in the 1990s after the Cold War ended. The result was nuclear arms proliferation, a threatened Indo-Pakistan nuclear war and the rise of the Taliban. Pakistan, as Mr. Trump has observed is just about the worst American ally imaginable. That is why America has little choice but to persist with it' (Trump and Pakistan, 2018)

Trump and the Withdrawal from Nuclear Deal

On May 8, 2018, US President Donald Trump decided to withdraw the US from the Iranian Nuclear deal and his unilateral act shocked the allies in Europe, Before his elections Donald Trump had termed the Iranian Nuclear Deal as 'unjust' which enabled Iran to continue using her proxies like Hezbollah and Hamas against allies and didn't put any restrictions on the Iranian Missile program. With just a stroke of his signature, Donald Trump had undone the Iranian Nuclear Deal that took the P (5+1) countries almost twelve years of a concerted effort to accomplish. Trump's new national security adviser (John Bolton) complained that the US had not stopped Iran from working on ballistic missiles or from bullying its neighbours. But that was never the intent of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCOPA), as it was formerly known (Despite North Korea arms, 2018). Iran had spent considerable resources to

establish its missile program despite the sanctions imposed by the United States. Iran said that its missile tests were not in violation of the UN security council resolution and denied that its missile was capable of carrying nuclear warheads. It said its missiles were defensive and used for deterrence and had rejected talks over its missile programme. (Iran Unveils long-range, 2019). John Bolton's hawkish behaviour on Iran may please the Saudis and Israelis but a military strike on Iran would have been catastrophic for the region. Iran was seen as a medium-range power with considerable expertise in asymmetric warfare and backed by its proxies in the region it could have created trouble for the US and her allies.

The rift between the Trans-Atlantic partners i.e. the US and European allies had widened on a number of issues including the Iranian Nuclear deal. "The Europeans had been united in shock and in anger at Trump's irresponsible move and in their refusal to accept it. But they were also united in their helplessness when it came to dealing with the new America" (Gebauer & Heyer, 2018). Many European countries had their trade interests tied to the United States and the partnership between the US and Europe had been the pillar of the Post World War II Western dominance. The European companies which had rushed to invest and do business in Iran were also apprehensive about the US withdrawal and feared US sanctions on Iran and Europe. The EU's strategic interests with regard to Iran and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) rested on four pillars: "maintaining stability in the Persian Gulf which is vital for global oil supply and prices; resolving conflicts in the Middle East so as to prevent further refugee movement toward Europe; diversifying energy supplies by increasing Iranian imports and reducing Europe's significant energy dependence on Russia and boosting the export of its industrial goods by exporting

economic relations with Iran" (Herrera, 2019).

Trump's Iran policy rested on three pillars: de-legitimation, sanctions and containment (Alcaro, 2018, p.5). Donald Trump wanted to reassert the US position that Iran was an irresponsible regional power and a threat to its neighbours. Trump had pledged to impose more stringent sanctions on Iran as a result of which the Iranian currency value had plummeted. Further, US and allies such as Israel and Saudi Arabia wanted to curtail the ascendancy of Iran in the Middle East and push back the 'Shia Revival' as it was termed by scholars such as Vali Nasr. Zahid Shahab Ahmed writes, "The imagines and real threat of Iran have compelled Saudi Arabia to invest heavily in enhancing its military capabilities by means of military hardware acquisitions. According to a report by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Saudi Arabia was the world's second-biggest importer of weapons - after India- in 2011-15, accounting for seven per cent of the world's total weapon imports over the period" (Ahmed, 2018, p.8). While Iran's annual military spending dwarfs in comparison to that of Saudi Arabia and Israel. Iran's annual defence spending is about US\$16 billion, or 3.7 per cent of its GDP (Simon & Stevenson, 2018). Saudi Arabia and Israel had very tense relations with Iran and were asking Donald Trump to take firm action against Iran. For the first time in its history, Saudi Arabia had allowed Indian planes safe passage over her airspace to fly to Israel. There were also reports of backdoor diplomacy between Saudi Arabia and Israel to counter Iran in the Middle East. The Trump administration was engaged in a dangerous game of appeasing the hawkish behaviour of allies in an already volatile region of the world. Trump's Iran policy contributed to simplifying interstate relations in the region,

with two blocs opposing one another (Alcaro, 218).

The other reason for withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal was Trump's intentions to fulfil his campaign promises to the American electorate and destroy Obama's legacy. It seemed President Trump had a particular dislike for what Barak Obama stood for and roll back all the major achievements of his predecessor. During the Obama presidency, Donald Trump raised the question of Obama's not being an American citizen. He even rolled back Obama's National health program, climate deal and the issue of refugees. It seemed Donald Trump attempted to please a certain section of American society that adhere to his views while ignoring the majority which ran counter to his convictions.

The withdrawal from the Nuclear deal revealed that regime change in Iran is back on the US agenda. The withdrawal had further emboldened the hardliners in Iran who accused moderates like Hassan Rouhani of being soft on the nuclear deal and that the West cannot be trusted. "The hard-liners in Iran, who agreed with Trump that the nuclear deal was the worst agreement in modern Iranian history, now trumpet that they were right all along about the deceptive Americans" (McFaul & Milani, 2018). The Trump administration desired that with a tough posture on the nuclear deal and with the help of the sanctions the Iranian regime might collapse. The proponents of regime change were constantly tempted to assess that the regime in question was "on the brink of collapse if only we push just a little harder and do a little more" (Sullivan, 2018). However, the policy of regime change in Iran had been on the US agenda and it had revitalized the Islamic regime rather than dissuaded them. Jack Goldstone wrote in the *foreign affairs* magazine in May 2011, during the uprisings of the Arab Spring:

"Although Iran has been called a sultanistic regime, it is different in several respects: unlike any other regime in the region, the ayatollahs espouse an ideology of anti-Western Shiism and Persian nationalism that draws considerable support from ordinary people. This makes it more like a party-state with a mass base of support. Iran is also led by a combination of several strong leaders, not just one. Finally, the Iranian regime enjoys the support of the Basij, an ideologically committed militia, and the Revolutionary Guards, which are deeply intertwined with the government. There is little chance that these forces will defect in the face of mass protests."

"The American withdrawal from the Iran deal was the most dangerous and cavalier foreign policy decision that a US president had made since the 2003 invasion of Iraq" (Gebauer, & Heyer, 2018). It had put the region in a very precarious position where disputes between states are a norm. "Mr Trump's move encouraged the hardline forces in Iran, raising the threat of Iranian retaliation against Israel or the United States, fueling an arms race in the Middle East and fanning sectarian conflicts from Syria to Yemen" (Landler, 2018). The US withdrawal from the nuclear deal could be the end of the deal as it would be difficult for Europeans, to sustain the same level of commitment in the face of US sanctions. There were genuine concerns that Iran might be compelled to begin enrichment of Uranium and renew her commitment to build nuclear weapons. It would then force Saudi Arabia and other Middle Eastern countries to begin their own nuclear program. Iran could then expand its support to regional armed factions and groups to enhance Iran's regional reach (Katzman & Kerr, 2018, p.9). The Europeans tried very hard to encourage European banks and businesses to stay engaged with Iran. However, the Europeans had to decide whether it is too risky to remain engaged with Iran and eventually, the Iranians had to

decide whether to remain in the nuclear deal or not. Eventually, the Iranians may have realized that the nuclear deal will have little benefits for them in the absence of the United States and they could decide to leave the nuclear deal. It is vital that both the United States and Iran realize that the only way forward is through negotiations and both countries' leadership need to take a step back from bellicose rhetoric.

Trump, Saudi Arabia and Iran

Donald Trump resorted to a long-term US policy of supporting Saudi Arabia to maintain the balance of power in the Middle East. President Obama tried to change the narrative and asked the Arab Gulf Countries to accept Iran as a regional power. Donald Trump reiterated the deep ties between the US and Saudi Arabia and signed a massive US\$350b deal of arms and services with Saudi Arabia. "The Trump administration had reversed course on the nuclear deal and was pivoting back to the old US-Arab alliance system, with Saudi Arabia as its anchor" (Nasr, 2018, p.115). The killing of a Saudi Journalist in a Saudi Consulate in Turkey was frontline news around the world and Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman was blamed for the killing of the journalist. Donald Trump instead of putting pressure on Prince Salman for the killing of the journalist blamed Iran for terrorism and instability in the region. Trump stood by his statements when grilled by reporters later that day arguing that any punishment of Saudi Arabia might hamper their lucrative military contracts (O'Conner, 2018).

The combined belief of the Trump administration and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was their enmity towards Iran. This was perfectly natural for Saudi Arabia, which faced a far more populous and powerful Iran across the Persian Gulf (Dyer, 2018). The problem with the Trump administration was that it has shown to favour one side over another instead of

playing as a neutral arbiter between the two sides and bridging the deep fissures that exist in the Middle East. Trump's provocative, unilateral support for Saudi Arabia and Israel had hardened the fronts in the region (Hoffman, 2018).

The election of Donald Trump was a defining moment in US politics as it proved wrong all the pre-poll surveys and predictions. The populist rhetoric that won him the elections had become a norm in relations between countries. Trump had not spared the close European allies by imposing tariffs and clashing with them over Iran Nuclear Deal. Trump's continuous tirade against friends and foes alike had sown the seeds of confusion and chaos.

Pakistan and Iran had not been immune from Donald Trump's rebukes and allegations. Pakistan had been accused of the familiar patterns of harbouring terrorists and getting billions of dollars in US aid. The sacrifices made by ordinary Pakistanis since the War on terror began in 2002 were brushed aside by the US administration and the US narrative pushed hard. The US had withdrawn from the Nuclear deal with Iran and the stifling sanctions had been imposed on Iran. The sanctions affected ordinary Iranians and they were bearing the brunt of massive devaluation of Iranian currency while the Iranian regime had remained defiant. The US had been imposing sanctions on Iran in one way or the other since 1979 except for a short interlude after the nuclear deal. It seemed improbable that Iran will yield to pressures or sanctions. However, sanctions may debilitate the Iranian economy, and create unemployment, hyperinflation, and a myriad of other political and economic problems. But one litmus test by which the sanctions can be judged is whether they can bring regime change in Iran or not. This seems highly unlikely in the near future. China and Russia had resolved to defy Trump's sanctions and European Union was

willing to trade with Iran on a limited scale. Both Iran and Pakistan had been grappling with the question of how to deal with the Trump administration. Iran and Pakistan had faced similar conditions before the Trump administration and sanctions and aid being cut off were initiated by previous US regimes. Pakistan and Iran could have waited out the Presidency of Donald Trump while taking precautions from much more stringent and harmful conditions from the United States.

The role of leadership in relations between Iran and Pakistan

It is often debated in foreign policy-making as to what is the role of leaders in making/changing the foreign policy of a country. Is it leadership that guides the foreign policy of a country or the international system (anarchy as the realist contend) that alters the way States and leaders behave in a certain way? There are also a host of other factors such as domestic constraints, economy and ideology that may force a State or leader to continue or alter the course of a country's foreign policy. "Leaders Perceive and Interpret Constraints and leaders define states' international and domestic constraints. Based on their perceptions and interpretations, they build expectations, plan strategies, and urge actions on their governments that conform with their judgments about what is possible and likely to maintain them in their positions" (Hermann & Hagan, 1998, p.126). In the twentieth century, leaders such as Winston Churchill, Joseph Stalin, and Franklin D Roosevelt are seen as great leaders who took decisive steps when the fate of the world hung in balance. The bold foreign policy of Anwar Sadat to initiate a peace process with the Israelis ultimately led to the Camp David Accords but cost the life of the leader (A similar case was that of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin who was assassinated in 1995). However, we are

not talking about a complete about-face in foreign policy, which is rare in foreign relations, we are concerned with the role a leader plays in the foreign policy-making of a country despite the constraints.

"The oil-rich and predominantly Shia Islamic Republic of Iran is indeed unique. Melding electoral processes and religious traditions, and combining Islamic and nationalist ideas, the country's Islamic regime has attempted to marry what is often seen as conflicting and contradictory trends in order to establish a two-tiered Islamic system of governance that enjoins the 'sovereignty of God' with the 'sovereignty of the people'" (Saikal, 2014, p.99). In democratic countries, the constraints on leadership are much more prominent than in an authoritarian set-up. In a democracy, the leadership has to take into account public opinion, opposition parties and has to convince the parliament before any final decision is signed and ratified. Iran has a unique set-up established after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 by Ayatollah Khomeini on the concept of Velayat-e-Faqih. In Iran, the most important figure in foreign policy is the Supreme Leader. He has the power to declare war or peace (article 110) and has control over the armed forces (Rieffer, 2009, p.9). And to understand the Iranian foreign policy one has to understand the world view of Ali Khomeini. Khomeini, a close insider during the days of the Islamic revolution in Iran, became the Supreme leader after Ayatollah Khomeini's death in 1989. For the past thirty years, Khomeini has tried to maintain the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iran in the face of US sanctions and Saudi and Israeli hostility. Khomeini's worldview has been formed in the religious education that he received at a young age, the struggles that he went through before and after the revolution and being in the close circles of Ayatollah Khomeini. He had been a witness to the Islamic revolution, the hostage crisis and the devastating Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. He had seen the US

sanctions being imposed on Iran and the withdrawal from the Nuclear Deal by Donald Trump. A cautious man, he is aware of his country's vulnerabilities and has tried to enhance its influence in the region despite threats from serious heavyweights in the region such as Saudi Arabia and Israel. Even today, he believes that the US government is bent on regime change in Iran, whether through internal collapse, democratic revolution, economic pressure or military invasion (Ganji, 2013).

In Pakistan, the role of democratic leadership and the foreign office in making foreign policy has been minimal. The security concerns loom large in Pakistan's foreign policy and its neighbour in the East (India) has been the main boogeyman in foreign affairs. Upon assuming the office of Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan was wooed by both Iran and Saudi Arabia to join their camp. Imran Khan's worldview was entrenched in a Pakistan that has become weak economically and is dependent on foreign donors due to the corruption and ineptness of past Pakistan rulers. As a result of Pakistan's weak economic position, it had to follow the dictates of foreign powers such as the United States and international financial institutions (IMF, World Bank). Imran Khan had been an outspoken supporter of Iran and his party backed the 2015 Iranian nuclear deal with P(5+1) countries. However, Pakistan was militarily and economically much closer to Saudi Arabia and Imran Khan would likely continue the same pattern of cooperation with Saudi Arabia.

Imran Khan needed to have better relations with Iran because of the issue of Sectarianism in Pakistan. The Sunni-Shia divide has widened in Pakistan and as Shia comprise about 20 per cent of Pakistan's population, it was vital that Imran Khan was seen as a balancer between Saudi Arabia and Iran. "In November 2017 General Bajwa, Pakistan's army chief, made a three-day

official visit to Tehran, the first trip of its kind for decades. And in July 2018 his Iranian counterpart, Mohammad Bagheri, visited Pakistan, where officials discussed the possibility of co-producing defence equipment" (Stone, 2018). However, there are several stumbling blocks that make it difficult for both Iran and Pakistan to have very close relations. The issues between the two countries have been mentioned in this foregoing research work which includes Pakistan's close links with Saudi Arabia, the Afghanistan problem, the fate of Shias in Pakistan and the close relations between India and Iran. The United States has also been a factor in isolating Iran and asking Pakistan not to trade with Iran as was the case of the Iran-Pakistan Pipeline which has failed to materialize because of sanctions on Iran. The test for Imran Khan was whether, in the coming years, he can sustain the foreign pressure in good relations with Iran without any frictions.

To sum up, after coming to power, Trump as a populist leader withdrew from the nuclear deal with Iran unilaterally and imposed further stringent sanctions against Iran. In fact, Trump supported Saudi Arabia and Israel to check Iranian presence in the Middle East. He also wanted to bring Iran to the negotiating table, too. He also stopped Pakistan's coalition support fund despite the fact that Pakistan had been a US ally in the 'War on Terror'. Both Pakistan and Iran need increasing trade opportunities which requires trade liberalization across the border and to achieve this goal is a litmus test for Prime Minister Imran Khan and President Rouhani to curb cross-border terrorism and remove all the irritants in their relations.

Conclusion

Populism which suggests quick fixes and simple solutions to complex problems is a rising trend in most countries of the world. Trump as a populist leader at the helm

further diminished US relations with Pakistan. He took coercive measures and stopped Pakistan's coalition support fund and as a result, the value of the Dollar skyrocketed in Pakistan. The US continued its mantra of 'doing more' against the Taliban and Haqqani network but Pakistan couldn't do so. Pakistan's current Prime Minister Imran Khan before his incumbency had condemned US drone attacks against the Taliban in Pakistan. In fact, there was an element of distrust between the US and Pakistan. The US felt that Pakistan was tacitly supporting the Taliban while Pakistan contended that its own people have badly suffered because of the war on terror. Pakistan took drastic steps against TTP (Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan) which had created mayhem in Pakistani cities and attacked Pakistani forces. Pakistan also helped in bringing the Taliban to negotiating table. Despite the bitterness, Pakistan and US didn't completely disengage and parted ways.

Trump's whimsical withdrawal from the Iranian nuclear deal was shocking to America's European allies and other members of P(5+1). He didn't care about the

sensibilities and interests of other countries and imposed tariffs on European businesses. Apparently, Trump wanted to bring Iran to negotiating table but his real motive was to bring regime change. In fact, Trump supported Saudi Arabia and Israel to check Iranian presence in the Middle East. Although sanctions debilitated and crippled the Iranian economy but Iranian Government and people withstood US pressure, rather it strengthened the hardliners in Iran.

The leadership of a country plays a significant role in foreign policy and takes decisive action as the leadership in the Second World War had shown. In Iran, the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khomeini is the ultimate authority in foreign relations and has his own worldview. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan was wooed by both Iran and Saudi Arabia but Pakistan is militarily and economically much closer to Saudi Arabia and it is unlikely that Pakistan will ignore Saudi Arabia at the expense of Iran. However, it is a test for Imran Khan and Pakistan's security establishment to steer Pakistan's relations towards Iran and Saudi Arabia in a balanced direction.

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