

Pakistan's State Sovereignty in the Light of Saudi Arab's Overt Dictation

Asma Batool*

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Abstract

Historically Pakistan's relations with Saudi Arab have been concerted and coordinated on the basis of calculated strategy, except for the few exceptions. Pakistan had maintained friendly ties with Saudi Arab but with time Saudi Arab started playing more assertive role in relation to Pakistan. Since inception Pakistan tends to look towards the Saudi Arab due to cultural orientation of its public. The unprecedented transition in paradigm of Pak-Saudi relations came when Saudi Arab assumed the role of major economic aid donor. Today, the role of Pakistan can be described as 'shatter belt' vis-à-vis major powers. Pakistani an attempt to pull itself out of Western influence relied on Saudi Aid which resulted in explicit dictation of Saudi Arab. The internal weakness of Pakistan extended the opportunity for accepting external pressure which compromised the sovereignty of state directly and placed Pakistan in compliant position in relation to Saudi Arab. This paper will divulge the unique relations of Saudi Arab and Pakistan by dissecting the dimensions of Saudi Arab's political, economic and cultural influence on Pakistan. It will also illumine the Saudi hegemonic policies in which Pakistan adjusts and influenced to revise its own policy choices. This paper will dwell on the way forward in Pak-Saudi relations in order to restore balance and maintain sovereignty of the state.

Key Words: Pak-Saudi Relations, Sovereignty, Hegemonic Strategy, Balance, Mutual Dependence

Introduction

Pakistan and Saudi Arab had close and friendly relationship since the inception of Pakistan. The relations between two states initially has been built on strategic and religious ties but later it grew into economic relations. The relation between two states have never been uneven before the start of enormous economic aid from Saudi Arab to Pakistan and also because of cultural orientation of Pakistan towards Saudi Arab. The mutual national interest and strategic ties kept the friendship of both states alive. However, despite the historical strong ties, challenges have been impaired because of mismatch outlooks on each side.

Serious and substantive bilateral ties between Saudi Arab and Pakistan date back to 1960's when the official diplomatic relations between two began on the basis of mutual strategic interests. Over the years, the Pan-Sunni Islamic affinities between the Pakistan and Saudi Arab started to become more apparent. The relations between Saudi Arab and Pakistan prior to 1971 were not uniformly cordial. But as Saudi Arab assumed the role of major economic aid donor especially in 1970's after the important events of

Afghan invasion and Iranian revolution, Pakistan suffered more and gained less.

The relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arab after 1979's war entered into new phase of asymmetric relations. The military and economic ties flourished from 1978-1988 under the regime of Zia-ul-Haq. Saudi Arab actively supported the Islamization campaign of Zia and also signed defense cooperation. In the wake of US sanctions on Pakistan after the nuclear tests, Pakistan depended on Saudi aid to preserve its national interest and autonomy in region. In exchange Pakistan began to serve the security and strategic interest of Saudi Arab in the wake of cold war and regional competition for hegemony.

In this background this research will explore the historical dynamics and evolution of Pak-Saudi relations. This study will focus on transition of Pak-Saudi relations from proportional to asymmetrical and its impact on Pakistan to preserve its sovereignty. Study will also use the theoretical framework of Interdependence theory to explain the relationship between two states of Pakistan and Saudi Arab under the changing regional environment of Middle East. In the end this study will discuss future pathway for Pak-

* M.PHIL, Department of IR, NDU Islamabad, Pakistan.

Saudi relations in the regional security complex environment.

Theoretical Framework

This study explores and analyzes the relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The analysis in the study will be conducted in two dimensions to construct the theoretical and epistemological basis. Firstly, this research paper will explain the transitioning dynamics of Pak-Saudi relations over the time and secondly it will discuss and analyze the impact of changing relations on the preservation of national sovereignty.

The theory of interdependence explains the relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia by focusing on the equal level of mutuality of dependence of two states while conducting its relations with other state. While formulating the foreign policy, if state A gains more control over the state B, then state A assumes the assertive or controlling position over B. The similar form of relation explained in theory was held between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan after the 1970's Iranian revolution and Afghan invasion by Russia 'til at present.

Interdependence theory is a social exchange theory which explains the phenomena of interpersonal interdependence of the states. The prominent scholars of the interdependence theory are Harold Kelley, John Thibaut, Jaap De Wilde and Kurt Lewin. The theoretical aspect is extended by Jaap De Wilde in his article, "Interdependence Theory In 21st Half of the 20th Century". In the article he argues that in the concept of interdependence, that the ambition and scope of a country's foreign policy is mainly driven by the mutual dependence on other state. Moreover, he contends that the impact of interdependence keeps the relation positive and alive between two states but if balance in outcome is disturbed then it can end the continuity in the relations. In general he referred the interdependence to independent social actors who desire to preserve their identity and sovereignty, but also structurally get affected by one another's behavior.

As guided by the Jaap De Wilde, the foreign relations of Saudi Arabia and Pakistan can be looked into by using the variable of mutual interest and international political system like Afghan war, Iranian revolution, cold war era and post-cold war era and also the hegemonic strategies of the Saudi Arabia while conducting foreign relations with Pakistan. After separating from India by making two nation theory a

strong foundation, Pakistan soon seek approval of Muslim States especially KSA. In this context the international system of seeking powerful alliance to gain position in international world, Pakistan's policy guided by seeking support of major Muslim alliance and looked towards KSA. As both states are part of the same system they are indirectly involved with the each other's affairs.

Historical Background of Pak-Saudi Relations

Pakistan since beginning forged special relations with the Saudi Arabia. Pakistan tends to look towards Saudi Arabia for the cultural orientation of its people. Since the inception the great emphasize from Pakistani government towards Saudi Arabia has been on religious solidarity, similarities in culture, ethnic bond and history heritage which cemented the friendly ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Generally Pakistan in most enjoyed friendly and cordial ties with Saudi Arabia. Two of the important elements simultaneously at work have had a profound effect on Pak-Saudi relations. First the emergence of Saudi Arabia as powerful state in the Middle Eastern region and secondly the fundamental changes occurred between Pak-US relations over the time. It has been observed that whenever relations of Pakistan with US deteriorated KSA was from one of the states which came ahead for help.

Saudi Arabia assumed the role of major economic aid donor and currently they are in a position to play more assertive role in region and across the region as well. This scenario gives the new dimension to Saudi Arabia in the relations it forges with Pakistan. As far as Pakistan concerned, the country that emerged after the war of 1971 established itself in a more vital position vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia. Pakistan gained important position in strategic thinking of the Saudi Arabia. Before 1971, Pak-Saudi relations were not uniformly cordial, although the salient feature of Pakistan foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia had a profound impact on relations between both states. Pakistan have had consistently extended undivided and steadfast support to Arabs in war against Israel. Pakistan without any doubt supported the Arab cause in war against Israel. In Saudi war against Yemen Pakistan also charged with involvement in war in favor of Saudis.

In post 1971 era, important transitions were made in the power pattern of the Middle East which proved favorable for Pakistan. The oil prices in the seventies were at peak and under these circumstances Saudi Arabia enjoyed the enjoyed

strategic and economic importance. Saudi Arab emerged as a powerful country in the world because of oil production. Due to change in concept of national power and increased emphasis on oil resource, Saudi Arab's importance enhanced in foreign policy of Pakistan along with special status it already enjoys by virtue of being spiritual fountain of Islamic countries.

In 1972 Pakistan faced many problems vis-à-vis India and looked towards Saudi Arab for supported after being denied from US. The politically weak and diplomatically isolated Pakistan decided to avail the Saudi option completely. Saudi Arab displayed their solidarity with Pakistan by not initially recognizing Bangladesh before Pakistan's official visit to Bangladesh. On the other side Russia also started establishing its presence in the region of Middle East and Saudi Arab required military and strategic support from Pakistan. Through frequent official visits of Pakistan to Saudi Arab the support was ensured. In 1974 on the advice of Saudi Arab in the Islamic conference Pakistan played the role of host. This conference was organized for the Muslim countries from all over the world.

The strategic link of Pakistan with Saudi Arab has been most important bond holding the two countries together. Pakistan occupies an important place in strategic policy of Iran and Saudi Arab on the other side. Pakistan played an important role in the sensitive zone of power competition and had to cushion the pressures from the both sides of Iran and Saudi Arab. Pakistan had to play a balanced role in the Saudi-Iran rivalry for gaining hegemonic position in region but due to internal weaknesses it proved to be unequal in its approach. The external pressure from Saudi Arab and Pakistan's response to that put the question mark on the sovereignty of the state.

According to an estimation by the time of 1974, military to military relations started between two states of Pakistan and Saudi Arab. Total 4000 airmen and Saudi soldiers had been given training in Pakistan under the contract signed with worth of \$10million per year.

The Pak-Saudi relations bonded more strongly due to Defense cooperation. There is also no basic clash of interest between two states and Saudi Arab generally believe that Pakistan can be relied upon in the time of security crises. The military to military ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arab flourished in the decade of 1978-1988 under the Zia regime. The Islamization campaign of Zia in Pakistan was also

supported by Saudi regime. With the turn of new decade and entering into cold war era the relations strengthened as fifteen thousand troops from Pakistan were stationed at Saudi Arab against the threat from Soviet. Pakistan proved to be strong ally in the time of crisis.

The economic ties of Pakistan and Saudi Arab expanded phenomenally during the past few decades. Previously the economic links were minimal and both states mostly shared strategic and religious interests and enjoyed long standing relations. But during the wars of 1965 and 1971, 1979 and nuclear tests of 1998 when Pakistan was denied of US assistance, Saudi Arab extensively assisted Pakistan financially in form of oil and construction of mosques and educational institutes. The social and economic assistance was also provided during the 2005 earthquake and flood of 2010 and 2011. The share of Saudi Arab in Pakistan's market is 7%. According to the recent FPCCI report of 2019, the trade between Pakistan and Saudi Arab stood at \$3.5B and also in favor of Saudi Arab. Pakistan's economic relations have been expanded considerably over the years and Saudi Arab emerged as most important country in Foreign policy of Pakistan.

The durable Pak-Saudi Relations have never been unconditional. In April 2015, Pakistan soon after receiving the loan of \$1.5 B from Saudi Arab decided to stay neutral in Saudi war against Houthis in Yemen. In Saudi's Yemen intervention Iran was central as Riyadh perceives Houthis supported by the Iranian. At that time Pakistan's response was very clear to delicately balance its relations with neighboring Iran and Saudi Arab with affirmation of support and friendship to Riyadh.

In late 2016 Pakistan's retired Chief of Army staff General Raheel Sharif was appointed to lead the Islamic Military Alliance to counter terrorism. The Saudi-led IMA alliance founded in December 2015, including members of Muslim countries but Iran was not in member list. Nevertheless, initially Pakistan was unaware about the group and government of Pakistan reacted with bafflement for being blindsided. Pakistan was conditioned by the Saudi Arab's regional consideration and compelled to become part of IMA. However, Pakistan managed to not spoil its ties with neighboring Iran.

Saudi Arab's Factors of Influence over Pakistan

Saudi Arab historically had covert influence on Pakistan due to Saudi position as religious

fountainhead as well as the enormous funding specially in 1970's after the important events of Afghan invasion and Iranian revolution and afterwards. Saudi Arab and Pakistan had a close relationship through decades but recently the Saudi influence on Pakistan overtly increased due to Imran Khan's attempt to avoid Western aid and relying on Saudi aid during financial crisis that further led to influencing the policy choices of Pakistan. The huge amount of remittances also come from Saudi Arabia which are important component of Pakistan's economy henceforth puts Pakistan in acquiescent position in relation to Saudi Arab. Due to Saudi pressure Pakistan pulled out from international Summit of Muslim leaders of the world in Malaysia in December 2019 and also became part of the controversial Saudi led coalition of Islamic Military Alliance in 2015, which aims to counter Iranian interests in Middle East. This represents the Saudi overt dictation which puts question mark on the sovereignty of Pakistan and its independent policy choices.

The Kuala Lumpur summit became controversial for Pakistan when Turkish President Erdogan raised concerns and gave statement about the absence of Pakistan from the Summit. Tayyip Erdogan stated, "Unfortunately, we see that Saudi Arabia pressured Pakistan....there are more than 4 million people of Pakistan working in Saudi Arabia. They (Saudi Arabia) would send (Pakistani workers) back and reemploy Bangladeshi instead." He further added that Saudi Arabia also threatened to withdraw its money from State Bank of Pakistan. According to the Turkish President Pakistan had to quit due to its economic difficulties. KL Summit also became one of the event where Pakistan seemed under the Saudi Influence due to internal weakness and imbalanced dependence.

In recent years Pakistan's PM Imran Khan and Saudi crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman formed strong bonding based on Pakistan's desire to stay away from western influence. The opportunistic friendship from Pakistan's side forced by debt crisis for which new government had to rely on foreign aid. The internal weakness of Pakistan led to seek help from Saudi Arab which became reason for accepting external pressure from Saudi side. The relations between two grow into unequal and imbalanced array when heavy amount of loans received from Saudi Arab in 2018 and 2019. During the October 2018 visit of Imran Khan and agreement was signed with Saudi Arab under which loan of \$3B sanctioned

to Pakistan to overcome its financial crisis. Moreover amount of \$3B sanctioned to Pakistan to make overdue payment on oil imports.

The implication of loan on Pakistan's sovereign position became more clear when in February 2019 during the MBS Crown Prince visit to Islamabad he signed the MoU of US\$20 billion with Pakistan. The official statement of Muhammad Bin Salman during visit also suggests that loan that has been given is not without cost and in future they might use Pakistan's help in achieving their interests.

"We've been brotherly country and friendly country to Pakistan. We believe that Pakistan going to be very important country in coming future."

The condition for these deals are unknown to public but definitely not without Saudi Interest. The loan were given by Saudi Prince in order to keep upper hand in relations with Pakistan.

Saudi Arab due to lack in expertise and trained personnel resorted to import the services of Pakistani workers. Because of expertise, manpower and technical know-how Pakistan had secured special place in Saudi Arab. Being developing country Pakistan's economy also dependent on remittance from foreign countries and Saudi Arab is one of them. According to the data of CEIC there are 496,286 registered employees working in Saudi Arab. During the last few years remittance trend in Pakistan is rising and \$13.186 B amount is received yearly. Remarkably most of the remittances are sent by Pakistani employees residing in Saudi Arab. The imbalance in mutual dependence put Saudi Arab in assertive position vis-à-vis Pakistan.

The internal weakness of Pakistan and Saudi Arab's role of assertive major donor of aid put Pakistan in compliant position. The economic relations between two countries showed the trend of rise as Saudi Arab is major source of Pakistan's petroleum but due to heavy loan payment from Saudi Arab the imbalance in interdependence is visible. During 2019 visit of MBS, Imran Khan expressed the relation of Pakistan with Saudi Arab.

"Saudi Arabia has always been a friend in need....which is why we value it so much."

Over the years Saudi Arab emerged as important strategic and economic partner and this relation is bound to increase. However the imbalance in interdependence and Saudi Arab's assertive position over Pakistan is matter of concern for future.

Challenge to Sovereignty

Pakistan officially claims that the loan package from Saudi Arabia involves quid pro quo and the deal is secured without any compromise on its freedom of action but events present different picture. Although Pakistan had not completely surrendered to Saudi dictates but several assertions are made by Saudi Arabia in recent past. KL Summit proved one of the significant event where Pakistan seemed to be under Saudi pressure due to its dependence on Saudi funds to keep economy stabilized. Pakistan had no choice to maintain neutrality and stood with Saudi Arabia because of economic reasons. Kuala Lumpur summit of 2019 like Islamic Military alliance also became one of the reasons that put question mark on independent foreign policy of Pakistan.

The situation day by day is becoming more challenging to Pakistan's internal economic difficulties and reliance on Saudi remittances. Pakistan has never compromised on its stand vis-à-vis Saudi Arabia before until recent. The compromised sovereignty against the backdrop of economic loans implies a halt to Pakistan's advancement at international level. Due to transitioning regional dynamics of Middle East, Saudi Arabia is trying to use Pakistan to establish its hegemony in region. Nuclear Pakistan can also be helpful to guarantee security of Saudi Arabia against Iran nevertheless without Saudi aid the survival of Pakistan is also not secured. It could be safely proclaimed that given the sharp rise in loans from Saudi Arabia, the economic benefits would be far less than the disadvantage to the national purpose. One of the favor that Pakistan could be compelled to make the open support to hegemonic policy of Saudi Arabia in the region and serving its interests against Iran.

However the assertive behavior of Saudi Arabia towards Pakistan depends on the continuation of economic crisis in Pakistan. After the completion of CPEC the changed geopolitical condition can converge the nature of Saudi relations with Pakistan. Currently Pakistan had little political option other than to depend on Saudi Arabia and strengthen friendship with them. Facing the hostile neighbors in vicinity and lacking the internal economic power Imran Khan seized the opportunity to consolidate Pakistan internally and externally by bonding with Saudi Arabia. But on the other hand Pakistan can made itself suspect in the eyes of international world by keeping Saudi Arabia as its top priority. To avoid the problem Pakistan must need to minimize its reliance on Saudi

Arab and initiate focusing on other Muslim countries as well.

Pak-Saudi strong relations continue to bedevil the independent foreign policy of Pakistan but the risk to economic security cannot be taken by shutting off Saudi dictation. Lacking parity in of usefulness and strength between both states proves disadvantageous for Pakistan. An association between emerging regional hegemon and financially crippled developing country like Pakistan can never be equal due to big power's using weak for its own interests.

Recommendations

Pakistan must consider following steps to deal with challenges to its Sovereignty time and again:

- Pakistan needs to maintain balanced relations with each country so no country can pressurize Pakistan for its policy choices
- Pakistan must focus on European States and Asian countries for trade and diplomatic relations so dependence on one or two country can be reduced
- Pakistan needs to stand on its own feet economically to come out of challenging and pressurizing situation
- Pakistan needs to revive its economy through industrialization instead of relying on remittances
- Pakistan must avoid to become part of any state's hegemonic strategy
- Instead of becoming alliance to major powers the focus should be on development of strong relations with neighboring states.

Conclusion

The increased Saudi influence over Pakistan is visible due to the historical religious orientation and enormous funding in recent past. Until now Saudi Arabia has been successful in exerting its influence regionally via Pakistan and against Iran. Owing to the special relations with Saudi Arabia, Pakistan could be made party to any offensive strategy against Iran and to serve Saudi hegemonic interests. The extent to freedom Pakistan enjoys in its foreign policy are recently minimized. However, Pakistan had not completely surrendered to Saudi dictation and managing to keep relations with Iran stable. Saudi influence has its own limits and as Pakistan striving to

maintain the balance in its obvious leaning towards KSA. The positive role of China and Iran can be of particular significance with regards to lessen the Pakistani influence on Saudi Arab. By easing tensions with Iran, it would be proved productive in minimizing the need of Pakistan for Saudi support.

Pakistan does not need to replace the friendship of one country with cordiality of another instead it should work to balance the equation with all states. By ensuring socio-economic development under democratic framework, Pakistan can guard itself from foreign machination be it US, China or Saudi Arab. Although there is no doubt that under the changing dynamics of power in world, an important strategically located country like Pakistan can never have risk free path. Since the policy of friendship with Saudi Arab have its own shortcomings, it is risky for the sovereignty of Pakistan. Pakistan must adopt a

policy which is less precarious to its independent foreign policy.

The need of time is to maintain the balance by shrinking the dependence on Saudi funds and remittances that come from Saudi workers of Pakistan. Pakistan needs to progress in industrial and agricultural enlargement so reliance on any state like Saudi Arab can be decreased. Pakistan must also focus on European States and Asian countries for trade and diplomatic relations so dependence on one or two country can be reduced. Trade links and businesses should be equally developed with every continent's countries and maintaining best possible links with neighboring countries should be priority of policy. Instead of becoming the party to Saudi Arab hegemonic regional plans and checkmating the Iranian influence it should focus on balancing the equation so it can independently conduct its own form of action.

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