

## **The US Factor in Pakistan-Iran Relations: New Dimensions**

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### **Abstract**

*Pakistan-Iran relations have been complex and uncertain due to United States tremendous influence since 9/11. National interest remains a dominant factor to form the core of bilateral ties between the states. The change of governments in these states resulted in to reassess the foreign policy which gave a new dimension to the suspected and hostile relations between both the Muslim States which successfully undermined the United States hegemonic pressure. This paper is an attempt to explore Pakistan's foreign policy towards Iran after Musharraf Presidency till now and the factors due to which it deterred and challenged the US influence.*

**Keywords:** US-Pakistan Relations, US-Iran Relations, Afghanistan, US-Iran Nuclear Deal, Zardari and Nawaz administration

### **Introduction**

Flexible approach helps better to define foreign policy objectives in understanding inter-state relations. If foreign policy is defined as the actions/reactions of sovereign states to change conditions of the external environment, it will result in another kind of scholarship which emphasized on the ideas of the decision makers in foreign policy decision making process. The desired change by the decision makers may be in the policy, behavior, or action/reaction of a state. (Holsti, 1983). In this scenario, the change of leadership plays a vital role in shaping the foreign policy of a state. In this paper the change of leadership is addressed in the light of the leader's attitude towards different regional and international problems. (Breuning, 2007). The troubled triangular relationship which formed among United States, Pakistan and Iran after 9/11, 2001 brought disastrous implications for both Pakistan and Iran due to the hegemonic strategic foreign policy objectives of the United States. Changing demands of United States national interests after 9/11 in response to regional or international challenges arises mainly due to terrorism questioned the adequacy of idealism in explaining Pakistan-Iran relations.

There is a general perception that United States has extremely influenced Pakistan foreign policy after the terrorist attacks of 9/11, 2001 and has served as an instrument of US strategic goals in the region against the Taliban government in Afghanistan. No doubt Pakistan has played a great job as a front line ally of United States in the global war on terror (GWT) but at the

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same time it has also weakened Pakistan's relations with its neighbors specially Iran. (Kumar, 2008). The ratio of US influence was extremely high during Musharraf presidency and continued with the same pace till the initial period of President Zardari which lasted from 2008-2013. Although United States has not been satisfied with Pakistan's role in this respect but the other side of the paradox also says that Pakistan had also been fed up with United States continued demand of "do more" in the so-called war on terror since 9/11 which resulted not more than lack of trust between them. (Hunter, 2010). This complex and uncertain strategic environment among the US, Pakistan and Iran continued also with the change of governments which lastly culminated in US-Pakistan weak and worst relations due to the subsequent events which paved the way for smooth and cordial relations between Pakistan and Iran.

Iran occupies a significant place in the foreign policy of Pakistan with its early independence. Iran was the first ever country which admitted the separate recognition of Pakistan as an independent sovereign state. The strategic support of Iran in the Indo-Pak wars of 1965 and 1971 is of immense importance which secured Pakistan's freedom against her rival, India. (Zeb, 2003). Islam is the main binding force which has tied them both closely. Although the Shia-Sunni balance in Pakistan has a great value in determining Iran's relations with Pakistan which were later became a serious problem in 1990s when the Shia community was harshly targeted by the Sunni militants in Pakistan.

US-Iran has a short history of good and reputable relations in the pre-revolution era. They had experienced hostile and bitter relations throughout history which composed of three decades. After 9/11, their relations had been come to the normal state but unfortunately for a very short time when President Bush placed Iran in the "axis of evil" list. After that the animosity between the two has been increased due to which their relations have come to the lowest ebb. (Kumar, 2008) However when President Obama took the charge of his office in 2009, some improvements have been occurred by involving the international community to peacefully solve the nuclear issue with Iran which United States regarded as the main source of trouble. However in a complex and uncertain environment what impelled United States to continue its pressure on both Pakistan and Iran in pursuit of its most strategic objectives? Also what were the factors which compelled Pakistan to rethink about its foreign policy objectives so that to pull out itself from American orbit of influence? What was the impact of changing governments in affecting the relations of these countries? This paper is an attempt to explore these propositions and alike in the trilateral US-Pakistan-Iran relationship.

### US and Pakistan-Iran Relations after 9/11: A Historical Background

Relations between Pakistan and Iran have been shaped by many factors including religious affinity, cultural harmony and geographic proximity. They have experienced peaceful relations in the pre-revolution era. After the Islamic revolution, their relations did not improve positively and remained much complicated and uncertain due to the US-Iran bitter hostility. (Khan M. S., 2014). After the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan with the conclusion of Geneva accord in 1988, Afghanistan became a major area of concern for both Pakistan and Iran. Their different perceptions and changing approaches towards the establishment of a new Afghan government created misunderstanding, tensions and confusions in Pakistan-Iran relations. (Khan & Ahmad, 2009). The emergence of Taliban in Afghanistan added much fuel to Pak-Iran rivalry as Iran was harshly opposed to Taliban and therefore supported anti-Taliban Northern Alliance. Iran blamed Pakistan and US for covertly supporting Taliban government to make Afghanistan a gateway for Pakistan toward Central Asian countries which was also a general policy of US to contain Iran. However with the fall out of Taliban in the event of 9/11, 2001 when United States declared war against the Taliban, the bilateral relations of both Pakistan and Iran got some remedies and both worked for accommodating each other's strategic and economic interests in Afghanistan. (Khan & Ahmad, 2009).

The relations between Pakistan and Iran were not productive in the post-9/11 strategic environment due to the US-Iran antagonistic relations and Pakistan's close strategic relations with US as a front line ally in the global war on terror. Although the defeat of Taliban resulted in an unsolicited marriage of convenience among US, Pakistan and Iran but this was short lived. Iran's signing of \$7 billion arms agreement with Moscow on 4th October destroyed the hopes of rapprochement with US after a long period of hostility. Having being signed this agreement, Russia also agreed to deliver a nuclear reactor to Iran's Bushehr nuclear power plant which was previously purchased by Iran from Russia. United States considered these strategic developments by Iran as a focal point of suspicion and hostility. Though officials in US had declared that Iran had no intention of developing nuclear weapons but some developments like the acquisition of Russian jet fighters (Su-27 and Su-30) and the Shihab-3 medium range ballistic missile continued improvement created concerns in United States and concluded that such bargaining of weapons of mass destruction could destabilize regional security and also threaten US allies and friends. (Brumberg, 2002). In contrast to this, the US reaction was to isolate Iran by undermining its position of influence in Afghanistan. The direct result of this felt on Pakistan-Iran relations which were cured after a decade hostility during the period of 1990s. President Bush put

tremendous pressure on Pakistan's foreign policy, leaving no other choice for President Musharraf but to cooperate with US to undermine Iran's strategic intentions. Thus Pakistan was not in such a position to improve its relations with Iran in the face of continued US pressure, rather it started to get upper hand in Afghanistan's new establishment. (Hunter, 2010). Correspondingly there developed a more complex relationship and a sense of misunderstanding among the three states which were affected by their mutual contacts with each other. US animosity with Iran and its well-equipped armed forces stations in Pakistan and Afghanistan had considerable effects on Pakistan's relations with Tehran. Shortly Iran found itself being encircled by the US. In this scenario Iran thought of Pakistan as a pro-American state reassuring US to extend its stay in the region. Consequently it created geo-political instability and halted Pak-Iran relations. (Wilson, 2005)

The disclosure of new and previously undeclared nuclear facilities at Arak and Natanz before IAEA by an Iranian opposition group in exile that the former head of its nuclear program Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan secretly transferred centrifuges for enriching uranium to Iran, halted the bilateral relations between the two states. Even before the investigations had to begin, Iran apparently accepted before the IAEA that it had received the assistance from Pakistan. However despite broad evidence about the links between Pakistan and Iran, Pakistan was not named as a cause of nuclear proliferation by the IAEA Director General quite for some time. (Mishera, 2006). It seems to be logical that why Pakistan backed a foreign state against its closer Muslim state. The main reason here is that due to the Iran's fall out before the IAEA that Pakistan provided it centrifuges for enriching uranium, Pakistan supported US to conduct secret operations against Iran to obsolete its economy. Pakistan faced the international pressure especially by the US who was already suspicious about Iran nuclear program. As a result US put much pressure on Pakistan to give up such developments. Since then the Iranian ambition to acquire nuclear capability have been the target of American ire and put a variety of sanctions on its nuclear program. Consequently it heavily affected their bilateral strategic relations which got remedy to some extent in the immediate post 9/11 era. (Shoaib, 2011).

The relations between US and Iran did not show any improvements in Bush era (2001-08) whom placed Iran in the "Axis of Evil" and regarded it as a threat for the whole world not merely to US. President Ahmadinejad (2005-13) harshly criticized America for creating 9/11 conditions. During the Presidency of Bush and Ahmadinejad, the rivalry between the two reached to its peak and did not let the ice to melt. (Mazhar & Goraya, 2014)

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### An Analytical view of Changing Governments in Pakistan and Iran in US Perspective (2008-13)

The U.S. policies vis-à-vis Pakistan and Iran have always been a key and an influential element in bilateral relations between the two states (Kumar, 2008). From the post-9/11 era to the end of President Musharraf rule, the US factor was extremely high which brought worst ramifications for Pak-Iran relations. Pakistan due to tremendous pressure by the United States followed its policy of destabilization of Iran due to its nuclear intentions and sponsoring of terrorism. This policy of destabilization also proceeded with the changing of governments in Pakistan in 2008 when President Zardari held the government office which lasted till 2011. (Hunter, 2010). Although US influence on Pakistan was not completely dismissed but continued to carry its subversive covert acts to create enough internal problems for Iran. Consequently in January 2010, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister, Hassan Qashqavi concluded his remarks that Pakistan now should need to take complete measures to root out terrorist activities across the border of the two countries which enormously jeopardized the security environment in Iran. He said that "Pakistani government is hoped to fulfill its promises to eradicate these wild terrorist activities". (Farrar, Wellman, & Frasco, 2010). Consequently officials from Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan met on January 16, 2010 and discussed the regional security environment and rising terrorism, agreed on a joint framework for mutual cooperation to handle this menace. Shah Mehmood Quraishi the then Foreign Minister of Pakistan elaborated that it is important to raise similar opinions and consultation about the issues with which we all have now confronted so that be able to find remedies for these issues. Serious concerns were raised by Iranian ministers about the extensive presence of US forces in Afghanistan and also Pakistan which was emerging a major irritant in their mutual relations. (Gondal, 2013). There is also revelations by an Iranian Foreign Ministry official that there is a veiled agenda on the back of these existing catastrophic events measured on Iran's eastern border with Pakistan and Afghanistan, pointing the United States covert activities to destabilize Iran. (Press TV, 2010).

The regional security issue is not a simple one because Pakistan is still enjoying good relations with US which Iran regarded the root cause for destroying the peace of the region. Balochistan resumes great importance for United States because it has still an easy access to this place especially the areas which are closed to Pakistan-Iran borders. Officials in Iran felt that it is the main reason for the worst situations and advised Pakistan to adopt different methods from that of US so that to keep secret the security information. Interior Minister Rahman Malik stated that our government is committed to create strong clutches against the militant extremist leaders of

Jundullah who carried explosive blasts with the foreign secret backing. He also said that Jundullah leadership has sought safe havens in Kabul under President Kurzai, a puppet government of US. (The Post, Rawalpindi, 2010).

Although US exercised enormous influence over Pakistan's foreign policy since Musharraf period but there were also ups and downs in their relations. President Zardari due to his Shia sect was more interesting to build friendly relations with Iran at the cost of US. (Khan M. S., 2014). The policy of infiltrating Iran which President Zardari has bestowed from his predecessor due to US pressure lost its momentum in the succeeding years. President Zardari clearly expressed his words to show his sympathy for Iran sending a message of defiance towards US that it will not use its soil for a military strike against Iran. (Taboola, 2012).

Pakistan's relations with United States were also not easy due to the problematic stance of United States on the IP gas pipeline which was not executed previously. Although President Zardari and Ahmadinejad by thwarting US pressure signed this agreement in 2009 which was hanged from 25 years but the geopolitical considerations, apart from economic and technical obstacles hindered the construction of this project.(Khan, 2013). Having being signed this project, it invited fury from US and its allies who wants Islamabad to abstain from this project. Although Pakistan faces immense energy deficiency and to pull out itself from this energy starvation, this pipeline was considered the right answer but due to the unjustified nature of the US, the project suffers delays due to the sanctions on Iranian nuclear program which has not only aggravated energy deficiency in Pakistan but also has affected Pakistan-Iran relations. (Defense.pk, July 30, 2013). The two Presidents Asif Ali Zardari and Ahmadinejad showed a bold stance and did not bow before the US pressure by officially inaugurated the construction of the Pakistani section of the pipeline in March 2013 which invited harsh criticism from US. There was a possibility that Pakistan may fall under the line of sanctions like Iran. Due to Pakistan fragile economy, Iran agreed to give a loan of 500 million to Pakistan out of 1.5 billion \$, so that to kept the project alive. (Jalivand, 2013). Pakistan was still unable to construct its remaining section of the pipeline but the decision of Pakistan to hand over the control of Gawadar port to China was a positive development. According to one Pakistani official in Tehran embassy that China has pledged to provide other 5 million dollars for the construction of the pipeline. (Bhutta, 2013). But due to the lukewarm response of Pakistani government towards IP project, some analysts are of the view that the Zardari government had taken this bold stance not in the country's national interest but to get support in the coming 2013 general elections from the energy starving poor Pakistani peoples. (Kugelman, 2013).

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New Pakistani government headed by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif although showed his commitment with regard to the project while assuming the office in May 2013 but he did not do that because his government was under continued pressure by the United States. Iran also rejected the claims made by the Pakistan that due to the United States sanctions imposed on Iran, it could not complete the remaining section of his pipeline. (Mustafa K. , 2014). The lack of sincere leadership from both the sides once again halted this wealthy project. Some believe that it is not more than a lack of Pakistan political will and strategic primacies. Pakistan on the other hand needed to strongly convince United States that if Turkey imports \$6 to \$9 billion cubic meter gas from Iran and similarly Armenia \$1 billion cubic meter gas, then it is illogical why objections have been made on Pakistan to import gas from Iran at the moment when it is confronted with the acute energy crisis. On the one hand United States chanted the slogans to pullout Pakistan from its crippling energy crisis, on the other hand it is struggling hard to obstruct Pakistan from obtaining energy. It exposed the hypocritical and unjustified nature of United States especially towards Pakistan who rendered great sacrifices for that country in a decade war of terrorism. (Hussain, Ahmed, & Khawaja, 2013). The economic conditions of Pakistan were also poor due to which it could not materialize the project but now the scenario has been changed when news appeared on the page of Express Tribune on 28 November, 2013 that Pakistan was offered the help of one billion dollars to help construct the pipeline by an anonymously friend country. (Bhutta, 2013). But the incumbent Pakistani government headed by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif is still lacking the ability to build the pipeline. Due to the close association of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif with Saudi Arabia, it is pushing back Pakistan on behalf of the United States to exclude it from the project. An Iranian Press TV raised these apprehensions with regard to the completion of the pipeline project. (Press TV, 2013). Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Sayyed Ali Hosseini Khamenei asked Nawaz Sharif during his visit to Iran in May 2014 that it is the time to take concrete steps on the project to improve relations between both the states because Pakistan was much needed the gas to handle the energy crisis of the country. Supreme Leader explicitly said to the Prime Minister about his government halfhearted response that don't look to foreign countries for permission to start work on the project because it is in the supreme national interest of Pakistan. So it should not bow before the external pressure and stuck to the policies to improve relations between both the states. (Dawn, 2014).

### **US-Pakistan Estrangements and its effects on Pak-Iran Relations**

Although US-Pakistan has an opportunistic relationship since the later independence in 1947 which is more based on the inequality of powers and

self-interests and have not relatively harmonious objectives which is characterized by on-off partnership. (Hilali, 2009). Pakistan's geographical connectivity with the Persian Gulf is the most influential factor for American strategic interest. This factor tied both the states to survive the suspected and inconsistent relations. Palmer had called it a "Tortured Relationship" due to the inconsistency in their relations. (Palmer, 1981). Though a front line ally of US in the global war on terror yet suspicion and tensions went along which created ambiguity in relations. A new twist emerged in the relations when United States killed the most wanted man Osama bin Laden whom they had been chasing for ten years. The already edgy relations entered into its most devastating period which brought worst implications for both US and Pakistan. The year 2011 saw the killing of Osama bin Laden, Raymond Davis episode, NATO helicopters airstrikes plus ground troop's attacks at Salala check posts which took the lives of twenty four (24) Pakistani soldiers. (Sial, 2015). The unilateral act taken by American forces without informing Pakistani intelligence agencies made a gulf between the two and more broadened the trust-deficit. (Mazhar & Goraya, 2012). Although President Obama cleared that the attacks were just a tragedy because the NATO forces were fighting with militants in the area near the Salala check posts which was closed to Pak-Afghan border and the ISAF forces thought that these were militants. However Pakistan strictly rejected these statements and claimed that the attacks were deliberated and planned. These events casted its dark shadows on their strategic collaboration and downgraded the friendly relations. (Muhammad, 2012)

These developments created gulf between Pakistan and United States close strategic relations against the global war on terror. Apart from this, relations between both the countries also remained strained and uncertain since 9/11 because United States did not satisfied with the sacrifices Pakistan rendered in the Global War on Terror and instead accused Pakistan of not taking the adequate measures to topple the Taliban. These situations created distrust with in Pakistan and its people. The repercussions of the Salala attacks also undermined even end Pakistan's involvement as an ally of the United States in the global war on terror. Pakistan in response closed the supply route of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan and also instantaneously stopped the Ground Lines for Communications (GLOCs) for NATO supplies from Karachi port to Afghanistan. Shamsi airbase was also vacated by the United States troops which was given to them on lease from where they conducted drone attacks in the tribal areas of Pakistan. (Aziz, 2011).

Other repercussions of the attacks undermined the United States efforts to peacefully end the war on terror in Afghanistan which seriously jeopardized



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“The Exit Strategy” of the US-led NATO forces from Afghanistan. Similarly it was also impossible without Pakistan’s help to bring the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani Network to the negotiations table with the United States because Pakistan was designated as a major non-NATO ally and a facilitator to bring Taliban to the one table. (Kamran, 2011). Another blow to Afghanistan’s fate was Pakistan’s decision not to attend the upcoming Bone conference. Thus it was difficult for US to conclude the Afghan end game in the absence of Pakistan because Pakistan was a close neighbor of Afghanistan and remained involved with United States in the Afghan security process. (Aziz, 2011).

Iran always regarded United States as the main source of contention who infiltrated the regional security scenario and itself exported terrorism in countries and instead accused others. Therefore it stood against the hegemonic US designs in the region who cared only for her strategic priorities even by endangering the sovereignty of weaker states and thus due to this stance it was considered by US as a potential threat to its strategic interests. Iran always suspected Pakistan’s close relations with United States and desired to create a gulf between them. It always remained in search of a competent partner to deter United States and therefore wanted Pakistan to help create an anti-American bloc. Just a few months before the Salala attacks, Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamanei and President Mahmood Ahmadinejad asserted the statements that Iran is looking ways to sabotage and weaken Pakistan-US relations. They made public statements about US intentions in the South Asian region that ran fear in Pakistan. (Robina, 2011). While conveying a message to Pakistan’s Chief of Army Staff, Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, commander of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps condemned the Salala attacks and regarded it a violation of international laws and territorial integrity and sovereignty of Pakistan which exposed to the whole world the true innocent face of United States who claims responsibility for the preservation of human rights and peace of the world.(The News, 2011).

Consequently the tragic incidents of Salala check posts and the death of Osama bin Laden at Abbottabad in 2011 created fissures in Pakistan’s close strategic relations in the so called war on terror with United States and resulted in a gradual closing of its relations with Iran because Iran’s relations with United States were also not going easy. So bilateral relations between both the states significantly improved during the last two years of Pakistan’s Peoples Party rule which enormously weakened United States strategic objectives to isolate Iran also. (Sial, 2015). Soon after the Salala attacks, Pakistan-Iran relations ran on the positive track and a climate of trust building developed. The arrivals of high officials further gave a boost to the two

neighbor's bilateral relations. President Ahmadinejad and President Karzai in February 2012 arrived at Islamabad to hold peace talks with Pakistan's civil and military leadership to create the regional cluster of the three countries. The proceedings of the peace talks among the three countries discussed wide range of issues which included Afghanistan peace talks and the completion of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project. This scenario being developed, created apprehensions in United States and regarded it against its core foreign policy objectives. In response United States warned Pakistan of getting too close to Iran because United States did not want Iran to become a regional power and for that purpose it has imposed strenuous sanctions and extreme pressure over Iran's nuclear program. However all the three Presidents made their commitments to enhance the mutual collaborations by thwarting the foreign pressure. (Yousaf & Khan, 2012). Similarly Dr. Firdous Ashiq Awan, a Federal Minister for Regulation and Services along with religious scholar Khanam Tayyaba Bokhari paid a visit to Iran in May, 2012 and met with President Ahmadinejad. During the meeting Ahmadinejad expressed complete solidarity with the government and people of Pakistan. He also showed his sympathy for Pakistan by saying that the enemy of Pakistan will be considered as an equal enemy of Iran. He blamed United States for creating such instances which internally destabilized Pakistan. They discussed so many issues in the fields of economic, social/cultural and reproductive health which hindered the process of development between both the states. President Ahmadinejad also praised the role of the women in societal, political and economic development of the state and proposed the women to women contact in order to improve relations between both the countries. (The Nation, 2012).

The regional understanding emerged in a convergence in policies between Pakistan and Iran which occurred after Pakistan's deterioration of relations with United States in the year 2011. During the last two years of Pakistan's Peoples Party (PPP-led rule), President Zardari twice visited Iran during which he signed the landmark pipeline agreement with his counterpart President Ahmadinejad instead of United States extreme pressure to withdraw from the project. United States put pressure on Pakistan that if he did not reversed from this project, sanctions like Iran will be imposed on Pakistan. But President Zardari pulled out this pressure and go ahead to join the project. This step taken by President Zardari won the hearts of the Pakistani people and also Iran which resulted in harmony between both the states. (Shoaib, 2011). President Zardari also positively responded to the issue of Iranian nuclear program which was become a serious matter. This move help President Zardari to gain further reputation in Iran, as majority of Pakistanis have shown a popular view on this issue. (Javedanfar, 2016). Although United States is a strong adversary of Iran and a global super power who can influence the foreign policy of any states by different means but now this

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scenario has changed completely. United States is being aware of the closed and tied relations between Pakistan and Iran which it did not realize as a threat. The reason behind it is that United States has no objection on specific areas of relations between Pakistan and Iran. Pakistan is also conscious in its relations with Iran because of the United States bitter history of relations with the Islamic Republic. The South Asian region resumes huge importance for United States and in this backdrop Pakistan's key central role for regional stability is viable and required Pakistan to sustain friendly and smooth relations with other regional states specially Iran. (Bashir & Jan, 2014)

The changing of government in Pakistan in 2013, however did not stopped the face of friendly and fraternal relations between the two states. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif who assumed the office in May 2013 paid his first visit to Iran where he met with President Rouhani in Saadabad palace at Sunday. During the minutes of the meeting they discussed the pipeline project and Prime Minister Nawaz said to the Iranian president that he is here with his finance, petroleum and interior ministers to solve the issues which created resistance in the completion of the project and regarded it crucial for both the states. Both heads of the states gave due importance to the regional security problems which to a great extent created gulf and suspicions in their mutual relations. They shared common views on border security matters and emphasized on the need to take steps for better management and improved security measures which will also give a boost to bilateral trade and cooperation and will also result in strengthening of relationship between the two states. (The Express Tribune, 2014). Although Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif said after coming into power that his government will complete the hanged project but the fate of the pipeline still remained ambiguous due to the continued pressure from Saudi Arabia and United States because Nawaz Sharif has closed relations with the Royal family. Pakistan was indirectly under pressure from the United States due to its close relations with Saudi Arabia to exclude it from the project and preferred Pakistan to search alternative sources to cope with the energy challenges. So Pakistan which has confronted with serious energy crisis could not pick up benefits from the project which has been regarded by many Pakistanis as a life project. Another reason of Pakistan's passiveness in the project was also stemmed from United States and international community's involvement with Iran on its nuclear program. Iran was under the continued layers of sanctions which played a key role to avoid Pakistan from joining the project. (The News, 2013).

## **US-Iran Nuclear Deal and its Impacts on Pak-Iran Relations**

The US-Iran nuclear deal brought significant improvements in Iran's relations with Pakistan and other regional and international countries as well. Pakistan

welcomed and appreciated the deal between the two rival states and regarded it a milestone in the world's history. Sartaj Aziz an adviser to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on Foreign Affairs called the deal a positive step for regional integration because the strategic and economic opportunities which arises from this historic rapprochement will give a new life to Pakistan's devastated situation. He said that the deal will strengthen the prospects to build the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline and similarly other wealthy projects being affected due to the sanctions on Iran. (Mustafa M. Q., 2015). In the passing years despite several agreements between Pakistan and Iran, the IP gas project could not implemented and remained halted due to United States and European Union sanctions. Pakistan largely due to financial problems also had not started work on its pipeline section because the national and international banks failed mainly due to United States apprehensions to finance the project which causes an unflow of the gas by the deadline of 2014 and similarly Pakistan came under the line of penalties to Iran. However Pakistan did not offer the penalties and Iran also not demanded that and instead said to Pakistan in clear words that it should look to their national interest to pursue it without tilting and demanding permissions from external powers because they never wanted to execute this project. So Pakistan is needed to go ahead with this project without losing much time after the US-Iran nuclear deal of July, 2015 has paved the way. (Mustafa M. Q., 2015).

Foreign Minister Javad Zarif as part of a multi-country tour visited Pakistan in August 2015 to explore new areas for economic and security cooperation with Pakistan. In post-Iran-US nuclear deal scenario, Iran-Pakistan relations will mostly be determined by economic and regional realities rather than external players. He said that the US-Iran nuclear deal will give a push to the halted gas pipeline project between the two countries and will also improve the economic cooperation and the security situation of the virtuous regions of their respective Baluchistan's, the areas which will be the most beneficiaries in terms of economic and trade from this landmark deal. (Rafiq, 2015). The implications of the nuclear deal will help Pakistan to address the issues of mutual concern and will take enough benefits from the Iran's energy assets to overcome its ever increasing energy demands. Other benefits which Pakistan will take is connected with industry development that had been devastated a decade before. Consequently Pakistan will be able to export its products to the international market and by getting sufficiency in various types of commodities, it will help to improve the economic and commercial activities of Pakistan. Similarly it will also give a rapid boost to Iran's economy by exporting gas, petroleum products, ores, chemical materials, iron and steel and other machinery to Pakistan and also to other regional and international countries. Iran will also be able to import a variety of items from Pakistan like,

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textile industry, rice, cotton fabric, chemicals, fruits and vegetables. (Hussain J. , 2015).

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei Supreme Leader of Iran feared that the US political, cultural and economic influence in Iran could be increased with the nuclear deal and said that the JCPOA will not bring any development in US-Iran relationship or a desired change in Iran's regional policies. However President Rouhani expressed the future prospects of the JCPOA during his speech to the UN General Assembly on 29 September, 2015 that the deal will enable Iran to maintain expanding relations with different countries of the world which before was not possible. It will increase Iran's regional influence by conducting trade and other economic relations with regional and international countries. President Obama expressed the same feeling that the deal will usher in a new era between Iran and United States by resolving all the conflicting issues. (Cohen, 2015).

Recently in February, 2016 Pakistan's decision to revive its economic and commercial relations with Iran in trade, investment, technology, banking, finance and energy will rightly give a new life to its fragile economy. President Hassan Rouhani visit to Pakistan in March 2016 was warmly welcomed by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif during which they set the course of future relations between both the countries.(Express Tribune, 2016). One of the main central point of the Presidential visit was on Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline. Both the Heads of states signed six memorandum of understanding (MoUs) and a Five Year Strategic Trade Cooperation Plan.

(Pakistan Today, 2016).Pakistan's decision not to play an active combat role in the Saudi-Iran tussle in Yemen war was, in fact, the most important test case of its diplomatic skills that have proved successful in keeping Pakistan out of the Iran-Saudi tussle. In fact Pakistan wants to balance its relations with Saudi-Iran relations and to remain neutral in this ethnic war will not hamper its relations with the two Gulf States. (Rafique, 2016)

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which has becoming a rapid source of national integration, economic prosperity and regional stability for Pakistan, is hoped to bring Iran to connect with this project because the Iranian ambassador to China has expressed his country's willingness to extend the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline to China after it is completed by Pakistan. Thus the future cooperation between Pakistan and Iran is seemed to improve not only the two counties economic relations but it will also benefit the whole region. (Rafique, 2016).

## Conclusion

The United States is undoubtedly an extremely important factor in shaping the security policy of Pakistan. Since 9/11 in particular, the United States has exerted tremendous pressure on Pakistan through coercion, intimidation, and offers of massive inflows of arms and money to take steps which the US wants. The United States succeeded to a great extent in developing clouts in Pakistan through threats and incentives and managed to acquire a significant presence of its military and intelligence personnel and control over military facilities in Pakistan during President Musharraf era to topple Taliban which seriously jeopardized Pakistan cordial relations with Iran because Iran suspected Pakistan's close strategic collaboration with United States. United States due to Iran's fears to become a nuclear power took every steps to push it back and used Pakistan as a launching pad against its close neighbor. President Musharraf followed US policy of destabilization against Iran to root out its nuclear ambitions which previously was supported by Pakistan but Iran's disclosure before the IAEA that the former head of its nuclear program Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan secretly transferred Iran the centrifuges for enriching uranium forced Pakistan to obey the US commands. Although Pakistan was not named as a source of nuclear proliferation by the International Atomic Energy Agency quite for some time but it allowed United States to increased counter insurgency efforts in the Tribal areas of Pakistan which created internal problems for Pakistan.

However later with the change of leadership in Pakistan and Iran, the trust deficit between both the states decreased. The events of salala check posts and the killing of Osama, the most wanted man to US, on Pakistani soil created fissures and vast gaps in Pakistan-US close strategic relations and even ended Pakistan designation as a front line ally of United States in the war on terror. It seriously weakened Pakistan's sovereignty and resulted in discomfiture in Pakistan because the sacrifices which it offered in the global war of terrorism was overlooked by the United States and instead demanded Pakistan to do more. Terrorism was not just simply a war of Pakistan but equally of the whole world and no other country suffered hard than Pakistan in this war. Looking to this stance of United States, Pakistan adopted changes in its foreign policies which created gaps in their relations. It also seriously affected United States "Exit Strategy" from Afghanistan in the near future. During the last two years of President Zardari government, Pakistan-Iran relations significantly improved. President Zardari was also much perceived towards Iran due to his Shia sect which helped him to sign the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline with his counterpart President Ahmadinejad in 2013 instead of United States continued pressure to withdraw from the project. Although President Zardari showed a bold stance on this project by neglecting US

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pressure but sanctions on Iranian nuclear program and mainly due to financial problems of Pakistan, it was not able to start work on the remaining section of the pipeline.

Although Pakistan signed this project with Iran against the United States intentions but the fate of the pipeline still seemed to be a dream. New Pakistani government headed by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif although showed his commitment with regard to the project while assuming the office in May 2013 but he did not fulfill his promise because his government was indirectly under continued pressure by the United States. Iran also rejected the claims made by the Pakistan that due to the United States sanctions on Iran, it could not complete the remaining pipeline. The lack of sincere leadership from both the sides once again halted this wealthy project. Some believes that it is not more than a lack of Pakistan political will and strategic priorities. Pakistan on the other hand needed to strongly convince United States that if Turkey imports \$6 to \$9 billion cubic meter gas from Iran and similarly Armenia \$1 billion cubic meter gas, then it is illogical why objections have been made on Pakistan to import gas from Iran at the moment when it is confronted with the acute energy crisis. On the one hand United States chanted the slogans to pullout Pakistan from its crippling energy crisis, on the other hand it is struggling hard to obstruct Pakistan from obtaining energy. It exposed the hypocritical and unjustified nature of United States especially towards Pakistan who rendered great sacrifices for that country in a decade war of terrorism.

However now with the lifting of sanctions on Iran and strategic rapprochement between US-Iran, the environment has changed because US has no objections on specific areas of cooperation between Pakistan and Iran. The prospects to build this pipeline has also strengthened when China a close friend of Pakistan shown her commitments to provide a sum of 85% out of \$2 billion, required to build this pipeline. A liquid natural gas terminal will be stretched to the port of Gawadar, southern city of Pakistan Baluchistan's province and also a 700 km long pipeline to other parts of Pakistan, mainly the industrial areas of Southern Punjab. The construction of the entire 800 km LNG pipeline will take about 30 months and is expected to start work on the remaining section in October 2015. The petroleum minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi said that we will have to build only the remaining 80 km pipeline and that is near to complete in six months. He noted that the same projects when complete in two and half a year will be turned into Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline.

The recent visit of President Hassan Rouhani to Pakistan in 2016 will cast its positive signs on both country's political, social and cultural relations. Also Pakistan's decision not to play an active combat role in the Saudi-Iran tussle

on Yemen war was, in fact, the test of its diplomatic skills that have proved successful in keeping Pakistan out of the Iran-Saudi tussle. It has urged restriction in the current Iran-Arab tensions and has opposed any military action

Pakistan and Iran have to become major players in the region. The crossbars have moved, but the bond of brotherhood, cooperation, and economic survival still remains firm. History is being created in the neighborhood of Pakistan and Iran, and now that the menacing obstacle of economic sanctions has been removed, the two countries must move swiftly to ensure that it favors the future of not only both the countries but the larger regions connected to them. On the whole, one can conclude that Pakistan succeeded in pursuing a fairly independent foreign policy without caring for external pressures. As a manifestation of this independent foreign policy, Pakistan will seek to maintain a smooth and friendly relationship with Iran, for the mere reason that it is an important and resourceful neighbor.



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