

Impacts of Regional and Global Players on the Dynamics of Pak-Iran Relations: Post-US Withdrawal from Afghanistan Scenario

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After the US pulled its troops out of Afghanistan, relations between Pakistan and Iran started to return to normal. Both countries have been at odds with each other for a long time because they backed different sides in the Afghan Civil War, and Iran and Saudi Arabia are rivals. However, since the US left, both countries have worked to improve their relationships with each other. Pakistan and Iran have signed several agreements and held joint military drills. Iran and Pakistan have also been having regular diplomatic talks to solve their problems and strengthen their relationships. In particular, the two countries have discussed making a free trade agreement to help their economies work together better. As part of a larger plan to increase its power in the area, Iran has also tried to expand its presence in Afghanistan and invest in infrastructure projects. Overall, the US leaving Afghanistan has improved the relationship between Pakistan and Iran; the two countries are working together and talking to each other more. This has been good for the area's stability because it has made it less likely that the two countries will fight. This thematic analysis-based study aimed to investigate the dynamics of relations between Pakistan and Iran. The internal situation in Afghanistan after the US left, the US's role and foreign policy in the region, and India's relations with Iran are all things that have had a significant impact on the political situation in the region .

Keywords: Iran; Pakistan; Political relations; Asia; Saudi Arabia; US; India; Afghanistan

Both countries share deep cultural and historical ties with one another's people. Modern depictions of Pakistan, especially in Persian literature, show the influence of these ties. After Pakistan became a country in 1947, Iran was the first to recognize it as a state. During the 1950s, both countries improved their relationships with other countries and became more involved in world events. Iran and the United States remained close allies under the rule of the monarchy in the decades following World War II, when the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in a cold war. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini led the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which Islamabad recognized and supported. During the Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988), the government was pressured

to back Saddam Hussein's Iraqi government. However, Pakistan publicly supported the Islamic Republic of Iran instead. The main functions of the state are the security of citizens, justice, public service, mobilization of resources, and infrastructure development, all of which require strong state institutions, which Afghanistan lacks (Khan & Rahman, 2020). The conflict in Afghanistan, sectarian tensions in Afghanistan and Pakistan, American influence in Pakistan and shifts in its foreign policy, Iranian government sanctions, and Pakistan's relations with Saudi Arabia are just a few examples of the many challenges to their bilateral relations.

Over the past few decades, the two countries have worked hard to stop being so hostile toward each other and get closer. Both nations are serious about identifying areas of mutual economic advantage and interest, such as a joint gas pipeline and business venture development. Iran is an important trade partner for Pakistan, which requires much energy due to its abundant oil and gas. New estimates put Pakistan's population at 209 million. The country as a whole has a per capita income of \$1,560. A 5.83 percent increase in GDP puts the country's total at \$313 billion. One-fifth of the country's total output comes from agriculture, and two-fifths of the country's workforce is also directly or indirectly involved in this industry. Even though services comprise 56.3% of GDP, the manufacturing sector still holds a 19.1% share of total production. To the tune of 50%, the country's exports are in the textile and clothing industries. Iran has a significant trade deficit with exports of about \$21.2 billion and imports of around \$48.51 billion. A balance of payments deficit, energy sector growth, and foreign investment are needed to keep the growing population, especially those under 25, in urban areas. This is one of Pakistan's current problems related to its changing population. Attained the level of economic development necessary to sustain the hiring of mature workers (CIA, 2018).

Political Dimensions

Iran and Pakistan share a border. These countries are close geographically and have much in common, like a similar history, culture, language, religion, and even some racial and linguistic traits. Iranians and Pakistanis have an ethnic identity as the Aryans (Ahmad, Shah, & Khan, 2014). Iranians gained favor in Pakistan thanks to the mystical and religious bonds that Shia and Sufi followers shared. However, business ties and trade routes that date back hundreds of years have reliably linked the two countries for decades. Iran, whose culture is also called "Persian culture," has had a considerable effect on Pakistani food, fashion, poetry, music, art, and architecture.

Also, the Persian language was used as the official language of the Mughal Empire until the British took over India. Also, famous Persian poets and writers like Rumi, Hafiz, Saadi, and Khayyam have written works that can be read in Urdu, Pakistan's official language. Also, the fact that Muslims in India fought politically for the Iranian people at the time shows how close the two Muslim countries are to each other. When foreign armies took over Iran in 1940, the All-India Muslim League passed a resolution for him. When Pakistan got its government in 1947, Iran was the first to recognize it as a sovereign state (Hussain, Khan, & Ayaz, 2021).

Occasionally, things would improve between Pakistan and Iran, and sometimes they would worsen. From 1947 to 1965, they could keep good relations with Iran and other Muslim countries. When Iran and Pakistan joined the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), their relationships became more civilized. Having formed the RCD in 1964, relations between Pakistan, Turkey, and Iran have only strengthened. Iran's honest attempts to heal the 22-month breach in Pak-Afghan relations in the early 1960s indicate the high quality of relations between

Pakistan and Iran. The only thing that could have gone wrong was figuring out the border between Pakistan and Iran. However, the problem had been rectified to everyone's satisfaction by December 1967. In the Arab world's fight against Israel, Pakistan joined Iran in siding with the enemy. Also, Pakistan's good relations with Malaysia can be traced back to 1967, when Iran tried to bring the two countries together (Qureshi, 1968).

Pakistan was weakened by the unrest of the late 1960s when events like the East Pakistan fiasco and the birth of Bangladesh occurred. There was a significant decline in strength after East Pakistan broke away. Politically, the state was weak during this time, and Iran was growing in power, especially when the British pulled out of the Suez Canal. Iran intended to overthrow British control in the Middle East. Thus it used the 1973 oil embargo to strengthen its hand and influence. It was a time of relatively solid commercial connections between Pakistan and Iran. The value of commerce between Pakistan and Iran tripled to Rs. 848 million between 1974–1975 and 1976–1977 (Bilal, 2017).

Since Pakistan became independent, relations between Islamabad and Tehran have steadily improved. After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, however, they got worse. As the Islamic religious leadership in Iran grows, it is clear that the US is its main rival. This means that Pakistan's regional foreign policy is about to get more complicated. This heightened tension between the two countries occurred when Iranian revolutionaries held US diplomats, hostage, for 444 days. So, Pakistan took a diplomatic position on the hostages being held by revolutionary students in Tehran (Mohammadally, 1979). Pak-Iran relations suffered after the Iranian Revolution when the United States was viewed as a relic of the past. At the time, the United States and Pakistan were against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. General Zia-ul-Haq, the military dictator in power then, was a staunch supporter of the Saudi government. Unfortunately, Iran is unhappy with Pakistan's foreign policy because of its pro-American and pro-Saudi tilt.

Fears of state meddling in religious concerns, such as General Zia's policies, are shared by Shiite communities in Pakistan and Iran. After the tragic events that led to the death of Sadiq Gangi, an Iranian ambassador, in Lahore (Hussain, 1993) and the deaths of five Iranian Air Force cadets in the country's capital in 1997, sectarian rifts between Sunnis and Shiites surged (Iqbal, 1997). Additionally, Iran's stance on Kashmir shifted in the 1990s. Sometimes Iran would emphasize the need for self-determination and back a bilateral solution (Pasha, 2000).

In the 1990s, when Iran offered India access to the landlocked Central Asian Republics, a tighter relationship between the two countries emerged (CARs). Pakistani and Saudi Arabian cooperation in aiding and encouraging the Taliban in Afghanistan was the second key issue that presented a chance for both states to strengthen the friendship between Iran and India (Pasha, 2000). Pakistan supported the Taliban, while Iran backed the Northern Alliance. Since the Taliban took over in Kabul in 1994, Iran and Pakistan have not worked together to help the Afghan government (Khawaja, 2004). Many Iranian diplomats were killed by the Taliban in Mazar-e-Sharif in 1998, nearly provoking an Iranian invasion of Afghanistan (Stone, 2018).

US Factor in Pakistan-Iran Relations

US-Iran relations are crucial to the study of Pakistan-Iran relations. The United States and Iran have been at odds over two contentious issues: oil and nuclear technology. Healthy relations between the United States and Iran were displayed for everyone to see after Pakistan's independence. Tehran's work on its nuclear program dates back to the 1950s. Ironically, the

United States gave Tehran its first nuclear facility in 1960. The United States became interested in Iran's nuclear fusion-producing plant after the oil crisis of the 1970s. The Islamic government rescinded the Pahlavi nuclear agreement with the United States.

Before 2002, the United States had no idea that Iran was working on a nuclear program; yet, tensions only increased as it demanded that Iran expand its nuclear program. According to a 2003 assessment by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Iran's government must provide full cooperation to ensure transparency in the country's nuclear program's activities (Congressional Research Service Report, 2022). The United States considers Iran a significant threat to its hegemony in the Persian Gulf. In addition, the Iranian government was hit with sanctions in 2006 by the United Nations Security Council as a punishment for its inadequate response to the disarmament process (Congressional Research Service Report, 2022). Pakistan's security and economy are inextricably linked to Iran's leadership, which is why the two countries have always stood side by side. Pakistan will likely join a coalition that would target Iran. Islamabad's ties with Tehran have been affected by the United States' discontent with the Iran-Pakistan gas project (Report of the Congressional Research Service, 2022). According to experts, the United States may have offered the Pakistani government in 1984 to destabilize Iran through Baluchistan (Hussain, 1993). There is no denying the significance of the American influence in the current renegotiation of Pak-Iran relations. Contributes to the plot. Pakistan has to work with its resourceful neighbor to stand up to the United States.

Since the sanctions against Iran were lifted a few years ago, there has been a lot of willingness on both sides to work together to benefit both countries. Nevertheless, former US President Donald Trump's comments show that Iran's nuclear behavior is upsetting Washington. When Trump withdrew from the nuclear deal, President Rouhani compared it to a "psychological war." On the other hand, Islamabad has taken Tehran's side and urged the United States not to leave the nuclear accord but rather to continue dialogue and negotiations (News, 2018). US officials are worried that there are still high-level contacts between Pakistani and Iranian officials. The United States has warned Pakistan against developing business relations with Iran (Ahmed & Akbarzadeh, 2020). President Trump of the United States imposed two significant penalties on August 6. Trump pulled out of the Iran nuclear deal (the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA) at the start of 2020. Given these developments, Pakistan's ongoing cooperation with Iran will likely be seriously affected.

Pakistan's civilian government has tried to keep the public from seeing that it has a bias toward Saudi Arabia in its foreign policy. The country's closer financial and strategic links with Saudi Arabia mean it is more likely to favor the Saudi monarchy than Iran in more significant regional concerns. Since the JCPOA agreement in 2015, economic ties between Pakistan and Iran have been thriving. Pakistan has kept its sovereignty and independence despite Saudi Arabia's demands on Yemen because it wants to keep its territory's integrity in the region. However, Pakistan has been less inclined to impose diplomatic influence on the Saudi monarch.

Literature Review

Ayaz (2013) provides a broad overview of the ties between Pakistan and Iran since 1947. He talked about the diplomatic ties that have kept Pakistan and Iran together over the years and suggested ways that they could continue to grow and thrive. As he saw it, the new ties between the two countries would have to be founded on common interests apart from those shared by Saudi Arabia and the United States. Ahmad (2009) shows how governments interfere in IMF and World Bank talks to improve their political and military standing. He was responsible

for getting American aid packages to Pakistan in the 1950s and 1960s. He explained how Pakistan's votes against China's membership in the UN were affected by American aid to Pakistan in the 1950s.

Kazimi (2011) focused on the broader relationship between Pakistan and the United States. He talked about how Pakistan and the United States have a special relationship. He contended that the United States and Pakistan needed American support against India. However, the United States also sought Pakistan's help in isolating communist nations like the Soviet Union and China. Ansari (2006) provides an overview of U.S.-Iranian relations. Ansari says the relationship between Iran and the United States started in 1953 when the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) established a coup to eliminate Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddeq. This meant that after 1953, the United States had a much more significant impact on Iran. He emphasized that Iran's geographical reality and abundant oil, natural gas, minerals, and metals were the primary reasons for the United States to view Iran as a geopolitically significant nation.

Although Kazimi (2011) highlighted three critical events occurring during the Cold War, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and 9/11, which prompted American support for Pakistan, In his book "Pakistan Studies," Jaffrelot (2008) zeroed in on the impetus behind the American sanctions against Pakistan. From the 1940s to the 1970s, he detailed how relations between Pakistan and the United States evolved. According to him, the American weaponry shipments to Pakistan and the officer training project started with the May 1954 mutual support and defense agreement between the two countries. In his book "Pakistan: A Modern History," Talbot (2005) outlined the events that led Pakistan to adopt a multilateral foreign policy and attempt to create a nuclear weapon. After India's crushing loss at the hands of China, the United States began shipping significant quantities of weapons to the country. As a direct result, Pakistan adopted a trilateral policy involving the United States, the Soviet Union, and China.

Kurzman (2004) wrote in his book "The Unthinkable Revolution in Iran" that the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 was "perhaps the most popularly engaged revolution," with 10% of the people taking part. He claims that only 2% of French citizens participated in the French Revolution and that less than 1% of Russian citizens participated in the Russian Revolution. Soon after the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, Pappas (2006) assessed the crisis in his book, "The Essential Guide to A Country on the Brink." He claims that protesters against the regime in Iran started complaining about the rapid pace of social change and the failure of corrupt and incompetent governments to distribute wealth in 1978, one year before the revolution. The country had gone from a traditional, conservative, and rural society to an industrial, liberal, and urban one. The clerics of Iran made an effort to limit exposure to Western culture in the years following the revolution.

Vatanka (2013) emphasized the shift in the two countries relations since 1979. According to him, after the Iranian revolution of 1979, Islamabad prioritized its connections to the United States and various Arab oil-producing countries in the Gulf region over its ties to Tehran. In his book Afghanistan, published in 2002, Tanner laid up the background of the Soviet-Afghan War and the Jihad of the Mujahidin against the Soviets. Special Soviet forces entered Kabul and Bagram Airfield in Afghanistan on December 24th, 1979. In his account, the Soviet Union's first overseas invasion in over two decades was swiftly organized and executed precisely. He claims that back then, most Americans could not stop thinking about the embassy takeover in Iran.

Pollack's analysis from 2005 says that Washington's decision to form an Islamic Coalition against the Soviets led to much Arab support for the Mujahidin, which helped get the Soviets out of Afghanistan and made it possible for Osama bin Laden and other Islamist terrorists to rise to power. He also talked about how the governments of Pakistan and Iran are handling their plans to make nuclear weapons. Islamabad feared retaliation from the United Nations, so he claims that Pakistan opted for clandestine proliferation and maintained that strategy until 1998, when India conducted nuclear tests. However, news of Iran's efforts to develop nuclear weapons spread.

In his book "Pakistan: A Hard Country," published in 2011, Lieven outlined the history of relations between Pakistan and the Taliban in Afghanistan. He asserted that Pakistan had not been involved in the formation of the Taliban, despite widespread assumptions to the contrary. Madrassa students in Kandahar and the surrounding area formed the backbone of the Taliban leadership. Instead of being motivated by Islamic theology, Islamabad supported the Taliban so India could not use Afghanistan as a springboard for an ethnic uprising inside Pakistan. Musharraf's (2006) book "In the Line of Fire" presented a different viewpoint from the conventional wisdom, which held that Pakistan and Iran had worked together to develop nuclear weapons. He claimed that Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan had been secretly and personally responsible for all nuclear proliferation in Pakistan, despite widespread belief to the contrary. He claimed that in 1987, Abdul Qadeer Khan began sending his nuclear know-how to Iran. He said Abdul Qadeer Khan shipped almost 18 metric tons of nuclear research materials to Iran and Libya through Dubai.

In his book "No departure from Pakistan," Markey (2013) provided one explanation. He saw Pakistan's domestic and international situations as dangers to U.S. interests. He said that nuclear weapons and proliferation, terrorist threats or terrorism, unstable society, expanding connections with China, and tensions with India were the fundamental causes that have challenged American security. Considering these factors, the United States has decided to stop ignoring Pakistan. He concluded that to safeguard American interests in Southeast Asia, the United States must keep its relationship with Pakistan on a solid footing. In their essay titled "Pakistan's Economy: Domestic Dissent and Foreign Reliance," Burki and Naseemullah (2016) noted that periods of military control in Pakistan coincided with the early Cold War, the Soviet-Afghan War, and the global war on terror coincided with times of economic prosperity. The underlying flaws in Pakistan's economy were also outlined (Rahman, 2021).

Conceptual Framework

This study is based on the claims of "neorealism," also called "structuralism." There is much literature to help with the conceptual framework. Kenneth Waltz's work from 1979 is the primary source of motivation. In it, he says that states are the most important players in international politics. Grieco (1988) focuses on "state rationality," while Donnelly (2000) talks about "Hobbesian anxiety" and "uncertainty" about "the intentions of other players." Keohane (1986) acknowledges states as the basic units of action. Waltz (1979) points out that the state has to do more than stay alive, and Gilpin (1983) looks at the link between "wealth and power" in international politics.

Agnew's (2005) definition of "hegemony" and Griffiths's (2008) explication of the hegemon illuminate many features of modern international relations. Lobell and Ripsman explain

state foreign policies, as does Taliaferro (2009). Rose's (1998) "neoclassical realism" focuses on how "relative power" and "primary motivation" affect how states act in the international arena. Both Schweller (1996) and Rasler and Thompson (2001) say that "domestic structure and institutions, ideology, and ambitions" affect how states act in the outside world.

Since the modern global system is supposed to make big wars impossible, it was decided that the word "strategy" needed to be rethought or given more meaning. So, it has been said that states' geostrategic rivalries probably will not be limited to just military issues but will instead include a broader range of issues, such as a growing focus on differences in commercial, political, economic, and environmental preferences. The works of several prominent scholars were consulted to arrive at an explanation that would cover the broader aspects of the term "strategy" rather than remaining limited to the earlier understanding of military matters alone.

Research Design: Thematic Analysis

Table 1

Respondents and Coding

No.	Respondents or Profession	Total	Code
1	Foreign Policy Experts	04	A-1; A-2; A-3; A-4
2	Teachers	03	B-1; B-2; B-3
3	Students/Scholars	03	C-1; C-2; C-3

Source: Generated by scholar

The scholar adopted post-positivism to answer the questions and meet the objectives. The primary question was: What factors affect the political relations between Pakistan and Iran? Furthermore, the objective was: To explore the factors which affect the political relations between Pakistan and Iran. A thematic approach was selected to conduct this study.

Based on the researchers' models, the letters A-1, A-2, A-3, and A-4 are the first four Pakistani and Iranian foreign policy experts. The interviewees (C-1, C-2, and C-3) have all earned master's or doctoral degrees from universities in Pakistan and Iran, while the three respondents (B-1, B-2, and B-3) are all experts in the fields of politics, international relations, strategic studies, and peace and conflict studies in Pakistan and Iran, respectively. With a two-row, three-column layout, the tables show the essential semi-structured interview questions, how the participants answered them, and, on the right-hand side, how the researchers interpreted what the participants said. Diplomatic ties between Iran and Pakistan have had ups and downs since their establishment in 1947. Nevertheless, despite difficulties, ties between these two neighboring countries have persisted. This chapter discusses several essential things that significantly affect the diplomatic relationship between Pakistan and Iran.

Impediments in Pak-Iran Political Relations: Thematic Analysis: First Theme generated

Table 2

Qualitative data analysis design

Theme -1	Afghanistan is a Vital Factor Impacting Pakistan-Iran Political Relations
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Question:	Interviewee Responses	Interpretation
<p>Is the situation in Afghanistan a vital factor in Pakistan-Iran Political Relations?</p>	<p>A2: Yes, Afghanistan remained a significant issue and hurdle in Pakistan and Iran relations since the emergence of the Taliban in the 1990s. Removing the Taliban from power in 2001 improved their relations, but the US withdrawal created the same situation again.</p> <p>B1: Yes. Afghanistan is not merely necessary for Pakistan but also for Iran. Iran and Pakistan have been working hard to bring a friendly government to Afghanistan. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan has also provided another phase of the Pak-Iran confrontation over the Afghanistan issue.</p> <p>C2: Yes. Of course. Both states have been using their influence to shape the internal politics of Afghanistan for their interests. The same is the situation after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The emergence of the Taliban and its full Pakistani support can deteriorate the Pak-Iran political ties.</p>	<p>Pakistan and Iran had also infrequently agreed on a common way to resolve the situation and probably have similar security issues in Afghanistan. The cost of the Afghan conflict in the region refugee overflow has been borne primarily by Pakistan and Iran. Drug smuggling, human smuggling, contraband, and rising crime statistics on both sides of the fence are other societal issues. Although Islamabad also struggled with the spread of extremism through the disputed border as Afghan terrorists escaped into an insecure various tribes region, Tehran had dealt with such a water problem and border control concerns. Nevertheless, rather than working together to address the common enemy, the two are getting themselves backing rival factions in Afghanistan: Islamabad backed the Taliban before 9/11, while Tehran steadfastly backed the Northern Alliance.</p>

Source: Generated by the scholar

Afghanistan is a Vital Factor Affecting Pak-Iran Political Relations

Nonetheless, it is not as if the two sides did not try to bridge the gap that the Afghan issue had opened up between them. Both sides' foreign ministry representatives made many attempts to set up meetings to discuss the situation in Afghanistan. After the tragic events of 1998 in Mazar-e-Sharif, where the Taliban killed Iranian consuls and Tehran accused Islamabad of betraying its trust, Iran's foreign minister, Kamal Kharrazi, suggested shuttle negotiations solve problems between the Taliban and the Northern Alliance (Laipson, 2012). In November 2001, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar said from Islamabad, "The two countries have decided to work together to get things back to normal in Afghanistan" (Pant, 2009). Once again, American influence overshadowed Pakistan and Iran's attempts to settle their differences and bring peace to Afghanistan. It also worked to keep Tehran out of any regional or international efforts to bring peace and security to Afghanistan.

Reports and polls indicate that the Taliban may still control a sizable area of Afghanistan, casting doubt on the feasibility of a graceful US withdrawal. The United States

thinks that Pakistan's lack of full support for its fight against the Taliban and its desire to keep its power in the area has made things worse between the two countries. After President Trump presented the United States' new policy toward Afghanistan, Islamabad rapidly concluded that it no longer considered it a partner in that country and that India should play a much more significant role. Meanwhile, neighboring countries like China, Russia, and Iran would have been worried about Afghanistan's unpredictability for quite some time. Given American hostility toward Pakistan in Afghanistan, it is now easier for Pakistan and Iran to work with other regional partners (Raza & Shapiro, 2021).

Thematic Analysis: Second Theme generated

Table 3

Qualitative data analysis design

Theme -2	Saudi Arabia is a Vital Factor Impacting Pakistan-Iran Political Relations	
Question:	Interviewee Responses	Interpretation
<p>Is the situation in Saudi Arabia a vital factor in Pakistan-Iran Political Relations?</p>	<p>A3: <i>Yes. Saudi Arabia is a close ally of Pakistan, and we also know that Saudi Arabia and Iran are competing for power in the Middle East for regional superiority and leadership. Their animosity can be witnessed in Pakistan. Their rivalry has been witnessed through the alleged funding of their sects' madaris which has time and again contributed to the escalation of sectarian violence in Pakistan.</i></p> <p>B3: <i>Saudi Arabia always considers Pakistan an ally in its struggle for regional dominance. This is why scholars think Saudi Arabia would be a factor in shaping the future of Pak-Iran ties.</i></p> <p>C1: <i>Yes. Saudi Arabia is a significant factor in Pak-Iran political relations.</i></p>	<p>Throughout General Zia-ul-rule Haq's in Pakistan, while the 'Islamization' period had been in full flow and shifting the balance away from Tehran, Pakistan's deep connections with Saudi Arabia became cemented. Since 98 percent of Pakistan's Muslims are Sunnis, the religious aspect of the connection was unintentionally added. Throughout this period, zia-ul-promotion Haq's of Sunni Islam attempted to instill a sense of jihad to support the struggle against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Tehran allegedly gave vital religious but monetary help to Shi'ite groups in Pakistan to combat the rise of Sunni Islamic doctrines. In contrast, numerous Arab nations put finance into opposition to this Iranian action. The outcome proved negative since it made Pakistan a sectarian proxy warzone for such conflict between Shias and Sunnis among Iran and Saudi Arabia. As a result, there was a spike</p>

		in the sectarian conflict, which began at the end of the 1980s but persisted far into the nineties.
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Saudi Arabia's Influences on Relations Between Pakistan and Iran

Many safeguards had been put in place to cut off support from all quarters and keep Pakistan from devolving into sectarian strife. Even though the sectarian violence of the early 2000s is not as bad as it used to be, the radicalism it caused is still around and hurting Pakistani society. After that, relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran got worse. This made Islamabad try to mediate between the two countries many times, but it did not work. They did this because they were worried that the growing animosity between the two countries could be used to control Pakistan's religious establishment. These two groups are helping different regional and international coalitions fight proxy wars in Yemen and Syria (Fatima, 2020).

Furthermore, relations between the United States and Saudi Arabia are tense. Pakistan faces difficulties since it seeks cordial ties with both groups but needs help striking a fair balance between them. In order to keep things calm between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, Islamabad decided not to help Saudi Arabia in the Yemeni conflict. Iran and Syria are not part of the Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC), which Saudi Arabia planned to lead (Sultan, 2018). This made Iran angry. Islamabad has clarified that it will only join the IMCTC if assured that it will not be used as a front against Tehran. This relationship must be handled more carefully because Tehran is a sizeable neighboring country, and Islamabad relies on Saudi Arabia for constant political and financial support. Given time, this factor could worsen ties between Pakistan and Iran (Raza, 2020).

Since 1947, when Pakistan was first created, one of its main foreign policy goals has been to make friends with other Muslim countries. Article 40 of Pakistan's constitution reads, "The Government shall seek to preserve and develop brotherly connections among Muslim nations based on Islamic solidarity," although this provision is not legally binding (MOFA 2018a). This phrase serves as the foundation for Pakistan's foreign policy. Hence, it appears multiple times on the ministry's website. Some Muslim groups, however, have voiced opposition to this strategy. Pakistani officials always favored Iran despite appearing neutral during the Iraq-Iran War (1980–88) (Sciolino, 1987). Long after the 2011 Syrian civil war began, a new challenge arose. In 2014, Pakistan's National Assembly Committee on Foreign Affairs said that Iran's interference in Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq made it essential for the country to stay neutral (GOP, 2014, p. 13).

Knowing why Pakistan is staying out of the fight between Iran and Saudi Arabia is essential. Even though some writers (Qaiser & Khan, 2017; Tehsin, 2017) have pointed out that competition between Pakistan and Iran is a limiting factor and argued for a more fair approach, there has been no evaluation of the international and domestic issues that force Islamabad to be fairer. It also needs to be clarified how Pakistan's stated impartiality benefits the country regarding its ties with Tehran. Even though the phrase will have different meanings in different places, the possible consequences of staying objective are not considered. Studies have been done on bias in international policy decisions in other places (Anceschi, 2009; Dalsjo, 2014; Moldadossova & Zharkinbaeva, 2015), but not Pakistan. In order to accomplish it, this research offers a viable alternative. This research tries to explain Pakistan's foreign policies by looking at

internal and external factors, such as the country's demographics and sensitivity along sectarian lines, historical connections, environment, economy, and geopolitical circumstances. According to the authors of this study, understanding the role of impartiality in any country's policies and activities is crucial for practitioners and academics. Pakistan's aspiration for it and the actuality of impartiality play different but significant roles in the country's national objectives.

Thematic Analysis: Third Theme generated

Table 4

Qualitative data analysis design

Theme -3	The United States is a Vital Factor Impacting Pakistan-Iran Political Relations	
Question:	Interviewee Responses	Interpretation
Is the US a vital factor in Pakistan-Iran Political Relations?	<p>A4: <i>Yes. The US is a global and regional major player. As we know that the US has withdrawn its troops from Afghanistan, but it still has so much influence in regional politics that Pakistan cannot import gas and other petroleum products from Iran.</i></p> <p>B1: <i>As a global superpower, the US has shaped regional political dynamics. The US has constantly been forcing Pakistani governments not to trade with Iran because they believe that Iran is under severe kind sanctions.</i></p> <p>C3: <i>Yes. The US has always been a factor in Pak-Iran relations.</i></p>	<p>Owing to the US' strong impact since 9/11 makes relations between Iran and Pakistan complicated and unclear. The foundation of bilateral ties between the countries continues to be the national interest. The broader definition was added to the tense and antagonistic ties between the two Muslim Countries as just a result of changes in administrations within those countries, effectively undermining domineering American influence.</p>

Source: Generated by the scholar

In the post-strategic era, relations between Iran and Pakistan were useless because of the bad relations between the U.S. and Iran after 9/11 and Pakistan's increased political ties with the U.S. as the front partner in the war on terror. After the Taliban were overthrown, the United States, Pakistan, and Iran entered a hasty marriage of convenience, but it did not last. After a long period of hostility, hopes for peace with the United States were crushed on October 4 when Tehran signed a \$7 billion weapons deal with Moscow. As part of this agreement, Moscow also promised to send Tehran the nuclear reactor it had bought from Russia for its Bushehr nuclear power complex. The U.S. saw these Iranian moves as proof that Iran was evil and could not be

trusted. U.S. officials may have said Iran did not appear to be working on a nuclear weapon. However, the country's purchase of Russian fighter jets and its ongoing development of medium- and long-range missiles prompted concern, leading some to conclude that negotiations with Iran over W.M.D. could put regional security and U.S. friends and allies at risk (Brumberg, 2002).

The United States' retaliation would have alienated Tehran and reduced its influence in Afghanistan. After a period of animosity, relations between Pakistan and Iran were mended throughout the 1990s, due mainly to this event. President Bush exerted enormous pressure on Pakistan's foreign policies, leaving President Musharraf with no choice but to collaborate with the United States to foil Iran's strategic goals. Therefore, Islamabad would not be able to mend its ties with Tehran in the face of continuous U.S. pressure; instead, it started to acquire the upper hand under Afghanistan's new leadership, as reported by Hunter (2010). Because of this, communication between the three countries was made much more complicated, and a sense of not understanding each other grew. Pakistan's relationship with Iran was hurt by how hostile the U.S. was toward Tehran and how it set up military bases in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The United States eventually surrounded Tehran. During this situation, Tehran thought Islamabad was a pro-American country that would make the U.S. feel safe enough to stay in the area for a long time. This led to problems between Pakistan and Iran and instability worldwide (Wilson, 2005).

Taking the lead in the region requires Iran and Pakistan to rise to the top. Even though the crossbars have been moved, the brothers' relationship, ability to work together, and ability to make money are still strong. Now that the scary threat of financial sanctions has been lifted, the two countries must move quickly to ensure that this is good for their futures and those of the larger areas connected to them. The history of Pakistan and Iran's neighborhood is still being written. Even though Islamabad was aware of outside influences, it maintained a foreign policy that was primarily independent. Islamabad would try to keep good relations with Tehran, a significant but influential neighbor, as a sign that it can run its foreign policy well.

Thematic Analysis: Fourth Theme generated

Table 5

Qualitative data analysis design

Theme -4	India is a Vital Factor Impacting Pakistan-Iran Political Relations	
Question:	Interviewee Responses	Interpretation
Is India a vital factor in Pakistan-Iran Political Relations?	<p>A1: <i>Indian strategic relations with Iran significantly hinder Pak-Iran political ties. As we know that India is the arch-rival of Pakistan which always seeks to stop the growth and development of Pakistan. It has always created impediments to Pakistan's progress. Recent developments like Kulbhushan Yadav and his arrival to Pakistan through Iran have also damaged the Pak-Iran political ties.</i></p> <p>B2: <i>India and Iran have friendly</i></p>	<p>India agitates Pak-Iran relationships to avoid Pakistan by developing geopolitics and political-economic connections with Iran. When India and Iran created an Indo-Iranian Joint Commission in 1983, their security and government cooperation began. The Indian proclamation marked a significant turning point in their military and strategic cooperation after MOUs on security coordination had been inked in 2001. The momentous Indo-Iran Defence</p>

	<p><i>relations in many areas, despite India not welcoming the 1979 Revolution. Significant trade ties exist, particularly in oil imports into India and diesel exports to Iran. India is a strategic partner of Iran. The Indian factor became a variable in Pak-Iran relations.</i></p> <p><i>C1: Yes. Both states have divergent views about the Taliban government there. Pakistan supported the Taliban the past which was severely criticized by the Iranian authorities in the past. The same situation is now; the emergence of the Taliban and their tackling of the Shia community will further deteriorate Pak-Iran relations.</i></p>	<p>Accord, inked on January 19, 2003, had been made possible by the Tehran Declaration, which laid the foundation for that too. A few days later, the "New Delhi declaration" and related provisions were also inked in New Delhi. That allowed India to use Iran's installations against Pakistan during a conflict. The military secretaries of India and Iran allegedly debated selling Tehran armaments, notably Indian Konkurs anti-tank guided missiles plus replacement components, whenever the MoUs were signed in 2001. Islamabad is now in a pickle due to such a range of Indo-Iranian cooperation and military collaboration. Strategic coherence was boosted by such military agreements but also strengthened military cooperation.</p>
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Source: Generated by the scholar

India is a Vital Factor Affecting Pak-Iran Political Relations

Just after the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the Taliban's leadership came to a close, while ties between Iran and Pakistan resumed their previous cordial nature. Up until 1979, Iran and Pakistan had a wide range of relationships. During the Arab-Israeli war, when Indian oil imports from Tehran increased, the Indian factor came into play in relations between Pakistan and Iran. The significance of such a factor emerged in the 1990s. However, it was only in the dawn of the 21st century that the broad outlines of India and Iran's economic and security relationship were set. Delhi wants to dominate South Asia, and to achieve this goal; it is strengthening its position concerning Islamabad. For that reason, it has developed close ties with Pakistan's western neighbors. India wants to establish geopolitical and political-economic links towards Tehran to avoid Islamabad, which irritates Pakistan and Iran.

Countries that live in this chaotic global system have their own set of problems because of the way the world is changing. The existing international order had reached a time of transformation, and the absence of solid world leadership had significantly contributed to the formation of strategic collaboration and the tearing apart of old alliances. The ongoing coronavirus epidemic that is causing trouble all over the world is the most recent and unique problem we face. Several countries are developing to challenge the imperialist plans of a sole superpower, signaling the end of the unipolar period. However, some adhere to Samuel P. Huntington's theories about uni-polarity, claiming that while there was only one superpower on the planet, there was no uni-polarity in the international political structure (Huntington, 1999). This perspective is also consistent with Fareed Zakariya's "Post-American Worldwide" theory, according to which multiple big countries would soon appear on the international stage, turning global affairs into a "Post-American" concern (Zakaria, 2011). This does not imply that US

dominance has completely decreased, in any case. It means there is now more than one leading player in world politics (Raza, 2020).

Discussion

The principal objective of this article was to explore the political dynamics of Pakistan-Iran relations, as we know that both of these states are situated in a significant geostrategic position in the region. Both countries have strong military forces that significantly impact regional and worldwide politics. Pakistan has nuclear weapons, and Iran, who also knows how to make them, is the most critical Muslim country. Both states are neighboring states and also have a strong influence on one another.

At first, the scholar looked into political relationships' history and what things could significantly affect those relationships. It is a matter of fact that both political relationships overlap. However, to understand these things better, the scholar put them into two groups, which can make it hard to improve these relationships—reviewing the existing research and talking to experts about these issues led to the discovery of these factors, which can have a significant effect on the political and economic ties between Pakistan and Iran. Afghanistan's internal and external politics were named as things that could affect political relations. So were Indian collaboration with Iran and their policies toward the region, Saudi Arabia's foreign policy and sectarianism issues, and U.S. policies in the area and how they affect regional politics.

The role of India and its ties to the Iranian government, found through thematic analysis and supported by the literature review, can significantly affect how political relations between India and Iran are worsening. Iran-India relations are far-reaching and multidimensional (Singh & Singh, 2019; Maleki, 2013). Iran's geopolitical position is significant for India, as it can counteract China's increasing presence throughout Asia and boost India's regional influence. India is working with Iran to open the Iranian port of Chabahar. The development of this port and Indian infrastructure along Iran's border with Afghanistan not only helps India to counter the massive Chinese investment in Pakistan's Gwadar port but also boosts India's influence in Afghanistan, which counters Pakistan's influence there (Maleki, 2013). It appears understandable in the context of two contradictory developments—Gwadar and Chabahar ports in the South Asian region. Singh (2016) has symbolized it as the Sino-India rivalry in the Arabian Sea.

Iran considers India significant for many reasons.

1. First, India, like Iran, is an Asian country that shares historical, cultural, and ethnic links. India's foreign policy is also congruent with Iran's; they oppose U.S. unilateralism and a unipolar world.
2. Following the New Delhi Declaration of 2003, Iran and India referred to each other as "strategic partners" and embarked on joint military exercises.
3. Iran cannot expect India to favor it in global and security issues, especially in its nuclear issue.

Iran can be helpful to India by providing it with a Muslim partner that acts as a counterbalance to Pakistan, and thus Iran presents a potential strategic advantage for India (Kaura, 2015; Maleki, 2013). Kaura (2015) also has given Pakistan a central place in India's moves toward Eurasian connectivity.

A vast body of academic literature is available on Indo-Iran relations. Topics like India's leading role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and its proximity with the Soviet Union vis-à-vis Iran have been discussed in the works of strategic scholars such as Naaz (2001a), Hunter

(2010), Hussain (2012), and Aishwarya (2017). Some strategic scholars (Alam, 2004; Webb, 2011) have concluded that the Iranian Revolution (1979), the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1979), Iran-US diplomatic relations, and recurrent security threat perceptions changed the geopolitical scenario having drastic bearings on Indo-Iran relations. At the same time, other scholars (Alam, 2004; Fair, 2007; Naaz, 2001b; Tishehyar, 2011; Ramana, 2012) have discussed Iran's and Pakistan's obsession with Islamic posture. Iran's relationships with India, China, and Pakistan have been shaped in many ways by geopolitics. In this respect, geopolitical dynamics like India's relationship with the U.S. on nuclear and terrorism issues and Indo-Pak rivalries have figured prominently in the works of Yazdani (2007) and Teja (2015).

One of the most significant provisions of 2003's New Delhi Declaration sought to upgrade defense cooperation between Iran and India. The wide-ranging partnership involved all three military services: the army, navy, and air force. In 2003, India and Iran signed the Chabahar Port Agreement, strengthening their relationship. It is articulated in the New Delhi Declaration of 2003. It provided a strategic underpinning for bilateral relations and cooperation. It mainly focused on connectivity, including the Chabahar Port and Chabahar-Fahranj-Bam railway network (Fair, 2010, p. 135). Iranian scholar Tishehyar (2011, p. 135) has talked about how important it is for Iran and India to work together on the Chabahar Port from a geopolitical point of view, saying that it would give viable and quick access to the Eurasian region through war-torn Afghanistan. During the visit of Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid (October 2012–May 2014) to Iran in May 2012, both countries showed their commitment to regional security and economic issues, including connectivity. Suresh and Ramesh (2015), on pages 381 and 382, said that these efforts had helped a lot to get the INSTC and Chabahar Port going again in this direction.

After the Iran-Iraq War, Tehran rebuilt its conventional arsenal by purchasing tanks, combat aircraft, and ships from Russia and China. It also reportedly solicited Indian assistance in 1993 to help develop new batteries for three Kilo-class submarines it had purchased from Russia. The batteries the Russians gave to the submarines needed to be changed to work better in the warm waters of the Persian Gulf. India had much experience running Kilo-class submarines in warm water, so this was a good idea. Iran will likely get help from India to improve its Russian-made military equipment, like its MiG-29 fighter jets, warships, and tanks.

Despite these efforts, strategic and military cooperation between the two countries could be much better. This is due to India's turn to the West (Maleki, 2013). The sectarian issue and Saudi Arabia's role significantly affect how Pakistan and Iran get along politically. Yazdani (2007, p. 356) argues that Iran remains apprehensive of Pakistan's involvement in the anti-Iranian Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Also, violence against the Shiite minority in Pakistan worsens because of Sunni sectarian differences. Other gas pipeline routes from Turkmenistan that do not go through Iran are being promoted. Iran was glad that Pakistan took action against anti-Shiite groups on its territory and kept good relations with Shiites by staying out of the Saudi-led war in Yemen (Gulati, 2016).

The current governments of Iran and Pakistan are still hopeful that relations between the two countries will improve. These factors, discussed in this dissertation, strongly influence political and economic relations. To cope with these challenges better, both states' policymakers and decision-makers must play their roles. Their relations can strengthen their political and economic ties if common sense prevails.

Conclusion

The following are the conclusions of the study:

It was concluded that among the factors that can influence

1. Pakistan-Iran political relations are Afghanistan's internal and external policies;
2. US policies toward regional issues following their withdrawal from Afghanistan;
3. India as a factor in critical regional issues and sectarianism issues; and
4. Saudi Arabia's relations with Pakistan

The people we talked to think that sectarianism and Saudi Arabia's policies have the most effect on the relationship between Pakistan and Iran, followed by India.

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