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Shifting Dynamics in the Middle East: Implications for Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

China's resurgence as a global actor has significantly altered international relations, particularly in the Middle East, particularly with Saudi Arabia and Iran. Pakistan's unique geographical location and complex international interactions present an intriguing situation due to these changes. Pakistan's close relations with China, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, along with its shared border and cultural ties with Iran, influence its security concerns, domestic politics, economy imperative, and foreign policy. China's growing relationship with Saudi Arabia is driven by its oil needs, global influence, and regional stability. Iran offers China a valuable counterbalance and potential ally in the Middle East due to its geostrategic position and abundant natural resources. The United States' long-standing hegemony in the Middle East has been put to the challenge by China's growing influence and strategic alliances in the region. This qualitative study investigates the issues relating to Middle East with an objective to evaluate the role of great powers' politics in the region. The Middle East's shifting geopolitical environment could be advantageous for projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), Chabahar Port Development, and Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline.

Key Words: Saudi-Iran Rapprochement, China, Pakistan, United State, Middle East.

Introduction

Iran and Saudi Arabia Rapprochement may have put an end to their proxy war in Middle East. Furthermore, improved regional stability and cooperation in fields like counterterrorism have resulted from closer bilateral interactions and

coordination between Iran and Pakistan, including intelligence sharing and border control. The Middle East is now seen in a fresh and dynamic light, with ramifications for Pakistan's political and economic landscape. The internal stability of Pakistan may be impacted by halt of religious tensions between the Shia-dominated Iran and the Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia and. Pakistan has a significant Sunni majority population, and sectarian tensions could potentially escalate in the country if the Iran-Saudi relationship deteriorates. As interruptions in the oil market or energy supply might have an impact on Pakistan's economy. However, through bilateral agreements involving the sharing of oil sources, some of these problems were partially settled. Shia Muslim clergy spearheaded the Islamic Revolution, which was seen as a direct threat to Saudi Arabia's predominately Sunni government. The two nations have taken part in several proxy wars and conflicts in past', frequently backing rival forces. Pakistan is conscious of regional security concerns because it is close to Saudi Arabia and neighbors of Iran. Any intensification of regional hostilities may have an effect on Pakistan's security and may necessitate the implementation of more stringent security measures. The main outcome of the March, 2023 negotiations was the restoration of two important agreements: the 1998 General Agreement for Cooperation in the Fields of Economy, Trade, Investment, Technology, Science, Culture, Sports, and Youth and the 2001 Security Cooperation Agreement, which were signed by King Fahd of Saudi Arabia and President Mohammad Khatami of Iran. In March 2023, China brokered a deal to resume diplomatic relations between Riyadh and Tehran (Shine & Guzansky, 2023). China has tried to influence into the Middle East diplomacy through this deal (Ali S. M., 2023). China simultaneous announced the agreement by arranging private meetings between the senior security officials of both nations (Ehteshami, 2023). The deal was welcomed by the United Nations, the European Union, the GCC, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, the UAE, Iraq, Algeria, Egypt, Pakistan, Sudan, Turkey, and France (Scita, 2023). Pakistan would be in a good position to support and facilitate these diplomatic efforts as its historical ties to both nations. Another factor is that both countries, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan are predominantly Muslim countries located in close proximity to one another. They foster strong ties between them due to share a common cultural and religious background. This rapprochement could not help just china but also helpful for Pakistan in various factor, as it rebuilds relation with Iran because Pakistan and Iran has severed relationship due to sectarian conflict and this could create peace not in just Pakistan but other Muslim countries like Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Afghanistan, Bahrain, and Lebanon etc. The accord has garnered positive responses from officials in various countries, including the UAE, Pakistan, Kuwait, and Oman, who have lauded it as a significant step towards stability and prosperity. Pakistan has a well-established positive influence on the Middle East and has continuously backed initiatives aimed at bridging gaps in the region. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) intends to boost China's political influence in the Middle East and

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create a sizable, interconnected market. Pakistan's participation in the BRI is essential to its potential economic expansion. Along with nineteen other Middle Eastern nations, Saudi Arabia and Iran, two of China's primary development sites, have signed the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2018. The potential of Gwadar as an industrial hub may potentially attract Middle Eastern and Chinese trade seeking to grow (Malik, 2023). Iran is deliberately attempting to maintain a balance between its relations with China and India as they strive for dominance in this region. China's decision to mediate the Saudi-Iranian conflict may have been influenced by Iran's involvement in the BRI. China's investment in Pakistan's Gwadar Port, which rivals India's investment in Chabahar, may have an impact on Iran's ties with both nations. However, the construction of a roadway and a natural gas pipeline from Chabahar to Gwadar may allow Iran to sell natural gas to China and Pakistan through Gwadar, opening up prospects for bilateral collaboration in a number of areas. China's Belt and Road Initiative includes a 25-year strategic trade and investment pact, estimated to be worth \$200–300 billion, with Iran in 2021. This action can be interpreted as an effort to counter India's investment in the deep-sea port of Chabahar, which is in competition with the Chinese-controlled Gwadar Port in Pakistan. Similarly, Pakistan would welcome stability in the region as a result of Saudi Arabia's cooperation in the agreement. As per the agreement, China and Pakistan will get Iranian oil at a minimum discount of 12%. Saudi Arabia's CPEC investment, which includes building a massive oil refinery in Gwadar, has the potential to revolutionize the area. The growth of Gwadar Port City may also help Pakistan's tourism sector and draw in foreign direct investment from Arab nations. Pakistan's economy will also benefit from the continued development of the re-export and special economic zones in Gwadar. Major investments in Gwadar's oil terminal city have already been announced by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) which invested \$10 billion in petrochemicals in 2019 while the latter is developing a \$5 billion joint venture to build an oil refinery (Liaqat, 2023).

The Complex Dynamics between Iran and Saudi Arabia

China's shifting connections with these regional countries, coupled with the historical, religious, and economic conflicts between Saudi Arabia and Iran, create a complex web of diplomatic maneuvering. Pakistan is in an interesting position as a result of these developments because of its distinct geographic location and intricate international interactions. An analysis of China's diplomatic and business ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran is necessary to comprehend the possible geopolitical ramifications for Pakistan.

The rivalry has impacted the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia since World War II (Khan, 2020). Both countries have recently engaged in "proxy wars" in places like Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq, and they even present direct military threats to one another's territory. The proxy wars in these adjacent nations may have repercussions that include increased terrorism, border security problems,

and cross-border violence. International warriors and extremist organisations have been drawn to the wars in Yemen, Syria, and Iraq (Shine & Guzansky, 2023). A few of these groups may be a security risk to Pakistan due to their ties to extremist groups. In Pakistan, the risk of terrorism and sectarian strife might be intensified by the return of radicalized individuals or the propagation of extremist ideology. These tensions between the countries escalated in Post 2015 era, now they are trying to cool the weather in the Middle East (Divsallar, A., 2023). As Iran has become a full member state of the SCO in September 2021 (Manruo, 2023; Weihang, 2023). The SCO member states stated that the bloc "considers it important to build up joint coordinated efforts by the international community to counter the activities of terrorist, separatist, and extremist groups, paying special attention to preventing the spread of religious intolerance, aggressive nationalism, ethnic and racial discrimination, xenophobia, ideas of fascism and chauvinism." The bloc is seeking further cooperation in the fields of politics, security, trade, economy, finance and investment, cultural, and humanitarian ties (Latif, 2023).

China and Iran signed a 25-year strategic agreement in 2021 called China–Iran Comprehensive Strategic Partnership that bring cooperation in commerce, investment, infrastructure project including BRI, information technology, defense, tourism, and communication. After seven years of antagonism and distrust between the two regional powers, this reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran represents a significant deal to re-establish diplomatic ties (Saleem & Bukhari, 2022). However, it's crucial to emphasize that reconciliation alone might ensure long-term peace or collaboration because there are still many causes of mistrust and dissent between the parties (Timeline, 2023). Iran and Saudi Arabia's reconciliation is a complicated and diverse phenomenon that needs constant monitoring and assessment (Pasha, 2016).

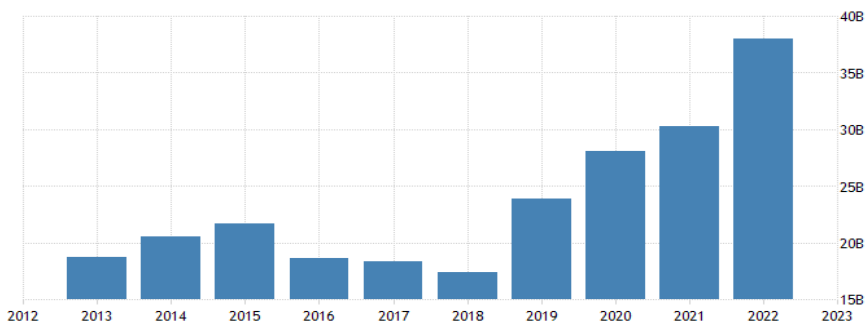
China's Ascendance and Diminished U.S. Influence

On the other side, the United States is no longer able to influence regional dynamics in the same way that it formerly did. The Middle East functioned for seven decades under an unofficial pact known as "oil for security" between the United States and Saudi Arabia (Saab, 2023). The United State received in this pact a steady supply of oil in the exchange for providing security to Saudi Arabia. But that balance was agitated when King Faisal imposed an oil embargo during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War (Zakariah, 2011). A major shift in the power dynamics in the area was indicated by Saudi Arabia's decision to stop using oil as a political weapon. The developments of Saudi Arabia under Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) is another revolutionary element. His initiatives have transformed the nation, giving women's and minorities' rights, offering them more equality, and changing Saudi Arabia's foreign policy to be less ideologically motivated. Now Saudi Arabia is taking a more independent stance when it comes to foreign affairs to find its own economic interests. While, Iran led by President Ibrahim Raisi, is

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pursuing regional reconciliation while adopting a more realistic and practical foreign policy.

This deal seems like China might overtake the United States as the dominating actor in the Middle East (Nic Robertson, 2023). United States has long controlled the region because of strong military presence, strategic allies, and economic ties. But over the years China significantly increased its influence in the Middle East (Nawaz, Khan, & Noor, 2023). China primarily interest in economic and diplomatic developments in Middle East. Furthermore, trade agreements denominated in Chinese Yuan RMB rather than US dollars indicate a move away from dollarization in many Muslim countries (Cafiero, 2023). China export with Saudi Arabia has increased from 2022 as compared to past.



<https://tradingeconomics.com/china/exports/saudi-arabia>

Iran-Saudi Reconciliation: Shaping Pakistan's Geopolitical Landscape

Pakistan has strong ties with China economically and diplomatically from 1950's. China is now emerging power through her economic and projects policies worldwide. China uses soft power in Middle East and plays a mediating role between Saudi Arabia and Iran with the help of Pakistan in March, 2023. Pakistan has strong allies with Muslim country Saudi Arabia but on the other side has a hostile relation with Iran. But now this rapprochement could build a good relation between Pakistan and Iran. The long standing regional adversaries, the Saudi and Iran have overcome their bitter hostility after an approximately seven-year diplomatic gap. On 10 March 2023, China played a mediated role to the restoration of diplomatic relations between the two countries in Beijing (Siddiq, 2023). Iran and Saudi Arabia have decided to reopen their respective embassies and resume diplomatic ties. As a move in the right direction toward resolving long-standing tensions and crises in the Middle East, both countries have pledged to reestablish diplomatic connections within a few months (Gilani, 2023). In addition to reviving earlier security and economic cooperation, this pact upholds the values of state sovereignty and non-interference in one another's domestic affairs (Abbas, 2023).

The reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia has important ramifications and chances for Pakistan, which is China's most important ally a neighbor of Iran, and a strong partner of Saudi Arabia. Normalizing diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran may help ease regional tensions and improve ties between India and Pakistan (Kugelman, 2023). Furthermore, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and India have interests in multilateral forums this deal would be advantageous for those organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Opportunities for positive communication between India and Pakistan may arise through increased cooperation within the SCO (Abbas, 2023). Pakistan may be able to mobilize the Muslim community in favour of the Kashmir cause if relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran improve. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the larger Belt and Road Initiative depend on increased collaboration between China, Iran, and Pakistan in addition to fostering regional security (Sheikh, 2023). Restoring ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia also presents opportunities for energy and economic cooperation, which is advantageous to Pakistan. Iran has long been Pakistan's trading partner, while Saudi Arabia is an also major economic partner with a sizable Pakistani diaspora.

Extremist organisations in Pakistan have incited sectarian bloodshed by taking advantage of Sunni-Shia tensions (Muzaffar et al., 2023). Rebuilding ties between these two regional major players may contribute to a more stable and peaceful Middle East by reducing extremist influence and easing sectarian tensions. Furthermore, there is a sizable Shia community in Pakistan that has experienced marginalisation and discrimination. This community could benefit from improved ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which could encourage religious peace and tolerance in Pakistan. Improved ties with Saudi Arabia could result in political and economic support, especially when it comes to dealing with problems like Kashmir. New prospects for commercial cooperation may potentially arise for Pakistan as a result of improved relations with the Gulf States. Pakistan has a track record of promoting initiatives that repair regional divides and have a positive influence on Middle Eastern affairs. This strategic approach considers the interests of all parties involved and could result in major benefits for Pakistan and its neighboring countries.

Furthermore, Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah and then-President of Iran, Rafsanjani, had a historic meeting at the 1997 Golden Jubilee OIC Summit, which Pakistan hosted in Islamabad. Pakistan and Iran are already involved in China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), while Saudi Arabia may be heavily involved in associated projects given the recent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Participation in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) opens doors for more collaboration in areas like as food and energy security through energy and infrastructure projects, Special Economic Zones (SEZs), and other initiatives (Siddiq, 2023). Furthermore, this accord creates new opportunities for trilateral collaboration between Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, particularly in the field of counterterrorism. With a focus on combating terrorist organisations like ISIS and

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Al-Qaeda, more cooperation against terrorist threats could arise from the sharing of intelligence data among these three nations. As a result of the normalisation of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan may see a decrease in sectarian conflict and an improvement in cohesiveness inside its borders (Mangi, 2023).

In the past few years, Pakistan has made a concerted effort to mediate negotiations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Nawaz Sharif, the former prime minister, called this mediation a "sacred mission" in 2016. Prime Minister Imran Khan travelled to Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2019 and offered to use his good offices to help the two countries have more communication. Tehran and Riyadh welcomed these efforts even if they produced no tangible results. The establishment of inter-regional political alliances and the entry of new actors into regional geopolitics are two additional significant developments (Moini, 2023). Given the congruence of Chinese and Pakistani interests, China's mediation efforts in the region are advantageous to Pakistan. But given how much New Delhi depends on Gulf oil imports, this trend might cause problems there (Karim, 2023).

Regional Connectivity

Pakistan enjoys a distinct advantage in fostering regional connectivity due to its strategic location at the intersection of South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia (Akhtar, 2019). In fact, more collaboration on energy and infrastructure projects, including the CPEC's extension, could be made possible by the normalisation of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This would improve regional commerce and economic integration. Better ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran may make Pakistan's surroundings more stable and encourage regional cooperation to handle its complex difficulties. Geopolitical rivalry and instability have centred on Afghanistan. Pakistan would greatly benefit from this since it borders Afghanistan and has a direct interest in the stability of that nation.

Infrastructure Projects

The potential benefits of improved relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, along with the involvement of Pakistan and India in significant infrastructure projects in Iran, could certainly help the region's economy flourish. Enhancing diplomatic ties and maintaining regional peace might be vital to the advancement of various infrastructure projects. A more conducive atmosphere for regional economic growth and connectivity may be produced by increased collaboration between Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and India (Ali, 2023). Through increased commerce and energy security, these initiatives have the potential to not only benefit the participating nations but also to advance peace and prosperity in the area. These projects' ability to be implemented successfully is still reliant on a number of geopolitical, economic, and security variables.

Chabahar Port Development

India's pledge to support the construction of the port of Chabahar in southeast Iran is a major project that is part of its broader plan to create a connectivity corridor that connects Afghanistan and Central Asia (Ali, 2023). A more stable environment for this project might be created by a thawing of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Stronger links could lessen the possibility of geopolitical disruption and offer the prerequisites for more efficient deployment of this important corridor. This would give items from Central Asia a quicker and more direct path to global markets, which might revolutionize trade and economic growth in the area.

Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline

The gas pipeline connecting Iran and Pakistan is an essential undertaking that has promise for mutual gain. Even though it has previously encountered a number of difficulties, such as international sanctions on Iran and security issues in Pakistan's Balochistan area, a closer relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran may actually make it simpler to get past these difficulties. Better ties may result in the lifting of sanctions, which would make Pakistan's completion of the pipeline more desirable and financially possible. Having access to Iranian gas could improve Pakistan's energy security and help ease its shortages.

Security Impacts

Tensions in the region may lessen if Saudi Arabia and Iran have better relations. Given that Pakistan has close ties to Saudi Arabia and shares borders with Iran, this would be advantageous for Pakistan. A more stable security climate in the area may result from lower tensions. A more amicable relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran may have a good effect on Pakistan's border security, particularly in the Balochistan region where militant groups and cross-border activity have been a problem. In the past, Saudi Arabia and Iran have used Pakistan as a proxy in hostilities. Reconciliation could lessen the urge to choose a side in these disputes, lowering the threats to security.

Reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran would remove any pressure on Pakistan to support Saudi Arabia at the expense of its relations with Iran. Iran and Pakistan now have the chance to continue their security collaboration, which was put on hold following the Iranian Revolution. Pakistan and Iran should work together to stop Baluch insurgent activity in their respective territories. Baluchistan's peace and security would enable Pakistan to investigate the province's mineral riches and move forward with development initiatives that have been put on hold because of militant attacks (Cheema, 2023).

Improved Saudi-Iranian relations would be advantageous for Pakistan, but there are a number of obstacles in the way. Iran and Saudi Arabia do not agree on

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a variety of issues and have been supporting opposing proxies in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. The Iranian nuclear and missile programmes are a point of dispute, and the Saudis and Emiratis will continue to be concerned about Iranian intentions in the region as long as Iran pursues its enrichment programme. There is no assurance that Iran's relations with the US and Israel would get better, even in the event that Saudi Arabia and Iran reach a peace deal. As previously mentioned, American consent would be necessary for Iran to be reintegrated into the global economy. Improving relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran may make things easier, even though there have been numerous barriers to this project's completion in the past that have harmed the security of the region, such as sanctions against Iran and security concerns in Pakistan's Balochistan province (Mehmood, 2023). Saudi Arabia lost around \$340 billion as a result of its military operation in Yemen. If peace were to be achieved with Iran, military activities in Yemen would halt, which would lower military spending. More money would be available for infrastructure development and economic investment as a result. The Houthi militants who were attacking Saudi oil infrastructure will stop their activities. Lower tensions and a stronger emphasis on economic matters would inevitably lead to more investment in the area, which would present Pakistan with new prospects. According to the interim government, Prince Mohammed is scheduled to visit Islamabad in the near future to finalise \$25 billion worth of investment agreements (Peshimam, 2023).

Economic Impacts

Improved relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran will be very beneficial to Pakistan's economy. The kingdom of Saudi Arabia is in the midst of significant economic changes and getting ready for a world without oil. Saudi Arabia lost around \$340 billion as a result of its military operation in Yemen (Jalal, 2020). If peace might to be achieve with Iran, military activities in Yemen would halt, which would lower military spending. More money would be available for infrastructure development and economic investment as a result. Fears of Saudi oil infrastructure being taken over decreased when Houthi rebels stopped attacking them. Lower tensions and a stronger emphasis on economic matters would inevitably lead to more investment in the area, which would present Pakistan with new prospects. A \$25 billion investment transaction is expected to be signed by Prince Mohammad during his upcoming visit to Islamabad, according to an announcement made by the interim government (Cheema, 2023).

He suggested that Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, and China create a consortium to engage in trade and investments given their economies' potential—Saudi Arabia has a booming economy and Iran has enormous trade potential after sanctions are lifted (Islamabad, 2023). Pakistan has enormous prospects to serve as the strategic partner of China, the neighbor of Iran immediately to the east, and a longstanding associate of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Pakistan can improve its trade volume with Saudi Arabia, an economic power, in order to reverse its

declining economy. In addition, a large population of Pakistanis residing abroad, whose remittances from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States make up almost 58% of all remittances, will increase the amount of currency coming in, according to the most recent data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) (Pakistan, 2022). The safe and prompt completion of the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline may be the second-biggest advantage for Pakistan. The nation has an obligation to finish its construction portion on schedule in order to avoid incurring an 18 billion dollar penalty as a result of a bilateral agreement if it fails to do so (Hussaini, 2023).

Pakistan is experiencing serious economic and energy issues that are impeding multiple businesses and resulting in extended power outages. The peace agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, two powerful oil-producing nations with big plans like Saudi Vision 2030 and Iran's new energy targets in the 6th Development Plan, may pave the way for Pakistan to work with these countries on a number of energy-related projects and to leverage investment for joint projects that will advance Pakistan's economic and energy development. A peace agreement between them creates opportunities for cooperative energy projects and draws capital to advance Pakistan's economic and energy growth.

With assistance from Saudi Arabia or China, Iran's natural resources may meet Pakistan's energy needs. As Pakistan imports oil, the Saudi-Iranian alliance has the potential to stabilise oil prices globally, which would be extremely beneficial for the country's economy and inflation management. Additionally, by reducing the number of refugees, acts of cross-border terrorism, and sectarianism, the détente between Saudi Arabia and Iran fosters regional stability. This stability helps Pakistan and Iran move forward with a free trade agreement more quickly and improves collaboration in a number of areas, including trade, energy, agriculture, and technology. A more stable and cooperative relationship between these two governments may present new chances for Pakistani firms and entrepreneurs. (1923, Mehmood).

Saudi Arabia fosters trust in the region by hosting over 1.5 million Pakistanis and providing financial aid to the country (Shah, 2023). Oil credit, investments in infrastructure, energy, and agriculture, as well as shared interests in regional cooperation and conflict resolution, particularly in the Middle East, are all aspects of their historically friendly relationship. Pakistan has provided military knowledge and experience for defence plans, bolstering Saudi security in the Yemen conflict. Pakistan's geographical location presents prospects for regional integration, particularly via the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which unites Iran, China, Pakistan, and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The construction of this infrastructure boosts the local economy and promotes friendly relations between Muslim countries and the rest of the world community. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) membership of Saudi Arabia presents an opportunity to address bilateral problems, notably those pertaining to security and the economy. Saudi Vision 2030 prioritises hiring the country's youth in order to cut unemployment to 7% by 2030 and generate 2.2 million jobs in the private sector

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by 2025 (Grand & Wolff, 2020). Pakistan stands to gain from Saudi Arabia's economic change because of its youthful, educated labour force that is unemployed. People-to-people relations between the two countries may improve as a result. Pakistan now has a chance to invest in the hotel sector because to the enhanced security environment and programmes such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The resolution of bilateral difficulties and the ongoing improvement of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran are critical to the achievement of these chances. An important factor in these changes will be Islamabad's capacity to manage its relations with both nations (Ansar, 2023).

Reduction in Sectarian Conflicts

The Saudi-Iran Rapprochement between Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia and Shia-dominated Iran would create peaceful circumstances that would enable Pakistani authorities to handle potential Shia-Sunni conflicts. The rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran has frequently resulted in sectarian strife throughout the Muslim world, including Pakistan. Better ties between these two nations may result in less outside assistance for sectarian organizations, which would lessen sectarian violence inside Pakistan. In the past, Saudi Arabia and Iran have supported Shia and Sunni organizations in Pakistan, respectively. Reconciliation could result in a decrease in the impact of extremist ideas and sectarian factions within Pakistan. It might help promote harmony between Pakistan's various religions. This would be particularly crucial considering the religious diversity of Pakistan, which includes communities of Sunni and Shia Muslims in addition to other religious minorities.

The Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) chief, Hafiz Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi, expressed optimism about the possibility of Saudi Arabia and Iran's relations improving in his remarks. The resumption of diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran, in Ashrafi's opinion, is good news for the Muslim Ummah, or Muslim community worldwide. "Saudi Arabia always supported Pakistan through thick and thin, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia will steer the Muslim Ummah out of the existing challenges and hardships," he said (News, 2018). This suggests a belief that better ties between these two prominent countries with majorities of Muslims could benefit the Islamic world as a whole. Ashrafi regards China's diplomatic efforts as constructive because they have been proactive in trying to broker a settlement between the two countries. In order for the Islamic world to overcome obstacles like outside meddling, radicalism, and sectarian conflict, Ashrafi highlights the significance of unity within the community. His vision of this unity includes the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Mohammed bin Salman, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, has received appreciation from Hafiz Tahir Mehmood Ashrafi for actively advancing peace and maybe helping to mend Saudi Arabia's strained relations with Iran (Saeed, 2023).

But Western academics and commentators have traditionally disguised this as a war between Sunnis and Shias. But the harsh truth is that there are some groups that are inspired by Iran's hidden military support, such as the Sunni Houthis in

Yemen. The Islamic Republic of Iran is also a source of inspiration for the Palestinian Islamic Sunni extremist group Hamas. Saudi Arabia has spoken out against this social organisation and in support of Israel. With so much unfortunate past behind them, the leaders of both nations have committed to work together for the welfare of their people, putting aside their stubbornness.

Diplomatic Influence

Rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran would remove any pressure on Pakistan to support Saudi Arabia at the expense of its relations with Iran. Iran and Pakistan now have the chance to continue their security collaboration, which was put on hold after the Iranian Revolution. Pakistan and Iran would work together to stop Baluch insurgent activity in their respective territories. Baluchistan's peace and security would enable Pakistan to investigate the province's mineral riches and move forward with development initiatives that have been put on hold because of militant attacks (Cheema, 2023).

Pakistan and India are diplomatically connected to both Saudi Arabia and Iran. They could foster an atmosphere that is favorable for communication and the pursuit of diplomatic resolutions to protracted conflicts, such as the Syria, Yemen, and Kashmir issues, if they use their influence to reduce tensions between these two South Asian countries (Abbas, CISS, 2023). The prolonged conflict in Yemen can fluctuate depending on how things go with the improved connections between the two countries. Thus, the Yemen accord was reinforced by a recent peace accord between Saudi Arabia and Iran, which was mediated by China.

Furthermore, considering the Kingdom's backing for Pakistan's position, diplomatic ties between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan may be important in resolving the dispute over Kashmir between Pakistan and India. It would be smart move for closer ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran on international platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and its consequences for Pakistan and India. The SCO offers a forum for regional nations to debate economic and security-related matters. There is certainly room for further communication and collaboration on regional concerns given the presence of Pakistan, India, Iran, and possibly Saudi Arabia as members or discussion partners. There has been progress in regional diplomacy, as seen by the willingness of Pakistan's foreign minister to attend a SCO meeting in India recently. It demonstrates that despite past conflicts, nations in the region are becoming more receptive to having fruitful conversations. Important doubts also exist regarding whether India and Pakistan would welcome Iran's and Saudi Arabia's participation in regional discussions, as well as whether they can overcome their bilateral issues. In the interest of promoting regional stability and peace, the potential for new regional dynamics and collaboration is encouraging. Iran and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan's neighbor and old allies, might work together more peacefully and cooperatively, which would free Islamabad from the diplomatic balancing act that comes with maintaining relations between the two

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nations. In order to protect its long-term national interests, Pakistan must also learn to adapt to the shifting geopolitical landscape and growing geoeconomic influence. In its dealings with Saudi Arabia and Iran, Pakistan might take a more accommodating stance (Islamabad, 2023).

Conclusion

China's facilitation of the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia has created opportunities as well as serious concerns for Pakistan in a number of areas. The United States' long-standing hegemony in the region has been challenged by China's growing sway, reshaping the Middle East's geopolitical environment. There could be a significant effect on Pakistan's political, security, diplomatic, and economic landscape. Pakistan must carefully monitor its relations with both nations and seek to resolve the underlying problems that have fueled tensions in the Middle East. By doing this, Pakistan may safeguard its own interests and security in addition to contributing to the creation of a more prosperous and secure region. One notable development in the Middle East is the possible decline in sectarian hostilities and religious tensions including Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. In the past, Pakistan has acted as a mediator between the two nations. Pakistan can offer to mediate disputes impartially and make diplomatic attempts to encourage communication. This would include serving as an impartial forum for talks involving several regional participants, including China, Egypt, and Turkey, as well as hosting talks between representatives of Saudi Arabia and Iran. A diplomatic gain will improve security conditions by stabilizing the nuclear program of Iran and Iranian funding for proxy militias, which concerned Saudi Arabia. The Iranian administration may now be less concerned about a regime change that is being pushed by outside forces in exchange. The two sides might defuse their hostilities in the Organization of Islamic Countries, and efforts to terminate the Muslim world's proxy war and lessen the Sunni-Shia division could be supervised by a diplomatic commission. It can also be encouraged to boost trade and economic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran might have a significant positive impact on the development of projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the Chabahar Port, and the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline. These initiatives would create chances for trade and improve regional connectivity. However, considering their historical rivalry and divergent interests, it is imperative to acknowledge the difficulties associated with maintaining the Saudi-Iranian relationship. In order to promote communication, address underlying problems, and increase confidence between these two countries, Pakistan's mediation efforts are essential. This position will involve negotiating on behalf of others, hosting talks, and offering an impartial platform for regional discussions. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) may also provide a forum for easing tensions and dividing the Muslim world along sectarian lines. Enhancing commercial and economic

cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Iran can also promote initiatives aimed at fostering confidence-building and boosting the region's economy.

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