**Israeli Saudi Indian engagement impact on Pak Saudi ties II**

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December 11, 2020

Precisely, Saudi Arabia- crafted policy towards Pakistan largely revolves around three important considerations in the given geo-economic/ geopolitical context: Firstly is Pakistan’s military power and nuclear capabilities articulating the strategic requirements for Saudi Arabia. Secondly, the economic limitations of Pakistan. And thirdly, the core factor of the Islamic identity of Pakistan- the idea of working in partnership for the larger welfare of Muslim ummah- must be an important orientation of Saudi Arabia in the given regional dynamics.

The Saudis must also realise our concern that we cannot ignore our brotherly relations with Tehran, our close neighbor at the cost of our warm relations with Riyadh. And yet, the Saudi dilemma is that while improving its economic ties with India, Riyadh has lost its fervour to raise the Kashmir issue on the OIC forum-an issue that has been creating tension between the two sides-India and Pakistan. Pakistan ‘s logical expectation that the Saudi leadership must adopt a bold stand on the Kashmir issue as it has adopted on Palestine as India cleverly exploits the OIC forum to remain inactive on Kashmir.

Notwithstanding the fact Pakistan has skillfully maintained a neutral position with respect to the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the evidence still endorses that Pakistan has leaned closer to the Kingdom. Some strong converging interests notwithstanding, there emerged few reservations in the bilateral engagement. Pakistan has expressed its concern over the observer status given to India at the OIC summit in the backdrop of  Balakot strikes  that India conducted after the Pulwama attacks. Saudi Arabia actively remained engaged with India in the recent past and both the states have extended the cooperation to numerous sectors.

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The MBS vision for 2030 gives a special place for India-Saudi Arabia relations because of India’s economic potential. India is one of the leading customers of Saudi Arabian oil and close cooperation with India in securing Riyadh’s interest in the Indian Ocean Region remains vital. The statistics show that bilateral trade between India and Saudi Arabia is $27 billion annually, while Pakistan-Saudi trade is just $3.6 billion. The sweeping implication is that Saudi Arabia is reluctant to displease India by asserting itself on Kashmir. But this Saudi policy on Kashmir is not a good departure.

Notably, the Malaysian summit-2019 had raised concerns in Riyadh (albeit unwarranted) that the meeting of Muslim leaders could change the OIC leadership status quo. Riyadh’s accentuated engagement with India caused discomfort to Islamabad. Nevertheless, in the post, August 5, 2019 phase, the UAE-Saudi initiative of honouring Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi (the butcher of the Kashmiri and Indian Muslims ) with a prestigious award while inviting him to a glittering investment forum in Riyadh created a feeling of deep resentment among Muslims around the globe.  Both countries –KSA and the UAE have developed their security ties to India while Mossad’s chief has currently visited the UAE. Riyadh has to understand that the GCC -formed alignment against Iran is not pragmatically sustainable.

As for the Iranian- Saudi rivalry, since taking office, PM Imran Khan has repeatedly tried to mediate between the two rivals. In 2019, after attacks on Gulf oil facilities, the prime minister travelled to Riyadh and Tehran to soothe tensions. After the US assassination of Iranian general  Qassem Soleimani  in January, Qureshi visited the two capitals. It is further revealed that Saudi expectations from Pakistan are not based on realism but on delusion. Pragmatically and realistically, Pakistan’s thinking is correct on the issue of Palestine that any compromise on the issue of the Palestinians will be sufficient enough to kill the fundamental core of Kashmiris’ freedom. PM Khan’s current statement is a true reflection of our national policy sentiment. “Our stance is very clear from day one and Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah had said Pakistan can never accept the state of Israel until the people of Palestine get rights and state,” he said in an interview with a private news channel on last Tuesday.

And most significantly, the military relations between the two countries keep a milestone since, like Pakistan’s role in UN’s Peacekeeping Mission, our troops have been protecting the two holy-sites in Jeddah and Medina. Pakistan’s military has remained the mentor of Saudi military skills training and professional enhancement. The PAF revitalised the status of the Royal Saudi Air Force in the 1960s and Pakistani pilots flew RSAF fighter jets during KSA’s Al-Wadiah conflict with Yemen (1969). In Addition, the Pakistan Army played a pivotal role in assisting the Saudi government in suppressing the Grand Mosque Seizure in 1979. In the current scenario, General Raheel Sharif has been performing a significant role as commander of the IMAFT.

Pakistan Army Chief General Qamar Bajwa visited Riyadh on August 17 to settle the dust. A brief Pakistani army statement via ISPR said Gen Bajwa met with Saudi Arabia&#39;s Gen. Fayyad bin Hamid Al-Ruwaili, chairman of the General Staff of the Armed Forces, and other top commanders to discuss military ties, including training exchanges. The role of Pakistan’s military diplomacy has been instrumental in mending the fences. Despite President Trump’s fool expectation that KSA has to join the current UAE-Israel deal, the Saudi stand is clear that they will not join the deal until the resolution of the Palestinian freedom and territorial rights “The notion that Saudi Arabia will be next to normalise relations with Israel was far-fetched,&quot; said Aziz Alghashian, a lecturer at Essex University. Make no mistake for Riyadh, any means of reconciliation with Israel will be tantamount to jettisoning the core principles of its own foreign policy.

Truly, one thing is clear that the two political powerhouses of the OIC—Saudi Arabia and Pakistan can hardly afford to downplay with each other. The long-standing Pak- Saudi alliance will continue on the basis of strong strategic, political and economic convergences remain pivotal for Islamabad and Riyadh now more than ever before as both countries keenly quest for securing the regional power postures in the Middle East and South Asia respectively. Pakistan welcomes the UAE-KSA entry into China’s BRI.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an energy Islamic power–refashioning itself towards a promising future under MBS’ dynamic leadership.. Pakistan is a nuclear power with immense untapped potential being the fastest growing economies in Asia. Pragmatically, it suggests that the KSA establishment will not follow the precedent set by the UAE– as being the founder member of the OIC– Riyadh cannot escape the role it has been bound to play for the betterment of Muslim Ummah, and hence a foreign policy based on the dynamics of pragmatic revisionism– via diplomatic magnanimity- seems imperative vis-à-vis Kingdom’s policy towards Malaysia, Iran, and Turkey (the ideological arms of the OIC). Hence, the call for the revitalization of the Pakistan-Saudi relations is the order of the day.