**Pakistan in changing regional pattern**

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August 26, 2023

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns)

The visit of the Iranian Foreign Minister to Saudi Arabia on the 17th of August 2023 is momentous, just as the KSA Foreign Minister’s visit to Tehran was in June 2023. The severed relations between the two countries since 2016 were revived with the efforts of China in March 2023, which has been termed as a major political breakthrough in the region. This rapprochement now marks a new beginning in the region and offers many opportunities for growth and development for several countries in the region and beyond.
Pakistan enjoys good relations with all three countries. China is Pakistan’s strategic partner, KSA is a trustworthy old friend, while Iran is the fellow neighbor. Being neighbors, both Iran and Pakistan have negotiated issues between themselves with dexterity over the years. Barring a few border troubles, nothing significantly serious occurred between the two. In fact, Pakistan was included in the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline, which was later named the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline after India retreated from the project.
It was unfortunate that the sectarian strife inside Pakistan was sometimes attributed to the KSA-Iran contest. Pakistan acted prudently while dealing with such troubles and did not let these clashes cast any impact on its relations with both countries. During the war in Yemen, Pakistan also showed neutrality and refrained from involving itself in the conflict. Despite the fact that both KSA and Iran severed diplomatic relations post-January 2016, Pakistan not only maintained cordial relations with the two but also tried its diplomatic efforts to act as a bridge.
Now that the China-led reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran is making news around the world, there are many opportunities for Pakistan to benefit from. Pakistan and Iran are neighbors, and leveraging this geographical contiguity, the Pakistani economy can be supported. Iran can help Pakistan in fulfilling its energy needs as 200MW of electricity is already being supplied to the Makran Division of Balochistan. In collaboration with China, Pakistan can review the IP gas pipeline and convert it into the Iran-Pakistan-China (IPC) gas pipeline. A few weeks back, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian also visited Pakistan, and deliberations were held in various domains of economics, commerce, security, and border management. Certain future ventures related to border markets, banking issues, barter systems, and gas transmission lines were also deliberated upon. It was highlighted during the meetings that the solutions can be developed within the framework of international law for the expansion of economic and commercial cooperation between the two countries.
Maritime is one domain where both countries can work in unison. Iranians, more than Pakistanis, are a maritime nation who are cognizant of this wealth both in their north and south. Iran is conscious of its southern sea vis-à-vis the Persian Gulf, where the Strait of Hormuz lies and is one of the world’s busiest chokepoints. Iran and its neighbors in the Gulf are connected via a ferry service, not only for passengers but also for trade. Pakistan can make use of this untouched domain and commence a ferry service first for passengers, notably pilgrims, and then for trade.
In June 2023, Iran proposed a new maritime alliance with Bahrain, India, Iraq, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Iran to bolster regional security. The assertion was brought to light just days after the UAE announced its exit from a US-led maritime coalition in the Gulf. This is a multilateral arrangement proposed to look after maritime security ostensibly in the Persian Gulf, as most of the member states are located there. Surprisingly, Oman is not included, which is another important state in the Gulf. Pakistan is the closest state outside the Persian Gulf, while India is the farthest. This proposal needs to be reviewed for its operational dividends for the Pakistan Navy, and if found beneficial, then Pakistan may like to propose the inclusion of Oman, which is a far more important regional state vis-à-vis India. The alliance can bolster regional cooperation not only in maritime security but also in maritime affairs overall.
The easing of relations between KSA and Iran brings good omens for Pakistan. The trio of China-KSA-Iran is in Pakistan’s favor, which can accrue substantial benefits financially and cost-effectively. It is now high time to explore such avenues of opportunities and fulfill necessary requirements to achieve economic stability.