**Intricacies of the Pak-Iran Relationship**

[Nawazish Ali](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/nawazish-ali/)

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Two bases belonging to the Iranian-labeled terrorist group, Jaish al-Adl, were specifically targeted after a missile strike by Iran on a village in Balochistan on 16 January. Two days later, Pakistan opted for retaliation by utilising drones, rockets, and long-range missiles to strike at the hideouts of BLA and the BLF near Saravan in Sistan (Iran), emphasising the resolve and making it abundantly clear that it would not tolerate any further escalation. In truth, both governments employ rhetoric concerning brotherhood at their convenience but frequently harbour doubts about the other party’s intentions. Iran’s calculus was intricate, and it seems that they may have miscalculated their actions, hoping Pakistan would absorb the strike and exercise restraint, or at the very least, voice their protest. For years, the Iranian government has consistently viewed Jaish al-Adl, a militant Sunni group, as a major threat linked to Israel. Likewise, the Pakistani authorities consider separatist groups like BLA and BLF to be a significant danger since they function from the Sistan and Baluchistan provinces of Iran. Both Iran and Pakistan are deeply concerned about the presence and activities of militant and separatist groups.

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As Iran conducted strikes inside Pakistan amid Israel’s assault on Gaza, experts have raised concerns regarding its intentions, especially considering its alliances with groups like Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. The strike was both reckless and feckless against a nuclear state and a deadly message sent to the wrong address, on whose cooperation Iran depends for reigning in armed Baloch groups. However, the occasional tensions between Pakistan and Iran can be attributed to their respective differing regional alliances. Iran has historically maintained close ties with India, while Pakistan has forged strong relations with Saudi Arabia. Additionally, economic competition and disputes over resources, such as water, have further contributed towards strained diplomatic relations from time to time.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, despite facing geopolitical and domestic challenges, has proven a resilient nation defying the expectations of scholars and experts by adapting its revolutionary rhetoric and implementing effective political and economic strategies. However, there is no guarantee of continued survival, as history has shown that authoritarian rulers and their regimes can suddenly be overthrown or may collapse. Iran’s future revolves around the possibility of grassroots regime change toward a more pluralistic and secular government. While there have been signs of internal efforts for a change, Iran’s opposition has yet to unite and articulate a cohesive vision for a post-theocratic Iran. This suggests that demographic changes and increased global engagement would moderate Iran’s international behaviour and lead to political liberalization. However, historical evidence shows that autocratic regimes experiencing internal transitions often do not move towards greater pluralism. Instead, they tend to undergo ‘autocratic to autocratic’ transitions. In this scenario, Iran’s transition could resemble China’s leadership change in the late 1970s, shifting from revolutionary fervour to a more bureaucratic style of governance.

The key to fostering a robust relationship between Pakistan and Iran lies in effectively managing geopolitical complexity, strengthening economic ties, and enhancing regional security through counterterrorism partnerships. Encouraging intercultural dialogue and people-to-people interactions will deepen understanding and foster collaboration in a changing geostrategic environment. Both nations must carefully navigate their respective national interests to promote sustainable regional connectivity and economic integration. Adapting foreign policy strategies to align with evolving dynamics and collaborating with other stakeholders will safeguard interests while promoting collaboration. Prioritising regional security through robust counterterrorism partnerships will create a safer environment for citizens and the region, alongside economic cooperation.

The United States has historically imposed sanctions on Iran, which have significantly impacted Iran’s economic and diplomatic engagements, including those with Pakistan. If the USA maintains or intensifies these sanctions, it could severely limit Iran’s ability to strengthen its relations with Pakistan. It is worth noting that the USA and Pakistan share a strategic partnership, particularly in the context of Afghanistan and counterterrorism efforts. This alignment may influence Pakistan’s approach to its relations with Iran, as it seeks to balance its interests between the USA and its regional neighbours. Such a scenario could hinder bilateral cooperation and strategic stability within the region.

Despite the external pressures and influences, Iran and Pakistan may still strive to pursue cooperation in areas of mutual interest, such as trade, energy, and security. This will require careful diplomacy, strategic manoeuvring, and compromises on certain issues to safeguard their respective interests. Diplomatic efforts aimed at mitigating these external pressures will play a significant role in maintaining this cooperation. The future of Iran-Pakistan relations will undoubtedly be shaped by a combination of internal dynamics, external pressures, and regional developments. Diplomatic efforts, economic interests, and security concerns will continue to play pivotal roles in determining the trajectory of their relationship.

Policymaking is challenging, but it is important to consider the costs and balance the positives and negatives. Improved relations between Iran and Pakistan are crucial, and both sides need to address their issues and work towards a resolution.

“Win as many hearts as you can, for breaking hearts is no art.” – Iranian Quote

*The writer is a retired Pakistan Army Officer and can be reached at nawazish30@hotmail.com*