**Pak-Iran Border Oil Ban Myths**

**Despite the slim probability of the rumored oil extraction restriction agreement between Iran and Pakistan, there is a widespread belief in its existence.**

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The recent Iranian President’s visit to Pakistan occurred at a particularly sensitive time, amid widespread dismay across the Islamic world over the perceived lack of a unified response from Muslim leaders to Israel’s genocidal actions in Gaza. Iran distinguished itself as the only Islamic nation not just vocally opposing Israel but also demonstrating the resolve to execute air strikes by launching hundreds of missiles into Israeli territory after Israeli strikes on the Iranian embassy in Syria. While the Pakistani populace generally lauded the Iranian President as a hero for his resolute stance against Israel, social media was rife with discussions centering on a long-held belief concerning restrictions on oil extraction.

The theory, widely circulated online, posits that a 1965 agreement between Iran and Pakistan prohibits oil drilling near the Iranian border within Balochistan. To make the narrative more credible, a well-choreographed and well-timed story is told. It reveals that the original 30-year agreement was renewed during a visit by an Iranian head of state to Pakistan, extending the prohibition for another 30 years, now set to expire in 2025. The visit of the Iranian President in 2024, just a year before the deadline, fuelled speculation that his trip was intended to secure an extension, thereby stirring significant debate among netizens.

[KP inter-madrassa special games to get underway today](https://www.nation.com.pk/30-Apr-2024/kp-inter-madrassa-special-games-to-get-underway-today)

While the rumored agreement between Iran and Pakistan restricting oil extraction near their border remains unsubstantiated, the concept of such treaties is not without precedent in international relations. Around the world, agreements concerning the management of natural resources that straddle national borders have been successfully negotiated and implemented. Examples include the 2010 Norway-Russia treaty on the Barents Sea and the Kuwait-Saudi Arabia agreement over the Neutral Zone. Both delineate boundaries and regulate resource extraction to prevent disputes and ensure mutual economic benefits, underscoring the feasibility of such agreements in managing shared natural resources.

The scientific rationale behind the rumored treaty is not unfounded. It is scientifically possible that extracting oil in one location can deplete reserves in adjoining areas across borders. Oil reservoirs often extend over large geographic expanses, including across national boundaries, and form interconnected underground systems. When oil is extracted, it lowers the reservoir pressure, causing oil from neighboring areas to migrate towards the lower pressure zone. This phenomenon, known as pressure drawdown, can affect oil availability in adjacent regions, necessitating cross-border cooperation and management.

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While there is a scientific justification for the agreement being plausible and precedents of similar agreements exist globally, the narrative that the timing of visits by Iranian heads of state to Pakistan is calculated does not align with historical facts. The record indicates that different Iranian leaders have regularly visited Pakistan, reflecting the ongoing geopolitical dynamics of the region. Notable leaders such as Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, and Mohammad Khatami, as well as more recent figures like Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Hassan Rouhani, and Ebrahim Raisi, have made significant diplomatic trips. These consistent high-level engagements over the decades contradict any claims of limited diplomatic interactions post the Iranian Revolution.

Despite the slim probability of the rumored oil extraction restriction agreement between Iran and Pakistan, which lacks official confirmation or traceable documentation, there is a widespread belief in its existence. This belief likely stems from the complex geopolitical dynamics involving Iran and Saudi Arabia, seen by some as a strategic setting for their regional ambitions. Both nations are thought to support religious seminaries, aligning with Pakistan’s sectarian makeup—its Shia minority and Sunni majority—with Saudi Arabia reportedly funding about two-thirds, and Iran the remainder. This support is believed to help foster sectarian narratives, possibly serving as a way for both countries to extend their influence in the region.

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The strategic purpose of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi’s visit to Pakistan in April 2024 sharply contrasts with recent rumored motivations for such visits, particularly amidst escalating tensions in the Middle East. The official aim of President Raisi’s trip was to diffuse border tensions, strengthen economic and political ties, and potentially rally support against Israel. This visit comes at a time when Iran is vocal in its opposition to recent Israeli actions in Gaza, which have been widely criticized for human rights abuses and described as genocidal. These circumstances position Iran as seeking to consolidate regional alliances and underscore its role as a counterforce to Israeli policies in the region. The visit, therefore, not only aimed at bilateral cooperation but also at situating Iran within a broader geopolitical framework that opposes Israeli actions, contrasting with the rumored reasons that often do not capture the depth of geopolitical and humanitarian considerations involved.

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During President Raisi’s visit to Islamabad, Iran, and Pakistan set ambitious economic goals, including increasing bilateral trade to about $10 billion within three to four years, and discussed finalising a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). These economic aspirations, while promising on paper, appear overly ambitious given the complex geopolitical and economic challenges both nations face. Additionally, Pakistan and Iran face significant challenges in moving forward with their plans to significantly boost bilateral trade to $10 billion, particularly in the context of the international sanctions regime against Iran. The joint gas pipeline project, for instance, epitomizes the difficulties inherent in such large-scale endeavors, having been plagued by delays and geopolitical pressures which oppose expansive trade with Iran.

The USA has traditionally utilized a variety of strategies, such as enhanced economic assistance, military aid, and support in international forums, to ensure alignment with its foreign policy goals. Pakistan is currently facing significant economic challenges, including unfavorable trade conditions and a substantial debt burden. As the end of Pakistan’s existing $3 billion IMF program approaches, the nation is actively engaging in discussions for a new, larger $6 billion program to support sustained macroeconomic stability and structural reforms. The success of this new funding arrangement, as well as additional support from Islamic nations like Saudi Arabia and the UAE, largely depends on the approval of the IMF and, by extension, the USA. This dynamic underscores the delicate balancing act Pakistan must perform in navigating its regional affiliations and the broader geopolitical landscape.

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