**Renewed Stimulus in Pakistan-Saudi Relations**

[Muhammad Asif](https://dailytimes.com.pk/writer/muhammad-asif/)

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Sheikh Abdul Aziz bin Naif Bin Saud, Interior Minister of Saudi Arabia arrived in Pakistan with his six-member Saudi delegation. Apart from meeting his counterpart in Pakistan, the Minister met with President Arif Alvi, Prime Minister Imran Khan, and Pakistani Chief of Army Staff. Minister Abdul Aziz’s presence in Pakistan at the time when Yemen’s Houthi are making regular attacks on UAE and Saudis, is a meaningful purpose to engage in dialogue for cooperation on defence and security cooperation.

While the interior minister was in Pakistan, another step was Pakistan-Saudi Joint Mechanized Training hosted at Multan Garrison reflecting on improved military cooperation and sharing of defence and security excellence. The joint training is aimed at strengthening and sharing knowledge through a comprehensive training program. Joint military drills and procedures are practised and tactical exercises are conducted to refine the same.

The bilateral relationship between Riyadh and Islamabad is all-encompassing and has been instrumental in the foreign policy goals of both countries. Riyadh has been supportive of Pakistan’s case at FATF, assisted oil purchase to Pakistan, and injected money to imbalanced current account deficit. Pakistan has offered assistance to the Kingdom to materialize its green economy by sharing proven knowledge of climate change covering tree plantations and the environment. In this regard, Prime Minister Khan visited Saudi Arabia to attend the launching ceremony of the Middle East Green Initiative where he shared nature-based solutions to combat environmental challenges.

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Kingdom has always been supportive to Pakistan on its key foreign policy objectives especially peace with neighbours. Saudi Arabia further supports Pakistan’s ailing economy by not only providing capital but the oil worth billions of dollars on deferred payments. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Pakistan share the goals of climate change, green economy and digitalization. Furthermore, Prime Minister Imran Khan has already offered his assistance to mediate between Iran and Saudi Arabia to end the diplomatic impasse and build normal relations and made a subsequent visit to Tehran which prevented possible escalation between both countries. Summarizing the entire episode of Pak Saudi Relations, it has been at its best, to say the least with deepening goodwill.

President Arif Alvi reiterated the need of diversifying and deepening the cooperation between both countries including counter-terrorism while condemning the Houthi attacks inside Saudi Arabia. Prime Minister Imran Khan hosted the royal guests at Prime Minister House and praised the role of Crown Prince for Islamic Unity, and initiatives to consolidate peace, security and development in the Islamic world. In reciprocation, Prime Minister Imran Khan reaffirmed Islamabad’s support to Saudi Arabia for the security of Holly mosques and the mainland at large. The sovereignty and territorial integrity of KSA is a prime interest of Pakistan given the religious attachment to the Holy cities of Mecca and Madina.

Another facet of bilateral cooperation between Riyadh and Islamabad is the exchange of prisoners and transfer of offenders under the Agreement on Transfer of Offenders. Upon his visit to Pakistan, his Excellency Crown Prince Muhammad bin Salman announced the release of Pakistani prisoners during the meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan. Since then, Saudi Arabia has repatriated scores of prisoners i.e. 2080 prisoners in the year 2020 to Pakistan held on minor accounts covering theft, bribery, and border crossing. The delegation visited the Ministry of Interior Pakistan and discussed the scope of bilateral cooperation between respective ministries. Both Ministers reiterated to work closely on matters of mutual interest and expand the scope of cooperation including facilitation for pilgrims.

Since Pakistan and Saudi Arabia are bound in a fraternal relationship, the essence of trust, understanding and cooperation reaffirms the traditional warmth of bilateral relationship. Security has been the most critical instrument of cooperation between Islamabad and Riyadh. His royal highness visited the GHQ, Rawalpindi and was received by General Qamar Javed Bajwa to discuss the security matters including the fight against terrorism. The matters of defence cooperation, Afghan security issues, regional security and proliferation came under discussion where the esteemed Saudi Interior Minister appreciated the efforts to handle Afghan security issues and support on humanitarian grounds. He reaffirmed his government’s support for Afghanistan and its people. It is worth mentioning here that Saudi Foreign Minister pledged announced the aid worth $100 billion at the extraordinary session of OIC held in Islamabad in 2020. It conforms to the Saudi efforts of humanitarian assistance in the region and beyond, especially in the Islamic world.

The number of meetings had been phenomenal during a one day visit of Prince Naif. The frequent visits of central leadership helped shape the positive direction of the bilateral relationships and ensure defuse the crisis if may occur. There is a lot of potential for both states to cooperate including economy, trade, Joint Ventures, Oil installations in Pakistan, and energy.

*The writer is Founder (Friends of Belt and Road Initiative).*