

Analyzing the Geostrategic Dynamics in Iraq: Saudi-Iranian Rivalry and Pakistan's Response, 2003-2018

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Abstract: *This research is about explaining Pakistan's proclaimed neutral policy towards the Saudi-Iran rivalry in Iraq. Regarding the Middle East, Pakistan's policy of neutrality has been adopted and claimed by Pakistan after the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which created an environment in the Middle East where Saudi Arabia and Iran emerged as rival forces in the region. While discussing the roots of neutrality, we found that Pakistan's policy of neutrality was the direct response to power politics between Saudi Arabia and Iran to safeguard its political and economic interests in the Middle East. This study uses qualitative methods. More specifically, John Scott's model of Documentary Analysis is used to explore the nature of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran in Iraq and Pakistan's response to it. A historical analysis of different factors demonstrates the extent to which Pakistan can plan, coordinate and execute a clear foreign policy to demonstrate its claim of neutral position.*

Key Words: Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan's Foreign Policy, Neutrality, Iraq War, Rivalry

Introduction

After World War One, states were created by major powers not to provide them with independence but rather to protect the geopolitical interests of those powers. Following this policy, in 1921 a highly diverse ethnic and religious country called Iraq was established not to provide self-determination to the different sectarian groups in the region but rather to create a state to meet the geo-economic interests of the British and French (Cleveland, 2009). Iraq's population consisted of Kurds, Sunnis and Shi'ite communities. The

rural-urban divide further broadens these differences by promoting ethnic conflicts among these religious identities. After the establishment of Iraq, Sunnis, a mere minority, dominated all the political and economic fronts by establishing authoritarian rule for the next 82 years. Especially, the Ba'ath party under Saddam Hussein, marginalized and suppressed the Shi'ite community by neglecting their economic, psychological and social needs and murdering popular religious figures to ban Shi'ite festivals (Dawisha, 2009). Furthermore, during the 80-year history, the political agenda of Iraq's political leaders was

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to build state institutions to reduce sectarian divides between different ethnic identities and to propagate large-scale nationalism under secular ideology.

After September 11, 2001, the U.S. launched a "global war on terror" and invaded Iraq in 2003 to accomplish its broader plan to overthrow Saddam Hussein in order to start a democratic regime in the Middle East (Altorai, [2012](#)). Although the basis for democratic modernization was established in the region due to the fall of Baghdad, the U.S. invasion unleashed a sectarian mindset that exploited various sectarian groups by unmolding the united identity in Iraq. As Vali Nasr explored, the Shi'ite community under the leadership of Ayatollah, Sayyid al-Sistani, saw American invasion as a great opportunity to establish their political dominance. Moreover, the U.S. saw this silent compliance by Shi'ites as a pro-American stance. As a result, Iraqi Shi'ite leaders tried to sway the Americans to their side in order to establish political dominance. As Vali Nasr describes in his book, "The only face of Shi'ism revealed itself to American troops as they entered one of Shi'ism's holiest cities was a distinctly quiescent and even spiritual one."

The Iraq War of 2003 is considered a key source of disruption in the existing regional order in the Middle East. As Barnes-Dacey ([2013](#)) explains, the new dynamics of the Middle East regional power game are directly linked to the collapse of the Ba'ath order in Iraq and its ultimate replacement by the groups allied with Iran which caused a rapid shift in the regional order in favour of Iran and its so-called axis of resistance - Syria, Hezbollah and Hamas. Saudi Arabia and other Sunni-dominated nations of the region are under serious pressure due to the increasing Shi'ite religious-political influence in Jordan, Bahrain and other nations of the region. As a result, the Iraq war cemented Shi'ite forces in other contested areas in the Middle East such as Lebanon, Palestine and Syria.

Previously, in 1980, Shi'ite fundamentalism was strictly restrained, as, the Saddam regime of Iraq, with the support of Saudi Arabia,

Jordan and even the USA, launched an 8-year war to contain the influence of possible exportation of Iranian Islamic revolution to the other nations led by Sunnis in the Persian Gulf region. Iraq has always been a threat to Iran due to its geopolitical position, significant amount of oil resources, and diversified nationalities and ethnicities. Furthermore, the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 significantly altered the regional political order of the Middle East as once weakened and contained Iran, has now become the dominant power of the region by supporting and protecting the Shi'ite political forces in Iraq against the Sunnis and Kurds. In December 2014 King Abdullah II of Jordan called this rise of the "axis of resistance" as "Shi'ite Crescent Area," which means emerging Shi'ite political force in Iraq would break the traditional balance of power by joining hands with other Shi'ite forces in other countries of Persian Gulf (Cole, [2004](#)).

As a fact in history, before the US invasion of Iraq, Iran- Iraq deteriorated relationships had been deliberately supported by the West since 1922 to maintain the balance of power in the Gulf region which ultimately led towards military competition in the region after 1970 (Marr, [2004](#)). Resultantly, as mentioned earlier, after the Islamic revolution in Iran, this military competition gave Iraq a pretext to attack Iran to counter the transportation of revolution to the other states of the region. Moreover, the tensions were heightened at the regional level, as after the end of the Cold War US changed its policy towards the Middle East to weaken the military power of both Iran and Iraq (Sajjadpour, [2002](#)). These far-reaching changes in the strategic backdrop of the region have challenged the old security paradigms, as the local states, with the main regional players, started to reaffirm and renegotiate their foreign policy approaches to one another. Furthermore, this unfolding alteration of regional affairs has not only changed the dynamic relations between the two powers but also affected their approaches in other areas of competition such as the Persian Gulf, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, Syria and Palestine.

After the collapse of Iraq as the eastern flank of the Arab world and the complete withdrawal of U.S. forces, Iran started to enlarge its existing influence by considering Saudi Arabia as an American proxy and countering Sunni Arab diplomatic influence on Iraq in the post-war political situation (Lowe & Spencer, 2006). Currently, Saudi Arabia's policy of rapprochement in Iraq is the ultimate outcome of the increasing threat of Iranian influence, which has intensified the long-lasting debate regarding the regional supremacy and sovereignty within the Arab states, as for all the smaller Gulf states including Egypt, Saudi's new activism in Iraq is considered similarly as alarming as the danger from Iran itself (Kaye & Wehrey, 2007).

Additionally, in 2003 US attacked Iraq by including it in the list of so-called "axis of evil" with Iran and North Korea, which proclaimed these three countries the enemies of global peace. However, due to the number of casualties of American soldiers and the worse security situation in Iraq, the US postponed its military action against Iran. Like any other independent nation of the region, the US military presence in the Middle East has continuously challenged Iran's political structure. Meanwhile, the US government has used Iraq as an activator to pressure the whole Islamic world for political resettlement in Iraq, which created new challenges for Iran on the Iraqi front (Ehteshami, 2003). Resultantly, as the majority of Iraq's population, the Shi'ite political force has become an important factor for Iran to restrain the US from threatening and interfering in Iran's internal security matters.

After the US attack, Iran adopted the policy of "neutral but not indifferent" and has always been opposed to the attack and occupation of Iraq by US and British forces by promoting its engagements with different religious sectarian groups in Iraq (Barzegar, 2005). The relationship between Iraq's new political elite with Iran points out that Iran has emerged as one of the significant beneficiaries in the post-war situation in Iraq. Currently, the conflicts among the ethnicities in Iraq are one of the significant challenges for Iran in executing its

policy in Iraq, as after 1970, Saddam-led Baathist regime had adopted the policy of antagonism towards Iran by marginalizing the Shi'ites and Kurds in Iraq (Wang, 2018).

Therefore, Iran was successful in limiting the power of Sunnis in the post-war situation by keeping good relations with other sectarian groups in Iraq. The other big challenge for Iran is to deal with the possible partition of Iraq, as since 1991 separatist Kurds have been inclined towards the establishment of an autonomous nation. Post-war situations provided Kurds a significant opportunity to achieve more autonomy for a de facto state (Stansfield, 2003).

Historical background

Historically, Saudi Arabia and Iraq have been allies, enemies and sometimes rivals due to their geographical proximity and other strategic and demographic calculations. Resultantly, disputes over land, resources and authorities have remained the persistent element of the Saudi-Iraqi relationship till 1981, when the neutral zone was defined, and borders were formally demarcated between both countries. During the post-Saddam period, both countries again faced bilateral difficulties due to the cross-border religious influence and demonstration effects of Iraq's democratization on the Saudi Arabian political structure (McMillan, 2006).

An article written by Hussein Ibish throws the light on historical background of Saudi-Iraq relationships identifying the familial and political competition that began in 1921 between the Saud and Hashemite clans (Ibish, 2018). He further explains that after the creation of a neutral zone under the British-imposed Uqair Protocol of 1922, Saudi Arabia and Iraq recognized each other. However, in 1955, Saudi Arabia expressed its concerns over Iraq's participation in the Central Treaty Organization, or "Baghdad Pact" by regarding it as an effort to consolidate the British domination in the region. Additionally, Saudi anxieties began to concentrate on the emergence of the Ba'ath Party due to its Marxist and pro-Soviet orientation, which came to power after the coup in Baghdad on July 14,

1958. Likewise, Saudi apprehensions about Ba'athist oriented regime in Iraq were substantiated when Iraq claimed its sovereignty over Kuwait, as Kuwait was seeking independence from British rule in 1961. As a result, Saudi Arabia challenged Iraq's claim in the Arab League by deploying 1,200 troops to Kuwait to replace the British forces. Through the 1970s Iraq started to support different revolutionary, Marxist and republican opposition groups in different countries of the Gulf region. Since 1970, Saudi Arabia has regarded Iraq's Baathist regime as a major threat to its regional interests and a direct challenge to its domestic political stability, as Kuwait remained the major source of deterioration in relationships between Saudi Arabia and Iraq (Goodwin, [1991](#)).

After the Iranian Islamic revolution in 1979, Saudi Arabia and Iraq started to maintain a good relationship due to the convergence of interest against Iran. Resultantly both states formally demarcated their border and arranged to share oil revenue from the defined neutral zone. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait both financially supported Iraq during the Iran-Iraq's eight-year war from 1980-88. Moreover, under the leadership of Saudi Arabia, other six Gulf Arab states established the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to respond to Iran's revolution by excluding Iraq.

As some commentators note the establishment of GCC not only measured the Gulf states' anxiety about Iraq's size and power but also formalized the cultural, historical and familial distinctions between Iraq and other monarchies of the Gulf states (Marr, *The Modern History of Iraq*, [2004](#)). Additionally, in 1990, Iraq's invasion of Kuwait heightened all the apprehensions of Gulf states by leading the two countries towards a prolonged period of absolute enmity and de-facto warfare. Resultantly, in 1991, Saudi Arabia played a front-liner role with the U.S.-led coalition to eject Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Since the fall of Saddam, Saudi-Iraqi relations have been marked by mistrust and resentment as both countries disengaged all diplomatic and trade relations by closing their borders.

Due to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Saudi Arabia unconditionally approved the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, without anticipating the potential increase in the influence of Iran in a new political order after Saddam's fall (Otterman, [2006](#)). Saudi Arabia has attempted to tackle all the potential threats on the political and military front through the lens of its traditional domestic political environment. With the 500 miles long shared border, Saudi Arabia and Iraq have been competing for regional influence as, Saudi Arabia, with the Shi'ite population in its eastern province, has always remained sensitive towards any Shi'ite-led government in the region (Matthiesen, [2015](#)). Contrarily, despite all the ongoing hostility against Saddam's regime, Saudi Arabia, in the beginning, adopted a neutral position during the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 due to the potential consequences of the U.S. invasion. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal was reported to have warned the U.S. over the Iraq war by anticipating the potential threats to regional stability. Furthermore, he said that Saudi Arabia would not support any military action against Saddam's regime without prior U.N. approval, as many Arab Gulf states would view this war as an act of aggression rather than a war for the implementation of UN Security Council resolutions (BBC, *Saudis warn US over Iraq war*, [2003](#)). On the other hand, Saudi Arabia not only participated in the operation against Iraq but also facilitated the U.S. invasion by providing its soil to launch and refuel the U.S. tankers, F-16 fighter jets and intelligence gathering flights (DeYoung, [2003](#)).

Objectives of Research

The following are the objectives of this research:

- To identify the nature of the Iraq war in the context of Saudi-Iran rivalry with a focus on Pakistan's foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia and Iran by testing Pakistan's position of neutrality towards Middle Eastern Conflicts.
- To outline the key factors behind Pakistan's neutral foreign policy

towards the Iraq War by describing the concept of neutrality in theoretical terms.

Significance of Study

The rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia is not the outcome of the recent regional hegemonic motivations of any of the two key players in Middle Eastern affairs. Due to divergence in interests, both countries became key players in Middle Eastern affairs and an unending rivalry started between both competitors. In the diplomatic history of Pakistan, it has always been a major challenge for Pakistani foreign policy decision-makers to establish and maintain a balanced and neutral relationship with the two major regional rival forces in Middle Eastern affairs (Malik, 2016). As a result, the deteriorated nature of the relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia led Pakistan to design a neutral and balanced foreign policy towards Middle Eastern politics. This complicates Pakistan's relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran. Hence, Pakistan's behaviour towards the Saudi-Iran rivalry in Iraq is to be studied from historical, political, ideological and economic aspects for a comprehensive analysis of Pakistan's foreign policy towards the Middle East.

Literature Review

Neil Patrick writes in his book that US policies led to the dissolution of the Iraqi military, which cumulatively weakened the hands of Saudi Arabia by encouraging the rise of Sunni insurgent extremist groups such as Al-Qaida (Patrick, 2016). Moreover, these insurgent extremist groups expanded their influence and started to upset the U.S. policies for Iraq's national agenda which not only narrowed the space for Saudi influence but also strengthened Iran's hands in post-invasion Iraq. Furthermore, some experts verified Iran's accusations against Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab states for the financial assistance to these Sunni extremist insurgent groups in Iraq (Reals, 2006). Additionally, some other experts also conclude that even though insurgency in Iraq is mostly "homegrown" as at least 90 per

cent of fighters are Iraqis, Saudi Arabia has also been involved in supporting different violent Sunni radical groups such as Al-Qaeda, as 350 Saudis were found within the insurgency (Cordesman, 2005). Moreover, in September 2005, Saudi Arabian foreign minister, Prince Saud al-Faisal was reported to warn the U.S. that U.S. policies in Iraq have pulled the Iraqi people apart by stigmatizing every Sunni as a Ba'athist criminal and said that Iran is involved in the business of money and weapons in Iraq (Brinkley, 2005).

From 2006 to 2014, under the premiership of Nouri al-Maliki, relations between Saudi Arabia and Iraq worsened further due to the increasing influence of Iran in Iraq's political order, as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates started to believe that Iraq had been handed over to Iran by the US. Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia showed its reservations about the US administration over the sceptical role of the Iraqi premiership, as a senior Saudi official was reported to point out that Saudi Arabia has adopted alternative means to influence different Sunni-led sectarian groups in Iraq (Cooper, 2007).

Saudi Arabia blamed Iraq's prime minister Nuri al-Maliki for a deteriorating situation in Iraq due to the discriminatory policies at the expense of Sunni communities and reacted by sealing its border with Iraq through a "550-mile high-tech fence" to stop the infiltration of militants (Quetteville, 2006). Resultantly, experts concluded that, from 2005-2014, this personal hostility between King Abdullah and Al-Maliki played a central role in deteriorating bilateral relations (Patrick, 2016). Despite these tensions, in March 2010, Saudi Arabia started to back the secular Shia leader and former Prime Minister Allawi after his meeting with the Saudi King, who later on emerged with the largest number of seats in the Iraqi Parliament. Despite the election results, Maliki, together with the largest coalition in parliament, the approval of the Irani-backed Iraqi chief justice, and U.S. crucial support succeeded in forming another government in Iraq (Ackerman, 2014).

As the consequences of the election debacle outspread, Saudi Arabia and other Arab Gulf

states kept lines open to support crucial Kurdish leaders such as Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) president Masoud Barzani, and Iraqi President Jalal Talabani by inviting them to Saudi Arabia to meet Saudi King (Hussein, [2010](#)). Maliki repeatedly accused Saudi Arabia of interfering in Iraq's internal political matters by funding violent extremist Sunni insurgents and ISIL, though Saudi Arabia denied all the accusations (Black, [2014](#)).

Moreover, as a result of Maliki's maladministration and sectarian policies, ISIL re-entered Iraq in 2014 and captured major cities of Iraq such as Falluja and Mosul. As a result, a quasi-official militia, named Popular Mobilization Force (PMF), which contained sectarian Shia Militia groups, was created to fight against ISIL and other extremist groups (Faleh, [2017](#)). Due to the above-mentioned political moves by the Iraqi government, Saudi Arabia attempted to re-engage with the Iraqi people through carefully defined political and diplomatic moves, as the Saudi King vowed \$500 million for Iraqi people as humanitarian aid regardless of their political, sectarian, religious and ethnic connections. Some commentators identify that although Saudi Arabia has attempted to build networks for post-invasion Iraqi politics through social and humanitarian projects, it found itself frozen as its Sunni partners constantly lost ground to other sectarian and ethnic Shia groups aligned with Iran (Patrick, 2016). Still, Saudi Arabia has been able to find opportunities to re-engage with different sectarian groups in Iraq, as, in September 2014, Maliki resigned due to the lack of support from the U.S. and the heavy pressure from many different communities in Iraq. In 2015, the uprisings of the Arab Spring overturned the regional geopolitical status quo in favour of Iran, which led Saudi Arabia to support different sectarian groups in Iraq by adopting a new and more assertive approach to push Iran to its border (Filkins, [2018](#)). Saudi arrangements with Iraq accelerated as Shi'ite cleric and politician Moqtada al-Sadr visited Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi and won considerable parliamentary seats in the May 2018 elections. As a political leader and

religious figure, he adopted a more balanced and regional approach by promoting his relationships with Gulf states, Turkey and Iran at the same time. As a result, Saudi Arabia sent an official request to Iraq's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to open a consulate and also invited prominent religious and political personalities of Iraq (Haddad, [2017](#)). Furthermore, along with many other world leaders, Saudi Arabia overtly conveyed congratulations to Haider al-Abadi, the new Prime Minister of Iraq and leader of the same ruling Dawa Party by appointing its first ambassador to Iraq after the Gulf War of 1990 (Mustafa, [2015](#)). Till the end of 2016, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iraq remained tense due to the execution of a Shia Saudi cleric, named Nimr-al Nimr, and the ongoing clashes in Yemen. Furthermore, Saudi-Iraq relations became more strained as Saudi Ambassador to Iraq Al-Sabhan ruthlessly criticized Iran's interference in Iraq. In May 2017, Saudi Arabia replaced him on Iraqi request and both countries, despite tensions, continued to explore new ways to maintain better relations. However, Iraq perceives the Saudi view regarding Iran's policy in Iraq as an unfair approach, particularly, when over the fifteen years, Iran, as a long-term regional ally, has played a central role in rolling back ISIS by building alliances with Iraq's sectarian, political and economic sectors (Vaez, [2018](#)).

Iraq under the premiership of Abadi, has attempted to balance relations between the regional rivals rather than being entirely influenced by one or the other, to pursue its own political and national interests. Throughout 2017, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iraq remained cordial due to some sudden and surprising breakthroughs, as in February 2017, Saudi Foreign Minister Adel al-Jubeir visited Baghdad for 27 years (Khan, [2017](#)). Furthermore, in March, Saudi Arabia congratulated Iraq on its continuing victories against extremist groups, and later that month a committee was formulated to halt exchanging accusations and to promote closer cooperation (Fayyad, [2017](#)). These developments were followed by a visit of Abadi to Saudi Arabia, as

he affirmed that Iraq would not be part of any axis in the region by specifying the need for reconciliation between the Sunnis and Shia groups in Iraq, and announced the establishment of a joint committee to protect the border, combat drug smuggling, and exchange intelligence regarding the counter-terrorism information (Arabiya, [2017](#)).

Material and Methods

This article measures the scale of neutrality in Pakistan's foreign policy towards the Saudi-Iran Rivalry during the Iraq War. Rather than scrutinizing every aspect of the Pakistan-Saudi Arabia or Pakistan-Iran relationship, we chose to focus on salient events in which Pakistan had a vested interest in achieving favourable results. In this case, we will explain a series of events that happened in Iraq within the defined period and evaluate Pakistan's position on these issues. The researchers pursued an analytical and descriptive route by reviewing extensive literature and different research studies on the topic. This article has qualitative scope, as the Iraq war will be analyzed by using John Scott's model of Documentary Analysis to explore the nature of rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran and Pakistan's position on these issues.

By applying this research method, the Iraq war will be discussed in its contemporary context for a better understanding of the war of influence between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Moreover, given the historical background of the Iraq War, Pakistan's foreign policy behaviour will be examined thoroughly by applying the framework of defined indicators of neutrality. By analyzing multiple dimensions of this issue, a perfect continuity and suitable assessment can be drawn regarding the factors behind the Saudi-Iran rivalry and Pakistan's claim of neutrality.

Saudi-Iran Rivalry in Iraq War

In May 2018, a Middle East report, published by International Crises Group, evaluates Saudi Arabia's policy in Iraq on political, economic and sectarian sectors to contain Iran's

increasing influence in the region. The report points out that engagements with the Shi'ite political elite in Iraq were the central point of Saudi policy in Iraq, as they signify the largest segment of tensions in the post-war political structure of Iraq by dominating the government and other stakeholders (Group, [2018](#)).

Furthermore, the only area where Saudi Arabia has an advantage over Iran is economic arrangements in the process of re-constructing Iraq by investing money, expertise and services, in December 2018, Saudi Arabia and Iraq signed 18 memorandums of understanding for cooperation in the field of energy during the inauguration ceremony of the seventh edition of Basra oil and gas exhibition (Mostafa, [2017](#)). On the social front, Saudi Arabia has attempted to restore its image by patronizing Iraqi individuals, tribes and communities through media engagements that had been spoiled due to its discriminatory treatment not only to its own Shi'ite population but also to the Shi'ite segment in Bahrain, Syria, Yemen and Lebanon (Saudi Arabia: Back to Baghdad, 2018). According to Mansour ([2018](#)), the new pragmatic approach of Saudi Arabia limits the influence of Iran by considering Iraq as a zero-sum game. He further identifies that after a 25-year-long disengagement from Iraq, Saudi Arabia has adopted pragmatic diplomacy by attempting to build good relations across the sectarian landscape of Iraq in order to contain Iranian influence. Saudi foreign policy decision makers, with Yemen, Qatar and Lebanon, have taken some bold initiatives to reverse regional order through gradual cooperation in social, political and economic segments of Iraq's new political structure. Some commentators have portrayed that under Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, Saudi Arabia has altered its previous policy of "patience and pragmatism" based on a heavy investment of wealth to win the allies to consolidate Saudi power in the region (Eilts, [2004](#)).

Analysis of Pakistan's Position on the Iraq War

After the tragic events of September 11, 2001, American reaction to the incident put not only Pakistan but the whole Islamic world in a dilemma regarding their reaction to the incident. A bilateral issue at its initial stage became an international crisis due to the hard positions taken by the USA and UK towards Iraq in the name of the global war on terror.

Following the events, Pakistan has played a significant role as a frontline state in the global war on terror against Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations in Afghanistan and Iraq (Eckholm, 2003). Despite the growing reservations of many Islamic leaders and protests and demonstrations staged by tens of thousands of people in Pakistan against the US attack on Iraq, the Pakistani government faced a dangerous choice by backing the US-led Security Council resolution against Iraq, as Pakistan held one of the crucial votes in United Nations Security Council. Historically, in 1955 Pakistan and Iraq joined the Baghdad Pact, a military alliance to contain Soviet influence in the region. However, Iraq left in 1959 (Butt, 2003). Subsequently, the relations between Pakistan and Iraq deteriorated after 1973, as Iraq has been involved in providing military aid to Baloch separatists in Pakistan and Iran to destabilize both countries and to create an independent greater Baluchistan. Additionally, Soviet-made weapons were also discovered at the Iraqi embassy in Pakistan through an effective special military operation by the Pakistan army (Zafar, 1973). Furthermore, Iraq was the first Arab country that recognized Bangladesh. Consequently, during the Iran-Iraq war, Pakistan maintained relations with Iran by selling US-made small weapons and stinger missiles (Shah, 1997).

Immediately after Iraq attacked Kuwait in 1990, Pakistan validated the US-led military campaign against Iraq by supervising the placement of Pakistani troops in the Middle Eastern region (Kamran, 2013). In 2004, a case study authored by Dr Ayesha Siddiqi and developed by PILDAT presented a factual commentary on entire issues regarding the Gulf Crisis of 1990 by mentioning that at the initial stages of the Gulf crisis, Pakistan

condemned Iraq's attack on Kuwait and dispatched its military troops on Saudi's request to assist the Saudi security forces (Siddiqi, 2004). This case study shows that Pakistan committed 11,000 troops at Saudi request that were largely positioned at Tabuk, which was located further away from the main battleground. Later on, Pakistan also sent more troops at the American request against Iraq. Resultantly, Iraq started to build close relations with India by forming a joint ministerial committee, as in 2000 Iraqi Vice President visited India and afterwards in August 2002 President Saddam Hussein vowed Iraq's unconditional support to India over the Kashmir issue (Amin, 2010). Nevertheless, in 2003, the U.S. invasion of Iraq has not only changed the political, religious and security dimensions of the Middle Eastern region but also affected severely the foreign policies of other countries of the world, especially Pakistan. After 9/11 the US invasion of Afghanistan left very negative repercussions for Pakistan due to the huge influx of Afghan refugees and rapid spike in terrorist attacks in Pakistan.

Initially Pakistan, as one of the UN Security Council's 10 non-permanent members, clearly opposed the U.S. and UK-backed resolution in favour of immediate military action against Iraq due to the immense public pressure (Anderson, 2003). Although the US and UK made many calls for the placement of Pakistan's military troops in Iraq by taking the cover of GCC and OIC, Pakistan declined these requests due to the internal anarchy and uncertain security environment in Iraq (Dawn, Pakistan to wait for appropriate time: Troops for Iraq, 2003). In September 2003, after his meeting with US President George W. Bush, then Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf said that Pakistan would send its troops to Iraq as a part of the UN-backed force with the troops of other Muslim nations. Meanwhile, in March 2013, according to a report, Pakistan and Iraq were likely to sign an agreement to improve defence and security cooperation by participating in each other's military exercises. Shah M. Jamal, Pakistan's Ambassador to Iraq

asserted that Pakistan will not only train Iraq's armed forces but will also provide training to 35 Iraqi pilots in PAF Academy Risalpur (INP, 2013). In May 2014, an article published in The Guardian reported that two agreements were signed between Pakistan and Iraq and the Iraqi Government placed an order to buy MFI-395 'Super Mushshak' trainer aircraft from Pakistan (Khan, 2014). Furthermore, the article indicates that in a high-level meeting, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif pledged to extend full support to meet Iraq's security needs by providing essential training to its troops.

In 2014, the emergence of Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria became a threat to global peace and security. Meanwhile, the sudden rise of ISIS not only endangered the peace and security of Iraq and Syria but also jeopardized the territorial integrity of other states in the Middle East, as it wanted to establish an Islamic state by capturing the multiple Muslim states in the region. Furthermore, the roadmap published by ISIL showed Pakistan and Afghanistan as part of the Islamic State. Subsequently, a ten-member Strategic

Planning Wing was reportedly formed under the umbrella of ISIS for the recruitment of Pakistani citizens (Zaidi, 2014).

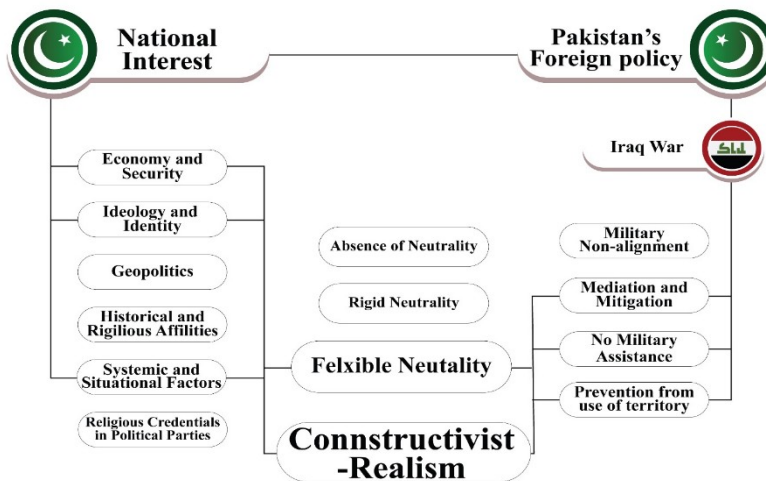
A report published by the provincial government of Baluchistan indicates that more than 10,000 Pakistani fighters from different areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Federally Administrated Tribal Areas (FATA) have been recruited by ISIS to carry out terrorist activities against Pakistan. Some reports identify that some prominent commanders of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), a banned militant organization in Pakistan, joined ISIS (Yusufzai, 2014). Resultantly, in 2014, the Pakistan Military with the full support of the political government, launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb and dismantled all the safe havens of terrorist organizations in North Waziristan (Ghazanfar, 2016).

Figure 5.3. Pakistan's position on Iraq War

The following figure provides an idea of Pakistan's position on the Iraq War

Figure 1

Pakistan's position on Iraq War



Pakistan's position on Iraq War

The above Figure 1 indicates that Pakistan has managed to adopt a flexible neutrality position

towards the Saudi-Iran rivalry during the Iraq war. Three indicators of neutrality are readily apparent in Pakistan's position towards the Iraq war such as a neutral state may not

augment the war-making capacity of any belligerent by keeping itself away from the conflict, mediation and mitigation of the sources of tensions between belligerents, refusing to provide any military assistance, obligation to prevent belligerents' use of neutral's territory to transport troops. Because of this policy, significant shifts in Pakistan's positions regarding the Iraq war have been observed. Due to the systemic and situational factors and some economic reasons Pakistan adopted a flexible neutral foreign policy towards the Iraq war.

Following the events, Pakistan has played a significant role as a frontline state in the global war on terror against Al Qaeda and other terrorist organizations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Despite the growing reservations of many Islamic leaders and protests and demonstrations staged by tens of thousands of people in Pakistan against the US attack on Iraq, the Pakistani government faced a dangerous choice by backing the US-led Security Council resolution against Iraq.

Discussion

Pakistan's motivations for maximizing its economy and strengthening the armed services justify Pakistan's engagements with Saudi Arabia and Iran in Iraq. Pakistan's flexible neutral behavior in Iraq is the result of its pursuing its pragmatic national interest. Pakistan believes in maintaining its influence throughout the region by backing proxies of the major rivals of the Middle East. Sometimes Pakistan's relationships with Saudi Arabia and Iran deteriorate over its attempt to create a balance between these rivals. In particular, Pakistan has backed UN resolutions regarding Iraq, because in this way Pakistan could pursue its pragmatic national interests. Pakistan has keenly been interested in gaining and maintaining its support from Pakistani populations regarding the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran in different parts of the Middle East especially in Iraq. As a result, the Pakistani government has been challenging the Saudi Arabian and Iranian wishes in their proxies to gain and maintain its popular support. Unlike Iran, Pakistan has never

confronted any threat from Saudi Arabia due to its geographic distance.

Conclusion

Due to the politicization of the sectarian divide, the

competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran for regional influence aggravated a number of battles to bring down different regimes in Iraq. To create a balance in its foreign policy, Pakistan has been struggling to maintain its neutral position toward the proxies in Iraq by planning, coordinating and executing a clear foreign policy to demonstrate its claim of a neutral position towards the Middle East.

After analyzing the case studies of Iraq, it is apparent that multiple factors influence Pakistan's foreign policy toward the Middle East. Though its foreign policy behaviour matches the realist expectations, constructivism also helps in understanding the role of ideological and historical factors. Our research suggests that the engagement with Saudi Arabia and Iran may be the "elegance" of Pakistan's foreign policy, where Pakistan pursues its material interests by using the ideology and national identity

Recommendations

The findings of this research further show that the extensive literature on Pakistan's foreign policy analysis suggests a need for a holistic approach to explain Pakistan's changing behaviour towards different foreign policy issues in the Middle East such as the Yemen crises, Iraq war and Syrian crises. As a result, it is impossible for a single theory to explain Pakistan's foreign policy behaviour. Therefore, it is suggested that future researchers include multiple theoretical explanations while analyzing Pakistan's foreign policy behaviour towards the Middle East. Such research should focus on different domestic, international, ideational and material factors in shaping Pakistan's position towards the Middle East. Going forward it would also be possible for future researchers to look at the extent to which Pakistani people classify the role of leadership in formulating Pakistan's foreign

policy behaviour towards the Middle East. Pakistan has felt insecure due to the increasing role of India in the Middle East, and doing more research would be quite attention-grabbing for

a future researcher to look at India's relationships with Middle Eastern states and its threats to Pakistan's foreign policy towards the Middle East.

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