

## **Pakistan-Iran relations: the security scenario**

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Pakistan and Iran are both repositories to ancient civilisations that have through the millennia evolved distinct characteristics – with many an overlap – which mark the two brotherly neighbouring states markedly apart from the entire region in their periphery. Bonded as they are by the Sulaiman Mountains in the north-south axis, the two nations – their culture, their language, their literature, their food, their religion, their way of life; indeed, their worldview – have more in common with each other than either has with the rest of its adjacent lands.

Pakistan, home to world's most ancient Indus Valley civilisation where scientific evidence has established the cultivation of wheat and barley in Mehrgarh at the foothill of the Sulaiman range nine thousand years ago, is bound in the opposite, eastern, direction by the Gangetic Plain where settled life began at least five thousand years later. Iran, too, represents one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, with historical and urban settlements dating back to 4000 BC.

The Gangetic Plain, on the other hand, has been the breeding ground of the racist Brahmanic creed which has been an anathema to the republican spirit of the dwellers of the Indus Valley. It was but natural for those in the Indus Valley to readily subscribe to Islam's essential message of human equality at birth.

That marks the first and the most fundamental commonality between the Indus Valley tradition and that of the land and people of Iran, the next-door western neighbour. In fact, those on the soil of Pakistan got converted to Islam in its early days mainly by the mystics and holy men travelling their way from Persia of the time. Also, while Persia, in its place, had come to subscribe to the same religion as that of its Arab neighbours to the west and south, the differences in the two civilisations are too two well known to be mentioned here.

Another characteristic shared down the ages by the dwellers of the Indus Valley and Persia, distorted in both instances by mostly prejudiced Western writers, relates to their jealously guarded freedom against foreign incursions on the one hand, and adherence to a strictly non-aggressive posture toward the neighbouring states in each case, on the other. The reason was simple enough: nature had bestowed upon them an abundance of its resources that in the first place required constant vigil against pillage by outsiders and, conversely, left no appetite for external aggression.

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As for the Indus Valley, the hordes that swept down from the northern heights could never consolidate their hold over these parts and were obliged to move on farther to the east in the Gangetic Plain for establishing their sway. The same was the case with Persia which, in the face of the wave upon wave of invaders, was always quick to reassert its national identity.

Islam's ascendancy on both sides of the Sulaiman range heralded the start of a glorious era in this part of the world when, instead of the age-old tradition of enriching each other, the Indus Valley and Persian civilisations converged to the point that the two became practically indistinguishable. That is best illustrated by the adoption of Persian as the language of learning and literary expression by those in the land of the Indus.

There is every reason to believe that this confluence of cultures would have continued to bear fruit in the realms of not just language and literature but also in various branches of science, but for the European colonial intervention – both direct and indirect – that not only set the two neighbours apart but also thwarted their individual advancement.

After gaining independence from colonial rule in 1947, Pakistan – which is nothing if not the stretch of the Indus Valley today – established most friendly relations with Iran. The two countries have stood out for each other in times of need which illustrates the depth of fraternity between the two nations.

The purpose of this presentation is not to dwell on the history of friendly relations between Pakistan and Iran over the past 62 years since the former's emergence as an independent country in South Asia. All relevant facts in this regard are well documented and have been amply commented on and analysed. The objective here instead is to attempt a contemporaneous overview of the extended region in which the two countries are situated so as to bring home the point that the given geostrategic realities of their shared neighbourhood call for a much greater cohesion in their policies than has obtained at any time in the past.

What is being proposed, in other words, is for both Pakistan and Iran to strive for regaining the kind of solidarity that functioned at the level of their respective societies prior to European colonial intervention in this part of the world that, as already noted, had set the two entities apart. That, it will be argued, is no mere poetic vision but a dictate of time. Imperialism, both regional and extra-regional, is on the prowl along the periphery of the two nations and, should Islamabad and Tehran fail to close their ranks at this juncture, it would become an increasingly arduous task for either to individually tide over the challenge.

We would, for our present purpose, focus on the South Asian flank of Iran's neighbourhood whose security dynamics are inextricably intertwined with Tehran's regional interests and concerns. The two countries central to the given calculus are, of course, Pakistan and India.

Without taking a detailed look back at the chequered relationship of India with both Iran and Pakistan in the post-colonial era, what is most striking in the immediate context is New Delhi's self-perception of a power on a par with the United States in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 9/11 on the regional scale to begin with. Its long-nourished vision of global ascendancy, informed with the mythological creed of Brahmanic supremacy, now saw an unprecedented opportunity to progressively realise the dream.

Thus, within three short months of 9/11, under the pretext of an attack on Indian parliament in which New Delhi could not advance any evidence of Islamabad's involvement, India started mobilising its entire military machinery in preparation for pre-emptive strikes against Pakistan. If the United States had arrogated the right to such offensive moves as a consequence of 9/11, India was no less entitled to follow suit – so went New Delhi's ill-advised calculation.

Pakistan was obliged to take defensive measures; and India found itself militarily incapable of carrying out its threats. Having thus been checkmated by Pakistan, India was obliged to deescalate the situation by withdrawing its forces from the border after more than a year of futile brinkmanship.

Significantly, India had decided to embark on this abortive misadventure even as the United States had been pressing hard on Pakistan to allow its forces the right to hot pursuit across the country's western border with Afghanistan in America's so-called war on terror. The effect of the unprovoked Indian hostile acts, therefore, was to subject Pakistan to a pincer move.

It would also be worth recalling here that, while Pakistan was still facing this possibly two-front situation vis-à-vis the United States on the western front and India on the eastern, Tehran was busy cultivating unprecedented affinity with New Delhi. President Khatami was in the Indian capital as the chief guest at the Indian Republic Day military parade on January 26, 2003. During the same trip, the two sides launched the highly celebrated "strategic partnership" with the signing of the "New Delhi Declaration" and seven other substantive agreements.

One of the agreements was on the development of transportation linkages between Iran and India. The Indian establishment could not hide its glee at having made Iran agree to a scheme that, in its view, made Pakistan irrelevant to the evolving regional strategic framework. To quote C. Raja Mohan, an analyst widely known for his proximity to those who matter in New Delhi,

"In a move that could radically alter the geopolitics of the region, India and Iran today [January 25, 2003] agreed to step up work on transport projects that link the subcontinent with the Persian Gulf, Afghanistan, Central Asia and Europe. The projects announced today ... as part of a new road map to strategic cooperation, would increase the leverage of India and Iran in the Great Game for accessing the landlocked resources and markets of Eurasia.

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“Ever since the Partition in 1947, Pakistan had blocked India’s access to Afghanistan and beyond. The new transport corridors through Iran could liberate India from the geographic constraints imposed by the division of the subcontinent.”<sup>1</sup>

It is another matter, though, that India has of late been less than keen on giving substance to its “strategic partnership” with Iran. The reason has everything to do with the even more grandiose “global partnership” it has struck with the United States in July 2005. We shall revert to this aspect later.

While still on the subject of Iran’s relations with India, however, it must be emphasised that Pakistan has all along stood for an entente involving Tehran, Islamabad and New Delhi. Pakistan welcomes the friendship between Iran and India, and views it as an important regional relationship with the potential of contributing to peace and security in this part of the world. Note must also be made here of the singular role played by Iran to exactly the same end in the aftermath of the Mumbai attacks in November 2008.

At the same time, the development of a broad security understanding between Pakistan, Iran and India – for which Tehran is ideally placed to play a crucial role – would certainly go a long way in discouraging extra-regional powers from meddling in the affairs of the region; often at the expense of peace, security and stability in this neighbourhood.

New Delhi has, however, anything but given up the pursuit of an ever-expanding militaristic role and presence in the entire region between the Persian Gulf to the south and not just Afghanistan but also Central Asia to the north. Pakistan, of course, remains the only gap in this extensive regional power projection by India in our shared part of the world.

It would be pertinent at this point to make a brief reference to the racist ideology that drives this relentless Indian quest to global domination. It is important to note at the outset that the given Brahmanic doctrine, although authored some two-and-a-half millennia ago, has had a chance to be put into practice by the Indian ruling establishment for the first time in history only after the country’s freedom from colonial rule in 1947.

The question, therefore, is not whether the doctrine is, to begin with, practicable or not – which, quite clearly, it is not – but how much damage it can cause to, first, regional and then global peace and security as it is progressively applied by New Delhi as its all but divine politico-military strategy. We in South Asia have understandably been at its receiving end for over sixty years now and are well aware of its disastrous consequences.

In its essence, the dogma relies upon the progressively expanding realm of the conquering ruler of the Brahmanic power. This core entity is first surrounded

by states that are by definition its enemies. As the conqueror tries by all means possible to subdue these surrounding countries, he cultivates friendship with the second circle of states beyond the inner circle of enemies.

When the realm extends to the territories of these enemies, countries in the outer circle of friends become enemies; and so on and so forth till the conqueror establishes his sway over the entire mankind that, by virtue of its 'inferior' status at birth, is destined to be ruled by him. It is as simple as that.

It just so happens that Pakistan, together with all the smaller states of South Asia, is situated in the inner-most circle of enemies, while Iran – as also Afghanistan – is blessed to be in the second circle of friends for the time being.

One has of late come across repeated references by the Iranian leadership to the effect that Pakistan's safety and security is the same as that of their own country. These sentiments were expressed most clearly by Iran in the aftermath of the late November 2008 attacks in Mumbai when India had, once again, started flexing its muscles on Pakistan.

A most note-worthy aspect of Iranian declarations in this regard has been Tehran's understanding that the heinous acts in India could not have been perpetrated by Pakistan, and that those from outside the region had been responsible for them. Generally, the media interpreted the reference to external powers as denoting the United States and Israel. Tehran has, at the same time, long held the position that external states should stop interfering in affairs of this region.

This Iranian position needs to be looked at in three complementary contexts. The first; India's global ambition, that is; has already been indicated. All one need add here is that, much like his racist soul-mate in the Talmudist rabbi, the Brahmanic pundit, too, has arrogated lies and deceit as permissible means to the pursuit of the 'divine' mission of establishing his superiority over the rest of mankind. The killing of any number of the 'lesser beings' among India's own citizens in order to advance the same supreme objective, would, apparently, be fully justifiable to this scheme of things.

The present writer had occasion to first encounter this trait while working on the unrest in Indian Punjab during the early 1980s that led in June 1984 to the storming of the holiest Sikh shrine of the Golden Temple by the Army. It was established on the basis of credible published sources in India that not a single killing of a member of the Hindu community in the state could be attributed to a Sikh, yet it was the pretext of violence between the two sides that was advanced by New Delhi as the major justification for the launch of the military operation.

One, therefore, has had reason to be sceptical about the claims made by India from time to time about Pakistan's involvement in terrorist acts in the former

country without the provision of verifiable evidence. The same was the case with the December 2001 attack on parliament. Even now, despite the lapse of some five months, New Delhi continues to drag its feet on sharing the full evidence on the Mumbai incidents with Islamabad. Not just that; India has also declined to give the relevant details to the Interpol, even as Pakistan wasted no time in taking the international agency in confidence on whatever material was available to it.

Now, coming to the second dimension of the external powers' meddling in our regional affairs, India has for all practical purposes placed itself in the position of a proxy for the United States as a consequence of the strategic alliance between the two countries. The ramifications here are multifaceted, but it should suffice to briefly mention here just a couple of them.

One of its early effects, insofar as Iran is concerned, was the casting of the Indian vote in favour of the International Atomic Energy Agency resolution on September 24, 2005, finding that Tehran's "failures and breaches constitute non-compliance" and calling "on Iran to return to the negotiating process."<sup>2</sup> Later developments in this area need not be recounted here. India's nuclear deal with the United States, on the other hand, has since been finalised. Iran has every reason to complain of double standards being applied by the United States in this regard. The country's representative to the IAEA voiced concern on this count when the IAEA approved an inspection plan for India on August 1, 2008.<sup>3</sup>

The same is the story with India's dragging its feet on the long-delayed Iran-Pakistan-India natural gas pipeline project. Apart from the U.S. opposition to the scheme, India's reluctance on this score may also have to do with its inborn aversion to the advancement of peace and stability in its adversarial relationship with Pakistan in the first instance. For, as the project has appropriately been called "the peace pipeline", it would, if carried through, have entailed mutual stakes for Pakistan and India in each other's internal stability. That is a concept alien to New Delhi's mindset.

India has for long years now been actively involved in creating difficulties for the brotherly ties between Pakistan and Iran as well; for, friendship between the two strong Muslim nations is an anathema not only to New Delhi but also those outside powers that Tehran would refer to as interfering in our region to advance instability. It is well known that Pakistan has not only most steadfastly upheld Iran's inalienable right to acquire nuclear power for peaceful purposes, but – in the face of stiff Western pressure – has continued to pursue the gas pipeline project even if India is not to from part of it.

Decisive progress on this front was marked only last week when the Federal Cabinet of Pakistan gave its formal approval to the terms and conditions of the proposed Iran-Pakistan pipeline project to the exclusion of India. It can only be hoped that, given the crucial importance of the project in terms of cementing the fraternal ties between the two nations, the project would now be completed at the

earliest. Even if India has any reservations to developing a transnational infrastructure of regional stability in this part of the world, Islamabad and Tehran have every reason to put the same in place without further loss of time.

With regard to India's covert activities along Pakistan's western borders with Iran and Afghanistan; to say nothing of acts patronised within Pakistan; Islamabad has long been complaining about the goings-on at the string of consulates established by New Delhi close to Pakistan's borders with the two countries where they do not have any valid, legitimate business to conduct. Unfortunately, these protests have not been heeded.

However, now that a noted American writer has substantiated these very concerns of Pakistan, Islamabad's words may be taken more seriously by our neighbouring friends. One refers here to the reported remarks made by C. Christine Fair, a Senior Political Scientist at the RAND Corporation who has authored and co-authored several books, including, most recently, *The Madrassah Challenge: Militancy and Religious Education in Pakistan*, at a roundtable discussion held by the prestigious *Foreign Affairs* on March 31, 2009. On the subject of these consulates, she stated:

“I think it would be a mistake to completely disregard Pakistan's regional perceptions due to doubts about Indian competence in executing covert operations. That misses the point entirely. And I think it is unfair to dismiss the notion that Pakistan's apprehensions about Afghanistan stem in part from its security competition with India. Having visited the Indian mission in Zahedan, Iran, I can assure you they are not issuing visas as the main activity!

“Moreover, India has run operations from its mission in Mazar (through which it supported the Northern Alliance) and is likely doing so from the other consulates it has reopened in Jalalabad and Qandahar along the border. Indian officials have told me privately that they are pumping money into Baluchistan.”<sup>4</sup>

We have to be clear that those fomenting trouble on both sides of the Pakistan-Iran border are friends of neither country. Under whatever different names these various miscreant gangs may operate here, they are all advancing the same imperial designs of powers both internal and external to the region. They are exploiting the cross-border ethnic linkages of the local population in both the countries to destabilise Pakistan as also Iran. It is, therefore, of utmost importance that Islamabad and Tehran recognise their common challenge and deal with it accordingly.

Although Pakistan has for some years now been hinting at the involvement of certain regional countries in its western province of Balochistan bordering on Iran, it has only recently made a clear public statement in this regard. According to a report in *Dawn* on April 23, 2009, “The prime minister's adviser on interior affairs surprised the Senate ... when he directly accused Afghanistan and India of

supporting the Baloch National Army's campaign for Balochistan's secession from Pakistan ... The so-called BLA, he said, was set up by the former Soviet Union and was now being supported by the governments of India and Afghanistan. He claimed that some 4,000 to 5,000 Baloch people were in various camps in Afghanistan and they were being trained there for terrorist activities in Pakistan."<sup>5</sup>

That brings us to the third dimension of the external powers' interference. Along with the United States, the other external influence whose working in our shared region would be alluded to by Iran as being detrimental to peace and security, is, of course, Israel. It would, in this connection, be useful to bear in mind that, unlike the fledgling strategic alliance that India has struck with the United States, the nexus between New Delhi and Tel Aviv is in a class of its own. The two sides have been rightly described as "soul-mates."<sup>6</sup>

Tel Aviv's animosity for the Islamic Republic of Iran needs no elaboration. However, what is often overlooked is the deeply adversarial position in which the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is held by Israel. According to a recent report in *The Jerusalem Post*, the country's former Intelligence Chief, Maj.-Gen. [res.] Aharon Ze'evi Farkash, told a large gathering of top Israeli military officers and scientists in Haifa that Pakistan rather than Iran should be viewed as the country's top enemy. According to him, it is Pakistan that poses "a more immediate threat" than Iran as the former is already a nuclear power.<sup>7</sup>

The same argument has been repeated by a top leader of the new government that came to power in Israel in April 2009: "In a major shift in threat perception for the Jewish state, Pakistan and Afghanistan have now been identified as the biggest threat for Israel with the much publicized danger emanating from Iran's nuclear programme pushed to the second rank.

"Israel's hardliner Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, in his first interview to a Russian daily after taking charge, has said that since he began warning against the nuclear threat from Iran, nuclear threats have become more prevalent. However, he said that a more urgent problem has developed in Pakistan and Afghanistan...

"These countries (Pakistan and Afghanistan) are a threat not only to Israel, but to the global order as a whole," he said. "Iran is not Israel's biggest strategic threat, rather Afghanistan and Pakistan are," he emphasised."<sup>8</sup>

The upshot is that there is many an actor out to destabilize our region in general and to create difficulties and misunderstandings between our fraternal ties. We must show maturity to not just see through their designs but also to frustrate them. The terrorist activities across our shared borders, sponsored by interests external as also internal to our part of world, drug- and arms-running and human smuggling are all challenges common to both Pakistan and Iran.

Better coordinated and more effective measures need to be put in place to check them.

In the larger security context, India has recently seen an opportunity to advance its regional hegemonic ambitions in the new U.S. regional approach toward Afghanistan. Knowledgeable sources in Islamabad speak of discussions being underway between Washington, D.C., and New Delhi on the possibility of deployment of Indian troops inside Afghanistan. Should that prospect materialize, India, acting as a proxy to its Western as also Israeli allies, would effectively extend its strategic reach from Afghanistan in the north to the Persian Gulf in the south where it already has naval presence.

Sectarianism is yet another weapon long employed by our enemies to spread discord within and between Muslim societies. Pakistan has suffered from this scourge from time to time over the past three decades. Yet, despite these relentless attempts during such a long period, the people of Pakistan have refused to fall for these divisive moves and maintained complete sectarian harmony at the social level. An attack on a Muslim place of worship or the targeting of a person belonging to one sect or another is not a sectarian incident, though those perpetrating it desire that it should be so viewed. They are all cowardly, terrorist acts pure and simple. That is the crucial point to be borne in mind in this context.

The times for Pakistan and Iran are challenging, indeed, but they equally provide the opportunity for the two countries to close their ranks. In order for that to happen, the two sides have first of all to be clear about their common foes.

It is also a dictate of time that the two countries developed a joint strategy to secure their maritime interests. Given such a formidable array of navies of both regional and extra-regional powers in the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea, Pakistan and Iran must start conducting joint exercises in these waters on a regular basis.

In particular, the increasing presence of such an aggressive blue-water navy as that of India in their vicinity should be a matter of deep concern to all the regional countries including Iran and Pakistan. It would be worthwhile bearing in mind here that the multi-role naval base India has constructed near Goa is fully equipped for power projection in all parts of the region.

Finally, the two countries need to improve and upgrade their transportation and communication linkages. Those trying to create differences between the two sides have made it a habit to advance the Gwadar Port in Pakistan and Iran's Chahbahar as rival international trade routes. They can – and should instead – be complementary. Their joint waterways have more than enough real and potential trade volume for the two of them to handle.

## **Notes**

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- <sup>1</sup> C. Raja Mohan, “India, Iran unveil road diplomacy”, *The Hindu*, Delhi, January 26, 2003.
- <sup>2</sup> [http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaIran/iran\\_timeline2.shtml#september05](http://www.iaea.org/NewsCenter/Focus/IaeaIran/iran_timeline2.shtml#september05)
- <sup>3</sup> Fredrik Dahl, “Iran accuses U.S. of double standards”, *Reuters*, Tehran, August 2, 2008. <http://uk.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idUKDAH21962320080802>
- <sup>4</sup> <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/discussions/roundtables/whats-the-problem-with-pakistan>
- <sup>5</sup> Ahmad Hassan, “Afghanistan and India behind BLA: adviser”, *Dawn*, April 23, 2009. <http://www.dawn.com/wps/wcm/connect/dawn-content-library/dawn/the-newspaper/front-page/afghanistan-and-india-behind-bla-adviser>
- <sup>6</sup> For a detailed look at the relationship, see, Ghani Jafar, “The Brahmanic-Talmudist Alliance: ‘Soul-Mates Come Together’”, *Regional Studies*, Institute of Regional Studies, Islamabad, 20(2) Spring 2002: 3-65.
- <sup>7</sup> “Farkash: ‘Peace more likely with Syria than PA’”, *The Jerusalem Post*, March 11, 2009. [www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1236764156826&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull](http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1236764156826&pagename=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull)
- <sup>8</sup> Harinder Mishra, “Pak, Afghan are the biggest threat for Israel”, *Press Trust of India*, Jerusalem, April 22, 2009. [www.ptinews.com/pti%5Cptisite.nsf/0/60D48517B3C12DB2652575A000328025?OpenDocument](http://www.ptinews.com/pti%5Cptisite.nsf/0/60D48517B3C12DB2652575A000328025?OpenDocument)