

## **Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Relationship: Changing Geopolitical Dynamics**

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*The close and cordial ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia is a well-established fact which traces back to the historical roots, the shared values, and to their interdependence. The basis of the relationship stood on the ground that in both countries perception being made was the centrality of the role of Islam in their respective politics, which served as a common ground to formulate the ties. But, with changing dynamics of global politics, and national interest taking precedence over ideology, the two countries have witnessed phases of bitterness in their relationship over the period of time. While their interests may not coincide with the other most of the times, yet the relationship between them has remained firm. In this changing environment Pakistan has to make some hard choices when it comes to balancing its relationship with Saudi Arabia and Iran while on the other hand, Saudi Arabia will try to tease Pakistan with its growing rapprochement towards India. This paper will take into account the factors that have been instrumental in shaping their ties in the changing geopolitical set-up and also to look at the way ahead in their relationship.*

**Keywords:** Geopolitics, Security, Islam, Economy, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia.

### **Introduction**

The birth of Pakistan took place at a time when the world was divided into power blocs headed by the U.S. and Soviet Union after the end of World War II. It was in this backdrop that Third World countries were affected by the influence of the international environment as they found themselves vulnerable to the outside pressures which adversely effected their autonomy in world affairs (Rizvi, 1993).<sup>1</sup> Because of the close association of Pakistan with Islam, especially the developments taking place in a pre-independence period where it generated sympathy of the Muslim world, this led Pakistan to project a Muslim identity in its foreign policy and to forge closer ties with the Muslim world. Over the period of time, Pakistan's relationship with the Middle Eastern countries has strengthened of which Saudi

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<sup>1</sup>Hasan Askar Rizvi, *Pakistan and the Geostrategic Environment: A Study of Foreign Policy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993), p.16.

Arabia forms an important linkage. Although two countries like every other conventional relationship share strategic, security and economic concerns, the interests and sentiments shared by them are not ordinarily associated with the contemporary inter-state behaviour. It is in this backdrop this paper will look at length the broader nuances involved in the relationship between these countries.

### **Historical Background: Islam as a factor**

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia share a cordial relationship which traces back to the times when the Muslim League was fighting for a separate nation of their own and for which they needed both material and moral support. The relations between the two countries shaped because Islam emerged as a binding force. However, Pakistan's signing of Baghdad Pact brought into focus an ever most important force that drives states to formulate foreign policy: the 'national interest'. Because Pakistan saw the world through the antagonistic prism of India and started to build military power to bring about strategic parity with India. By joining the Baghdad Pact, Muslim countries felt betrayed by Pakistan, with Arabs terming this pact as a neo-colonialist move designed to create a rift within Muslim states (Siddiq, 2018).<sup>2</sup> Saudi Arabia was a bit more vocal in its opposition to the pact and thus urged Pakistan to drop its membership while terming act as "a stab in the heart of Arab and Muslim states".(Siddiq, 2018).<sup>3</sup> The subsequent fallout of the Baghdad Pact was that Pakistan was left with few non-Arab, pro-West allies i.e. Iran and Turkey. Also, in 1962 Saudi Arabia in order to not alienate India, did not support a resolution on Kashmir in UN (Jaffrelot, 2016).<sup>4</sup> Pakistan did not mind upsetting its relations with other Muslim states when it came to its national interest- it joined the West at a time when fellow Muslims were fighting them. Later on, the changing dynamics of world politics and the threats posed by Communist and Pan-Islamist movements converged their interests. This was because Gamal Abdul Naseer of Egypt was riding high on the nationalistic that they feared for their interests in the region. Besides, Egypt at that time was very apprehensive about the intentions of Pakistan in the Middle East and moreover, Egypt maintained good relations with India as both followed the socialist ideology. Saudi Arabia headed by a monarch found itself in danger primarily because of the growing ties

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<sup>2</sup> Ayesha Siddiq, "A Friendship fit for a King," *The Friday Times* Accessed on 28-12-2018 <http://www.thefridaytimes.com/tf/a-friendship-fit-for-a-king/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, *Pakistan at the Crossroads: Domestic Dynamics and External Pressures*, ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), p.7.

between Egypt and Moscow. King Faisal tried to rope in scholars who could work on the idea of pan-Islamism. This was the reason that after establishing the Islamic University of Medina in 1961, the founder of Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan, Maulana Maududi was made one of the first trustees of Rabaata –al Islami, whose job was to spread the idea of Pan-Islamism (Siddiqa, 2018).<sup>5</sup> So, it was the culmination of these factors which played a part in forging ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. The subsequent period saw defence agreement being signed by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia regarding military training and exchange of military advisors in 1967-- a move which formalized Pakistan's role into the Saudi defence structure (Honsa, 1981).<sup>6</sup> There was a period of strain in the relationship when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto led government came to power. This grew as a result of his alleged Shi'i lineage, socialist rhetoric and being sympathetic to the radical elements opposed to the conservative regime which included the Saudi regime as well. Also, the appointment of Pakistan's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia belonging to Ahmedi sect labelled as heretics by Saudi Arabia was the other reason for the strain in a relationship (Amin, 2010).<sup>7</sup> However, the Arab-Israel war in 1973 and the role played by Pakistan in supporting the Arabs brought the relationship back on track. This relationship was further fructified when King Faisal and Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in their effort to unify the Muslims of the Third World countries laid the foundation of Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), now Organisation of Islamic Cooperation.

After Pakistan lost its East Wing- present-day Bangladesh, in 1971 war with active help from India, it found more reasons to associate itself with the Muslim Middle East region. Pakistan was let down by its main ally i.e. U.S and also its much-lauded "all-weather friend", China didn't do much for it. The culmination of these factors resulted in the "journey of resistance" by Z.A. Bhutto in January 1972, to Iran, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Egypt, and Syria. Bhutto being a socialist began to assert Islamic identity in order to gain trust of the Muslim world who otherwise would doubt his Islamic credentials. In the later part of the same year, he visited other Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Guinea, Nigeria, Sudan, and Somalia. The purpose of this tour was to collect money for the

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<sup>5</sup> Ayesha Siddiqa, op.cit

<sup>6</sup> Carol Honsa, "Pakistan Boosting its Gulf Security Force?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, March 5, 1981. Accessed on 30-01-2019 <https://www.csmonitor.com/1981/0305/030541.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Shahid M. Amin, *Pakistan's foreign policy: a reappraisal* (UK; Oxford Pakistan Paperbacks, 2010), p.134.

Pakistani economy in order to build the “Islamic Bomb.”(Jafferlot, 2016, p.7).<sup>8</sup> It is being believed that Saudi officials attended the Pakistani nuclear test. In the following decade, Pakistan became a major recipient of Saudi aid in the region and subsequently, military advisors of Pakistan in Saudi Arabia witnessed a surge (Weinbaum and Khurram, 2014).<sup>9</sup>

Iranian Revolution, which proved to be a watershed moment on many counts had a strong impact on Pakistan-Saudi relationship. While Saudi Arabia felt threatened by the usurping of power and the establishment of orthodox Shia state, at the same time Saudi Arabia was grappling with the uprisings in their Shia dominated eastern province of Qatif and Wahhabi rebellion in Mecca. So, in order to stem this tide of growing insecurity, Saudi Arabia came up with a proposal to develop a network of Sunni countries of which Pakistan thus became an important constituent. Because of the fear of Saudi Arabia from Iran, it needed military help from Pakistan as it didn't have the well-trained military force and thus making it dependent on them. Saudi Arabia in order to address the fear emanating from the possibility of growing Iranian influence in Pakistan started supporting anti-Shia groups and Zia ul Haq regime proved to be an ideal platform (Weinbaum and Khurram, 2014).<sup>10</sup> Also, it started funding of madrasas in Pakistan and to ‘strengthen its ideological and institutional’ linkage with Pakistan for internal defence (Siddiq, 2018).<sup>11</sup> Iran on the other hand threatened to shake status quo in the region by exporting the revolution. It also made contacts with the Shia leadership in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and thus got involved in the proxy wars.

Pakistan has used Muslim identity to its advantage by presenting its image as that of defender and saviour of Islam, and this has been instrumental in formulating its ties with the Muslim world. Depending upon the significance of Muslim countries for Pakistan, they have divided the Middle East Muslim countries into ‘near’ Arab and the ‘far’ Arab (Siddiq, 2016)<sup>12</sup> However, of the ‘near’ Arab, Saudi Arabia remains central to Pakistan, followed by Persian Gulf states, Libya and Jordan. Muslim countries in the region look at Pakistan through

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<sup>8</sup> Christophe Jafferlot, op.cit., p.7.

<sup>9</sup> Marvin G.Weinbaum and Abdullah B. Khurram, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia: Deference, Dependence, and Deterrence, *Middle East Journal*, Vol.68, No.2 (Spring 2014), p.218.

<sup>10</sup> Marvin G.Weinbaum and Abdullah B. Khurram, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia: Deference, Dependence, and Deterrence,

<sup>11</sup> Ayesha Siddiq, op.cit.

<sup>12</sup> Ayesha Siddiq, “Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Military- Ideological Dependency: Can Pakistan Afford to Loose the Middle East?,”2016, p.4. Accessed on 23-06-2019. [https://chairestrategie.univ-paris1.fr/fileadmin/chairestrategiesorbonne/conferences\\_2016/Articles\\_2016/Ayesha\\_Siddiq\\_Le\\_Pakistan\\_pourt\\_il\\_se\\_permettre\\_de\\_perdre\\_le\\_Moyen-Orient.pdf](https://chairestrategie.univ-paris1.fr/fileadmin/chairestrategiesorbonne/conferences_2016/Articles_2016/Ayesha_Siddiq_Le_Pakistan_pourt_il_se_permettre_de_perdre_le_Moyen-Orient.pdf)

security prism and that it is willing to use its military and nuclear capabilities to defend them. Saudi Arabia because being home to the two holy places for Muslims thought itself to be at an added advantage in its relationship with Pakistan. In the siege of Mecca in 1979, Pakistan deputed its military to defend the holy place and prior to that in 1969, Pakistani pilots flew Saudi jets to thwart Yemeni incursions into the kingdom and thus strengthening the perceived belief (Rafiq, 2015).<sup>13</sup>

Moreover, Pakistan has never discouraged Saudi Arabia from thinking that its nuclear arsenal would be used in Saudi Arabia's defence (Siddiqa, 2016).<sup>14</sup> After conducting the nuclear tests in 1998, Saudi crown prince was the only foreign dignitary to be taken to the nuclear facility centre. Pakistan used this to instil confidence in Saudi Arabia and also to show the value they attach to it. Saudi Arabia returned the favour by pledging 50,000 barrels of oil per day to Pakistan at concessional rates. Pakistan, because of its nuclear capability and having a professional military force has been of great interest to the near Arab world.

### **Strategic and Security Dimension**

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have looked at each other as strategic partners with each trying to help the other from weaknesses. Saudi Arabia looks at Pakistan as a Sunni nuclear-armed Muslim power with a world's fifth strongest army, while Pakistan looks at Saudi Arabia as a partner ready to bail it out of any economic crisis and also as a route to the Muslim world. Saudi Arabia has supported Pakistan at the most difficult times, be it Kashmir issue, 1965 or 1971 wars, support for Afghan Jihad and also on the most challenging times after conducting of nuclear tests by Pakistan (Kasuri, 2015).<sup>15</sup> The two countries enjoy close military ties, and during the period 1970s and 1980s, 15,000 Pakistani troops were stationed in Saudi Arabia (Reidel, 2008).<sup>16</sup> In return for the favours from Muslim countries, Pakistan has provided military help by sending its soldiers on different missions to these countries. "Between 1972 and 1977, Islamabad concluded military protocols with Saudi Arabia, Libya, Jordan, Iraq, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. Pakistan had almost sent 2,000 military advisors and

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<sup>13</sup> Ari Rafiq, "The Dangerous, Delicate Saudi-Pakistan Alliance," *Foreign Policy*, April 1, 2015. Accessed 28, January, 2019 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/01/the-dangerous-delicate-saudi-pakistan-alliance-yemen-iran/>

<sup>14</sup> Ayesha Siddiqa, *op.cit.*, p.4

<sup>15</sup> Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, *Neither a Hawk nor a Dove: An Insider's Account of Pakistan's Foreign Policy* (UK: Penguin, 2015), p.721

<sup>16</sup> Bruce Reidel, "Saudi Arabia: Nervously Watching Pakistan," *Brookings*, January 28, 2008. Accessed on 31-01-2019 <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/saudi-arabia-nervously-watching-pakistan>

trainers to the Middle East. Approximately 50,000 Pakistani soldiers served in the Middle East in the 1980s, including 20,000 in Saudi Arabia” (Jafferlot, 2016, p.7).<sup>17</sup>

Later it was Afghan war which brought them further closer as interests were at stake and Saudi Arabia because of its dependence on Pakistan purchased arms in 1981, including fighter F-16 jets, by contributing around US\$800 million, for Pakistan (Jafferlot, 2016,p.8)<sup>18</sup> Also, it was being believed that because of growing insecurity in Saudi Arabia vis-a-vis Iran, in the '90s there was a tacit understanding of Pakistan contemplating over providing Saudi Arabia some form of nuclear security umbrella cover.It was in this backdrop that Crown prince Fahad on his visit to Pakistan openly declared that his country's security was tied to that of Pakistan.<sup>19</sup> In the wake of 1990 Iraqi attack on Kuwait, Saudi Arabia feeling threatened sought help from Pakistan and they in return sent 5000 troops to the Kingdom.<sup>20</sup>

The interests of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia converged yet again in the middle of the decade when they granted diplomatic recognition to the Taliban government in Afghanistan along with UAE. Pakistan by doing this gained the strategic depth against India and also for easy access to Central Asia while Saudi Arabia needed a reliable Sunni power at the backdoor of Iran. Pakistan because of the 565-mile long border with Iran and also the 21 percent of its population being Shia, has always tried to improve its relationship with it. Both, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia know that Iran has the potential to cause trouble by inciting Shia population in respective countries and thus Pakistan is trying hard to resist to be drawn towards any Saudi-Iranian proxy war in Afghanistan or elsewhere. Also, because of the rebellious Baloch population in Iran and Pakistan, it lies in the interest of both countries to maintain a good relationship.

Ayesha Siddiqa argues that the relationship of Pakistan with Saudi Arabia is strategic like that of with China and that this is rarely being talked about in detail. Having failed to call this alliance as strategic is based on thinking that Saudi Arabia doesn't have the muscle power to bail us out during any crisis.<sup>21</sup> Also, she points to the fact that Pakistan's relationship with Saudi Arabia and the Middle East despite the popular perception it holds, is less clearly

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<sup>17</sup> Christophe Jafferlot, op.cit. p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Christophe Jafferlot, op.cit., p.8.

<sup>19</sup> Marvin G.Weinbaum et.al op.cit., p.214.

<sup>20</sup> Barbara Crossetee, cited in Marvin G.Weinbaum and Abdullah B. Khurram, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia: Deference, Dependence, and Deterrence ibid. p.214

<sup>21</sup> Ayesha Siddiqa, op.cit.

defined. The relationship between the two has now witnessed a visible change with Saudi Arabia taking the role of a senior partner unlike past when Pakistan used to be its elder brother.<sup>22</sup> This change can be attributed to the changing politics in the Middle East region as the threat perception of Saudi Arabia shifted from Israel to Iran after the Iranian Revolution. Saudi Arabia knows that Pakistan because of its strategic importance can't help her in case of war against Iran and thus lessens its importance for them. Now we see that Pakistan is taking lead in wooing Saudi leaders by frequently visiting the country, but that doesn't mean Saudi Arabia will give up on Pakistan as it still continues to be its trustworthy partner besides being an important partner in the Islamic world as well.

However, despite Pakistan's refusal of turning down the request of Saudi Arabia to participate in Yemen conflict, the two countries can't afford to snap ties with each other. Pakistan continues to have its military personnel in Saudi Arabia for training and defence purposes. Amid this bitterness in the relationship, there was a growing clamor that Saudi Arabia will turn to India for its defence purposes, but that was out rightly denied by Saudi officials and reiterated that Pakistan continues to be Saudi Arabia's 'brother-in-arms'.<sup>23</sup> Hasan Askar Rizvi, a noted political scientist, and military analyst maintain that Saudi Arabia understands the strategic importance of Pakistan and that it prefers Pakistan for its internal threats.<sup>24</sup> Pakistan has although refused to be a part of Yemen war, but they have assured that they are going to protect Saudi Arabia from the internal conflicts, knowing that US and India won't be allowed inside Saudi Arabia. Pakistan on its part does not want Saudi Arabia to turn towards India and thus it maintains that balance. After Zulfikar Ali Bhutto sought Saudi financial help for its nuclear build-up, Saudi King Faisal provided money in return to a promise that the Pakistani nuclear program will provide a security umbrella to the Kingdom.<sup>25</sup> But it is very unlikely that Pakistan can transfer nuclear technology to Saudi Arabia or to any other country, going by the repercussions Pakistan had to face after the reports of nuclear weapons and technology being supplied by it to North Korea and Libya surfaced.

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<sup>22</sup> Shahid Amin, op.cit. p.135

<sup>23</sup> Mian Abrar, "Pakistan First, Saudis Tell India," *Pakistan Today*, August 26, 2015. Accessed 31-01-2019 <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2015/08/26/pakistan-first-saudis-tell-india/>

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Bruce Reidel, "Saudi Arabia: Nervously Watching Pakistan," *Brookings*, January 28, 2008. Accessed on 31-01-2019 [https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/saudi-arabia-nervously-watching-pakistan.](https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/saudi-arabia-nervously-watching-pakistan/)

Saudi Arabia, having the dual objectives in Syria, that of toppling Assad regime and also to weaken al-Qaeda affiliated groups in the country, aimed to train 5,000 to 10,000 rebel army with the help of Pakistan. While Pakistan has reportedly acceded to the Saudi demands, but they have maintained a visibly very low profile in Syria.<sup>26</sup> The relationship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia may be deemed as strong, yet the Saudi kingdom is not referred to as ‘all-weather-friend’ like China. The relationship between the two countries has ebbed and flowed yet most Pakistanis believe that they share a strong relationship with Saudi Arabia. The fact is despite all the convergence and divergence of their interests, each of them has allowed the other a choice to frame their policies national interests.<sup>27</sup> This relationship got further strengthened when Pakistan in its attempt to pay back as a mark of friendship towards Saudi Arabia, named many monuments and cities after the Saudi King, examples being Faisal Mosque and Faisalabad.<sup>28</sup> This closing up of ties between the two countries can be attributed to the political changes happening around at the time which led to the convergence of both the countries interests and hence mutual cooperation.

After turning down the Saudi request of sending its troops to Yemen, this gave rise to the prospects that Pakistan was de-linking itself from the most accepted norm--that of its dependency on Saudi Arabia. This came after the backdrop of a statement that Pakistan has stressed on the commitment to protect the sovereignty of Saudi Arabia against any sort of aggression and in this regard various meetings took place between Pakistani and Saudi officials over the period of 2006.<sup>29</sup> The Pakistani Army Chief, General Raheel Sharif made it clear in January 2016 while meeting the Saudi leadership that, “Any threat to Saudi Arabia’s territorial integrity would invoke a strong response from Pakistan.”<sup>30</sup> Earlier, Defence Minister Khwaja Mohammad Asif reiterated the pledge of ‘protecting the territorial integrity of Saudi Arabia’ to a question of providing military support to Saudi Arabia against Houthis.<sup>31</sup> Merely days after this statement, a unanimous resolution was passed in Pakistan

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<sup>26</sup> David Kenner, “Saudi Arabia’s Shadow War,” *Foreign Policy*, November 6, 2013. Accessed on 31-10-2019 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/11/06/saudi-arabias-shadow-war>

<sup>27</sup> Marvin G. Weinbaum et.al, op.cit.

<sup>28</sup> Kasuri, op.cit .p.721

<sup>29</sup> YoelGuzansky, “Pakistan and Saudi Arabia: How Special are the ‘Special Relations,’” INNS, Insight No.797 February 16, 2016. Accessed January 22,2019 <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/pakistan-and-saudi-arabia-how-special-are-the-special-relations/>

<sup>30</sup> ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Jonah Blank, “What Pakistan and Saudi Arabia Want from Each Other,” RAND Corporation, 06-2015, Accessed on 29-01-2019. <https://www.rand.org/blog/2015/06/what-pakistan-and-saudi-arabia-want-from-each-other.html>

parliament where they not only voted against sending troops to Yemen but also decided not taking sides in the conflict.<sup>32</sup> Jonah Blank, in his analysis to understand this seemingly warm-but-not-too-warm friendship between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, has come out to term that how each of them uses the other as a 'wild card' and that each is the other's out-of-region game-changer.<sup>33</sup>

### **Economic Dimension**

One of the important reasons that bind Pakistan to Saudi Arabia is the generous financial assistance it receives at crucial junctures. Saudi Arabia has bailed out Pakistan on various occasions through direct aid or through deferred payments on oil and this has been instrumental in strengthening the relationship between the two. Saudi financial assistance to Pakistan is because it does not want its key Muslim ally, important for its security reasons, to be weak and also to keep it away from Iran. Pakistan is the biggest trading partner of Saudi Arabia and currently, the trade volume between two countries stands at \$ 3.2 billion which is expected to touch further heights.<sup>34</sup> In this unbalanced trade relationship, Saudi Arabia is the biggest exporter and Pakistan being the biggest importer with 90 percent of its imports related to oil and oil-related products.

The economic relations between the two countries increased after 1973 when the huge oil revenue generated in the Middle East provided Saudi Arabia with a chance to expand its political and economic leverage. While Shah of Iran tried to play the role of a policeman in the Gulf region, Saudi Arabia on the other hand with its strong ties with Pakistan forged a Sunni block to curb the ambitions of its rival, Iran.<sup>35</sup> Ayesha Siddiqa contests this perceived belief of Pakistan's dependence on Saudi Arabia. There seems to be a lot of myth-building around Pakistan's economic dependence on Saudi Arabia, as the data shows that non-Arab countries have contributed more and that this relationship seems to be more of an emotional bond driven by Islamic identity.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> "Pakistan-Saudi trade ties to scale new heights" *Arab News*, September 7, 2018. Accessed on 07-02-2019 <http://www.arabnews.pk/node/1367676/pakistan>

<sup>35</sup> RanaqMuhammadAwis Anwar, SamiaNasreen, and Muhammad AkramChaudary, "Terms of Trade and Its Future Prospects in Pakistan: A Time-Series Analysis," *British journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol.13, No.2 (May 2013), pp.228-41.

<sup>36</sup> Ayesha Siddiqa, "Pakistan-Saudi Military-Ideological Dependency: Can Pakistan Afford to Loose the Middle East?" *op.cit.*

According to the Bureau of Emigration and Overseas Employment (BEOS), Saudi Arabia has become the largest market for Pakistani workers in the world. The number of Pakistanis migrating to the oil-rich Middle East region forms an important part of the economic history of Pakistan. The working people from Pakistan in Saudi Arabia till 1983 was estimated to be around 500,000 and the remittances from them working in the Gulf amounted to around \$3 billion.<sup>37</sup> Over the period of time Saudi Arabia has become the largest source of remittances to Pakistan with figure reaching up to \$4.9 billion in 2018.<sup>38</sup> Pakistan, facing the balance of payments crisis has relied on Saudi aid for bailout packages and received \$1.5 billion from Saudi Arabia to shore up its foreign exchange reserves. This was followed by the recent \$6 billion

In what would be first of its kind, Pakistan government claimed that Saudi Arabia will be a third major partner in the mega China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project after Imran Khan went to Riyadh and made this offer to Saudi Arabia.<sup>39</sup> While there is some ambiguity regarding Saudi Arabia joining in, but if they went ahead with this, this will be first of its kind of major investment where it would be holding stakes in Pakistan's economy.

Over the past few months, the dependence of Pakistan on Saudi Arabia and UAE has increased considerably because of the 'aid both countries agreed to give to Islamabad and because of industrial, strategic investments.'<sup>40</sup> It was this looming crisis that Imran Khan choose Saudi Arabia as the destination for his first official foreign visit. He was given the assurance of \$6 billion packages from Saudi Arabia and \$3 billion from UAE to address the balance-of-payment crisis. Also, Saudi Arabia decided to invest \$10 billion in a refinery in Gwadar.<sup>41</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Relationship with Pakistan lies in the historic quest of Saudi Arabia where it was looking for a non-Arab ally to help to strengthen regional hegemony. Pakistan on the other hand by

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<sup>37</sup> Jonathan Addleton, "The Impact of International Migration on Economic Development in Pakistan," *Asian Survey*, Vol.24, No.5 (May, 1984) p.574.

<sup>38</sup> "Saudi Arabia remains largest source of remittances to Pakistan," *Arab News*, April 12, 2019. Accessed on 05-09-2019 <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1480941/business-economy>

<sup>39</sup> Umair Jamal, "The Future of CPEC: Enter Saudi Arabia?" *The Diplomat*, September 27, 2018. <https://thediplomat.com/2018/09/the-future-of-cpec-enter-saudi-arabia>

<sup>40</sup> Christophe Jafferlot, "The Regional great game," *The Indian Express*, February 1, 2019. Accessed on June 15, 2019.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*

forging a Muslim identity is eyeing the role of a Muslim leader and also with an aim to reap economic dividends. Besides, the shared religious values attached to this relationship has made it sacrosanct for most Pakistanis which cannot be severed. Changing geopolitical realities might compel the two countries to seek a renewal push in their relationship. Pakistan's equation with Iran will be a point of contestation with Saudi Arabia and although Pakistan might not have found itself in a position where it had to make some hard choices to choose between Saudi Arabia and Iran, this may well be the case in future. Likewise growing Saudi-India rapprochement which is mostly business-oriented will be a cause of concern for Pakistan, but Pakistan will continue to be an important strategic ally which Saudi Arabia cannot abandon. The growing stature of India and its spreading influence in the world will put the onus on Pakistan to restore friendly ties with it and Saudi Arabia would also be hoping for the same. What happens in Afghanistan is of immediate concern to both the countries. Because of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the receding US influence, Saudi Arabia will strengthen its ties with Pakistan. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia relationship may change a different course in- case Saudi Arabia along with UAE choose to play a major role in Afghanistan at the expense of Pakistan. It is in the desired political framework of both Pakistan and Saudi Arabia that they favour any negotiation aimed at including the Taliban in the political system of Afghanistan. Going by the change in geopolitics Pakistan- Saudi Arabia relationship is likely to go strong in the coming times, but testing times for Pakistan lie ahead. While as the response of Saudi Arabia Arab against the removal of autonomous status from Jammu and Kashmir has not been what Pakistan would have expected, but that is not going to derail the ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Moreover, the muted response of the Arab world, in general, should serve as a reality check for Pakistan that its delusional belief in Muslim *Ummah* has failed miserably.