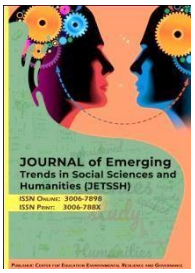
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Iran-Saudi Arabia Rift: A Critical Analysis of Pakistan's Foreign Policy Rationale

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ABSTRACT

It has historical, religious and cultural affinities with Iran and Saudi Arabia. This very fact binds Pakistan to strike a balance between the two states at foreign policy fronts on one hand. Saudi Arabia being an orthodox Sunni state and Iran as a fundamentalist Shia state has been at proxies with each other not only in the Middle East but beyond the region as well. Despite the Iran and Saudi Arabia"s rapprochement, it is arguable that whether this will help Pakistan as well to pacify the intense social and religious strife in her society. For that Pakistan needs to, first of all, strike a balance between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan is immediate neighbor of Middle East. It definitely needs to assume an active role in sustaining peace and stability in the region but this goal should be accomplished without being party in Arab-Persian clash and Intra-Arab affairs. This recent advancement has opened new avenues for Pakistan"s foreign policy makers as well.

Introduction:

In the complex web of global politics, Iran and Saudi Arabia has long history of confrontation at ideological and strategic fronts. Striving for hegemony, both Iran and Saudi Arabia are ambitious to shape social, political and religious dynamics of regional and global politics. After Arab springs, the two states have fueled sectarian strives in Yemen, Syria and Lebanon. This ambitiousness has profound impacts not only on Middle east as well as it overshadow the socio-political dynamics of South Asia significantly. The most noteworthy impact of this rift can be observed on politics of sectarianism in Pakistan.

Being a militarily strong Muslim state and also situated at crucial geographical location, Pakistan is expected to play a vibrant role in the geopolitics of Muslim world. It has historical, religious and cultural affinities with Iran and Saudi Arabia. This very fact binds Pakistan to strike a balance between the two states at foreign policy fronts on one hand. It has been commonly observed that with the rise of Iran-Saudi escalation, its repercussions are distinctively felt on the socio-political fronts that define sectarian fault lines phenomena on the other hand. Keeping in view intricacies involved in how Pakistan manages this ongoing rift is crucial not only to understand domestic implications it have yet additionally for weighing the more extensive ramification on regional politics.

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This research paper lays out to crack the complex puzzle between Iran-Saudi rift and its bearings on the sectarian perspective/outlook in Pakistan. It strives fundamentally to examine impacts of Pakistan‟s foreign policy rationale while dealings with these two regional powers, analyzing the motivations and strategic concerns that reflects Islamabad‟s considerations in this regard. By analyzing these diplomatic considerations, security maneuvers and economic impacts of this trio, this research paper means to impart comprehensive perception of how Pakistan‟s foreign policy rationale converges with the dynamics of sectarianism.

As the paper unfold, it will look into underlying causes of sectarian politics with in Pakistan particularly with reference to external influences radiating from Iran-Saudi rivalry. This exploration will also reveal how Pakistan‟s foreign policy rationale negligently intensify sectarian tensity and how this rationale shape the domestic landscape of the country and regional political dynamics. In sum, this research will add to the current discourse on intricate relationship between sectarianism fault lines and external geopolitical dynamics with reference to Pakistan.

In order to see complex interplay between Pakistan‟s foreign policy rationale and Iran-Saudi rift and the impact of this interplay on rise of sectarianism in Pakistan from scholarly point of view, it is imperative to see the historical background of ideological and strategic intricacies between Iran and Saudi Arabia and its implications on the region and beyond the region.

2. Iran-Saudi Rift and Its Implications beyond the Region:

The primeval clash between Shias and Sunnis in Islam is on new resurgence of dissentions in the Middle East particularly and Muslim world generally. Civil war in Syria and Yemen are the irrefutable evidences where power struggle among locals diversified in to sectarian crisis. The root cause of schism between these two sects is the controversy over the Caliphate after the death of the Prophet (PBUH). (Hiro, 2018)The debate over Caliphate/succession split the Muslim community into two camps: Shia and Sunni. First camp was represented by those who believed that only the bloodline of Prophet (PBUH) had the right to lead the Muslim Ummah. Later believed that succession was the right of the most capable/distinguished person of then the community. (Lewis, 2004) Another reason of Shia-Sunni schism was the prejudice of ethnic Arab States towards the non-Arabs. Most of these non-Arabs converted to Shia Islam in early centuries as a reaction. (Sergie, 2023)

Sunnis, overwhelmed the initial nine centuries of Islamic rule (other than Shia Fatimid dynasty) until the Safavids dynasty was laid out in Persia in the beginning of 16th century. They implemented Shia Islam as the state religion, and until the next two centuries they battled with the Ottomans, the then seat of the Sunni caliphate. (Sederberg, 1994) With the passage of time, their conflict demarcated the political boundaries of present day Iran and Turkey and shaped the current demographics of these two main sects of Islam. Present day Iran, Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Bahrain, and Lebanon are consist of Shia majority. From Morocco to Indonesia, Sunni Muslims represents 85 percent of the Muslim population across forty states. (Sergie, 2023)

For centuries, Shia and Sunni Muslims lived together peacefully for they share common believe in Prophet hood of the Prophet (PBUH), Quran and common prayers with a slight difference of rituals and interpretation of Sharia laws. (Lewis, 2004) Despite of the fact, Middle East has become a battle ground for sectarian strife led by the two most prominent states: Iran and Saudi Arabia. Today, the rivalry between these two states for their hegemonic designs drawing new lines in the region and beyond the region as well.

Iran is a Shia majority Muslim state. It has never been subject to colonization by the Western powers. Iran also takes it as a pride for being part of the mighty Persian Empire. (Sadjadpour, 2011) On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is a Sunni majority state with monarchial set up. Being the custodians of the two holy cities of Makkah and Medina, it is resonating with nearly one billion Muslims across the world. Geographically, Iran and Saudi Arabia is divided by Iraq to the West and by the Persian Gulf to the East. Both Middle Eastern nations proudly exhibits their own cultural distinctiveness: Saudi Arabia as Arab and Iran as Persian. (Pflatzgraff, 1981)

Despite of having ideological differences but sharing proximate geostrategic location, both states have fervent desire to influence Islamic community.

The diplomatic ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia were first time furnished in 1929 in the form of friendship treaty. (Wrampelmeier, 1999) This treaty actually pacified the apprehensions of Shah of Iran, Raza Shah Pahlavi, about Ibn Sauds that if they would allow Shias to offer Haj in Makkah as per their own rituals. (Hiro, 2018) In late 1960s, Saudi Arabia supported the liberation of Bahrain, the area that Iran claimed as its 14th province at that time, led to cancellation of Shah of Iran‟s visit to Saudi Arabia in 1968. (Guab, 2016) Then Iranian revolution 1979 particularly soured the ties between the two states mainly because Iranian leadership was keen to export the revolutionary zeal to the Arab nations. (Shaukat Ali Khan 2020) On the other hand, Saudi Arabia also had hegemonic designs. The post Iranian Revolution 1979 era was characterize by the conflicting ideological interpretations, contest over oil prices by influencing OPEC and Iranian apprehension on pro US approach of Saudi Arabia. (Marwan Muasher, 2011)

The identities of both states are predominantly based on their religious interpretations of Islam. The ruling regimes of both states exploited ideological interpretations to legitimize their rule. The political understanding between Al Sauds and Muhammad Ibn Abad al-Wahhab, the founder of the Wahhabi Reformation movement, enabled Al Sauds to lay down the foundations of the modern day Saudi Arabia with the strict commitment to declare Wahabbism as an official religion of the state. (Shaukat Ali Khan 2020) Iran was also an absolute monarchy with Shia majority in population but the King Raza Shah Pehlvi kept Iranian identity also intact to ensure modernization. His son Muhammad Raza Pehlvi also kept the spirit of modernization and close collaboration with US during cold war. (Azedh Mashayehki, 2015) His anti religeous and authoritarian rule and his adverse policies against Shiites led to a widespread uprising. It ultimately gave rise to Khomeini to power in 1979: commonly known as Islamic Revolution in Iran. Since that the official religion of Iran is the Shia branch of Islam. It is greatly influenced by the teachings of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. He successfully disseminated his religious ideology among the Iranian population, leading to a transformative shift from an absolute monarchy to an Islamic republic. (Takeyh, 2009) He redefined the iranian identity representing fundamently the interpretation of shia ideology. Standing aginst an unjust ruler and the idea of Wilayat-Fiqah: the power to exercise the state authority by the preeminent jurist, were the fundamental interpretations of Shia theoloy by the Khomeini. (Hamid Dabashi, 2017) Khomeini contended that Islam and monarchy on the base of inheritance were contradictory to each other. (Koven, 1978) and this interpretation was taken as a threat to their inherited monarchial set up by the Al Sauds in Saudi Arabia and also by the other Gulf monarchies on the whole. (Woemer, 2013) Thus rivalry between the two arch rivals was redefined politically besides ideological differences. The urge to extend their influnce to other states influnced the region‟s politics.

Saudi Arabia tactically supported Iraq against Iran during 1980-1988 war between Iran and Iraq but the death of icononic leader Khomeini eased the situation perheps. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia were sided with Kuwait agianst Iraq in 1991. (Guab, 2016) The next decade mark the new era of hostility between the two states and this time it is the invasion of Iraq 2003 that defined the ties between them. Saudi Arabia‟s apprehension regarding Iran‟s influence in Baghdad and Beirut and Tehran‟s ambitions regarding nuclear program contributed the new dimensions to the strained ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Even rise of Ahmadinejad as president after 2005 elections and his visit to Saudi Arabia in 2007 did little to pacify the tensions with Riyadh.(Guab, 2016) This era was the clear evidence of the fact that the Iran-Saudi rift was affecting the geopolitical dimensions of the region.

In a heated exchange with the Iranian foreign minister Mattoki, King Abdullah expressed his concerns over the Iran‟s influence in Arab states. *''They are Muslims''* replied Mattoki. *''No Arabs. You as Persians have no business meddling in Arab matters'' countered the king.* (Carl, 2009) *Under the influence of Saudi Arabia, smaller Gulf States, Egypt, Jordan and others*

presented their grave concerns to US diplomats on Tehran's nuclear ambitions, its involvement in Iraq and support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Palestinian Hamas. (Black, 2010)
After 9/11, Iran's role in providing intelligence to U.S. against Taliban had enhanced its position in the region. Later on Arab Spring and social disharmony across the region of Middle East facilitated ample oppertunites to Iran to enhance its influence. Iran extented its support to Shia minirorities in Arab states in order to destabilise them politically as well. *The Iran Saudi rivalry reached to another level after the Yemen Crisis 2010. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia were involved in the crisis through proxies, supporting to their respective sects in Yemen. Saudi Arabia is looking forward to extend its influence to the neighboring state: Yemen whereas Iran is supporting Shia cause.* (Wright, 2015) *Another evidence of the fact of Iran-Saudi rift, was strife of both states in Bahrain. It is Shia majority state but having government from Sunni sect supported by the Saudi Arabia. Iran is backing Shia groups in Bahrain. Given the intricate nature of clash between Iran and Saudi Arabia has entangled Bahrain in power politics of both states particularly after 2015.* (Shaukat Ali Khan 2020) *Iraq is another flash point between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iraq is a multi-ethnic state with 80% Shia, 17% Sunni and 20% Kurds population.* (Courbag, 2022) *The growing influence and support of Iran to Iraqi Shia population has aggravated serious distress in Saudi Arabia. This distress led Saudi Arabia to extend its assistant to any group against Iran and Shias in Iraq through proxies.* (Hinnebusch, 2007) *Unlike Bahrain, Syria is a Sunni majority state but ruled by the Asad from Shia sect. In case of Syria, the prime source of contention between Saudi Arabia and Syria is the Syrian and Iranian support for Hezbollah.* (Shaukat Ali Khan 2020)
Following the execution of an eminent Shia scholar Nimer al-Nimer by the Saudi Arabia, was an another blow to Iran-Saudi ties. The saudi act was severly criticised by the Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamieni. (Hubbard, 2016) Saudi Arbia‟s two diplomatic missions in Tehran and Mashad were assulted by mobilised mob. Saudi Arabia blamed Iran for these assults..Gulf states including Jordan stood by Saudi stance. (Zahid Shahab Ahmed, 2020) Diplomatic ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia received an other blow due to the entire inccident.
After assuming power in 2015, Prince Muhammad Bin Salman has transformed Saudi Arabia‟s policy. Suadi Arabia is now focusing Sunni Muslims ultra-conservatives through culture exchnage and diplomacy to meet the challenge of Iranian ideological and revolutionary zeal. It can also observed that current leadership is trying to reduce its relaince on US in order to contain Iran. (Aderson, 2018) Otherwise Arab States including Saudi Arbia are substancially relay on US for their security. Iran itself is closly collaborated with Russia in Syria but Saudi Arabia‟s relaince on US is seen with distress by Iran. Besides geopolitical dimensions this rivalry has a economic dimension too. The Saudi intervention in Yemen and fluctuating prices of oil has worrisome economic fall outs for Saudi Arabia.
Saudi Arabia has been a key player in Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) mainly due to kingdom's funds. When Iran severely criticized Saudi Arabia for the Hajj incident 2015 that claimed 700 lives, OIC had to give an official statement to support Saudi's effort to make arrangements for the huge event of Hajj under Saudi Arabia's influence. In subsequent years, Istanbul Summit turned out an anti-Iranian summit when it declared it Lebanon-based Hezbollah as a terrorist organization, a close ally of Iran. (Ilves, 2016)
The new geopolitcal dimensions of the region have aggraveted Iran-Saudi rift and this rift is also affecteing and shaping the geopolitical realities of the region in return. Saudi Arabia‟s Wahabism percieved Iranian Shiasm as a clear deviation from true devotion and spirit of Islam. (Linge, 2016) Iranian revolution and Iranian commitment to export it across the region is taken as challenge to legitamacy of dynasty of Al Sauds and other monarchies. In this way ideological differences coupled with Iran‟s call to abolish monarchy are transforming the political dimensions of the region. Islamic schism, rooted back in fourteen century is not enough to achknowlede the ground realities of the region. (See Table: 1 for Contemporary Political Dynamics between Iran and Saudi Arabia)

Year	Event	Details
2011	Arab Spring	The Arab Spring saw protest movements against the status quo across the Middle East. Saudi Arabia accused Iran of inciting protests in Bahrain against the royal family and sent more than 1,000 soldiers to stop the demonstrations. Iran denied the accusation.
2011	War in Syria	The rivals squared off again after the Syrian war erupted in 2011. Shia-ruled Iran backed President Bashar al-Assad and provided him with military forces and money to battle Sunni rebels. Sunni-majority Saudi Arabia backed the rebel groups but later joined a US-led coalition formed to fight ISIL (ISIS) from 2014.
2015	War in Yemen	When the civil war in Yemen began in 2015, Saudi Arabia backed its internationally recognized government and targeted Houthi rebel strongholds. The Houthis are aligned with Iran
2015	Mekka Stempede	A stampede in Mecca during the annual Hajj pilgrimage in 2015 further inflamed tensions. Iran accused the Saudi government of mismanaging the most important event in the Muslim calendar. About 2,000 pilgrims were killed in the crush, more than 400 of them Iranians.
2016	Saudi Arabia Cut Ties	Four months after the stampede in Mecca, Saudi Arabia executed prominent Shia leader Nimr al-Nimr, a critic of the Saudi government. Protesters in Tehran stormed the Saudi embassy, and Iran‟s supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, warned of “divine vengeance” for Nimr‟s execution. Riyadh then cut ties with Tehran.
2016	Iran Suspend Hajj Participation	That same year, Iran suspended participation in the Hajj, and Saudi Arabia launched a Persian-language television station covering the pilgrimage. Riyadh said the 24-hour satellite channel would cover Hajj rituals and prayers from the Grand Mosque in Mecca. Khamenei slammed Saudi Arabia over how it runs the Hajj and suggested Muslim countries think about ending Riyadh‟s control of the pilgrimage.
2017	Qatar Blocked	Another regional rupture took place in June 2017 when Saudi Arabia and its allies in the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Egypt imposed a blockade on Qatar. They said Qatar was too close to Iran and supported “terrorism”, allegations that Doha denied. Those ties were mended in January 2021.
2017	Lebenese PM Resigns	The prime minister of Lebanon, Saad Hariri, resigned unexpectedly on November 4, 2017 and bizarrely from Riyadh, citing Iran‟s “grip” on his country through Hezbollah. He later withdrew his resignation. The move plunged Lebanon into a political crisis seen as part of a Saudi effort to counteract Iran‟s influence in the country.
2017	Missile Attack On Riyadh	Hours after Hariri‟s resignation, Saudi Arabia intercepted a ballistic missile over Riyadh International Airport. It asserted that the missile was supplied by Iran and launched from territory held by Houthi rebels in Yemen.

		In comments reported by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, the crown prince told then-British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson that Iran‟s actions “may be considered an act of war against the kingdom”.
2018	Cancellation of US-Iran Deal	In May 2018, President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from the Iran nuclear deal, a move praised by both Saudi Arabia and Israel. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman warned in a US television interview that if Tehran gets a nuclear weapon, “we will follow suit as soon as possible.” The prince also referred to Iran‟s supreme leader as “the new Hitler”.
2019	Attacks on Saudi Targets	A year later, Saudi Arabia blamed Iran for a series of attacks on targets in the kingdom, including one that struck the heart of the country‟s oil industry, temporarily halving the kingdom‟s crude production. Iran denied involvement. Yemen‟s Houthi rebel group claimed responsibility for the attacks.
2020	Qassem Soleimani killed	When the Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani was killed in a US drone strike in Baghdad, official Saudi media celebrated the attack.
2021	Iran-Saudi Talks	In April 2021, Iran and Saudi Arabia held their first direct talks since they cut off official ties. Baghdad was the host.
2022	More Talks	Between April and September last year, four rounds of talks were held, mostly mediated by Iraq and Oman. After Iran and Saudi Arabia held a fifth round of talks, a top adviser to Khamenei called for Saudi and Iranian embassies to be reopened. Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Saudi Arabia for talks with Mohammed bin Salman.
2023	Agreement to restore ties	Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi visits China to meet Xi in February. The following month, Riyadh and Tehran announce they have decided to re-establish ties.

Source: (Aljazeera, 2023)

The hegomonic zeals of both Iran and Saudi Arabia can be seen in their proxies in Iraq, Lebnon, Yemen, Syria and Bahrain. Sectarian strife in Pakistan and Aghanistan are the evidence of the fact across the region. Before digging deep into the interplay of Iran-Saudi rift and politics of sectarianism in Pakistan. It is essential to see the societal outlook in Pakistan.

3. Genesis of Societal Outlook in Pakistan:

The sociopolitical outlook of Pakistan is described by the complex reciprocation of ethnic, linguistic and religious entities. With the population of more than 220 million people, it is predominantly a Muslim country with Sunnis as majority, but also a significant portion of its population is Shia whereas Christians and Hindus are in minority. Both Sunnis and Shias are also divided in to sub sects. Bralevi and Deobandi account 50 and 20 percent of the Sunni population respectively. Deobandi sect is following the most extremist interpretation of Islam.

Pakistan is an autonomous country with unique interplay of its religion and history. Despite of that there are vigorous elements challenging its integration. The tug of war between the militant and moderate faction of Islam is one of those elements.

Pakistan movement was an initiative of a nation comprised of distinctive ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious entities but Islam served as a combining force during Pakistan movement. What would be the place of Islam in state affairs after the emergence of Pakistan, was a million

dollar question. James Wynbrant, in his commentary on Pakistan‟s history has mentioned that Jinnah, father of the nation, never wanted to make Pakistan a theocratic state. (Wynbrandt, 2009) He categorically pledged for the freedom of the faith to practice for all.

Religious orientation inculcated during Pakistan Movement fostered the urge in Muslims living in Pakistan to lead their lives according to Islam. This mass aspirations led political class to initiate politicization of Islam as a state affairs. Objective resolution was the one evidence of the fact. This conviction also provide an opportunity to the political elites and establishment to manipulate Islam as a tool for their vested interest.

The liberal and secular Bhutto manipulated Islamic symbolism in both foreign and domestic affairs to boost his populism and enhance his own power. Under the influence of PNA‟s election campaign based on Islamic drive, Bhutto framed his election campaign with the captivating slogan „„Musawat-e-Muhamddi. (Hussain, 2004) Bhutto‟s sarcastic manipulation of Islam paved the way for the Islamic revival through politicization. This kind of manipulation not only played with the sentiments of the public but it casted adverse effects in subsequent years.

Later on, incautious process of politicization of Islam in later years was instrumental in aggravating competition among various ethnic and religious entities. Further more distinctive interpretation of Islam by these sectarian groups escalated division among society on sectarian lines. With the passage of time, these historical facts/ aspects have carved out economic and political contention and ethnic and religious division. Musharraf, in his maiden address, inveighed against the exploitation of Islam for vested interest. He even pledged to reform anti blasphemy law that was on hand to abuse by any disgruntled person against anyone, who was subject to imprison without any preliminary investigation. (Wynbrandt, 2009) (Bruce, 2003)Though under the sheer influence of religious elements, Musharraf had to surrender his zeal for enlightenment yet he remained committed to minimize polarization in the society. This complex web contributed the intricate sociopolitical land scape of Pakistan.

Though with the passage of time, Pakistan is increasingly susceptible to internal threats than external ones. Nevertheless, external forces have intensified these internal vulnerabilities. Unfortunately, the international community frequently overlooks the significance of domestic political dynamics particularly defining the foreign policy options a country have. In case of Pakistan the complexity of sectarian conflicts and divisions among society is directly exacerbated by the external forces though it is an undeniable fact that this phenomenon is deeply rooted long before. Involvement of Iran and Saudi Arabia has added the fuel to fire. Before digging into deep the sectarian politics in the country, it is essential to see the interplay of Iran-Saudi rift and Pakistan‟s foreign policy rationale.

4. Interplay of Iran-Saudi Rift and Pakistan's Foreign Policy Rationale:

States operate in complex global environment where nothing is permanent except neighbors. States conscientiously strive to enhance fraternal ties with the neighboring states. The cornerstone of Pakistan‟s foreign policy has always been to maintain fraternal relations particularly with the neighboring states. In case of Iran, relationship between the Iran and Pakistan could never reached to its maximum potential despite of having historical, cultural and religious affinities. Pakistan‟s ties with Saudi Arabia revolves around ideological affinity, defense and economic aid. The historical context of Pakistan's foreign policy and sectarianism is complex as internal dynamics often influencing external engagements and vice versa. Pakistan‟s engagement with Iran, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan define its intricacy of sectarianism.

Iranian support during Indo-Pakistan‟s wars of 1965 and 1971 was considered by Pakistan‟s military establishment „„ as actual strategic depth““. (Abbas, 2023) but divergence of interest raised between Pakistan and Iran on Afghan political battle among locals due to Saudi Arabia‟s influence. (Woemer, 2013) Afghan Taliban arrested ten Iranian diplomats during the seizure of Mazar Sharif incident. Taliban accused of those Iranian diplomats for provision of arms to Tajiks and Hizb-e-Wahdat. Those diplomats were brutally killed publically. Iran accused of Pakistan for

its unwillingness to convince Taliban for ensuring the safe return of those diplomats. (Abbas, 2023)

Saudi Arabia considers Pakistan as a resource to counter and restrict Iranian influence owing to its 900 kilometer long border with Iran. Saudi Arabia serves as a cornerstone in GCC connectedness to Pakistan, deep pockets and have substantial religious ascendancy in Pakistan. Being the second largest country in Muslim world and only nuclear power, Saudi Arabia looks forward Pakistan as a catalyst in its defense. Evident examples of the fact were the Pakistan‟s support in freeing the Grand Mosque in Makka in 1979 and Iran-Iraq war. Post Iranian Revolution 1979 era enhanced Pakistan and Saudi engagement. Saudi Arabia managed to counter Iranian influence and its zeal to support Shia community in Pakistan by promoting Sunnis by ample contribution to Pakistani madrassas in terms of financial and ideological background. This was the beginning of Sectarian based conflicts in Pakistan. Later on Soviet invasion in Afghanistan also provided opportunity to both Iran and Saudi Arabia to extend their ideological influence by promoting militarily and financially to their subsequent sects. Zia regime blindly played a pivotal role in strengthening the sectarian based militant outfits. These militant outfits were recognized as strategic assets in both foreign and domestic policy. The financial aid extended by the Saudi Arabia to the Sunni Madrassas nourished sectarian based militancy. Jihadist were trained and financed by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia respectively to participate Afghan mujahidin in their fight against Soviet invasion. *Iran and Saudi Arabia remained at ethnic and sectarian clash in Afghanistan also. Being Sunni, Hikmatyar and Taliban were actively supported by the Saudi Arabia and Pakistan both military and financially. Ahmed Shah Masood leading Northern Alliance contained Tajiks and Hazb-e-Wahdat was backed by the Iran.* (Hiro, 2018) *Direct or indirect fallout of this proxy was felt not only in Afghanistan but in Pakistan as well in subsequent years.*

The militant outfits nourished in Pakistan were also engaged in jihad in India-administered Kashmir in the 1990s also allowed these groups to widen their footprint in the country. Post 9/11 global politics led Pakistan transform its foreign and domestic policy regarding jihadi and militant organizations, considering them strategic assets. Pakistan‟s partnership in global war of terror provided an excuse to these militant organizations to expand their spectrum. These outfits exploited the prior sectarian divided against each other, against all other sects and against non-Muslim communities of the state also. The militant organizations adopted maxim, "war against infidelity." This new maxim bought a wave of terrorism. (Nafees, 2021) It also instigate dynamics of sectarianism.

Pakistan‟s escalating sectarian tension forced it to not to join the Arab Coalition formulated to counter Shia Houthies supported by Iran in Yemen‟s civil war. (Zahid Shahab Ahmed S. A., 2020) This led to emerge divergence between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan have second largest Shia population after Iran. This Shia section of the society was susceptible to come on roads to protest following the execution of Shaikh Nimr al-Nimr in January 2016 under the influence of Iran. Despite caution, Pakistan found it difficult not to endorse the Saudi position in public statements. In a speech delivered in the National Assembly by Adviser to the Prime Minister on Foreign Affairs, Sartaj Aziz was adamant that attacks on Saudi diplomatic missions were unacceptable. It was also revealed by the media reports that Pakistani Shias were recruited by the Iran to contest with Assad regime along Iranian Revolutionary Guards in Syrian war. Another factor that compel Pakistan to reconsider its leaning policy towards Saudi Arabia is the dynamics of separatist elements operating in Baluchistan. Suppressing these elements is in the interest of both Iran and Pakistan. Furthermore both Iran and Pakistan are aligned to cooperate in Afghanistan, Iran for its investments and Pakistan for its domestic environment. Also emergence of Gwadar and Chabahar ports as sisterly ports is a new development. (Khetran, 2018)

As the tension escalates between Iran and Saudi Arabia, it becomes test of nerves for Pakistan‟s policy makers to find a neutral course to go together with the arch rivals by preserving its own interest. Equipped with nuclear power, Iran is a source of tension for GCC states particularly

Saudi Arabia. (Amara Tul Kubra, 2022) This is matter of concern for Pakistan that cannot maintain its convergence with Saudi Arabia on the cost of its ties with Iran anymore keeping in view its domestic dynamics in terms of sectarian grounds.

4. Escalation of Sectarian Violence in Pakistan

Pakistan is known for its probability for being a conflict prone country in sociopolitical and religious terms but. Last two decades of Pakistan Movement were led by Jinnah who belonged to the Shia community though Muslims in Subcontinent were Sunnis in majority. Tension between Shia and Sunni remained insubstantial during early years after emergence of Pakistan. Ahmadi Movement is viewed as heterodox both by the majority of the Shia and Sunni population on the whole. (HDS, 2014) during Pakistan movement and after the emergence of Pakistan. Thus sectarian division remained minimal for quite a long time.

According to Maryam S. Khan the real catastrophe began when the "constitutionalization" of sectarianism in Pakistan was embarked on after 1970s. In one of her report, she has defined the very phenomena in these words. „"It the process of constitutionally articulating sectarian divisions and excluding various sects from equal rights and citizenship – as well as the politics behind it."" (Khan, 2015) Inculcating religious zeal through the constitution of 1973 in the Pakistan was one evidence of the fact.

Zia"s policies of Islamisation. His zeal to make Pakistan a true Islamic society was evident from his maiden speech to the nation. He invigorated the influence of Islamic parties and ulamas on the state affairs and societal outlook. His policies not only implicated the Muslim personal laws and religious dynamics (Wynbrandt, 2009) but also moved society unavoidably towards sunnification and prompted the militant and sectarian fault lines of society. The institutionalization of Islam particularly on Zakat collection by the state raised mistrust among Shias. Musa Khan JalalZai in his book „"The Crisis of State and Security in Pakistan"" has analyzed that when a state institutionalized a religion, confrontation and competition may arise among various sects. (JalalZai, 2002) No wonder same confrontation through vested political and militant wings can be observed among Shias and Sunnis in Pakistan particularly soon after Zia"s process of Islamization.

Besides Zia"s policies, execution of Bhutto, a prominent political figure from Shia sect, raised sheer apprehensions among Shias. The discriminatory policies of state against minorities were increasingly becoming intolerable. (Fischer, 2004) Tehrek-e-Nafaz-e-Fiqah was launched by the Shias with the support of Iran due to the political vacuum sensed by them. Establishment fearing from appeal of Iranian Revolution in Shias of Pakistan, Sipah-e-Sahaba (SSP) was created by the establishment as countering measure with the financial aid extended by the Riyadh. SSP demanded to declare Pakistan an officially Sunni state on the lines of Saudi Arabia and also denounce Shias as non-Muslims. (Lieven, 2012) Furthermore Iran-Saudi Arabia"s proxy in Afghanistan yielded favorable circumstances for Zia"s zeal of Islamization in Pakistan with the U.S. support. (Hiro D. , 2018) Under the influence of Saudi Arabia, Zia"s policies brought heedless Sunnification that deepened the never ending clash between secular or moderate and religious faction of the society where Shia-Sunni schism through political and militant wings kept stewing deeper level. (JalalZai, 2002)

Bloody Tit-for-tat killings, suicide bombings and targeting the mosques, funerals and religious gatherings of the other sects caused anarchic law and order in the country. Huma Yousuf has mentioned that poverty, underdevelopment and political vacuum were the contributing factors for rise of extremism and sectarian schism in Southern Punjab particularly and in Pakistan generally. According to her, the main actors involved in cultivating sectarianism were Ahle Sunnat Waljammat(ASWJ), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipah-e-Mohammadi Pakistan (SMP), Tehrik-e-Jafria Pakistan (TJP), Sunni Tehreek (ST), Jundullah and TTP (Yousuf, 2012)

In 1990s, Nawaz Sharif government took some strict measures against anti-Shia militants. Even in Musharraf regime, ban was imposed on SSP and LeJ. In retaliation SSP and LeJ extended ties to TTP. (Lieven, 2012) Not only this, some local militant organizations also established alliances

with global Jihadist Organizations like Al-Qaida. (Chisti, 2011) In the coming years, SSP remained successful in making entry in the politics by alliancing with PPP. (Hiro D. , 2018) These alliances brought immense domestic security challenges.

The first recorded incident of sectarian violence is found to have happened on 3rd June 1963 in Thehri area of Khairpur when 118 Shia Muslims were killed by a mob of Deobandies who tracked down the Tazia procession by Shia Muslims against their convictions. (Murphy, 2018) Another major development was the Shia-Sunni riot occurred in Karachi during the month of Muharram that killed 60 persons in 1983. (Boarder, 1987) This was the beginning of the sectarian violence that continued in the subsequent years. From 1983 to 2020, 1311 incidents of sectarian violence were reported in the country that left 6424 persons dead and 8970 wounded. From year 2021-2023, more than 400 incidents of sectarian violence were recorded that claimed 450 lives and left more than 600 people injured. (The Data has been collected by the author from the websites of Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies (PIPS) and Interior Ministry of Pakistan)
From 1983 to 2020, 53 percent lives claimed in these sectarian violence incidents were from Shia community while 23 percent were Sunnis. Remaining 11 percent were unknown in terms of their while 13 percent were either Christians or Hindus, Ahmadis, Sikhs, Sufi devotees, and Zikris. Largest number of these sectarian violence acts occurred in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa (including previous FATA district) 40 percent, trailed by Sindh (22 percent), Balochistan (22 percent), Punjab (including Islamabad as well) 15 percent, GB and AJK 1 percent. Though Shias and other non-Muslims groups are 20 percent of the total populace, they were 66 percent of the all the lives claimed in these incidents. A similar type of variance was distinguished among the provinces as well. The population of Khyber Pukhtunkhwa and Balochistan is around 22 percent of the entire populace of the country while the 62 percent of casualties claimed in these sectarian violent acts were from these provinces. (Nafees, 2021) According to a report by Canada's International Forum for Rights and Security, more than 4,000 people from Shia sect are said to have been killed between 2013 and 2021. By the end of 2021, the number of missing persons from the said community reached to 700. (Sering, 2023) Out of 5,070 fatalities from sectarian violence, 1,150 were claimed to have been committed by Sunni militant groups like TTP (plus splinter groups), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Daish (Islamic State), and Jundullah. (Nafees, 2021)
In a report by the International Crisis Group (2022) has mentioned a new dynamics in the politics of sectarianism in Pakistan. It has mentioned that antagonism to non-Sunni Muslims was the hardcore policy of the Deobandi militants but it has reached to Sufi-based Barelvi sub-sect of Sunnis. Somewhere around 2017, a Barelvi group called Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) has been responsible for inducing probably the most horrifying tactics in the dynamics of state‟s sectarian violence chapter. On the other side, the local Islamic State franchise, Islamic, the Salafi Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), is invigorating the facts. The coldblooded murdered of the Srilankan manager by the mob being accused of blasphemy in 2021 and a bombing on a Shia mosque in Peshawar in 2022 that resulted the loss of 60 people were claimed by the TLP and ISKP respectively.
Though by ruling out some of the militant outfits is the evidence of state‟s keenness to tackle its domestic dynamics yet these sectarian and militant outfits are managing to sustain and remaining involved in eye for an eye killings. Managing the impact of these sectarian militants‟ outfits is a game of chess since they allure minds by evoking sensitive religious issues like blasphemy on one hand and political elite of state is still accommodating them for doing their plus and minus on the other hand.
Pakistan was came into being to protect the lives and interests of the minority community, Muslims of Subcontinent, against the fear of encroachment of their right by the majority community, Hindus. Ironically, its internal policies and letting the external forces to influence the societal and religious division in a way that served the same sense of alienation and fear of encroachment to its minorities.

5. Impact of Iran-Saudi Arabian Dialogue on Pakistan's Foreign Policy Rationale

The post Arab Spring animosity between Iran and Saudi Arabia reached on peak after the execution of Shaikh Nimral. Due to global efforts particularly by Pakistan, Iraq and China, there emerged some probability of rapprochement between them. Iraq offered to reconciliatory role in this regard in April 2019. (Connor, 2019) Major breakthrough was brooked by China‟s efforts of mediation. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to resume their ties. (Gans, 2023) This peace deal was a clear evidence of diminishing US role in political dynamics of Middle East and China‟s entry in politics of the region.

Pakistan also assumed the role of a facilitator among Iran and Saudi Arabia to reduce Iranian-Saudi rivalry. (IPS, 2022) It is expected from the rapprochement that it will pacify the political instability in Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain. (Bishara, 2023) It will definitely has diplomatic and social implications for Pakistan as well. In order to see far reaching implications, Pakistan also need to strike a balance between the aid and ideology. This new development may give rise to new opportunities for Pakistan to enhance its role in regional stability of the region. Pakistan may employ the situation in its favor in terms of investment, man power and business opportunities.

6. Conclusion

Iran-Saudi rift has always implicated Pakistan‟s foreign policy rational. It has always been a concern for Pakistan to maintain friendly ties with Iran as well as Saudi Arabia. Both Iran and Saudi Arabia has a history of confrontation at ideological and strategic fronts. Saudi Arabia being an orthodox Sunni state and Iran as a fundamentalist Shia state has been at proxies with each other not only in the Middle East but beyond the region as well. Striving for hegemony, the two states have fueled sectarian strives in Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon and Bahrain. Both states are ambitious to shape the social, political and religious dynamics of the region. This is how the Iran Saudi Arabia rift has crossed the boarders now. Proxies of Iran and Saudi Arabia has not only direct bearing on Pakistan‟s foreign policy rational but it has further aggravated the situation in Pakistan in terms of sectarian violence. Due to the rift of Iran and Saudi Arabia, it is a matter of great concern to strike a balance between these two arch rivals but Pakistan most of the time lean towards Saudi Arabia from Iran. Recently Iran and Saudi escalation has been pacified due to the involvement of global and regional actors. This recent advancement has opened new avenues for Pakistan‟s foreign policy makers as well.

Despite the Iran and Saudi Arabia‟s rapprochement, it is arguable that whether this will help Pakistan as well to pacify the intense social and religious strife in her society. For that Pakistan needs to, first of all, strike a balance between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan is immediate neighbor of Middle East. It definitely needs to assume an active role in sustaining peace and stability in the region but this goal should be accomplished without being party in Arab-Persian clash and Intra-Arab affairs. For sustaining friendly ties with others must not cost the neutrality of a state. This lesson must be kept in view the foreign policy makers of Pakistan as a foreign policy rationale has fall out in terms of domestic social and political dynamics. This is what one can observe in case of Pakistan particularly in terms of sectarian strife. Pakistan‟s foreign policy rational regarding Afghanistan and Iran-Saudi rift is a clear evidence of the fact. Secondly, Pakistan also needs to check the civic space it has provided to the sectarian and militant groups to flourish keeping in view them as strategic assets to achieve any domestic or foreign goal. Last but not the least, unless the judicial system is not playing its part in making the state and society accountable in granting the equal rights to practice their religion by minorities, politics of sectarianism can‟t be managed.

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