

PAKISTAN-IRAN RELATIONS: INTERSECTIONS OF POLITICS, CULTURE, AND REGIONAL SECURITY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the intricate political, cultural, and security dynamics shaping Pakistan-Iran relations. Rooted in shared history, religious ties, and cultural affinities, the relationship between these neighboring countries reflects both cooperation and conflict. The research explores diplomatic engagement, geopolitical considerations, and cultural diplomacy, analyzing how these factors influence bilateral policies and regional stability. Additionally, it examines collaborative efforts in counterterrorism, economic partnerships, and responses to shared security threats in the broader contexts of South Asia and the Middle East. Using a descriptive research method, the study synthesizes data from academic literature, policy reports, and official documents to provide a comprehensive analysis of contemporary and historical relations. The findings reveal the interconnectedness of political decisions and cultural interactions, offering fresh perspectives on regional geopolitics. This research provides strategic insights for scholars, policymakers, and analysts, contributing to a deeper understanding of the evolving Pakistan-Iran partnership and its implications for regional and international affairs.

Keywords: Pakistan-Iran Relations and Political Dynamics, Cultural Diplomacy and Regional Security, Economic Partnerships and Geopolitics Bilateral Policies, Foreign Policy and Strategic Cooperation, Religious Ties, and Historical Relations, South Asia and Middle East

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan-Iran relations represent a complex nexus of historical, political, and cultural dimensions. Their bilateral engagement is driven by strategic interests, sectarian dynamics, and regional security concerns. Shared borders and transnational issues contribute to both collaboration and contention (Ali 2016). As neighboring states, Pakistan and Iran share deeply entrenched historical, political, cultural, and geographical bonds that transcend formal diplomacy, encompassing trade, religious ties, and grassroots-level people-to-people

interactions (Rehman 2017). As influential states in South Asia and the Middle East, Pakistan and Iran have navigated a relationship marked by periods of strategic cooperation, shared geopolitical challenges, and shifting regional dynamics. These phases illustrate a complex interplay of mutual interests and occasional policy divergences, reflecting the nuanced nature of their bilateral ties (Ranjan and Baba 2023). The bilateral connection between Iran and Pakistan is pieced by multifaceted layers of attention. These

coatings enclose economic collaborations, political dialogues, vibrant cultural exchanges, and religious ties (Fatima, 2018). Amid the intricate landscape of international diplomacy, the relationship between Pakistan and Iran emerges as a compelling subject worthy of extensive analysis. Situated at the crossroads of the Middle East and South Asia, these neighboring states share a historical trajectory shaped by strategic interests, episodic tensions, and deep-rooted cultural ties (Bukhari 2019). Both countries have spanned a path that knots strategic interests with shared religious and cultural norms. Their connection has witnessed periods of collaboration, cooperation, and an era of suspense, reminiscing the complex tapestry of diplomatic relations (Rahim, 2019).

Historical Context of Pakistan and Iran

The historical context of Pakistan-Iran connections is deeply rooted in their rich heritage of cultural and religious instances of both countries (Jones, 2010). For centuries, a shared history marked by the exchange of scholars, intellectual traditions, and cross-border commerce has fostered enduring ties between Pakistan and Iran. These connections, deeply rooted in the legacy of ancient civilizations and empires, have significantly contributed to the unique and resilient nature of their bilateral relationship (Ansari 2013). The Iranian Revolution of 1979, the dynamics of the Cold War and the fascinating geopolitical method in South Asia and the Middle East have all played climactic roles in shaping the shapes of Pakistan-Iran ties (Ahmed, 2015). The bilateral relationship between Pakistan and Iran has been significantly influenced by major geopolitical transformations, particularly the Iranian Revolution of 1979 and the broader strategic context of the Cold War. Prior to the revolution, both states were closely allied through Western-backed security arrangements like CENTO and shared mutual regional interests. However, the revolution shifted Iran's ideological orientation, replacing the monarchy with an Islamic theocracy, and created a new regional power dynamic that challenged Pakistan's pro-Western stance. The Cold War further intensified these shifts, as global rivalries extended into South

Asia and the Middle East, compelling both states to recalibrate their foreign policies. While these changes caused periods of diplomatic tension, shared borders, economic interests, and cultural linkages ensured continued engagement. The post-revolution era, thus, reflects a transition from strategic alignment to a more complex, interest-driven bilateral relationship (Rizvi 2004). While existing research has offered practical insights into various aspects of this connection, a thorough investigation that blends both cultural and political dimensions remains conspicuously absent. The present study aims to bridge that gap by providing a holistic acuity of the dynamics stating the Pakistan-Iran relationship.

Literature Review

This study explores Pakistan's diplomatic relations, with a particular focus on its engagement with Iran. It opens with a broad overview of international relations, incorporating perspectives from the United States, Russia, China, the Middle East, and South Asia. The review summarizes key findings from existing literature and identifies critical research gaps, which inform the development of research questions and objectives. The chapter concludes by outlining the study's significance and anticipated contributions.

The study by Jones (2010) examines the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Iran, with a primary focus on historical perspectives. The findings reveal key historical trajectories that have shaped their relationship, emphasizing shared cultural, religious, and regional influences that contributed to its development. International relations evolve from non-alignment toward cooperative regionalism, shaped by historical legacies, strategic interests, and shifting alliances in dynamic geopolitical contexts (Paul 2010). Geopolitical, historical, and regional concerns have driven a shift from non-alignment to expanding cooperation between Pakistan and Iran, marking a significant transformation in their bilateral relationship. However, the findings of the study by Rafique et al. (2014) reveal that despite these cooperative trends, lingering issues such as border security, sectarian tensions, and competing regional alliances continue to challenge the depth

and consistency of their diplomatic engagement. Mahmood (2015) conducts a comparative analysis of the role of major powers in shaping Iran-Pakistan relations. The findings explore how interactions with global actors influence bilateral dynamics, revealing asymmetrical outcomes and the divergent interests of external players. The study further reveals that the involvement of global powers—such as the United States, China, and Russia—often shapes Iran-Pakistan relations through competing strategic agendas. For instance, U.S. sanctions on Iran have historically restricted Pakistan's economic cooperation with Tehran, while China's growing presence in both countries through projects like CPEC and Chabahar Port introduces a new layer of regional competition and interdependence (Mahmood 2015).

Bilateral Relations of Pakistan and Iran

The bilateral relationship between Pakistan and Iran is marked by a mix of historical ties, religious connections, strategic alignments, and intermittent tensions. Rooted in shared borders and cultural heritage, both countries have maintained diplomatic relations since Pakistan's inception in 1947. According to Bukhari (2019), the early years were characterized by strong cooperation, particularly through regional organizations such as the RCD and CENTO. However, post-1979 ideological shifts resulting from the Iranian Revolution brought a new dynamic, creating divergence in their domestic and foreign policies. Despite these differences, both countries continued to maintain formal diplomatic relations, often prioritizing regional stability and economic cooperation (Rizvi 2012). Rehman (2017) highlights that border security, sectarian tensions, and differing alignments—especially Pakistan's close ties with Saudi Arabia—have challenged bilateral harmony. Nonetheless, shared concerns over terrorism, cross-border trade, and regional conflicts such as Afghanistan have kept dialogue ongoing. Rafique et al. (2014) note that economic initiatives like the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline have reflected attempts to deepen bilateral cooperation, though international sanctions on Iran have repeatedly stalled progress. Moreover, Sial (2020) emphasizes the significance of people-to-people contact, cultural exchange,

and religious pilgrimage in maintaining goodwill, despite occasional diplomatic strains. Overall, while the relationship is occasionally shaped by external influences and strategic misalignments, the literature indicates a consistent effort from both sides to preserve and advance bilateral ties through pragmatic cooperation and diplomatic engagement.

Geo-Strategic Considerations of Pakistan and Iran

Scholars widely acknowledge that geo-strategic considerations have played a defining role in shaping Pakistan-Iran relations. Their shared 900-kilometer border, strategic proximity to the Persian Gulf, and positioning between South Asia and the Middle East place both countries at the center of regional power dynamics (Rizvi 2004). Mahmood (2015) argues that major power involvement—particularly by the U.S., China, and Saudi Arabia—has influenced bilateral engagements, often creating external pressures that challenge cooperation. Projects such as Iran's Chabahar Port (developed with Indian assistance) and Pakistan's Gwadar Port (under China's Belt and Road Initiative) are emblematic of this rivalry, reflecting not only economic competition but diverging strategic allegiances (Bukhari 2019). Rafique et al. (2014) highlight that border insecurity, sectarian tensions, and proxy conflicts have further strained ties, despite shared religious and cultural foundations. Meanwhile, Khan and Khan (2020) contend that the evolving situation in Afghanistan has forced both nations to reevaluate their regional postures, sometimes encouraging temporary alignment. Collectively, the literature reveals that while geography offers opportunities for bilateral cooperation, persistent external and internal pressures have prevented the realization of a stable strategic partnership.

Cultural Affinities of Pakistan and Iran

Cultural affinities between Pakistan and Iran have historically provided a foundation for diplomatic engagement and mutual understanding. Both nations share a rich legacy of Islamic traditions, literary exchanges, and religious symbolism, particularly rooted in Persian influence on South Asian culture (Zubaida 2005). The shared

observance of religious events—especially within the Shia and Sufi traditions—has helped foster people-to-people contact and religious tourism, reinforcing informal ties despite political fluctuations (Nasr 2006). According to Khan (2011), the interconnectedness of Baloch tribes along the Iran-Pakistan border has further strengthened cultural continuity, leading to shared linguistic and tribal identities that transcend national boundaries. Additionally, Kamrava (2013) notes that despite strategic differences, cultural diplomacy and educational exchange programs have served as soft-power tools that reinforce historical connections. These enduring cultural linkages, while sometimes overshadowed by geopolitical tensions, remain vital for sustaining bilateral dialogue and shaping long-term cooperation.

Diplomatic Engagements of Pakistan and Iran

Diplomatic engagements between Pakistan and Iran have evolved through fluctuating periods of alignment and divergence, largely shaped by geopolitical transformations, regional conflicts, and global alliances. In the early decades after independence, both nations enjoyed strong bilateral ties, cooperating under Western-aligned security frameworks like the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and the Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) (Hilali 2001). However, the 1979 Iranian Revolution marked a turning point, introducing ideological contrasts between Iran's theocratic governance and Pakistan's military-led, pro-Western stance. Despite this ideological rift, formal diplomacy continued, driven by shared interests in trade, border security, and regional stability. Ranjan and Baba (2023) argue that both countries have maintained diplomatic resilience, often engaging in high-level visits and regional dialogues despite periods of tension. The post-9/11 era added new complexities, as Pakistan grew closer to Saudi Arabia and the United States, while Iran remained under Western sanctions and pursued independent regional strategies (Javaid and Khan 2019). Mir (2021) highlights that the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and evolving alliances in the Middle East have necessitated renewed pragmatic engagement between the two

countries. In addition to formal state-level diplomacy, religious diplomacy and backchannel communication have played crucial roles in managing sensitive issues, particularly those related to sectarian dynamics (Rafique et al. 2014). Overall, the literature suggests that while diplomatic relations have experienced ideological and strategic fluctuations, engagement has remained a consistent feature of Pakistan-Iran relations, underscoring the enduring need for cooperation in an increasingly polarized region.

Economic Dimensions of Pakistan-Iran Relations

The economic relationship between Pakistan and Iran has historically been shaped by mutual dependence, geographic proximity, and regional infrastructure needs. Despite strong potential, the bilateral economic engagement has faced persistent challenges due to geopolitical tensions and international sanctions. According to Bukhari (2019), trade between the two nations remains below its potential, hindered by inadequate banking channels, border restrictions, and external pressure from global powers, particularly the United States. The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project, which once symbolized energy cooperation, has remained incomplete largely due to U.S. sanctions and political hesitations on Pakistan's part (Rizvi 2012). Nonetheless, informal trade and cross-border smuggling continue to thrive in the Balochistan region, reflecting grassroots economic interdependence (Rehman 2017). Sial (2020) points out that official trade has seen occasional spurts, especially in commodities such as rice, textiles, petroleum products, and fruits, yet overall volumes remain inconsistent. Moreover, China's economic influence in both countries through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Iran's involvement in regional trade initiatives like the Chabahar Port create both cooperation and competition (Javaid and Khan 2019). Rafique et al. (2014) argue that economic diplomacy remains underutilized, and both nations require institutional mechanisms to stabilize and formalize trade. While opportunities for economic collaboration persist—particularly in energy, transport, and agriculture—the literature

emphasizes that sustainable growth in Pakistan-Iran economic ties will depend on resolving geopolitical constraints and enhancing bilateral institutional frameworks.

Pakistan-Iran Trade Agreements

Trade agreements between Pakistan and Iran have long been seen as a mechanism to strengthen bilateral economic ties. Despite their shared border and historical connections, formal trade has remained underdeveloped. According to Rafique et al. (2014), the two countries signed a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) in 2006 aimed at reducing tariffs and boosting trade volume, but its implementation has faced several obstacles, including lack of banking channels, poor logistics, and international sanctions. Bukhari (2019) asserts that while political leaders frequently express intent to enhance trade, structural and legal impediments—especially related to compliance with global financial systems—continue to hinder progress. Rehman (2017) notes that informal trade through the Tafton border in Balochistan often surpasses formal trade, underlining the gap between policy and practice. Sial (2020) emphasizes that despite frequent bilateral commissions and memoranda of understanding (MoUs), tangible economic outcomes remain limited. However, Javaid and Khan (2019) suggest that regional infrastructure initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Iran's interest in integrating with Pakistan's Gwadar port offer new avenues for cooperation, contingent on resolving security and diplomatic tensions. While the trade agreements hold potential for economic integration, the literature concludes that without institutional reforms and protection from international sanctions, these frameworks are unlikely to achieve their intended impact.

Methods and Material

This study primarily centers on descriptive research literature, aligning it with the overarching theme of the study. By critically comparing and contrasting various scholarly approaches, the relevance of descriptive methodology emerges as particularly suited for analyzing Pakistan-Iran relations. The study relies on carefully selected

secondary data, ensuring its credibility and relevance through a stringent evaluation of validity and source reliability. This data is then systematically organized and presented in an operationalization table, which maps the literature to the specific research objectives and questions. This structured presentation allows for a more coherent understanding of the variables, indicators, and dimensions explored in the study, offering a clear foundation for analytical discourse. In doing so, the literature review not only contextualizes previous work but also highlights gaps that the current study aims to address, reinforcing the methodological fit of descriptive research within international relations scholarship.

Results and Discussion

This study draws upon the findings of a comprehensive review of existing research to build a strong theoretical foundation. It identifies and analyzes key scholarly sources relevant to the research topic, guiding the direction and scope of the investigation. By gathering, synthesizing, and interpreting literature within the field, the study highlights significant contributions, recurring themes, and existing research gaps. Furthermore, it presents a systematic summary of the reviewed literature, outlining the Key Measuring Indicators drawn from various sources to support the research framework. These indicators serve as essential components of the applied research framework adopted in the reviewed studies. Moreover, particular attention is given to the concluding observations, especially those that reflect broader perspectives emerging from Pakistan and Iran. These insights provide valuable regional context and distinct viewpoints, enriching the overall understanding of the subject and its implications within a wider geopolitical and cultural landscape. This study highlights five core research questions that form the basis of the findings, with a particular focus on political dimensions, cultural exchanges, language adoption, and public relations. These questions are designed to guide the investigation and offer fresh insights into the dynamics of Pakistan-Iran relations. Each question serves as a measurable objective, enabling a structured approach to

analyzing key aspects of bilateral interactions. The first research question explores the political dimensions of the relationship, aiming to elucidate how political developments, government policies, and regional alliances in both Pakistan and Iran shape their bilateral priorities. It further examines how these factors influence the overall tone and direction of diplomatic engagement. The second research question investigates cultural exchanges between the two nations, analyzing how shared religious beliefs, traditions, and artistic expressions contribute to mutual understanding and soft power diplomacy. It considers the role of cultural institutions, events, and people-to-people interactions in fostering cross-border connectivity. The third research question focuses on language

adoption, exploring how linguistic ties—particularly through religious discourse, media, and educational institutions—reinforce cultural affinity and bilateral communication. The fourth research question examines public relations and media representation, evaluating how each country portrays the other in news, policy narratives, and social discourse. It seeks to understand the impact of media framing on public perception and diplomatic relations. Finally, the fifth research question synthesizes the findings from the above dimensions to assess the broader implications for regional cooperation, stability, and strategic partnership in South Asia and the Middle East.

Table 1: Bilateral Relation of Pakistan and Iran

Key measuring Indicators	Bilateral Relation of Pakistan and Iran
<i>Pakistan</i>	Pakistan regards its bilateral relations with Iran as a crucial component of its foreign policy, characterized by a blend of economic interests, historical ties, regional security concerns, and the need to navigate complex regional dynamics (Jones, 2010). The findings of this study reveal that these factors are not only historically rooted but continue to shape contemporary diplomatic strategies, with both countries seeking cooperation in areas such as border security, energy trade, and cultural diplomacy.
<i>Iran</i>	Iran views its bilateral relations with Pakistan as essential, given their shared border and regional significance. It seeks to enhance economic cooperation, address security challenges along the border, and maintain a balanced regional foreign policy, acknowledging Pakistan's role in promoting regional stability (Hassan, 2016). The findings of this study indicate that Iran increasingly prioritizes strategic engagement with Pakistan to counter mutual security threats, especially in border areas, and to expand energy and trade initiatives. This reflects a shift toward pragmatic diplomacy rooted in regional interdependence and shared geopolitical interests.
<i>Remarks</i>	This study aims to elucidate how political developments in Pakistan and Iran shape their bilateral priorities and influence the overall tone of their relationship. The findings reveal that shifts in government leadership, regional alliances, and external pressures—such as U.S. sanctions on Iran or Pakistan's ties with Gulf states—significantly affect diplomatic engagement between the two nations. Periods of political alignment have fostered cooperation in trade, security, and energy, while conflicting geopolitical interests have occasionally led to diplomatic strain. Overall, the study highlights that political developments act as both catalysts and constraints in shaping the dynamics of Pakistan-Iran relations.

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of Bilateral Relation of Pakistan and Iran

The political relationship between Pakistan and Iran is shaped by a complex interplay of historical ties, shared borders, regional ambitions, and evolving domestic and international political landscapes. On one hand, Pakistan views its bilateral ties with Iran as a vital component of its foreign policy, driven by economic interests, religious and cultural connections, and regional security considerations. The study finds that Pakistan's engagement with Iran is often influenced by the need to balance its alliances with other regional and global powers, such as Saudi Arabia and the United States, while maintaining constructive relations with its immediate neighbor.

On the other hand, Iran considers its relationship with Pakistan crucial due to their shared border

and Pakistan's strategic role in South Asia. The findings reveal that Iran prioritizes enhanced economic cooperation, joint efforts to address border security issues, and the pursuit of a balanced foreign policy that recognizes Pakistan's influence in regional stability. Political developments in both countries—such as leadership changes, foreign alliances, and regional tensions—directly shape the tone and priorities of their diplomatic engagement.

The study concludes that while both nations emphasize cooperation in areas like border management, trade, and regional diplomacy, fluctuating political conditions often determine the intensity and direction of their relationship. Despite occasional tensions, the mutual recognition of shared interests continues to provide a platform for dialogue and collaboration.

Table 2: Diplomatic Engagements of Pakistan and Iran

Key measuring Indicators	Diplomatic Engagements of Pakistan and Iran
Pakistan	Pakistan's diplomatic engagement with Iran is characterized by several key dimensions. Economic cooperation, particularly in energy projects and trade agreements, presents promising opportunities for both countries. Shared security concerns—especially those related to border areas—further motivate collaboration in border management and counterterrorism. At the same time, Pakistan carefully balances its relations with Iran alongside its strategic ties with the Gulf states, the United States, and other regional actors (Rehman, 2017). The findings of this study reveal that while Pakistan views Iran as a significant regional partner, its diplomatic strategy is shaped by a need to maintain equilibrium in a complex geopolitical environment. This balancing act often leads to cautious but steady engagement with Iran, particularly in areas of mutual benefit such as energy, border security, and cultural exchange.
Iran	Iran's perspective on diplomatic engagement with Pakistan is multifaceted, encompassing regional security concerns, economic interests, cultural connections, and a desire to play a formative role in promoting regional stability (Ahmed, 2017). The findings of this study indicate that Iran increasingly views Pakistan as a strategic partner in managing border security and countering extremism, particularly in the Sistan-Balochistan region. Moreover, Iran seeks to strengthen economic ties through energy exports and infrastructure projects, despite challenges posed by international sanctions. Cultural diplomacy also emerges as a soft power tool, with shared religious and linguistic heritage offering a foundation for deeper people-to-people connections and long-term cooperation.

Remarks	Despite the identified areas of diplomatic engagement between Pakistan and Iran, this study reveals several critical gaps that hinder the full realization of their bilateral potential. First, while economic cooperation is frequently emphasized, there is a lack of consistent follow-through on major energy and trade projects, often delayed or derailed by geopolitical tensions and external influences, such as sanctions on Iran or pressure from allied states. Second, although border security collaboration exists, there is minimal institutional coordination and limited transparency in joint operations, which reduces long-term trust. Third, the cultural exchange dimension, though acknowledged, remains underutilized due to insufficient policy focus and weak public diplomacy initiatives. Finally, the study finds a notable gap in academic and policy literature analyzing how Pakistan's diplomatic balancing between Iran and other regional powers impacts sustained engagement. Addressing these gaps is essential to strengthening bilateral relations beyond strategic caution and toward deeper, long-term cooperation.
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Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of Diplomatic Engagements of Pakistan and Iran

Iran's diplomatic engagement with Pakistan reflects a multidimensional approach shaped by overlapping regional, economic, and cultural interests. Strategically located along a shared border, both countries face common security challenges, particularly in relation to insurgent activity and border instability in the Sistan-Balochistan region. The study finds that Iran views Pakistan as a critical partner in maintaining border security and addressing transnational threats through bilateral cooperation and intelligence-sharing initiatives. Economically, Iran continues to pursue trade and energy collaboration with Pakistan, including projects like gas pipeline agreements and transit routes that can bypass regional constraints. However, these efforts are often impeded by external sanctions, financial restrictions, and Pakistan's complex relations with U.S.-aligned Gulf states. Despite these barriers, the study reveals a persistent Iranian interest in maintaining and expanding economic ties, especially in sectors like energy and transportation. Culturally, Iran leverages its historical and religious links with Pakistan's Shi'a population and broader Islamic identity to foster mutual understanding. The findings also suggest that cultural diplomacy is increasingly seen by Iran as a tool to strengthen public opinion and build long-term goodwill in the region. Overall, Iran's diplomatic engagement with Pakistan is informed by both pragmatic regional strategy and ideological alignment, though its full potential remains

constrained by geopolitical realities and fluctuating bilateral priorities. To strengthen diplomatic engagement between Iran and Pakistan, several strategic steps are recommended. First, both nations should enhance bilateral mechanisms for border security cooperation by establishing structured joint operations and regular intelligence sharing to address mutual threats in the border regions. Second, despite challenges posed by external sanctions and geopolitical constraints, efforts must be made to revitalize key economic initiatives, such as the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline and trade corridor projects. These can be supported through collaboration within multilateral platforms like the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Third, cultural diplomacy should be expanded through academic collaborations, student exchanges, and cultural programs that promote people-to-people connectivity and counter misperceptions. In addition, both countries need to develop a balanced regional diplomatic strategy that allows them to pursue mutual interests without compromising their ties with other regional powers. Institutionalizing high-level strategic dialogues would ensure continuity in engagement, even amidst political transitions. Lastly, promoting collaborative research through think tanks and universities can generate evidence-based policy solutions and deepen mutual understanding, ultimately contributing to a more stable and constructive bilateral relationship.

The third research question explores the role of language adoption in reinforcing cultural affinity and enhancing bilateral communication between Pakistan and Iran. The findings of this study suggest that linguistic ties, though not central to formal diplomatic relations, play a significant role in informal cultural diplomacy and the transmission of shared religious and ideological values. In both countries, language serves as a medium for religious discourse, particularly through the use of Arabic and Persian in religious texts, sermons, and seminars, which facilitates mutual understanding and cross-border ideological connectivity. Persian, historically influential in the cultural and intellectual traditions of the Indian subcontinent, retains symbolic significance in Pakistan's religious and literary circles. In parallel, Urdu has gained some recognition in Iranian media and educational institutions, particularly where regional cooperation is emphasized. The study reveals that language adoption occurs more through indirect channels—such as religious institutions, academic settings, and media—than through formal policy mechanisms. This organic linguistic exchange contributes to cultural continuity and soft power influence. However, the findings also identify a gap in structured language policy initiatives between the two nations. There is limited investment in promoting each other's language formally through educational curricula or state-sponsored language programs. While mutual interest in cultural and religious texts fosters a level of linguistic familiarity, the lack of institutional frameworks restricts its expansion. Moreover, media cooperation, though present, remains underutilized in promoting bilingual or multilingual platforms that could foster deeper cross-cultural communication. In conclusion, language adoption remains a subtle but impactful element in Pakistan-Iran relations. Strengthening institutional support for language exchange—through academic partnerships, cultural centers, and translation initiatives—could further enhance mutual understanding and contribute to a more cohesive regional identity rooted in shared linguistic and cultural heritage.

Discussion

This study investigates the complex and evolving diplomatic relationship between Pakistan and Iran, uncovering multiple layers shaped by political, economic, security, and cultural considerations. The findings demonstrate that both countries recognize the strategic importance of their bilateral ties, yet their engagement remains limited due to regional rivalries, external geopolitical pressures, and internal policy constraints. Pakistan's foreign policy reflects a balancing act, as it attempts to sustain positive relations with Iran while simultaneously aligning with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and maintaining strategic partnerships with the United States and China. This cautious approach is evident in the selective implementation of economic projects such as the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, which remains incomplete due to sanctions and diplomatic sensitivities. While cooperation in border security has been pursued, the lack of institutionalized frameworks restricts long-term planning and consistent outcomes. Iran, on the other hand, views Pakistan as a critical neighbor in South Asia and a potential partner in ensuring regional security, particularly in countering cross-border insurgency in the Sistan-Balochistan region. Iran also aims to expand economic cooperation and cultural diplomacy. However, its initiatives are constrained by international isolation and financial limitations. The study highlights a significant gap in the effective use of soft power, with minimal emphasis on cultural exchange, academic collaboration, or public diplomacy. Despite shared religious and historical linkages, mutual distrust and sporadic communication weaken the potential for sustained cooperation. Both countries lack a structured bilateral dialogue mechanism, which further limits the consistency of diplomatic engagement. The findings suggest that the long-term strengthening of Pakistan-Iran relations depends on pragmatic, interest-based diplomacy that transcends ideological divisions. Enhanced institutional cooperation, greater people-to-people engagement, and regionally focused policy autonomy are essential for building a more stable and mutually beneficial relationship between the two nations.

Conclusion

The diplomatic relationship between Pakistan and Iran is shaped by a complex interplay of historical connections, shared borders, regional security concerns, economic interests, and cultural ties. This study concludes that while both countries recognize the strategic importance of their bilateral relationship, their diplomatic engagements remain cautious, often influenced by shifting regional alliances and international pressures. Pakistan continues to balance its ties with Iran alongside its strong relations with the Gulf States and Western powers, which affects the depth and consistency of its cooperation with Iran. Iran, on the other hand, views Pakistan as a key regional actor, particularly in terms of border security, economic collaboration, and religious-cultural connectivity. Despite political willingness on both sides, the progress of joint initiatives, such as energy projects and trade agreements, has been slow due to external sanctions, diplomatic sensitivities, and lack of institutional support. The study also identifies underutilized areas of cooperation, particularly in cultural diplomacy and language exchange, which hold potential for enhancing mutual understanding and public engagement. Moreover, the absence of structured diplomatic forums and long-term policy planning has limited the potential for a deeper and more stable partnership. In conclusion, while diplomatic engagement between Pakistan and Iran has shown moments of alignment, it remains constrained by broader geopolitical realities. For future progress, both countries must invest in institutionalized dialogue, pragmatic cooperation in trade and security, and the promotion of cultural and academic exchange. Doing so will pave the way for a more balanced, stable, and mutually beneficial bilateral relationship.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, it is recommended that both Pakistan and Iran pursue a more structured and forward-looking approach to strengthen their bilateral relations. One of the most pressing needs is the institutionalization of regular diplomatic dialogue through high-level forums, joint commissions, or regional summits. These platforms would enable consistent

communication, reduce misunderstandings, and support long-term policy planning, regardless of changing political leadership. There is also a strong need to revitalize economic cooperation, especially in the areas of trade, energy, and infrastructure. Both countries should revisit and implement delayed projects, such as the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline, by exploring multilateral solutions to overcome sanctions and financial barriers. Establishing special economic zones and easing trade regulations could further promote bilateral economic growth. In the realm of security, it is essential to develop joint strategies for border management and counterterrorism. A coordinated response to shared challenges, particularly in the Sistan-Balochistan region, would help build trust and contribute to regional stability. Furthermore, cultural and linguistic exchanges should be actively promoted. Despite shared religious and historical links, formal cultural diplomacy has been minimal. Establishing cultural centers, encouraging student exchange programs, and supporting joint media and academic initiatives can foster stronger people-to-people ties. Finally, both states must adopt independent, interest-driven foreign policies that prioritize regional cooperation over external alignments. A more pragmatic and balanced diplomatic approach, rooted in mutual benefit, will allow Pakistan and Iran to transition from cautious cooperation to a resilient and strategic partnership.

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