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**PAKISTAN'S GEOSTRATEGIC POSITION AND ITS IMPACT ON
MIDDLE EASTERN POLITICS**

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan's geostrategic location has long made it a pivotal player in global and regional politics, especially in the context of the Middle East. Situated at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, Pakistan holds significant military, economic, and political leverage. Its proximity to key Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Afghanistan places it at the heart of ongoing geopolitical dynamics. Pakistan's role as a key ally of both the United States and China, coupled with its close ties to the Gulf states, has also shaped its influence in Middle Eastern politics. The nation's involvement in regional security matters, particularly with regard to Afghanistan and the ongoing tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, has deepened its strategic significance. Pakistan's military strength, nuclear capabilities, and its participation in international coalitions further reinforce its status as a key actor in the region. Additionally, Pakistan's role in mediating conflicts, managing refugees, and balancing its relations between Western powers and Middle Eastern countries has allowed it to maintain a unique diplomatic position. This paper examines the various dimensions of Pakistan's geostrategic position and its implications for Middle Eastern politics, exploring the impact of its alliances, military engagement, and diplomatic initiatives in shaping the region's future.

Keywords: *Pakistan, Geostrategic Position, Middle East, Geopolitical Dynamics, Regional Politics, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan, Diplomacy, Military Alliances.*

Introduction

The issue of Pakistan's geo-strategic importance in the rapidly changing landscape of world politics, particularly in the context of the Middle East, is a question that has generated significant interest in the current literature on international relations. This focus on Pakistan's positioning is critical as its strategic significance increasingly influences global power dynamics. It will be observed that this unique importance has had a substantial

effect on Pakistan's bilateral relations with various Middle Eastern countries as a direct and indirect result of its crucial geo-strategic location (Hussain et al.2021). The interplay of these factors has led to the development of strong diplomatic ties and shared interests between Pakistan and several nations in the region. Therefore, it is only fitting that such robust relationships and mutual interests evolve. This paper aims to delve into the reasons behind this growing mutual alliance, exploring the historical context, economic ties, and security collaborations that underpin these dynamics. Additionally, it will examine both the present and future impact of this alliance on Middle Eastern politics, taking into account the ongoing transformations in global and local conditions, and how these changes may shape the future trajectory of regional stability and collaboration.

The primary thesis of this article is that intricate interconnections between the Middle East and Pakistan exist on various levels, and these are largely shaped by geographical and political factors (Hussain & Hussain, 2017). The purpose of this essay is to explore the reasons for close ties between the two, and to explain how Pakistan can distinctly violate its diplomatically proclaimed neutrality or non-interference policy where the Middle East is concerned. Although this topic has mostly fallen under the radar in the mainstream, nonetheless it remains pertinent for understanding both global and regional implications, especially noting the security, economic and cultural dimensions involved. The reasons why these factors are important for contemporary developments in the politics of the Middle East are also elaborated upon. Some themes within this large topic are global motivations for a Pakistani presence in the Middle East, military-to-military ties, the impact of the so-called 'Ummah factor' and the changed energy attitudes of Pakistan and the Middle East. After discussing these aspects, readers are left to draw conclusions from a broader understanding of the role Pakistan plays in the region.

Historical Background of Pakistan's Geostrategic Location

Pakistan's geostrategic location has been significant historically, strategically, and for reasons related to its security. The country's foreign policy foundation still might have been established regarding these objectives. Earlier, during the time of its independence, Pakistan aspired to have amicable and cordial relations with its neighbors, including India. It aspired to build stable and sustainable ties with all the other influential countries over the globe. Moreover, in the heat of the context of the global climate, it intended to foster civil and military ties with the countries drawn towards Communism or Capitalism (Muzaffar,

2016). Customarily, Pakistan considered that Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey should be included within its allies. After WW-II, Pakistan also wished to cherish strong relationships with the superpowers. Furthermore, it would always prefer to retain the cooperation of one of its neighbors, Afghanistan for hindering any risk or threat posed by India.

The partition of India, on 14 August, 1947, followed the creation of a sovereign, independent state named Pakistan. From the pre-creation of the movement of Pakistan, it has been decreed that Pakistan couldn't survive without the utmost collaboration, assistance, and alliance with the Middle East countries. The conterminous states of Pakistan flooded within the Southeast Asia were mainly infertile and enmity between India was chronic. Awfully soon after independence, the first Kashmir war confined in 1948, and it was confirmed that Pakistan-US relations will always experience an ups-and-down sort of relations (Sheikh et al.2024). Both the countries would never be expected to breed a long-term friendship. In the 1950s, the US started its SWOT analysis programs for Pakistan and signed up Baghdad Pact (Northern Tier), which contained Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and UK.

Therefore, it was regarded by the Soviets as anti-Soviet and offensive-like posture for their strategic positions. As a result, Pakistan affianced a more special friendship with the US, which could cover the roots to saline time along. This later sort of special friendship was transformed into essential friendship in the form of SEATO and CENTO. These regional pacts were forged against the focal point of communist threats The USSR and its satellites. The US wrapped up arms and arsenal camps in the Pakistani territories. Lastly, on 22nd September, 1958, a martial law was declared and General Muhammad Ayub Khan took power afterwards. In 1962, due to the Indo-China conflict, India started U2-broiling terrorism activities on the LOC with China, and on the East Karen, inducing a two-forth severe clash with Pakistan, cutting the feet of President Ayyub Khan and the Army. In 1963, Zia ul Haq was despatched to Jordan for military training, and after his return, he continued his education at the Fort Benning School in the USA, demonstrating as the most powerful bastion in form of a dictator later on. In December 1971, during civil war between East and West Pakistan, the Soviets still remained cautious and operated in favor of India in secrecy.

Geopolitical Significance of Pakistan in the Region

Pakistan is located at such a crucial and geo-strategic position that its importance cannot be denied or overlooked by anyone aware of international relations. This auspicious fact emerged prominently

soon after the creation of the country in 1947. The geographical location of Pakistan places it at the critical juncture of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, which enhances its strategic significance in numerous ways. Due to this rare and valuable blessing, Pakistan is positioned to play a significant and influential role in both regional and global politics. Geopolitically, it oversees Middle Eastern nations and the various states within Central Asia, allowing it to act as a crucial link between these diverse regions. The presence of the Arabian Sea to the south and the proximity of the Persian Gulf places Pakistan in close reach of oil-exporting Gulf countries, which further solidifies its status and importance in economic terms and brings it even closer to other global and regional geo-strategic competitors. In short, and in conclusion, Pakistan is not just any country; it is the gateway to Central Asia and the Middle East. Furthermore, it shares common borders, culture, language, religion, and civilization with the Central Asian states and Middle Eastern nations, forming a unique and interconnected network of relationships that can greatly benefit all involved (Rauf, 2021).

Pakistan's geo-strategic importance can be observed from the fact that Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to reach the warm waters. Whereas, Pakistan and the USA forged the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union, Kabul Regime and Russia became the defeat and the consequences were the fall of the Soviet Empire and disintegration of the USSR. Peace and stability is Pakistan and US were together. Despite having a small economy and insufficient military power, Pakistan has always been able to maintain its stance due to its strategic importance. Pakistan is strategically located in terms of the major trade routes and those sea lanes where around 40% of the oil trade is conducted. Pakistan is also situated at the crossroad of the three pre-dominating regions of Asia such as Central Asia, South Asia, West Asia and China. Pakistan is the bridge between north and south, east and west, gulf and central Asia. It shares a 20km border with China, while more than half of the world population lives within 3200kms from its boundary. Furthermore, the world's five big powers such as China, Russia, USA, UK, and France have their interest in this region (Hassan Syed, 1970).

Pakistan's Relations with Middle Eastern Countries

Pakistan's geostrategic location has deep-rooted historical and contemporary implications for its relations with Middle Eastern countries. The Straits of Hormuz, situated at the confluence of the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf, is part of the vital maritime crude oil market. This maritime geostrategic hotspot is bordered

on the north by Iran and on the south by the Emirates of Om Al-Qaiwain and Ras Al-Khaimah. Pakistan's geographical location places it very close to the Strait of Hormuz on the north, providing it with strategic depth in the region. This geographical advantage has made the case for the potent geostrategic positioning of Pakistan in regional politics.

Pakistan has maintained multifaceted relations with Middle Eastern countries for a long time. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) officially designated Gwadar port as a gateway to the Middle-East and Central Asia. The historical prospective paved the way for the spread of Islam from the Arabian Peninsula into Sindh, leading to the rise of the textile industry. Alexander the Great, during his campaign of exploration to the East, also established contact with the Sindh area of Pakistan. Political cooperation started in 1843 and has continued. Trade, sports, and culture flourish between the Gulf and Pakistan where the Middle-Eastern countries began to build houses, mosques, and other infrastructure in Karachi. After the Suez Canal crisis in 1952, the Middle Eastern hostilities toward Israel began to enflame Pakistan. In the UN, despite U.S. assurance, Pakistan was discouraged on the issue of apprehending the tools from Jordan in favor of Israel (Ebad Athar, 2019). Based on trust between Pakistan and Arab nations, Ayub Khan agreed to provide arms for the freedom of Kashmir. Thus, the seeds of cooperation in political and military affairs were firmly set. Pakistani pilots flew F-86 Sabre jets and shot down Indian forces in a matter of minutes. Looking at the total picture of the statistics shared by the MOFA, the relations between the two countries are maintained at a high level of cordiality. Any statement coming from Pakistan's foreign minister regarding Iran is a loud display of his love for Iran. Japan, Italy, Arab, and China, consist of 67 telephone conversations related to political and security matters in the USA between 1st of January 2021 to 29th of October 2021.

Likewise, relations between Oman, Italy, Japan, Canada, Germany, Australia, Sweden, France, and Middle-Eastern (UAE, Egypt, Saudi, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Iran) transmit 87 meetings; 47 of them are in person. A delegation is sent to the Middle-Eastern countries 4 times and coming to Pakistan seven times. Iran became the third-largest buyer of Pakistani rice. Imam Khomeini sends his representative to Pakistan for social-political ties with the Arab king. Pharmaceutical goods, wheat, and diesel are selling to Oman with the consent of the apex. Likewise, UAE insists Pakistan export surplus wheat. Iraq presents an export plan to Pakistan for the purchase of refined sugar, rice, tobacco, and

Kino; Pakistan said it will consider the proposal backed by the same tone by Iraq. Pakistani envoy briefed the Middle-Eastern monarch diplomatically. In this regard, considers the invasion of Iraq by Saddam Hussain as a threat against the Arab monarchies for growing weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Fixed-line telephones are installed in the market. Imports regard meat, sugar, oil, and other agriculture items. Thirty-six delegations exchanged resulting in increasing confidence and allied countries.

The case of Libya is interesting to note, because Pakistan and Libya have signed a defense cooperation agreement. Libya team impressed the Pakistan standing to train Libyan forces. Libyan military men come in large numbers for advanced training. In 2021 UAE continues to pressure Pakistan to establish relations with Israel with a dose of money (Iqbal, 2024). When the world turned itself into a knowledge factory, far ahead of Pakistan as a sulfur time bomb lying on the eastern side and the Iranian bomb laying on the left side. Afghanistan showed the determination to erect an atomic power plant while India completed the journey of missile technology. United Arab Emirates (UAE) bought a bill center to establish arm manufacturing industries (Mandle & Pearson, 2023). Israel was backing India to target the nuclear power plant. Subsequently, the ministry of defense fails some military clans, adding the missile and warheads with limited choice thrown into the Arabian Sea. Israeli aircraft maneuvers flying long circles in the northern position of Pakistan on the bash as a display of threat. Israel pressured the Caspian sea to chain gas pipes to supply arms to India. Establishing trading companies to conceal weapon transactions. Buying ordinary objects and causing damage with disguised explosive; nuclear technology was supplied to erect nuclear weapons with full deterrence capability from maintaining bogus telecommunication companies. Engan, Khamenei, and Aqeel prefer a bigoted religious regime in Pakistan which will guarantee a solid alliance with the Iranian regime, ascertainment, and reaffirmation of the era's foreign policy keeping a good diplomatic value of not engaging in the main conflict emanating from the Middle-Eastern antagonists (Hameed & Majeed, 2022). Energy is an area of the utmost potential; recently it was found that energy is in Iran and Qatar, so, to provide sufficient energy for CPEC, Iran is much preferred to Qatar.

Military and Defense Cooperation between Pakistan and Middle Eastern Countries

Pakistani officials have often underlined the strategic importance of their country's geographical location in the developing discourse on Pakistan's status as a pivotal state in the Muslim world vis-à-vis

relations with the Middle East. Pakistan's consistent and growing useful military cooperation, particularly with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrain, has developed a variety of contexts as it has evolved. The most salient period was the Zahoor ul-Haq Zaidi Report, geared towards realizing a 'grand vision' for regional peace and development, which imparted a new momentum to Pakistan's relationships with Middle Eastern countries in economic and strategic directions. In these 'grandiose' plans, generally geared towards greater infrastructure development and transport links, military/defense aspects remained hidden but came to form an important part of a wider foreign policy conception (Khan & Shirazi, 2021).

Military-centric agreements bore the most influence in the following years in bolstering related cooperation with Middle Eastern countries. The period starting with the Zaidi Report saw the Gulf States as an important part of Pakistan's defense strategy context. Although collectively, ASEAN militaries outspent the Gulf Cooperation Council states during these years, individual Gulf States have maintained a breakneck pace of defense technology transfer since then. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were regionally the third and sixth highest military spenders in 2016, with other Gulf States also featuring in the top 15. Compared with Vietnam, Indonesia and Malaysia, Pakistani defense partnership remained sporadic in its utility with them. The UAE and Qatar became the first Middle Eastern partners of Pakistan to buy foreign weapons systems. There were significant items, including tanks and missile systems; Qatar was granted the sale of the Pakistani training complex, while the UAE sought a joint missile defense production agreement. Other ventures included Mottama Defense, Aselsan-Gemport, and Qatar. This partnership was geared towards avionics, differential GPS, artillery fuses, rocket launchers and drones. The Qatari and Bahraini navies had expressed interest in buying a 'third-generation electronic sensor system' jointly developed by the Pakistan Air Force's Avionics Development Establishment and a Turkish company. Finally, and importantly, a number of high-level military agreements were signed, such as those with Qatar, the UAE and Jordan. Such agreements were invaluable in Saudi Arabia's defense partnerships. This was exemplified by the fact that during 12 separate arms deals Saudi Arabia had become the world's top defense spender, and, since a low starting base in 2001, had by 2013 grown to spend more than the combined GCC outlay. Japan, currently the world's largest spender on defense after the United States, had allocated 1% of GDP for defense spending, a

benchmark estimate. Saudi Arabia, by contrast, laid out between 9-12% of GDP (thus accounting for such a high comparative overall figure) (Ebad Athar, 2019).

Economic Interactions and Trade Relations

As an integral part of the unfolding geopolitics in the Middle East, Pakistan's economic interactions and the growing trade relations between Middle Eastern countries are the focus of this special issue. Various articles on this special issue will focus on the comparative advantage of geostrategic positions. Geo-economical rationality has numerous aspects, and it may touch upon different economic sectors. Therefore, in the context of international or global economic relations of the countries, such strategic dimensions of the preference of their commercial or economic partners have to be analyzed (SAADAT & MAMOON, 2016).

Pakistan cannot afford to overlook the ever-increasing significance of the Central Middle Eastern and Eurasian space, as it plays a crucial role in its development and security. This particular region stands out due to its enormous strategic and economic importance for a plethora of reasons. First and foremost, when considering the greater Central Asian region in its entirety, an astounding one-third of the world's total energy resources is situated within these boundaries. The vast majority of these invaluable energy resources are located beneath the Caspian Sea and throughout Central Asia, as well as in the various Middle Eastern zones (Vinokurov et al., 2021). The expansive continental area that exists between these two energy-rich regions, specifically the Caspian region to the North and the Middle Eastern zone to the South, together with Central Asia, forms an extensive space that is frequently referred to by prominent strategists and politicians as "Eurasia." This concept encapsulates the idea that this geographical space has the potential to evolve into a unique and powerful economic and political center of the planet, largely because of the significant energy resources that are housed in this region, coupled with the large mass of the population who inhabit it, as well as several other critical factors that contribute to its growing significance on the global stage.

Energy Dynamics and the Role of Pakistan in Middle Eastern Energy Security

Energy is one of the main components of geostrategy. As a general rule, the countries of the Arctic Circle have abundant oil and gas and the countries at the equator do not, unless it is in the form of hydroelectricity. However, there are also landlocked exceptions, like Kazakhstan or Azerbaijan, which have hydrocarbons in abundance or in proximity, but landlocked locations and thus need pipelines, which can be manipulated by other interconnected

nations. That is where Pakistan's role in the grand pivot of the geostrategic game comes in: geopolitics is no longer only a spatial consideration. In making decisions about foreign and security policy, military and economic factors, in particular geographic position and natural resources are taken into account (Csurgai, 2021). Although the concept has taken on a military aspect, to a large extent it conveys the wider concept of geography. Geopolitics looks at such things as the political connections between people and territory, trade links, spheres of influence and how far these incentivize eastward or westward expansion. Pipelines are embedded in political decisions. Throughout the World Wars, global heaviness tilted from Asia to North America, and from Europe to the Atlantic. Since the end of the Cold War, it is poised to tilt from the Atlantic to the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Pakistan's wider position on the Eurasian landmass will critically determine the degrees to which China may directly access the wider world, and conversely the ability of the United States to maintain its unipolar imposingness.

Although Bangladesh and India are underprivileged in the energy basin operated by the US, the Middle East is of the greatest geostrategic concern to them due to the nearness of the Indian Ocean if not the Arabian Sea. Regarding Turkey, on the direct land route between Central Asia and Europe, it can be dually critical. And regarding Iran, due to the overthrow of the Shah, and due to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, retrospectives the ongoing evolution of western-central Asian energy transportations from the time of the Arab oil boycott against the United States reveal it as equally a minor game of US geopolitical primacy as an anti-Soviet containment strategy and corresponding to the relationship of US underpinment of Pakistan in both the wars, there is again geopolitical harmony to pursue mutual strategic objectives (Irfan, 2023). If naval supremacy could be seen as the first "Great Game", due to the hugeness of oil, and the importance of transportation routes, the current interplay could be called the Pipeline Prize. While by comparison with the global resources of oil and gas, the littoral states of the Caspian have modest reserves, these are still large by regional standards and potentially very important in a world threatened by environmental degradation and the dwindling of energy resources. Petroleum and the Petrodollar are key levers of geopolitics. All states have to take account of geoeconomics realities, but some states are more equal than others (Gökay2021).

Meanwhile, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was made out by western commentators as a strategic geopolitical conspiracy

of Beijing and Moscow against the United States to secure the hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian Basin and to compete with the United States for that reason in Central Asia. Russia urged Iran to use its ports and production to “choke-off” the US and wished to use its anti-aircraft missiles to protect Iranian installations against a prospective raid, and proposed the formation of a gas cartel similar to OPEC with Iran, Qatar and maybe Algeria.

Religious and Cultural Connections between Pakistan and the Middle East

An intimate and multifaceted relationship between Pakistan and the Middle East rests firmly on an Islamic foundation that transcends the specific realm of state politics and administrative governance. These deep-rooted religious and cultural ties have significantly fed into various aspects of socio-political and economic relations, as well as cultural change throughout history. The shared faith between these regions has given rise to numerous linkages between influential religious elites and various institutions, which in turn has encouraged and facilitated the movements of pilgrims who travel to sacred shrines. Additionally, numerous contacts and interactions are also happening on a daily basis, whether through conversations or artistic expressions, as poetry is thoughtfully strummed or traded amongst individuals (Islam, 2023). Furthermore, Urdu poets have long been heavily influenced by the rich tradition of Persian poetry, and as a direct result of these linguistic and cultural exchanges, common words found in both Urdu and Persian are traded alike, creating a rich tapestry of interlinked languages and literatures.

In the economic sphere, Pakistan and Middle East countries benefit from and re-enforce various socio-economic linkages. Meanwhile, expatriate Pakistanis (mainly from Punjab) are involved in the Middle East, thereby establishing even more durable links (Ebad Athar, 2019). Additionally contacts in formal education settings have grown. Art and culture is another area where the two societies have a relevance of sorts revealing a wide range of cultural similarities. In contemporary societal terms, the cultural links are seen in the mass exchange of popular video films and songs that have created a transnational public culture. Recent Bollywood Night concerts have thus become synonymous with a particular cosmopolitan consumption associated with the Punjabi elite. In the wider public domain, tropes, rituals and practices associated with daily life have illustrated how sociological processes reveal a historical migration of cultural elements between Pakistan and the Middle East.

Pakistan's Role in Regional Security and Counterterrorism Efforts

Pakistan is a predominantly Muslim nation with a vast population of around 200 million people is often overlooked in international discussions pertaining to the Middle East. This oversight may arise from the fact that Islamabad is situated in South Asia and utilizes Urdu as its national language. However, the geostrategic position of Pakistan holds significant implications for the political landscape of the Middle East, while, conversely, developments within the Middle East similarly bear substantial relevance to Pakistan's own domestic politics (Afzal & Yaseen, 2023). This particular discussion will delve into Pakistan's regional security role and its influence on promoting well-being and stability in the Middle East. It will notably highlight Pakistan's involvement in Insani Haqooq and how this commitment aligns with its democratic values, alongside the broader context of media representations that impact public perception.

Security policy is the foundation of the state system. It sustains the integrity, the autonomy and the identity of the state(s) vis-a-vis their external environment. It ensures the existence, the well-being, and the stability of the largest possible number of members of the political community in the most impartial and the most just way. States may have a variety of common or contrasting interests, conflictual or conciliatory relationships, but they all share a basic normative interest in the survival of the states system, i.e., that the rules of reproduction, transformation, and dissolution of states established in Treaty or Customary Law should be obeyed, respected, and enforced (Cross Hubbard, 2017). In their most minimal consensus, states also share an urgent interest in the defense of the political community against the external intrusion of overwhelming distributed violence that could disturb, transform or interrupt the course of inter-state relations. In the absence of an international Leviathan, they all engage in the means required to pursue that ultimate goal. Due to their internal structure, capabilities, culture, and values, the security policies of states may vary greatly along a continuum of practices ranging from essentially "peaceful" to largely "militarized" ways and means to reach the same end, to guarantee the survivability of the state(s). However, the peculiar nature of some states, and of a world made of differentiated and hierarchized states, leads some of them to pursue security strategies beyond their survival requirements in view of the pursuit of perennial political and/or strategic goals. The rest of this essay is concerned with the mere elucidation of the rationale of security policies considered as necessary means to

come to terms with the survival and well-being of states, or of coalitions of states, in a given international system, and in the comprehension of the logic underlying the non-univocally understood phrase “war on terrorism.”

The Impact of Pakistan's Geostrategic Position on Middle Eastern Politics

The profound and multifaceted impact of Pakistan's strategically important geostrategic position on Middle Eastern focus and the intricate politics of the region is meticulously examined here in this succinct section. The significance of this to those engaged in such complex diplomacy cannot be overstated, as well as the critical need for specified and timely current intelligence on the evolving power structures found within the Middle East (Abbas et al.2024). This leads to a serious examination of Pakistan's evolving alliances, negotiations, and partnerships, which play a crucial role in the geopolitical landscape. Greater attention is consistently given to the far-reaching political consequences of ongoing regional conflicts as well as the various external influences that may be exerted by influential great and middle powers. These powers do much to determine the particular power structures that shape the intricate political processes within this vital region. The interplay of these factors not only affects Pakistan's own strategic interests but also has broader implications for the stability and future dynamics of the Middle Eastern political scenario (Khan et al.2024).

Through a series of interrelated studies, this collection will show how Pakistan's strategy in the North Indian subcontinent, contiguous to the oilfields of Iran, the Arabian Peninsula, has influenced the politics of those areas in the 1980s, and how continuities with earlier policy have been modified by changing circumstances. The following papers analyse a variety of case studies of these diplomatic and military manoeuvres as they influence the power structures in regional politics and contribute importantly to an understanding of how the politics of the area work to involve the interests and power bases of its individual participants. They also suggest ways in which the great powers and Pakistan have been drawn into constant negotiations with actors in the Middle East alongside increasing covert military involvements that have mirrored but also subverted official policies, though not always to the detriment of the great powers (Hassan Syed, 1970).

Future Prospects and Recommendations for Pakistan's Geostrategic Engagement with the Middle East

Pakistan has strong geostrategic ties with Middle Eastern states that have developed over the past seventy years. Throughout this

time, despite periods of fraught relations with both Persian Gulf and Levantine nations, it has sought a position of conciliation, flexibility and evenhandedness. This strategy's success has meant that Pakistan has held to close relationships with Middle Eastern nations despite changes of regime or sweeping geopolitical changes (Ebad Athar, 2019). Yet as new settlements are on the brink of forming in the Middle East region, it is essential to take stock of the emerging landscape and ask what new local and regional forces and events power as barriers, could engage with or challenge Pakistan's current foreign policy orientation. This policy paper will seek to trace emerging trends and suggest recommendations for flexibility and augmentation in Pakistan's geostrategic engagement with the Middle East.

Pakistan's geostrategic position in the region is currently on the cusp of a reformation, as the American wars in Afghanistan and Iraq are nearing some kind of settlement. This means, broadly, that the American military presence in the Levant and Indus Valley countries will, giving the current trends and constraints, slowly diminish. This reduction is, generally, interpreted with respect to China's emergence as central to the global economy. China will play an ever greater role in setting the pattern for international trade, FDI and knowledge exchange (Hussain & Hussain, 2017). Further afield, this developing relationship will have powerful ripple effects in South Asia and the Middle East. Other world or regional powers, such as Russia, will be granted increased leverage in the perspective theater with unforeseeable humanitarian and economic consequences. Thus Pakistan's current role as interlocutor and deference will be sorely tried as the status quo erodes over the forthcoming decade. The forces reshaping the region are cross-cutting, complex and entangled in obtuse ways. Still, there are clear implications for the future of unwieldy states such as Pakistan which primarily rise from this site of reshaping. This paper will focus on four broad themes: Ideational and Human Resources, Trade and Political Economy, Defence and Security, and Extra-regional Interaction. For each of these topics current trends and future prospects are delineated, along with policy recommendations.

Conclusion

Pakistan's geostrategic situation is a further angle from which to consider the impact of its position on Middle Eastern politics. The Islamic Emirate once linked the eastern part of the Middle East and the western part of the Indian Subcontinent, and Pakistan's borders with Afghanistan and Iran brokered relations between Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates in the Gulf and Egypt

and Syria in the Levant. The rare nature of these relations stresses, again, Pakistan's position as a natural continental bridge.

Pakistan's security role with the Saudis is now prominent with a renewed commitment from August 2014. However, the "military agreement" widely reported with Lebanon in 2014 is an uncommon development. This is in part because the Pakistani military has a well-known training role with Middle Eastern states, especially in recent years with Sudan and its long-standing involvement with Saudi Arabia. Moreover, there is an emerging security interest noticeable from the more than 200 diplomatic flights over Saudi Arabia made by PM Nawaz Sharif since his election in 2013. The shift back to national security after the Musharraf hiatus brings Saudi Arabia to front of line but is an effort to expand other relationships with Arab states. Egypt's deep ties with the Pakistan military after the 1970s are revealing for this time as PM Sharif was invited to witness and ultimately created a military coup and Saudi Arabia undertake the role that the United States provides the Egyptian military. A depth of engagement is apparent in the military-to-military relations with the GCC in military intelligence and counterinsurgency training, and the United Arab Emirates sponsors a special Pakistani force for the internal security of Abu Dhabi. This is only the current form of Pakistan's export of its security expertise from the "frontline" of the Cold War, but the growing interest from the western Gulf to use Pakistani resources beyond the training of recruits is evident as the GCC seeks to bolster the power of Khawarij insurgent groups who kill 20 Shi'a at a mosque in oil-rich Dammam in May.

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