



Middle East Dilemma: Pakistan's Role as Mediator for Conflict Resolution

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Abstract

The development of international relations together with forces like globalization and technology has brought the world closer to each other. Friendly ties and relations with states create massive challenges during times of conflict. The focus of the paper is on the crisis evolving in the Middle East region and the role of Pakistan in solving those crisis considering relations with its closest allies, political and financial circumstances, and its foreign policy principles. A qualitative research approach with desk analysis technique has been applied to analyse the role of Pakistan as a mediator for the conflict resolution among Middle Eastern countries. The research highlights how the disputes created great problems for Pakistan, but it is still striving to resolve conflicts among Middle Eastern countries because maintaining peace and prosperity in the Muslim world has always been a top priority of Pakistan's foreign policy.

Keywords: Pakistan, Middle East, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Muslim World, Conflict Resolution.

1. Introduction

According to Sattar, (2017) a geographic and cultural region, located in Western Asia and north eastern Africa is known as Middle East including all Muslim countries along the Arabian Gulf: Iran, turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, UAE, Lebanon, Qatar, Palestine, Jordan, Kuwait, Yemen, Bahrain, Oman, Cyprus and only one non-Muslim country that is Israel. The world now, is a global village and the inter connectedness and inter dependence as a result of globalization has pulled all states together, closer to each other in a sense that events occurring in one particular state may in one way or the other influence events in the other state (Yamin, 2017). Since Pakistan holds good friendly relations with the Middle Eastern countries, it holds an integral position in the concerned affairs and can by no means stay aloof of the current situation (Adeney, 2017). Pakistan is the only greatest nuclear power among these states; thus, it is its primary responsibility to act as an arbitrator among states. Not only because of the good union, it holds with these states, but also the challenges that Pakistan has to face because of the crisis evolving in Middle Eastern countries, instigate it to play its part in conflict management to ensure peace and prosperity (Khalid & Safdar, 2016). Also, Pakistan's ties with these states are not the ones that just developed. Immediately after independence, Pakistan established links with these states about fields of trade, military, and diplomatic ties. As a leading Islamic

country, Pakistan has always maintained strong relations with the Muslim countries and supported in their legitimate causes (Vatikiotis, 2016).

Pakistan's close links with the Middle Eastern Muslim countries hold significance for various religious, political, and economic reasons. These strong relations did not develop overnight, these consist of numerous treaties and pacts signed, constant support for each other, trade agreements and provision of aid whenever required whether military aid in the form of equipment such as jets, navy ships, armed forces, financial help or any type of international support on any key issue may constitute to the type of aid offered by countries (Adeney, 2017). The origins of these relations can be traced back to the Muslims of Indian subcontinent before 1947 and their relations with their fellow Muslims spread in most of the parts of the world such as the Ottoman Empire. After some years of independence and solving internal disputes of the newly formed country, Pakistan took steps towards international affairs. Starting from the 1955 Baghdad pact among Pakistan, Iran, Iraq and Turkey to Pakistan's role in the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), it has always supported all Muslim countries in their causes and defended them by supplying military forces (Yang, 2018, p. 35). In this regard, this study aims to analyse the role of Pakistan as mediator for the conflict resolution among Middle Eastern Countries through qualitative research approach and desk analysis technique.

2. Literature Review

The foreign policy of Pakistan is a true picture of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's vision and is based on the principles presented by him. "Our foreign policy is one of friendliness and goodwill towards all the nations of the world. We do not cherish aggressive designs against any country or nation. We believe in the principle of honesty and fair play in national and international dealings and are prepared to make our utmost contribution to the promotion of peace and prosperity among the nations of the world. Pakistan will never be found lacking in extending its material and moral support to the oppressed and suppressed peoples of the world, and in upholding the principles of the United Nations charter" (Vatikiotis, 2016, p. 45). Not only has this but the Article 40 of the Constitution of Pakistan also directed Pakistan's foreign policy for the future. "The State shall endeavour to preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic unity, support the common interests of the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America, promote international peace and security, foster goodwill and friendly relations among all nations and encourage the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means" (Yang, 2018, p. 35).

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's principles and the article 40 of the Constitution makes it clear that the pursuit of universal peace remains a fundamental centrepiece of Pakistan's foreign policy. Pakistan has been an integral part of the global community when it comes to encouraging and strengthening peace and order. It has always played a fundamental part to combat terrorism and extremism which has always appeared as a threat to the law and order in the international world. As a member of the United Nations, Pakistan has always worked for the organizations' objectives of ensuring harmony and good will in the global community to maintain a stable and peaceful world order. Also, Pakistan has always gathered appreciations for its great contributions in the UN's peacekeeping missions. The UN Secretary General, Ban Ki Moon cherished Pakistan's contributions to international peace and harmony in the following words: "Gratitude as UN Secretary General and gratitude as a global citizen for what Pakistan has been doing for international peace and security. More than 100 countries

contribute troops and police for UN peacekeeping missions, Pakistan is number one” (Cleveland, 2018).

This desire for cooperation of Pakistan to ensure non-aggression, nonviolence and a harmonious settlement of disputes has also spread to the Middle East countries. The region holds immense importance for Pakistan as large number of Pakistani populations works in these countries as labourer or have their businesses set. It is estimated that around 112,366 workforces are exported to Saudi Arabia in the year 2017 and approximately 209,930 in UAE. The money sent by them to Pakistan contributes to most of the total foreign remittances. Approximately US\$ 4.43 billion remittances were received from UAE in the year 2017. Not only this but Pakistan imported a large quantity of petroleum products from these oil rich countries most of which comes from Saudi Arabia. Also, these Muslim countries have proved to be very helpful for Pakistan in times of need. It is evident from the geo-strategic and financial factors, that these countries hold immense importance for Pakistan; thus, it cannot stay aloof from the impartial changes happening in this region (Terrill, 2015). Not one but numerous agreements and resolutions have been passed about Pakistan’s foreign policy to make its policy clear. For instance, Pakistan’s parliament passed a resolution in 2015 declaring its neutrality on the Yemen issue looking for a harmonious solution to the crisis. The resolution was praised, and Pakistan was seen as a peace-loving country in the eyes of the international world (Papanek, 1967).

The efforts were acknowledged and recognized. The most important part of the resolution passed by Pakistan on the issue was that it declared its neutrality and played a diplomatic role in the conflict resolution which shows Pakistan’s attempt of reaching a peaceful solution always. The primary focus of the resolution was a harmonious solution for the Saudi Iranian conflict and unites the entire Muslim Ummah with the cooperation of their respective Muslim leaders of the countries. The foreign policy of Pakistan always looks forward to unity of the entire Muslim world as stated in the 1973 Constitution of Pakistan. The motif was to not allow any kind of sectarian division to take over because according to the code of conduct in the constitution of Pakistan, the chapter 2 of the constitution states that it is the fundamental and primary responsibility of the state to solve any dispute between the countries of the Muslim World, promote international peace because that is the only way to ensure peace, law, order and prosperity around the globe (Yamin, 2017; Naazer, 2018). Moreover, Article 29 of the Constitution instructs clear and direct responsibility for each organ of state and every citizen of Pakistan performing duties and obligations on behalf of that institution to fulfil and act according to the principles of policy as laid down in the Constitution.

3. Materials and Methods

The process of qualitative research approach with desk review techniques is followed in this study. The desk review is the process in which the results of already published papers are presented and reviewed (Creswell & Clark, 2017). In this regard, the research papers, newspaper articles and books are included in this study as a discourse analysis. The keywords during the search process were used such as “foreign policy of Pakistan, Pakistan’s relation with Middle Eastern countries, and Pakistan’s foreign Policy for Arabian countries.” After compilation of relevant material, only those material was included that were purely based on the Middle Eastern countries and all other irrelevant studies were excluded from the thorough discussion and analysis.

4. Discussion and Findings

4.1. The Middle East in Flux

The Muslim world, representing one fifth of world population, consists of 57 countries, control over 70% of the world's resources and 50% natural resources. By owning all these resources, the Muslim world presently should have been the greatest power. However, rich in everything but unable to solve disputes and enclosed in a pile of conflicts at the mercy of foreign powers and under protective military control. "Muslim disputes remain unaddressed for decades. Palestine is tired and may be near to give up. Iraq is still burning. Lebanon is simmering. The Muslim world could not be more chaotic and more helpless" (Legrenzi, 2016). Although, some countries have large oil and gas reserves while the others are poor. The Middle East crisis began with the collapse of Saddam regime in 2003. The US-led Iraq invasion which had created an inspiration for the rest of the middle eastern countries not only left it in a bundle of crisis but also paved the way for various regional security threats.

The Arab spring characterised by anti-government protests, massive uprisings and armed rebellions that escalated across Middle East in 2010 was thought to be a good change but it only created dreadful circumstances. One of which is the development of ISIS - The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria that consist of millions of militants from numerous countries holding strong influence over many areas of Iraq and Syria fighting Shia forces. The situations have only worsened leading to authoritarian regimes developing in most of the countries such as Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen and creating problems for the already existing ones such as Syria. The crisis has reinvigorated new problems on the grounds of the older ones. The situation in Middle East is defined by ongoing political disturbances, increasingly growing sectarian divide and troubles, and regional conflicts leading to the particular region in flux and crisis (Zehra, Fatima, & Khan, 2018; Yamin, 2017).

4.1.1. The Arabs Iranian Conflict

The hostile relations between Arabs and Iranians can be traced back to the ancient period of Islamic history. This is because how the two groups are associated with opposite sects. The Arabs are mostly Sunni while Iranians are Shias. The origins of these hostile relations lie in the Iran Iraq war when the Iraq's military forces were mostly supported by the Arab kingdoms mainly Saudi Arabia. As the Shia began to dominate Iraq in the post Saddam era, it added to the Arab anxiety. The rulers feared that this rise in the Iraqi Shia may serve as a model for their own Shia population's upbringing greater tensions. In 2004, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia raised his views about the domination of Pro-Iranian groups in the governments of Iraq because this would lead to the influence of Shia groups and governments, causing harm to the traditional balance of power between the two opposite sects: Shias and Sunnis. This is what King Abdullah feared. The Arab anxieties worsened after the changing role of US in Middle East because after the cold war, US had always been a major supporter of the Gulf States after the invasion of Iraq, situations changed, and serious difference emerged between both sides (Yamin, 2017).

Resolving the crisis in the Middle East has been Pakistan's top priority which may sometimes prove challenging for the government. One of the challenges was the situation of Yemen involvement and the interference of two important Middle East states, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. This war like situation is known as the Saudi Iranian cold war. A large part of Yemen in said to be under the influence of Houthis, a group following Shia religion and is supported by Iran.

The development of Iranian laid Shia power in an Arab state instigated the Gulf Cooperation Council to act. The council is a political and economic union of all the Arab states except Iraq. It conducted a military operation against the Houthis in March 2015. Saudi Arabia wished Pakistan to accede to the group fighting in Yemen by providing military equipment such as fighter jets, war ships, and armed forces. The situation was not easy for Pakistan as both sides were having equally close relations.

Despite differences, Pakistan always enjoys good friendly relations with Iran. It has economic, strategic and security interests in the region. Iran's nuclear deal with the world provided Pakistan with trade and commerce opportunities. The resource rich country provided Pakistan with chances to fulfil its energy requirements. On the other hand, same is the case with Saudi Arabia that has always promised help to Pakistan no matter how difficult the situation was in terms of support in the international world and aid whenever required for instance it gave Pakistan a grant of \$1.5 billion in 2014, providing job opportunities to a greater percentage of Pakistani population resulting in foreign remittances almost \$5.6 billion annually and also a source of our petroleum products (Papanek, 1967).

If Pakistan acceded to either side, it would strain relations with the other ally also giving to rise to sectarian conflicts in the country. Thus to maintain a stable environment in the International world, not to instigate the Sunni Shia rivalry and not to spark another conflict, Pakistani parliament in 2015 unanimously agreed to not send forces to war in Yemen and declare neutrality because Pakistan's priority includes promoting peace and order in Muslim countries and disapproving territorial violations of any kind especially countries consisting of holy sites which hold significance importance to Muslims. Keeping in mind this principle, then prime minister of Pakistan in 2015 said that in case of any violation of the territorial sovereignty of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan would not stay quiet and will be bound to act. The war is going on since 2014 and it has destroyed the infrastructure and displaced millions of the people of Yemen. It has led to a famine in the area and thus this war has continued on the cost of millions of lives of civilians.

According to Kasuri, (2015) Pakistan decided to take a mediatory role in this Saudi Iranian conflict, requesting both the countries to solve their disputes with peace and harmony. Pakistan has always tried to ease the tensions by peaceful means to avoid any aggression and violence in the global community. Prime minister Imran Khan while talking in an interview with the Saudi Newspaper, speaking about the Saudi Yemen dispute said, "I feel that every conflict has a political solution. I am not a believer in a military solution." And also, "I would like to ensure peace in the Middle East because it is very distressing for Muslims to see conflict among Muslim nations. There are already several conflicts plaguing the Muslim world, starting from Libya to Somalia, to Syria, Afghanistan... Pakistan has [also] suffered a lot. Conflicts in the Muslim world are weakening us all. Pakistan would like to play a role to put out these fires through reconciliation" (Sorenson, 2018).

As Saudis were trying to convince Pakistan by using their influence to join the military coalition in support of the Arab Kingdom and against Iran, Pakistan's parliament passed a resolution in 2015 declaring its neutrality on the issue and demanded for a political settlement for the Yemen crisis. The resolution was appreciated and the efforts of Pakistan to look for a peaceful settlement and solution were praised around the world. The most fundamental part of the resolution which was passed by Pakistan on this issue was that it (Pakistan) announced her neutrality in order to carry a position to play a diplomatic role in the dispute to end the crisis.

The primary focus of the resolution was a peaceful and harmonious solution for the Saudi Iranian conflict and to unite the entire Muslim Ummah with the cooperation of their respective Muslim leaders.

The motif was to not allow any kind of sectarian division to take over and create a division among the Muslim Ummah because according to the code of conduct and the principles set out by in chapter-2 of the Constitution of Pakistan, it is the fundamental and primary responsibility of the state to solve any dispute between the countries of the Muslim World, strengthening bonds between them and promote international peace because that is the only way to ensure peace, law, order and prosperity around the globe. Not only this but also Article 29 of the Constitution of Pakistan instructs clear and direct responsibility for each organ, department and the governmental authorities of Pakistan and every citizen of Pakistan performing duties and obligations on the behalf of any organ, department and institution of Pakistan to fulfil and act according to the principles of the policy as laid down by the Constitution of Pakistan. This resolution provided Pakistan an opportunity to bring the issue of sectarian division and violence on the international table and seek a positive resolution for the problem that have been there for decades, but no real solution could be found. It still creates problems for Pakistan because this division has led to massive killings in the region, and no one is ready to take responsibility thus maintaining the deadlock (Pant, 2009).

Pakistan is striving to arbitrate between Iran and Saudi Arabia to end this war in Yemen (Sorenson, 2018). The Prime minister of Pakistan, Muhammad Nawaz Sharif said, "We are acting as a conciliator between the two countries to end the war. In Yemen too, we will, if required, play a positive role to end this conflict" (Terrill, 2015). The information minister added the details that the government of Pakistan is acting as a mediator and arbitrator between the two rival states and is trying its best to take legitimate steps thus the state is in contact with the stake holders of the conflict in order to find any way of resolving the issue (Cleveland, 2018). Since Pakistan is the only nuclear power in the Muslim world, it can optimistically resolve the rivalries between Muslim countries of Middle East. It has already made clear that it will not take sides in any conflict and allow any state to use its military forces in order to cause harm to any Middle Eastern country moreover, it will not allow any exploitation of its strength for narrow selfish interests.

4.1.2. Syrian Dispute

Apart from the Saudi Iranian conflict, Pakistan has taken certain steps to ensure peace in many other Middle Eastern countries and supported Muslim causes till the fullest. In 2011, the uprisings that took place under the banner of Arab spring, lead to the collapse of Tunisia and Egypt's governments. It provided momentum to the Syrian activists, but anyone seen to be supporting Arab spring movement were brutally tortured by the government led by President Bashar-al-Assad. Hundreds of demonstrators were killed and many imprisoned. Till then, the conflict was inside Syria only but in 2015, the civil war was backed by foreign powers. The countries with Shia majority: Iran, Iraq and Lebanon based Hezbollah supported Assad's governments while the countries with largely a Sunni majority: Turkey, Qatar and Saudi Arabia supported the anti-Assad rebels. Different countries launched different operations and air raids supporting anti Assad rebel groups. Israel carried air raids targeting pro government fighters. In April 2017, US carried its first ever direct military action against Assad's government. The war like situation has led to millions of Syrians to flee from homes to seek safety abroad (Al-Jazeera, 2018).

From the start, Pakistan is against any attempts of the foreign governments to topple the government of Bashar Al Assad to destabilise Syrian state. In 2015, the foreign secretary Aizaz Chaudhary said that Pakistan completely supports the territorial integrity of the Syrian Arab republic and disapproves any violations of Syrian territory. Pakistan does not support any sort of act of the foreign powers in Syria against the government which would threaten the peace and order of the state. He also added that Pakistan is looking for a peaceful settlement of disputes through a comprehensive political dialogue rather than any sort of military action (Pant, 2009). Since the unrest started, seven years ago Pakistan has kept a fine, delicate stance on the Syrian conflict opposing foreign intervention to settle the crisis. It has kept its position clear by supporting the principles of international law and the rules of conduct presented in the UN Charter. Article 2(4) of the UN Charter prohibits such violations in the following words: “All members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the UN” (Legrenzi, 2016).

Also, in 1949, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) observed that “between independent states, respect for territorial sovereignty is an essential foundation of International relations.” This code of conduct was originated after the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 which created a new system of political order that was based on the idea of co-existing independent states (Hussain, 2018). Pakistan has explained its stance that it is not taking sides, only ensuring that its position is based on the principles of the United Nations (Pant, 2009).

4.1.3. Israel-Palestine Conflict

As a state found on the grounds of Muslim identity, Pakistan is bound to be sympathetic about and show keen support for the Islamic causes around the world. Since Pakistan holds a strong attachment to Palestine and has given it a significance due to Jerusalem. Israel is seen as an enemy and a constant threat to its security. It has always supported the Palestinian cause, recommending complete fulfilment of the principles and resolutions of the UNSC demanding withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the occupied territory with pre-1969 borders and the development of a viable, independent state of Palestine with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital and that is the only guarantee that it will live with Israel in peace. The Pakistan’s ambassador to UN Maleeha Lodhi at an emergency session of the OIC not only condemned the atrocities carried out by the Israel military forces in Gaza but also declared complete support to the Palestinian people. Pakistan criticized UNSC for not raising a voice and condemning the brutal atrocities of the Israeli military forces in Gaza. Apart from that, Pakistan also demanded a fair and just investigation by UNSC to be conducted against these brutal military actions of Israel forces. The cruelty by the Israeli forces is never ending. A crackdown occurred on the Gaza border left 60 Palestinians dead and around 2700 injured because of the tear gas by the military (Arnald, 2019). Pakistan urges the entire global community to play its part in the settlement of a peaceful solution to the Israeli Palestinian conflict for the sake of humanity.

4.1.4. Iraq-Kuwait War

Moving on to the war between Iraq and Kuwait in 1990, Kuwait on one hand has good secure relations with Pakistan. It provided economic aid and assistance during hours of need such as during natural disasters. While on the other hand, relations with Iraq are equally healthy. It was the first ever country to recognize Pakistan as a newly formed state and provided support in the Bengal crisis, siding with Pakistan. Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990 and this conflict

brought Pakistan in a difficult situation because both the competitors had good relations with Pakistan and choosing one ally was a challenge but no matter how the situations were, Pakistan always made attempts to resolve conflicts peacefully rather than choosing a military solution and as a peace loving country, it always looked forward to peace and prosperity in any particular area.

4.2. Internal Challenges to Pakistan

As the crisis in Middle East grow, it continues to be a serious challenge for Pakistani authorities and policy makers to draft effective policy for future use as they seriously affect the domestic as well as foreign policy of Pakistan.

4.2.1. Sectarian Violence

A major security challenge emerging from the ongoing Middle East crisis is the rise of sectarian violence in the country. The Sunni Shia rivalry or the famous Saudi Iranian conflict can be traced back to the post Saddam era. Pakistan itself has its own sectarian problems, a history of Sunni Shia violence which is taking place on the cost of thousands of lives since the last three decades. According to South Asia Terrorism Portal, 4734 persons were killed in sectarian violence in Pakistan, between 1989 and 2014 (Chaziza, 2016). The conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran has played a key role in raising the problem of sectarian violence in Pakistan. Fears arise that this Sunni Shia rivalry may spark the tensions further and a sort of similar rivalry in Pakistan.

4.2.2. Terrorism and Extremism

Another challenge springing from the Middle East crisis has been a wave of terrorism. The Sunni Shia conflict has led to a disenfranchisement of Sunni from political and economic matters in both Iraq and Syria. This has caused the neglected Sunnis to develop militant organisations such as Islamic State (IS) or Daish. They are popularly known as Jihadists groups. Activists from Pakistan, Afghanistan and India are said to be a part of these organisations which raises concerns about its growing influence in Pakistan especially. However, the Pakistani authorities have denied the presence of such groups in Pakistan. In February 2015, the interior minister of Pakistan while speaking at USIP said with confidence that the militant organisation of IS only exists in the Middle Eastern countries and has no headquarters in Pakistan. It is a serious challenge for Pakistan as these organisations such as IS may emerge as a threat to the peace and security of Pakistan and South Asia (see, Salim, Semetko, & Zehra, 2018).

4.2.3. Economic Crisis

Another problem for Pakistan can be the economic crisis as the results of Middle East flux. It can threaten the economic development of Pakistan in numerous ways. First, if the peace in the Middle Eastern countries is at risk, it would at once affect the flow of remittances entering Pakistan from the oil rich countries. These remittances are sent by the Pakistani laborers working in the Gulf States. Another issue can be the security threat because of the sectarian tensions in the country. Pakistani authorities are concerned about the foreign workers working in the country; also, the occasional trips of foreign ambassadors into the country may also be at risk. Thus, these forms of violence pose a threat for the economic development of Pakistan.

5. Conclusion

Despite all the challenges that Pakistan had to face as a result of the crisis and disputes evolving in Middle East, Pakistan always ensured peaceful settlement of all disputes and kept the peace and prosperity of the Muslim world as its top priority because It is like a union where if one disputes deepen in one particular country, it weakens all of them. Also, as a Muslim majority country, it is Pakistan's primary responsibility to work for the harmony and unity of the Muslims around the world. Anywhere in the part of the world, if the Muslim state is under oppression or involved in a conflict, the duty to resolve the conflict must be fulfilled effectively. No doubt, Pakistan as always responsibly played its role in supporting all legitimate Muslim causes around the world, whether it be the Syrian conflict, the Palestinian issue or the Yemen dispute, it has always raised his voice against those who carry out atrocities and oppressions in order to resolve the conflict. Pakistan's foreign policy is based on Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's vision and in line with the principles of international law and UN Charter thus, any unlawful act by any particular country is disapproved by the state whether it be the use of chemical weapons or the violation of territorial sovereignty of any particular state by the other, no matter what the purpose of the intervention is. Pakistan needs to continue to adapt similar policies for the future also, where the primary focus should be on conflict resolution and management especially for the fellow Muslim countries and to be available for support in all hours of need.

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