

## PAKISTAN- IRAN RELATIONS: CHALLENGES AND THE WAY FORWARD

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### ABSTRACT

Relations between Pakistan and Iran hold significant importance for both nations. Iran was the first country to officially recognize Pakistan upon its establishment, and reciprocally, Pakistan swiftly recognized the new Iranian government in 1979. Nevertheless, various challenges have hindered the progress of bilateral relations, including ties between India and Iran, sectarian tensions, groups like Jandullah, and the presence of the Taliban in the region, particularly post-9/11. Despite the potential for growth in the post-9/11 era, certain factors have impeded the strengthening of ties between the two countries. Concerns have arisen in Islamabad due to the burgeoning relationship between India and Iran, particularly regarding projects like the North-South Transport Corridor and India's inclusion of Chabahar Port in its plans. Meanwhile, Tehran is troubled by the presence of militant groups operating in Baluchistan near its border with Pakistan. This article advocates for the need to bridge the existing mistrust between Pakistan and Iran to facilitate greater cooperation. With the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan and the comprehensive cooperation agreement between China and Iran, there are new opportunities for both nations to deepen their relationship. It is suggested that Pakistan and Iran should adopt a collaborative approach to regional issues and consider forging a strategic partnership with Russia and China. Such a partnership, exemplified by the proposed Pak-China-Russia-Iran Partnership Group, would offer considerable advantages and be mutually beneficial for all member states.

**Keywords:** Pak-Iran relations, India, U.S. withdrawal, Taliban, Jundullah

### INTRODUCTION

Though there are occasionally difficulties, relations between Iran and Pakistan, which are linked by a common religion, proximity, and cultural affinity, remain cordial on the public and official levels. With Iran's importance for regional economic growth and security, Islamabad sees Tehran as an essential ally in pursuing its foreign policy goals. Signing a friendship pact on February 19, 1950, Iran became the first nation with most Muslims to recognize Pakistan. This relationship was strengthened even further by the travels of the Shah of Iran to Pakistan in 1950—the first formal

state visit to the newly constituted nation—and Liaqat Ali Khan, the first minister of Pakistan, to Tehran in 1949.

When Pakistan and Iran jointly joined the U.S.-led Baghdad Pact in 1955, their relationship grew. Iran unfailingly supported Pakistan politically and diplomatically during India's wars with Pakistan in 1965 and 1971. Iran also had a significant influence on the 1963 resumption of diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

However, with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979, there were

notable changes in the relationship between Iran and Pakistan. Both countries backed rival groups in Afghanistan even while they denounced the Soviet military operation. Pakistan supported the Mujahideen, who were predominantly Pashtun, whereas Iran sponsored non-Pashtun organisations. The lack of trust between the two nations was exacerbated by this difference, which remained after the Soviet Union left the country in 1989. The connection became even more strained when Pakistan and Iran had poor relations due to the Taliban's actions, which included the murder of Iranian diplomats and Shia Hazaras in Mazar Sharif.

They did, however, unanimously agree that the situation could only be solved by withdrawing foreign soldiers unconditionally. Pakistan became a "front-line state" in the fight against Soviet invasion, receiving significant military and economic help from the international community, particularly the United States. Iran supported the Shia community in its resistance against Soviet imperialism, however its role was restricted due to the eight-year war with Iraq.

Relationships between Iran and Pakistan deteriorated in the 1990s because of several issues, such as rival interests in Central Asia, sectarian strife in Pakistan, and the growth of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Relations with Pakistan were strained because of Iran's overt support of the Northern Alliance, an anti-Taliban organization in Afghanistan. However, ties between Tehran and Islamabad greatly improved when the Taliban administration fell after the September 11 attacks and Pakistan took steps to ease sectarian tensions. During his visit to Islamabad, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharazi demonstrated the countries' renewed commitment to working together by backing an Afghan multi-ethnic government that is supported by the UN. This showed their support for Afghanistan's future as outlined in the Bonn Process.

Despite the encouraging actions, there were still several points of contention, such as Pakistan's worries over Iran's close relations to India and its participation in the coalition led by the United States in the fight against terrorism. More importantly, disagreements emerged over routes to the resource-rich Central Asian countries; Pakistan

preferred routes via the ports of Gwadar and Karachi, while Iran supported Chabahar and Bandar Abbas. Three factors—Pakistan's strategic alignment with the United States, the existence of groups like Jundullah, and India's strategic relationship with Iran—hindered the development of Pakistan-Iran ties after 9/11. These issues will be examined in this study. It will also look at how the interests of both countries line up in Afghanistan once the Taliban seize control in August 2021. In conclusion, the study will suggest possible avenues for addressing these problems and cultivating improved relationships between the two countries.

### **THE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND IRAN**

Pakistan and Iran had close connections with the United States prior to the Islamic Revolution in 1979. But after the revolution, tensions between Tehran and Washington grew worse, especially during the U.S. embassy hostage crisis in 1979. Tensed ties were caused by several factors, such as the struggle between Iran and Israel, the United States' backing for Iran during the Iran-Iraq war, the application of sanctions, and Iran's contradictory role in the Middle East peace process. Both nations had a combative attitude towards one another. Nevertheless, there was a limited window of opportunity for collaboration between Washington and Tehran following the 9/11 attacks.

Iran immediately condemned the bombings in public and used a variety of channels to back the American military effort in Afghanistan. This included barring Al-Qaeda members from entering its borders, consenting to support American pilots in need, allowing the transportation of humanitarian aid to Afghanistan via its territory, exchanging intelligence with the Northern Alliance, and actively taking part in the Bonn conference to establish an interim government in Afghanistan (Rubin, 2020). Jawad Zarif, Iran's former foreign minister, and General Qasim Sulemani, killed in an American drone attack in Iraq in 2020, were key players in settling disputes between the United States and the Northern Alliance, Barnett Rubin once told me. The United

States and Iran did collaborate for a short while, though. In a 2002 State of the Union speech, President Bush named Iran as part of the "axis of evil," along with Iraq and North Korea.

Iran became more uneasy about the U.S. military's involvement in Afghanistan after the events of 9/11. The United States accused Iran of developing nuclear weapons and interfering in domestic issues in Afghanistan. In addition, Iran's worries of being encircled were further heightened by the presence of American forces at the nearby Shindand airfield and in other neighbouring Central Asian nations including Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. According to one researcher, this led to increased sensitivity in Iran:

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advantages beyond only the economy; it might also increase Iranian influence in South Asia. Washington thus put pressure on Pakistan and India—two nations that had cordial ties with the United States—to back out of the agreement.

Pakistan refused to bow to US pressure, despite US attempts to exert pressure on Islamabad. On June 5, 2009, they proceeded to sign the gas pipeline agreement with Iran in Turkey. The United States told Pakistan that the timing of the transaction was not good and advised against moving further. However, Pakistan said that the project will go on since it was in their own best interests. Presidents Zardari of Pakistan and Ahmadinejad of Iran formally launched the gas pipeline in March 2013, defying American pressure. Declaring that the initiative was merely the start of something significant, Ahmadinejad referred to the day as historic.

It is noteworthy that Iran had completed most of the pipeline's construction. They will even lend \$500 million to Pakistan to support its construction efforts. Then, Islamabad refused to back down from the gas pipeline project in the face of pressure from Washington. However, Washington's fears and the sanctions on Iran are the major reasons the project is still unfinished. The project has also been delayed by other factors like instability, economic difficulties, and security concerns in Baluchistan.

### SHIA-SUNNI FACTORS

The Sunni-Shia divide is one of the main causes of tension between Pakistan and Iran, along with other issues. With a substantial Shia population, Iran believes it can further its objectives by providing aid to Shias in Pakistan and using them as workers in insecure areas. According to Alex Vatanka, Pakistan-Iranian ties are negatively impacted by this issue:

Violence against Shi'a Sunnis is not only a tragedy for Pakistan overall, but it also acts as an index of Tehran's ability and desire to protect the Shi'a in Pakistan. Being the world's leading protector of Shi'a Muslims requires extra effort on the part of the Iranian government. Security, diplomacy, and American influence in Iran and Pakistan (Vatanka, 2015) Tehran's actions, however, rarely match its most passionate rhetoric about the suffering of

Pakistan's Shi'a, even though some elements of the Iranian regime have turned the suffering of Pakistani Shi'as into a rallying cry.

Iran asserts that the Shia community in Afghanistan and Pakistan is persecuted and in need of assistance. Iran feels superior historically because of the long-lasting Persian empire that it built in the sixth century B.C. Iran consequently aspires to and desires to rule the area. The Iranian Quds Force, one of the eight branches of Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), is active in Syria,

Iraq, and other neighbouring countries to further Tehran's goals. In a similar vein, Iran has backed Shia groups in Syria ever since the crisis began. A Salafi group launched a rocket attack on the Zainab shrine in Damascus, which led to the formation of the Zainabyon Brigade (Zahid, 2016). Iran enlists Shias from the Kurram tribal territory for the Syrian war. But a local once informed me that war dead are buried in Iran or Syria rather than Pakistan<sup>65</sup> because Pakistani officials are terrified of them. In July 2020, a drone assault on the outskirts of Baghdad killed Qasim Sulemani, the head of the Quds force, by the United States. The Quds force operated in both Iraq and Syria.

Thus, the Shia element has a considerable influence on the relationship between the two states.

### PAKISTAN-SAUDIA RELATIONS

A major actor in Pakistani affairs is Saudi Arabia. Pakistan's ties with Iran, a neighbor, are determined by its relationship with Saudi Arabia. Pakistan often offers strategic support and stands with Saudi Arabia in times of crisis in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia's objectives in Afghanistan are mostly in line with pro-US goals, hence they do not constitute a primary issue for its strategy. Furthermore, Pakistan's bilateral relations with Iran are impacted by Saudi Arabia's connection with Pakistan. To protect its geopolitical interests, Saudi Arabia assists Pakistan in limiting Iran's influence and expanding its involvement in Afghanistan, particularly since the US announced its withdrawal plan from the country in 2014. She backs peace negotiations with the Taliban and helps the Kabul administration avoid civil conflict. With agreements in technology and defense,

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have had a close relationship since the 1960s. Pakistan has given Saudi Arabia military training and in times of need, has benefited economically from free oil and diplomatic help. Saudi Arabia has supported Pakistan's stance on Kashmir and helped Pakistan in its wars against India in 1965 and 1971. The political and military leadership of the two nations have changed, but sixty-three their relationship has stayed cordial. However, because of the Pakistan People's Party's (PPP) strong links to Iran and secular views, there were some difficulties with the alliance under the PPP's political rule. Pakistan is dependent on outside assistance to tackle both internal and foreign issues because of its poor economy and institutions. For several reasons, Saudi Arabia has a big say on what is said in Pakistan, both internally and outside. Most people in Pakistan are Muslims, who belong mostly to the Sunni branch of the religion and share close ideological ties with Saudi Arabia. Pakistan sees Saudi Arabia's activities favorably, given its strongly devout population and its complicated religious and ideological terrain. Due to its role as the country that gave rise to Islam and as the guardian of the two locations that Muslims consider to be sacred, most people have strong ties to Saudi Arabia (Haramain Sharefain). Additionally, there are ideological parallels. Saudi Arabia expanded its sphere of influence in the SovietAfghanistan conflict by endorsing jihadist doctrine and lending money to the establishment of madrasas, or places of religious instruction. The Wahhabi school of Islam has also been introduced into Pakistani politics by Saudi Arabia. The general population and society are greatly influenced by madrasas. Religious-ideological tools have shaped Pakistan's educated and religious population, allowing the nation to fight Iranian influence and strengthen ties with military and political elites for geopolitical ends. In favour of nuclear-armed Securing regional interests and enhancing its influence in Middle East issues need Pakistan to play a strategic role. Its influence in internal affairs is increased by Saudi Arabia's tight ties to Pakistan's ruling class. Saudi Arabia supported Nawaz Sharif and gave Pakistan's leading political party sanctuary after General Pervez Musharraf overthrew Sharif's

administration in 1999. Strong and continuous military-to-military connections have existed between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan since Sharif had already built positive ties with that country. Apart from being traditional, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan is strategic, well-established, and has a significant impact on the formulation of foreign policy. Saudi Arabia looked to Pakistan, a former friend, for strategic help during the Yemeni conflict. Owing to its tight relations with Iran, a neighbour, and the changing nature of Middle Eastern politics, Pakistan's administration, however, turned down the proposal. Pakistan's foreign policy rhetoric was influenced by the regional competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

### **SUNNI BALUCH MUSLIMS IN SHIA- RULED IRAN**

Iran is predominantly Shia Islam and ethnically Persian. However, there are also millions of minorities from different ethnic, religious, and linguistic backgrounds living in the country. Among them are the Baluch, who are Sunni Muslims and speak Baluchi. Most of the Baluch, around 1.6 million, reside in the south-eastern Sistan and Baluchistan Province, making up approximately 2% of Iran's total population. There is also a small Baluch population in Kerman Province. Many Baluchans<sup>76</sup> have migrated to Tehran and other parts of Iran in search of employment opportunities. The Baluchans in Iran have faced racial persecution for a long time. The combination of their ethnic and religious differences has resulted in harsh victimization by successive Iranian Shia governments, including the shah and presidents Ahmadinejad and Hasan Rouhan. Sistan and Baluchistan, one of Iran's poorest provinces, has experienced severe droughts and extreme weather conditions in recent years, which have worsened the province's already limited resources. It has the worst indicators in Iran for life expectancy, adult literacy, primary school enrollment, access to improved water and sanitation, and infant and child mortality. The province in Iran has the lowest per capita income and a high poverty rate among the Baluch population. It has significant reserves of natural resources such as gas, gold, copper, oil, and

uranium. However, unlike Pakistani Baluchistan, Tehran has not utilized these resources and prefers to keep the area underdeveloped. The province was previously called Baluchistan and is now known as Sistan and Baluchistan. The capital city, formerly known as Duzzap, was renamed Zahedan by the Pahlavis. Some analysts say that the area has Shia missionaries trying to convert the local Sunni population. However, it is ironic that Tehran supported Sunni Islam in the region in the early 1980s to suppress communist and secular sentiments among the local Baluch community. Restrictions on journalists and rights groups make it difficult to get a clear understanding of the situation in the area. Nevertheless, international rights groups, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have well-documented Tehran's repression of the Baluch. These rights groups criticize the lack of freedom of expression in Iran, where the government tries to silence dissent while claiming to pursue "national security" reforms. Some analysts claim that Shia missionaries are present in the area, attempting to convert the Sunni population. However, Tehran's support of Sunni Islam in the region during the 1980s to suppress communist and secular sentiments among the Baluch community creates a painful irony. Due to restrictions on journalists and rights groups, obtaining a clear understanding of the situation is challenging. Nevertheless, international rights groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights have documented Tehran's repression of the Baluch. Freedom of expression remains a significant issue in Iran, where the government attempts to silence dissent while calling for reforms in the name of national security. The insurgency has gained popular support due to a lack of development, cultural and religious repression in the area. In response to armed resistance by Baluch groups<sup>77</sup>, Iranian security forces have arrested suspected militants, tortured suspects to obtain confessions, and carried out extra-judicial killings. Executions of alleged enemies of God are common, including journalists, bloggers, poets, and teenagers, with the majority executed without trial. Some rights organizations suggest that the Baluch, who make up 2% of Iran's population, account for at least 20% of Iranian executions since 2006. The United

Nations special rapporteur about human rights in Iran has expressed concern over the abrupt increase in executions in the country since the start of 2014, with at least 40 people reportedly hanged in the first two weeks of January.

India and Iran have a long history of friendship. India remained neutral in international disputes after gaining independence, while Iran tended to align with the West. Their relationship was impacted by this. India had limited contact with Iran during the early stages of the Islamic Revolution in Iran due to a number of factors. Iran enjoyed cordial relations with the Afghan government that the Soviet Union had imposed and supported the cause of Kashmir. Their relationship was strained as a result. Tension was also caused by Iran's position on the predicament of Indian Muslims. They did, however, continue to collaborate in the energy, economic, and somewhat manufacturing sectors. India and Iran naturally collaborate in the energy industry because India is a significant buyer of Iranian gas and oil. Iran started to provide India with oil in 1999–2000, and from 2007 to 2010, it was the country's second-largest supplier, behind Saudi Arabia. India's imports of Iranian oil were impacted in 2018 after President Trump withdrew from the Iran nuclear agreement. India and Iran faced fresh chances and difficulties following the end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the USSR. They have similar concerns about energy security, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. Both were worried that the Taliban's ascent in Afghanistan would cause instability in the area. They backed the group fighting the Taliban, the Northern Alliance. Their intimacy was also fueled by energy. Iran was a logical partner for India since Iran had abundant energy to provide and India needed a lot of it.

Another area where both countries are collaborating is Central Asia. After the events of September 11, 2001, India and Iran developed closer relations. The closeness of their friendship was demonstrated in 2003 when Syed Muhammad Khatami, the president of Iran at the time, was honoured as the principal guest at India's Republic Day Parade. Interestingly, India invited its closest allies to this function. The New Delhi Declaration, several agreements, and the signature of seven

memorandums of understanding marked the end of the tour. Iran and India are becoming closer due to several reasons. The US has imposed severe economic sanctions on Iran and has worked to isolate the nation internationally over the years. Iran has responded by implementing several steps to lessen their effects. Developing stronger relationships with countries that disagree with the United States is one such tactic that aims to provide a counterbalance. As a result, Iran has signed commercial and military accords with nations such as China, Russia, and India. Notably, the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between China and Iran, which was inked in April 2021, is thought to be a major step towards relieving Iran of the strain of economic sanctions. Islamabad is concerned about Tehran and New Delhi's growing defense cooperation. As per an academic, this cooperation is described as:

If there are Indian soldiers on Iranian military outposts, even only for training, that might give India a covert way to use resources like early warning systems and information collection against Pakistan. India might potentially be a threat along its western frontiers in the case of a confrontation with Pakistan if it were to build a military presence in Iran, whether it included attack capability. India's influence on Iran has steadily grown as Pakistan-Iranian ties have gotten worse (Zeb, 2003).

Russia, Iran, and India signed the North-South Corridor Agreement in September 2000 with the intention of linking Mumbai to St. Petersburg through Tehran and Moscow. Later, in 2005, Azerbaijan became a member of this accord. This agreement's adoption reduced transit costs and made it easier for trade to grow between India and the other nations. Furthermore, India built and funded a 215-kilometer road that connected Kabul with Zaranj, Iran. With this strategy, India would have better access to these regions for commercial purposes while also disrupting Pakistan's trade lines with Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics (CARs) via Pakistan. India has long sought to use its western border as a means of applying pressure on Pakistan by building up a sizable presence in Afghanistan. Following the events of 9/11 and the following installation of President Karzai as the head of the interim Afghan

government, with US oversight of Afghan matters, this endeavor acquired impetus. India opened several consulates in Afghanistan at this time, especially close to the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan. But these consulates were shuttered once the Taliban took control of Kabul in August 2021. There have been allegations that these consulates, especially in areas like Baluchistan and the Federally Administered Tribal

Areas (FATA), encouraged insurgency within Pakistan. Regarding these consulates, Professor Christine Fair has said the following:

It would be incorrect to ignore Pakistan's regional concerns because of concerns about India's ability to carry out covert operations; this is because it ignores a larger picture. It would also be unjust to overlook the possibility that Pakistan's security competition with India has a role in shaping its worries about Afghanistan. I have visited the Indian Mission in Zahedan, Iran, and I can attest that issuing visas is not the mission's main function. In addition, India has operated from its consulates in Mazar and will continue to do so from the consulates it has restored along the border in Jalalabad and Qandahar. I have been personally informed by Indian authorities that they are funding Balochistan (Kazmi, 2009).

Tehran allowed India to open a consulate in Mashhad despite the little Indian minority there. Islamabad expressed anxiety about this move, but Tehran told the city that the consulate would not be used against Pakistani interests and that it would be well monitored. There is a flourishing Indian consulate in Zahedan, which borders Pakistan, with over 100 Indian families living there (Montazeran, Mumtaz, 2004). Similarly, Islamabad has expressed worry about India's 2002 establishment of its consulate in Bandar Abbas. India can keep an eye on ship movements in the Persian Gulf through this consulate. One expert provided a summary of these issues:

Because of the Indian consulate in Zahedan, where there may be an Indian intelligence presence, many experts who focus on South Asia think that Delhi and Tehran have close security ties. Additionally, in 2001, India established a consulate in Bandar Abbas, an Iranian port city, giving it the ability to monitor ship movements in the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. The

quantity of defence trade in money might not matter as much in terms of regional security as the continuous, perhaps more qualitative actions. India has considerable access to Iran thanks to the presence of Indian engineers at Chahbahar, as well as Indian military advisors and intelligence officers there. For India to demonstrate its might in comparison to Pakistan and Central Asia, this access is essential. India may now keep a closer eye on Pakistan and possibly utilise Iran to carry out daring operations against the country.

Iran claims that its ties with India do not adversely affect Pakistan. Dr. Hassan Rouhani stated that Tehran's close relations to New Delhi may help to open talks between India and Pakistan to help resolve the Kashmir dispute during his visit to Islamabad in November 2001. In a similar vein, Hassan Rouhani stressed Pakistan's and Iran's interdependence during his March 2016 visit to Islamabad while serving as president (Husain, 2016). Nonetheless, a few things could prevent India and Iran's relations from being even stronger. India has significant relations to Israel and maintains a tight partnership with the United States. Furthermore, India voted twice in Favor of resolutions from the International Atomic Energy Agency that called for sanctions against Iran and backed resolutions passed by the UN Security Council that placed restrictions on Iran.

#### **A WAY FORWARD**

Several circumstances, especially in the wake of the U.S. pullout from Afghanistan, might help improve relations between Pakistan and Iran. First off, stronger connections have been cultivated because of both nations' discovery of common ground with the Taliban in Afghanistan. Tehran and the Taliban have forged a partnership despite their prior disagreements because of their common interests in Afghanistan, particularly the Taliban's accommodating attitude towards Shia parties, which is crucial for Iran.

- Second, Tehran's fears have lessened due to the subduing of the sectarian violence in Pakistan. The activities of organizations like as Jundallah have diminished, which has added to the security of Pakistan's border with Iran. The Sistan-Balochistan rebellion had previously caused problems for Iran, but

things have since improved. Iran could also want to reevaluate its strategy of sending Pakistanis to fight overseas, like the Zainabiyoun Brigade in Syria.

- Thirdly, Tehran may become closer to Beijing and Pakistan because of the 25-year Comprehensive Partnership between China and Iran. The close ties between China and Pakistan may allow Tehran and Islamabad to cooperate as China and Iran align during the China-US rivalry. It is conceivable that China, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan may work together on connectivity and commerce projects.
- Fourth, Pakistan and Iran both see the United States' exit from Afghanistan favorably. Iran was threatened by the U.S. presence, especially the Shindand Airbase in Herat Province. On the other hand, Pakistan could gain from the new Kabul administration, as the former one frequently held Pakistan accountable for Afghanistan's instability at India's instigation. Stability is increased by the Taliban's determination to stop Afghan territory from being used against any state.

Finally, Pakistan-Iran ties may change because of a possible breach between Iran and India. Improved relations between China and Iran may have an impact on India-Iran relations and present chances for Pakistan-Iran relations to improve.

## CONCLUSION

Iran and Pakistan's relationship was impacted by the new opportunities and difficulties the region faced following the September 11 attacks. The concerns and interests of both nations are intertwined in this dynamic regional and international environment. Pakistan refrained from permitting US activities against its neighbours, such as Iran, despite Pakistan's partnership with the US. Pakistan has no interest in a confrontation between the US and Iran. Pakistan's security was impacted by the instability of the area since terrorism affected both Iran and Pakistan. To counter this threat, collaboration, intelligence sharing, and mutual trust-building are the best strategies. In addition, initiatives must concentrate on elevating the disadvantaged groups in society where terrorism is most prevalent. Pakistan feels

accountable for the unity of the Muslim world against Indian intentions to divide the Muslim community, even if it does not oppose Iran's connections with India.

Pakistan and Iran may work together in response to the changing circumstances in Afghanistan by endorsing an impartial Afghan administration that forbids the use of Afghan territory as a means of aggression. Strategic adjustments are being made by regional parties considering the US departure from Afghanistan. However, considering their own previous experiences as well as the effects of the protracted battle on their nations, Pakistan and Iran must coordinate their foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Both have the potential to strengthen Afghan unity by using their sway over various ethnic groupings.

Iran and Pakistan have always had cordial ties and no major conflicts. India is Pakistan's greatest security threat, not Iran, and Iran has helped Pakistan in its hour of need. Any cooperation between Iran and India should take Pakistan's worries into account, though. Furthermore, ties between Pakistan and Iran may improve because of China and Iran's increasing closeness.

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