

## PAKISTAN BALANCING ACT: NAVIGATING FOREIGN POLICY BETWEEN SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN

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### ABSTRACT

The research paper takes a deep dive into how Pakistan walks the tightrope of foreign policy with Saudi Arabia and Iran on either side. It's all about the fine line that Pakistan has to tread, and this study digs into those real moments when Pakistan had to make some tough calls between the two. It looks at how Pakistan responds to sticky situations in the region, and the kind of diplomatic backflips it has to do. Plus, the paper doesn't just stop there. It also looks at Pakistan's take on big issues that the Saudi-Iran rivalry stirs up and what this tug-of-war means for Pakistan's choices. The research doesn't miss a beat—it covers everything from the smooth diplomatic moves to the sharp economic plays and the security tactics Pakistan uses. It's kind of like getting a backstage pass to see how Pakistan keeps its balance when the regional scene gets shaky. By really getting into these examples, the study adds some serious depth to what we understand about Pakistan's foreign policy dance moves and how it holds its own in the Middle East's ever-changing theatre.

**Keywords:** Public Diplomacy, Foreign Policy, Regional Powers, Geopolitical Dynamics, Regional Stability, Saudi-Iran Rivalry, Security Challenges

### I. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan has a tricky foreign policy when it comes to Saudi Arabia and Iran. It's like walking a tightrope. Pakistan wants to stay friends with both countries, which is important for its security and stability in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia has a big role in the Middle East and the Gulf Cooperation Council, and Pakistan's relationship with Saudi Arabia has changed over time (Siddiqi, 2019). Pakistan's relationship with Iran has also changed due to the world changing (Raza, 2020). They have some things in common, but they also disagree on some things.

Saudi Arabia and Iran don't get along, which has caused problems in the region (Anwar, 2020; Faheem et al., 2021). This rivalry affects Pakistan's decisions, especially in the Yemen crisis (Ali & Ahmad, 2021). Pakistan has to be careful because the Saudi-Iran conflict is complicated (Muzaffar et al., 2017). Things are even more complex because other countries, like China, are getting involved in the Persian Gulf (Garlick & Havlová, 2020). The

interests of these global powers make Pakistan's job even harder (Verma, 2021).

This research will look at Pakistan's foreign policy towards Saudi Arabia and Iran. We'll explore the history, the reasons behind their actions, and what might happen in the future. We'll analyze how Pakistan's relationship with these countries is changing and how the Saudi-Iran conflict influences their decisions. This will help us understand the challenges and opportunities that Pakistan faces in the Middle East.

### II. Literature Review

So, this feud between Saudi Arabia and Iran isn't anything new. It's been a big part of the drama in the Middle East for years. We've got ancient bad blood, serious religious fallout, and a never-ending tug-of-war for who gets to be the big player in the region. The whole thing kicked up a notch when the Iran-Iraq war went down from 1980-1988. That's when Saudi Arabia, with a nod and a wink from the US,

backed Iraq to push back against Iran (Khatib, 2013). All this history is why the rivalry's more than just a spat; it's a heavyweight bout that shakes the entire area.

Then there's the religious throwdown. Saudi Arabia and Iran are like two sides of a coin when it comes to their take on Islam. They've both got their own strategies for winning friends and influencing people in the Muslim community. Peter Mandaville and Shadi Hamid (2018) tell us that as the world's game changes, so do these religious power moves. Mix that with politics and security stuff, and you've got a rivalry recipe that's spicy on every level.

Let's bring Pakistan into the mix. They've been juggling their friendships with Saudi Arabia and Iran, and it's like walking a tightrope. You've got Saudi Arabia, a key strategic ally, and then there's Iran, sharing a fence and a whole lot of history (Mustafa et al., 2017). Trade, security, and shared prayer times play into this dynamic, shaping how Pakistan moves and shakes in the Middle East.

And Pakistan isn't just sitting on the sidelines, either. They've been the ones trying to cool tempers and get folks talking again in the Middle East (Zikriya et al., 2019). This role paints a picture of a country that's all about promoting peace and keeping relations smooth with the neighbors. To really get why Pakistan swings the way it does in foreign policy, digging into its past with these two nations helps you see the full board.

Now, scholars have been poring over what Pakistan's up against in keeping things cool with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. There's a lot of fancy footwork in diplomacy and tons of critical thinking on where to stand on different issues (Raza, 2020). As the neighborhood and the world's mood switches up, Pakistan's foreign policy has to be on point, playing nice with all sides.

And we can't forget the military angle here. Pakistan's got nukes, and that fact doesn't just sit in the background—it's part of the whole conversation with Saudi Arabia (Zweiri & James, 2021). You've got regional tension, security headaches, and allies to keep happy—all stirring the pot for Pakistan. Grasping these headaches is key to getting the bigger picture of how Pakistan is trying to stay friends—or at least, not enemies—with two of the region's heavy hitters.

### **III. Theoretical Framework**

States use foreign policy balancing to stay on an even keel with other countries. They have to deal with different interests and alliances. Urbelis Jakštaitė (2014) says balancing is a big strategy, like a master plan. It includes different ways to act, like containment, engagement, and deterrence. This big strategy helps countries manage the complicated world of international politics. They carefully plan out their diplomatic, economic, and security moves to protect their interests and keep things stable.

Pakistan's foreign policy choices are shaped by three key things: location, money, and security. Pakistan is located in a strategic spot where South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East meet. This means its location is important and influences its relationships with other regional powers (Hudson & Sampson, 1999). Money matters a lot too. Pakistan works with other countries to improve its economy. This includes trade, aid, and investments (Nganje, Auerbach & Bloch-Elkon, 2005).

Pakistan's foreign policy decisions are strongly affected by security issues, especially terrorism and regional conflicts. The country's strategic planning is closely connected to security threats from its neighbors and global terrorism (Darabu, 2021). Pakistan's foreign policy framework combines geopolitics, economics, and security concerns, guiding its relationships with Saudi Arabia, Iran, and other important countries in the region.

Events in South Asia and the Middle East heavily influence Pakistan's strategic planning and foreign policy choices. Pakistan's foreign policy changes with the regional landscape, which includes power shifts, conflicts, and cooperation efforts (Darabu, 2021). Changes in the foreign policies of neighboring countries, like Iran (Jathol et al., 2017) and India (Blank, 2007), directly affect Pakistan's strategic outlook and diplomatic actions.

Regional crises, like the conflict in Yemen (Ali & Ahmad, 2021) and the situation in Afghanistan, show how regional events influence Pakistan's strategic planning. Pakistan tries to deal with regional challenges while protecting its national interests, which involves a complicated mix of alliances, rivalries, and security needs (Hussain, 2024). Understanding regional dynamics and their impact on Pakistan's strategic planning is key to understanding how the country makes foreign policy decisions.

### **Case Studies**

Pakistan's foreign policy is a bit like a tightrope act, especially when it comes to dealing with Saudi Arabia and Iran. These two countries are power players in the region but don't always see eye to eye, putting Pakistan in a tough spot now and then. Take the crisis in Yemen, for example. Pakistan was feeling the heat from both sides because they were on opposite ends of the issue. In the end, Pakistan chose to stay neutral, showing off some pretty skilled diplomatic moves to keep the peace at home and in the region (Ali & Ahmad, 2021). Plus, there's the huge deal with China, the CPEC, where Pakistan's again got to be sharp to keep everyone's interests balanced.

So, this Saudi versus Iran rivalry really does shake things up for Pakistan. It's like a tug-of-war where both sides are trying to pull Pakistan in their direction. This has a big impact on how Pakistan behaves in sticky situations. For example, when Saudi Arabia and a few other countries decided to freeze out Qatar, Pakistan had to walk a really fine line. It didn't want to pick sides but rather aimed to keep things stable while still managing to stay on good terms with everyone (Anwar, 2020). This isn't just a one-off; it's pretty much how Pakistan rolls when it comes to dealing with issues that pop up because of the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

### **Factors Influencing Pakistan's Balancing Act**

#### **A. Religious, cultural, and historical ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran**

Pakistan's foreign policy is like walking a tightrope between two big influencers in the region, Saudi Arabia and Iran. There are lots of factors at play here. For starters, Pakistan has some deep-rooted religious ties to Saudi Arabia, thanks to shared Islamic traditions and the significance of the Hajj pilgrimage, which is huge for Muslims everywhere. These bonds create a sense of unity and really shape how Pakistan and Saudi Arabia get along on the diplomatic front (Amiri et al., 2011). On the cultural side of things, Pakistan has a long history with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. We're talking about languages, social norms, and age-old traditions that go way back. It's these cultural links that build a feeling of closeness and help smooth the way when Pakistan deals with these countries, making sure there's respect on both sides (Zweiri & James, 2021). That shared history is super important when Pakistan thinks about its moves on the foreign policy chessboard.

Let's not forget the big historical moments that have played out between Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran. Events like the Iran-Iraq war and other major shifts in the Gulf have left their mark on how Pakistan juggles its relationships with these nations. Those events from the past still cast a long shadow over Pakistan's game plan and diplomatic choices (Ramazani, 2004). To sum it up, it's a mix of religious closeness, cultural bonds, and big historical chapters that keep Pakistan's foreign policy dance with Saudi Arabia and Iran on its toes. As Pakistan tiptoes through the complex dance of the Saudi-Iran rivalry, these factors help it keep the peace, work well with others, and look out for its own interests.

#### **B. Global influences and power dynamics affecting Pakistan's foreign policy choices**

Everything from international rivalries to big economic interests plays a part in how Pakistan decides its foreign policy, especially when it comes to dealing with Saudi Arabia and Iran. Pakistan has to figure out not just how to play nice with these two countries, but also how to keep up with the ever-shifting power games in the Middle East.

Look at the tussle between Saudi Arabia and Iran, for example. It's not just a local issue; it creates a ripple effect that impacts the whole region, making the scene there pretty complex. Pakistan has to be pretty savvy to steer through this (Juneau, 2016). Plus, with major global powers like China and the US in the mix, Pakistan's dance card is really full, and making the right moves is trickier (Dil et al., 2020).

And it's not just about who's friends with who. Money talks, too. The economic might of Saudi Arabia and Iran, along with their strategic partnerships and face-offs, has a big say in Pakistan's decisions (Umair & Waheed, 2017). When new players step up in the Middle East and the balance of power starts to shift, Pakistan has got to adapt and rethink what's best for its interests (Al-Rasheed, 2011).

Don't forget about trade and cash flow. Money sent home from workers in Saudi Arabia, big investment opportunities, and trade deals—all of these are big factors that influence how Pakistan handles its relationships with these countries (Ahmed, 2018). And, of course, with the whole world economy changing and markets being what they are, all of this feeds into how Pakistan positions itself on the global stage. So, yeah, global goings-on and who holds the power at any given time are key to understanding Pakistan's foreign policy moves. By carefully

weighing these complex elements, Pakistan aims to keep a steady hand on the wheel, watching out for its own interests while staying in touch with the main players regionally and globally.

#### C. Domestic considerations and public opinion on Pakistan's alignment with regional powers

In Pakistan, what happens inside the country can really sway the big decisions it makes about foreign policy, especially when it's about getting along with neighbors like Saudi Arabia and Iran. What the people of Pakistan think, what's going on in politics, the economy, safety – all this stuff has a big say in how Pakistan acts on the world stage.

Take the country's politics, the push and pull of the economy, and those ever-present concerns about keeping the people safe. They're super important when Pakistan is deciding how to be friends (or not) with other countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran. Pakistan's corporate big shots and what everyday people think should be done also have a lot to say about the direction of the country's foreign policy (Hussain, 2023). And you can bet that what's happening within Pakistan's own borders can really push the needle when it comes to forming ties with other nations.

Then there's the opinion of the Pakistani people about these regional powerhouses. How Pakistanis feel about them can push the government's foreign policy in one direction or another. If people have a soft spot for a country because of shared history or culture, then that can make Pakistan lean one way in dealing with that nation.

Money matters, too. How Pakistani people view economic deals and trade with big players like Saudi Arabia and Iran matters a lot. If the public is all for trading with one of these countries, the government's more likely to focus on making those economic ties strong. So, the people's take on business and trade with these countries can drive how the government handles economic and foreign policy (Hussain, 2023). So, wrapping up, what goes on in Pakistan and what the public thinks is pretty key to how the country manages its relationships with heavyweights like Saudi Arabia and Iran. This dance of domestic issues and public opinion with Pakistan's foreign policy is what keeps the country moving in a particular direction on the diplomatic dance floor, showing just how much those local vibes matter for big global relationships.

#### **Future Prospects and Challenges**

Looking ahead, Pakistan's got some serious navigating to do with its approach to Saudi Arabia and Iran. With a region that's always in flux, staying on top of the game and finding the sweet spot in foreign policy is key. Both the future challenges and potentially good stuff on the horizon will play a big part in Pakistan's moves.

In the near future, we can expect to see Pakistan shake up its foreign policy a bit with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. It's probably going to use its shared history and cultural links to make those relationships even stronger. With the world changing pretty fast and new economic interests coming up, Pakistan might just adjust how it works with these countries (Pirsalami, 2023).

The ongoing head-to-head between Saudi Arabia and Iran isn't slowing down, and this is going to keep affecting how Pakistan makes its decisions. We're talking about stand-ins fighting proxy wars, power tugs-of-war, and clashes over ideas. These new trends are going to put Pakistan's strategy and diplomatic skills to the test, especially if the heat turns up between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Faheem et al., 2021).

Pakistan's walking a tricky line, trying to keep things smooth with Saudi Arabia and Iran. It's got to deal with all sorts of headaches like regional firefighting, security scares, and tough economic choices. But it's not all rough seas; there are chances to forge stronger partnerships, open doors to new economic deals, and launch some solid diplomatic efforts. All these could help Pakistan make a positive splash in the big regional picture (Ramazani, 2004).

In wrapping up, Pakistan's got a mixed bag when it comes to its future with Saudi Arabia and Iran. It's about being ready for new twists, getting the lay of the land in this rivalry, and facing up to both the tough stuff and the wins that could come. By keeping an eye on all these moving parts, Pakistan is aiming to find the right balance and do what's best for its own backyard in a region that's always changing.

#### **Key Finding**

The study "Pakistan Balancing Act: Navigating Foreign Policy between Saudi Arabia and Iran" takes a close look at how Pakistan makes its foreign policy decisions while dealing with Saudi Arabia and Iran. What this research does is sort of pull back the curtains to show us what's driving Pakistan's moves in the region. Now, when you dive into the religious,



cultural, and historical links that Pakistan has with these two countries, you start to see a pattern. These ties are super important and really shape how Pakistan does things diplomatically. The closer the cultural and religious connection, the more it seems to affect the choices Pakistan makes in the Middle East. But it's not just about these relationships. The research points out that big-picture stuff like regional power tiffs, economic agendas, and all the geopolitical shake-ups also put their spin on Pakistan's strategic thinking. Basically, it's a juggling act of working with the big names on the block, all while trying to keep its own house safe and stable.

Looking forward, the paper's got some thoughts on what might be in store for Pakistan's relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran. It says, "Hey, keep up the diplomacy and adapt as things change." With the Saudi-Iran faceoff still cooking, Pakistan's got its work cut out trying to stay even-handed in a region that's always up for grabs. The research doesn't shy away from the tough spots either. It calls out the hurdles Pakistan might stumble over, like threats to security, the cash flow, and what people inside the country think. By being one step ahead, clued in on what's shaking the region, and factoring in both local and international plays, Pakistan could navigate through the rough waters of the Saudi-Iran rivalry. So, what the paper's really saying is, this whole foreign policy tango is complex, with plenty of stuff to consider. It's crammed with insights that could help Pakistan chart a course through all these challenges and keep its eye on long-term goals in a part of the world where surprises are just another Tuesday.

### **Recommendations and Future Research**

The study on how Pakistan juggles its foreign policy between Saudi Arabia and Iran can really give us some food for thought. It can help those making decisions and scholars who want to get to the bottom of these issues. Here's what the study suggests decision-makers and researchers could do next:

#### **Recommendations:**

1. **Boost Diplomacy:** Work on building better relationships with both Saudi Arabia and Iran. This means more talks, stronger cooperation, and getting on the same page.

2. **Work for Peace in the Region:** Do your part to smooth over conflicts, build trust, and find ways to peacefully sort out issues in the Middle East.
3. **Grow Economic Ties:** Look for ways to do business and trade with these countries to keep ties strong and beneficial for everyone involved.
4. **Public Diplomacy Efforts:** Get the people involved. Spread awareness, swap cultural experiences, and connect folks in Pakistan with those in Saudi Arabia and Iran.

#### **Future research:**

1. **Global Impact:** Look into how the big international players and groups affect Pakistan's moves in the Middle East.
2. **What the People Think:** Researchers should study what people in Pakistan think about the country's relationship with Saudi Arabia and Iran. This might tell us how public opinion sways foreign policy.
3. **Safety First:** We need to dig into the security stuff—like fighting terrorism, dealing with conflicts, and defense plans—to understand how these shape Pakistan's foreign policy.
4. **Trade and Foreign Policy:** It's worth taking a closer look at how business deals and trading can influence the way Pakistan deals with Saudi Arabia and Iran.
5. **Changing Regional Powers:** Keep an eye on the tug-of-war between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and what it means for Pakistan trying to stay on good terms with both.

If decision-makers and researchers take on these suggestions and keep looking into these areas, they're bound to get a clearer picture of Pakistan's foreign policy. It's about understanding the give-and-take in the Middle East and working towards a more stable, cooperative future.

#### **Conclusion**

Wrapping up, the study titled "Pakistan Balancing Act: Navigating Foreign Policy between Saudi Arabia and Iran" really did a deep dive into the whole shebang of Pakistan's foreign policy moves. It figured out the many different things that shape how Pakistan deals with Saudi Arabia and Iran. Stuff like shared beliefs, culture, history, and the bigger picture of world politics and who holds the cards—all of this is part of Pakistan's tightrope walk in Middle Eastern politics. What's the takeaway for the people calling the shots? They ought to double down on making and maintaining strong diplomatic relationships, work toward keeping the peace in the area, look for good

business deals, and keep the lines of communication open with both Saudi Arabia and Iran to build a solid foundation of trust and cooperation. For the brains looking into the future of these policies, they've got their work cut out for them too. They should pay close attention to how worldwide trends, what people think back home, security issues, money talks, and the shifting sands of who's got power in the region can teach us more about Pakistan's game plan. As Pakistan plots its course with Saudi Arabia and Iran, it won't be a walk in the park—the whole situation is complicated with lots of different pieces to consider. But if Pakistan plays its cards right and stays aware of both the rough spots and opportunities, it could keep things steady. Keeping focused on a strategy that brings stability and looks out for its own backyard is key. If Pakistan can keep up with the research and savvy policymaking, it's got a fighting chance to sort through the Saudi-Iran rivalry and help the region find its footing in peaceful cooperation and stability.

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