

IRAN – PAKISTAN TENSE FRIENDSHIP

The article deals with bilateral relations between Iran and Pakistan and its influence on the stability of neighbouring Afghanistan. Such issues as drugs proliferation, trade and transborder terrorism are examined.

Key words: *bilateral relations, transit, economic cooperation, security threats.*

У статті розглядаються особливості двосторонніх відносин Ірану та Пакистану й їх вплив на стабільність сусіднього Афганістану. Одночасно проаналізовано такі чинники у взаєминах сторін як розповсюдження наркотичних речовин, торгівля і транскордонний тероризм.

Ключові слова: *двосторонні відносини, економічне співробітництво, торгівля, тероризм*

В статье рассматриваются особенности двусторонних отношений Ирана и Пакистана, а также их влияние на стабильность соседнего Афганистана. Одновременно проанализированы такие факторы во взаимодействии сторон как распространение наркотических веществ, торговля и трансграничный терроризм.

Ключевые слова: *двусторонние отношения, экономическое сотрудничество, торговля, терроризм*

Iran and Pakistan share a 900-kilometer border, which divides land area of desert Baluchistan between both Muslim countries with huge non-Arab population. Farsi became working language for South Asian poets and writers and widely spoken by the people of western regions of Pakistan. Both countries provide nearest outlet to the Persian Gulf for landlocked post-Soviet states of Central Asia and also exert considerable influence in postwar Afghanistan. Official Tehran and Islamabad have similar threat perceptions of their northern neighbour because of drugs proliferation and painful issues of refugees on their soil. 1,7 million Afghani Pashtuns live in Khyber Pushtunkwa province of Pakistan and more than 1 million of Afghans temporary reside in Tehran and eastern part of the Islamic republic [1]. Thus Iran and Pakistan have a vital stake in stabilization of internal situation in Afghanistan which would allow refugees to return, but at the same time want NATO troops to leave the country. Iran with its second biggest natural gas reserves and around 10 per cent of

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world oil deposits represents closest source of energy supply for overpopulated South Asia.

Iran became the first country that diplomatically recognized Pakistan after decolonization of British India and later developed with its eastern neighbour close relations within several regional organizations – the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), Shanghai Cooperation Organization and SAARC as an observer or a full-fledged member. Pakistan, beset with Kashmir and Pashtu problems, could not afford to downgrade ties with official Tehran. On the other hand, Iran became isolated in the Arab Middle East during Islamic revolution of 1979 and subsequent Iran-Iraq war, therefore needed close ties with one of the biggest Muslim states on the eastern flank. During the rule of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Shah of Iran Mohammad Rezā Pahlavi provided funds and helicopter-gunships to help Pakistani prime-minister to quell disturbances in rebellious province of Baluchistan. Relations remained stable after sudden regime changes in both countries. During Zia ul-Haq rule neighbors conducted similar reforms of harsh Islamization and tried to undermine Soviet military presence in Afghanistan while hosting huge number of refugees. But with the rise of Pashtu-based movement Taliban former allies became fierce competitors and official Tehran provided support to Persian-speaking Hazara people of Central Afghanistan and Tajik residents of biggest western city Herat. The assassination by Talibs of Iranian diplomats and consular employees in Mazari-Sharif in summer of 1998 brought bilateral relations to the lowest level in the decade. In 2000-es Iran and Pakistan mended fences because of economic imperatives and new security situation in Afghanistan under NATO umbrella. Both partners remain unstable and considered failed states in western world despite their resources and political clout. Moreover, official Tehran remains isolated by international sanctions for clandestine nuclear programme and desperately tries to find new allies not only in Asia, but also in Latin America [2].

The relations between countries can be characterized by simultaneous cooperation and competition under the influence of American factor. Pakistan with population over 185 million is energy-hungry country and Iran is in excellent position

to satisfy its needs by export of electricity, oil and natural gas. Country is considered a world leader in number of cars (around 2 million), which use compressed natural gas and intends to increase the sales of those vehicles in order to save money on expensive gasoline import bill. Land of pure also suffers from constant blackouts and interested in uninterrupted supply of electricity from its western neighbor. The stability of textile industry, which is a main contributor to the country budget and hard currency earner, is highly dependant on this type of energy. Additionally Pakistan can buy some Iranian oil because of proximity of Sistan and Baluchistan to its western border.

Iran and Pakistan consider gas pipeline from massive oil field Southern Pars to the biggest Pakistani cities as a priority and signed respective treaty in 2010. This project due to become operational in 2014 and attracts interest from China, whose landlocked western provinces also demand blue fuel. The simultaneous deterioration of relations of both countries with the United States probably would create a necessary precondition for cooperation. Official Washington convinced Indian prime-minister Manmohan Singh to abandon the 'Peace pipeline' in 2008 and exerted strong pressure on Pakistan, forcing it to do the same. But several scandals in bilateral relations (CIA's contractor Raymond Davis affair, Osama's liquidation in Abbottabad on 2nd May, death of 24 Pakistani soldiers from NATO's friendly fire in border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan on 26th November 2011, permanent high civilian casualties of drone attacks) caused many tensions between former allies. Moreover, Pakistan does not see any other viable blue fuel suppliers, because Qatar lignified gas is expensive and complex project TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India) depends on long-term stability of Afghanistan and marked improvement of official Islamabad's relations with India. National economy is ready to import 750 cubic feet of Iranian gas daily and to pay around 3 billion dollars annually. China is eager to join the project and build a pipeline along famous Karakorum highway in order to feed Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region with energy [3].

The biggest Pakistani province Baluchistan needs efficient cross-border cooperation with its Iranian counterpart in order to overcome separatism and stabilize security situation. The alienated Baluch population feels neglect of the state, because

local people live in poverty-ridden region, which paradoxically endowed with huge mineral resources – marble, coal, gold, copper and natural gas (already depleted). They consider the development of port Gawadar as an attempt to let in more workers from densely populated Sind and Punjab and extract natural resources for their sake. Baluchistan issue also remains very painful for official Tehran in spite of the underdevelopment of this region. Sparsely-populated southeastern Iran, where province Sistan and Baluchistan is situated, always received small allocations from state budget, because western parts of the country were destroyed from 1980 to 1988 war with Iraq and needed substantial investments for reconstruction. Iran, isolated by international sanctions, could not provide substantial funds for all administrative units and decided to ignore Sunni areas of Sistan and Baluchistan. As a result, in 2003 radical young people created a terrorist organization Jundallah (Soldiers of God), whose members assassinated state servants and police officers and found temporary refuge in Pakistani Baluchistan. Thus both sides are interested in efficient border control and economic integration of respective parts of Baluchistan in order to pacify local population and increase trade volume.

Both Iran and Pakistan are looking for a new quality of trade relations since preferential trade agreement decreased tariffs on 647 items in 2006. Huge and arid Iranian plateau hosts 75 million Iranians who are dependent on food imports – halal meat, rice, wheat, fruits and vegetables, which can be imported from fertile Indus river region in Pakistan. Iran, as a producer of cheap vehicles (cars, tractors and buses), might be an attractive trade partner for Pakistan, whose specialization is garments and leather industry. Iranian companies consider possibility to use Karakorum highway in Gilgit and Baltistan to transport goods to western regions of China. The Gul Express – another important project, which connects railways of Pakistan, Iran and Turkey and provides Pakistani producers with a direct link to Southern Europe via commercial city of Istanbul. First train route became operational in 2010. It's an important breakthrough for Pakistan, whose road network is dominated by trucks. In 2011 trade volume between countries constituted 1,5 billion dollars, but their representatives

agreed to increase it to 5 billion in the nearest future thanks to improvement of infrastructure and further removal of trade barriers to zero level [5].

Both state actors became victims of drugs proliferation from Afghanistan and make efforts to combat this illicit trade route. Iran already has some 1,7 million of addicts and Pakistan hosts 5 million of narco-dependant people. Additionally Pakistani statistics says that 9 million citizens tried drugs at least one time. Afghanistan shares a 2,430-kilometer border with Pakistan and a 936-kilometer porous frontier with Iran. Country's war-torn borders are ill-protected, southern highlands have huge land areas under opium poppy cultivation and characterized by minimal state presence. Moreover, constant flow of humanitarian aid (mainly wheat and rice) diminished incentives for local farmers to cultivate legal crops and thus only opium provided instant enrichment for them. As a result, in 2007 Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran agreed to conduct joint border operations against drug dealers, establish special checkpoints and exchange relevant reconnaissance information. Iran also decided to fence 700-kilometer Pakistani border with 3-meter high separation wall in order to stop heroin shipments, contraband of diesel fuel and basmati rice [6].

The presence of NATO troops in Afghanistan causes concern in neighbouring countries for different reasons. Pakistanis consider military campaign against Talibs, who are mainly Pashtu people, as a manifestation of the civil war for the sake of the United States. Moreover, 15 percent of army conscripts belong to the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region and reluctant to fight against fellow countrymen. Islamabad is also jealous of India's 'soft power' efforts to improve Delhi's standing in Afghanistan and unable to match 2 billion US dollars of Indian development package to official Kabul [7]. Iran wants to see the departure of NATO forces because of strained relations with official Washington and reconnaissance flights of CIA-operated drones above its nuclear plants starting from 2007. Both countries ignore the activity of Afghani arm of Taliban on their territories, silently allowing the movement to rearm and regroup. Their leaders are also in position to influence the decisions of President Hamid Karzai by threats to immediately depart their respective Afghan refugees.

On the other hand, there are a several problems, which create considerable difficulties in bilateral relations. For example, sectarian violence in Pakistan – an issue, which both countries can not ignore. Paradoxically people from Shia religious minority (Yahya Khan, Iskandar Mirza, Ali Zardari and so on) from time to time were elected or appointed to highest office in Pakistan. Today at least 20 percent of Pakistanis belong to Shia belief. They were encouraged by Iranian revolution of 1979 to protect their religious rights. At the same time Saudi assistance guaranteed constant flow of weapons and helped to create huge network of madrassa during the Soviet phase of Afghan war, whose activity led to the climate of intolerance between the biggest religious groups – Sunni and Shia. Today sectarian killings take place almost daily not only in megacity of Karachi, but also in western provincial capitals of Quetta and Peshawar, that host large Shia refugee population from Afghanistan. In many cases terrorists ruthlessly attack buses that carry pilgrims to sacred Shia sites in Iran – Mashhad and Qum. There are grounds to believe that Taliban fighters partly responsible for those atrocities. Well-to-do Parsi community also became target of abductions for ransom by local gangs. In December of 2011 several bombs exploded in Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif in places of Shia worship for the first time, promising to bring violence to a new level within unstable region [8]. Shia followers constitute 10 percent of Afghanistan's population, but many people of their belief live as refugee in Iran and Pakistan.

Official Tehran also temporary sided with India in Afghanistan, because Delhi is interested to create regional transit and trade hub within Iranian territory for landlocked Central Asia and Afghanistan. Moreover, Iran along with Saudi Arabia remains the main supplier of oil to Indian economy and tries to circumvent international isolation with Indian assistance. In 2001 Russia, India and Iran agreed to develop a new transport corridor through Caspian Sea in order to bypass Suez channel and nearly return to life a trade route of Tsarist Russia, known as Astrakhan – Bender - Enzeli [9]. Later some post-Soviet states agreed to join the project, but its success became questionable due to the corruption of road police in the countries-participants and low quality of highways. Port Chahbahar in eastern Iran with present capacity of 2.5

million tones became the principal hub for Afghan goods, destined to India, in contrast to Gawadar in western Pakistan, developed with grants and investments from China and Oman, which owned a long strip of land on Makran coast till 1958.

The primary aim of Gawadar situated in 72 kilometers away from Chahbahar is to serve as an entry port for Western China in case of modernization of 1,300 kilometer Karakorum highway. This object can provide vital link between the Persian Gulf and Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region. But official Islamabad wants more than that, getting ready to extend its facilities for landlocked states of Central Asia. On the contrary, Iran decided to strengthen Shia population of Western and Central Afghanistan, providing them with investments, aid and trade corridor to the Persian Gulf through its own territory. Herat, the main city of Iranian sphere of influence, remains relatively wealthy even without use of Chahbahar, but can be even more developed by utilizing infrastructure of Iranian harbour. To this end Indian companies built a 200 kilometer road link from Nimroz province in Afghanistan to Chahbahar. On the other hand, both ports are extremely important for the development of Greater Baluchistan, because they generate employment, provide transit fees and saturate distant and deserted region with food and imported consumer goods. The difference between them can be seen in the fact that Gawadar is closer to violence-ridden southern part of this country and Chahbahar is relatively peaceful Iranian place [10].

Both countries also clash in the Persian Gulf, where Iran presents itself as a regional power with Persian roots and world's biggest Shia population. The desire of official Tehran to support Shia majority in Bahrain against ruling minority of Al-Khalifa royal family during 'February 14 Revolution' was countered by intention of official Islamabad to sustain Pakistani image as a reliable source of soldiers and policemen for vulnerable monarchies of the Persian Gulf, whose rulers do not trust huge blue-collar workforce, which outnumber tiny local population in all countries except Saudi Arabia. Bahrain, well known under the name 'Middle East Light', attracted huge numbers of Saudi tourists during weekends, because those people were looking for relative freedom from mutaween (religious police) control. Moreover, this country of 33 tiny islands is connected to Saudi oil-rich eastern coast with 26-kilometer

long King Fahd causeway. Saudi Arabia was alarmed by the development in the near neighbourhood, because its Eastern province is populated by 2 million of Shia followers, who always felt discrimination in political and cultural life of the conservative kingdom. President Ali Zardari sent some military volunteers to help quell disturbances and fully supported questionable decision of the Gulf Cooperation Council to bring in 'peacekeepers' from Saudi Arabia and UAE to Manama. Pakistan also declared its willingness to place two army divisions at disposal of Saudi king as an insurance against possible revolt of local population in the nearest future. Thanks to 'Arab Spring' even more former Pakistani soldiers can enter police and army ranks in the Persian Gulf monarchies, whose rulers are scared by the events in Northern Africa. Iran has to tolerate this because country does not want to lose lucrative gas contract with Pakistan and can not send troops to Bahrain without painful consequences. Now official Tehran proposes its good offices to Bahrain rulers in order to mediate internal conflict in this tiny country [11].

The relations also became more complex when Pakistani obsession with Islamic bomb culminated in nuclear tests in 1998. The site in Chagai hills was situated near Iranian border in Baluchistan province but at first official Tehran did not react negatively to six underground explosions. In 2004 famous scientist Abdul Qadir Khan confessed that he provided Iran with technology and centrifuges, which appeared to be insufficient for a breakthrough but greatly aided military programme. This was done in order to attract attention of the world to clandestine efforts of Tehran during rule of Pervez Musharraf, when the US hit out at Pakistan in the wake of nuclear tests. Later official Islamabad escaped international sanctions by agreeing to participate in the USA campaign against Al Qaeda and Taliban in 2001, but Iran can not do the same, taking into consideration Israeli and Saudi factor. Traditional enemy of Iran Saudi Arabia supplied cheap oil to Pakistan during several years of international isolation (50 thousand barrels a day for free) and official Tehran still harbours suspicion that in return Pakistani scientists provided kingdom with nuclear technology or even with ready-made bombs. The kingdom as a leading member of OPEC with 24,5 percent of world oil reserves and can easily declare itself nuclear weapons state without fear of

major sanctions from the world community. Example of South Asia shows that attainment of nuclear bomb by China in 1964 led to chain reaction in India and Pakistan respectively 10 and 23 years later and the same would happen in the Greater Middle East in case of Iranian success in pursuit of this kind of weapon of mass destruction [12].

Conclusion. Iran is interested in huge Pakistani market, ready to develop its Sistan and Baluchistan province in cooperation with border regions of Western Pakistan and striving to end menacing NATO military presence in Afghanistan. Pakistan is looking for a stable energy supply, but substantial economic interests in the Persian Gulf and Central Asia turn this country into regional competitor of official Tehran. Both unwilling partners are unsuccessfully competing for the influence in Central Asia, because local political regimes remain inward-oriented, business-unfriendly and display high levels of dependence on Russian Federation, China and Turkey. On the other hand, Iran and Pakistan need each other in order to overcome international isolation and confront an image of failed states. Official Tehran is also striving to demonstrate that Sunni-Shia divide, declared by Saudi Arabia as inalienable feature of regional politics, does not work in relations between huge Muslim neighbours.

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