

# Current Affairs

CSS - 2024

Q: Saudi Arabia and Iran both have significant place in Pakistan's foreign policy. How Pakistan can maintain friendly relations with both KSA and Iran, especially after the mediation of China between the two countries?

Ans:

## 1) Introduction:

Pakistan's foreign policy is intricately intertwined with its relationships with key regional players, particularly Saudi Arabia and Iran. As both nations in Middle East hold considerable sway over geopolitical dynamics, economic interests and religious affiliations that profoundly impact Pakistan's strategic interests.

In recent years, tensions between KSA and Iran have escalated, presenting Pakistan with the challenge of maintaining friendly

relations with both the countries. Amidst these complexities, China's mediation efforts between KSA and Iran have provided a potential avenue for Pakistan to reinforce its role as a mediator and promoter of regional stability.

## 2) Glance at Saudi-Iran Rivalry

In 2011 and 2018 Shia led uprising occurred in the country against the Sunni King which was supported by Iran. On the other hand, KSA supported the King to suppress the uprising. Iranian revolution occurred in 1979. 1979 onwards, the policies of both the countries were overwhelmingly driven by clergy.

### (i) Wahabi School of thoughts and funding to religious seminaries.

In KSA Wahabi school of thought was promoted. KSA promoted Wahabi school

of thought not only in the country but also across the Muslim world especially Middle East, Afghanistan and Pakistan

Both the countries provided funds to religious seminaries in Middle East and South Asia specifically Pakistan and Afghanistan. KSA started funding Madrasas while Iran funding Imam-Bayzabs.

### (ii) Sectarian hate literature

These fundings to religious seminaries involved in creating sectarian hate literature.

Both the sects started calling each other Non-Muslims.

This is visible from the divide in Syria, Yemen, Tehran, Iraq and more importantly Pakistan.

### 3) Break through achieved after talks in Beijing

Iran and Saudi Arabia, which have been major rivals in the Middle East, recently

announced they intend to restore diplomatic ties and re-open their respective embassies. This historic breakthrough was achieved after talks in Beijing that were brokered by China.

4) Pakistan has made efforts to bring the two states on the table.

In 2016, then-Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of Pakistan calling mediation between the two countries a "sacred mission". In 2019, Pakistan's then-Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Iran and Saudi Arabia and displayed the intent of acting as a mediator.

5) How Pakistan can maintain friendly relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran?

Maintaining friendly relations with both the states is crucial for Pakistan.

Pakistan's friendly relations  
with KSA & Iran

↓  
Balanced Engagement

↓  
Mediation and  
Diplomacy

↓  
Economic Cooperation

↓  
Regional Security  
Collaboration

↓  
Cultural Exchange

(i) Balanced approach in  
its relations with KSA  
and Iran.

Pakistan can demonstrate

a commitment to maintaining a balanced approach with both the states. This avoid taking sides in regional conflicts and favouring one country over the other.

### (ii) Pakistan's diplomatic services

Building on China's mediation efforts, Pakistan can offer its diplomatic services to facilitate dialogue and negotiations between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

### (iii) Economic Cooperation

Pakistan can strengthen economic ties with both Saudi Arabia and Iran by pursuing mutually beneficial trade agreements, investment opportunities, and energy partnerships.

### (iv) Regional Security Collaboration

Pakistan can collaborate with Saudi Arabia and Iran on regional security issues, such as counterterrorism, maritime security, and stability in neighboring Afghanistan.

## (v) Culture and People-to-People Exchange

Promoting cultural and people to people exchange can help bridge cultural divides and promote understanding between the nations. By highlighting commonalities and shared heritage, Pakistan can foster greater good will and cooperation among the nations.

## 6) KSA - Iran normalization of relations and its implications on Pakistan.

Some of the implications

- (i) <sup>are</sup> <sup>neutral</sup> Foreign policy of Pakistan
- (ii) Opportunities for trade and energy ties.
- (iii) Defuse sectarian tensions and reduce the influence of extremist groups.

## (i) Neutral Foreign Policy of Pakistan

Normalization of relations would provide Pakistan with

an opportunity to pursue a neutral foreign policy, which could help to strengthen diplomatic and economic ties with both the countries.

### (ii) Trade and Energy ties.

Pakistan can benefit from increased economic cooperation with both states. Neighboring Iran has always been an important trading partner, and Saudi Arabia is a significant economic ally, with a large Pakistani diaspora working in the kingdom, which is a significant source of remittances.

### (iii) Sectarian tensions

Pakistan has been plagued by sectarian violence for decades, with Sunni-Shia tensions being fanned by extremist groups. The restoration of friendly relations between KSA and Iran could have positive impact on Pakistan and it may help to defuse sectarian tensions and reduce the influence of extremist groups.



## 7) Conclusion:

Pakistan has a history of playing a constructive role in the Middle East and has consistently supported and coordinated efforts to bridge gaps between countries in the region. In the light of recent restoration of diplomatic ties between KSA and Iran, it is important for Pakistan to continue this role and maintain the positive momentum.

