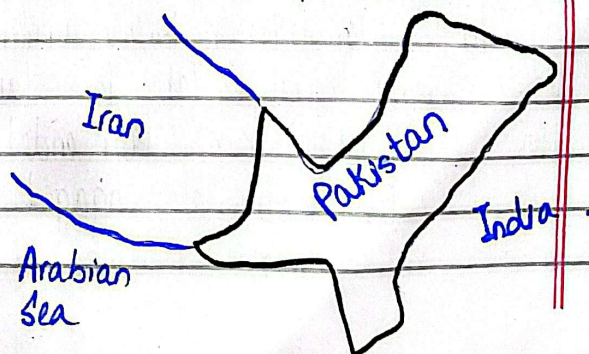


IRAN-PAKISTAN RELATIONS.

INTRODUCTION:-

Iran and Pakistan share religious and cultural identities. However, despite that, the relations have remained on bumpy ride — characterized by cordial eras and strained relations depending on geo-political landscape. While the era of Shah of Iran was inclined towards Pakistan, the post-Iranian Revolution era posits a hotchpotch of collegiality and adversity. This must be attributed to the US-Iran strained relations, positions of both countries in opposite groups during the Afghan conundrum, the presence of India in Iran and sectarian conflicts characterized by Iran and Saudi Arab rivalry. Despite that, the geographical proximity coupled with cultural values project prospects for enhanced cooperation between both the countries that mainly encompass presence of Baluch communities on both sides, cross-border economic relations, integration efforts for bringing Iran into CPEC and cordial relations of both countries with Russia. This would help Pakistan to combat challenges emanating from border with Iran with joint venture to maintain sustainable peace in the region.



HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

(Era of Shah of Iran — Cordial relations)



(Afghan War — Convoluted alliances)



(Current Scenario — Cordial relations.)

The Iran-Pakistan border has been dubbed as "border of peace". Yet, it has remained subjected to limited skirmishes ensued from internal and external challenges. When Pakistan came into existence, Iran was the first state to recognize Pakistan. It also supported Pakistan in its wars against Iran. The Shah of Iran also declared the security of Pakistan as one of agendas of Iran's foreign policy. Additionally, it also condemned the involvement of India in dismemberment of Pakistan in 1971. However, the Khomeini revolution transmogrified the dynamics of Iran's foreign policy. The Islamization policy unleashed by Zia-ul-Haq in similar period exacerbated tensions and mistrust between both countries. Besides this, when Pakistan supported the Taliban government in Afghanistan, Iran supported northern alliance. Adding fuel to fire, Pakistan's decision to go into the "War on terror" further amplified divergences. While several initiatives taken for establishing peace, the US withdrawal from JCPOA ended space for peace. The two countries also engaged in missiles exchange in 2023. However, now relations are becoming warm.

owing to both countries diplomatic support for each other wars : India-Pak four day war and Iran-Israel war

CAUSES OF STRAINED RELATIONS.

1)

Influence of US deterred Pakistan from engaging with Iran.

Pakistan and Iran enjoyed cordial relations during the era of Shah Pahlvi because he was a pro-Western President. However, the Iranian Revolution followed by Khomeini's anti-American posture towards the US developed hostility between US and Iran. Consequently, the US adopted "coercive diplomacy" to abstain Iran from developing nuclear weapons by imposing sanctions on it despite facilitating the program in the pre-revolution era. Since Pakistan has remained dependent on the US for aid and loans, it refrained from engaging in trade with Iran. The Iran's regional hegemonic aspirations emerging as a threat to the US bastion—"Israel"—have overshadowed the prospects and amenities of political and economic engagement in Iran-Pakistan relations. This is demonstrated by the stalled work on Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline which remain subjected to the US threats and influence.

2)

Presence of both countries in opposite blocs exacerbated mistrust in the Afghan War.

Although Iran condemned the 9/11 attacks but the Bush administration's declaring of Iran, Iraq, and North Korea as "axis of evil" bode ill for future relations. Consequently, Iran didn't greenlight the US intervention in Afghanistan. On the other hand, Pakistan's involvement in the war on terror was like icing on the cake for Iran-Pakistan relations. Hence, Iran strived for alternative options rather than engaging with Pakistan.

3)

IRAN-Saudi Arab proxy war exacerbated tensions between Iran and Pakistan.

At the time of the Iranian Revolution, Zia's Sunni Islamization policy gave birth to the factor of sectarianism in Iran-Pak relations. Additionally, the engagement of Pakistan in Afghan Jihad followed by the formation of Sunni-militant groups funded by Saudia led Iran to export its Shiite ideology into Pakistan. Consequently, Pakistan turned into a hotbed for proxy war between Iran and Saudia. Being a Sunni Muslim state, Pakistan held more cordial relations with Saudia than Iran. While Pakistan never remained part of anti-Iranian alliance—characterized by refrain from the Yemen war—its presence in Saudi led Muslim Army Alliance, having no presence of Iran and Syria, amplified Iran's reservations.

4).

India's presence in Iran has amplified Pakistan's reservations.

Pakistan's involvement in the US alignment brought Af Iran into Indian and Russian orbit. Consequently, India signed a Chabahar deal with Iran to gain access to Central Asia while bypassing Pakistan's Gwadar Port built by China. Additionally, it aims to utilize IMEC to boost its trade and economic relations with the CARs via Iran. On the other hand, Pakistan's apprehension of Indian spy, Kalbushn Yadhev who pervaded terrorism in Balochistan via Iran's route have added to Pakistan's concerns regarding Iran-India close ties.

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE AND SUSTAINABLE COOPERATION

1)

Presence of Baloch community on both sides.

The presence of Baloch community in Sistan and Pakistan's Balochistan share cultural values. Both countries need to work on socio-development of these regions while protecting minority communities in their respective provinces. This would mollify the extreme narratives prevailing in the region by developing people-to-people connections.

2)

China can work as a catalyst to boost connectivity.

China has remained the larger importer of Iranian oil and holds immense economic relations with Iran. CPEC should be expanded to inculcate Iran into the connectivity network. Pakistan has invited China to invest in Iran-Pak pipeline to bring it into completion. Along with boosting connectivity and trade, the initiative will assist in combating other security challenges prevailing in the region.

3).

Russia can assist in developing sustainable cooperation between Pak and Iran.

Russia enjoys cordial relations with both Pakistan and Iran. Through partnerships in political and multilateral forums facilitated by Russia, Iran and Pakistan will find a strong ground for cooperation. Yet, Pakistan will have to navigate a balanced approach without antagonizing the USA.

CONCLUSION:-

Since the inception of Pakistan, Pakistan's relations with Iran have remained convoluted characterized by negative peace. To harness the potential of geographical proximity and resources, both countries will have to navigate turbulent environment reflected by internal and external threats. Hence, mutual cooperation is a gateway for regional connectivity for both countries.