

Q/8)

Amid the ongoing middle East Crisis, what is Pakistan's stance, and how has it managed its diplomatic relations with key middle eastern countries like Saudi - Arabia, Iran and the UAE?

Ans::

Introduction::

The middle East has been a region of continuous turbulence, with numerous crises affecting regional stability, such as the Yemen conflict, the Saudi - Iran rivalry, the Syrian civil war, and tensions involving Israel - Palestine - Pakistan with its deep religious, cultural and economic ties to key middle eastern countries, has had to adopt a careful and balanced diplomatic stance. Below is an explanation of Pakistan's approach to the middle East crisis, specifically focusing on its relations with Saudi Arabia, Iran and the UAE.

2: Pakistan's Neutrality and Balanced Approach in the Middle East

2.1) Neutral Stance on Saudi - Iran Rivalry

Pakistan has maintained a neutral stance in the Saudi - Iran rivalry, one of the

most significant geopolitical divides in the Middle East. While both Saudi and Iran have sought Pakistan's support in their respective confrontations, Islamabad has been chosen a policy of balance, refraining from becoming embroiled in the sectarian and geo-political disputes that divide the region.

Pakistan's neutrality is driven by both strategic interests and domestic concerns. Pak shares a long border with Iran, and has important religious and cultural ties with its Shia population. Simultaneously, Pakistan relies heavily on Saudi Arab for economic aid, energy imports and support in multilateral forums.

2.2) Pakistan's Mediation Role:-

Pakistan has offered to mediate between Saudi Arabia and Iran, a move that reflects its desire to maintain a balance in its relations with both countries. In 2019, Prime Minister Imran Khan undertook diplomatic visits to Tehran and Riyadh in a bid to de-escalate tensions after a series of confrontations between the two countries. Pakistan's stance has consistently been to encourage dialogue and peaceful resolution of conflicts between Saudi and Iran.

3:- Pakistan - Saudi Arabia Relations

3.1) Strategic and Economic Ties:-

Saudi Arabia is one of Pakistan's closest allies and has played a significant role in supporting Pakistan both economically and diplomatically. Saudi Arabia has been a major source of financial aid, loans, and oil supports for Pakistan, particularly in times of economic crisis. In 2021, Saudi Arabia pledged \$3 billion in aid to help stabilize Pakistan's economy, alongside a \$1.2 billion deferred oil payment facility. Saudi Arabia is also a significant source of remittances with over 25 million Pakistani expatriates living and working in the Kingdom, contributing billions of dollars annually to Pakistan's economy.

3.2) Military Cooperation:-

Military ties between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have been strong for decades. Pakistan has provided military training and advisors to Saudi Force and the two countries have held joint military exercises. However, Pakistan has refrained from direct military involvement in the Saudi-led

Coalition's war in Yemen despite pressure from Riyadh.

In 2015, Pakistan's Parliament voted against sending troops to Yemen, reflecting Pakistan's desire to avoid involvement in regional conflict that could damage its relations with Iran or worsen sectarian division at home.

3.3) Recent Diplomatic Tensions & Reconciliation

While relations between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have generally been strong, there have been periods of tension. In 2020, Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi expressed frustration over Saudi Arabia's lack of support for Pakistan's stance on Kashmir. This led to a temporary cooling of ties, with Saudi Arabia recalling some financial support. However, relations have since been reconciled, with the two countries reaffirming their commitment to bilateral cooperation.

4) Pakistan - Iran Relations

4.2) Shared Border & Security Concerns

Pakistan and Iran share a 909 km long border and both countries face security challenges, including cross-border military and

drug trafficking. Relations b/w Pakistan and Iran have often been shaped by these security concerns. The presence of extremist groups like Jaish-e-Millat along the border has led to tensions, but both countries have worked together to improve border management and enhance security cooperation.

3.2) Economic Ties and Energy Cooperation:-

Pakistan and Iran have sought to expand their economic ties, though US sanctions on Iran have limited the scope of cooperation. One of the major projects that symbolize the potential for bilateral cooperation is the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline, intended to transport Iranian natural gas to Pakistan. However, the project has faced significant delays due to international sanctions on Iran and pressure from the US.

4.3) Diplomatic Balancing:-

Pakistan has been careful to maintain cordial relations with Iran while also balancing its close ties with Saudi Arabia. Pakistan's efforts at mediation between Riyadh and Tehran reflect its strategic interest in ensuring regional stability, as any escalation of conflict b/w the rivals could have negative repercussions for Pakistan.

5) Pakistan - UAE Relations

5.1) Economic Ties and Labor Cooperations.

The UAE is another crucial partner for Pakistan, particularly due to the presence of over 2.6 million Pakistan workers in the UAE, making it a major source of remittances (approximately \$ 6 billion annually). The UAE is also a significant investor in Pakistan, particularly in sectors like telecommunications, real estate, and energy.

The UAE has provided financial support to Pakistan during economic crises, such as its \$ billion loan in 2021 to help Pakistan negotiate its balance of payments crisis.

5.2) Diplomatic Challenges and Reconciliations.

Despite close ties, there have been occasional diplomatic challenges, especially over Pakistan's neutral stance on certain regional issues, such as the Qatar crisis. The UAE, aligned with Saudi-Arabia, was displeased when Pakistan did not openly side with the Saudi-UAE bloc during the 2017 blockade of Qatar. However, these differences have been managed diplomatically and the two countries continue to cooperate closely on economic and security matters.

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6) Future Prospects for Pakistan in the Middle East

6.1) Economic Diplomacy and Trade Expansion:-

Pakistan's future engagement in the Middle East is likely to be driven by its need for economic support and energy security. Expanding trade and investment partnerships with Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, will be a priority. Initiatives such as Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia and similar diversification efforts in the UAE provide opportunities for Pakistan to enhance its economic ties, particularly in the areas of construction, labor and technology.

6.2) Mediation Role in Regional Conflicts:-

Pakistan's role as a mediator in the Middle East, particularly between Saudi Arabia and Iran, remains a key aspect of its foreign policy. As tensions persist in the region, Pakistan is likely to continue offering its services as a neutral broker, which could enhance its diplomatic stature in the broader Muslim world.

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Conclusion:-

Pakistan's stance amid the Middle East Crisis is shaped by a careful balancing act, driven by its economic interests, security concerns, and strategic relationship with Saudi Arabia, Iran and the UAE. By maintaining neutrality in regional conflicts, promoting economic diplomacy and offering mediation services, Pakistan has managed to sustain strong diplomatic and economic ties with key Middle Eastern countries. Moving forward, Pakistan's ability to navigate the complex political landscape of the Middle East while capitalizing on economic opportunities will be crucial for its regional and global standing.