

The Conduct of Pakistan's Foreign Policy

Structure, Strengths and Issues

(2018-2020)

Policy Brief

Part-8

Pakistan's Relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Turkey and Malaysia

This brief deals with Pakistan's relations with five important Muslim countries: neighboring country Iran and four extended neighbors, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Turkey, and Malaysia. Historically speaking, Pakistan's relations with all the Muslim countries, especially the five countries focused in this brief, are rooted in commonalities like shared faith, values, traditions and mutual goodwill.

Pakistan-Iran Relations

Although Pakistan and Iran have historically developed close, cooperative, cultural, and fraternal ties, yet some mistrust, irritants, and geopolitics had prevented the bilateral relationship from reaching its full potential. Bilateral relations were not progressing very well when the incumbent government assumed office due to Iran's tilt and engagement with India, subversive activities and involvement in terrorist attacks in Balochistan by the Indian RAW agent, Kulbhushan Jadhav, who was based in Chahbahar and arrested in Pakistan's province of Balochistan, Pakistan's participation in the Saudi-led Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAFIT) headed by General Raheel Sharif, and the killing of ten Iranian border guards in a terrorist attack at Mirjaveh near the border with Pakistan in 2017. While Pakistan has tried to strike a balance, its attempts to improve relations with Iran were hobbled by more hawkish US administrations that imposed sanctions on Iran.

Apart from the above factors, there was the growing realization by the leaders and policymakers of the two countries that their security and economic well-being were interlinked. Before the formation of the incumbent government, the civil and military leadership of Pakistan and Iran had begun to put their

relations on a sound footing and the two sides agreed to cooperate with each other in combating terrorism, cross-border criminal activities, promoting bilateral defense and security cooperation, and build-up cooperation in political, economic, commercial, and cultural fields.

Chronology

Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif was the first foreign dignitary to visit Pakistan in August 2018 after the formation of the new government. The two foreign ministers underlined the need to promote bilateral relations in diverse fields, exchanged views on regional and global issues including the situation in Afghanistan and the US decision to withdraw from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi assured his counterpart that Pakistan will stand with Iran and hoped that the remaining parties to the JCPOA would uphold their commitments.

The Iranian foreign minister paid a second visit to Pakistan on October 17, 2018, and discussed with Foreign Minister Qureshi the situation arising from the abduction of Iranian guards near the Pakistan-Iran border at Mirjaveh. Qureshi briefed his counterpart on

the efforts of the Pakistan law-enforcement agencies to ascertain the whereabouts of the Iranian guards. Zarif visited Pakistan for the third time on October 31, 2018, and held in-depth discussions with his counterpart on the situation in Afghanistan, and the re-imposition of US sanctions on Iran, and agreed to continue close consultations on the Pakistan-Iran border issues.

The foreign minister of Pakistan, accompanied by the foreign secretary, paid his maiden visit to Iran on December 24, 2018, as part of the government's policy of outreach to the neighboring countries. Prime Minister Imran Khan paid two official visits to Iran in April 2019 and in October 2019 to strengthen Pakistan's relations with Iran in order to mediate and defuse tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia after the September 14, 2019, drone attacks on a Saudi oil facility. The visit strengthened the mutual understanding of important bilateral issues and commitment to address Pakistan-Iran border security issues, facilitation of Pakistani pilgrims and *zaireen* traveling to Iran, overcoming hindrances in promotion of bilateral trade and economic activity, and enhancing cooperation in energy, consular, health, and railways sectors, ways to promote peace in Afghanistan, and the worsening situation in the IIOJ&K.

Foreign Minister Zarif paid his fourth visit to Pakistan on May 24, 2019, and met Foreign Minister Qureshi. The two sides expressed concern over rising tensions in the wake of President Trump's withdrawal from JCPoA. Qureshi reiterated Pakistan's support to JCPoA and stressed that the implementation of obligations by all parties to the agreement was vitally important. On the direction of the prime minister, Foreign Minister Qureshi visited Iran and Saudi Arabia on January 12-13, 2020, to share the outcome of Pakistan's mediation in the resolution of Iran-Saudi Arabia tensions. The Iranian leadership appreciated

Prime Minister Imran Khan's efforts for defusing tensions.

Foreign Minister Zarif paid a fifth visit to Pakistan on November 10-11, 2020. The two foreign ministers held detailed talks to promote bilateral relations and to support efforts for peace in Afghanistan. Foreign Minister Qureshi briefed his counterpart on the worsening situation in the IIOJ&K and "conveyed deep appreciation for the Supreme Leader's steadfast support for the Kashmir cause".¹

Analysis

Pakistan-Iran relations witnessed a transformative phase, a renewed energy, growing positivity, and desire to work together through the exchange of leadership and high-level visits after the formation of the new government in Pakistan. There has been a visible attempt to enhance bilateral ties, with high-level visits by civil and military leaders from both sides occurring with some frequency. During Prime Minister Imran Khan's two visits to Iran, leaders of the two countries "highlighted the need to resolve the issue of Jammu & Kashmir through dialogue and peaceful means based on the will of the people of that region and in line with the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council".² Similarly, Pakistan's support on JCPoA and commitment towards Iran, despite US's unilateral sanctions, has been greatly appreciated in Iran. These developments boded well in the promotion of bilateral relations. The Pakistani leadership, at the behest of President Trump, played a positive mediatory role to defuse Iran-Saudi Arabia tensions. These mediatory efforts are indicative of softening of positions of Iran and Saudi Arabia and there is a silver lining of understanding between the two countries. Pakistan, being located in the neighborhood of the Middle East, needs to play an active role in promoting peace and stability in the region without getting dragged as a party into Iranian-Arab and intra-Arab rivalries and conflicts.

¹ "Foreign Minister Javad Zarif of Iran met Foreign Minister Qureshi," MOFA press release, November 11, 2020, <http://mofa.gov.pk/foreign-minister-javad-zarif-of-iran-met-foreign-minister-qureshi/>

² "Joint Statement by The Islamic Republic of Iran and The Islamic Republic of Pakistan," MOFA press release, April 22, 2019, <http://mofa.gov.pk/joint-statement-by-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-and-the-islamic-republic-of-pakistan/>

Pakistan-Saudi Arabia Relations

Pakistan and Saudi Arabia have always enjoyed very close fraternal ties in commercial, cultural, religious, political, defense and security, and strategic fields. Pakistan's defense relations with Saudi Arabia cover military training of Saudi armed forces in Pakistan, deputation of Pakistan armed forces personnel to Saudi Arabia, and provision of arms and equipment including JF-17 Thunder. Around 2.3 million Pakistanis are working in Saudi Arabia whose remittances to Pakistan constitute an important source of foreign exchange. Saudi Arabia is the largest exporter of petroleum to Pakistan. Saudi Arabia has been a source of extensive financial assistance and loans during Pakistan's economic hardship and generous humanitarian aid when it was devastated by earthquakes and floods. Bilateral relations were somewhat strained in 2015 when Pakistan's Parliament remained steadfast in its decision that Pakistan's army will not participate in the war in Yemen and side with Saudi Arabia. The overall relations were facing some irritants such as visa problems of Pakistani manpower, imprisonment of Pakistanis in Saudi jails, and the expulsion of Pakistanis when the incumbent government came to power.

Chronology

Prime Minister Imran Khan paid six visits to Saudi Arabia, which was the maximum number to one country. The first visit (September 18-19, 2018) took place in the backdrop of Pakistan's financial crunch, economic woes, and the debt crisis. The prime minister met King Salman bin Abdul Aziz and held talks with the Crown Prince, Mohamed bin Salman. The leaders reached an understanding to address the debt crisis, agreed to enhance cooperation in political, defense, economic, commercial fields, joint ventures, and resolving issues of Pakistani expatriates in Saudi Arabia. The prime minister briefed the Saudi leadership on the deteriorating Pakistan-India relations and the grave situation in IOJ&K. He underlined the need for Islamic unity in raising the Kashmir issue at the OIC and UNHRC.

The Prime Minister paid a second visit to Saudi Arabia (October 22-23, 2018) to participate in the Future Investment Initiative Conference. It was agreed in an MOU that Saudi Arabia will place a deposit of \$3 billion for one year as a balance of payment support, provide a deferred payment facility for import of oil

up to \$3.2 billion for three years, and reduce visa fee for Pakistani workers. The Saudi side evinced interest in investment in a petroleum refinery and mineral resources in Pakistan. President Arif Alvi visited Saudi Arabia (December 11, 2018) and met King Salman bin Abdul Aziz.

The Saudi Crown Prince, Mohamed bin Salman, visited Pakistan (February 17-18, 2019). The crown prince and the prime minister, *inter alia*, expressed their satisfaction with the development of bilateral relations. The crown prince praised the efforts of the prime minister for dialogue with India for resolving outstanding issues. Saudi Arabia pledged to invest over \$20 billion in Pakistan. The positive outcome of the visit included the establishment of the Saudi-Pak Supreme Coordination Council, reduction in visa fees for Pakistanis working in Saudi Arabia, initiation of the Road to Makkah Project from Islamabad, and increase in Hajj quota by Saudi Arabia. The other major takeaways of the visit included launching of Saudi-Pakistan Supreme Coordination Council to be headed by Prime Minister Imran Khan and Prince Muhammad bin Salman. The crown prince also announced the release of 2,107 Pakistani prisoners.

The prime minister paid a third visit to Saudi Arabia to participate in the 14th OIC Summit (May 30 to 1 June 2019) held in Makkah. The summit reiterated the principled support for the right to self-determination of the people of IOJ&K. The prime minister undertook a fourth visit to Saudi Arabia (September 19-20, 2019) on his way to New York to attend the 74th session of the UNGA. The prime minister discussed with the Saudi leadership the grave situation in IOJ&K arising from India's illegal and unilateral actions of August 5, 2019. He traveled to Saudi Arabia by commercial airliner as per austerity drive. While in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi crown prince arranged a special jet for the prime minister to travel to New York. On the way back, the prime minister and his delegation traveled to Islamabad by commercial flight as the Saudi special jet reportedly developed a technical fault.

Prime Minister Imran Khan paid a fifth visit to Saudi Arabia (October 15, 2019) to act as a facilitator to reduce tension between Iran and Saudi Arabia. He briefed King Salman and the Crown Prince MBS about his consultations with the Iranian leadership. Foreign Minister Qureshi visited Saudi Arabia (December 11, 2019) for preparations of Prime

Minister Imran Khan's sixth visit to Saudi Arabia (December 14, 2019) after signals from Riyadh that Saudi leadership was not happy with the prime minister's decision to attend the Kuala Lumpur Summit in Malaysia in December 2019. On Saudi persuasion, the prime minister announced not to attend the KL Summit. (See details under heading 'Pakistan-Malaysia Relations'). The Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al-Saud, paid his maiden visit to Pakistan (December 26, 2019) to convey the Saudi leadership's thanks for not attending the KL Summit.

Foreign Minister Qureshi visited Riyadh (January 13, 2020) and briefed the Saudi foreign minister on the prime minister's diplomatic outreach to defuse Iranian-Saudi tensions. The Saudi foreign minister appreciated Pakistan's support for efforts to defuse tensions.

Analysis

The incumbent government assumed office at a time when Pakistan was facing the worst economic crisis and debt burden. The prime minister approached Saudi Arabia and got an economic bailout and identified new areas of bilateral cooperation. Pakistan played the role of a facilitator and a bridge between Iran and Saudi Arabia to defuse Iranian-Saudi tensions and there are some signs of rapprochement.

Saudi Arabia did not move on to Pakistan's repeated requests for the OIC CFM emergency meeting on Kashmir. It obliged Foreign Minister Qureshi to leave the path of quiet diplomacy and, in a talk show on ARY News on August 5, 2020, the foreign minister publicly expressed dismay over OIC's inaction and stated that he would recommend to the prime minister to call a meeting of like-minded Islamic states if OIC does not call an emergency meeting of the CFM on Kashmir. This public statement annoyed Saudi Arabia and it resultantly scuttled any possibility of a special OIC conclave on Kashmir. It is not fair to publicly discuss sensitive foreign policy issues for public consumption.

Amidst strain in Pakistan-Saudi Arabia relations against the backdrop of the foreign minister's above public statement, Pakistan Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, accompanied by the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) chief, Lt. Gen. Faiz Hameed, had to visit Saudi Arabia on August 17, 2020, to calm diplomatic strain over convening the OIC special session on the IOJ&K and putting financial support for Islamabad on hold. Reportedly, the visit was "a damage control trip" though the director general ISPR in a press release expressed that it "sought to dispel the idea of a rift" and stated that the visit was "pre-planned, and for military-to-military purposes". There were not many details released of the visit other than the army chief's meetings with the Saudi Chief of General Staff Air Chief Marshal, Fayyadh Al-Ruwaili, and the Vice Minister of Defense, Khalid bin Salman.³ But the fact remains that the visit reaffirmed and reassured the Saudi side that there was no shift in Pakistan's policy towards the OIC and Saudi Arabia.

The fact also remains that Saudi Arabia maintained a clear tilt towards and engagement with India due to its economic interests, oil supplies, and investments in India. These vested interests also influenced Saudi Arabia not to take a forthcoming stance and position on the IOJ&K after India's illegal steps of August 5, 2019. Like other Arab states, Saudi Arabia remained non-committal on Kashmir. It was evident from the fact that Saudi Arabia, which had agreed in October 2018 to provide \$6.2 billion financial package to Pakistan which included \$3 billion in cash assistance and \$3.2 billion worth of annual oil and gas supply on deferred payments for three years, asked Pakistan to pay back part of the \$3 billion loan when Pakistan persisted in its requests to convene the OIC CFM emergency meeting on Kashmir to Saudi Arabia. Pakistan had to pay back \$1 billion in July 2020. To overcome this situation, China immediately lent \$1 billion to Pakistan following the decision by Saudi Arabia. The Pakistan army chief visited Saudi Arabia in August 2020 to resolve the growing diplomatic spat that demanded Pakistan's early repayment of a \$3 billion loan.

³ Madiha Afzal, "The Pakistan-Saudi Arabia relationship hits a bump in the road," Brookings, August 24, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/08/24/the-pakistan-saudi-arabia-relationship-hits-a-bump-in-the-road/>

Pakistan-UAE Relations

Pakistan and the UAE have developed and consolidated close fraternal and cooperative ties since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1971. The UAE continues to be a major donor of economic and financial assistance to Pakistan. The UAE recognizes Pakistan's contribution to the evolution of key institutions in the Emirates while Pakistan recognizes the UAE's investment in Pakistan's economy and infrastructure. The UAE is Pakistan's important trade and investment partner and is home to 1.6 million Pakistanis working in the UAE. In 2020, Pakistan received all-time high foreign remittances from overseas Pakistanis working abroad as figures increased from \$22.252 billion (2019) to \$26.108 billion (2020).⁴ Pakistan registered a 9 percent rise in foreign remittances from the UAE, the second biggest contributor⁵ after Saudi Arabia, in 2020. According to the figures given by the State Bank of Pakistan, foreign remittances from the UAE to Pakistan from July 2020 to March 2021 amounted to \$4.5 billion.⁶ Nevertheless, at the time of the formation of the incumbent government, the bilateral relations were devoid of strategic depth in geopolitical context due to the UAE's tilt and special relations with India, Israel, and the US. The UAE was also non-committal in its support on the Kashmir dispute.

Chronology

The incumbent government had to make concerted efforts to reset bilateral relations. Prime Minister Imran Khan paid three visits to the UAE in September and November 2018 and February 2019. The Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan, paid two visits to Pakistan in January 2019 and January 2020. In leadership contacts, Pakistan's prime minister, the crown prince of Abu Dhabi, and Prime Minister/Vice President of the UAE, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, expressed their resolve to further deepen

and expand bilateral relations in diverse fields. Besides, the prime minister apprised them of the worsening situation in the IIOJ&K, his peace overtures and desire for settlement of all disputes, especially the Jammu and Kashmir dispute through dialogue, and Pakistan's efforts to defuse Iran-Saudi Arabia tensions. The two sides signed an agreement to upgrade bilateral relations to a "Long-Term Strategic Economic Partnership".

Pakistan's Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, visited the UAE on December 14, 2019, and met Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan. The two leaders exchanged views on the latest regional and international developments and reaffirmed long-standing commitment and determination to bolstering co-operation between the armed forces of the two countries in defense and military affairs.

Analysis

Pakistan was circumscribed to seeking an economic bailout from the UAE under the worst economic crisis and debt burden. The UAE came to Pakistan's rescue and provided a \$6.2 billion package that included \$3.2 billion of oil supplies on deferred payment and a \$3bn cash deposit in the State Bank of Pakistan⁷ to address the balance of payments' challenge. Besides, the UAE made commitments of \$10 billion investments in Pakistan. The moot point was that the leaders expressed their resolve to transform existing cooperative, cordial, fraternal, and close bilateral relations that had evolved in the last five decades into a Strategic Long-Term Economic Partnership with a commitment to chalk out a comprehensive roadmap to accelerate cooperation in areas of trade, investment, economic development, energy, infrastructure, and agriculture.

Pakistan took a principled decision, duly approved by the two houses of the Parliament to support the Kashmir cause, for not attending the 46th session of

⁴ "Personal remittances, received (current US\$) – Pakistan," The World Bank, 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.CD.DT?locations=PK>

⁵ "UAE-Pakistan remittances grow despite depressed global outflows," *Arabian Business*, March 11, 2021, <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/banking-finance/460174-uae-pakistan-remittances-grow-despite-depressed-global-outflows>

⁶ "Record remittances from overseas Pakistanis helping cash-strapped economy: Central bank," *The Economic Times*, April 12, 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/record-remittances-from-overseas-pakistanis-helping-cash-strapped-economy-central-bank/articleshow/82033087.cms?from=mdr>

⁷ Syed Irfan Raza, "UAE, Pakistan formalize \$6.2bn bailout package," *Dawn*, January 7, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1455942>

OIC CFM held in Abu Dhabi in March 2019, in protest to the UAE's decision to invite the Indian minister of external affairs to attend the session as guest of honor. The decision conveyed a strong message to the UAE that Pakistan, being the founding member of the OIC, was disappointed at the UAE's tilt, closeness, and growing engagement with India that has consistently continued oppression and atrocities against the people of Jammu and Kashmir, violated human rights, and denied them the right to self-determination. Despite Pakistan's protest against inviting the Indian minister of external affairs, the UAE continued its tilt, closeness, and engagement with India.

The UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, at the behest of the USA, signed agreements with Israel in 2020 on the recognition and normalization of relations with Israel. This tilt and engagement not only caused a serious setback to unity of the Muslim Ummah on the Palestine issue but also highlighted the Arab support to Israel to strengthen its ties with the Arab countries. The government of Pakistan, both at leadership and institutional levels, reiterated its principled stance, ideological principles, and consistent policy not to recognize Israel as a legitimate state and maintained Pakistan's "abiding commitment to the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination".

Pakistan-Turkey Relations

Pakistan and Turkey have historically developed a unique and abiding relationship characterized by mutual support and exceptional mutual trust and understanding. Turkey has always supported just resolution of the Kashmir dispute. At the time of installation of the incumbent government, the leadership of the two countries had already fortified relations into an enduring partnership and strengthened political, economic, diplomatic, and defense cooperation. The leadership of the two countries had translated historic amity into vibrant cooperation in diverse fields such as combating Islamophobia, promoting Islamic solidarity, and advancing shared goals of regional peace, security and stability. Turkey had continued its steadfast support to the cause of self-determination for the people of IOJ&K. Likewise, Pakistan strongly stood by Turkey on the question of Cyprus. The changing global scenario, the situation in the Middle East, and shared political, security, and economic challenges have brought the two countries closer.

Chronology

Prime Minister Imran Khan, accompanied by a high-level delegation, paid an official visit to Turkey on January 3-4, 2019. He had a *tête-à-tête* with President Erdogan followed by delegation-level talks. The two leaders exchanged views on Turkey-Pakistan bilateral relationship and issues of regional and international importance, expressed satisfaction over a strong strategic partnership, reaffirmed their resolve to further strengthening the existing economic, trade and commercial relations, and underscored the need for

resolution of the Kashmir dispute through a sustained dialogue process following the relevant UNSC resolutions.

President Erdogan, accompanied by a high-level delegation, paid an official visit to Pakistan from February 13-14, 2020. Prime Minister Imran Khan and President Erdogan co-chaired the sixth session of the Pakistan-Turkey High Level Strategic Cooperation Council. President Erdogan also met President Arif Alvi, addressed a joint press briefing, and attended the Pakistan-Turkey Business and Investment Forum. The prime minister appreciated Turkey's principled stance on the Kashmir dispute and its offer for mediation. The two leaders reiterated their resolve to strengthen bilateral relations, continue cooperation in the fight against terrorism, work closely to combat Islamophobia, counter stereotyping and defamation of Islam and Muslims, work together for sustainable peace and stability in Afghanistan. Pakistan reaffirmed its support for Turkey on the question of Cyprus.

Analysis

Prime Minister Imran Khan and President Erdogan took bilateral relations to new heights. The two leaders, with growing personal chemistry and identical views on bilateral, regional, and international issues, have reposed resolve to focus on cultivating strategic and long-term relations and cooperation in diverse fields. They have accorded top priority to continue the mechanism of the High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council as the main political forum to guide bilateral relations. President Erdogan also stood with Pakistan in avoiding being placed on the IMF and FATF

blacklist. The leadership of Pakistan and Turkey have conducted a very successful, balanced, consistent, and well-calibrated foreign policy and forged closer ties, strategic partnership, and collectively worked for the

solidarity of the Muslim Ummah. These developments augur well for promoting bilateral relations in the years to come.

Pakistan-Malaysia Relations

Pakistan and Malaysia have enjoyed longstanding and substantial economic, commercial, and investment ties, and political understanding based on commonalities of faith and culture, marked by exceptional mutual trust and understanding. At the time of formation of the incumbent government, bilateral ties had deepened leading to closer cooperation in the sphere of trade, investment, industry, defense, and education. The leaders of the two countries had identical views at various international forums on the Kashmir dispute and the Palestine issue.

Chronology

(1) Leadership Visits

Prime Minister Imran Khan paid an official visit to Malaysia (November 20-21, 2018) at the invitation of the Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad. The two leaders held detailed discussions on bilateral, regional, and international issues, promotion of bilateral relations in diverse fields, agreed to uphold the true values of Islam at international fora while strengthening the solidarity of the Muslim Ummah, and reaffirmed their commitment to collaborate more closely on issues affecting the Muslim world.

Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad undertook an official visit to Pakistan (March 21-23, 2019) at the invitation of Prime Minister Imran Khan and attended the 23rd March parade as the guest of honor. He called on the president of Pakistan and held a one-on-one meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan followed by delegation-level talks. The two countries signed five memoranda of understanding worth \$900 million in the areas of telecommunication, information technology, and power generation, while also bolstering cooperation across agriculture, palm oil, halal food products, automotive parts, banking, science and technology, and energy sectors. Malaysia redoubled its interest in acquiring JF-17 Thunder jets and anti-tank missiles from Pakistan. Malaysian automobile company, Proton, agreed to set up its first South Asian plant in Karachi. The two leaders decided to elevate the bilateral relations to a strategic

partnership. They also reiterated to strengthen the solidarity of the Muslim Ummah, exchanged views on the situation in Palestine, and discussed the grave human rights' situation in Kashmir.

(2) Mahathir's Speech on Kashmir at UNGA and Other Fora

An important development in Pakistan-Malaysia relations was a very strong and principled position taken by Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, on the Kashmir dispute at the United Nations General Assembly and other international fora. He delivered a strongly worded speech at the 74th session of the UNGA on September 27, 2019, in which, *inter alia*, he stated that "despite UN resolutions", Jammu and Kashmir "has been invaded and occupied". He urged India to work with Pakistan to resolve the J&K dispute and stressed that "Ignoring the UN would lead to other forms of disregard for the UN and the rule of law". In retaliation, India imposed restrictions on imports of refined palm oil from Malaysia. This politically motivated decision was, however, reviewed by India and the restriction on import of palm oil was lifted after the resignation of Prime Minister Mahathir in February 2020.

Prime Minister Mahathir also raised concerns on Indian atrocities in the IIOJ&K during his bilateral meeting with the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, on the sidelines of Eurasian Economic Forum in Vladivostok in September 2019. Malaysia also expressed concerns over human rights situation in the IOJ&K at the 42nd session of the United Nations Human Rights Council held in Geneva in September 2019.

(3) Kuala Lumpur Summit Fiasco

Prime Minister Imran Khan made a hasty decision to attend the Kuala Lumpur Summit on request of Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, and Turkish President, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, during the UNGA session in September 2019 ostensibly without consulting foreign policy professionals. Subsequently, Pakistan announced participation in the KL Summit.

Foreign Minister Qureshi visited Malaysia (November 4-5, 2019) on the invitation of Malaysian foreign minister and attended a preparatory meeting on Kuala Lumpur Summit that was also attended by the Qatari foreign minister and Turkish minister of industry and technology. The Special Envoy of Malaysian Prime Minister, Dato Marzuki bin Haji Yahya, visited Pakistan (November 29, 2019) and briefed Foreign Minister Qureshi on the KL Summit to be held on December 18-20, 2019. The foreign minister assured that Pakistan supported the objectives of the KL Summit and would work closely with Malaysia for its successful conclusion. Foreign Minister Qureshi visited Qatar on December 3, 2019, for the second ministerial consultative meeting on the KL Summit and reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to its success. All these diplomatic steps exhibited a clear intention that Pakistan will attend the KL Summit.

Prime Minister Imran Khan subsequently took a U-turn on persuasion and pressure exerted by Saudi Arabia and announced not to attend the KL Summit, which was an inconsistent approach in the conduct of foreign policy. Reportedly, the Saudi leadership was not happy with Malaysia's attempt to build a platform that could potentially challenge the OIC. The spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave a face-saving statement that "Pakistan did not participate in the KL Summit as time and efforts were needed to address the concerns of major Muslim countries regarding possible division in the Ummah. Pakistan will continue to work for the unity and solidarity of the Ummah, which is indispensable for effectively addressing the challenges faced by the Muslim world".⁸

In order to avoid huge embarrassment and to convey his profound regrets to the Malaysian leadership, Prime Minister Imran Khan visited Malaysia on February 3-4, 2020, and in a joint press conference said: "I want to say how sad I was that I couldn't attend the conference in Kuala Lumpur in the middle of December. Unfortunately, our friends, who are very close to Pakistan as well, felt that somehow the conference was going to divide the Ummah. It was

clearly a misconception because that was not the purpose of the conference as evident from when the conference took place."⁹

Analysis

Pakistan-Malaysia relations developed an upward trajectory and the two prime ministers took pragmatic decisions to bolster bilateral relations in diverse fields and enhance cooperation in a number of areas by institutionalizing bilateral consultations between the two foreign ministries, enhancing greater collaboration between high-tech industries in Malaysia and Pakistan, further strengthening defense cooperation, developing educational ties, and promoting tourism and people-to-people contacts. During the visit of the Malaysian prime minister to Pakistan (March 21-23, 2019), the two prime ministers announced landmark cooperation in the automotive industry and jointly officiated the symbolic ground-breaking ceremony of the Proton plant in Islamabad. Both leaders agreed to elevate the existing relations between Pakistan and Malaysia to a strategic partnership. It marked a new level of bilateral cooperation between both the countries in various fields, namely trade in palm oil, agricultural products, food retail, halal products, automotive parts, energy, science and technology, and telecommunication investment.

The only irritant in bilateral relations was the KL Summit fiasco which reflected an imprudent manner in which Pakistan pulled out from the summit after confirming participation. Barring this debacle, Pakistan and Malaysia have reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening economic, strategic and security relations. The leadership visits and personal chemistry of the two leaders have given new impetus to further consolidate, deepen, and enhance bilateral relations in diverse fields. The Pakistani side successfully utilized the opportunity of the visit of Prime Minister Mahathir to Pakistan but the momentum generated could not be maintained subsequently, after the sudden resignation of Mahathir in February 2020.

⁸ MOFA Press Release, December 20, 2019, <http://mofa.gov.pk/press-release-201/>

⁹ "PM regrets missing KL Summit over others' misconception 'it would divide ummah'," *Dawn*, February 4, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1532420>

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