

# The Conduct of Pakistan's Foreign Policy

## Structure, Strengths and Issues

### (2018-2020)

#### Policy Brief

#### Part-9

#### Pakistan's Engage Africa Policy

In 2019, the incumbent government launched the "Engage Africa Initiative" to strengthen political, diplomatic linkages, and economic ties with the African continent, reviving Pakistan's historical and long-standing partnership with Africa. The policy initiative is also aimed at expanding cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

This positive initiative was pursued to an extent by the government. The first important development took place when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Commerce jointly hosted an envoys' conference in Islamabad (November 27-28, 2019), which, *inter alia*, recommended engaging Africa through meetings between African leaders and Pakistan's prime minister and the foreign minister at UNGA, holding of Pak-Africa dialogue at prime minister and foreign minister's level with their African counterparts at Davos, meetings between Pakistan's chief of army staff and his African counterparts at Munich Security Conferences, and organizing leadership and high-level visits between Pakistan and important African countries.

As a step forward in 2019, the Ministry of Commerce also launched "Look Africa Initiative" and relocated six commercial sections from Europe to Africa taking the total number to nine covering top economies of

Africa including Nigeria, South Africa, Egypt, Algeria, Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Senegal, and Sudan.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi and Adviser to the Prime Minister for Commerce and Industry, Abdul Razzaq Dawood, co-led Pakistan delegation to the first-ever Pakistan-Africa Trade Development Conference held in Nairobi, Kenya, from January 30-31, 2020. The conference provided an important opportunity to deliberate upon ways and means to enhance trade between Pakistan and the African countries. The initiative has started paying off, with a 7% growth in Pakistan's trade with Africa, despite the Covid-19 related challenges.<sup>2</sup>

The government took another positive initiative and approved in November 2020 the opening of five new embassies in Djibouti, Rwanda, Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Uganda and upgrading embassies in Niger and Tanzania to ambassadorial level. Another positive initiative is under consideration to open five more embassies in Mozambique, Botswana, Namibia, Angola, and Gabon in 2-3 years.

In pursuance of the Engage Africa Policy, Prime Minister Imran Khan met the Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, and the President of Ethiopia, Sahle-Work Zewde, on the sidelines of the 74<sup>th</sup> session

<sup>1</sup> "Pakistan's Trade Missions Abroad," Ministry of Commerce, <https://www.commerce.gov.pk/mission-abroad/pakistans-trade-missions-abroad/>, accessed on September 12, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> "Foreign Minister's Virtual Meeting on Economic Diplomacy with Pakistani Envoys in African Countries," MOFA press release, January 6, 2021, <http://mofa.gov.pk/foreign-ministers-virtual-meeting-on-economic-diplomacy-with-pakistani-envoys-in-african-countries/>

of the UNGA in September 2019. Earlier, the prime minister also met the Egyptian President on the sidelines of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Makkah Summit in May 2019. Foreign Minister Qureshi visited Kenya from January 29-30, 2020, to participate in the Pakistan-Africa Trade Development Conference in Nairobi. The foreign minister led Pakistan's delegation to the 47<sup>th</sup> session of the OIC CFM held in Niamey on November 27-28, 2020. Apart from attending the CFM, he, on the sidelines, met the prime minister and foreign minister of Niger, the prime minister of Chad, the minister of state for foreign affairs of Somalia, and the foreign minister of Sudan. Pakistan took another positive initiative during the CFM and announced to host the 48<sup>th</sup> session of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Islamabad in 2021. A 12-member parliamentary delegation of the African Union led by president of the National Assembly of Djibouti visited Pakistan in December 2020.

Foreign Minister Qureshi visited Egypt on February 16-18, 2021, on the invitation of his Egyptian counterpart, Sameh Hassan Shoukry. He also called on the Egyptian President, Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi. In his meetings with the Egyptian foreign minister, businessmen, and interaction with the Pakistani community, Qureshi stressed on promoting bilateral relations in various fields, especially trade, investment, education, and defense cooperation.

### **Analysis**

The Engage Africa Initiative is an ambitious plan undertaken by the incumbent government in the right direction to be realized through consistent efforts. However, the fact remains that the implementation and actualization of the initiative in the last three years has been pretty slow. It is because of bureaucratic formalities and lukewarm approach on the part of the relevant ministries to implement decisions for opening of new embassies as well as lack of priority accorded by the leadership to forge closer relations with the African countries through leadership and ministerial visits.

It is evident from the fact that at the time of compiling and updating this brief in September 2021, the incumbent government in pursuance of its decision taken in November 2020 for opening five new embassies in Africa, has opened only one embassy in Rwanda and two embassies in Tanzania and Niger have been upgraded to ambassadorial level. The government has announced the appointment of

ambassadors to Djibouti and Ghana but these embassies are yet to be fully functional. In addition, embassies have not yet been opened in Ivory Coast and Uganda. The exchange of visits and meetings that have taken place so far is encouraging but much below the desired level. The prime minister has not paid a single visit to any African country in the last three years. Likewise, there was no leadership visits from the African countries to Pakistan. Foreign Minister Qureshi has paid three visits to Kenya, Niger, and Egypt.

Moreover, other than holding meetings between African leaders and Pakistan's prime minister and foreign minister at the UNGA and the OIC, holding of Pak-Africa dialogue at prime minister and foreign minister's level with their African counterparts has not taken place at Davos. In addition, meetings between Pakistan's chief of army staff and his African counterparts have not taken place at Munich Security Conferences.

The frequency of leadership and ministerial visits needs to be accorded priority and enhanced for forging meaningful, productive, and mutually useful relations. The momentum generated needs to be bolstered and prioritized through consistent efforts, meaningful interaction, and robust engagement with all important African countries by developing, promoting, and deepening bilateral relations that would lead to cooperation on regional and international levels. Friendly relations and political goodwill in African countries for Pakistan need to be translated into a more robust and mutually beneficial economic partnership focusing on trade, investments and tourism.

In this regard, the lead Ministry of Foreign Affairs should evolve a working ministerial mechanism with the link ministries of Commerce & Textile; Energy, Defence, Defence Production, Educational & Professional Training; Finance, Revenue and Economic Affairs; Industries and Production; Science & Technology; Maritime Affairs, and the Economic Affairs Division to chalk out an action plan for Africa. These ministries may also prepare workable proposals for expansion of political and diplomatic outreach, greater presence and footprint in Africa, and building stronger cooperation at the multilateral forums with African institutions and African regional organizations. All efforts must lead to promote new bilateral trade and investment initiatives; improve air and maritime connectivity; enhance linkages among parliaments, think tanks, academia, and specialized

institutions; and promote collaboration in the fields of education, science and technology, capacity-building, and training. The incumbent government also needs to

establish a monitoring and implementation cell at the Prime Minister's Office for reviewing progress on various decisions regularly.

**Prepared by:**

**Ambassador (retd) Tajammul Altaf**  
Senior Research Associate,  
Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad.

**For queries:**

**Naufil Shahrukh**  
General Manager Operations  
Institute of Policy Studies, Islamabad.  
naufil@ips.net.pk | www.ips.org.pk