

Foreign Policy of King Salman Bin Abdul Aziz: Impacts on Pakistan

By

¹Syed Akbar Shah, ²Saeeda Mengal, ³Muhammad Zia- Uddin

Abstract:

Saudi Arabia has shifted the course of its foreign policy and the current monarch Salman bin Abdul Aziz has redirected the foreign policy of the Saudi Kingdom toward a more proactive and aggressive conduct. It has increased its intervention in the domestic affairs of the Gulf States and it has increased its hegemonic activities in the entire Middle East. Furthermore, its relations with its traditional strategic partner US have grown stronger and its rivalry with Iran has aggravated further deeper. Saudi Arabia has come up with a new vision for the kingdom which aspires for more development, but less reliance on oil. Given these circumstances, the foreign policy conduct of Saudi Arabia with a different posture has seriously affected Pakistan in both positive and negative ways which are discussed in this article.

Keywords: Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, vision 2030, Iran, USA, foreign policy, intervention etc.

Introduction:

The foreign policy of Saudi king Salman has affected Pakistan in a very comprehensive manner. The bilateral relations of Pakistan have also been affected by the foreign policy shifts of the Saudi kingdom. The change in the foreign policy conduct of king Salman has brought a more aggressive posture of Saudi Arabia. The current monarch of Saudi Arabia is King

¹M.Phil. Scholar, Department of Area Study Centre, University of Balochistan, Quetta Pakistan

²Professor, Dr. Saeeda Mengal, Research Supervisor and Chairperson, Department of History, University of Balochistan, Quetta Pakistan

³Professor, Department of General History, and Dean Faculty of Arts, Federal Urdu University, Karachi, Pakistan

Contact No: 03337898115

Salman bin Abdul Aziz who has made his son Mohammad bin Salman the heir to the throne. (Peskes, 2016)

With his ascendancy to the power, he changed the entire course of the foreign policy not only toward the Middle East, but also toward its trade and strategic partners. This change of the course in the foreign policy conduct is necessarily leaving deep impact on Pakistan because Pakistan is one of the strategic partners of Saudi Arabia. (Hoodbhoy, 2017)

The uncertain political as well as security situation of a highly volatile Middle East has increased the role of Saudi Arabia. Being the most trusted ally of the US and Pakistan along with the capacity to bring any serious security changes, Saudi Arabia is a major player in the region to affect its stability. (Hoodbhoy, 2017)

With the Iran crisis going on, the Saudi policies have become more robust. Amid these changing circumstances, the role of Pakistan has become more crucial as it needs a more balanced and carefully crafted foreign policy conduct replete with neutrality and pacifism. (Hoodbhoy, 2017)

An active role in the Arab World Since the demise of the former king of the kingdom Abdullah and the rise of Salman bin Abdul Aziz, the kingdom, the Saudi foreign policy has evolved and it has begun to take a more proactive part in the Middle Eastern politics, especially, in the Arab world. It has somewhat emerged as the leader of the Muslim world and it has adapted a more active foreign policy course. (Shahin, 2013) It has been seen in the wake of the Arab Spring and Saudi Arabia has taken a robust and practical action in the Syrian and Yemen crisis. With the assumption of power by King Salman bin Abdul Aziz, Saudi Arabia has decided not to stay dormant in Middle Eastern politics and engage in all the affairs that directly or indirectly affect Saudi Arabia in one way or the other. (Hoodbhoy, 2017) Whether it is the issue of the security crisis in the Middle East in the shape of Syrian crisis and the active role against Iran. the foreign policy of Saudi king Salman has affected Pakistan in a very comprehensive manner. There is no denying the fact that Saudi Arabia is the leading country to support the US sanctions on Iran and endorses an isolationist policy for Iran. (Farquhar, 2016) Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has also taken an active role in the efforts of making peace in Afghanistan. It has been a part of the peace process in the given country and a lead country beside China, US and Pakistan in the negotiations with the Taliban. This active role has also affected Pakistan in both the positive as well as the negative manner as well. (Farquhar, 2016) The positive impact of this activism of Salman bin Abdul Aziz is that new gates of development and investment have opened for Pakistan in the shape of Vision 2030 and the active role of Saudi Arabia has given much support to Pakistan in the peace talks with the Taliban. On the other hand, the

negative aspects of the Saudi activism on Pakistan have been even greater. The active role of the Saudi kingdom in Syria has also indirectly driven Pakistan into the war. (Bronson, 2015) On the other hand, the relations of Pakistan with Iran have also been affected. Pakistan has felt it very hard to stay neutral and support Iran against the US sanctions. The economic relations of Iran and Pakistan have also been cold since the Saudi king Salman ascended to power. Pakistan has also faced problems in striking its neutrality in the Qatar crisis. Saudi Arabia in spite of being the largest purchaser of arms in the world among the Muslim countries relies heavily on the military expertise of Pakistan in all its conduct pertaining to security in the Middle East or elsewhere. The foreign policy of Saudi king Salman has affected Pakistan in both positive as well as negative aspects. (Bronson, 2015)

Shift in The Foreign Policy After Arab Spring and Its Impact On Pakistan:

The Arab Spring was an unprecedented political and social movement which was aimed at overthrowing the dictators and monarchs who had been ruling the countries of Middle East for decades and the political, social and civil rights of the people had been usurped. This movement started in Tunisia and soon it spread like wildfire to all the countries of the region and the countries of Egypt, Libya and Iraq and Syria had been affected badly by this movement. (Farquhar, 2016) This wave also reached the Gulf countries of Bahrain and Yemen. Saudi Arabia could not remain inactive under these circumstances due to the leadership of the Arab world. The then king Abdullah intervened in Bahrain and drove the protestors out and his successor king Salman has even proved more active. (Bronson, 2015) He has taken Saudi Arabia to the civil war of Syria where it has become a part of the anti-Assad regime parties in order to oust him because he has been an ally of Iran for quite some time. It has also increased its defense budget and has become the largest arms purchaser of the world among the Muslim countries. It has also assumed the leadership and has become a more active country in the peace dialogues in Afghanistan as well. (Farquhar, 2016)

The shift in the foreign policy of the Saudi kingdom under the leadership of Salman bin Abdul Aziz has increased its dependency on the military of Pakistan and the creation of the Arab NATO which consists of 41 countries led by Saudi Arabia has increased the role of Pakistan in the foreign policy of the former even more. This military organization is led by the Pakistani military leadership and their expertise has been utilized to improve the military skills of the countries which are part of the given military organization. Hence, the foreign policy of Saudi king Salman has affected Pakistan in a very comprehensive manner. (Shahin, 2013)

Vision 2030 of Saudi Arabia:

Saudi Arabia throughout its history has been heavily dependent on oil for its economic growth and development. Oil was discovered in the region during the expeditions of 1925-26 and the modern Saudi state came into being in 1932. Since then, the entire process of the revenue generation and the wealth of the kingdom have been grateful to oil because it is the leading exporter of oil in the world with the second largest reserves of oil in the world. (Farquhar, 2016) Most of the economic activities, trade and local development owe much to the earnings that come from oil, but oil is a non-renewable energy resource and it can exhaust like the other energy resources which are finite. Being finite, oil is depleting as the export of oil has rapidly grown in the past couple of decades. (Farquhar, 2016) Now with the growing economic challenges and the depletion of the natural resources around the world, many countries around the world have found alternate ways to cope with these issues. New methods of modernization and development have emerged which are not dependent on the energy resources, likewise, Saudi Arabia has also formed a vision for development and prosperity and modernization without the natural resources dependence. It is now planning to reduce its dependence on the oil and bring it on equal footing with the modern and advanced countries. For this reason, Saudi kingdom has come up with the Vision 2030. This is an initiative which is based on a series of development and trade reforms including some domestic reforms. (Bronson, 2015) The relations of Saudi Arabia with Pakistan are likely to improve if seen from the prism of this vision. Owing to this vision, the former will open up its economy and will require the expert and technical assistance of Pakistan in this regard. Furthermore, the expansion of the Saudi economy is also imperative for Pakistani markets and vice versa. New horizons of development and mutual trade can be opened with this vision. The foreign policy of Saudi king Salman has affected Pakistan in both positive as well as negative aspects. (Bronson, 2015)

Emergence of Saudi Arabia as A World Superpower:

Saudi Arabia always wanted to become an independent state who in any condition wanted to survive successfully. According to these strategies and policies, Saudi Arabia had to fulfill its all ambitions successfully in this modern era of globalization. (Sohail, 2007) Consequently, Saudi Arabia successfully has planned to bring reforms in the shape of Vision 2030 (Marti, 2002) in order to liberalize its economy and after that Saudi Arabia also mixed up all its politics through its trade for the purpose of engaging itself with organizations and institutions all around the world. Saudi Arabia

with its effort for approving the ideas of liberal institutionalism theory formally and adopted them to develop its economy. (Sohail, 2007)

According to Robert Keohane Saudi Arabia has been successful through the policies of interdependent economy. Because of this policy Saudi Arabia thinks that the conflict between the South Asian countries will be limited and it will bring them all closer and gather them on a one platform. However, by working together they will work in a positive manner and one direction. Undoubtedly this manner will bring stability and prosperity in this region. Moreover, according to the idea of King Salman and his son for the Vision 2030, the political development of Saudi Arabia will nurture more because once the nations of the Persian Gulf and beyond together on one direction, the possibilities of economic expansion will increase. (Al-Jazeera, 2013) For the remunerative power to be exercised, it has brought forth its institutions to do the bidding and overtake the economic ventures. But one factor with far reaching implications has often been ignored by the critics and academics are the relationships of the economic growth the political stability. Saudi Arabia is successful because of the greater hold and incredible role in different institutions. Specially, Saudi Arabia has a great affiliation with International Monetary fund and World Bank because of which the western developed countries have a greater concern. Consequently, Saudi Arabia's increasing tendency towards these institutions has raised the chances of its active involvement in the participation of economic institutions. (Alvi, 2014)

Growing Saudi-Iran Animosity and Its Impact On Pakistan:

For the very reason, Saudi Arabia has strongly backed USA in the Security Council. The July Accord was a diplomatic triumph for Iran as it won back its energy creating reactors and at the same time it also was to be relieved of all the sanctions that USA had imposed on Iran. Though, USA did not want a strong Iran in the Persian Gulf where it already enjoys cordial ties with China and a strong Iran would resist its every political move in the Middle East. (Reidel, 2019) Given these circumstances, when Donald Trump came into power, the first thing he did was to renounce this deal, but this time USA was the aggressor, therefore, Iran was defended by China which brought Saudi Arabia closer to USA in the Security Council and the European countries like Germany also denounced US influence and announced to continue their trade with Iran as per the rules of the July Accord. (Reidel, 2019). The Trump policies were also not favorable to China as the trade war was taking its toll. Iran and Saudi Arabia got closer as a result of the aggressive posture of the Trump Administration. Even though, Russia has supported Iran on every diplomatic platform further

reducing the prospects for USA to alienate Iran from the international economic and political relations. (Reidel, 2019)

Saudi Ambitions for Iran Beside Oil:

Oil is not the only natural resource Iran is blessed with. Iran is rich in numerous natural resources like gas, marble, copper (copper reserves are found throughout the country making it one of the largest deposits of copper in the world), coal, iron ore, bauxite and zinc. All these minerals are found in Iran in abundance and large quantities. Iran also has valuable deposits of chromite, gold, manganese, silver, tin, and tungsten, as well as various gemstones, such as amber, agate, lapis lazuli, and turquoise. Saudi Arabia though is not an energy starving and resource hungry country, yet it is countering Iran in every platform. (Reidel, 2019) At the moment Saudi Arabia is ambitious for the oil of Iran, but if the relations go deeper and the economic ties are get worsened, they are likely to affect the trade relations of Iran with Pakistan.

Yemen Crisis and Pakistan:

Yemen is a very volatile region and it has been extremely instable since the Arab Spring. Having a mixed population of Sunni and Shia, it has witnessed some serious sectarian clashes. The Houthi tribe which is Shia is fighting against the Saudi hegemony and in retaliation; Saudi Arabia has carried out many air strike campaigns in Yemen. (Urwat, 2016) Under these circumstances, a serious humanitarian crisis has emerged in the region. Pakistan being a strategic partner of Saudi Arabia is ambivalent whether to partake in the Saudi led aggression or not. This scenario has put Pakistan into a very critical situation where the decisions made will not only affect the bilateral relations; in fact, they will affect the entire course of the foreign policy of Pakistan. (Qutbrain, 2019)

Qatar Crisis and Pakistan:

The foreign policy of Saudi king Salman has affected Pakistan in both positive as well as negative aspects. Whether it is the crisis of humanity and security in Yemen or the diplomatic crisis of Qatar, Pakistan has felt it very hard to stay neutral. The Qatar crisis which was initiated by Saudi Arabia was a diplomatic crisis in which many countries including Pakistan were put under pressure to cut-off their diplomatic ties with Qatar. (Reidel, 2019) There is no denying the fact that Pakistan did not completely cut-off its diplomatic ties with it, but its mutual ties had been affected with Qatar as a direct relationship in the face of the Saudi pressure had become quite challenging. This proves that the bilateral relations of Pakistan have also been affected by the foreign policy shifts of the Saudi kingdom. (Rohan, 2018) Even Pakistan did offer for its good offices to end this diplomatic crisis and also endeavored to persuade king Salman, but could not end this

crisis; rather, it got entangled in this crisis. This diplomatic crisis was a posture of the hegemonic ambitions of Saudi king Salman that it was demonstrating in the Persian Gulf. This change in the foreign policy conduct of king Salman has brought a more aggressive posture of Saudi Arabia. (Rohan, 2018)

Identity Crisis in Pakistan:

The identity crisis a huge reason for the people of Pakistan is at par with each other. National identity is the key to the cohesion of the masses and their mutual interaction, but there is a huge lack of national identity and the identity crisis prevailing across the country. (Akbar, 2005) The confusion that who to follow has stagnated the society and Pakistanis have begun to resist change. Resistance took the people toward more conservatism and furthering of the adherence to orthodox believes or practices. Violence became the main source of their communication. (Nonneman, 2014) Identity crisis was defamed by the Wahhabi impact and Afghan War which left every one of the ways to change disappeared. Brutality sorted out and militancy and psychological warfare cleared the harmony and strength of the nation. The young have lost their actual personality. Tolerance is supplanted with savagery and psychological oppression is the least demanding access to youth to make their voice heard. (Sorel, 2015) This identity crisis has exacerbated in the current monarchy of King Salman bin Abdul Aziz due to the diverging policies he has undertaken toward the other countries of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. Therefore, Pakistan being so ideologically clinging to Saudi Arabia is also facing some serious foreign policy crisis whether to treat the enemies of the Kingdom as enemies and treatment its friends as friends or adapt a more independent course. The same identity crisis and ideological crisis has plagued the minds of the people. (Nonneman, 2014) Striking neutrality in its relationship with the countries that have strained relations with Saudi Arabia, especially in times when Pakistan has to heavily depend on the former for extending its assistance in rescuing the economy of the country, has become way too arduous. The Saudi foreign policy toward the countries of the Persian Gulf like that of Iran and Qatar has been of somewhat hegemonic nature. (Urwat, 2016)

Deep Running Saudi Iran Economic Hostilities and Their Impact On Pakistan:

The imbalance in economy between the rich and poor countries has widened the gap so much that it has resulted in the shape of violence in some countries. Such as, in Middle East there is movement going on against west and on the other hand many demonstrations are happening whenever an annual economical meeting is held. (Sorel, 2015) The depression has passed

through many countries such as former Soviet Union and Africa over the mutually dependent world economy. It shows that the countries are getting fear over the interdependent world economy. Now the Middle East is facing this recession. Iran is facing is more than any other country. It also failed to leave a lasting impact on the peace process of Afghanistan as well. Saudi ascendancy is solely based on the economic focus and avoiding the use of military power, though, it continues to grow with the each passing day. Following are the driving forces behind the growing focus of Saudi Arabia toward Iran. (Sorel, 2015)

- ❖ It is seeking economic and strategic interests in the Persian Gulf which also are sought by Iran. The latter is in proximity to Central Asia in the north, Gulf countries in the West and South Asia in its south and southeast. Therefore, the former is weary of the economic expansion of the latter and has urged the US to maintain its economic sanctions on Iran. (Salman, 2015)

- ❖ Much of the mineral wealth of Iran is lying unused waiting to be untapped. USA could not succeed in exploiting the resources for it was confined to a particular region, more like confined to its military bases. The animosity of the local people did not allow USA the space China enjoys in Iran. This deepening of the relations of Iran with China is also pushing Saudi Arabia more toward the US. China sought the strategic partnership of China for two main reasons, first, it wanted to contain the growing influence of United States of America from the Persian Gulf, secondly, it wanted to quench its mounting energy shortage in the face of its giant industries. These both interests have brought China closer to Iran and Saudi relations with Pakistan in this regard have also been affected. (Salman, 2015) The reason why the relations of Saudi Arabia with Pakistan have been affected due to the Sino-Iran relations is because China is endeavoring to link the China Pakistan Economic Corridor with the West Asian Corridor (the West Asian Corridor is the crucial part of the One Built One Road Initiative of China and mainly is based in Iran), this linkage would benefit Iran and increase its vale and influence in South Asia as well, which the Saudi kingdom does not approve of. Therefore, Saudi Arabia has exerted pressure on Pakistan not to engage economically with Iran too deeply.

- ❖ By increasing its influence in Iran by negotiating a long term, it wants to increase its role as a regional hegemon that intends for containing Iran and wants to curtail its influence from the Persian Gulf as well. (Start, 2015)

- ❖ Consolidating its ties with Pakistan in the shape of China Pakistan Economic Corridor and strengthening the ties with Afghanistan, it is expelling the influence of Iran to contain and weaken the politico-economic position of the latter. For the very reason, Saudi Arabia has embarked upon the largest oil refinery of the region in Gawadar. (Start, 2015) This aim is

to counter the Sino-Iran strategic and economic relations. The strong presence of Saudi Arabia in the CPEC projects is led by the idea that in order to contain Iran, Saudi Arabia has to invest and practically engage through different policy initiatives like that of the oil refinery in Gawadar. (Walsh, 2015)

❖ More importantly, China fears an outflow of militancy from northeastern Afghanistan to the Sinkiang province which is a Muslim majority province where low intensity unrest is unfolding in the province. That is why harmonizing relations with Iran means a joint effort by these countries to establish peace in Afghanistan and beyond. Pakistan is also making efforts to stabilize the region for securing the route for CPEC and Saudi Arabia has taken keen interests in increasing its ties with Pakistan. However, the Iran-Saudi hostilities and their efforts to counter and contain each other have created ambivalence for Pakistan since both of these countries are strategically imperative for Pakistan. (Dessouki, 2013)

Conclusion

Besides the militant influence and funding, the political impact of Saudi Arabia is beyond measures. Pakistan has been economically rescued so many times by the former; therefore, Pakistan has been obliged to it for its relief packages and in return has endorsed the Saudi political agendas without hesitation. The adaption of these agendas like the period of Zia regime and the Islamization of the constitution of Pakistan and the formulation of the Islamic laws, but with many lacunas has left deep imprints on the political thought of the country. However, the current monarchy of Salman bin Abdul Aziz has followed the suit of its predecessors in this regard.

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