

The Geopolitics of the Iran-Saudi Arabia “Rapprochement”: What Are the Implications for Pakistan?

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The Iranian-Saudi rapprochement presents Pakistan with some unexpected challenges that it arguably would have been in a much better position to deal with had last year’s post-modern coup not taken place. The past 11 months have crippled its capability to respond to game-changers such as this one, which means that it’ll probably miss out on the opportunities connected with this black swan event while remaining at risk of sliding further into regional isolation.

The [Chinese-mediated Iranian-Saudi rapprochement](#) is unquestionably a positive development for all members of the international community apart from the US and Israel, both of which have a stake in dividing-and-ruling West Asia by indefinitely perpetuating those two’s rivalry. Pakistan had previously been victimized by their competition so it makes perfect sense why it praised their unexpected reconciliation, but it might also struggle to adapt to the new grand strategic reality that it created.

On the one hand, Pakistan is now no longer tacitly conceived by either of them as an object of rivalry against the other, within whose territory they previously competed with their counterpart by proxy. This will in turn relieve enormous pressure on that country at one of its most sensitive security moments in decades characterized by unprecedented political polarization, rising terrorist attacks from Baloch sub-nationalists and the [TTP](#), and an ever-worsening economic-financial crisis.

On the other hand, however, there’s an inadvertent chance in the short-term that the Baloch aspect of its security challenges might worsen. [The Cradle](#), which is a popular [Alt-Media](#) outlet with exclusive sources known for their reliability, cited an unnamed individual who was part of the Beijing-based negotiations to report that one of the hidden security clauses agreed to was that Riyadh “pledges not to fund organizations designated as terrorists by Iran, such as...militants operating out of Pakistan.”

This can be understood as a reference to Jundallah, an extremist group that operates out of Pakistan's Balochistan region allegedly with the tacit approval of that country's military leadership and which has been previously accused by Iran of being a Saudi proxy. Upon being cut off by Riyadh and out of work, its fighters might join other extremists like the TTP or sub-nationalists like the BLA unless Islamabad successfully detains them first or begins their disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration.

It can't be taken for granted that the [post-modern coup regime](#) that came to power last April will do so, however, since it's irresponsibly redirected a significant share of the security services' attention from preemptively addressing those threats to persecuting their peaceful political opponents. That's one of the reasons for the upsurge of terrorism across the country in the past 11 months, and it's unlikely to be rectified in a timely enough fashion even if the political will was present (which it isn't) to deal with this.

Failure to proactively address the abrupt rise of unemployed anti-Iranian militants could further exacerbate Pakistan's already difficult security challenges in the coming future, thus contributing to its cascading crises that are pushing that geostrategically positioned country closer to the brink of chaos. Not only that, but it can no longer take the scenario of Saudi bailouts for granted either since the Kingdom appears poised to invest more in Iran than in Pakistan going forward.

The Iranian-Saudi rapprochement will unlock the [North-South Transport Corridor's](#) (NSTC) maximum potential by connecting the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to this promising series of Eurasian megaprojects between Russia and [India](#) that run through the Islamic Republic. This is the official assessment of influential Chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee on International Affairs Leonid Slutsky, which he shared with his country's publicly financed international media flagship [TASS](#).

Pakistan can "piggyback" on these projects by using them to comprehensively enhance its connectivity with Iran, Azerbaijan, and Russia, which would align with the geo-economic grand strategy promulgated by former Prime Minister Imran Khan, but economic stability and political will are the prerequisites. Both are presently lacking, however, which reduces the chances that it'll benefit from Saudi Arabia and the rest of the GCC's participation in the NSTC anytime soon.

With the Kingdom likely to focus more on mutually beneficial Iranian investments than on dumping billions into seemingly never-ending Pakistani bailouts that haven't ever brought it anything in return, Islamabad will predictably become more dependent on the US-controlled IMF. China will always provide the bare minimum required to keep Pakistan afloat in the worst-case scenario, but even it seems to be getting cold feed nowadays for a variety of reasons, thus meaning that US influence might further grow.

About that, last year's post-modern coup restored American suzerainty over Pakistan to a large degree, which now makes that country a regional anomaly in the geopolitical sense considering the broader region's drift away from that declining unipolar hegemon. The very fact that previously US-aligned Saudi Arabia patched up its seemingly irreconcilable problems with Iran as a result of Chinese mediation reinforces this factual observation. Pakistan now stands alone as the broader region's only US vassal.

That country's military leaders will predictably try to leverage this to their benefit, both

personally as well as in terms of what they believe (whether rightly or wrongly) is the national interest, but the power asymmetry is obviously in the US' favor and therefore places Pakistan at a supreme disadvantage. It'll thus probably continue being exploited and led down the counterproductive path charted by last year's post-modern coup due to Pakistan's desperate hunger for the carrot of American financial aid.

Just like international perceptions of Pakistan will continue moving in a negative direction due to its status as the broader region's only US vassal, so too will domestic ones of its post-modern coup regime as a result of the counterproductive path that its patron will continue leading it down. Political polarization will expectedly spike with uncertain consequences for stability considering the brutal methods that the authorities have employed for persecuting peaceful protesters.

Their perception management efforts will also be dealt a blow by the Iranian-Saudi rapprochement since The Cradle's previously mentioned source also reported that neither party will "engage in any activity that destabilizes either state, at the security, military or media levels." This is only relevant in the Pakistani context to Saudi Arabia's clandestine funding of anti-Iranian propagandists who coincidentally happen to be the post-modern coup regime's loudest supporters.

The authorities turned a blind eye to the activities of these literal foreign influence agents as a quid pro quo for their support against the opposition, but now this increasingly bankrupt country is forced into the dilemma of either having to foot the bill for their propaganda or have them shill for someone else. Levers of pressure might be exploited to coerce them into remaining loyal despite the cut in their pay if the regime replaces the Saudis as their boss, but others might still work elsewhere or even emigrate.

For all the reasons shared in this analysis, the Iranian-Saudi rapprochement presents Pakistan with some unexpected challenges that it arguably would have been in a much better position to deal with had last year's post-modern coup not taken place. The past 11 months have crippled its capability to respond to game-changers such as this one, which means that it'll probably miss out on the opportunities connected with this black swan event while remaining at risk of sliding further into regional isolation.

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