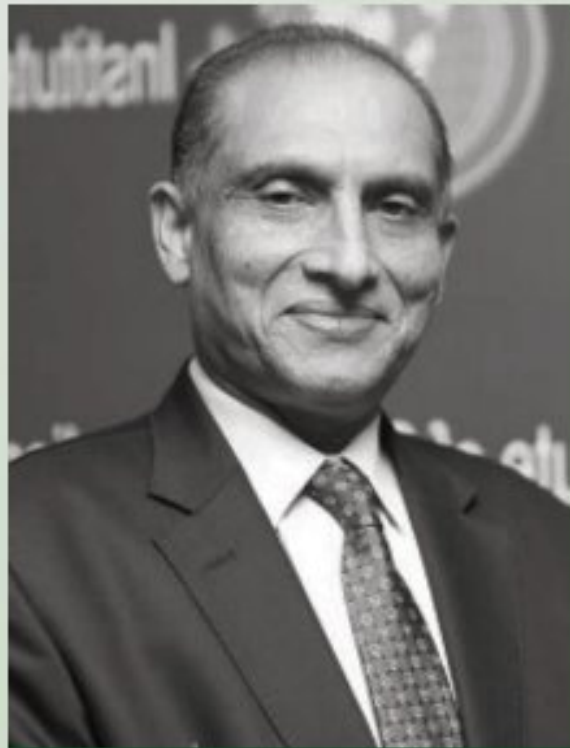


Pakistan - Iran Relations:

Can Full Potential of Bilateral Cooperation be Realised?



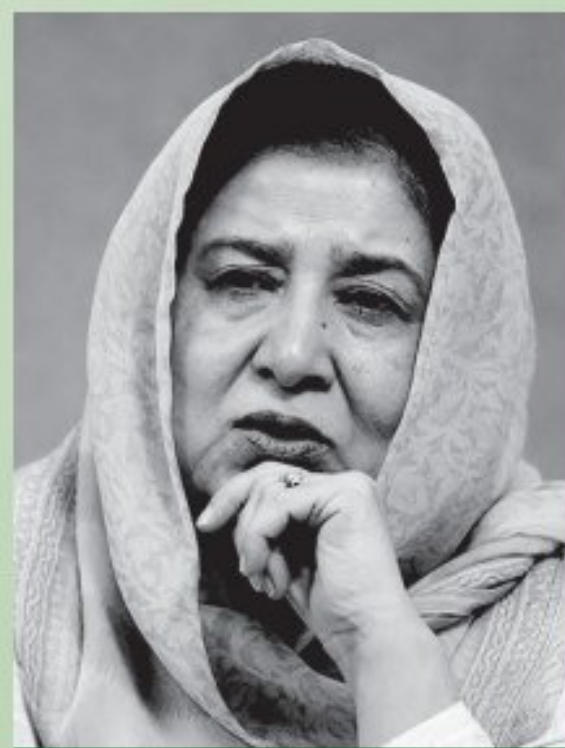
**Ambassador
Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhry**

Former Foreign Secretary -
Chairman Sanober Institute



Dr. Qamar Cheema

Executive Director
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**Ambassador
Riffat Masood**

Former Ambassador
to Iran



Dr Qandil Abbas

Professor at
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Baqir Sajjad

Correspondent Dawn

Summary:

- Emphasis on deep cultural ties, untapped potential in energy cooperation, and border security concerns.
- Urgent need to address trust deficits and shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics.
- Historical challenges post-1979 and the call for a review of Pakistan's foreign policy.
- Concerns about missed opportunities and external factors influencing the relationship.
- Advocacy for improved border security, enhanced trade relations, and increased people-to-people contact.
- Shift from geostrategy to geoeconomics, learning from China's diverse relationships.
- Prioritize economic ties, especially the potential of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline.
- Increase engagement at political, military, intelligence, and parliamentary levels.
- Leverage evolving Middle East dynamics and regional connectivity initiatives like CPEC.
- Overcome historical issues through political will, sincere efforts, and enhanced cultural exchanges.

Introduction:

The panel discussion hosted by the Sanober Institute, with participants including Dr Qamar Cheema, featuring insights from Ambassador Aizaz Ahmed Chaudhary, Ambassador Riffat Massod, Professor Dr Qandil Abbas, and Baqir Sajjad. The conversation explores the rich cultural ties between the two nations, the potential for bilateral cooperation, and the historical perspectives that shape their relationship. The panel emphasizes the need for a shift from geopolitics to geo-economics, increased engagement at various levels, and the importance of addressing trust deficits and historical issues. The evolving Middle East dynamics and global power structures are seen as opportunities for collaboration between Pakistan and Iran. The discussion concludes with a call for a comprehensive and pragmatic approach to strengthen

Key Takeaways:

- **Cultural Ties and People-to-People Interaction:**

The discussion underscores the deep cultural connections between Pakistan and Iran, emphasising the untapped potential in fostering people-to-people interactions. Strengthening cultural bonds can create a foundation for improved diplomatic relations.

- **Economic Cooperation Over Geopolitics:**

There is a consensus on the need to shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics in Pakistan-Iran relations. The emphasis is on exploring economic collaboration, with examples like the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline highlighted as a win-win opportunity.

- **Addressing Trust Deficits:**

Participants recognize historical trust deficits and stress the importance of building trust for sustainable relations. Enhanced border security measures and conflict resolution efforts are crucial to overcoming lingering issues and fostering mutual understanding.

- **Role of Political Will:**

The panel highlights the significance of political will in shaping foreign policy decisions. Leaders are urged to prioritize national interests over external pressures, fostering a unified approach that aligns civil and military establishments.

- **Opportunities in Evolving Global Dynamics:**

The changing dynamics in the Middle East and global power structures present opportunities for collaboration. Participants see these shifts as advantageous for recalibrating Pakistan-Iran relations in alignment with evolving geopolitical circumstances.

- **Importance of Regional Connectivity:**

Initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are recognized as pivotal for enhancing economic ties. Regional connectivity is seen as a key driver for fostering stronger relations and mutual economic benefits.

- **Strategic Engagement at Various Levels:**

The discussion underscores the need for increased engagement not only at the political level but also at the military, intelligence, and parliamentary levels. Building relationships across different segments of governance is crucial for comprehensive collaboration.



- **Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline as a Potential Catalyst:** Despite challenges, the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline is viewed as a significant opportunity for economic cooperation. The potential benefits in addressing energy deficiencies in Pakistan and Iran's need for economic revitalization make it a viable option.
- **Acknowledgement of Historical Issues:** Historical issues, including border disputes, are acknowledged with optimism that political will and sincere efforts can overcome these challenges. A mutual understanding of historical complexities is seen as essential for moving forward.
- **Encouragement for People-to-People Contacts and Cultural Exchanges:** Panelists encourage fostering more people-to-people contacts and cultural exchanges. These initiatives can contribute to a better understanding between the nations and lay the groundwork for stronger diplomatic ties.

Recommendations:

- **Enhanced Diplomatic Exchanges:** Facilitate high-level diplomatic visits between Pakistan and Iran to build personal rapport among leaders. Increased diplomatic exchanges can foster mutual understanding and pave the way for collaborative decision-making.
- **Economic Diversification and Goeconomic Focus:** Prioritize economic cooperation over geopolitical considerations. Actively explore trade opportunities, investment collaborations, and joint economic ventures. The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline should be pursued as a key goeconomic initiative for mutual benefit.
- **Comprehensive Conflict Resolution:** Establish a comprehensive conflict resolution framework to address historical disputes and build trust. Focus on enhancing border security measures and intelligence cooperation to mitigate security concerns and promote regional stability.
- **Coordination Between Civil and Military Establishments:** Ensure a unified approach by fostering coordination between civil and military establishments. Aligning national interests and strategic goals is essential for a cohesive foreign policy stance, minimizing internal divides.
- **Parliamentary Engagements and Bilateral Committees:** Encourage parliamentary exchanges and establish bilateral committees to address shared concerns. A robust parliamentary dialogue can contribute to legislative support for diplomatic initiatives and create a platform for people's representatives to voice concerns.
- **Cultural and Educational Initiatives:** Promote cultural and educational exchanges to strengthen people-to-people ties. Initiatives such as student exchange programs, cultural festivals, and collaborative research projects can enhance mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's heritage.

- **Strategic Alignment with Regional Connectivity:**

Strategically align with regional connectivity initiatives, particularly emphasizing collaboration within the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) framework. Leveraging regional connectivity projects can enhance economic ties and create shared prosperity.

- **Sustained Public Diplomacy Efforts:**

Implement sustained public diplomacy campaigns to inform and engage the public on the benefits of improved relations. Utilize media, cultural events, and digital platforms to shape positive perceptions and garner public support for diplomatic initiatives.

Conclusion:

The Sanober Institute's thought-provoking panel discussion, supplemented by additional insights, provides invaluable perspectives into the intricate dynamics of Pakistan-Iran relations. The emphasis on political will, economic cooperation, and enhanced engagement at various levels reflects a consensus on the need for a comprehensive approach. The evolving Middle East dynamics and the transformative potential of regional connectivity initiatives, such as CPEC, present opportunities for strengthened collaboration. While historical issues persist, the call for increased people-to-people contacts and cultural exchanges signals a commitment to building mutual understanding. The recommendations highlight the importance of a shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics, underlining the role of economic ties in fostering sustainable relations. As both nations navigate geopolitical complexities, the panel's vision for a balanced and pragmatic approach lays the groundwork for a positive trajectory in Pakistan-Iran relations.

