

The Maritime Neighbor: Pakistan's Relations with Oman – A Review

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Abstract

[Pakistan has four land neighbours. Two of these, India and Iran, also share maritime boundaries with Pakistan. Oman is the only country that shares a direct maritime boundary with Pakistan, through the Arabian Sea, without having a land connection. Relations between Pakistan and Oman have generally remained cordial. Historical, cultural and religious affinities bind the two states together. Defense sector ties are quite strong, and there is reasonable trade and commercial cooperation between the two sides. In addition, a sizeable number of Pakistanis living and working in Oman are an important linkage between the two sides. However, the relationship remains short of being as robust as the potential suggests. The two countries need to devise joint strategies to further cement it, and to make it broad-based. – *Editors*]

Introduction

Pakistan is situated in a region of great political, economic and strategic significance. This region has always attracted the interest of great powers of the globe, particularly so in the past few decades.

Apart from being at the confluence of South, West and Central Asia, Pakistan's maritime neighborhood also assumes immense significance. Pakistan's neighboring water bodies – Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman and Persian Gulf, all of which are part of the so-called 'Indian' Ocean – and the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) passing through these water bodies remain constantly in limelight as these are major supply routes of global oil transportation, fast increasing Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) business, and merchandise trade, both intra- and inter-continental.

Arabian Sea plays an important role in determining the geo-strategic importance of Pakistan. It directly links Pakistan with Oman, as per typical definition of maritime boundaries. Through this sea, Pakistan shares maritime boundaries with India in the east, Iran in the west, and Oman in the south. The scope of this paper is limited to bilateral relations

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between Pakistan and Oman as two other articles of this special issue deal at length with Pakistan's ties with India and Iran.

Geographically, Oman is the closest country to Pakistan among the six nations of Arabian Peninsula.

The paper however discusses overall nature and state-of-affairs of ties between the two sides, not just the maritime aspect. It starts with a brief historical background and evolution of the ties between the two sides and moves on to discuss, in detail, as to how the relationship has developed since the beginning of the 21st century. Towards the end, some conclusions are drawn and a set of recommendations is presented

for further improvement in the ties.

The Historical Background

Interactions between the areas now making Pakistan, especially the coastal belt of south-western subcontinent on one hand and the Arabian Peninsula on the other are well established since early 8th century starting with the arrival of Mohammad bin Qasim in 712AD.¹ Exchanges spanning over subsequent centuries bound the people (particularly Muslims) of the undivided sub-continent in strong religious, cultural, social and commercial bonds with Oman. A wealth of literature is available on it.²

Geographically, Oman is the closest country to Pakistan among the six nations of Arabian Peninsula. Ethnically, almost 30% of Omanis are of Baloch origin from Pakistan's Balochistan province, having settled in Oman over a hundred years ago.³ They are well-absorbed in the Omani society and several of them have also been occupying important positions

¹ P. R. Kumaraswamy, "Reading the Silence: India and the Arab Spring", The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2012, p 6.

² Giorgio Cafiero and Cinzia Miotto "Oman Diversifies Allies with Closer India Ties", Middle East Institute, Oct 05, 2016. <http://www.mei.edu/content/article/oman-diversifies-allies-closer-india-ties>. (Accessed Feb 28, 2017.) Please also see: "India and the Sultanate of Oman – A timeline of relations Burgeoning relations with our friendly neighbour Oman", Middle East Analysis, December 24, 2010. <http://middleeast-analysis.blogspot.com/2010/12/india-and-sultanate-of-oman-timeline-of.html> (Accessed February 28, 2017.)

³ Some of these Balochis went to participate "in a number of civil wars that took place in Oman as a result of disputes among the sons of Imam Sultan bin Saif" and many of those who survived, settled there. <http://www.atheer.om/en/7162/brief-history-of-the-relationship-between-oman-and-baluchistan/> (Accessed Feb 24, 2017.)

in the private and public sectors.⁴ The community in general has been a source of binding.

Gwadar, now in limelight due to being the port city of Pakistan to be linked to China's Kashgar through China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has historically been an important linkage. It has been noted in some studies that "In 1792 governor of Balochistan, Mir Naseer Khan, awarded Sayyid Sultan bin Ahmed, the ruler of Oman, the port city of Gwadar on the Makran coast..."⁵ Thus the port city remained a part of Oman until 1958 when on September 8 it was transferred to Pakistan, for 3 million pound sterling, which was equivalent to ten million US dollars at that time.⁶ As Azhar Ahmad notes, at that time Gwadar was a fishing town with very scant population. The town was made a Tehsil of district Makran, and on July 1, 1997 it was given the status of a district.⁷ After handing over of Gwadar to Pakistan, the government of Oman had awarded dual nationality to some of the residents of the town, and those living on the Markran coast around it. Those residents were given the dual nationality who were then working in Oman. The children of those who migrated to Oman before 1970 can still obtain Omani nationality.⁸

**In 1970s and 80s, Oman
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purchase of military
equipment and trainings
of its military personnel.**

The two countries established formal diplomatic relations in 1972,⁹ and these have since grown from strength to strength. Bilateral visits of 1980s and 1990s depicted a unanimity of views on important regional issues such as the USSR invasion of Afghanistan and the first

⁴ J. E. Peterson, "The Baluch Presence in the Persian Gulf", *Baluchi Linguist* <https://balochlinguist.wordpress.com/2014/01/07/the-baluch-presence-in-the-persian-gulf/> (Accessed Feb 5, 2017.)

⁵ "Brief History of the Relationship between Oman and Baluchistan", *Atheer*, 18 November 2016. <http://www.atheer.om/en/7162/brief-history-of-the-relationship-between-oman-and-baluchistan/> (Accessed December 22, 2016.)

⁶ Azhar Ahmed, "Gwadar: A Historical Kaleidoscope", *Policy Perspectives: 2*, Vol.13 (2016).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ <https://www.justlanded.com/english/Oman/Oman-Guide/Visas-Permits/Citizenship>

⁹ Jeremy Jones, Nicholas Ridout, Oman, *Culture and Diplomacy*, Edinburg, 2012, P.236 https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=tbNvAAAAQBAJ&pg=PA233&lpg=PA233&dq=pakistan+oman+formal+relationship&source=bl&ots=dDytDaFZYj&sig=18bjQ5i90R_LU_et1H7m5vkcy0Y&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKewie_IWYI9rRAhUGvBQKHZL0AiQQ6AEIRDAI#v=onepage&q=pakistan%20oman%20formal%20relationship&f=false (Accessed November 15, 2015)

Gulf War.¹⁰ Voices were jointly raised by the two sides for the rights of the people of Palestine, Kashmir and Bosnia. The two countries also negotiated and moved towards closer economic and social sector collaboration, noting and building upon their historical closeness.¹¹

Military and security cooperation has been an important sphere of exchanges. Ties in this arena go beyond the procurement of military items or joint exercises. The Southern Regiment of Omani Army mainly consists of the recruits from Pakistani Baloch community. The Omani Armed Forces are, to large extent, composed of Balochs from different districts of Balochistan. "In 1960's and 70's when Oman was facing a rebellion in southern region, two Southern Regiments consisting of Balochis were raised"¹². In 1971, a Frontier Force battalion consisting of Balochis was also raised."¹³ In 1970s and 80s, Oman relied to a large extent on Pakistan for purchase of military equipment and trainings of its military personnel. The equipment included various types of armaments and ammunition from Pakistan Ordnance Factories (POF). The two countries also established a "Pak-Oman Joint Programmer Review Group (JPRG)" in 1985 that holds meetings regularly in Pakistan and Oman once every two years, to review progress of bilateral defense cooperation.¹⁴

The two countries also laid the foundation for closer cooperation in economic, trade and commercial affairs during these years. Pakistan encouraged investors from Oman through interaction between the private sectors of the two countries. Visits of high level delegations to interact with each other and ascertain the business opportunities remained an important feature of relations between both countries. The two governments signed formal agreements such as Organizing Air Service Agreement in 1976; Promotion of Protection and Investment Agreement in 1997; Cultural and Educational Agreement in 1984;

¹⁰ Government of Pakistan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Joint Communiques 1977-1997*, pages 71-72, 109-110, 265-287.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Lawrence G. Potter, ed. "Sectarian Politics in the Persian Gulf" p.235-237 <https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=50pRBAAAQBAJ&pg=PA236&lpg=PA236&dq=recruitment+of+Baluchi+soldiers+in+Oman+army&source=bl&ots=5QSMfuaXSL&sig=r2jYVYRG-QEdBP74VIUxxE7KmUA&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj18fDjxPbSAhWDshQKHWhWAN4Q6AEITDAG#v=onepage&q=recruitment%20of%20Baluchi%20soldiers%20in%20man%20army&f=false> (Accessed Nov 19, 2016.)

¹³ "Pakistan Airbases Needed in Jordan and Saudi", January 14, 2015. http://liveleak80.rssing.com/chan-13459557/all_p167.html. (Accessed August 17, 2016)

¹⁴ Sehar Kamran Muddassir, "Pakistan and Gulf Region – Historical Perspective and Future Trends".

<http://www.senatedefencecommittee.com.pk/publication-detail.php?pageid=publication&rid=NQ==> (Accessed December 22, 2016.)

Economic, Technical and Commercial Cooperation Agreement in 1986.¹⁵ Signing of these agreements later proved very helpful by increasing investment, enhancing economic and cultural relations.

Post 2000 Ties

The incident of 9/11 and subsequent American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq had a number of bearings on this region of which Pakistan and Oman are a part of. Bilateral relations between the two however continued to forge ahead, with focus on defence and security ties alongside economic cooperation leading to sustained political / diplomatic relationship. A brief account of post 2000 ties is given in the following paragraphs.

Political and Diplomatic: Regular, though not so frequent high-level visits have remained a strong foundation of bilateral relationship. Such exchanges led to increased confidence level, and subsequent solution of issues, the leading example of which is the agreement on the delimitation of maritime boundary, considered as a huge success of Pakistan and Oman in diplomatic terms¹⁶.

The visit of Sultan Qaboos to Pakistan in April 2001 was noted as "a milestone and key catalyst of ever growing exchanges between two countries."¹⁷ From Pakistani side, President Musharraf visited Oman Prime Ministers Shaukat Aziz and Yusuf Raza Gillani also visited Oman in 2002, 2005 and 2010 respectively. The latest of such high level bilateral visits from Pakistani side was by Sartaj Aziz, prime minister's advisor on foreign affairs, in September 2016. During this visit, the two sides resolved to cement bilateral relations in all the areas of mutual interest.

The signing of Agreement on the Delimitation of the Maritime Boundary in which both the states agreed to "delimit the maritime boundary between the two countries permanently, equitably and definitively in conformity with international law and relevant international

¹⁵ Zahid Shahab Ahmed, Stuti Bhatnagar "Gulf States and the Conflict between India and Pakistan" *Journal of Asia Pacific Studies*, Vol 1, No 2, 2010. 275. <http://www.japss.org/upload/8.%20zahid.pdf> (Accessed December 20, 2016.)

¹⁶ Jonathan I. Charney & Dr. Robert W. Smith, ed., *International Maritime Boundaries, Volume 4*, Hague, Martinus NIJH off Publisher, 2002, PP. 2810-2815. https://books.google.com.pk/books?id=4EOcBE6VIikC&pg=PA2811&lpg=PA2811&dq=pakistan+oman+delimitations+of+boundaries&source=bl&ots=AWaXHohxjd&sig=h8yMTmiBeHOPgu2FbOUauLvZrgo&hl=en&sa=X&sqi=2&ved=0ahUKEwjbr6rzvvsAhVG1RQKHeq_BsUQ6AEIKzAD#v=onepage&q&f=false (Accessed November 25, 2016.)

¹⁷ "Hassan Kamanpoori , Envoys laud Oman's Renaissance", *Oman Observer*, 20th, July 2015, <http://omanobserver.om/envoys-laud-omans-renaissance/> (Accessed October 7, 2016.)

conventions".¹⁸ Diplomatically it is a success story in which both the countries have determined their EEZs of 200 nautical miles (nm).

In May 2009, Pakistan claimed for an additional 150 nautical miles and Oman did not challenge this claim.¹⁹ This did away with the only major bottleneck that could still have plagued bilateral ties to an extent. Moreover, in March 2015, UN body accepted Islamabad's claim for extension of sea limits, therefore, Pakistan's seabed territory grew by about 50,000 square kilometers. Some of the Pakistan's claimed territory overlapped with Omani claim. Verdict in favor of Pakistan was announced by the UN when after successful negotiations with Oman, Muscat dropped its objection.²⁰

**Joint military exercises
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important characteristic
of this relationship.**

Oman has emerged as an important and reliable country when it comes to backchannel diplomacy. For instance, Oman has been very active in the negotiations between Iran and the West over the former's nuclear programme. Sultan Qaboos was the key player in conducting the secret diplomatic dialogue between Tehran and Washington in 2012, making the Iran-P5+1 agreement in July 2015 possible. This diplomatic activeness on part of Oman did not remain limited to Iran and the US alone. In 2011, Oman hosted a private meeting between then Pakistan Army Chief General Ashfaq Pervaiz Kayani and then US Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen in which both the Chiefs talk about the security situation of the region and to explore new ways to better coordinate military operations.²¹ It is worth noting that Pakistani parliament's decision not to take sides in the Yemen crisis, 2015, did not have any noticeable negative bearing on bilateral relationship between Islamabad and Muscat. Oman joined hands with Turkey and Pakistan for diffusing the crisis.

¹⁸ "Muscat Agreement on the Delimitation of the Maritime Boundary between the Sultanate of Oman and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan" <http://www.un.org/depts/los/LEGISLATIONANDTREATIES/PDFFILES/TREATIES/OMN-PAK2000MB.PDF> (Accessed October 12, 2016.)

¹⁹ Jamal Shahid, "Pakistan's sea limits set to be extended", *Dawn*, May 07, 2009. <https://www.dawn.com/news/462726> (Accessed March 28, 2017)

²⁰ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Pakistan seabed territory grows by 50,000 square kilometers", *Dawn*, Mar 21, 2015. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1170986> (Accessed July 24, 2016)

²¹ "Muscat rendezvous: Adm Mullen, Gen Kayani discuss war on terror", *Express Tribune*, February 24, 2011. <http://tribune.com.pk/story/123181/muscat-rendezvous-adm-mullen-gen-kayani-discuss-war-on-terror/>. (Accessed November 25, 2016)

Defence and Security: Close defence and security cooperation between Pakistan and Oman continued, rather broadened in some dimensions, in post 2000 period. Like diplomatic exchanges visits of high ranking military officers from both the countries also took place on regular basis. "In August 2007, Air Vice Marshal (AVM) Yahya bin Rasheed bin Rashid al Juma'ah, Oman's Royal Air Force Commander visited Pakistan. He had meetings not only with the top officials from Pakistan Air Force but also in Ministry of Defense. He was awarded Hilal-i-Imtiaz (Military) on that occasion."²² The May 2014 visit of Commander of Royal Army to Pakistan signaled even closer defence cooperation with Pakistan PM offering Oman "to train its Army according to professional needs."²³ Furthermore, "in 2015, Pakistan's Director General Joint Staff visited Oman for a meeting with Commander Royal Navy of Oman, and discussed issues of mutual interest including talks on how to further improve the Omani-Pakistan Joint Working Group between the armed forces of both countries."²⁴

Joint military exercises also remained an important characteristic of this relationship. Pakistan and Oman have had series of joint naval exercise titled 'Thamar Al Tayyib' held in Pakistan and Oman after every two years. This series was started in 2004 and year 2014 witnessed the biggest exercise of the series from December 14 to 18, which according to Task Group commander, was "a hallmark as long range maritime patrol aircraft [(LRMA) from the two sides had] also participated in the exercise."²⁵ It was further noted that: "This exercise is a biennial feature meant to enhance inter-operability between the two Naval Forces and improve security in maritime domain."²⁶ In 2014, "the Sultanate announced the recruitment of additional 350 Baloch youth for its state army."²⁷ Only Balochs other than Omanis are working as soldiers in Oman's army.

²² Senator Sehar Kamran, "Pak-Gulf Defense and Security Cooperation", *Center for Pakistan and Gulf Studies*. <http://cpakgulf.org/documents/Pak-Gulf-Security-Ties-final.pdf>. (Accessed May 25, 2016.)

²³ Muhammad Zubair, "Pakistan Offer Oman to Train its Army" *ifun* May 29, 2014. <http://ifun.pk/news/pakistan-oman-military-relation-single-news-872.aspx>. (Accessed January 20, 2017.)

²⁴ Z. Khalid "Pakistan and Oman can help Defuse the Saudi-Iran Standoff", *Insider*, January 18, 2016. <http://insider.pk/featured/pakistan-oman-can-help-defuse-saudi-iran-standoff/>. (Accessed November 22, 2016)

²⁵ "Pakistan Navy Officer Says Drill With RNO Will Boost Ties", *Muscat Daily*, December 23, 2014. <http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Oman/Pakistan-Navy-officer-says-drill-with-RNO-will-boost-ties-3p16>. (Accessed November 22, 2016)

²⁶ "Pakistan, Oman to hold joint naval exercise". (Accessed November 22, 2015.) <https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/pakistan-oman-to-hold-joint-naval-exercise.17904/>

²⁷ Behram Baloch, "Oman army to recruit 350 Baloch youths", *Dawn*, Nov 26, 2014. <http://www.dawn.com/news/1146956>. (Accessed December, 29 2016.)

Cooperation in Economic and Social Sectors: Pakistan and Oman enjoy reasonably good relations in economic and socio-economic spheres, an account of which is given below:

Trade: Since 2000, trade and economic relations between the two countries grew steadily. Trade volume in ten years from 2001-11 witnessed an annual increase of around 40 percent, amounting to US\$ 263 million in 2011, with Pakistan's exports accounting for US\$146.8 million.²⁸ The increase however was not consistent and quantum leaps were witnessed during two financial years, 2008-09 and 2013-14. Total trade volume between the two countries, in 2013-2014, reached \$ 1067.638 million.²⁹ Bilateral trade was boosted by encouraging business community in both the countries to step forward and play an active role in strengthening economic ties. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed by Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) and Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FPCCI) in November 2015. A Business Opportunities Forum was also organized which led to setting up of Oman-Pakistan Joint Business Council (JBC).³⁰

Investment: Visits of President Pervez Musharraf to Oman in 2000 and return visit of Sultan Qaboos Bin Said to Pakistan in 2001 gave a boost to economic relations between both the countries, especially enhancing the investment. During his visit, Sultan announced \$100 million for Pakistan, much of which was directed for Gwadar – for extending of runway at Gwadar Airport, construction of jetties, up-gradation of Gwadar Hospital, provision of 100 engines to fishermen and construction of power house. The government of Oman also financed construction of Gwadar-Hoshab Road, water supply scheme in Gwadar area and construction of irrigation dams.³¹ Pakistan-Oman Joint Investment Company (POIC) was initiated with an initial capital of Rs. 1.5 billion shared equally by both sides, and later launched in July 2001. The capital of the company has now increased to \$ 100 million (more than 10 billion PKR). Oman's investment in Pakistan is not limited to POIC. In 2008,

²⁸ "Charting A New Course", *Business Today*
<http://www.businesstoday.co.om/Issues/REALIGNING-GROWTH/CHARTING-A-NEW-COURSE> (Accessed 25 August, 2016.)

²⁹ Hassan Kamanpoori, "Envoys laud Oman's Renaissance", *Oman Observer*, 20th, July 2015. <http://omanobserver.om/envoys-laud-omans-renaissance/> (Accessed January 3, 2017)

³⁰ Ghadia, "Oman Pakistan sign joint business council agreement", *Customs Today*, November 20, 2015.
<http://www.customstoday.com.pk/oman-pakistan-sign-joint-business-council-agreement/> (Accessed January 3, 2017.)

³¹ "A brief Overview of Deep-sea Gwadar Project"
<https://1scholar.wordpress.com/2010/11/01/a-brief-overveiw-of-deapsea-gwadar-port-project-2/>. (Accessed November 6, 2016.)

state-owned OmanTel purchased Pakistani telecom giant WorldCall for \$193 million which was its biggest foreign investment at the time.”³²

Bilateral investment is not only from Oman in Pakistan but Pakistan's private and public sectors are also investing in Oman. A few Pakistani companies have been successfully operating in Oman, “including the national carrier, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) and National Engineering Services Pakistan (NESPAK) which is involved in major road consultancy projects”³³. Other companies have invested “in the fields of trading, real estate, road construction and manufacturing.”³⁴ However, in the broader context, overall level of bilateral investment remains low as compared with other regional and global players According to 2012, UK, UAE and India were the major investors in Oman's industrial sector.

Labor and Manpower: Pakistani diaspora is contributing the world over, playing an important role in developing the host countries. Currently,

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over 260,000 Pakistanis reside in Oman; although majority of them are unskilled labourers³⁵, they include professionals, doctors and engineers, as well. Remittances sent home by these Pakistanis have grown consistently over the first 16 years of the 21st century, from a meagre \$ 38 million in 2000-2001 to \$685 millions in 2014-15, and are estimated to exceed \$800 million by

the end of fiscal year closing on June 30, 2017. The services of Pakistani work force are also well acknowledged by the country's leadership.

Education: Pakistan and Oman have also attempted to enhance relations in the field of education. During the visit of Sultan Qaboos to Pakistan in April 2001, “a special grant was awarded to establish Sultan Qaboos Chairs in various universities in Pakistan. Accordingly, IT chair in

³² Z Khalid “Pakistan and Oman can help Defuse the Saudi-Iran Standoff”, *Insider*, January 18, 2016. <http://insider.pk/featured/pakistan-oman-can-help-defuse-saudi-iran-standoff/> (Accessed November 14, 2016.)

³³ Charting A New Course, *Business Today*, <http://www.businesstoday.co.om/Issues/REALIGNING-GROWTH/CHARTING-A-NEW-COURSE> (Accessed November 25, 2016.)

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Pakistan-Oman friendship”, *Times of Oman*, November 19, 2016. <http://timesofoman.com/article/96850/Opinion/Columnist/Long-live-Pakistan-Oman-friendship!> (Accessed January 11, 2017.)

Punjab University, an engineering chair in Karachi University and an agriculture chair in Agricultural University in Faisalabad have been set up which are playing an important role in promoting technical cooperation in relevant fields.³⁶ Both the countries have offered reciprocal scholarships. Pakistan under its Technical Assistance Program while the Sultanate of Oman under the Omani Cultural and Scientific Cooperation Program. The volume of these scholarships, nevertheless is small. As to the presence of Pakistan's education sector in Oman, "... there are seven schools under Pakistan School System, including school for children with special needs, where 6000 children from a range of nationalities, in addition to Pakistanis, are enrolled. Schools from Pakistan's private sector, have also established several branches, catering to the educational needs, there."³⁷

Humanitarian Aid: Oman has continuously helped Pakistan in the hour of need, be it any natural calamity or, rehabilitation of internally displaced people (IDPs). In 2015, in the latest such gesture, "Sultan Qaboos gifted six ambulances for the IDPs besides humanitarian assistance of US \$10m."³⁸ Earlier during the 2010 floods, Oman diverted the unspent amount of \$19.1 million, allocated for development works, for the flood relief funds, making it a grant.³⁹ Moreover, "The Oman Charitable Organization (OCO) sent 2,336 metric tons of aid to Pakistan, comprising foodstuffs, water, dates, tents, relief supplies and tools."⁴⁰ While the amounts and/or quantities of aid coming from Oman may not be large enough, it has served as a gesture of goodwill between the two nations.

Cultural and People-to-People Contacts: Events symbolizing the historical bonds between the two sides are organized time to time.⁴¹

³⁶ "Charting A New Course, *Business Today*", <http://www.businesstoday.co.om/Issues/REALIGNING-GROWTH/CHARTING-A-NEW-COURSE> (Accessed 25 August, 2016.)

³⁷ "Pakistan – Oman Relations: Sartaj Aziz further cement ties", *The Times of Islamabad*, September 04, 2016. <https://timesofislamabad.com/pakistan-oman-relations-sartaj-aziz-cement-ties/2016/09/04/> (Accessed November 12, 2106.)

³⁸ "PM for developing Pak-Oman maritime trade", *The Nation*, <http://nation.com.pk/business/03-Mar-2010/PM-for-developing-PakOman-maritime-trade> (Accessed 25 August, 2016)

³⁹ Ibid

⁴⁰ Arab aid to Pakistan in numbers", the inside story on emergencies, August 20, 2010. <http://www.irinnews.org/report/90233/middle-east-arab-aid-pakistan-numbers> (Accessed December 2016.)

⁴¹ In order to increase socio-cultural relations, Pakistani embassy in Muscat off and on conducts events like Kite Festivals and Cricket Tournaments. Recently, in 2016, Pakistanis residing across the Sultanate also held "7 cities – 7 days festival" to mark the National Day Celebrations which was formally launched from Pakistan School Salalah on November 12. Ali Javed, "Long live Pakistan-Oman friendship!", *Times of*

Moreover, in order to increase people to people contacts PIA, Shaheen Air and Air Blue are operating some 25 flights per week between Muscat and Pakistan. As transportation is directly linked to the promotion of trade and people-to-people contacts, the governments of the two countries are in process of starting ferry service from Karachi to Muscat. It is viewed that this service will help increase commercial as well as socio-cultural ties between both countries.

The Issue of Trafficking: In terms of people-to-people contacts, an issue that has the potential to strain the bilateral relations is human and drug trafficking. While international institutions' studies highlight that human trafficking from and through Pakistan has increased in yester years.⁴² From 2009-2014, over 31,000 Pakistanis were deported from Oman, with 6,123 in 2013 alone.⁴³ To address this issue, "A joint exercise between the Royal Navy of Oman (RNO) and the Pakistani Navy (PN) to strengthen ties in combating human trafficking, drug trafficking and illegal fishing in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea" was successfully conducted in January 2011.⁴⁴ Furthermore, as noted in *Gulf News* of September 18, 2013, "There have been tripartite efforts between Oman, Iran and Pakistan to counter human trafficking but infiltrators continue to be a problem for Oman." While some steps have been taken, there is a need to formulate a regular and coordinated mechanism to deal with such irritants.

Defence cooperation
can further be cemented
in the wake of emerging
non-traditional threats,
at land and at sea.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Pakistan's relations with Oman have generally been positive and have grown steadily, since the two countries established diplomatic relations

Oman, November 19, 2016.

<http://timesofoman.com/article/96850/Opinion/Columnist/Long-live-Pakistan-Oman-friendship!> (Accessed January 11, 2017.)

⁴² Ayaz Gul, "UN: Human Trafficking Increasing in Pakistan", *Relief web*, January 23, 2014,

<http://reliefweb.int/report/pakistan/un-human-trafficking-increasing-pakistan> (Accessed January 12, 2017.)

⁴³ Zahid Gishkori, Illegal immigrants: 208 Pakistanis deported every day since 2009, January 8, 2014. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/656301/illegal-immigrants-208-pakistanis-deported-every-day-since-2009/> (Accessed March 28, 2017.)

⁴⁴ "Oman Pakistan join hands to fight human and drug trafficking," *Muscat Daily*, January 15, 2011.

<http://www.muscatdaily.com/Archive/Stories-Files/Oman-Pakistan-join-hands-to-fight-human-and-drug-trafficking> (Accessed August 17, 2016.)

in 1972. The growth and journey towards closer interactions is visible more in the post 2000 period. Affinities in political and diplomatic arenas, closer interactions in the security and military spheres and a sizeable economic/commercial cooperation define this bilateral relation. Yet, as a whole, the ties in none of these areas are compatible with the corresponding potential.

In the political and diplomatic spheres, the two countries can jointly play an important role for fostering unity among the OIC member states in general, and for bringing Saudi Arabia and Iran together, in particular. This needs due consideration.

Defence cooperation can further be cemented in the wake of emerging non-traditional threats, at land and at sea. As Pakistan is coming up as an important defence equipment exporter, possibility of Omani investment in defence sector and joint ventures in defence production need further exploration.

Avenues for enhanced trade, investment and commercial cooperation need to be studied and steps taken, with the involvement and help of private sector – led by chambers of commerce and industries, investors, and other businesses.

Infrastructure building, construction become attractive fields for joint ventures. Opportunities for collaboration emerging in the wake of CPEC – particularly in Balochistan and on the coastal belt where Oman has a special interest – need to be identified and feasible projects need to be expeditiously funded to move ahead promptly. CPEC makes Pakistan an ideal linkage for whole of the Gulf, towards China, and particularly so for Oman, being the closest. Space for absorption of more

Pakistanis into Oman, especially skilled workers, needs to be jointly planned and executed, with simplifications of procedures involved and guaranteed labor welfare schemes. With issue of overlapping claims in the continental shelf amicably resolved, the stage is set for joint off-shore explorations.

Further investments from Oman into Pakistan may be made as vast prospects of investment lie in industry, livestock, energy, agriculture, information technology. Pakistan can benefit from Oman's

Avenues for enhanced trade, investment and commercial cooperation need to be studied and steps taken, with the involvement and help of private sector.

technological advancement in the oil sector. As Pakistan is updating its infrastructure for import of LNG from Gulf States, Oman's investment can be a win-win for both the countries.⁴⁵ To make the relationship between the two countries broad-based, and building upon the centuries old historical, religious and cultural bonds, strengthening of ties in education, tourism, sports, etc. need special attention from the two sides.

Pakistan, with its globally acclaimed professionals and expertise, may explore and negotiate a larger role in Oman's Vision 2040.

Oman is moving ahead to implement its vision 2040. The sectors in focus are tourism, transport & logistics, mining, fisheries, industry & manufacturing. Pakistan should devise a strategy to look for larger role in the prospects that these long-term plans present. Technical training would be an important requirement. Pakistan, with its globally acclaimed professionals and expertise, may explore and negotiate a larger role in Oman's Vision 2040.

Considering Oman's geographic proximity and contiguity as well as historical linkages with Balochistan, a special joint developmental package may be negotiated. Such a package would focus on an integrated costal areas' management and development plan. Such cooperation can entail the development of fisheries sector and welfare of the fishermen, aquaculture, and costal tourism.

The planned and agreed ferry services need be implemented at the earliest as it would link not only Oman but the entire Gulf region to the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Trucks from Oman could be loaded with goods and transported using the ferry service to Pakistan from where these could take the road linkages being built as part of CPEC. Other countries and ports may also be involved in such an arrangement. Oman can also play a role in fostering closer collaboration between Pakistan and GCC as a forum, as GCC members are economically of utmost importance for Pakistan and Oman has a noted influence at the forum.

⁴⁵ KCCI, Country Wrap, October 2014, Karachi Chamber of Commerce and Industry. Accessed. [https://www.kcci.com.pk/Rnd/Country%20Wraps%20\(PDF\)/IW-%20KCCI-%20Oman%20-%20Country%20Wrap%20-%20Programmed.xlsm.pdf](https://www.kcci.com.pk/Rnd/Country%20Wraps%20(PDF)/IW-%20KCCI-%20Oman%20-%20Country%20Wrap%20-%20Programmed.xlsm.pdf) (February 28, 2017.)

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