



Foreign Policy of Pakistan: Major Determinant and Relations with Countries

Amer Liaquat Chattha *

Corresponding Author: Amer Liaquat Chattha (Deputy Director Research, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan. Email: amerliaqatchatha@gmail.com)

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Abstract: *This research paper delves into the foreign policy of Pakistan with a primary focus on major determinants. The study is conducted by analyzing the historical dimensions of Pakistan's foreign policy and highlighting the key factors in its formulation considering the relations with other countries. A comprehensive analysis is established by utilizing the qualitative method of research and scholarly literature available on the subject. There is a number of factors that influence Pakistan's relations with countries: economic vitality, security dynamics, and geo-political landscape; particularly, in the context of its relations with key stakeholders such as India, Afghanistan, China, and the United States. In concluding remarks, the study underscores the inevitability of the geo-economic aspect of the security-oriented foreign policy paradigm of Pakistan. In the contemporary hyper-globalized world mega projects like One Belt One Road (OBOR) have extreme potential to make Pakistan an important competitor in the global arena.*

Key Words: Economic, Foreign Policy, Security

Introduction

Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan and its first Governor General, in a broadcast talk to the people of the USA in February 1948, outlined the following goals of Pakistan's foreign policy: "Our foreign policy is one of friendliness and goodwill towards all the nations of the world." Being a developing country, geography, economy, and politics are the components on the basis of which the foreign policy of Pakistan is formulated. The major aim is to secure peace and prosperity, promotion of goodwill and friendliness avoiding aggression through fair play and honesty. The guiding principles are the policy of non-alignment and no interference;

respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries; world peace promotion; friendly relations with the Muslim world as Ummah on the basis of Islamic ideology; solution of the Kashmir issue; and proper implementation of the charter of United Nations. Time and again Pakistan has tried to build cordial relations with neighbouring Afghanistan, India, Iran, and China and with international powers such as USSR, China, and USA.

Guiding Principles of Pakistan's Foreign Policy

The geographical and geo-political existence identifies Pakistan as a decisive player in global politics and in the balance of power

* Deputy Director Research, Provincial Assembly of the Punjab, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

pertaining to South Asia. It is the only Muslim state in the world possessing nuclear weapons. Whether its role in the war against communist Russia or the post-9/11 war against terror, Pakistan has always been the apple of an eye when it comes to the interests of global superpowers. However, the hostile relations with India, Afghanistan, and Iran invoked the threat-oriented security perception challenging the sovereignty, domestic peace and stability of the country. The question is what are the main characteristics that determine the foreign policy of Pakistan? Given below is the description of factors that are kept in mind while formulating the foreign policy of Pakistan:

- I. The nation theory is the ideology behind the freedom struggle persuaded by Muslims of British India. It enforces the notion that Muslims are religiously, culturally, and ideologically different nations. The creation of a separate state envisioned by Quaid-e-Azam and Allama Iqbal was based on the separate identity of Muslims of North-West India. The constitution of 1973, declared Pakistan as an Islamic Republic having more than 85% of the Muslim population. Thus, while formulating foreign policy the policymakers kept in mind the Islamic nature of the state. Pakistan supported Palestine, Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Indonesia, and Eritrea, against the imperial British after partition (Rizvi, [1993](#)). In 1969, the Organization of Islamic Conference was established to safeguard and protect the interests of Muslims through interfaith dialogue.
- II. Pakistan enjoys a determining position in South Asia from a strategic and economic perspective due to its geographic location (Sethi, [2001](#)). It is

located at the intersection of the ancient Silk Route and the crossroads of West, Central, and South Asia. Pakistan shares an international border with India, Iran, China, and Afghanistan. Attitudes and behaviours of neighbouring countries are kept in consideration by policymakers because the geographic environment has a direct influence on resource allocation, security, and development. Major priorities are to preserve sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and safeguard independence.

- III. The controversial and disputed division of the subcontinent by the British engendered inherited conflicts in Pakistan. The hostile relations with India on the Kashmir issue and insurgency in Balochistan created a permanent threat perception; while, the war against the Soviet Union in 1979, the refugee influx, and the war on terror after 9/11, changed the foreign policy dynamics. This region has always been exploited by foreign invaders. Russia's expansion, USA containment, and China's presence as a neighbouring country made Pakistan a decisive player in the region during the Cold War. Thus, historical factors including security threats from neighbouring countries ascertain the primary foreign policy objectives of Pakistan.
- IV. The social, political, and economic stability governs relations with other countries. In the contemporary economic world order, big markets and booming economies are the centre of focus for international stakeholders and corporates. Foreign policy has implications on the domestic affairs of a state and vice versa. Alignment with global superpowers on the basis of

national interests particularly for developing countries imposes a huge responsibility on the policy makers. The establishment of Pakistan as an economically-crippled state enforced the alignment policy for loans and foreign assistance. Due to security and economic threats perpetuated by India, the country was forced to join SEATO and CENTO. The 1979, Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and WoT, destabilized Pakistan in the form of terrorism and mass migration of refugees. The political instability ceased the foreign investment and accelerated the capital flight. Pakistan is facing a huge investment problem due to political instability, energy crisis, global inflation, and poor law and order situation. International investors are sceptical about investing in Pakistan (Attari, Yasir, Attaria, [2011](#)).

- V. Security is the first priority in Pakistan's foreign policy. Paul Kennedy described Pakistan as one of the pivotal states whose evolution would determine the fate of the region and international stability. The balance of power in South Asia has been changing. The dominance of China, and the emerging alliance between Russia, Pakistan, and China are creating a power shift once hegemonies by the United States in compliance with India (Baqai, [2023](#)). There has also been a paradigm shift in Saudi-Iran relations. The security dynamics for Pakistan are altering at a great pace. The role of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), is creating new corridors of opportunities but security threats for Pakistan as well. The West in compliance with India wanted to sabotage and halt this One Belt, One

Road (OBOR) initiative through proxy warfare in Balochistan, in order to contain the expansionism of China. Moreover, after invoking Article 370, India's aggression and deadlock with Pakistan, are creating new security challenges in the region. It is inevitable for policymakers to forsake the security dimension in overall foreign policy formulation.

Pakistan Relation With Other Countries

Pakistan-US Relations

After independence, Pakistan was seeking security and economic assistance from global powers. In the meantime, the USA became the first country to support the newly independent state. The beginning of the cordial relations set out with the 1950s visit of Pakistani premier Liaquat Ali Khan to President Henry Truman when the USSR repulsed and developed relations with India. In 1956, at the request of Dwight Eisenhower, Pakistan granted permission to build a command and control station in Peshawar for the CIA. The U-2 incident in which a US spy plane flew from PAF Badaber Base was captured by the USSR aggravated the relations between the Soviet Union and Pakistan. The very first visit paid by Ayub Khan to the USA was warmly welcomed; however, resentment erupted in East Pakistan due to the allocation of economic benefits to West Pakistan, they denounced the military assistance of 1954 with the USA. Pakistan was one of the leading members of SEATO and CENTO in 1954, an alliance developed with the US to counter Russia.

In 1965 Operation Gibraltar was launched turned into a full-scale war. The lack of support caused a huge economic loss to Pakistan. The GDP growth plummeted from 9.38% in 1964 to 2.32% in 1966. Zulfiqar Ali

Bhutto with his diplomatic skills managed Richard Nixon's visit in 1972 to China and helped normalization of relations between the two countries. During the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, the USA supported Pakistan behind the curtain and threatened to suspend economic assistance. Bhutto's socialist leanings disturbed the relations. Trade embargo was imposed by Jimmy Carter and relations were stalled between the two countries. In the book, *Eating Grass*, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's statement about nuclear bombs is mentioned. At that time Pakistan was facing an unprecedented nuclear threat (Khan, 2012). Despite opposition from the United States, Bhutto continued the nuclear program and the first test was conducted. Pakistan prepared and brainwashed locals as jihadists were thrown into a foreign-funded war. After the death of Zia-ul-Haq, U.S. relations with Pakistan deteriorated over the issue of nuclear proliferation and economic embargo in the form of the Pressler Amendment imposed by the George H. W. Bush administration. In the wake of 1998 nuclear tests and the Kargil War. However, Clinton criticized the martial law of Musharraf and ordered the restoration of democracy but the nuclear issue stalled the diplomatic relations between the countries.

However, the 9/11 attacks proved to be a threshold in Pakistan's foreign policy once again bringing the USA closer to the War on Terror (WoT). From 2008 onwards after the Musharraf era, China's influence in Pakistan became dominant replacing the USA. The reason behind this estrangement was Pakistan's support to the Taliban in Afghanistan who were becoming more and more powerful. In 2011, a clandestine operation Neptune Spear launched by USA and Osama bin Laden was captured in Abbottabad. Tension between both the countries reached an acme. Moreover, the USA tilted towards India owing to its huge

trade market. Despite facing a death toll of more than 70,000 lives and an economic loss of around 126 billion in the war against terrorism, the USA insisted Pakistan "do more" and blamed it for providing safe heavens to the Taliban. After becoming President in 2018, in his first tweet, Donald Trump said, '\$33 billion of aid was given to Pakistan by the US and in return got only lies and deceit'. He sought help from Pakistan's traditional enemy India to 'help them more with Afghanistan'. The reason behind US resentment was the misconstrued image of Pakistan as only a stakeholder in the Afghanistan conundrum. There is no doubt left that Pakistan had supported the Haqqani network and Pakistan-sponsored Afghan Taliban, but there were other dimensions involved in this war. For example, there was a lack of coordination between the Afghan army and US troops, the reconstruction and reconciliation process was mismanaged and misguided, and politics was another dimension where political leaders had affiliations with one or another terrorist group. However, the US's abrupt withdrawal from Afghanistan and takeover of the Taliban in 2021, testifies the rest of the history.

China-Pakistan Relationship

China has a decisive role in the security and economic growth of Pakistan. Bilateral relations between countries developed in 1950 when Pakistan became the first country to recognize China. As early as September 1950, Pakistan supported China in Taiwan and neutralized the Tibet issue in the United Nations. The export of coal, jute, textiles, cotton, and leather started in 1953. Amin Shahid wrote in his book, that Pakistan has established friendship with China since independence (Shahid, 2004). The boundary agreement of 1963 earned Pakistan the 'most favoured nation treatment'. During the Sino-

India border conflict in 1962, western nations put huge pressure on Pakistan in order to oppose China and support India (Sheikh, 2004). China supported in 1965 war with India, while Pakistan facilitated Henry Kissinger's secret to China in 1971. The major visits include Zhou Enlai's in December 1956, 164, and President Shao Chi's visit in 1966. Pakistani President Ayub visited China in 1965 and Yahya Khan in 1970.

Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was criticized by China who considered it a grave threat to peace and security in the Asia region. Mao Zedong maintained a neutral on Kashmir and desired the right to self-determination. In his book Pakistan's Foreign Policy, S.M Burke mentioned that 'in 1960, during Sino-Indian boundary discussion, India realized that China has negated the recognition of Kashmir accession to India (Burke, 1973). Moreover, in the wake of India's abrogation of Article 370, China firmly supported the stance of Pakistan. It helped attain observer status at SCO (Shanghai Co-operation Organisation). Both China and Pakistan signed CPEC in 2013, this project is a part of China's ambition of going global through the OBOR (One Belt One Road) initiative and the relationship between the two countries has risen to "all-weather strategic cooperation partners."

India-Pakistan Relations

The disputed division of the subcontinent has defined the hostile nature of Pak-India relations. Both countries have geographical, linguistic, and cultural similarities still the violent partition and number of historical events have mired the complexity of their relations. The bone contention is the Kashmir issue which led to the full-scale wars of 1948, and 1965 and some dogfights between the enemies. While separation of East Pakistan was the reason behind the

third war fought in 1971 culminated in the creation of a separate state Bangladesh. In his book, Pakistan's Security and Foreign Policy, Agha Shahi describes the relations and says that ' during the short history of both the countries after independence three wars were fought between India and Pakistan' (Shahi, 1988). The Simla Agreement defined the ceasefire line as the new "Line of Control (LoC)" ratified by the Parliaments of both countries. Since the beginning of the armed insurgency in Kashmir, India accused Pakistan of "cross-border terrorism" and used this narrative to gain international support specifically from Western countries. India's detonation of nuclear bombs at Pokhran in 1998 raised alarms and in return, Pakistan conducted its nuclear tests in Chaghi District of Balochistan. The first major agreement between the countries was signed when PM Vajpayee came to visit Pakistan and undertook the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) to improve bilateral relations.

Kargil incident took place and both countries face to face once again. Escalation of full-scale nuclear war led to the intervention of American President Bill Clinton and the situation was neutralized. The attacks on the Indian parliament in 2001, pushed countries towards a military standoff along the LoC (Line of Control). In the year 2004, the dialogue process started between the countries at the 12th SAARC summit. Different levels of diplomatic and security-oriented meetings were held. The bilateral dialogues were productive enough that in 2004 Manmohan Singh announced scaling down of troops along borders. The terrorist attacks of Nov 26, 2008, in Mumbai confessed by a Salafist-Jihadist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) created a diplomatic deadlock and worsened the relations between India and Pakistan. A week after the visit of PM Modi to Pakistan in 2016, an

Islamist Kashmiri group launched an attack on India Punjab's airbase in Pathankot resulting in a direct military surgical strike in Uri on the suspicion of the presence of terrorists along LoC. The first-ever UN report about human rights violations in Kashmir showed a favourable situation for Pakistan considering the human rights situation along both sides' borders.

The Pulwama incident on Feb 14, 2019, on Indian forces was the deadliest attack in the last few decades. India imposed high tariffs on all imports and vowed to befitting reply. India launched a pre-emptive strike in Balakot with aerial bombing. One of India's planes was shot down and a pilot (Abhinandan) was captured. In a goodwill gesture, the Pakistani Prime Minister released the pilot and put forward his hand to bring India to the negotiation table.

Pakistan-Afghanistan Relationship

Pakistan and Afghanistan not only share a frontier region but also have historical, religious, ethnic, and cultural similarities. Yet the relationship remained hostile for most of the time. At the time of Independence, Afghanistan was the only country to oppose the establishment of Pakistan. The Durand Line and Pashtunistan are the misfortune between the countries. In his book, Abdul Sattar wrote that the Afghan premier said in 1947 that Frontier Province should become part of Afghanistan if an independent Pakhtoonistan could not be established (Sattar, [2007](#)).

Despite the claim of territory, Pakistan has always tried to maintain good relations with the neighbouring countries. General Qamar Javed Bajwa rightly said that "peace in Afghanistan means peace in Pakistan." In order to develop bilateral relations, Pakistan signed a Transit Trade Agreement with Afghanistan in 1965. It was a goodwill gesture from the former to sustain a neutral

stance during the Indo-Pakistan wars. The Soviet-Afghan of 1979 dramatically changed the dynamics and retained Pakistan's position as a key player in the game. In *Imagining Pakistan*, Rasul Bakhsh stated that the establishment of an Islamic polity and liberation from Soviet infidels was the core motivation of Islamist fighters in Pakistan (Rais, [2017](#)). The situation was exploited by the military dictator Zia-ul-Haq, who in scavenging the USA military and economic assistance, provided bases and prepared jihadists on Pakistan's soil to fight against the Soviets. When these freedom fighters turned back they were declared terrorists by the state. The Geneva Accord of 1988, was a turning point where a settlement deal was signed between Pakistan and Afghanistan with the guarantee of the Soviet Union and United States. The agreement was instrumental in developing bilateral relations, non-interference, and withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Unfortunately, after the Soviet withdrawal, civil war started in Afghanistan because of the exclusion of Afghan mujahedeen from this agreement.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and with the beginning of the civil war the country became divided into various groups. The Taliban, supported by Pakistan as well, started their own movement and rose to the helm of affairs in 1996. The relations between the Taliban's regime and Pakistan remained cordial in nature because the former served the latter as a proxy for regional interests. Since 9/11, there has been a drastic change in the relations of both countries. Pakistan paid the price in terms of lives and economy for having a destabilized and war-ridden neighbour. When the West specifically America gave up their interests, the new players assumed a new position in the region. Thus, relations with Afghanistan mean dealing with India, China, Russia, the US, and Iran. Through the Memorandum of

Understanding (MoU) and the Pak-Afghan Transit Trade Agreement in 2010, both countries tried to reconcile the differences. Moreover, in 2018 a joint framework for the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity was prepared. After the US withdrawal and with the resurgence of ISIS, Pakistan became more concerned about its role as a key player in regional stability.

Pakistan and the Muslim World

Before and after the independence of Pakistan, the Muslims of the subcontinent had a profound affiliation with the Islamic world. They have expressed their sentiments at various moments in history. The Khilafat movement of 1924 was launched in the support of Ottoman Empire by the Muslims of the subcontinent. The Islamic ideology shared values, and history are the key motivating factors behind relations with Muslim countries. Having a distinct geographical location at the entrance of the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz at the western coastline retains Pakistan's strategic significance intact for the Gulf countries. The most important ally for Pakistan in the Middle East is Saudi Arabia.

Saud ibn Abdul Aziz toured Pakistan in 1953, the very first visit of a Saudi king to Pakistan. Then Ayub Khan paid a visit to the country and gained unrelenting support for Kashmir from King Faisal. In 1967, both countries signed a bilateral defence agreement to enhance their security capability. During the debacle of 1971, Saudi Arabia refused to recognize Bangladesh as an independent state. The two countries supported each other in OIC on the issue of Palestine. Saudi came to help Pakistan with economic assistance when the USA imposed sanctions on Pakistan during 1998 nuclear tests. However, there were some tensions between the two countries on the issue of Riyadh's intervention in Yemen against

Houthi rebels who were allegedly sponsored by Iran. Pakistan ex-army chief General Raheel Sharif is appointed as C-in-C of the Islamic Military Alliance. In 2019, new Saudi Crown Prince Muhammad Bin Salman visited Islamabad and signed an investment agreement of \$20 billion.

Pakistan's role in the Middle East has also another dimension to the Saudi-Iran relationship. It can be considered as more of a balancing act between the countries. Iran becomes suspicious when Saudi Arabia comes close to Pakistan. The issue of the Taliban and their growing ties with Iran makes Saudi Arabia and the US vulnerable the reason behind opposition against peace talks held in Qatar. Despite having religious leanings, Pakistan has strategic interests in keeping good relations with Saudi Arabia. Pakistan's position in the South Asia region is vulnerable due to India's growing relations with Iran, Afghanistan, and even with Saudi as well. The Crown Prince Zayed-al-Nahyan of Abu Dhabi also visited Pakistan and promised a \$ 3 billion economic assistance to Pakistan. The UAE is the largest trading partner of Pakistan in the entire Middle East. During the 2006 and 2010 floods, the UAE granted \$2.45 billion in aid to Pakistan. There is also a grand presence of expatriate Pakistanis in this region. However, when India revoked Article 370, both UAE and Saudi Arabia decided to stay silent owing to India's booming business market and economy. Strategically, Pakistan's significance is inevitable owing to CPEC, the role of a powerbroker in Afghanistan, and defence assistance in terms of military support if Iran mounts a policy of aggression against the Middle East.

Conclusion

In 2021, Pakistan drafted its first National Security Policy, the geo-strategic pivot shifted to geo-economic is a welcoming step

to formulate an economy-oriented foreign policy. In the contemporary world order, the global position of a country is determined more by economy than security or balance of power. Pakistan being a geographically significant country neighbors the second largest economy of the world China and the emerging economy India. On the other side, beyond Afghanistan resides the energy-rich Central Asia including the oil and gas-rich Middle East. Moreover, Pakistan stands at the crossroads of the largest trade route in

the world at Arabian Sea to the South. Being part of One Belt One Road, the CPEC has the potential to make Pakistan one of the economic hubs in the South Asian region. However, as Aziz Ahmed mentioned in his article leveraging geography for economic benefits is a useful idea but it would be better to make a 'change' instead of a 'shift' while monitoring the geostrategic depth of Pakistan as a major component of national security (Chaudhry, [2021](#)).

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