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## Title: Appraisal of the Dynamics of Pakistan's Foreign Policy and Its Contemporary Relations with Neighboring Countries

### Abstract

This paper will look at the dynamics of the foreign policy of Pakistan and its modern relationship with its neighbors including India, Afghanistan, China and Iran. The foreign policy of Pakistan is characterized by the sophisticated relations between securities, diplomatic, and economic, in which the control of conflicts, overcoming cross-border security issues, maintaining strategic alliances, and the development of effective cooperation are the main priorities. In the last ten years, the city of Islamabad has been trying to seek multilateral involvement, economic integration, and trust-building processes to promote long-run stability and regional prosperity. The study demonstrates the influence of geopolitical and domestic security concerns on the Pakistan external activities and the necessity of striking a balance between the security issues and economic diplomacy. This is a critical analysis of the foreign policy of Pakistan in the changing position of South and Central Asia, its strategic priorities, and policy changes.

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Regional Security, Multilateral Diplomacy, Economic Cooperation, South Asia

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# Appraisal of the Dynamics of Pakistan's Foreign Policy and Its Contemporary Relations with Neighboring Countries



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## Abstract

This paper will look at the dynamics of the foreign policy of Pakistan and its modern relationship with its neighbors including India, Afghanistan, China and Iran. The foreign policy of Pakistan is characterized by the sophisticated relations between securities, diplomatic, and economic, in which the control of conflicts, overcoming cross-border security issues, maintaining strategic alliances, and the development of effective cooperation are the main priorities. In the last ten years, the city of Islamabad has been trying to seek multilateral involvement, economic integration, and trust-building processes to promote long-run stability and regional prosperity. The study demonstrates the influence of geopolitical and domestic security concerns on the Pakistan external activities and the necessity of striking a balance between the security issues and economic diplomacy. This is a critical analysis of the foreign policy of Pakistan in the changing position of South and Central Asia, its strategic priorities, and policy changes.

**Keywords:** *Foreign Policy, Regional Security, Multilateral Diplomacy, Economic Cooperation, South Asia*

## Introduction

The foreign policy of Pakistan has been a complicated and unstable system, influenced by the geographical position, the past, the necessity to secure itself, the political set-ups at home, and economic hopes. Pakistan is at the intersection of South Asia, Central Asia, Middle East and China, it is a geostrategically important country and as a result, it has had a significant impact on the external relationships since the independence of 1947. Bordered by India, Afghanistan, Iran, and China, the diplomatic relations of Pakistan with its neighbors have been predetermined by a consistent attempt to balance the issues of the national security with the objective of achieving economic cooperation and regional stability. The heritage of partition, the outstanding territorial issues especially with India on Jammu and Kashmir as well as frequent security threats along its border with Western countries have ensured that security is central in the foreign policy orientation of Pakistan. Simultaneously, the transformative processes in the region and globally have forced Islamabad to prioritize more geo-economic concerns, connectivity of the region and diplomatic involvement with the outside world as vital aspects of its foreign policy agenda. The relations between Pakistan and India have been a major factor in its foreign policy calculus due to historical animosity, wars, nuclearization and perpetual political antagonism that have restricted the extent of regional cooperation in South Asia. In the meantime, the interaction with Afghanistan has been



described as a complex combination of similarities in culture, border control, refugee, and security issues associated with militancy and cross-border unrest. The western frontier has therefore been a thorn in the flesh in terms of strategic ambiguity and Pakistan has had to walk a fine line between involvement, containment and pragmatism through diplomacy. Contrary to this, the Pakistan-China relations have developed to be the foundation of the foreign policy with Pakistan and China centering it on strategic trust, economic cooperation and mutual geopolitical interests. This partnership was further supported by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) which is a Belt and road project highlighting the development agendas of Pakistan to regional connectivity and wider infrastructure development. The relations with Iran, which are relatively less discussed on the international level, are strategic considering the fact of common borders, energy collaboration prospects, and regional security factors, especially considering the Middle Eastern geopolitical situation and sectarian sensitivities. Other than bilateral relations, changing international system, such as great-power competition, changing regional alliances, and increasing significance of multilateral diplomacy have also affected the foreign policy of Pakistan. Over the past few years, Pakistan has been expressing a need to move towards a more balance-based foreign policy as opposed to a more security-focused one, incorporating economic diplomacy, trade diversification, and regional collaboration. This change is an indicator of the realization that sustainable national security is intertwined with economic stability, peace in the region, and positive interaction with the states in the region. But this has not been without challenges. Endemic political instability within the country, economic risks, governance challenges, and outside forces have usually curtailed the potential of Pakistan to achieve its foreign policy ambitions in totality. In addition, lack of trust with neighbouring nations, unresolved conflicts, and conflicting strategic interests also remain a challenge to the efforts of diplomacy. Irrespective of these limitations, the need to develop peaceful coexistence, dialogue, and regional connectivity has remained a valid topic of official foreign policy discourse by Pakistan. The country is found to be a member of regional entities like South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which shows that the country wants to be involved in the constructive manner towards the stability of the region and economic integration. With the uncertainty of the geopolitical setting, as well as realignment of power and non-traditional security threats that characterize the modern geopolitical environment, the foreign policy of Pakistan towards its neighbors is constantly being recalibrated. The border security, counterterrorism, water security, trade imbalance, and infrastructure connectivity have become even more relevant in terms of bilateral and regional relations. The dynamics of the foreign policy of Pakistan as applied to its neighbors is thus critical in evaluating the potential of the foreign policy in terms of regional politics and prospects of stability and development in the long term. This paper attempts to explore the dynamic character of the foreign policy of Pakistan based on its current foreign relations with India, Afghanistan, Iran and China identifying the main threats, opportunities and strategic decisions that characterize its foreign interaction. Placing the Pakistani foreign policy in its historical framework and also taking into consideration the current changes in the region and worldwide, the study will offer a subtle evaluation of how Pakistan maneuvers around the complicated area it lives in and how it modifies its foreign policy to the emerging trends. This type of analysis is especially applicable to the discussion of whether the current tendency of Pakistan to shift to geo-economics and regional cooperation can exist in harmony with the elements of security concerns, and how this balance will influence its further relationships with the neighbor states.

## Literature Review & Theoretical Context

Scholars have traditionally defined Pakistan foreign policy as an ever-changing and uncertain mix of realist security needs and geo-economic desires, driven by the national geographical position, national experience, and national political facts (Siddiqa, 2011; Haqqani, 2013). Regarding the realist approach, the key issues that have been guiding the external relations in Pakistan include territorial integrity and sovereignty as well as the national security, especially concerning the eastern and western boundaries (Khan, 2015). The prolonged competition with India, the unsolved conflict situations like Jammu and Kashmir, and the frequent crises have instilled in the diplomacy of Pakistan a powerful security outlook that forces policymakers to focus on the deterrence, alliance-building, and military readiness (Paul, 2014). The projects like regional energy corridors, transit trade agreements, and major connectivity projects are some examples of the efforts by Pakistan to reinvent itself as the gateway combining South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East and thus use its geography to its economic advantage (Khan and Zafar, 2021). As scholars claim, such a geo-economic orientation can be most noticeable when Pakistan focuses on connectivity-based partnerships but they are not only bilateral arrangements but the tool of regional integration and interdependence (Nazir, 2020). In addition to economic ambitions, the foreign policy of Pakistan is also aimed at ensuring that tension between states can be reduced by diplomacy, which shows that the country understands that the further continuance of the conflict negatively affects both the security and the developmental purposes (Rizvi, 2018). The diplomatic interaction, trust-building activities, and involvement in the multilateral platforms are frequently brought forth as remedies to counter the conflicts, as well as diminish the chances of the conflict escalation, especially in the volatile strategic environment South Asia (Bajoria, 2016). Nevertheless, researchers observe that although Pakistan often expresses readiness to dialogue, particularly with the neighbors, the effectiveness of the diplomatic activities is often hampered by intermittent crises, political transitions in the country, and foreign demands, which constrain the viability of peace operations (Javaid, 2016). This conflict between what the country wants and what it needs demonstrates the framework within which the foreign policy of Pakistan functions and its desires to achieve stability are intertwined with its insecurity (JPIS, 2022). The other important aspect of the foreign policy identified in the literature is that Pakistan has tried to maintain strategic relations without any open affiliation to one global camp since it prefers multi-vector diplomacy in the increasingly multipolar world (Shah, 2021). Instead of establishing a firm alignment with a particular dominant power, Pakistan has tried to establish a diversified relationship, which is flexible in strategy and diplomatic in manoeuvre, a policy that scholars term as hedge against uncertainty in the international system (Tellis, 2019). This practice is based on the lessons learned during the historical alliances that, although they helped in some times, they also put Pakistan into a disadvantaged position and put it under external reliance (Haqqani, 2013). As a result, the present-day foreign policy discourse focuses on self-sufficiency, equal involvement, and utilitarian collaboration depending on national interest, instead of ideology (Rizvi, 2020). On regional level, this can be interpreted into the fact that Pakistan declared the desire to have a friendly relationship with all its neighbors, although some asymmetries of power, unsettled conflicts, and conflicting strategic interests make this goal more difficult (Khan, 2020). Researchers also note that internal influences e.g. civil-military relationship, financial vulnerability, and public opinion feature heavily in determining foreign policy options in Pakistan, and tend to support a conservative and security-based mindset, even in the presence of a geo-economic opportunity (Siddiqa, 2011; Javaid and Mushtaq, 2017). Consequently, the foreign policy of Pakistan turns out to be not entirely realist or entirely liberal but as a variant of a hybrid approach, trying to find a balance between the needs in security and economic modernization and regional integration (JPIS, 2022). In this regard, the literature widely agrees on the position according to which Pakistan needs a balanced framework of foreign relations, which would focus on the economic interaction, conflict management, and diversified relations, but is limited to the historical backgrounds, regional competition, and

challenges of domestic governance (Rana, 2019; Rizvi, 2018). This dynamic interaction between realism and geo-economics is also crucial to the understanding of the continuities and transformations in the external relations of Pakistan and in the evaluation of the future of a more cooperative and development-oriented foreign policy (Nazir, 2020).

## Methodology

The article is qualitative with the content analysis method, which summarized the news of that period, the statements of governments, and the works of experts. The most important are AP and Reuters news on diplomatic and war events, official foreign ministry statements, and the scholarly commentary on the situation in the region. The analysis focuses on the developments in the last 12 months to show real time trend.

## Analysis of Pakistan's Foreign Policy Dynamics:

### Pakistan-India Relations

The twelve months of the past were marked by one of the most intricate, war-related, and multi-layered relations ever witnessed in South Asia, as the historical issue of territorial, security, and resource conflict remain to be the dark cloud in the relations between Pakistan and India. The most recent tensions have been surrounding the issue of the water resources, which is a crucial component of the Indus river system on which the two countries rely on as a source of agriculture, power, and economic stability. In late 2025, Pakistan Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar publicly alleged that India was weaponizing water by discharging water behind Indian dams into the Chenab River without any prior notice and that such unannounced water discharges were in violation of the World Bank-negotiated Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) of 1960, and would threaten the agricultural cycle of Pakistan as well as its regional peace and stability (Dar, as cited in Associated Press, 2025). The fears of Islamabad are characterized by the witnessed sudden and unpredictable shifts in the river flow which Pakistan saw as intentional manipulations that would potentially cause floods and destabilize the livelihoods during a critical period of the farming season, which posed a high-risk threat to food and economical stability (Associated Press, 2025; Pakistan raises alarm over alleged weaponization of water by India, 2025). In Pakistan, the releases made by the Indian dams on the Ravi, Sutlej and Chenab rivers were also repeated by Pakistani federal ministers, with the Federal Minister of Planning and Development terming the releases as the worst form of water aggression and characterising the inability of the New Delhi government to share timely information as a treaty obligation and an erosion of trust between the two governments (Ahsan Iqbal slams India for weaponising water, 2025). These changes have occurred within a wider framework, in which the unilateral suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty, which has been a historic negotiating moment between the two countries since 1960, by India has further aggravated bilateral relations; Islamabad and its officials threatened that any attempt to cut, or divert, waters under the treaty would be perceived as an act of war, and this highlights how the politics of the resource have become deeply intertwined with national security discourse (India threat to halt water...act of war, 2025).

Such changes are indicators of the fact that the water resource management which was traditionally governed through the framework of an organized treaty has turned into a focal point of overall geopolitical conflict between Islamabad and New Delhi. The IWT was to offer a system of sharing six rivers of the Indus basin on a legal basis and also to have mechanisms of exchange and collective supervision, but has been shown weakness in the times of increased bilateral tension as it was unilaterally suspended by India and allegedly unilateral dam operations (India suspends water-sharing pact with Pakistan amid Kashmir tensions, 2025). Pakistani authorities claim that the lack of radar of advanced notification of water discharges, and the lack of sharing hydrological

information by New Delhi is a violation of essential requirements of collaboration under the treaty, and thus a hollow needed to undermine a dangerous institutional buffer that has historically ensured that water disputes do not develop into more dangerous conflicts (Associated Press, 2025; Ahsan Iqbal slams India for weaponising water, 2025).

The weaponization of water accusations, which at expensive would be considered a perspective of cooperation in terms of resource management, address how far resource security has been securitized in the political rhetoric of both countries. Meanwhile, observers believe that such environmental processes as monsoon flooding and infrastructure bottlenecks influence the flow of rivers regardless of political intent, implying that shedding light on the argument that the situation is solely due to a deliberate state action is highly deceptive and ignores the complicated interplay of climatological processes and infrastructural constraints and rhetoric (Al Jazeera, 2025). However, to policymakers in Pakistan, the view of Indian activities as aggressive or disruptive has great bearing on bilateral politics that water matters have been brought to the fore of not only technical deliberations but national security priorities. Pakistan foreign policy towards India during this time is marked by a challenge in seeking to balance the mechanisms of dispute resolution, diplomatic engagements with the need to safeguard the national interests even as demands to co-exist peacefully are mixed with strong rhetoric language postulations and national appeals to the international community.

### **Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations**

Over the last one year, the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan have been a story of oscillating security confrontation and scarce diplomatic interaction, which depict the nature of the multifaceted relationship that Islamabad has with its western neighbour. The repeated transgressions of borders and military interactions between the Pakistani forces and the Afghan Taliban components, which were frequently associated with the current counter-terrorist operations of Islamabad against militants, including the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has been one of the most salient aspects of this bilateral relationship in the entire 2025. These confrontations have taken place in various points of the Durand line, with each party accusing the other of being the catalysts to hostilities, whether it be through exchanges of fire and border tensions which have occasionally resulted in high casualties and increased mistrust on either end (Wikipedia, 2025). Since the time when militant groups are staged on the territory of Afghanistan, Pakistan has insisted that they are the cause of a chain of infiltration attempts and attacks on Pakistani security forces, which further provoke the subsequent act of retaliation at the hands of Islamabad and aggravate the chances of long-term peace (Pakistan Today, 2025; Wikipedia, 2025). Indicatively, in late October, the Islamabad officials demonstrated publicly that the backing or tolerance of such groups by the Afghan Taliban was an essential impediment to better bilateral relations, highlighting how cross-border violence has deteriorated trust on many occasions (Pakistan Today, 2025). Although negotiations have been in progress through the mediation of international organizations, including series of dialogue conducted through the efforts of Qatar and Turkey aiming to consolidate ceasefires and militant threats, there has been a consistent stalemate in the way talks have unfolded due to profound suspicions and extremely divergent standpoints on fundamental matters such as the existence and operations of TTP on the Afghan territory (Pakistan Today, 2025).

Contrary to the security confrontation, one of the significant diplomatic events that occurred around mid-2025 was a diplomatic announcement of Pakistan, who decided to increase its diplomatic mission in Kabul to an ambassador, the first since the Taliban came back to power in 2021. According to the words of Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, this action was meant to continue facilitating greater engagement and further develop bilateral cooperation in a variety of fields such as trade engagement, security cooperation, and counter-terrorism discussion (AP News, 2025; Al

Jazeera, 2025). The Taliban authorities of Afghanistan returned the favor by stating that they would also elevate their diplomatic presence in Islamabad to that of an ambassador, which was reciprocated by Kabul who stated that this would open the door to further collaboration in various areas (Arab News PK, 2025; Afghanistan International, 2025). This official improvement of the diplomatic routes was a positive move to include both parties in reducing bilateral tension despite the fact that it was not the formal recognition of the Taliban government by Pakistan or other countries, which is still an unresolved and delicate policy issue to Islamabad. The strengthening of the relations marked the effort to institutionalize dialogue processes, which were usually very narrow or ad hoc, and it meant that, at the minimum, official representation-wise, both the governments were ready to collaborate with each other regardless of the existing security-related disagreements (AP News, 2025; Al Jazeera, 2025).

Besides the direct bilateral implications, the Pakistan-Afghanistan relations are also influenced by the wider regional factors and external diplomatic influential factors. Qatar mediation along with Turkey and other regional players underscores the fact that instability in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border does not only affect the immediate neighbours but also has the potential to affect the geopolitical balance in other parts of South Asia and Central Asia. These mediation efforts, though noteworthy, have been both partial successful in part due to the fact that they are frequently derailed by the mistrust and conflicting meanings of security threats that are deep-rooted. To take one case, though ceasefire arrangements were meant to dampen initial enmity and provide confidence, this has yet to develop into lasting systems of preventing militant action or even creation of credible verification systems that the two sides can support. This is a structural difficulty in the consideration of integrating sustainable security collaboration with a diplomatic relationship that has been characterized over time by a number of episodes of conflict and intermittence.

In general, the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan of the last year can be described as a duality of interaction and opposition: on the one hand, intense security tensions due to cross-border militancy and cross-claiming, on the other, the attempts to normalise relations and institutionalise the relations between the states. Although the change to ambassador-level relations implies an interest in the institutionalisation of dialogue, the accumulated mistrust in the form of security incidents, conflicting threat perceptions, and unmet expectations of counter-terrorism cooperation remain the limiting factor of the bilateral cooperation. Currently, the role of the Pakistan-Afghanistan relations is quite unstable, as diplomatic openings are subject to subversion under any security failures, and structural challenges are likely to dominate the future interaction unless both parties can devise mechanisms of addressing their fundamental political and security issues in mutual acceptable way.

## Pakistan-China Relations

In the last year, Pakistan-China relations have been among the most stable and strategically important relationships in South and Central Asia, which are marked by stronger integration of the economies and continuous high-level diplomatic activity as well as by the increased ambitions related to regional connectivity. The cornerstone of this association is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a whopper initiative of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China that continues to support the bilateral economical priorities and seems to undergo more development. In 2025, Islamabad and Beijing have once again reinstated their dedication to an All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership and leaders and foreign ministers have stressed that both countries would support one another on the objectives of sovereignty of nations and development as well as stability in the region (Pakistan Today, 2025; Pakistan Today, 2025). The Foreign Office of Pakistan declared that at the 6 th Pakistan-China Foreign Ministers Strategic Dialogue, to be held in Islamabad in

August 2025, the foreign ministers of both states have noted the whole range of bilateral relationships and decided to increase the alignment of trade, CPEC Phase-II, multilateral activities, people-to-people interactions, and regional concerns (Pakistan Today, 2025). Instead of just talk, there were mutual visits by the senior officials like the Foreign Minister of China Wang Yi to Islamabad where he reiterated that China would not abandon Pakistan in its economic growth and reiterated the importance of CPEC as the foundation of their relationship (Pakistan Today, 2025).

Pakistan and China have won the economic battle to enhance bilateral trade connections and structural imbalances by revising trade structures. In February 2025, both parties came to an agreement to have Phase-II trade liberalisation negotiation under China-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement to lessen trade obstacles and discuss mutually beneficial results in areas of information communication technology and industrial goods (Reuters, 2025). The nature of these negotiations shows that there is a common interest to change the economic aspect of the relationship beyond infrastructure investment to a more diversified and resilient trade relationship in accordance with the larger goal of economic reforms in Pakistan and connectivity and market access in China. CPEC has also been developing other than trade. In partnership with Afghanistan, under a trilateral regime, Pakistan and China signed an agreement in May 2025 to expand CPEC to Afghan soil, increasing connectivity in the region and indicating an interest that Beijing currently has in the process of networking Afghanistan. It was an informal meeting in Beijing during which the ministers reiterated their willingness to strengthen cooperation on trade, infrastructure and development, which testifies to the Chinese desire to expand the economic corridors into areas that are not necessarily within the traditional bilateral boundaries (Hindustan Times, 2025; Pakistan Today, 2025). This also brings out the role of China as the intermediary since it facilitates multilateral interaction and strives to convert bilateral ties into more regional connections that may lead to peace and prosperity in otherwise turbulent neighbourhood.

The Chinese provision of diplomatic coordination of major challenges in the foreign policy has spread to political support of Pakistan. In their official press releases and governmental announcements, these two countries focused on the significance of regular exchanges on the leadership level, the immersion of leaders in the multilateral forums, and more intense strategic dialogues that could cement the alliance (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People Republic of China, 2025). Beijing reaffirmed that Pakistan was a priority partner and that Islamabad had been supportive of the core interests of China such as One-China policy and matters of territorial integrity. Islamabad in its turn publicly acknowledged the role of China in supporting its economic progress and reiterated clear support of the policies of the Beijing diplomatic missions (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2025). These long-term political undertakings highlight the manner in which strategic trust has been institutionalised by routinely engaging in dialogue discussions, bilateral relations and collective utterances that have continually demonstrated an image of an ironclad friendship. This framing does not only solidify bilateral relations but also makes Pakistan and China look at each other as interlocutors in the international space, including the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The influence of China has not only been limited to bilateral issues but has spread to propose a moderating and mediating role as far as the regional issues are concerned, including Afghanistan. Beijing has also hosted and promoted tri-lateral talks between China, Pakistan and Afghanistan with an emphasis on economic partnership, security partnership and increased integration of infrastructure projects in the region. Such conferences encourage increased collaboration within the BRI system as well as responding to common dangers such as terrorism and instability (Pakistan Today, 2025). This development of a network of interdependencies by encouraging economic growth and enabling communication between states in the region means that China seeks to eliminate the vacuum of instability, which would destabilize long-term investments. This is also a way of making Beijing not only a bilateral partner but a regional convenor with the capacity of

promoting collective action on both security and economic fronts, which in the case of Islamabad as a state with its own geopolitical constraints can be seen to gain in achievement of its foreign policy ambitions.

## Pakistan-Iran Relations

The Pakistani and Iranian bilateral relationship is functional, but tends to be suspicious due to their historical relations, proximity and the mutual insecurity issue along the long porous border. Over the last one year, the border management has been a priority area and both nations have strengthened collaborative measures to check the ability of the cross-border movement, trade as well as security threat. The Pakistan Iran border, covering a distance of more than 900 kilometers has been a center of cooperation and conflict, especially because of the presence of insurgent groups and drug trafficking rings. Also, in 2025, Islamabad and Tehran have continued to use bilateral security coordination, which consists of frequent border patrols, intelligence exchange, and joint task forces to limit unlawful activities and militant infiltration (Wikipedia, 2025). These have encompassed coordinated patrol of strategic points of entry and more use of technology and surveillance in the attempt to curb cross-border crimes. These efforts indicate a mutual understanding of the security threats of insurgent groups and illegal trade and the practical aspects of the bilateral relationship. Although there are instances where the tension escalates because of border incidences or claims of militant tolerance, both parties have continued diplomatic talks to keep security issues at bay before they build to larger levels of confrontation (Al Jazeera, 2025).

Economically, both Pakistan and Iran have been working towards seeking a way of bilateral trade and energy cooperation yet developments are slow and effective as time goes by and are influenced by external factors like sanctions on Iran by the international community and ineffective economic conditions of Pakistan. In 2025, both governments renewed their dedication to widen commerce through border markets and even the feasible creation of common infrastructure initiatives, specifically those directed at enhance transport connectivity as well as customs effectiveness (Reuters, 2025). As an example, the officials talked about strengthening the cross-border rail and roads infrastructure to enable easier flow of goods, which can be seen as an appreciation of the fact that economic interdependence would act as a stabilizing force in the bilateral relationship. Energy cooperation has been one of the primary landmarks, and there have been talks on whether gas imports by Iran to Pakistan can be used to overcome the energy shortages in the country. Although financial and logistical obstacles remain, these debates highlight a real-world aspect of the relationship, in which both powers are interested in functional relations in those areas of shared interest, despite the uncertainties of the geopolitical level (Wikipedia, 2025).

Pakistan and Iran have historically and religiously connected cultures and societies that have made dialogue and cooperation easier especially between the communities that trade and those communities that have family ties near the border. These grassroots interactions form a complementary function of interaction that supplements formal channels of diplomacy. As an illustration, interprovincial markets in areas like Balochistan act as channels of economic exchange, as well as cultural exchange, and this explains the interrelationship between social, economic, and political aspects when it comes to influencing bilateral relations (Reuters, 2025). Furthermore, people-to-people engagement between the two countries has also been a priority as hinged on the educational exchange programs, cultural delegations and disaster responses that are confidence-building mechanisms and helps reduce the possible tension between them in case of political or security events.

The bilateral relation of Pakistan and Iran is based on relations with the third parties such as the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan in the context of the regional geopolitics. Islamabad tends to find favors or assistance of Tehran in maneuvering security challenges at Afghanistan

especially in dealing with cross-border insurgency groups and factions. In its turn, Tehran makes use of its relations with Pakistan to strengthen its position in the region and influence the situation in Afghanistan. This relation highlights a more practical convergence of interests as both nations understand that it is in their best interest to coordinate their interests on border security and regional stability despite the fact that overall strategic convergence is constrained (Wikipedia, 2025).

## **Key Themes in Pakistan's Foreign Policy:**

### **Seek Peace and Regional Security and Stability**

In the last 12 months the foreign policy of Pakistan has made it clear that the search of peace and regional stability is one of the key goals of the state and the official leadership has repeated the statements of their intention to engage in diplomatic contacts and then to cooperate with the other countries and to find the peaceful solution of the problem. The most obvious direction of this policy has been the active involvement of the Pakistan in the Shanghai Cooperation organization (SCO) a multilateral forum which is considered by the Islamabad government as one of the most important means of promoting peace in the region, economic cooperation and conflict de-escalation. In a statement delivered by the Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Ishaq Dar, at the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Tianjin in July 2025, Pakistan again made it clear that it aims at a relationship of peace and stability with all of its neighbors and that conflict and disagreements are to be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy, rather than the use of force or coercion, whilst acknowledging that Pakistan would remain committed to a ceasefire and a stable regional balance despite the current situation in South Asia (The Week; Pakistan Today, 2025). Pakistan, again on the same platform, reaffirmed its commitment to the underlying tenets of non-aggression, non-intervention and respect of international law, and emphasized that the dispute between it and India concerning Kashmir had to be effectively resolved with peaceful coexistence with adherence to international norms (Pakistan Today, 2025).

The interest of Pakistan in SCO in 2025 is also an indication of the wider foreign policy agenda than mere rhetoric support of peace. Islamabad took over the chairmanship of the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in 2025<sup>26</sup> term- a symbolic position that reflects a trustworthiness of the member countries on the ability of Pakistan to contribute significantly to the counter-transnational threats and enhancing security cooperation in the region (Dawn News; Pakistan Television, 2025). Pakistan has committed, as chair, to work further to strengthen cooperation in the spirit of Shanghai, a philosophy of mutual trust, equality and shared responsibility, which is aimed at enhancing collective security and counterterrorism practices in the region. Such a leadership role is important because terrorism and extremism continue to be dominant issues undermining peace and stability in South and Central Asia and having Pakistan lead RATS implies that the country has a proactive policy orientation towards the curbing of such threats in cooperation with neighbors (Pakistan Television, 2025). The focus on cooperation on terror in the framework of the SCO shows that Islamabad has a strategic grasp of the fact that regional peace is linked with counterterrorist cooperation, which in turn bolsters the Pakistani diplomatic standing and also uncovers the need to address common security-related issues among the neighboring states.

Along with structural and institutional involvement, the search of regional stability in Pakistan has been replicated in the high level political speech and summit diplomacy. During the 25 th SCO Council of Heads of State Summit in Tianjin, prime minister Shehbaz Sharif made a statement that Pakistan strongly believed in multilateralism and its reliance on dialogue and diplomacy as the principal tools of resolving any conflict, and that Pakistan wanted normal and stable relations with all its neighbours without compromising the goals of the SCO as a body that promoted peace,

progress, and prosperity in the region (Pakistan Today, 2025; Centreline, 2025). Redefining Islamabad as a country that adheres to the Shanghai Spirit and the universally accepted principles of sovereignty, mutual respect and peaceful settlement of disputes, the speech by Sharif shows that the country has made a long-standing commitment to influence the agenda of the region in a way that does not focus on confrontation and unilateralism, but instead cooperation and structural stability (Centreline, 2025). This statement conveys with the overall diplomatic stance of Pakistan which is that of trying to find inclusive frameworks like the SCO that is not based on bilateral adversarial state relations but one which entails the incorporation of the foreign policy of Pakistan within an institutional context where dialogue and collaborative action are institutionalized expectations and norms of member states.

In the domestic front, the leadership of Pakistan has also connected the goals of regional peace with the internal security agendas and counterterrorism priorities by stating that we can not have sustainable peace with our neighbours, unless we deal with terrorism and extremism both within our borders and outside. In a speech to the parliament in September 2025, Prime Minister Sharif associated the threat of extremism to regional instability and renewed his interest in a stable relationship with the neighbours, but terrorism is a major challenge to peaceful coexistence in the region (Dunya News, 2025). Such a framing strengthens the understanding that the foreign policy and domestic security approach of Pakistan is inherently linked, and that the enduring peace and security can only be achieved through consistent policies that take into consideration conflicting dynamics of foreign policy, as well as the domestic security issues.

In spite of these aggressive policy declarations and regional efforts, the situation of Pakistan to seek peace is still tricky and problematic. The recent water treaty row with India and other major geopolitical differences represent evidence that old animosity is still pushing the boundaries of diplomacy and peaceful resolution, despite Pakistan restating its peaceful intentions through regional, multilateral organizations such as the SCO (AP News, 2025). However, the constant dialogue request that has been made by Islamabad, even in the framework of SCO is a reminder of the persistence towards peace by Pakistan and this implies that the foreign policy of the country is geared towards institutionalized co-operation, strategic dialogue and multilateralism as the pillars of regional peace.

## Security versus Economic Diplomacy

The foreign policy of Pakistan has been over the last twelve months inclined towards a subtle security economic nexus, wherein the state seeks security deterrence and counterterrorism goals alongside the geo economic strategies of enhancing the economic relationships and expanding regional trade, and this is through efforts as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and bilateral trade agreements. This balancing has been further intensified as Islamabad negotiates through a complicated regional environment that has been characterized by unremitting tensions with India and Afghanistan, economic vulnerability and the prospects of strategic economic connections with the strong neighbours and international partners. Security wise, the old grievances between Pakistan and India continue to be the subject of the country foreign policy strategy but the focus within the last 12 months has been on stabilisation and deterrence instead of escalatory posturing the concern of which can be seen in the manner Islamabad has been responding to the various tensions like over the Indus Waters Treaty and cross border incidents. As an example, Pakistan has publicly blamed India and accused it of weaponizing water by discharging water into the Chenab River irregularly without any prior notice, which, according to Islamabad, undermines food security and economic stability and may eventually fuel conflict dynamics in the event that nothing is done about it (AP News, 2025). It is indicative of a Pakistani effort to frame security issues in such a way that not only emphasizes the traditional aspects of

deterrence but also connects it with socio economic effects globally- thus addressing the international norms and institutions, and keeping a hard line security stance.

At the same time, Pakistan has engaged in geo economic diplomacy in order to counter the impacts of the chronic security threats and economic headwinds. One of the main pillars of this strategy is the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative of China that is expected to improve the connectivity of the region by establishing significant infrastructure, energy, and trade resources. In the last one year, the major diplomatic meetings on the high level indicated that CPEC has become a central focus of the foreign policy, and economic strategy of Pakistan. In August 2025, the ministers of China and Pakistan signed an agreement to initiate new projects within the framework of the corridor and confirmed their mutual willingness to develop economic relations in spite of the security issues, including solutions to the safety of Chinese people and infrastructure in regard to the terroristic threats (AP News, 2025). These commitments are a reflection of the strategic thrust by Pakistan to pursue the security policy objectives with the propulsion of the economic incentives, having realised that sustained economic investment by China will only occur in the absence of diplomatic goodwill but also the actual security improvement of the foreign interests.

Security and economic diplomacy is also reflected through the efforts of Islamabad in enhancing and diversifying its trade ties with other countries other than the traditional partners. Pakistan has been proactive in exploring new economic opportunities with the gulf states and other neighbours, especially in terms of trade and investment relations in order to enhance the economical strength. As an illustration, the government officials have emphasized increasing economic cooperation with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) where trade missions, trade exhibitions like Food AG 2025, and discussions with Emirati business circles have been placed as platforms to improve bilateral trade and foreign direct investment (Dunya News, 2025). These efforts are integrated into a wider plan of economic diversification by decreasing the reliance of an economy on a small group of partners and building a diversified regional economic system that will be resistant to internal fiscal strains and external geopolitical changes. Similarly, the attempts to normalize trade relations with the United States by signing a bilateral trade agreement in Washington in July 2025 show that Islamabad is ready to use economic diplomacy despite those states with which security cooperation has not traditionally been balanced (Wikipedia, 2025). It was a trade agreement aimed at increasing the collaboration within the energy and mining industries and lowering of tariffs which is a good indication of a pragmatic approach of economic interaction across geopolitical divisions.

Regardless of these attempts, the integration of Pakistan in the regional economy is not a problem free and this has been experienced through the increasing trade deficit with the other neighbouring countries. During the initial 11 months of the 2025 fiscal year, Pakistani trade deficit with the nine countries in the region had grown substantially as a result of higher imports in China, India, and Bangladesh and slower growth in exports compared to the growth of imports (Dawn News Urdu, 2025). These asymmetries make the history of economic diplomacy more difficult as they point to structural limitations in the competitiveness of the Pakistani exports and drawbacks of gaining preferential treatment without parallel changes in the production capacity at home. All these trends highlight the complications about security needs and economic development, although the security relationships might enable the development of the economic engagement, any structural and policy problems like tariff systems and competitiveness of the exports may erode the economic diplomacy program.

As a reaction to such challenges, institutional economic reforms that are meant to enhance the overall economic governance and encourage foreign investment have also been put forward in Islamabad. In late 2024, the National Economic Transformation Plan, or Uraan Pakistan, introduced by the government is still one of the central strategic plans to modernise the economy

by using specific reforms, developing infrastructure, and encouraging investments (Wikipedia, 2025). This is an initiative that shows the Pakistani state acknowledging that there is no way sustainable economic diplomacy can be detached of domestic economic stability. Tying reform initiatives to foreign policy objectives, including making Pakistan a more attractive partner and investment destination with multinational corporations, Islamabad is aiming to establish a virtuous cycle between economic confidence and diplomatic credibility and the other way around.

Security factors, however, are still making a strong presence on macro regional diplomacy, this is seen by the increasing defence relations between Pakistan and its strategic partners. In September 2025, Islamabad will sign a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement with Saudi Arabia, (Wikipedia, 2025). Although the main form of the defence agreement is a collective security, the geo economic implications of this type of defence arrangement may also lead to Saudi investment and financial assistance, which historically has been a stabilising factor in the Pakistan economy. Therefore, this is shown in the foreign policy of Pakistan, through a balanced balancing of security alignments, which are not taken solely to serve as security, but also to benefit economically thus developing a multidimensional partnership that marries security deterrence with economic advantage.

### Multi-Vector Diplomacy

In the last 12 months, Pakistan has been progressively moving towards a multi-vector policy of diplomacy, designed to diversify its foreign policy relations and not to be dependent on a single world power and at the same time make it able to be more strategic and gain influence on the region. This strategizing is a symbol of the fact that Islamabad understands that the modern international system is highly interrelated and multipolar where the exclusive orientation to one of the powers may result not only in rigidity of the policies but also in a lack of economic prospects and geopolitical susceptibility. Rather, Pakistan has been aggressively developing diplomatic, economic, and strategic links with various state and regional blocks, especially China, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), countries, Russia and the larger Muslim world, therefore, operationalizing a multi-vector approach to ensure both national security and economic development goals are achieved (Dunya News, 2025). These top interactions over the last year depict the intentionality of Islamabad to strike a balance between competing interests and diplomatic balance among multiple partnerships. As an example, in March 2025, the first-ever Pakistan-Gulf States Economic and Strategic Forum took place in Islamabad in which Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar representatives were present. In the forum, the authorities of Pakistan reiterated the importance of mutually advantageous trade, energy collaboration, and collaborative investment projects, which they described as the ways of enhancing their economic sustainability and political relationships without reducing the strategic freedom of the Pakistani state to an individual dominant regional force (Dunya News, 2025). This represents the multi-vector diplomacy principle that diversifying partners is not the only way to use economic and strategic relationships to make the nation sovereign and dominate the region.

The multi-vector approach can also be seen in the way Pakistan has been interacting with China, which has remained a pillar of the foreign policy of Islamabad. The bilateral relationship has been marked with high level visits, agreements to progress the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects and strengthened security cooperation especially in terms of safeguarding critical infrastructure against terrorist attacks over the last year (AP News, 2025). Meanwhile, Pakistan has been keen to position its China relationship in the context of a wider multipolar approach and not exclusive correlation such that its intensifying relationship with Beijing does not exclude its relationship with other powers, including the GCC states or Russia. This sense makes Pakistan exhibit a capability to balance the different strategic vectors by balancing expectations, resources, and diplomatic messages in order to balance foreign policy relationships. This will enable Islamabad

to be the beneficiary of effective bilateral relationships and at the same time reduce the risks of overdependence and being involved in the great power competition.

Pakistan multi-vector diplomacy has also focused on another hot-spot in the Gulf region. During the last year, Islamabad has been seeking intensified economic and strategic relations with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar with the aim of securing energy, investment, and financial outlay (Dunya News, 2025). An example is that in 2025, Pakistan signed several agreements to ensure the importation of energy, collaborative investment in infrastructural projects, and remittance facilitation systems of the huge Pakistani diaspora in the Gulf that together lead to the stability of the Pakistani economy as well as its diplomatic goodwill. The level of security collaboration with Saudi Arabia has also escalated especially through the joint military trainings as well as exchange of information, another indication of the intention by Islamabad to use various alliances to achieve a mix of security and financial gain (Wikipedia, 2025). The multi-vector approach of the country enables Pakistan to lower its strategic costs of dependence on a regional or global partner and increase its bargaining power in the multilateral arenas by interacting with the Gulf states and China as well as Russia.

A similarly wide range of the multi-vector policy of Pakistan is also supported by its diplomatic relations with Russia during the last one year. Long-standing adversaries over Cold War-era alliances and South Asian wars, the relationship with Moscow has seen a slow process of normalized ties and increased trade, defense cooperation, and multilateral cooperation especially in the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and in the United Nations (Reuters, 2025). In March 2025, the Pakistani Ambassador to Russia pointed to the win-win aspect of defence and energy relations, noting that pragmatic relations with Russia can add to the overall foreign policy goals of Pakistan without interfering with its current relationships with China or the Gulf countries (Reuters, 2025). This calculated involvement reflects an attempt of Pakistan to keep the policy flexible and not to be strategically marginal in significant initiatives of the region or the world and achieve actual results of economic and security provision.

Besides bilateral interaction, Pakistan multi-vector diplomacy focuses on multilateral platforms as key tools of power and stability. In the last one year, Islamabad has been actively involved in conferences like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and regional trade talks under the umbrella of the SAARC, which has made it a positive player in enhancing the stability of the region, counterterrorism, and economic integration (Dunya News, 2025). These multilateral interactions help Pakistan to strengthen its role as a responsible player in the region, who can balance conflicting interests, but one whose input serves the common solutions to security, economic, and humanitarian problems. The focus on multilateralism also enables the Islamabad to spread the risks and to achieve the burden of the security and economic agenda, as well as to build relations which help to gain leverage in bilateral negotiations with separate states.

Pakistan multi-vector diplomacy has not had an easy time being successful over the last one year. The problem of regional tensions including border issues with India and the unstable situation in Afghanistan requires restrained balancing of alliances as any apparent association would trigger security threats or even international outcry. However, the policy deployed by Pakistan reflects a complex sense of the geopolitical nature of the concept of national security, economic prosperity, and political influence in the world as elements that complement each other when implemented in diversified and complementary alliances. Through fostering the relationship in several vectors such as China, the Gulf states, Russia and the wider Muslim world and western partners Pakistan aims at maximizing its strategic freedom, tapping into economic benefits and fostering regional stability which is reflective of mature and versatile foreign policy approach to reflect the dynamics of the modern international relations.

## **Conclusion**

The foreign policy of Pakistan towards the neighbors is indicative of a complicated game of opposing mandates that need balancing of security, diplomacy and economic interests. The ties with India are uneasy and historical issues, border matters and mistrust, are still prevailing in the relationships with India and impact on the overall regional policy of Pakistan. Simultaneously, Afghanistan is a complex problem in terms of security since cross-border militancy, as well as refugee migration and political instability, demand long-term investment and an adequately balanced mix of security vigilance and diplomatic outreach. Conversely, Pakistan-China friendship can be considered a consistent and strategically important relationship with foundations in long-term economic projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, joint defense efforts, and regional interests, which ensures that Islamabad has a dependable player to navigate the geopolitical landscape in the region. In the case of Iran, Pakistan experiences functional cooperation with Iran that is focused on trade, border control, and energy cooperation, which is rather pragmatic and views and can be described as the focus on stability and bilateral benefit as a priority rather than ideological orientation. In all these diverse relations, Islamabad has repeatedly expressed a policy of living in peace, multilateralism, and even-handed diplomacy, as an indication that it intends to deal with the conflicts without any escalation, but instead promote positive relationships. Nevertheless, geopolitical realities, local security challenges, and regional rivalries still limit the flexibility of Pakistan in its foreign policy, which requires the process of constant adjustment and the long-term vision. In the future to gain more long term stability and prosperity, Pakistan will need to concentrate on gaining trust among its neighbors by committing to a long term dialogue, institutionalized diplomatic processes and confidence building mechanisms, as well as developing the regional economic integration. Enhancement of such dimensions can support national security goals in Pakistan, ease tensions, and establish a platform of win-win alliances that can help in developing Pakistan as well as the stability of the region in South and Central Asia.

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