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Pakistan's Strategic Partnerships: A Comparative Analysis of Ties with the US and China

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ABSTRACT

This study is based on the analyses of Pakistan's foreign policy towards the United States and China, deciphering the key factors that have shaped these relationships over time. It explore the idea that alliances in international relations are based on shifting strategic interests rather than being solely based on permanent friendships or rivalries. Pakistan's significance to the United States was because of its geographical proximity to former Soviet Union and China and its strategic role in U.S. military and political objectives concerning Afghanistan. Historically, the US remained an important strategic partner of Pakistan, in terms of economic and military support. However, in recent decades, a notable shift has been seen in Pakistan's foreign policy, with a growing emphasis on its close relations with China. This shift is largely driven by the deepening of strategic and economic ties between the two countries in the 21st century, particularly through the CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) and bilateral trade and defence agreements.

Introduction

Foreign policy of Pakistan is a dynamic interplay of strategic, security and economic concerns, all shaped by regional and global dynamics. Since the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, it has faced a complex geopolitical environment, ranging from its antagonistic relations with neighbouring India and Afghanistan and internal security threats to the need of external assistance for its economic and defence needs.

During the early years, Pakistan claimed to establish itself as a neutral player on the globe. However, the geopolitical scenario during the Cold War period and the ongoing Kashmir conflict with India, forced Pakistan to make closer relations with the US. Consequently, Pakistan became a strategic ally of US. Throughout the Cold War, Pakistan actively participated in military alliances

led by US, including South-east Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization) (CENTO). Pakistan's relationship with the United States was strengthened, especially in the context of the US support for the Afghan Mujahedeen during the invasion of Afghanistan by Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). During this period, the two countries' military and economic partnership increased, but after the defeat of red army in Afghanistan, Pakistan's nuclear ambitions and changes in the foreign policy objectives of the United States led to conflicts, resulting in strained relations.

Although Pakistan maintained its strategic ties with the United States, it also began developing its ties with China in the 1950s and 1960s. Early relations between Pakistan and China were based on cautious diplomacy and practical cooperation, especially in the areas of trade and defence. Over time, Pakistan-China relations deepened and China became an important partner of Pakistan, especially after because of strained relations with India and growing disillusionment with US policies. CPEC is proved to be a major sign of deepening relationship with China, which turned Pakistan's foreign policy towards closer economic and strategic relations with China. Common strategic interests and other bilateral agreements, has made Pakistan an important strategic ally of Republic of China.

This growing relationship between Pakistan and China raised important questions about the future of Pakistan's relationship with the US. It is evident that the US provided military and financial aid to Pakistan in areas such as the war on terrorism, but the changing balance of power at the global level compelled Pakistan to revisit its foreign policy towards the US. This very shift reflects the change in influence of global powers, with China emerging as a vital economic power and consolidating its position as a key player not only in South Asia's peace and security but also of the world.

These radical shifts in foreign policy of Pakistan are not only relevant to its own strategic interests, but are also important from the lens of growing competition between global powers. The reason behind the Pakistan's leadership's strategic importance to the growing relationship with China is to strengthen its defence and to promote further partnership with China for economic advancement and regional stability. Ostensibly, this shift can prove to be a milestone for Pakistan's relations with major powers and its future diplomatic strategy.

Methodology

This paper is based a qualitative method, which relies on secondary sources to give insights about the development of Pakistan's relations with the United States and China. In order to to examine the key events that led to changes in Pakistan's diplomatic relations the case study analysis are applied. Significant events such as the development of the CPEC, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) are analysed in order to understand how these geopolitical developments have shaped Pakistan's foreign policy. Moreover, the regional security scenario such as the tussle between India and China in Ladakh and its impact on Pakistan's strategy is also examined. This study is also based on comparative analysis to decipher the changes over time in Pakistan's relations with the US and China.

Theoretical framework

Various theories including realism, neorealism, dependency theory, and strategic culture theory underpin this piece of research. Realism and neo-realism give in-depth insights about how Pakistan's foreign policy has been directed by its security concerns and attempts to pursue national

interests. In line with these theories, Pakistan has always made shifts in its foreign policy strategies in order to enhance its defence by developing cordial ties with China, especially in view of the growing relationship between the US and India. The study also incorporates dependency theory to explore how Pakistan's economic ties with China, reduces its dependence on US. Strategic culture theory has also been used to explain how Pakistan's historical experiences, particularly its conflicts with India and its alliance positions during the Cold War, have shaped its foreign policy. Pakistan's propensity towards nuclear weapons and long-term security threats from neighbouring countries such as India have led Pakistan to develop strong ties with major world powers to bolster its national interests and security.

The Early Period

During the Early Period, Pakistan aimed to stay out of conflicts between major powers. Quaid-iAzam Muhammad Ali Jinnah confirmed that Pakistan's foreign policy would be based on friendliness and goodwill toward all nations. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan also declared right after Pakistan's creation that the country would not take sides in ideological disputes between nations. However, in its early days, Pakistan faced numerous challenges, including the scarce economic and military resources, the ongoing Kashmir conflict with India, an influx of refugees, a long stretch of hostile Indian territory between East and West Pakistan, security threats from the North-West Frontier due to the Durand Line issue, and limited funds to support the government. At that time, China was not very focused on building foreign relations, and the United States prioritized its ties with India. However, after the Chinese revolution in 1949, the U.S. became concerned about China's influence and reassessed its policy towards Asia. This concern grew when China formed a thirty-year alliance with the Soviet Union, which improved Pakistan's standing with American policymakers, given its strategic location

Pakistan at the Doorsteps of USSR

In the 1950s, first Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan, visited the United States to meet President Harry S. Truman. During this visit, Truman allegedly asked Khan to allow Central Intelligence Agency the (CIA) to set up a base in Pakistan to monitor Soviet activities, but Khan did not agree to the request. In May 1954, Pakistan signed the Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement with the U.S., which led to many Pakistani soldiers receiving training in the U.S. Additionally, the U.S. established a Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) in Rawalpindi. Pakistan also joined two U.S.-led defence alliances: the SEATO and the CENTO. In 1955, President Eisenhower requested that Prime Minister H.S. Suhrawardy allow the U.S. Army to use the Peshawar Air Station for surveillance of the Soviet Union's missile program, a request which Suhrawardy granted. Due to these agreements, the U.S. supported Pakistan in its ongoing disputes with Afghanistan, particularly concerning the Durand Line.

Meanwhile, Pakistan also made significant diplomatic moves toward China. In 1950, Pakistan became the third non-communist country and the first Muslim nation to recognize the People's Republic of China, sending a delegation to Beijing in January. However, Formal diplomatic relations were established in May 1951. Notably, Vice President Soong Ching Ling visited Pakistan, and Prime Minister Suhrawardy visited China in the first high-level exchanges between the two countries.

Ayub Khan's Era

In his book, "Friends Not Masters", General Ayub Khan, emphasized that Pakistan's foreign policy goals were security and development. He believed Pakistan could no longer remain neutral and needed to align with one of the major blocs. During his rule, Pakistan's ties with the U.S. grew

stronger. Ayub allowed the U.S. to conduct spy missions over the Soviet Union from Pakistan's territory and even visited the U.S. with his daughter. This period saw an increase in American aid to Pakistan.

However, relations with the U.S. soured during the 1962 India-China war. President Kennedy had promised Ayub that he would consult him before providing military aid to India, but the U.S. failed to do so, which was a moment of concern for Pakistan. Additionally, In 1965, when war broke out again between Pakistan and India over Kashmir, the U.S. cut off aid to both nations, and Pakistan felt betrayed by its former ally.

These frustrations with the U.S. led Pakistan to shift its foreign policy towards China. In 1963, Foreign Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto made a historic visit to China, and that same year, Pakistan and China signed a boundary agreement after peaceful negotiations. Pakistan became the only neighbouring country to have no border disputes or conflicts with China. In the same year, Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) began flights to Beijing, becoming the first non-communist airline to operate in China. Pakistan played a crucial role in facilitating China's engagement with the rest of the world, and the two countries signed an agreement on cultural cooperation to strengthen mutual understanding.

Bhutto, Mao, Carter & Nixon

In the 1970s, Pakistan was a crucial ally of the United States (U.S.). The US intervened during the 1971 war between Pakistan and India, preventing India from attacking West Pakistan. After the war, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto became Pakistan's president and later its prime minister. Though Bhutto was a socialist, he developed a close relationship with Nixon, which worked in Pakistan's favour.

On the diplomatic front, Pakistan played a key role in facilitating Nixon's visit to China, which helped normalize US-China relations. In 1971, Bhutto himself visited China, where he was warmly received by Mao Zedong. Bhutto was impressed with China's development, particularly its agrarian policies. During this visit, Pakistan and China signed an agreement on scientific and cultural cooperation, which benefited Pakistani students and scientists. Additionally, the Karakoram Highway, connecting Pakistan to China, was officially opened, enhancing economic and strategic ties between the two countries. However, when Jimmy Carter became president in 1977, his anti-socialist views created tensions with Bhutto. Carter pushed for restrictions on nuclear weapons and imposed stricter sanctions on Pakistan, which weakened Bhutto's position. Despite this pressure, Bhutto continued to advance Pakistan's nuclear program, refusing to halt its development.

Revival of Traditional Foreign policy

After the Soviet Union invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, the US, under the Carter administration, wanted to prevent Soviet expansion into the Persian Gulf. Carter asked Pakistan to help the Afghan mujahedeen fight against the Soviet Union, offering military aid in exchange. However, General Zia-ul-Haq, was cautious and sought more substantial military and economic support before committing. When Ronald Reagan became president of the United States in 1981, he took a tougher stance against the Soviet Union and offered large amounts of military aid to Pakistan. After getting enough peanuts .Pakistan greed to help the US in its policy of containment against the Soviet forces.

During Zia-ul-Haq's reign, the relations betwenn Pakistan and US remained very strong, particularly due to military cooperation. The CIA and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), worked together and provided billions of dollars in aid to support Mujahedeen's resistance against

Soviet forces in Afghanistan. This collaboration left a horrible legacy that continues to impact the regional stability to this day.

On the other hand, Pakistan's relationship with China grew stronger, with both countries signing bilateral agreements.

Pressler, Brown & Glenn Amendments

During 1990s, the US imposed economic sanctions on Pakistan, under the Pressler Amendment, as the country lost its strategic importance to US after the defeat of red army from Afghanistan. Relations between the two countries deteriorated further when U.S. Ambassador Nicholas Platt cautioned Pakistan that it might be added to the list of state sponsors of terrorism due to its continued support for militant groups. In response, Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visited the U.S. and urged President Bill Clinton to lift the embargoes and collaborate on efforts to combat militancy in the region.

In reaction to her request, the Brown Amendment was passed, allowing the delivery of $368 million worth of military equipment purchased by Pakistan before the Pressler Amendment sanctions were imposed. However, the U.S. sanctions on arms remained in place.

Following Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998, which were conducted in retaliation to India's similar actions, President Bill Clinton imposed sanctions under the Glenn Amendment. This included a suspension of U.S. aid to both India and Pakistan, including economic assistance, loans from international financial institutions like the IMF and World Bank, and exports of dual-use nuclear or missile technology.

United States lifted sanctions in July 1998 on both countries to allow for the purchase of agricultural products from U.S. farmers. In 1999, a military coup led by General Pervez Musharraf ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. The U.S. sanctions restricting aid to countries with military coup governments came into effect. At the same time, Pakistan strengthened its ties with China, signing the Agreement for Traffic in Transit with China, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, opening new trade opportunities. Additionally, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visited China for the 4th Women's Conference in Beijing, strengthening ties between the two nations. A landmark agreement to jointly develop and produce the JF-17 fighter jet was also signed, boosting Pakistan's defence industry.

21st Century

After the 9/11 attacks and the U.S. incursion in Afghanistan, President of Pakistan General Pervaiz

Musharraf admitted that Pakistan had no choice but to support the U.S. in the fight against alQaeda, as the U.S. had threatened to "bomb Pakistan into the Stone Age" if it refused. The U.S. then introduced legislation to lift sanctions under the Pressler and Glenn Amendments. President George W. Bush also designated Pakistan as a major non-NATO ally, allowing to purchase the advanced military equipment.

During this period, the U.S. launched several drone strikes in Pakistan's northwest regions targeting Taliban militants and al-Qaeda supporters. However, these strikes also resulted in civilian casualties, sparking significant opposition within Pakistan.

In May 2011, U.S. Navy SEALs killed al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in an operation conducted in Abbottabad, Pakistan. U.S. President Barack Obama later stated that the Pakistani government was not informed about the operation, while Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence

(ISI) claimed it was a joint operation. The dispute led to tensions, with former President Asif Ali Zardari supporting the operation during a phone call with Obama, which some quarters criticized as a weak response. Meanwhile, China and Pakistan further strengthened their bilateral relations. In 2001, Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji visited Pakistan, during which the two countries signed various agreements marking 50 years of diplomatic relations, including cooperation in the tourism sector and a preferential trade agreement. A Free Trade Agreement (FTA) was signed between China and Pakistan in 2006, resulting in a significant increase in economic relations between the two countries. Pakistan and China also collaborated in defence jointly producing the JF-17 aircraft, which later became a significant asset of the Pakistan Air Force and was also exported to other friendly countries.

2013 marked another significant development when Chinese Premier Li Keqiang visited Pakistan and launched a revolutionary project the "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)". CPEC resulted in further strengthening of economic ties between the both countries, by giving China's economy access to Pakistan's ports.

In 2018, Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan, attended the first China International Import Expo (CIIE) in Shanghai, promoting Pakistani products in the Chinese market and creating new business opportunities. The visit not only strengthened the economic relations between the two countries, but Pakistan also made efforts to increase its trade volume with China. This growing strategic partnership between Pakistan and China in the economic and defence sectors is ushering a new era of cordial relationships.

Present Scenario

Strongly influenced by economic needs and security concerns, foreign policy of Pakistan has changed significantly over time. In recent years, Pakistan's relations with the United States and China, have become vital to its diplomatic strategy. Important agreements such as COMCASA and BECA, the Ladakh crisis, and major infrastructure projects the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have played a key role in shaping Pakistan's international stature.

In 2018, The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) signed between India and the US, which establishes secure communication channels between the two countries. At the same time, the deal could pose a serious threat to India's neighbouring states, as COMCASA gives the US a direct access to India's military communications network. Through this agreement the US can gather sensitive intelligence, posing a serious threat to Pakistan in maintaining its security position in the region. Additionally, The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) of 2020, also enabled the US and India to exchange real-time exchange of sensitive satellite and aerial surveillance data. It includes high-quality imagery, which can equip India with fascinating military capabilities, as she can monitor movements across the region, including Pakistan and China. The deal could affect the balance of power, and peace and security of the region.

The border tension between India and China in Ladakh has further affected the stability of the region. While India is focused on securing its borders with China, it also risks a possible war on two fronts, one with China and the other with Pakistan. In this context, Pakistan's alliance position with China becomes more pronounced, as it seeks to balance India's growing strategic relationship with the United States.

At present, CPEC is one of the most significant factors shaping foreign policy orientation of Pakistan. This massive infrastructure project aims to connect China's western region with Pakistan's Gwadar port, giving China a direct access to the Arabian Sea. At the same time, CPEC

can also contribute to reduce Pakistan's dependence on the US and reorienting its strategic priorities. The India and US see the success of CPEC as a threat, as it has the ability to make Pakistan economically independent, which could be prove an obstacle for the US to maintain its influence in the region. Both countries know that if Pakistan's economy is stabilized through CPEC, their influence on Pakistan maybe reduced.

Last but not least, the north-eastern states of India are linked to the rest of India through Siliguri Corridor, also known as the "Chicken's Neck". This Sixty-kilometre-long and Twenty-Two kilometre-wide stretch of land is considered a major weakness in India's defence strategy. If China were to gain control of this region, it could split India into two parts and isolate its north-eastern states. Pakistan, through its relationship with China, can contribute to this strategic divide. Tibet is also an important area for water conservation in Asia, known as the "Water Tower of Asia". The Brahmaputra River, which flows through Tibet, is important in supplying water to countries such as India's Chicken's neck states, Nepal, Bhutan and Pakistan. China has built several dams on the river and plans to build a large hydroelectric project on it. If China takes control of this water supply, it could affect the water supply to India's north-eastern states and put India in a very vulnerable position. Thus, the importance of relations with China in Pakistan's foreign policy continues to grow, and these relations play a key role in strengthening its strategic interests.

Conclusion

Foreign policy of Pakistan has always been shaped on the basis of national interests. The country has changed its allies in response to geographic and political changes. For decades, Pakistan was key ally of the US especially, during the Cold War and in the global war on terror. However, Over the past few years, China had overtaken the US to become the biggest supplier of military equipment to Pakistan. In addition, China has committed $62 billion investment in the CPEC and this is the potential to change the landscape of Pakistan's economy, providing the country with modern infrastructure and economic growth. The success of CPEC will help Pakistan become less dependent on the US.

In the current situation, the growing alliance with China has become important in the field of economy and security. As CPEC nears completion, Pakistan's ties with the US may further weaken. The US will also maintain relations with Pakistan in the Afghan peace talks and its strategy vis-àvis China, but Pakistan's current policy and future direction seem to be moving towards a stronger relationship with China. Diplomacy is driven not by lasting friendships or rivalries, but by enduring national interests. That is why Pakistan's foreign policy will always change in view of the protection of its interests and national security, so that it can meet its economic and security needs while effectively navigating the complex relations with the US and China.

Way Forward

In view of increasing economic and military ties with China, Pakistan will continue to strengthen its strategic partnership with China, particularly emphasizing the successful implementation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This partnership could provide significant economic benefits, infrastructure development and security cooperation opportunities for Pakistan. However, Pakistan must ensure that its growing economic dependence on China does not lead to any imbalances, and at the same time it must negotiate better economic and military terms to make the relationship mutually beneficial.

Although Pakistan does not have as close an alliance with the US as it did during the Cold War, it still plays a significant role in terms of regional security. Pakistan should strive to maintain a

pragmatic and interest-based relationship with the US, focusing on common interests such as the fight against terrorism, regional stability and the future of Afghanistan. Such a balanced approach gives Pakistan an opportunity to improve its relationship with the US.

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