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Pakistan's Foreign Policy In Transition: Driving Factors And Emerging Trends

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Key Points:

- Pakistan needs to proactively devise mechanisms to gear up with the transforming international political order.
- A foreign policy with an exemption of even one great power may lead the state back to the Cold War dynamics. Pakistan might find itself walking the tightrope between its geo-strategic interests with the U.S. against its geo-economic interests with China.
- Pakistan's future partnership with any of the great powers must not compromise its strategic autonomy.
- Pakistan's foreign policy outlook on international forums has remained rather coherent since the new government has assumed office. With the addition of a strategic division in the Foreign Office, and the affiliation of a leading academician as Prime Minister's Special Advisor on National Security, Pakistan's narrative has been heard internationally very effectively.
- Pakistan has seen a significant increase in its "diplomatic influence" in Asia as well as an improvement of ties with its western neighbour.

INTRODUCTION

Any state's foreign policy - being a means of translating its political, economic and strategic interests into tangible policy decisions - remains subject to transitions resulting from the given internal and external dynamics.¹ Pakistan, being a case in point, also appears to be undergoing a paradigm shift in terms of its foreign policy orientations and diplomatic posturing.² Since the incumbent government led by Prime Minister Imran Khan has acquired the reins of political power, Pakistan's foreign policy is experiencing a major

¹ Raja Mohammad Khan, "Foreign Policy of Pakistan in the Changing Regional and Global Setting." *Journal of Contemporary Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 14-30.

² Nasir Jamal, "Aspirations for a Paradigm shift", *Dawn News*, last modified October 12, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1584603>

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overhaul.³ While pursuing domestic politico-economic stability, territorial sovereignty, regional stability, and the revival of Pakistan's international image as its overarching objectives, the state appears to be revamping the modalities of its foreign policy.

The on-going transition in Pakistan's foreign policy can be assessed across various dimensions. In the few years, Pakistan has embarked upon horizontally expanding its diplomatic outreach. With an increasingly vocal posture at different international organisations, Pakistan has introduced a renewed clarity and assertiveness to its foreign policy goals and objectives. Ideology continues to remain the constitutive basis of Pakistan's foreign policy; however, the way Pakistan approaches it, has also experienced a reorientation lately. Moreover, while hyphenating Pakistan's emphasis on achieving geo-economic objectives, the

³ Ibid.

country has given its foreign policy a strong overtone of soft power. This displays a probable departure from Pakistan's traditional security-oriented, hard power-centric approach.⁴ In this respect, this perspective paper seeks to establish an understanding of the driving factors and the emerging trends in Pakistan's current foreign policy.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXTUAL BASIS OF PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY

The traditional International Relations theory on the subject of foreign policy views "maximisation of national interest" as any state's exclusive objective pursued via statesmen's utmost rationality, while conducting interactions with the extra-territorial world.⁵ Unlike the comparative perspective of foreign policy analysis, the traditional approach assumes the international political dynamics to be a key force in driving any state's foreign policy.⁶ However, to understand the contextual basis of Pakistan's foreign policy, the traditional theoretical understanding of foreign policy may not suffice, as certain domestic factors have played a key role in shaping Pakistan's foreign policy. This section seeks to theoretically present the contextuality that has historically set the basis of Pakistan's foreign policy with a comparative perspective.

Pakistan's foreign policy is a case of certain domestic factors effectively coming at play with the international political environment. Over the years, it has ensued from the interplay of normative ideals prevailing in the country's organisational elite and masses, with the country's internal statist-level power capability.⁷ Together, these two factors have come at the helm of the international political environment and formulated Pakistan's foreign policy.

In terms of the domestic factors, the normative ideals of Pakistan's organisational elites as well as the public opinion have played a characteristic role in determining the country's foreign policy.⁸ The state of Pakistan has historically experienced extensive periods

⁴ Moeed Yusuf, interview by Sahar Khan, *The Atlantic Council*, August 10, 2020

⁵ David Lumsdaine, "The Intertwining of International and Domestic Politics." *Polity* 29, no. 2 (1996): 299-306.

⁶ Juliet Kaarbo, Jeffrey S. Lantis, and Ryan K. Beasley, "The Analysis of Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective" in *Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective: Domestic and International Influences on State Behavior* 1-23. Washington D.C.: SAGE Publishers, 2002.

⁷ Farhan Hanif Siddiqui, "Exploring the Impulses In Pakistan's Foreign Policy", *South Asian Voices*, last modified September 17, 2020, <https://southasianvoices.org/exploring-the-impulses-in-pakistans-foreign-policy/>

⁸ Farhat Asif, "Pakistan's foreign policy: Transition, Prospects and Perspectives", *The News International*, last modified August, 2018, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/355063-pakistan-s-foreign-policy-transition-prospects-and-perspectives>

of autocratic military rules, a factor that considerably limited democratisation in policy formulation.⁹ In the process, Pakistan's military emerged as a dominating body, influencing the decision-making process.¹⁰ Therefore, Pakistan's foreign policy has by-and-large remained hostage to the civil-military divergence over the idea of Pakistan's strategic interests.¹¹ Owing to this, a consistent objective has remained the achievement of hard power vis-à-vis its eastern and western neighbours.¹² On the other hand, the ideological inclinations of the general masses have also considerably geared Pakistan's foreign policy.¹³ Most prominently, the Islamist identity has been interchangeably employed by both, the masses as well as the organisational elites to steer Pakistan's foreign policy to the desired direction.¹⁴

The other prominent domestic contour of Pakistan's foreign policy has remained its internal power capability in terms of its military strength and economic prowess. Historically, the overarching objectives have remained sovereignty, within and without, along with the achievement of economic stability.¹⁵ In retrospect, Pakistan's economic and military fragility, specifically vis-à-vis its eastern neighbour, has essentially come at the crossroads, overwhelmingly lending its external outlook a "security-oriented" approach.¹⁶ Had the tangible power capability equation been the other way around, Pakistan's capacity to autonomously carve its foreign policy would have increased.

Thus, Pakistan's policies towards the global political scenarios have largely remained a measure of the interplay between the normative ideals emanating from its domestic circles, and security-oriented objectives emanating from the military-economic duo. However, this is not to over-rule the structuralist dimension of the systemic factors relevant to the international political system. An international world order characterised by bi-polarity and a hostile

⁹ Hassan Askari Rizvi, "The Military and Pakistan's Political and Security Disposition", *Asia Policy*, No. 19 (2015): 147-151, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/asp.2015.0005>

¹⁰ Naseem Ahmed, "Military and the foreign policy of Pakistan." *South Asian Survey* 17, no. 2 (2010): 313-330. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/097152311201700208>

¹¹ Umair Jamal, "Can Pakistan Pursue an Independent Foreign Policy?" *The Diplomat*, last modified December 19, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/can-pakistan-pursue-an-independent-foreign-policy/>

¹² Ahmed, "Military and the foreign policy of Pakistan." *South Asian Survey* 17, no. 2 (2010): 313-330. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/097152311201700208>

¹³ Hasan Askari-Rizvi, "Pakistan: Ideology and foreign policy." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 10, no. 1 (1983): 48-59.

¹⁴ Andrea K. Grove, *Political Leadership in Foreign Policy: Manipulating Support Across Borders*, (New York: Macmillan Palgrave, 2007): 139

¹⁵ Foreign Policy of Pakistan in the Changing Regional and Global Setting." *Journal of Contemporary Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 14-30.

¹⁶ Ahmed, "Military and the foreign policy of Pakistan." *South Asian Survey* 17, no. 2 (2010): 313-330. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/097152311201700208>

regional environment considerably limited Pakistan's options in its early years.¹⁷ Pakistan's intent to comply with international norms and law has also formed a major contour of its foreign policy over the years.¹⁸

DRIVERS OF TRANSITION IN FOREIGN POLICY

Political Leadership

The current political leadership is playing a key role in revisiting Pakistan's foreign policy.¹⁹ The incumbent government took the office with a relatively clearer stance regarding its diplomatic ties with its key strategic partners.²⁰ Also, the political clout surrounding the country's Prime Minister himself is generating Pakistan's softer image internationally.²¹ The incumbent government has also taken up reforms like strengthening the Legal Division of the Foreign Office, introduction of a Kashmir Cell and a 24/7 Crisis Management Centre.²² However, the need for revving up the foreign office in line with the emerging systemic challenges remains central.²³

Organisational Autonomy

Organisational autonomy has considerably remained a case of concern in formulating Pakistan's foreign policy. However, the current Foreign Minister has reiterated Pakistan's foreign policy to be a function being exclusively executed by Pakistan's Foreign Office.²⁴ A relatively increasing alignment between the political and military establishment is observed, seemingly ushering an era of institutional autonomy.²⁵ Nevertheless, despite the number of positive developments, the Foreign Office has a long way to go

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Foreign Policy of Pakistan in the Changing Regional and Global Setting," *Journal of Contemporary Studies* 4, no. 1 (2015): 14-30.

¹⁹ Fahad Nabeel, "One Year in Office: Revisiting Imran Khan's Foreign Policy", *South Asian Voices*, last modified September, 2019, <https://southasianvoices.org/one-year-in-office-revisiting-imran-khans-foreign-policy/>

²⁰ Prashanth Parameswaran, "Touqir Hussain on Pakistan Foreign Policy Under Imran Khan", *The Diplomat*, last modified September 10, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/09/touqir-hussain-on-pakistan-foreign-policy-under-imran-khan/>

²¹ Alyssa Ayres, "A Glimpse of Pakistan's Foreign Policy Under Imran Khan", *Council of Foreign Relations*, last modified July 6, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/glimpse-pakistans-foreign-policy-under-imran-khan>

²² "World no longer buying India's terrorism narrative on Pakistan 'blindly': Qureshi", *Dawn News*, last modified October 15, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1584683/world-no-longer-buying-indias-terrorism-narrative-on-pakistan-blindly-qureshi>

²³ Maleeha Lodhi, "Foreign Office needs reform", *Dawn News*, last modified September 14, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1579617>

²⁴ Kamran Yusuf, "Pakistan's foreign policy will be made at Foreign Office, says Qureshi", *The Express Tribune*, last modified August 20, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1785114/dialogue-way-forward-india-say-qureshi>

²⁵ Ibid.

in attaining optimal autonomy.

Domestic Power Equation

Domestic power equation, involving military capabilities and economic prowess constitutes a major aspect of the country's foreign policy. While Pakistan has fairly-established military capabilities, nevertheless, the security dimension of its foreign policy is yet expected to be by-and-large influenced by the military wing of Pakistan's governance apparatus.²⁶ In the case of economic prowess, the current government has largely remained unable to redeem domestic economic stability. Pakistan's foreign policy continues to remain a hostage of its economic difficulties. Most recently, this aspect came to fore after Pakistan abstained from attending the Kuala Lumpur Summit.²⁷ Nevertheless, Pakistan's economic interdependence, specifically through the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has lent it a breather.²⁸ Also, the current government seeks to build its foreign policy on the premise of "Economic Diplomacy".²⁹

Changing Regional and International Political Environment

Transition in the regional and international political environment has a major role to play in Pakistan's current foreign policy.³⁰ Pakistan increasingly finds itself in the position to navigate through its foreign policy options as the world order transitions from unipolarity to multipolarity.³¹ The probable change in the U.S. leadership may also require Pakistan's apt preparedness. This is coupled with the transforming regional geo-political environment. The changing power dynamics in Afghanistan and the aggressive regional policy pursued by India together render operational space to Pakistan.³² Pakistan currently seeks to capitalise over the systemic opportunities and

²⁶ Atika Rehman, "Military will continue to shape security, foreign policy: report", *Dawn News*, last modified November 8, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1515569>

²⁷ Rahimullah Yusufzai, "Foreign policy predicaments", *The News on Sunday*, last modified December 29, 2019, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/590043-foreign-policy-predicaments>

²⁸ Rabia Akhtar, "Review Report: CPEC: A transformation in Motion", *Pakistan Politico*, last modified September 26, 2020, <http://pakistanpolitico.com/review-report-cpec-a-transformation-in-motion/> <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/08/26/the-pakistan-armys-belt-and-road-putsch/>

²⁹ Javed Hafeez, "For Pakistan, the growing importance of economic diplomacy", *Arab News*, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1750221>

³⁰ Javid Hassan, "Resetting foreign policy agenda", *The Nation*, last modified August 14, 2018, <https://nation.com.pk/14-Aug-2018/resetting-foreign-policy-agenda>

³¹ Abdul Rehman Malik, "The new world order and Pakistan", *Daily Times*, last modified February 18, 2019, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/355675/the-new-world-order-and-pakistan/>

³² "World now views Pakistan as 'solution, not problem': FM", *Daily Times*, last modified October 13, 2020, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/677148/world-now-views-pakistan-as-solution-not-problem-fm/>

emerge as the forebearer of peace and stability.³³

DOMINANT FEATURES OF PAKISTAN'S CONTEMPORARY FOREIGN POLICY

The dominant features driving Pakistan's contemporary foreign policy are the ideological basis of the country, geo-economic and geo-strategic interests, and the efforts to extend diplomatic outreach.³⁴

Ideology

The Islamic ideology continues to remain an underlying feature of Pakistan's policies adapted internally and externally. With changing international and regional scenarios, Pakistan has revisited its ideological inclination in the formation of foreign policy.³⁵ The Islamised foreign policy era seems to be in departure. The repeated mentioning of Pakistan as a Muslim welfare state on international forums by the Prime Minister clarifies the notion of ideology. Under the current government, ideology seems to remain, if not dominant than an underlying factor in determining foreign policy. Nevertheless, appropriating due importance to ideological basis must not undermine economic motives or national interest of the country in future as well.³⁶

Geo-economically Motivated Objectives

Considering foreign policy as Pakistan's "first line of defence", the Foreign Office has laid down the dominant feature of contemporary foreign policy to be economic diplomacy.³⁷ Recently, Pakistan's Special Assistant to the Prime Minister Dr. Moeed Yusuf delineated on how economic diplomacy would acquire a dominant place in Pakistan's bilateral relations. Thus, a shift from previously held hard security posture to a dialogue-oriented and geo-economically motivated posture can be witnessed.³⁸ The intent of pursuing economic diplomacy as a driving objective also reaffirms the already on-going economic projects with key strategic

partners.³⁹

Horizontal Diplomatic Outreach and Soft Power

A prominent trend seen in Pakistan's contemporary foreign policy is the horizontal expansion in its diplomatic outreach. In light of foreign policies of the past having a "reactive" front, under the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan, it has evolved to be more "proactive" in nature.⁴⁰ Hence, soft power is adapted as a tool to deliberate Pakistan's narrative in the international arena with clarity and assertiveness.

Right after joining the office, the Prime Minister made sincere efforts to mend relations with neighbouring India. For which, renowned cricketer and politician of the Congress Party Navjot Singh Sidhu was invited as a state guest to Prime Minister's oath-taking ceremony.⁴¹ Moreover the significant and historic opening of "Kartarpur Corridor" spoke many folds about Pakistan's soft-power-centric approach.⁴² Additionally, in the recent spat between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Pakistan displayed its support to Muslim-majority Azerbaijan. Aligning Pakistan's own stance on Kashmir, to abide by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions, Pakistan supported Azerbaijan's position on Nagorno-Karabakh.⁴³

Furthermore, in its efforts to achieve its economic objectives, as well as people-to-people diplomacy, Pakistan has taken up a number of initiatives lately. These include: welcoming the Bangladeshi cricket team for a bilateral tour, mutual appreciation exchange in defeating COVID-19 pandemic with Australia and the invitation to Pakistan to organise a road-show in Moscow.⁴⁴

In Pakistan's efforts of revamping bilateral ties and extending diplomatic reach, the three key borders with Afghanistan which had remained closed in the past

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Muhammad Taimur Fahad Khan, "Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards Russia." *Strategic Studies* 39, no. 3 (2019): 89-104.

⁴¹ Mutaheer Khan, "Righting the wrongs: Pakistani foreign policy under Imran Khan", *Insideover*, last modified October 13th 2019, <https://www.insideover.com/politics/righting-the-wrongs-pakistani-foreign-policy-under-imran-khan.html>

⁴² Rahat Shah, "The Foreign Policy of Pakistan under Imran Khan", *Modern diplomacy*, last modified 23rd February 2020, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/02/23/the-foreign-policy-of-pakistan-under-imran-khan>

⁴³ Eurasian times desk, "How Sworn Enemies Pakistan & Israel Are Supporting Azerbaijan While Armenia Gets Russian & Indian Backing?", *Eurasian Times*, last modified September 29th 2020, <https://eurasianimes.com/sworn-enemies-pakistan-israel-support-azerbaijan-while-armenia-gets-russian-iranian-indian-backing>

⁴⁴ Web desk, "PM Imran Khan discusses coronavirus, Afghan peace with Australian PM Scott Morrison", *The News*, last modified: October 12th 2020 <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/728373-pm-imran-khan-discusses-coronavirus-afghan-peace-with-australian-pm-scott-morrison>

³³ Nasir Jamal, "Aspirations for a Paradigm shift", *Dawn News*, last modified October 12, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1584603>

³⁴ Farhat Asif, "Pakistan's foreign policy: Transition, prospects and perspectives", *The News*, last modified August 14th 2018, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/355063-pakistan-s-foreign-policy-transition-prospects-and-perspectives>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, "Questions of recognition", *The News*, last modified October 7th 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/725670-questions-of-recognition>

³⁷ Web Desk, "India's stance on Kashmir 'no longer accepted' internationally: FM Qureshi", *The News*, last modified October 12th 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/728376-indias-stance-on-kashmir-no-longer-accepted-internationally-fm-qureshi>

³⁸ Atlantic Council, *YouTube*, last modified: August 10th 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EgI4_V_1r1w&t=1260s

are also reopening.⁴⁵ The Pakistan-Afghanistan border crossing at Chaman reopened in August this year, after closing for a short time in late July, as well as the north-western Torkham border crossings for transit trade and exports to Afghanistan.⁴⁶ The opening of the strategic Gwadar Port for Afghanistan's export and import has further strengthened trade linkages between the two countries.⁴⁷

EMERGING TRENDS IN PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

With the new government assuming office in 2018, the pledge was to put "Pakistan first" and at the same time improve ties with other states internationally by the use of dialogue.⁴⁸ This section seeks to analyse the contemporary trends in Pakistan's foreign policy towards different states.

Policy towards Great Powers

In the case of Pakistan's ties with the U.S., previously the two countries were termed as "staunch allies".⁴⁹ However, currently, both are clearly in a transactional partnership. In the earlier days of his presidency, President Trump's administration viewed Pakistan as a "troublesome friend".⁵⁰ Currently, Pakistan's weak economic situation and its status in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list is being capitalised over by the U.S., for achieving a peaceful withdrawal from Afghanistan.⁵¹ Therefore, it is pertinent to establish that Washington would need Islamabad in the future to carry out any harmonious South Asia policy.⁵²

China, on the other hand, is a key strategic and economic partner.⁵³ By acknowledging Pakistan's battle against

⁴⁵ Web Desk, "Pak-Russia growing relationship", *The News*, last modified August 18th 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/702237-pak-russia-growing-relationship>

⁴⁶ Amir Latif, "Pakistan reopens 2 routes for trade with Afghanistan", *Anadolu Agency*, last modified June 20th 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/pakistan-reopens-2-routes-for-trade-with-afghanistan/1884146>

⁴⁷ INP, "Pak-Afghan trade resumes at Chaman border", *Profit Pakistan*, last modified August 12th 2020, <https://profit.pakistantoday.com.pk/2020/08/12/pak-afghan-trade-resumes-at-chaman-border>

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Sarah Siddiq, "Irritants in US Pakistan Relations: Way forward", *IPRI*, last modified May 20th 2019, <http://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/pusr2052019.pdf>

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Madiha Afzal, "The future of U.S.-Pakistani Relations", *Brookings*, last modified January 12th 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/unpacked/2018/01/12/the-future-of-u-s-pakistani-relations>

⁵² Touqir Hussain, "Trump vs. Pakistan", *Dawn News*, last modified February 20th 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1535549/trump-vs-pakistan>

⁵³ Khalid Hussain Chandio, "Trump and South Asia: Politics of Pakistan-US Relations in Perspective", *IPRI*, last modified October 2nd 2018, <http://www.ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Article-3-2-Oct-2018-ED-SSA.pdf>

terrorism, China has astutely filled the void left by the U.S.⁵⁴ China is a key actor in the Kashmir dispute as well and has also offered its mediatory role.⁵⁵ It has also asserted its intent to help Pakistan in defending "its legitimate rights and interests" in the Kashmir region.⁵⁶

In addition to stable political and strategic ties, Pak-China relations have seen economic openness only with the offset of the CPEC Phase-II, thus, to reflect the bilateral relation's as a "model to follow" by other countries.⁵⁷ Whereas, for Pakistan, closer ties with a great power forms an immaculate strategic partnership on the international stage.⁵⁸

Russia amongst the great powers "remains a key priority" for Pakistan, with a strong military, diplomatic and soon to-be-established "multi-dimensional" relationship.⁵⁹ Whereas trade relations are set to be resumed right after the pandemic is over.⁶⁰

Foreign Policy towards the Regional States

Besides Kashmir being a constant irritant, other fronts of trade, rail links and even diplomatic ties are not under workable condition between Pakistan and India.⁶¹ The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government, since the beginning, has been using the policy of appeasement through dialogue with India.⁶² Even amidst the worst military crisis of Pulwama following the Balakot incident, Pakistan shot one of the Indian pilots and returned him

⁵⁴ Hamza Rifaat Hussain, "Pakistan's relationship with China remains unbreakable", *CGTN*, last modified August 14th 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-08-14/Pakistan-s-relationship-with-China-remains-unbreakable-SX01yf66BO/index.html>

⁵⁵ Naeem Sarfaraz, "Kashmir Solution China is now a party", *The Express Tribune*, last modified July 25th 2020, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2256510/kashmir-solution-china-is-now-a-party>

⁵⁶ Shamil Shams, "Pakistan thanks China for 'support on Kashmir issue'", *DW*, last modified October 9th 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-thanks-china-for-support-on-kashmir-issue/a-50745277>

⁵⁷ Hussain, "Pakistan's relationship with China remains unbreakable", *CGTN*, last modified August 14th 2020, <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-08-14/Pakistan-s-relationship-with-China-remains-unbreakable-SX01yf66BO/index.html>

⁵⁸ Catherine Putz, "Andrew Small on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor's Return to the Shadows", *The Diplomat*, last modified October 6th 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/10/andrew-small-on-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridors-return-to-the-shadows>

⁵⁹ Web Desk, "Pak-Russia growing relationship", *The News*, last modified August 18th 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/702237-pak-russia-growing-relationship>

⁶⁰ Dr. Naila Barlas, "Foreign affairs and Pakistan's policy options", *The Nation*, last modified June 6th 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/06-Jun-2020/foreign-affairs-and-pakistan-s-policy-options?show=preview>

⁶¹ Sputnik, "Pakistan seeks to ramp up 'Trade and Defence' Ties with Russia: Ambassador", *The Nation*, last modified June 3rd 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/03-Jun-2020/pakistan-seeks-to-ramp-up-trade-and-defence-ties-with-russia-ambassador>

⁶² DHNS, "India-Pakistan ties under strain again", *Deccan Herald*, last modified July 25th 2020, <https://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/first-edit/india-pakistan-ties-under-strain-again-853768.html>

back as a “gesture of peace”.⁶³ On the other hand, Modi government at the peak of their election campaign only had the card of a tougher stance on Pakistan to be played to win a second term.⁶⁴ India responded by disregarding the United Nations (UN) treaties on the issue of Kashmir and revoking Article 370, ultimately repealing the special status of the Indian Occupied Kashmir.⁶⁵ It is only when the rising tensions sky rocketed, Pakistan published a new official map of the state, maintaining the status of Kashmir as a disputed territory.⁶⁶

Past relations of cross-border militancy and sectarianism between Pakistan and Iran are restructuring into significant determinants of success in economic projects like CPEC and the Chabahar project.⁶⁷ With Iran having offered a tie up-of Gwadar and Chabahar last year, Pakistan has a window to further strengthen the relationship on the proposed partnership.⁶⁸ Moreover, Iran could prove to be a good option for Pakistan to meet the energy deficit of the country. The two countries have signed Declaration for Cooperation in Healthcare Sector, and are initiating the process for release of Pakistani prisoners and a trade volume of \$392.08 million.⁶⁹ On the political front, the backing of Pakistan on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and support by the Iranian leadership on the issue of Kashmir, calling for a peaceful solution to the conflict, shows growing ties of Pakistan with its western neighbour.⁷⁰

It is in the economic, political and strategic benefit of Pakistan to maintain strong relations and enhance economic diplomacy with Iran under the umbrella of their mutual ally, i.e. China.⁷¹

The recent positive move towards an intra-Afghan peace

⁶³ Khan, Righting the Wrongs in Pakistan's Foreign Policy under Imran Khan, *Insideover*, last modified October 13th, 2019,

⁶⁴ <https://www.insideover.com/politics/righting-the-wrongs-pakistani-foreign-policy-under-imran-khan.html>

⁶⁵ Michael Safi and Mehreen Zahra Malik, “Pakistan returns Indian pilot shot down over Kashmir in ‘peace gesture’”, *The Guardian*, last modified March 1st 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/01/pakistan-hands-back-indian-pilot-shot-down-over-kashmir-in-peace-gesture>

⁶⁶ Sitara Noor, “Pulwama/Balakot and The Evolving Role of Third Parties in India-Pakistan Crises”, *Stimson Center*, last modified March 25th, 2020, <https://www.stimson.org/2020/pulwama-balakot-and-the-evolving-role-of-third-parties-in-india-pakistan-crises>

⁶⁷ News correspondent, “India revokes occupied Kashmir’s special autonomy through rushed presidential decree”, *Dawn News*, last modified August 24th 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1498227>

⁶⁸ Naveed Siddiqui, “In landmark move, PM Imran unveils ‘new political map’ of Pakistan”, *Dawn News*, last modified August 5th, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1572590>

⁶⁹ News correspondent, “Iran drops India from key Chabahar project”, *Dawn News*, last modified July 15th, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1569090>

⁷⁰ Sabah Aslam, “Pakistan-Iran Relations”, *Modern Diplomacy*, last modified March 3rd, 2020, <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2020/03/03/pakistan-iran-relations>

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Umar Karim, “Be cautious: India hasn’t left Iran’s Chabahar”, *Arab News*, last modified August 21st, 2020, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1722536>

dialogue and opening of Pak-Afghan border for trade paves the way for optimistic bilateral terms with the neighbouring state.⁷² The approval of new visa policy for Afghan citizens will make the acquiring of visas easier with multiple entry visit visas and long-term business, investment and student visas.⁷³ Pakistan has revived all border points with the neighbour country for trade and pedestrians.⁷⁴ Both countries are looking forward to enhancing trade and commerce through investment in the industrial and agricultural sectors.⁷⁵

Policy towards the Muslim World

In the changing world dynamics, there is seen adrift in priorities of the Arab nations, from ideologically driven leadership to politically and economically motivated interests. With inadequacy in proposing a pertinent resolution or significant statements to back the issues of Kashmir or Palestine, the Muslim Arab leadership seems to be losing its grip over the Muslim world. In the wake of such a vacuum, the non-Arab bloc is supposedly emerging with Turkey, Iran and Malaysia taking the steering wheel.⁷⁶

Pakistan has comprehensively exercised two policy options of neutrality and balancing. Pakistan’s policy towards the Middle East has been alternating between the two options in order to maintain the balance of power in the region. As internal and external forces have always had influence over Pakistan’s foreign policy, thus its trajectory has never been a declaration of one divisive policy towards any region. Thus it could be rightly termed as “neutrality-cum-balancing” approach which Pakistan has exercised in the past crisis of the Muslim world.

In the present dynamics, at the Kuala Lumpur Summit Pakistan made a last-minute decision to not attend the summit, which has also been perceived as a balancing act by Pakistan. It is pertinent to mention that Pakistan has remained successful in applying the neutrality-cum-balancing posture at the summit. By maintaining a strategic partnership with supposedly non-Arab quadrant, as well as, by providing a reaffirmation to Saudi Arabia as fundamentally a leader of the Muslim

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Tahir Khan, “Afghanistan welcomes Pakistan’s support, cooperation in peace process”, *Daily Times*, last modified October 15th, 2020, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/678051/afghanistan-welcomes-pakistans-support-cooperation-in-peace-process>

⁷⁵ APP, “Pakistan vows to develop vibrant relations, trade with Afghanistan”, *Daily Times*, last modified October 1st, 2020, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/672758/pakistan-vows-to-develop-vibrant-relations-trade-with-afghanistan>

⁷⁶ Muhammad Amir Rana, “Muslim world politics”, *Dawn News*, last modified February 9th, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1533303>

world; maintaining the leadership over Muslim states.⁷⁷

However, on the issue of Kashmir, Turkey has openly sided with Pakistan on international forums, whereas the efforts of Saudi Arabia have remained insufficient in speaking up for the rights of thousands of Kashmiris.⁷⁸ In this case, Pakistan finds itself in a difficult position to maintain the balancing posture in the future.

Foreign Policy Outlook on International Forums and Media

Pakistan's foreign policy outlook on international forums has remained coherent since the new government has assumed office. It could be better witnessed by Prime Minister Khan's writings in international newspapers like the Washington Post and various global think tanks.⁷⁹ Moreover, with the addition of a strategic division in the Foreign Office as well as the affiliation of a leading academician as Prime Minister's Special Advisor on National Security, Pakistan's narrative has been heard internationally very effectively.⁸⁰ Although last year Prime Minister's speech at the United Nations General Assembly 74th session was taken as "extemporaneous".⁸¹ But the assertion and emotions needed to explain the illegal revocation of Kashmir's status by the Indian government, was the requirement of the sensitive issue.

Pakistan in the Lowey Institute's Asia Power Index has secured 15th place due to the significant increase in Pakistan's "diplomatic influence" in Asia, while other indicators remained consistent.⁸² It further clarifies Pakistan's domestic composure on international forums, which will strengthen the state's foreign policy posture internationally.⁸³

⁷⁷ Pakistan Geostrategic Review, *You Tube*, last modified October 20th,2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=epOr17xtv3U&t=56s>

⁷⁸ Rana, "Muslim world politics", *Dawn News*, last modified February 9th2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1533303>

⁷⁹ Khan, Righting the wrongs in Pakistan's Foreign Policy under Imran Khan, *Insideover*, last modified October 13th,2019, <https://www.insideover.com/politics/righting-the-wrongs-pakistani-foreign-policy-under-imran-khan.html>

⁸⁰ Imran Khan, "Imran Khan: Peace is within reach in Afghanistan. A hasty international withdrawal would be unwise", *The Washington Post*, last modified September 26th, 2020' <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/09/26/imran-khan-peace-is-within-reach-afghanistan-hasty-international-withdrawal-would-be-unwise>

⁸¹ News desk, "How international media covered PM Imran's powerful UN speech", *The Express Tribune*, last modified September 18th,2019,<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2067293/international-media-covered-pm-imrans-powerful-un-speech>

⁸² Lowey Institute, *Lowey institute Asia-Pacific Power Index 2020 Edition*, accessed on October 26,2020, <https://power.loweyinstitute.org/countries/pakistan>

⁸³ News Desk, "Pakistan 15th most powerful country in Asia owing to increased diplomatic clout: US Think Tank", *Global Village Space*, last modified October 20th, 2020, <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/pakistan-15th-most-powerful-country-in-asia-owing-to-increased-diplomatic-clout-us-think-tank>

FOREIGN POLICY FAULT LINES

This section seeks to highlight the state-level and regional fault lines that may challenge the perusal of Pakistan's foreign policy and therefore need to be adequately addressed by the state of Pakistan.

State-level Institutional Fault Lines

Although the current government has extended in the realm of diplomacy and soft power, at the institutional level there remain some weak links which are hindering the further progress of the country's foreign relations. It has been noted by former Ambassadors, that Pakistan's foreign missions are considered to be weak as they lack training, tactical clarity, strategic vision, and capacity.⁸⁴ The root cause seems to be appointments of junior diplomats in most crucial diplomatic stations on the basis of favouritism and internal lobbying. This weakness creates a spiral effect resulting in key diplomatic stations left being vacant for a long time.⁸⁵ Moreover, during the previous government, the country operated without any designated Foreign Minister.⁸⁶

Regional-level Structural Fault Lines

A number of regional-level structural fault lines existing in South Asia have historically exacerbated challenges for Pakistan in pursuing its foreign policy. The existence of interstate conflicts resulting from border contentions and transnational terrorism remain two dominant fault lines that may pose challenges to Pakistan in the future as well.

South Asian regional stability has largely remained hostage to recurring inter-state conflicts, mainly emanating from inter-state border-related contentions. Given the Indian expansionist foreign policy goals in the region, border contentions once again flared up recently. Currently, India shares border disputes with five of its bordering states i.e. China, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar.⁸⁷ Resultantly, inter-state bi-lateral relations in the region are experiencing an ebbing, specifically vis-à-vis India. A faltered regional integration has come at the cost of receding economic integration, people-to-

⁸⁴ News desk, "Pakistan lacks leverage to play Mideast peace broker", *The Express Tribune*, last modified January 14th,2020,<https://tribune.com.pk/story/2136680/pakistan-lacks-leverage-play-mideast-peace-broker>

⁸⁵ Hassan Khan, "Where is the foreign office headed in 2020?", *Daily Times*, last modified January 14th2020, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/536045/where-is-the-foreign-office-headed-in-2020>

⁸⁶ Abdul Basit, "Our Foreign Policy Dilemma", *The News*, last modified June 18th,2016, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/128754-Our-foreign-policy-dilemma>

⁸⁷ Iftikhar Gilani, "India's border dispute with neighbors", *Anadolu Agency*, last modified 31 May 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/indias-border-dispute-with-neighbors/1859854#>

people contacts and stability within the region.⁸⁸

More importantly, transnational terrorism has remained a defining feature of the region's security agenda and continues to remain an underlying fault line. While Islamist militancy has overwhelmingly remained central to policy-making and academic discourse, 'Saffron Terrorism' has largely evaded due attention. The ethnically exclusivist and religiously extremist ideology has resulted in the rise of saffron terror incidents in India since the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party established its government in 2014.⁸⁹

Largely pertaining to India, the rising tide of saffron terrorism may be equally detrimental for the broader regional security. The upsurge in saffron terrorism has already triggered reactionary Jihadism, within India and without.⁹⁰ In 2016, Al Qaeda's South Asia branch launched its campaign against Hindutva-inspired saffron violence against Indian Muslims. More so, the campaign attached a special focus on extending its geographical footprint in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.⁹¹ In May 2019, the Islamic State – "Wilayah Hind" announced its presence in Indian Occupied Jammu & Kashmir (IOJ&K) on the premise of fighting Indian aggression in the territory.⁹² Hence, the threat of a resurgence of transnational terrorism within South Asia remains a key fault line that needs to be addressed by Pakistan adequately.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The incumbent government's approach towards the prevailing ideological notions should neither compromise the national interests nor should it dominate the determination of the bilateral relationships with other states.⁹³
- In order to enhance the performance of the Foreign Office, further reforms need to be introduced. These may include: providing specialised training, providing timely briefings to the Ambassadors via modern technology, restructuring of the recruitment process and capacity-

⁸⁸ Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Stuti Bhatnagar, "Interstate conflicts and regionalism in South Asia: Prospects and challenges." *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 13, no. 1 (2008): 1-19.

⁸⁹ Khuram Iqbal, "The Rise of Hindutva, Saffron Terrorism and South Asian Regional Security." *Journal of Security and Strategic Analyses* 5, no. 1 (2019): 43-63.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Animesh Roul, "Saffron Scare: Al-Qaeda's Propaganda War in India", *Jamestown Foundation*, last modified March 23, 2018, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b728d054.html>

⁹² "What Does Islamic State's Wilayah al-Hind and Wilayah Pakistan Mean?", *Islamic Theology of Counter-terrorism*, last modified May 20 2019, https://itct.org.uk/archives/itct_article/what-does-islamic-states-wilayah-al-hind-and-wilayah-pakistan-mean

⁹³ Barlas, "Foreign affairs and Pakistan's policy options", *The Nation*, last modified June 6th 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/06-Jun-2020/foreign-affairs-and-pakistan-s-policy-options?show=preview>

building of the office-holders.⁹⁴

- As the Foreign Office has repeatedly reiterated the centrality of economic self-sufficiency for pursuing an independent foreign policy, tangible steps need to be taken in the said direction. Pakistan needs to establish a posture that allows its engagement into different economically-interdependent apparatuses on an equitable basis. Pakistan needs to redeem domestic markets and encourage local businesses to achieve greater economic stability.⁹⁵
- Pakistan needs to up its diplomatic offensive against India's violations of international laws in IOJ&K on different international forums.
- Pakistan must revisit its bilateral ties with Iran and Afghanistan in order to strengthen Pakistan's economic diplomacy stance. In addition to which, formulation of a Pakistan-China-Iran nexus could better serve the stance of economic diplomacy on Pakistan's end.⁹⁶
- Pakistan needs to proactively devise the mechanisms that allow the country to gear up with the transforming international political order. In future, Pakistan might find itself walking the tightrope between its geo-strategic interests with the U.S. against its geo-economic interests with China. Having a foreign policy with an exemption of even one great power may lead us back to the cold war dynamics.⁹⁷ Moreover, Pakistan's future partnership with any of the great powers must not compromise its strategic autonomy.

CONCLUSION

Over the decades, in terms of its foreign policy, the state of Pakistan has consistently put up with a spectrum of diverse internal and external challenges. The current government is also up against a number of challenges. A domestic economic situation subject to instability, internal political landscape up against rising sectarian tensions, an international image demanding rehabilitation, a regional environment that is calling for greater Pakistani engagement and the international environment exacting Pakistan's preparedness for the emerging trends together make up the infrastructure of internal and external challenges.

In an effort of rowing through the subject's internal and external dynamics, Pakistan certainly appears to be rethinking its foreign policy objectives and the modalities

⁹⁴ Lodhi, "Foreign Office needs reform", *Dawn News*, last modified September 14, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1579617>

⁹⁵ Hussain, "Trump vs. Pakistan", *Dawn News*, last modified: February 20th, 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1535549/trump-vs-pakistan>

⁹⁶ Barlas, "Foreign Affairs and Pakistan's policy options", *The Nation*, last modified June 6th 2020, <https://nation.com.pk/06-Jun-2020/foreign-affairs-and-pakistan-s-policy-options?show=preview>

⁹⁷ Ibid.

of their implementation. While the government is intent on capitalising the opportunities that the domestic and systemic factors offer, implementing a foreign policy that ensures a multitude of bilateral and multilateral relations based on a positive-sum game for Pakistan is easier said than done. Pakistan's foreign policy, though with a renewed posture, is yet to stand the test of rising global political polarities: be it the U.S. against India, or the Saudi Arabia against Iran or Turkey. Pakistan's economic predicaments on forums like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the FATF may yet come at the crossroads to determine the direction of Pakistan's foreign policy. Moreover, Pakistan's principled stance on regional peace and stability may also come to stand the ire of its eastern neighbour's outrightly aggressive posture. In a nutshell, while the foreign policy of Pakistan seems to have turned for the better, the long-term outcomes of it remain at the dispensation of the times to come.