



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Understanding Pakistan's Foreign Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century:  
Challenges and Opportunities**

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**ABSTRACT**

Understanding Pakistan's foreign policy is a herculean task because Pakistan has a diverse kind of country in its geostrategic and geoeconomic circumstances. This chapter will explain the theoretical and operational understanding of Pakistan's foreign policy framework in the contemporary world. Pakistan's geostrategic conditions are challenging and lucrative at the same time. Three nuclear powers surround it: China, India, and Russia. The fourth nuclear power is Pakistan, which is in the region. Iran, the fifth nuclear power, is in the making. Therefore, Pakistan is balancing its relations with Iran and Saudi Arabia, as an extremely Shia country and as a Sunni country, respectively. China is a communist, and the US is a democratic country, but Pakistan's foreign policy is based on mutual interests and peaceful co-existence. The qualitative method would mainly be used to test this research's hypothesis based on Pakistan's ability to sustain itself in the comity of a nation as a soft power and peaceful country instead of a warmonger in the region. The consolidation in the form of recommendations will also be included at the end.

**KEYWORDS** Geoeconomic, Geostrategic, Soft Power, Warmonger

**Introduction**

After the Second World War in 1945, it was difficult to confine international relations and foreign policy owing to the independence of many countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Usually, foreign policy is defined as a formal strategy of a country to protect its national interests.

The twenty-first century has been war-ridden. At the outset of this century, the 9/11 incident changed global politics. It also redefined the concepts of international relations. In 2009, there was an economic crunch in the U.S., and the collapse of capitalism happened when the U.S. government directly intervened in market forces by giving a bailout plan to sustain the banking system in the country. At the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020, there was a COVID-19 pandemic that changed the foreign policy of every country. France, the U.K., and the U.S. faced political instability. After Brexit 2020, the U.K. still faces political instability, and its foreign policy is unpredictable.

The pandemic gave space to many challenges to the nation-state: Islamophobia, terrorism, diseases, economic meltdown, political instability, and security challenges to the global community.

Like foreign policy, the international relations and political science subfield went under a broader perspective. Therefore, understanding foreign policy as a concept has become an arduous task in the twenty-first century since the human being is a unit of the state, and a state is a unit of the global international environment. Thus, foreign policy is a complex phenomenon owing to the unpredictable behaviors of human beings and the states.

## **Literature Review**

To understand Pakistan's foreign policy in the contemporary world, we need to review the literature in the following domains: the Kashmir issue, Security Concerns, Afghanistan and the War on Terror, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and Relations with the Muslim World, Diplomatic Relations, Economic Considerations, and Nuclear Policy.

Strategic Foresight for Asia published an analysis of Riaz Khokhar, Review of Pakistan's Foreign Policy In 2019, in the year 2020. He explains Pakistan's foreign policy's significant concerns regarding Kashmir, the Afghan Issue, CPEC, and the U.S.A.'s criticism regarding Chinese investment in Pakistan. (Khokhar, 2020)

Rana Eijaz Ahmad writes about Pakistan and the West in a research paper, Pakistan and the West: Entwined, Entangled and Engaged, published in the International Journal of Humanities and Social Science in 2011. He explains that Pakistan's relations with the West have been entangled, entwined, and engaged.

He further narrates that it has been an open secret that the West, specifically the U.S.A., usually constructs relations with individuals in Pakistan. Those individuals belong to the military, judiciary, or parliament. The term of Pakistan-America Relations is skeptical. The U.S.A. used to spend money in Pakistan's media industry to control information spreading disinformation. It creates a trust deficit among people about their government, which the U.S.A. has done successfully (Muzaffar, et. al. 2018. Bruce Riedel, in his celebrated treatise Deadly Embrace, published in 2012, claims that Pakistan and the U.S.A. relations are like a deadly embrace; both countries are aligned with an unending relationship due to the geographical constraints of Pakistan.

Daniel S. Markey's No Exit from Pakistan, published in 2013, is a story of painful relations between Pakistan and the U.S.A. The U.S.A. administration intends to talk to the Pakistan military for all kinds of assurances and always support the military in Pakistan.

Ahmad wrote another article on the Security, Political Dimensions, and Consequences of NATO Expansion in the Region and how it impacts Pakistan's foreign policy, published in South Asian Studies A Research Journal of South Asian Studies in 2010. He describes that Muslim countries are not integrated. First, we must be ready for Muslim integration through the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). It is the call of the day that Muslim Ummah should make an Islamic Union like the European Union and should act reasonably rather than belligerently.

Ahmad wrote another piece in 2009 on Pakistan's Internal Security Threats in the Age of Globalization, published in the journal Pakistan Vision, Vol. 10 No.2. He vehemently explains that many horizontal and vertical divisions in Pakistan keep people divided based on religion, caste, creed, status, and language, along with a perpetual void between haves and have-nots. These cleavages undermine Pakistan's economic system and cause socio-political instability.

Sumaia Khizar writes on The Dynamics of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), published in the Journal of Development and Social Sciences in 2022, explaining the Chinese investment in Pakistan and the U.S., Indian and Iranian concerns on this bilateral geoeconomic project.

Maryam Raashed and Rida Anwar write excellently about Pakistan's Foreign Policy in Transition: Driving Factors and Emerging Trends, published in 2020 in the Journal of Centre for Strategic and Contemporary Research. Pakistan must adopt a proactive approach in determining its relationship with any superpowers without losing economic autonomy.

Khalid Saifullah and Irfan Hussain Qaisrani discuss soft power in Pakistan's foreign policy: Prospects and Potentials, published in the Journal of Strategic Studies, winter issue 2022. This article explains how soft power works in Pakistan. Along with culture and political values, they consider foreign policy a third vital resource in soft power.

Raja Muhammad Khan writes Foreign Policy of Pakistan in the Changing Regional and Global Settings; in the age of Globalization, more and more areas of global, regional, and mutual interactions today come into the realm of foreign policy. The terms citizen diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, commercial diplomacy, defense diplomacy, digital diplomacy, economic diplomacy, and regional diplomacy are presently considered part and parcel of foreign policy.

### **Material and Methods**

This paper is mainly based on qualitative and comparative methods. The descriptive method is also used to make the analysis more pertinent and credible. The mixed method is making this paper more readable and balanced in understanding Pakistan's foreign policy in the contemporary world.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

For this paper, we may define foreign policy as a formal strategy to protect the nation's mutual interests in the anarchic world. Here, we start understanding the theoretical framework of foreign policy making.

### **Foreign Policy: As a Concept**

Foreign policy is a government strategy that deals with other nations and international organizations (IOs). It includes a set of ethics, a pattern of goals, and many practices that determine a country's relations with the rest of the world. The core value of foreign policy is to protect national interests, sustain security, and achieve economic, political, and social goals (Muzaffar, et. al 2016).

Foreign policy encompasses different diplomatic, economic, cultural, and military tools to achieve its objectives. These may include treaties, trade agreements, military engagements, international aid, peaceful negotiations, alliances, and participation in IOs. All states' priorities and approaches vary due to their geopolitical position, history, economic interests, and ideological reflections.

Governments often conduct foreign policies to promote economic affluence, human rights, environmental concerns, national security, and regional stability. The development and implementation of foreign policy stereotypically involve alliances among diplomats, intelligence services, and other relevant institutions to circumnavigate multifaceted international relations and protect the country's interests and values on the global stage.

### **Foreign Policy: Why States are bound to Make Decisions**

Foreign policy is a phenomenon in which decision-makers have to make decisions in the country's best interests. Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, while talking to the people of the U.S.A. in February 1948, outlined the succeeding goals of Pakistan's foreign policy:

Pakistan's foreign policy believes in openness and benevolence towards all the world's nations. We do not appreciate belligerent strategies against any sovereign entity in the world. We believe in promoting peace and prosperity among the nation-states with sincerity and honesty. We will keep appreciating all freedom movements in the world and

cooperate with all kinds of support to the helpless and needy peoples of the world. We keep abiding by the United Nations Charter of human rights. (<https://mofa.gov.pk/foreign-policy-2/>, 2023)

The Constitution of Pakistan 1973, Article 40 explains that Pakistan would strive for the brotherhood and integration of Muslim Ummah to work for the people of Asia, Africa, and Latin America to protect the mutual interests of developing nations. We will always support and promote international peace and security among the nation-states for settling their disputes with each other in peaceful manners. (<https://mofa.gov.pk/foreign-policy-2/>, 2023)

Pakistan's foreign policy, like that of other countries, primarily seeks national objectives. It believes in establishing peace and stability at national and international levels through integrated efforts in the age of globalization. It also tries to be reflected globally as a moderate and liberal society that believes in goodwill and peace at all levels.

Pakistan's foreign policy always promotes the internationally recognized norms and values of relations among nations. It involves respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all States, non-interference in the internal affairs of other States, non-aggression, and peaceful settlement of disputes. Therefore, Pakistan has always wanted friendly and cordial relations with other countries.

### **Routine Decisions in Foreign Policy Making**

The foreign office of Pakistan makes decisions in routine matters, and all those decisions get approval from the cabinet's committee on foreign affairs. Pakistani diplomats implement those decisions according to international norms and values. More realistically, it may be considered that the executive branch usually makes foreign policy decisions for the government.

There was no foreign minister in the Nawaz Sharief government from 2013-2016; he has been designated foreign minister, which shows the importance of the portfolio. (Ahmad, 2014)

Defense decision-making or any decisions relating to important projects in foreign policy has always been a civil-military joint exercise in democratic countries. However, Pakistan barely observes a stable democracy. Therefore, civilians are perhaps never included in military decision-making. (Pattanaik, 2000) From the perspective of Pakistan's history, we may derive that all military-related decision-making is only done by the military itself. All Pakistan- India-related issues are also considered by the armed forces only. (Pattanaik, 2000)

Pakistan has long articulated its foreign policy choices as a security state based on security needs and the objective of creating itself as a hard military power. This approach has permitted the military to lead in determining national and foreign policy decisions, often overwhelming civilian institutions (Sulehria, 2023). However, with varying global undercurrents, the current civil-military institution is aggressively signaling a change in Pakistan's strategic culture and foreign policy interests.

It has been just over a year since General Asim Munir took command of Pakistan's military and continued the Bajwa doctrine to transform Pakistan from a geopolitical to a geo-economic regional power. This elaborates on the significance of economic security for a country as compared to any other factor in the country. Economic autonomy gives a country sustainable security.

## **Decisions in Crisis in Pakistan's Foreign Policy**

In a crisis situation in Pakistan's foreign policy, all stakeholders, along with security and intelligence agencies, come together to pursue international law and make rational decisions based on the rational choice model.

A crucial aspect of the doctrine of General Munir involves guiding Pakistan away from the strategic predicament of choosing between the U.S. and China and avoiding the high costs it has incurred for Islamabad's foreign policy. General Munir has made clear a preference for pursuing a hedging strategy, aiming to avoid getting entwined in global block-based politics. His approach is strategic to attain increased economic gains for Pakistan, avoiding subservience to significant powers and increasing its room for maneuver. He articulated this visualization for defending Pakistan's sovereignty by building a healthy economy, highlighting that "all Pakistanis must throw out the beggar's bowl." (Sulehria, 2023)

At least three interconnected points describe General Munir's foreign policy preferences, each representing noteworthy tasks he must confront. These conclusions are observed from his recent announcements or speeches and other actions. First, he intends to express a commitment to protecting and advancing a softer image of Pakistan. Second, he has shown keen interest in uplifting Pakistan as a regional middle power. Third, he has placed a substantial emphasis on "prioritizing geoeconomics over geopolitics." (Sulehria, 2023)

## **Major Challenges for Pakistani Foreign Policymakers**

In the contemporary foreign policy of Pakistan, these are the primary concerns: Islamophobia, terrorism, diseases, economic meltdown, political instability, and security challenges.

Islamophobia is an agoraphobia; an anxiety lies with the West that Islam and Muslims will dominate and rule over the world again. It obliges the West to fight against an enemy within, who misguided it against the peaceful people.

The communication revolution demonopolized the Western monopoly. The forces that have been using the U.S.A. as a puppet to serve their purpose for a long are anxious about the downfall of the U.S.A. The U.S.A. president Trump started a popular narrative to withdraw the U.S.A. troops from Afghanistan and Syria to sustain the American economy. It was unacceptable to the U.S.A. establishment; therefore, General Mattis resigned against Trump's policy towards Asia. The international establishment started Islamophobia as a new stunt to maintain its control of the war industry and global politics. Islamophobia is an agoraphobia for the West as it has anxiety about losing its monopoly over the global south and fear of the dominance of Islam and Muslims. The forces behind all this agoraphobia are Jews. This research paper is based on secondary data and focus group activity.

Islamophobia is agoraphobia in which the victim has the fear of anxiety of losing something or scare of dominance of others. The West has fear and anxiety about the dominance of Islam, which is not imminent owing to the bad shape of the Muslim Ummah and the absence of leadership.

There was no secularism before and no Hindutva today- all are attempts to control the economic market as per the Western agenda. Saudis, Qatar, Kuwait, Iran, and UAE are the big investors in India. The West intend to spoil their investment.

India tested international opinion in Kashmir. Now, the whole of India is against Muslims. After the elimination of Article 370 of the Indian constitution, which used to give

special status to the Indian-administered regions, the pro-Indian political parties in Kashmir challenged it, and the native Bar Association and some individual complainants assisted the court in upholding and finishing the autonomy of the Jammu & Kashmir region. (India's Supreme Court Upholds Revocation of Kashmir's Autonomy, 2023)

India has the authority to make amendments, and the communities of India must raise their voices against such inhuman or unconstitutional amendments. Nothing is possible until or unless local people do not raise their voices. Pakistan amended its constitution as per Islamic canons. What happened in East Pakistan was that Bengali rose against the Federation.

Therefore, regardless of region, the government must look into its internal affairs. The government is heading towards positive things. The establishment is losing control over the government. Moreover, the government of Pakistan never have control over the establishment. However, losing control over the government may be painful for the agencies.

Pakistan needs to make pragmatic reforms to sustain itself on a solid footing. All forces must work under the government, and a state within a state is unacceptable.

### **Operational Framework**

The dismantling of a vicious radical group called *Action des Forces Operationnelles* in France, which was ready to slay Muslims in July 2018, is an indication of the professionalization of Islamophobia networks and a threat to the local security outfits at large. They are opportunists and mercenaries who will kill anyone for the sake of money and their benefits. Those groups are the two faces of the same coin. They would never mind that while killing, they would be Muslim, Christian, European, or Western. (Bertran, 2018)

It is the U.S., Europe, and Australia; everywhere, the same type of Islamophobia exists with the same pattern of action and brutalization. In the name of loyalty to faith, good Arabs convert into bad guys, and a veiled woman into a fanatic one who is striving for any political struggle or their fundamental rights. Therefore, interfaith dialogue is needed at international and national levels to unite all stakeholders and help them understand each other's concerns for a peaceful, liveable planet. (Bertran, 2018)

### **Internal and External Threats of Pakistan**

Pakistan has more internal threats than external threats. Political and economic instability, increased inflation, and unemployment are pushing the country towards a large scale of restlessness and dissatisfaction among the youth. This is creating a brain drain at a large scale in Pakistan.

Skillful labor and intelligent minds are running abroad for better opportunities in life. Corruption, nepotism, and the absence of the rule of law, along with the absence of any accountability, are the primary internal threats to Pakistan's socio-political and economic stability.

Terrorism, foreign intervention in the political affairs of Pakistan, and drone attacks are direct threats to Pakistan's sovereignty. However, all these external threats are directly linked to the internal threats mentioned earlier. Therefore, Pakistan only has internal threats, not any single external threat.

There is only one agenda point to deal with all internal challenges in Pakistan: implementing laws and rigorous accountability for everyone holding a public or private office. Terrorism is an errorism because the West has made many mistakes in the name of

terrorism. The West first used the term starting of crusade wars. American President George Bush used it intentionally and later returned from his words and claimed it was mistakenly uttered. It was senior Bush who first intervened in Iraq in the name of weapons of mass destruction but later said it was a blunder on the part of the American forces. Therefore, Pakistan is a member of the Muslim world and concerned with all kinds of Western outlaws. However, Pakistan's foreign policy is always based on a balance where Pakistan simultaneously enjoys good relations with the U.S. and China. In the same way, Pakistan successfully creates a balance while interacting with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Geopolitically, Pakistan is located in a lucrative place but also vulnerable at the same time. Pakistan is surrounded by three other nuclear powers: China, India, and Russia, and fourth, Pakistan itself and Iran in the making. Therefore, security has been Pakistan's primary concern, which is why Pakistan is known as a security state. It would not be wrong to say that Indian foreign policy starts and ends at Pakistani borders owing to the geographical constraints of Pakistan (Muzaffar, et. al. 2021).

### **Opportunities: Pakistan Foreign Policy in the 21st Century**

In the twenty-first century, Pakistan needs to be proactive in its actions and needs to realize to the world that we have already made many sacrifices in the so-called war against terrorism. Pakistan has been the front-line state against terrorism and a non-NATO ally of the U.S.A. Unfortunately, Pakistan's infinite sacrifices and economic loss have never been considered essential to constructing a meaningful relationship with Pakistan. The U.S.A. always has a trust deficit towards Pakistan, and Pakistan also reciprocates the same feelings toward America.

Pakistan did a great job during the pandemic, and the world started looking towards Pakistan's policy to counter the pandemic. In the same way, Pakistan also remained an example of environmental concerns, and the Imran Khan era was very much concerned for the environment. Tourism was also given importance in the same era. This is why, in 2021, Pakistan was considered the number one destination in tourism by one of the U.S.A.'s organizations. This is how Pakistan was seen at the international level.

The journey from terrorism to tourism may be considered a milestone in Pakistan's foreign policy-making in the twenty-first century. In contemporary Pakistan, the political and economic instability is at its peak, and the caretaker government is doing its best to manage the crises in Pakistan's political economy with the help of armed forces. Asim Munir is trying to maintain relations with other countries, especially with the Muslim World, on the basis of trade only. The West is not ready to give space to Pakistan in the international community in front of India. The global tilt towards India is not political but economic because it has the second-largest economic market after China.

### **Conclusion**

This research has explained diverse reasons for the undesirable defiance of the U.S. against Muslims and vice versa. It is the day's call to encourage mutual respect and understanding between two ideologies and the West's and Muslims' social and cultural values. There is no need to pass bucks upon each other but a time to work like a global community. This world is full of war-like actions and diseases. The environment is degrading quickly.

Unfortunately, in Pakistan, cult politics is deep-rooted, and the so-called political elite, who are political demagogues in reality, exploit the backing of people for the fulfillment of their nefarious designs. They build their businesses abroad and keep the people at daggers drawn back home upon trivial issues of caste, creed, and status. It alienates the ordinary person in Pakistan from mainstream politics. It creates a gap between the people

and the government. This de-alignment creates hatred among people towards their political system that ultimately ends in disintegration or killings of each other for controlling the economic resources.

Thus, leadership in Pakistan remains unsuccessful in bridging the gap between the elite and the masses. People in Pakistan usually pursue their rights instead of duties, and the trust deficit between the people and the political elite is increasing daily.

Like the West, social media (SM) and electronic media have transformed Pakistan on a large scale. Many people in Pakistan have access to SM and the Internet, and it is also said that Pakistan may be one of the largest Internet users. Therefore, SM informs people on the one hand and misinforms them simultaneously. Mobilization is a positive outcome of the use of SM in Pakistan, but propaganda based on misinformation is altogether unacceptable for any civilized nation in the world.

Today, General Asim Munir is working to develop Pakistani institutions. However, people, on the other hand, want change and revolt in Pakistan through SM. The judiciary, parliament, and executive are all exploiting their powers and degrading the political system in Pakistan. Political and non-political institutions have monopolized the power corridors and are trying to supersede each other without pragmatic thinking.

All parties are trying to protect their party, family, or personal interests; no one is ready to resolve the ongoing crises of the people of Pakistan. The elite is exploiting the resources of the civil-military bureaucracy, which is taking a heavy toll on Pakistan's economy. Under the prevailing circumstances, there is no central authority ruling in Pakistan. Inflation is rising, and price hikes have dismantled the middle class. No one is ready to understand the problems of the common person in Pakistan.

The international establishment intends to see Pakistan as a dependent entity due to its lucrative geographical conditions. However, China and Russia are also actively keeping superpowers' influence out of this region. In such precarious circumstances, Pakistan needs prudential leadership to sustain itself at the international level in a dignified way. The general elections are going to be held in Pakistan by February 8, 2024. We can expect free and fair elections to get Pakistan back on track. Although difficult in the situation, we can hope against hope.

### **Recommendations**

A collective and integrated effort is required to integrate the global community. Wars are not the solution to any crisis. The Afghan war is an example that the U.S.A. spent almost a trillion dollars to win over Afghans, but after the inept war of twenty years, it had to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan. It caused more than trillions of dollars to the U.S.A. economy. The results are undesirable for the U.S.A. Japan learned a lesson after the Second World War: It would not go to war again. Today, Japan is one of the world's most technological powers. Pakistan and India need to understand that they have to work together with China and Russia in the region for peaceful coexistence. All hegemonic tendencies must shut down immediately for an economically prosperous region.

China and Russia also need to think about cementing their relations with Taiwan and Ukraine respectively for regional peace. It is proved that wars and killings never sustain peace but sow the seeds of consternation among the next generations. It causes annihilation and destruction for generations. Arms and armaments can only destroy peace and can never install peace in any part of the world. There is only one way of development: promoting or working for the national interest instead of personal, party, and family interests.



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