

**US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Assessment of Pakistan's Foreign Policy Options**Muhammad Shahab<sup>1</sup>, Dr. Sadia Sulaiman<sup>2</sup>, Asad Ullah\*<sup>3</sup>**Original Article**

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**Abstract**

Pakistan, being the immediate neighbour of Afghanistan, has been widely affected by the developments taking place in the country in the aftermath of the US withdrawal and the subsequent rise of the Taliban into power in August 2021. Pakistan's relationship with both the US and Afghanistan encountered new scenarios and a set of challenges. The US and Pakistan both found a space for more focus on bilateral ties, away from the burden of third party i.e., Afghanistan, which remained a key determining factor in their ties. However, it is yet to be seen how both countries carve a way out of the troubled history of engagement in the past. Similarly, despite Pakistan's historical links with the Taliban, its relationship with Afghanistan also witnessed a downward spiral due to border tensions and the resurgence of TTP. The paper looks into the changing dynamics of the bilateral US-Pakistan and Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship in the backdrop of geopolitical changes in the region after the US withdrawal. It argues that despite divergence in interests, it is crucial for Pakistan to engage both the US and Afghanistan for the fulfillment of its geo-economic aspirations in the region as a key determining factor of its foreign policy in recent times.

**Keywords:** US Withdrawal, Pakistan Foreign Policy, Foreign Relation, Challenges and Policy Options

**Introduction**

Pakistan has been obsessed with its security since its inception. T.V. Paul termed it as strategic curse meaning that the obsession with security made Pakistani institutions and democracy weaker, corrupt, and inefficient (Paul, 2014). But, in the year 2022, Pakistan formulated its first-ever National Security Policy which clearly demonstrated a shift from geo-strategy to geo-economy. The policy also recognizes the traditional as well as the non-traditional security threats to the country (Akhtar, 2022). This 180-degree shift in the foreign policy is bolstered by various factors. Most importantly the world order is rapidly changing where war or traditional security no longer gets the amount of attention that it got in the past, and the reasons behind are; interconnectedness, interdependence, and globalization (Jaeger & Brites, 2020). Despite the growing importance of geo-economic in international relation, traditional security cannot be undermined. Pakistan still faces traditional security challenges in the shape of the insurgence of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 (Mir et al., 2023). Likewise, Pakistan also considers India as an eminent threat to its security and does not spare a chance to counter it and in the case of Afghanistan the interests of both states diverge.

Afghanistan is the immediate neighbour of Pakistan. In the past Pakistan looked at Kabul through the lense of 'strategic depth' but due to changing regional dynamics, Pakistan no longer considers it like that (Mofa, 2020). Historically, Pak-Afghan relations are strained by the Durand line and Pashtunistan issue (Qassem & Durand, 2008). But currently, after the US withdrawal and the rise of Taliban, the relations are strained by the issue of the resurgence of TTP. TTP has safe havens in Afghanistan and Pakistan wants action against them (D'Souza et al., 2023). Besides this, the current Taliban government is faced with grave economic crises, and states, such as Pakistan and China are trying to steer it out of this situation. After the US withdrawal, a power vacuum is created in the region which China and Pakistan are trying to fill collaboratively (Jash, 2021).

Now, Pakistani Foreign Policy is faced with several challenges. First and foremost, the resurgence of TTP in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Secondly, before the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the deciding factor in Pak-US relations was Kabul, but now this factor has diminished, so Pakistan must seek other avenues that can lead to good relations with the US. Thirdly, Pakistan is also facing the challenge of balancing its relations with both China and the United States. Finally, the challenge of tackling India still persists and how Pakistan is going to tackle it matters.

### **Methodology**

The research methodology for this paper involves a qualitative approach and secondary data collection. The data consulted during this study includes books, journal articles, newspaper articles, reports, official documents, and web sources. Concurrently, an analytical research methodology is applied such as content analysis in which different patterns, themes, and documents are analysed. Furthermore, for reliability, the triangulation technique has been used to consult multiple data sources which enhances the robustness of the analysis.

### **Foreign Policy: Impact of International Structure**

In International Relations, the structure of the international system is of prime importance while analysing the happenings of the world. States formulate their foreign policies according to that structure and behave accordingly. The current structure of the international system is bipolar; US represents the status quo and China is a rising power challenging US' hegemony (Xuetong, 2020). Moreover, Russia is also showing its military muscles by fighting a war in Ukraine (Mbah & Wasum, 2022). For two decades US hegemony in the world was unchallengeable but today it's been challenged.

On May 26, 2022, the US Secretary of State delivered a speech in which he unleashed the long-awaited US response to counter China in global politics. According to Mr Blinken, China is posing a serious challenge to the world order. Meanwhile, he also shed light on the US strategy to mitigate this risk. He presented a tripartite approach in this regard focusing on 'investment, alignment, and competition'. Meaning that the United States while building its relationship with China will first of all invest in its own capabilities. Secondly, they will try to ally themselves with their allies and lastly, they will be going to compete with China. As a response, Beijing's Ministry of Foreign Affairs termed this speech as "disinformation" and most interestingly they confirmed the fact that the US is once again returning to the bloc politics. They also argued that the aim and objective behind the US strategy is to encircle China in the Indo-Pacific region through its allies and partners (Legarda, 2022). This incident directly leads us to the fact that our region is going to witness an estrangement of two major powers. In this power politics, the middle-ranged and small-ranged powers will also have a part by aligning themselves with either the one or the other.

In fact, Beijing's apprehension regarding its encirclement is genuine because the US has already signed agreements and has established alliances in the region such as AUKUS and QUAD. AUKUS is a nuclear-powered submarine naval project announced in September 2022. The

security partnership is aimed at containing China in the Indo-Pacific region via Australia (Luthra, 2023). The pact is strongly criticized by Beijing by arguing that it's going to speed up the arms race in the region. Furthermore, its foreign ministry blamed the signatories by saying that the three involved states are "walking further and further down the path of error and danger". On the other hand, Joe Biden, US' president asserts that the agreement is for peace and stability. He further asserted that the submarines provided to Australia under the deal are "Nuclear-powered, not nuclear-armed" (Mao et al., 2023). From a critical perspective, the deal may violate the 1968 NPT (Non-proliferation Treaty) which emphasizes the reduction and non-transfer of nuclear weapons and materials such as uranium, etc to non-nuclear states (Borger, 2023). Similarly, Professor Andre Molle terms this pact as an embodiment of the 'security dilemma'. He further says that China considers it a potential threat to its security and to counter it they will also try to act similarly (Molle, 2021).

Besides AUKUS, there is another forum called QUAD which is of immense importance with respect to Pakistan as India is its member. (Graham et al., 2018). It is a loose grouping of four states i.e., Australia, India, Japan, and the US focusing on issues like security, health, and economy but our focus will be more on the security side of it, as the objective of the grouping is to contain China's rise in the region. For nearly a decade the forum was not functional. But, in the year 2017 the forum once again resurrected and this time unlike before, the goal of the forum was to contain China (Smith, 2021). As a response, China named it to be the "Asian NATO". Interestingly, the group staunchly opposes Russia's invasion of Ukraine but meanwhile, India is increasing its oil purchases from Russia a matter of concern for the group (The Guardian, 2022).

The aforementioned groups clearly demonstrate that the world is moving towards bipolarity and countries like Pakistan are in a perplexing situation because, on one hand, Pakistan's friendship with China is 'sweeter than honey, higher than the Himalayas, deeper than the ocean, and stronger than steel' while on the other hand, Pakistan does not want to annoy its former most allied ally i.e., the US. However, the already discussed National Security Policy of Pakistan clearly outlines the importance of geo-economics over geo-strategy (Levesques, 2022). Subsequently, if the relationship of Pakistan is analyzed vis a vis China and the USA it could be concluded that with China, it is economic-centric; while with America, it is security driven. Currently, US has already abandoned Afghanistan but they still are worried about the security dynamics of the region due to which they still need Pakistan's cooperation. On the other hand, Pakistan's relations with China are better than that of the US but it does not mean that Pakistan does not want good relationship with the US. However, Pakistan wants it to be economic-centric while the United States has always seen Pakistan as a strategic ally. In conclusion, Pakistan should stick to its policy of economic-centrism and must try to engage the US on issues such as climate change, cyber security, public health, and pandemics etc. Additionally, Pakistan needs to engage China on issues such as the ongoing crisis in Afghanistan, assist her in the reconstruction process and must try to persuade them to play a decisive role against the TTP via Afghan Taliban because at the moment China has leverage over the Afghan Taliban.

### **The Fall of Kabul and Changes in the Regional Chessboard**

After the 9/11 attacks, the US decided to invade Afghanistan and bring to justice the perpetrators of the attack i.e., Al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden. At that time Afghan Taliban were the de-facto rulers of Afghanistan. The US first asked the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden, but they refused. Thus infuriated, first by the attacks and then by the Taliban's response they launched an attack on Afghanistan in the year 2001 (Connah, 2020). The United States fought the longest war of its history in Afghanistan for nearly two decades.

After two decades, the US decided to evacuate its forces from Afghanistan and end its longest-fought war. Subsequently, a peace agreement between the Afghan Taliban and the US was inked in February 2020. The agreement was based on four cardinal principles that included the reduction of violence meaning that the Afghan Taliban will try to mitigate the intensity of violence in Afghanistan. Secondly, the US pledged to withdraw its security forces along with other foreign troops. Thirdly, the US urged Afghan Taliban to initiate negotiations with the main stakeholders of Afghanistan including the warlords and incumbent government at that time. Finally, the Afghan Taliban guaranteed that their soil would not be used for any kind of terrorist activities against other states (Maizland, 2020). Resultantly, In August 2021 the forces withdrew from Afghanistan. The hasty withdrawal faced severe criticism from countries like China. Beijing is of the opinion that the US must have established a strong Afghan government before leaving the country (Ma & Chang, 2021).

After the complete withdrawal of foreign forces, on August 15, 2021, the Taliban took over the government. On this occasion, the Taliban showed their interest in taking key Afghan stakeholders on board by saying that they would hold talks with Afghan officials to form an open and inclusive Islamic government. The fall of Kabul further substantiated criticism over the US withdrawal, but the US president was still defending their withdrawal and said that the US mission against counterterrorism was completed. Though he admitted the fact that the withdrawal was messy but at the same time blamed Afghan security forces for the fall of Kabul (Timeline: U.S. War in Afghanistan, n.d.).

The establishment of Taliban government mean different to different states depending upon their ideologies, national interests, and their geographical positions. Starting from China, Beijing has concerns about the resurgence of The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). China sees it as a potential threat to the security of Xinjiang because the Uighur Muslims already have links with the movement. Consequently, they are investing in Afghanistan in different projects and providing them with humanitarian aid and assistance. The issue has already been raised by Beijing with the Taliban and the Taliban tried to push some fighters of the movement away from the China-Afghan border, but at the same time, the Taliban fears the inclusion of these fighters in the notorious ISKP (Islamic State of Khurasan Province) (UNSC Report, 2022). Similarly, China will try to fill the vacuum created in Afghanistan after the US withdrawal but recent developments show that Beijing's interest in Afghanistan is to counter ETIM, and that too is through the Afghan Taliban (Rakisits, 2022)

Then comes Pakistan, Pakistan shares a border of 2250km with Afghanistan and anything happening in Afghanistan has a direct spill over effect on Pakistan. The porous border and the rise of the Afghan Taliban into power have enabled the TTP to launch attacks against Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban are providing safe havens to TTP which has rejuvenated the militant group. Islamabad is trying to persuade the Afghan Taliban to take firm action against TTP, but they seem less interested. Pakistan is somewhat annoyed by the Afghan Taliban's attitude and resultantly in the near past, they penetrated the Afghan border and targeted TTP's sanctuaries inside Afghanistan (Ashraf, 2022).

As far as central Asian Republics are concerned, their primary apprehension is related to IS-KP (Islamic State of Khurasan Province). At the same time, they trust the Afghan Taliban that they will act against it because ultimately the group is also posing a serious threat to the Taliban government. Although the Afghan Taliban is targeting the network, minor attacks are still carried out by the group against countries such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan (Pannier, 2022). Resultantly, it is reported that Uzbek drones are seen flying in the airspace of Afghanistan, but Uzbekistan denies it (Ariana News, 2022).

Iran, another neighbour of Afghanistan is also worried about the current situation in Afghanistan. The first reason is the Shia-Sunni rift and it must be noted that Iran is a Shia majority country while Afghan Taliban are fundamentalist Sunnis in essence, therefore Iran's concern is very much legitimate. It is in the background of their mind that terrorism and deadly attacks over religious places can be carried out on Afghan soil. Additionally, IS-KP is another and more serious threat to the security and stability of Iran (Daragahi, 2022).

India is another country and interested player in Afghanistan. Prior to the Taliban's takeover, India was a staunch supporter of the Afghan Government and that was because of the Pak-Afghan tense relationship. Subsequently, the relationship between India and the Taliban is also very interesting because in the nineties when the Taliban was in power, their attitude towards India was hostile and the chief reason behind was the great leverage of Pakistan over the Taliban at that time. But this time Pakistan's grip over the Taliban is not only slippery but also losing interest in subjugating them to their own will, and the reason is Islamabad's shift from geo-politics to geo-economics. Consequently, India is taking great interest in building their relationship with the current Afghan Taliban. Interestingly, the Afghan Taliban has assured Delhi that they will act against groups that threaten India's sovereignty or have the ambitions to carry out terrorist activities in Kashmir (Pandey, 2022).

Then comes Russia, a country having high degree of relevance with respect to Afghanistan. In 1979, Russia's invasion of Afghanistan underscores the significant importance of Afghanistan for Russia. Although, at the current juncture of history Russia seems to be oblivious towards Afghanistan but it is not 100 percent correct. Afghanistan still holds a key place in the eyes of Russia. Currently, Russia's primary focus is on Ukraine, they are in a state of war. Russia has recently praised the Taliban for its actions against the IS-KP. Moreover, as far as Russian recognition of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is concerned President Putin has made it clear by saying that 'Russia will engage with the Taliban when they enter into the family of civilized people' (Al Jazeera, 2021). Similarly, Andrei Kortunov, the director-general of the Russian International Affairs Council, has expressed his concerns about the Taliban's ability to exert control over northern Afghanistan and the deteriorating economy of the country. He argues that these factors collectively can result in the rise of Al-Qaida and IS-KP. Furthermore, they are also worried about the security of their neighbours i.e., the Central Asian States (Ramani, 2021).

### **US and Pakistan: New Breathing Space in Relationship**

The love-hate relationship between Pakistan and the US began right after the independence of Pakistan. During the Cold War, the defining factor in the relationship was the containment of the USSR. To counter communism in the region Pakistan was one of the most trusted allies of America, however, America's first choice in the region has always been India but India's policy is that of non-alignment from antiquity. Both Islamabad and Washington entered into several treaties and agreements in the 1950s, namely 'The Mutual Defence Treaty', 'SEATO', and 'CENTO' (Aroz, 1994). Then after the notorious 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre in 2001, America intervened in Afghanistan to punish the perpetrators behind the attack i.e., Al-Qaida or more precisely Osama Bin Laden. During the war on terror, Pakistan used to provide logistical and intelligence support to the foreign forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan also provided military bases as well as sanctioned the US to use its airspace to target terrorists in the tribal region of Pakistan (US State Department, 2022). Pakistan's relationship with the US is full of ups and downs. At some point, Pakistan was conferred with titles such as 'The Most Allied Ally' (Hussain, 2021). While sometimes they blamed Pakistan for 'double game' and said that the promises made by Pakistan during the war on terror are based on 'lies and deceit' (Janjua, 2018).

Till 2021, the relationship was defined by the geo-strategic factor but now as the Afghan factor has almost gone both countries especially Pakistan is keen to explore new avenues toward a better relationship. Pakistan is keen to carry forward the relationship with a focus on non-security issues such as climate change, trade, cyber-security, health, and education etc but the post-withdrawal situation looks very uncertain. Before the US withdrawal from Afghanistan till 2018 Pakistan received a massive amount of aid and assistance from America. According to the US embassy in Pakistan, in direct assistance, Pakistan received an amount of \$32bn in total (US Embassy in Pakistan, 2022).

Currently, Pakistan-US relations rest on several factors including Sino-US relations, US-India relations, and the future developments in Afghanistan (Ali & Akhtar, 2023). China is the closest ally of Pakistan as well as a rising power. This rise has deeply insecured the US and from 2010 they want to counter China's ambitious designs. A good example of this rivalry between the two powers is the trade war initiated by the then-American President Donald J. Trump in 2018. This was the largest commercial conflict in modern history. In the wake of it, the United States imposed heavy tariffs on Chinese goods. As a response, China also reciprocated with the same zeal and zest, and they also imposed tariffs on US-made products and goods (Zeng, 2023). Similarly, the two countries also have differences of opinion on issues like Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the South China Sea, etc. These are basically the points of divergence and potential flash points of rivalry between Beijing and Washington. Subsequently, Pakistan is facing a very precarious situation in this context because on one side is China the immediate neighbour as well as an all-weather friend while on the other hand is the US a country of immense importance to Pakistan. China supports Pakistan economically, politically as well as security-wise. It is the only country that invested an amount of \$46bn in Pakistan via its project called CPEC. Furthermore, they bolster Pakistan's stance on issues such as Kashmir and also side with Pakistan diplomatically against the Indian Factor. Similarly, the US is the biggest trade partner of Pakistan. Additionally, the United States is one of the favourite destinations for Pakistani students hailing from elite families. Although the situation is very clear for Pakistan if taking one side, but Pakistan still needs not to place all its eggs in China's basket. It needs to keep the arena of options open and not indulge in the conflict of great powers (Ali, 2022).

India is another key country with respect to the Pakistan-US equation. Pakistan has trust issues with the United States regarding India, and it is because of history. In the war against India in 1971, some Pakistani analysts and thinkers had the opinion that the US betrayed Pakistan. After the war, it turned Pakistan's foreign policy upside down and a major shift in the foreign policy was the beginning of a new era of friendship with China. Pakistan's foreign policy from its antiquity has always been Indian-centric. In recent decades the theatre of dispute alongside Kashmir between India and Pakistan was Afghanistan. In 2006, Musharraf accused Karzai of giving access to Indian agents via the western border of Pakistan. Moreover, they are still blamed for the terrorist activities in the Baluchistan (Najam, 2020). Finally, the revival of QUAD has increased Pakistan's apprehensions towards India. The revival of the grouping was done to apprehend and deter China in the Indo-Pacific region. India is trying to act as a speed-braker in the region under the auspices of America (Deb & Wilson, 2021).

Now let's delve into the analysis of the overall foreign policy of Pakistan towards Washington and vice versa. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent take-over of the Afghan Taliban left the US in awe and shock. In this situation, the US is once again closely examining Pakistan's role in the war on terror. In order to have an understanding of the immediate seizure of the Afghan government by the Taliban, a congressional hearing took place. During the hearing, US Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff General Mark Milley said that "we need to fully examine the role of Pakistan sanctuary" in understanding how the Taliban prevailed. Similarly, in the US

Senate, 22 Republican lawmakers put forward a bill recently asking for sanctioning the Taliban. They also demanded a report on state and non-state actors that supported the Taliban during the war on terror including Pakistan (Khan, 2021). Besides this, the US wants Pakistan not to recognize the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Additionally, they want Pakistan to exert pressure on the Taliban to grant women the right to education and to reduce violence and human rights abuses. The US commander of central command General Frank McKenzie has hinted at seeking Pakistan's support in different areas such as air lines of communication and ground lines of communication. On September 9, 2021, US Central Agency Director William Burns visited both India and Pakistan. The primary objective of the visit was to discuss Afghanistan's situation. In this visit, he met with the then Army and ISI Chiefs. The ISPR also issued a press release saying that "it was reiterated that Pakistan remains committed to cooperating with its international partners for peace in the region and ensuring a stable and prosperous future for Afghan people" (Tanzeem, 2021). Subsequently, in the same month the then Foreign Minister of Pakistan Shah Mehmood Qureshi met with his counterpart the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on the side-lines of the UNGA. The agenda Afghanistan but this time, Pakistan's FM also expressed his desire for a balanced relationship with America. Additionally, he also sought US engagement with Pakistan in fields such as trade, energy, and regional connectivity. The attitude of Pakistan's foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi was a perfect reflection of Pakistan's shift from geo-politics to geo-economics (Yousaf, 2021). Likewise, from October 5-8, 2001, US Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman visited both Pakistan and India. In India, she stated that "the purpose of the visit to Pakistan is very narrow and specific i.e., Afghanistan" She further said that "we are not going to broaden our relationship with Pakistan". However, in Pakistan, she met with Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood, COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa, and the then National Security Advisor Moeed Yousaf. Here, she stated that "Afghanistan is at the top of the agenda, but we also discussed our cooperation in other areas, including the climate crisis, geoeconomics and regional connectivity, and ending the COVID-19 pandemic" (Sharma, 2021). In a nutshell, even the current developments between Pakistan and the US revolve around Afghanistan completely and they seem to be less interested in building the relationship on a broader spectrum.

### **Pakistan-Afghanistan: A Tough Alliance**

Pak-Afghan relations have four principal drivers and they sometimes individually and sometimes collectively shape the relationship. These drivers include sovereignty issues, security interests, geopolitical ups and downs, cross-border ties between the tribes of both states and connectivity and trade (Threlkeld & Easterly, 2021). People of both countries share a common culture, religion, and traditions. The people of both countries have familial relations with each other. Despite all these commonalities, government-to-government relations are bitter except for the four-year rule of the Taliban. After Independence, Afghanistan was the only country that opposed the inclusion of Pakistan into the comity of Nations. Major irritants in the relationship include the Durand Line, the Pashtunistan issue, and mistrust between the two countries. Afghanistan's hostile attitude towards Pakistan is characterized by Pakistan's role in the Soviet-Afghan war, its role in the war on terror, and growing cross-border militancy (Ali & Safdar, 2021).

It was believed that Pakistan had leverage over the Taliban but this time in August 2021, when the Taliban came into power they were in a different mood. Although Pakistan is trying to get support for Afghanistan from the international community, Pakistan failed to have cordial relations with the Taliban. Cross-border terrorist activities after Taliban's coming into power have become a matter of routine in Pakistan. Currently, the relations are strained by issues such as the resurgence of TTP and Durand Line and Pakistan is concerned about the growing India-Afghanistan ties (Ramachandran, 2022).

In September 2021, when the Taliban were constituting their cabinet former Pakistani ISI Chief Faiz Hameed visited Afghanistan to influence the cabinet structure. He tried to keep away the associators of Mullah Ghani Baradar from key governmental positions because of his past. Although Faiz Hameed was successful in installing personals of his choice in the nascent government it also stirred resentment in some circles of the Taliban (Ramachandran, 2022). In December 2021, the Afghan border guards stopped Pakistani workers from fencing the border. After the incident, public statements were also issued by key government officials of both countries. Afghan's Chief Spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid in a statement said "The issue of Durand Line is still unresolved one, while the construction of fencing itself creates rifts within a nation spread across both sides of the border. It amounts to dividing a nation" (Khan, 2022). As a response DG ISPR, Major General Babar Iftikhar said that "The blood of our martyrs was spilled in erecting this fence. It is a fence of peace. It will be completed and remain in place" (Syed, 2022).

Another major source of bitterness in the relationship is the resurgence of the TTP. Afghan Taliban and TTP fought side by side against the foreign forces. After the fall of Kabul, hundreds of TTP militants were released by the Afghan Taliban annoying Pakistan (Qazi, 2022). Afghan Taliban's friendly attitude has emboldened the TTP to carry out terrorist activities in Pakistan. An increase in the intensity of terrorist activities can be observed in Pakistan after the fall of Kabul a matter of worry and concern for Islamabad. A cease-fire agreement between TTP and the Pakistan government was concluded in June 2022 with the mediation of the Afghan Taliban, but the agreement was short-lived and TTP resumed its notorious activities (Hussain, 2022).

### Conclusion

In the fast-changing international and regional situation Pakistan needs to be more pragmatic and rational while making foreign policy choices. The modern world system demands an all-encompassing approach. Now the world has become a global village and a situation in one state affects the others. Furthermore, the world is moving towards greater connectivity and interdependence. Pakistan must try to steer its people out of poverty via its robust foreign and economic policies. In this regard, the National Security Policy of 2022-2026 and its architects should be given due credit. Pakistan needs not to take sides in the great power's rivalry. Additionally, it needs to stick to the policy of non-alignment. The areas where Islamabad should focus include better relationships with India, Afghanistan, Iran, and the United States. To persuade the US to take an interest in the non-security issues of Pakistan, Pakistan needs to play a positive role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. In order to engage the Afghan Taliban Pakistan must adopt the policy of both carrot and stick. Most importantly, if Pakistan wants to have an assertive and effective foreign policy, it must make the economy of the country stronger, insurmountable, and stable.

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