

The Evolving World and its Impact on the Security Dynamics of South Asia; Recommendations for the Foreign Policy and Economic Options for Pakistan

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Abstract

Pakistan is one of the most important countries in the Islamic world and also in the South Asian region. It is a struggling economy severely impacted by various factors including recent COVID-19, with multiple security and social issues, and law enforcement problems due to an ever-increasing population. All these and many others make the situation even worse and demand a rapid course of action to avoid being ostracized by nations around the globe. In the wake of a current evolving world, this paper analyses the impacts on the security dynamics of SA and proposes tangible solutions for the foreign policy and economic growth of Pakistan.

Keywords: Security Dynamics, South Asia, Foreign Policy, Economic Options, Pakistan

Introduction:

The world in which humans exist is ever-evolving. It is not wrong to say that today is a world of proxy wars, occupation, expanding, creating and demolishing nations, races and regional boundaries. In this small world, the bigger South Asia (SA forthwith) is situated in a locality which principally involves powerful nations to poke their noses into its matters and devise their policies according to what is happening in this region. The US invasion of Afghanistan, the Kashmir issue, the China-Taiwan Conflict, Sino-India relations and Iran are a few examples of this. However, the matter of concern is that whatever is happening in SA or the rest of the world, is heavily impacting the security dynamics of SA in one way or the other but principally the economics and foreign policies of its countries. The global geopolitical landscape is undergoing significant shifts driven by technological advancements, shifting economic power centres, climate change, and the rise of multipolarity. SA, home to over a quarter of the world's population and marked by complex historical rivalries, is significantly affected by these changes. Key regional actors—India, Pakistan, China, and Afghanistan—are navigating a new security environment shaped by evolving alliances, asymmetric warfare, and transnational threats. This analysis examines how global developments are transforming the security dynamics in SA (Pervez, 2012).

Literature Review:

The evolving global order is reshaping SA's security architecture in profound ways. The U.S.-China rivalry, technological disruptions, climate insecurity, and regional geopolitical shifts are interacting with longstanding rivalries and internal challenges. South Asian states must adapt through diplomacy, multilateral cooperation, and strategic foresight to manage the risks and leverage the opportunities presented by this new era.

The U.S.-China Rivalry and Its Strategic Fallout: The intensifying rivalry between the U.S. and China is perhaps the most defining global shift impacting SA. India has increasingly aligned with the U.S. through mechanisms like the Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), which includes Australia and Japan, as a hedge against China's assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific (Pant & Joshi, 2020). This alignment has security implications for Pakistan, China's close ally, which views the Indo-U.S. partnership with suspicion. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), especially the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has further entrenched Chinese influence in the region. India views CPEC as a violation of its sovereignty, given its passage through Gilgit-Baltistan, part of the disputed Kashmir region (Small, 2020).

Nuclear Postures and Strategic Stability: SA remains a nuclear flashpoint, particularly between India and Pakistan. The global decline of arms control regimes and the modernization of nuclear arsenals by major powers may encourage similar behaviour in the region. Both India and Pakistan continue to develop tactical nuclear weapons and enhance their delivery systems, which lowers the nuclear threshold and increases the risk of escalation in a crisis (Kapur, 2021). Furthermore, China's growing nuclear arsenal and its strategic cooperation with Pakistan introduce another layer of complexity. The triangular nuclear dynamics in Asia—between China, India, and Pakistan—could destabilize existing deterrence relationships.

Technological Disruption and Cybersecurity: The proliferation of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, cyber warfare, and space capabilities is altering the nature of conflict. SA's strategic stability is now increasingly dependent not just on military strength, but on technological superiority. India has made significant advances in space and cyber capabilities, prompting Pakistan to follow suit (Joshi & Mukherjee, 2020). These developments increase the unpredictability of conflicts, especially if deterrence is eroded by misinformation or cyberattacks during crises.

Climate Change and Non-traditional Security Threats: Climate change poses a growing security risk in SA. The region is prone to natural disasters, water scarcity, and extreme weather events that exacerbate existing socio-political tensions. For example, disputes over river water between India and Pakistan have taken on a securitized dimension in recent years (Gleick, 2014). Environmental degradation also fuels internal displacement and resource competition, providing fertile ground for insurgencies and extremist recruitment.

Afghanistan and Cross-Border Militancy: The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan has revived concerns about cross-border terrorism and regional instability. Pakistan faces the challenge of managing relations with the Taliban while dealing with renewed threats from the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). India, which had invested heavily in Afghanistan's reconstruction, is recalibrating its strategy amid fears of increased terrorist infiltration via Kashmir (Fair, 2021). Afghanistan remains a crucial factor in South Asia's broader security puzzle.

Methodology:

To explore the topic under discussion this study adopts a qualitative and descriptive research methodology. The research relies primarily on secondary data, including academic

journals, policy briefs and government publications. Content analysis was applied to examine the data. Additionally, key regional events—such as the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the India-China border standoff, and Indo-Pakistan military tensions, etc. served to illustrate broader strategic shifts affecting the region.

Workable Options for Pakistan:

In light of the shifting global power dynamics and the increasingly complex security environment of South Asia, Pakistan must recalibrate its Foreign Policy (FP forthwith) to prioritize strategic autonomy, regional cooperation, and economic diplomacy. Rather than over-reliance on any single power such as China or the Gulf states, Pakistan should diversify its partnerships by engaging constructively with both traditional allies and emerging regional players. Strengthening ties with ASEAN, Central Asia, and the European Union can help reduce geopolitical vulnerabilities. Furthermore, Pakistan should actively participate in multilateral forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and SAARC to enhance regional dialogue, reduce tensions with neighbours, and project itself as a responsible stakeholder. De-escalating hostility with India through backchannel diplomacy and confidence-building measures can also improve regional stability and create space for economic cooperation.

On the economic front, Pakistan must shift focus from aid dependence to trade-led growth. This includes deepening economic reforms, improving the ease of doing business, and attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) through political stability and legal transparency. Leveraging its position in China's Belt and Road Initiative—especially through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)—should be balanced with safeguards to avoid unsustainable debt and ensure equitable development. Pakistan should also prioritize regional connectivity projects that link it with Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, opening new trade corridors. Investing in technology, education, and green energy will further strengthen Pakistan's economic resilience, reduce security risks rooted in socio-economic instability, and enhance its standing in a rapidly evolving global order.

There are several workable solutions for Pakistan to implement to stay strong in foreign or financial crises. A few of them are as elaborated:

- a. **Economy:** The economy faces threats to bring the country to default because it is struggling not only the internal problems like corruption, nepotism, bribery, and poor infrastructure but the export/trade is also damaged due to demand and supply problems like the US-Ukraine War, Economic Recession, and Israel-Philistine Conflicts. It is like everything happening in the world is damaging the economy of Pakistan in petrol and other commodities price hikes and dollar game. To strengthen the economy of Pakistan, the following workable solutions are deemed appropriate:
 - i. **Travel and tourism:** There are a lot of countries in the world which for their economy depend principally on travel and tourism only. Pakistan is also blessed with sites, mountains, water bodies, deserts and other places which can attract tourists from around the globe provided the security and infrastructure conditions are up to the mark. This will bring unmatched promotion to the positivity about Pakistan and not only the economy but also other desirable objectives that can be met if travel and tourism are

- promoted. The sea journeys from and to Pakistan must be taken into consideration while introducing travel and tourism.
- ii. **Government-sponsored skilled labour to other countries:** India's progressing economy, apart from other factors, is also a result of labour that is working abroad (Montgomery & Edelman, 2015). In Pakistan, a large number of people want to go to various lands of opportunity because of prevailing corruption and nepotism and lack of opportunities within the country. There are no supporting circumstances in the country to make this procedure easy and smooth. If there were some schemes of government sponsorship, people would be saved from wasting so much money sometimes at the cost of their lives, in efforts to settle abroad and send back money to their families back in Pakistan. Instead of introducing, rickshaw, taxi, cab, and motorcycle schemes, the government should work on this line to bring foreign earnings to Pakistan. For this purpose, a detailed country-to-country analysis may be undertaken to identify the regions and skills where Pakistanis can prove to be beneficial.
 - iii. **Small business:** In the present scenario of social media and globalization, a detailed analysis may be taken up about the needs of the countries where Pakistani goods, especially the small industries can be utilized. Websites like Amazon, eBay and Alibaba can be introduced to promote the local SMEs to the rest of the world. The mutual relations of the countries can be a point of interest in this regard to be sure about demand and supply.
 - iv. **Effective seaports:** The seaports of Pakistan must be made effective to promote trade with the neighbours and other countries where trade by air and land is not so fruitful and reachable. The rules for imports and exports need to be reviewed and revised to facilitate the maximum number of people involved in the import-export business. Take only one industry, the shipbuilding industry in Pakistan in which heavy investment was made but could not make any breakthrough because there is no effective national policy for the support of the industry and investment for more shipyards by the government or by any foreign yard/firm.
 - v. **Agricultural facilities:** In agricultural countries, students get industry scholarships, and agricultural lands are being utilized for the construction of various residential and business projects. The government should sponsor all those schemes which may promote and exploit the agricultural potential of the country.
 - vi. **Better taxation:** Needless to say, taxation and tax collecting systems are only for those who receive their salaries from the government. Much stress is paid to the returns but the implementation of rules and collecting is still vague. The country is heavily suffering because of those who own much but do not pay taxes.
 - vii. **Outgoing Money:** Pakistan should work in all those sectors which result in the outgoing of the country's finances to other countries. For example, a strong education system would save its people pay hefty amounts to Cambridge and Edexcel systems. A good medical facility would help

people to prefer local doctors instead of taking their patients abroad. Every year medical students take admissions abroad in China, Russia and Central Asian states due to ineffective evaluation systems of entry tests. Those who have money prefer to go to Switzerland but never visit the Northern areas because of the lack of infrastructure and safety/security concerns. Shell is preferred over PSO because of its enduring quality, pampers is better than local diapers, TCS is better than UMS or Pakistan Post and the list goes on.

viii. **Return of Afghan Refugees:** Pakistan supported Afghan refugees in a way which has no match in the history of the world but now it is time to return to their land. The return of refugees which is intact now should be expedited because they are occupying various resources and utilizing this land for their settlement on a permanent basis. This is undoubtedly creating problems for the local communities and they are not an easy nation to mingle with for the rest of the country. Transportation, food, clothes, and electronics businesses are occupied by them and they can be seen in every nook and corner of the country dominating local people and their businesses. The prices of property purchase and hiring in those areas of Pakistan are unreachable for Pakistani communities where Afghans are seen as settled (Chaudhry, 2018).

ix. **Border controls:** Last but not least, the situation over borders is worst to damage the economy. It is like OPEN to everybody. Strict control over borders and smuggling through various loopholes must be controlled and stopped to save the economy from damage.

b. **Foreign Policy:** Having an effective and clear FP is key to the progress of a country because it sets rules for trade, cooperation, facilitation of its citizens around the globe and many other things. To strengthen its FP, the following steps may be taken by the government of Pakistan:

i. **Avoiding religious/linguistic/regional extremism:** Educating people to avoid various sorts of biases and prejudices that exist in Pakistan in the form of caste and creed, regions, sects, religions, and many others, is a must. The economic crunches and ostrich beliefs of people have demolished all pillars of standards that make a nation strong. All mob justices, for example, are a result of various forms of extremism and those from other countries will believe or care about the country's FP when internal matters are not given heed (Khan, 2015).

ii. **Relations with neighbouring countries:** Pakistan is situated in a region which is strategically very important. With India, China, Afghanistan, Iran and the Arabian Sea around, strong and healthy relations with neighbours should not only be written in black and white but also be reflected in the course of actions. Cooperation in various fields and tangible actions in this regard will promote a healthy FP.

iii. **Iran-KSA relations:** Pakistan has always been a home for proxy wars so far these two countries are related. The heavily paid religious leaders and

their illiterate followers have harmed the positive image of Pakistan in all respects. The bleeding image of the country needs repairs so solid media control, severe punishment for mobs, and an eye on Madrasah education may be a few steps to start with.

- iv. **Relations with the US and Russia:** Pakistan has lost the confidence of its people over decades because of its involvement in the US and Russian matters. Therefore a comprehensive and unified counterterrorism policy document be prepared outlining the direction and contours of counterterrorism and the role of each element of the state. An intelligence department be created to overlook both civil and military intelligence departments to fill gaps in the correlation and analysis of information. Efforts to win the battle of hearts and minds through social development, political integration and countering militant ideology be further enhanced. Improved relations with the USA and Russia be sought which are crucial for winning the confidence of its people. Seeking relations based on mutual respect with the US and ensuring non-usage of Pakistani territory against any other country is a must to develop an effective FP.
- v. **Relations with China:** With China, Pakistan has established quite friendly relations over decades but a balance is to be maintained. In the friendship of China, other countries like the US must not be made to realize that Pakistan is a party to one side. Military cooperation with China must be very carefully devised to avoid any perceived threats to the US India or any other smaller country.
- vi. **Improved Strategic Communication:** Often the people involved in the process of representing the country's point of view regarding an evolving situation in the world are not so mature communicatively. Statements and press conferences by such people often damage the positive image of the country and take the stance in a direction quite opposite to the FP (Khan, 2015). Again comes the question of educating and controlling the media and personnel involved to be careful in issuing statements which could reach the foreign media portraying a negative image of the country.
- vii. **Better relations with India:** It is time to develop better relationships with India being the country with the largest population and struggling through similar problems. Having the same background, cooperation in various fields can prove beneficial for the economy and the FP. A better image of Pakistan cannot prevail if relations with India are not like America- Canada, Australia-New Zealand or other neighbours in the world. Potentially there are a lot of fields and areas where cooperation can be helpful for the economy of both countries.

Recommendations:

Only the change is permanent so the world will keep evolving. The point to ponder is how Pakistan can keep pace with this evolution as being in SA and one of the most important countries strategically, its economy and FP need to be progressive and accommodating. Keeping in view the foregoing, the following are recommended for the FP and economy of Pakistan:

- i. FP should be clear and concise without any ambiguity.
- ii. To start from neighbours, every opportunity to maximize the economy and improve FP should be exploited.
- iii. Outsourcing of skilled labour should be supported by the government on a much bigger scale.
- iv. The country should not become a part of war, literal or proxy, of any other country.
- v. Extremism at all levels and of all sorts should be discouraged and dealt with an iron hand.
- vi. Law enforcement agencies should work effectively to help promote tourism.
- vii. The people of the country must be given all sorts of agricultural support.
- viii. Businesses should be made easy to establish and various favors should be given to small industries.
- ix. Pakistan should move beyond reliance on traditional partners like China and the U.S. by building stronger ties with the European Union, ASEAN, Turkey, and Central Asian republics to broaden diplomatic and economic opportunities.
- x. Pakistan should reinvigorate engagement in SAARC and SCO to foster dialogue, reduce regional tensions, and participate in multilateral initiatives on trade, counterterrorism, and climate change.
- xi. The country should resume backchannel diplomacy with India to address core issues like Kashmir, cross-border terrorism, and water sharing while promoting people-to-people contact and trade normalization.
- xii. It should maintain balanced relations with the Taliban-led government while cooperating with international stakeholders to stabilize Afghanistan, curb terrorism, and manage refugee flows.
- xiii. It should develop robust cyber defence capabilities and regional frameworks for cybersecurity collaboration, especially in light of rising hybrid warfare threats.
- xiv. Pakistan should also diversify exports beyond textiles by investing in IT, agriculture, and manufacturing sectors; and provide incentives for value-added industries and SMEs.
- xv. Pakistan needs to renegotiate project terms where necessary to ensure debt sustainability and greater local participation while expanding CPEC to include new regional stakeholders.
- xvi. The country should ensure regulatory transparency, political stability, and protection of investor rights to attract FDI. The special focus should be on renewable energy, infrastructure, and the digital economy.
- xvii. It should increase public spending on education, vocational training, and health to improve labour productivity and equip the youth for a tech-driven global economy.
- xviii. It should integrate climate adaptation into national development plans. Invest in water management, clean energy, and disaster-resilient infrastructure to mitigate non-traditional security threats.

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