



Diplomatic Complexity: Effects of Pakistan's Closer Relations with Russia on its Ties with the US

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Abstract: *The article explores the evolving dynamics of Pakistan's diplomatic relationships with Russia and the United States in the contemporary era. It delves into the multifaceted impacts of Pakistan's growing proximity to Russia on its traditional partnership with the United States. The shifting global landscape influenced by geopolitical realities, regional security concerns, and economic interests, plays a pivotal role in shaping this diplomatic complexity. The article highlights the need for Pakistan to navigate a delicate balance between these relationships to safeguard its national interests while adapting to the ever-changing dynamics of international politics.*

Key Words: Pakistan, Russia, United States, Imran Khan Tenure, Shehbaz Sharif Tenure, Foreign Policy, Challenges of Diplomacy

Introduction

International relations are characterized by dynamic partnerships, fluctuating alliances, and changing strategic agendas. Pakistan has historically been an important actor in South Asian geopolitics and beyond, and both regional stability and international affairs are significantly impacted by its connections with major world powers. Pakistan's relations with Russia have been improving recently, which has resulted in more cooperation across a range of areas. The changing dynamics between Pakistan and Russia have important ramifications for both the surrounding area and Pakistan's long-standing alliance with the US. This

article delves into the complex dynamics, opportunities, and problems that this emerging tripartite relationship brings as it examines the various effects of Pakistan-Russia relations' upward trend on Pakistan-US relations (Khan, 2021). Understanding the historical background is crucial to understanding Pakistan's current relations with Russia and the US. Pakistan was an unwavering friend of the United States during the Cold War, mainly because of its assistance to the Afghan resistance movement against the Soviet invasion in the 1980s. In the region, the US and Pakistan established a strategic alliance, with the US providing major military and financial

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support to Pakistan. In contrast, Pakistan's affiliation with the United States meant that its relations with the Soviet Union (and later Russia) remained distant, if not antagonistic, during this time. However, the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War fundamentally changed regional and global dynamics, rearranging alliances and interests (Kurita, [2019](#)).

Dynamics of Pak-US relations in the contemporary era

US- Pakistan relations under the Imran Khan Government

The period of turmoil in U.S.-Pakistan relations was mostly brought about by Imran Khan. The relationship between Pakistan and the United States reached a record low in 2018 when then-President Donald Trump cut defence aid to Pakistan. There was some improvement in the relationship between Donald Trump and Imran Khan following their 2019 White House discussion. The 2020 Doha Accord and America's withdrawal from Afghanistan were made possible as a result of the discussions between the US and the Afghan Taliban, which were mediated by Pakistan. The relationship deteriorated before the year was over as the recently elected Biden administration showed little mercy for Pakistan. Given America's goal to promote good relations with the new Pakistani administration while simultaneously pressuring them to use their influence with the Taliban to meet the expectations of the international community, the scope of bilateral ties is relatively narrow and safety-centric (Chaliha, [2021](#)).

Relations with Pakistan soured as soon as Joe Biden's government assumed office because Biden neglected to call Prime Minister Imran Khan, which irritated him and sparked a discussion. Pakistan was

crucial to attaining US foreign policy goals after the US withdrew from Afghanistan in August 2021, but this time around, terrorism and border security were the main factors, as they still are. After leaving Afghanistan, the Biden administration focused more on the diplomatic struggle with China in Asia, keeping Pakistan—with its financial ties to China—at a distance. Subsequently, Imran Khan publicly charged that the US was encouraging Pakistan to enter the conflict (often referred to as the War on Terror), which claimed over 80,000 lives and resulted in losses of almost 123 billion dollars in revenue (Hussain, [2012](#)).

Shehbaz Sharif became Pakistan's 23rd prime minister after Imran Khan resigned on April 12 in response to an opposition party motion of no confidence. Khan said that he left because of a plot supported by the United States to penalize him for having a different foreign policy with China and Russia, but he has not provided any evidence to support this assertion. Khan's ambition to use international matters as a tool for his political survival and integrate them into his national political campaign has exacerbated the already strained friendship between the United States and Pakistan. Despite these facts, Shehbaz Sharif still has a long way to go in rebuilding Pakistan-US relations. Given that the United States intends to cultivate positive relations with the recently elected Pakistani government while simultaneously pressuring them to use their influence with the Taliban to satisfy the demands of the international community, it is evident that the nature of bilateral cooperation is limited and protection-centric. After the election of a new government in Pakistan, U.S.-Pakistan relations are probably going to stay safety-focused on issues like nuclear proliferation, terrorist activity, and Afghanistan. While the nature of the connection is likely to remain restricted,

Pakistan ought to endeavour to restore a reset in its relations with the United States (Sheikh, [2023](#)).

Pak- US relations under Shehbaz Sharif's government

In 2023, prices are expected to rise by over 10 per cent, and Sharif's economy is not merely suffering from inheritance. The new prime minister will have to take on the difficult mission of mending ties with the United States of America, which has significant influence over the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other monetary institutions that decide Pakistan's eligibility for rescue packaging. After recognizing the gravity of the situation, Sharif stated in his inaugural speech to Parliament that he was in favour of friendly relations with the US. America is Pakistan's main trading partner, followed by China. Pakistan is presently taking part in its 22nd project with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The program was placed on pause when the Khan administration neglected to uphold all of the loan's stipulations, but Shehbaz's administration is currently in talks to restart it. Similar to this, Pakistan also requires US assistance in getting its name removed from the "grey list" of countries that the International Financial Crimes Action Task Force has associated with money laundering and support for terrorism.

Positive contacts have always existed between US President Joe Biden and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the alliance partners of Sharif's PML-N, and it is likely that they will continue to do so in an effort to repair the damaged relationships (Craig, [2015](#)).

Even if ties between the US and Pakistan improve, they will likely remain focused on security and the economy. Pakistan's relations with China have entered a new phase of bilateral strategic and financial

partnership with the launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and America's long-term strategic objective of restraining China is more in line with India than with Pakistan. Through the geopolitical lens of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), America will approach future relations with the governments in Pakistan.

However, there are signs that the relationships are beginning to take on a completely different essence than they were under Khan's leadership. Shortly after Shehbaz assumed the country's leadership, US Ambassador Antony Blinken greeted the new leader and reiterated that "America sees a powerful, flourishing, and democratic Pakistan as vital for the well-being of both our countries". At the same time, however, Pakistan's Foreign Office denied that the joint declaration was justified following the 4th Annual U.S.-India 2+2 discussions in Washington, requesting that Pakistan refrain from allowing its territory to be used for cross-border terrorist activities. After speaking with Pakistan's newly elected foreign minister, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Secretary Blinken invited him to a ministerial session on the "Global Food Security Call to Action" on May 18 at the UN headquarters in New York. Pakistan appears to view this as an opportunity to patch things up, as seen by its efforts to set up a private discussion between the secretaries during the conference (Khalid, [2021](#)).

In summary, even if the scope of the partnership between the US and Pakistan remains restricted, Shehbaz's administration will still need to take immediate action to repair the harm in order to restore the relationship. Pakistan has said unequivocally that friendly relations founded on objective assessments are preferred over the nationalist rhetoric of the Khan administration. Re-establishing ties with the new leadership in Pakistan is

another way that America hopes to reclaim lost ground and influence Pakistani perceptions. Extending the connection perspective outside the safety-centric emphasis might potentially be made easier. The United States might accomplish this goal by advocating for Pakistan's removal from the Financial Action Task Force's "grey list," applying pressure to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to support Pakistan's flagging economic growth, and congratulating Pakistan for its contributions to the War on Terror. Following the Vote of Confidence, Pakistan will also need to make a major effort to lessen the negative impacts and boost confidence. Foreign Minister Bhutto's visit to New York, which came just weeks after Prime Minister Khan's visit to Moscow during that country's invasion of Ukraine, demonstrates how much Pakistan values America during these pivotal years of great power struggle. Since Pakistan and the United States are celebrating their 75th year of bilateral ties this year, it would be a perfect opportunity to rebuild relationships (Tanvir, [2022](#)).

The Upward Trajectory in Pakistan-Russia Relations

A number of factors have led to the strengthening of bilateral ties between Pakistan and Russia in recent years, and they have also initiated a path of rapprochement:

- The frequency of high-level diplomatic visits, dialogues, and exchanges between Pakistan and Russia has increased. Through these interactions, the two nations have been able to gain a deeper comprehension of one another's viewpoints on regional and international concerns.
- An essential element of the developing partnership between Russia and Pakistan has been defence

ties. The two nations have exchanged technologies, sold weapons, and participated in military drills. A major shift in bilateral defence relations occurred in 2014 when Russia decided to lift its embargo on arms sales to Pakistan (Hussain & Fatima, [2015](#)).

- Initiatives like the Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline project, which aims to carry Russian natural gas to Pakistan, have contributed to the strengthening of economic cooperation. Russia may be able to reach the South Asian market through this project, which might also meet Pakistan's energy needs.
- Russia and Pakistan are both very interested in maintaining regional stability, particularly in light of the current state of affairs in Afghanistan. Pakistan has played a crucial role in the efforts by the United States and Russia to find a diplomatic solution to the Afghan conflict (Khan, 2021).

Impact of Pak-Russia Ties on Pakistan-US Relations

Pakistan's relations with the United States have been significantly impacted by the growing cooperation between the two countries. These effects can be examined from a variety of angles, each of which highlights a distinct aspect of this dynamic tripartite interaction:

Diversification of Foreign Policy Options

Russia and Pakistan have strengthened their ties, giving Pakistan another option for the foreign policy that would help it diversify its alliances and lessen its reliance on the US. Pakistan's ability to negotiate more effectively with Washington is bolstered by its choices variety. As a result, Pakistan's foreign policy has undergone a dramatic

change, going from being too dependent on the United States to being more multifaceted. Pakistan hopes to more successfully safeguard its sovereignty and national interests by doing this (Tanvir, 2022).

Pakistan's cooperation with the United States is still very important, but the strengthening of its ties with Russia adds a counterbalance and gives it greater leeway in determining its foreign policy. In the context of Pakistan's historically difficult relationship with the United States, which has alternated between eras of close cooperation and strained tensions, this diversification is an important step (Kaura, 2018).

Balance of Power

As a counterweight to the US in the region, the connection between Russia and Pakistan is strengthening. As it looks to preserve its power in South Asia, this dynamic urges the United States to give Pakistan's worries more weight. Particularly when it comes to military and financial assistance, the United States has always had considerable influence over Pakistan. But as Pakistan increases its military and political ties with Russia, it becomes less dependent on American support and more equipped to pursue its own goals. The way the United States interacts with Pakistan may change as a result of this shift in the balance of power, possibly resulting in more equitable and reciprocal partnerships in a number of areas, including counterterrorism, regional stability, and economic development (Javed, 2022).

Defence Procurement and Modernization

Pakistan's relationships with other nations have an impact on the modernization of its military and the choice of its defence

equipment. The availability of Russian military hardware has significantly impacted Pakistan's defence posture and the weaponry it chooses to purchase, particularly since the termination of the United States military aid program to that country (Javed, 2022).

Russia is becoming a more popular source of Pakistan's military gear, which includes fighter planes, helicopters, and air defence systems. Its military capabilities are improved and its vulnerability to any one supplier is decreased by diversifying its sources of defence equipment. Although Pakistan still relies heavily on the United States for defence technologies, the growing defence connections between Pakistan and Russia have given Pakistan the chance to improve its military might (Khan, 2021).

Geopolitical Implications

There are important geopolitical ramifications for the larger South Asian and Eurasian regions from the tripartite connection between Pakistan, Russia, and the US. Recent years have seen a significant change in the global scene, and Pakistan's shifting alliances with the US and Russia are significantly influencing this change (Khan, 2019)

Pakistan's ties to the US and Russia directly affect regional stability in South Asia, especially in light of the ongoing peace negotiations in Afghanistan. These three important parties' collaboration and coordination will determine how well these negotiations go in the main. The region's geopolitics are becoming more complex as a result of Pakistan's pivotal position in enabling peace negotiations in Afghanistan and its increased involvement with Russia. This might have an impact on both the peace process and the stability of the region. Pakistan's alliance with Russia has consequences for the changing dynamics of world politics within the larger Eurasian

environment. It is a reflection of the increasingly multi-polar world order that is developing in which countries are entering into alliances based less on tradition and more on relationships that best suit their interests. Pakistan is able to retain its position of power and influence in international affairs by navigating this framework (Yousaf, [2014](#)).

Afghanistan and Regional Stability

The peace process in Afghanistan is one of the most important and direct effects of Pakistan's changing relations with Russia and the US. Russia and the United States both have a lot riding on the outcome of the lengthy struggle in Afghanistan, and Pakistan's changing alignments affect these nations' approaches to regional stability. Pakistan has long been seen as an important participant in the peace process in Afghanistan because of its close relations with the United States. Divergent viewpoints and strategies could, however, surface in the endeavour to mediate a peace agreement in Afghanistan given the strengthening of its ties with Russia. Pakistan's ability to maintain a healthy balance between its ties to the United States and Russia while also supporting the peace process in Afghanistan is called into doubt by the tripartite relationship that is changing (Qingyan, [2021](#)).

Widen trust deficit

An excellent illustration of a cyclical alliance marked by convergence and divergence of national interests is the history of relations between the United States and Pakistan. The current relationship between the two states is strained due to a number of issues that lead to mistrust and resentment. Collaboration between the two countries is hindered and mutual goals and objectives are difficult to attain due to the current mistrust and discontent. A strong Pakistan-

US partnership is essential for the general peace and stability of South Asia (Yousaf, [2014](#)).

Security-related Compulsion

Pakistan's military ties with the United States are going to deteriorate as its connections with Russia continue to progress. The military relationship between Pakistan and Russia is noteworthy in 2018. General Qamar Javed Bajwa, the head of Pakistan's army, visited Russia in April 2018 and the two nations established a Joint Military Commission. In addition, both nations' national security advisors convened in Moscow the same month to talk about nuclear and strategic concerns. A memorandum of understanding was signed between the two nations when a delegation from Pakistan's navy visited Moscow in the ensuing months. US President Donald Trump terminated Islamabad's participation in the US International Military Education Program as a result of the regular military delegation exchanges between Russia and Pakistan. Following that, US military assistance to Pakistan ceased during the Trump administration (Khan, 2021).

Economic Reliance on US and US-led Economic Institutions

Given the tension in relations with the United States of America, Russia has taken a more inclusive stance in the economic arena. Moscow has developed close commercial connections with Pakistan as a result of this paradigm change. Russian President Putin's vision has reduced the chance of developing mutually exclusive ties with any state. In this regard, Ex- PM Imran Khan's visit is an indication of Moscow's longstanding commitment to include the entire Asian states in its policy priorities. Pak-Russian economic relations require strong economic contacts to secure a rightful place in South

Asia (Javed, 2022). However, the US government has suspended providing Pakistan with more than \$300 in aid as a result of the economic engagement and cooperation between Islamabad and Moscow, further straining ties between the two countries (Kaura, 2018).

Conclusion

The geopolitical environment in South Asia has been dramatically altered by the improving ties between Pakistan and Russia, which has repercussions for relations between Pakistan and the United States. Pakistan is attempting to expand its foreign policy options and ties, even as it continues to cherish its long-standing partnership with the United States. Maintaining equilibrium between its relations with the United States and Russia is crucial, particularly in light of the changing dynamics in the region, particularly with regard to Afghanistan. Pakistan's capacity to successfully negotiate this intricate web of foreign connections will be vital in determining how South Asia and beyond develop in the future. Pakistan's changing relationship with both Russia and the US represents a fundamental shift in world politics as countries want to build numerous ties in order to protect their sovereignty and interests. Beyond the immediate area, the geopolitical ramifications underscore the complexity and elasticity of modern international relations. Pakistan's position in this changing environment, as it strikes a balance between its ties with the US and Russia, is a reflection of the dynamic nature of international relations as well as its diplomatic skill. Pakistan is positioned to have a major influence on how the world

and the South Asian region develop in this complex game of diplomacy.

Way Forward

- A careful balancing act is needed to maintain Pakistan's historical ties to the United States while pursuing deeper relations with Russia. Pakistan has a diplomatic task of skillfully managing the aspirations and concerns of both nations without alienating the other.
- The way that Pakistan, Russia, and the US are relating to each other is changing, and this has an impact on regional dynamics, especially when it comes to South Asia. It is imperative for Pakistan to exercise caution in navigating its foreign policy to preserve regional peace and prevent its developing alliances from unintentionally inflaming tensions in the region.
- Pakistan's economic progress can be aided by economic cooperation, particularly in the energy sector, provided that Pakistan is not overly dependent on any one partner. Pakistan has to carefully consider the potential geopolitical and strategic repercussions of its energy and infrastructure initiatives with Russia against the economic benefits.
- Pakistan plays a crucial role in promoting peace negotiations in Afghanistan. It ought to handle its changing ties with the US and Russia in a way that encourages a peaceful conclusion to the Afghan conflict. Pakistan's involvement in the peace process needs to be consistent with both its dedication to regional stability and its national objectives.

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