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PAKISTAN–MUSLIM WORLD DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS UNDER GREAT-POWER COMPETITION

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ABSTRACT

The competition between the great powers is influencing the relations between states and changing the international order. These developments have also had an impact on Pakistan's foreign policy and its relations with the Muslim world. Pakistan's diplomatic choices are influenced by its strategic location, security concerns, economic interests, and historical ties with Muslim countries. The paper explores the impact of great power competition on Pakistan's relations with Muslim countries and its foreign policy choices. The research will be conducted in the areas of strategic balance, security cooperation, economic diplomacy and shared interests. It discusses Pakistan's relations with Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Iran and the Gulf countries and the involvement of China, the USA and Russia in these relations. Political and strategic interests of each country are different and at times pose problems for Pakistan. Despite religious and historical ties, Muslim countries don't always see eye to eye on regional and international issues. This study covers the post-Cold War period, especially the 21st century when the competition of major powers has been more influential in regional politics. Pakistan needs to safeguard its national interests and at the same time keep relations with countries having diverse interests. It also seeks to enhance relations with Muslim countries and promote their unity. However, the pressure of the international community and the conflicting regional interests are problems. The study suggests that Pakistan's foreign policy is reliant on the country's security requirements, economic interests, national interests and the evolving global dynamics. Hence, Pakistan has to be cautious in its foreign relations and keep its relations balanced with the major powers and the Muslim countries. The research is qualitative and is based on the analysis of secondary sources such as literature, policy papers, diplomatic communication, and other sources of information, which will be used to explore Pakistan's diplomatic strategies and their impact on its international relations.

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Introduction

Multipolarity is becoming a reality, great power competition is resurfacing, and power dynamics are changing in the contemporary international system. The strategic competition between the big powers, particularly China and the US, and Russia's increasing presence in the region have affected the foreign policy decisions of many middle and regional powers. In this changing global climate, Pakistan's diplomacy in the Muslim world has gained significant importance due to its geopolitical position, security needs, economic demands, and historical ties with Muslim-majority governments (Khan, 2021; Tellis,2016; Akbar, 2011).

The Muslim world has always been the main focus of Pakistan's foreign policy since the inception of the state of Pakistan. The nation has also been looking for bilateral cooperation, and has been involved in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The initiatives are aimed at strengthening political contacts and economic and security cooperation. These ties are based on Islamic identity, but also on shared interests and security concerns in the region (Samad, 2025; Sattar, 2020). The relationship between Muslim nations and other countries is changing, and Pakistan faces new challenges in diplomacy.

This research examines Pakistan's foreign policy towards the Muslim world in the context of competition for the new international order. It explores the tensions between Pakistan and great power relations and Muslim connections. Particular attention is paid to the way in which national interests shape diplomatic decisions. The study also looks into how economic diplomacy can enhance security cooperation and regional stability. It examines relations with Saudi Arabia and Turkey, and relations with Iran and other Gulf countries (Abbas, 2029). It looks at the dynamics of these relationships in the light of the U.S., China, and Russia competition for hegemony, technological supremacy, and economic dominance.

The study addresses the problem of Pakistan's relations with some of the Muslim-majority countries after the end of the Cold War. It covers this broader period, but with an emphasis on the twenty-first century. It addresses and evaluates the impact of great-power competition on foreign policy choices of Pakistan and the dynamics of its strategic alliances. Besides the concerns of defense and security, the study also examines economic connectivity and regional cooperation. It explores the question of how diplomacy can do so in the new international context. Faiz et al. (2024) examined the evolution of Pakistan–US strategic relations from 1947 to 1977, highlighting the political and strategic considerations that shaped bilateral cooperation. The study provides historical context for understanding Pakistan's foreign policy choices during the Cold War. Faiz et al. (2022) presented a comparative overview of the political systems and leadership approaches of Zia-ul-Haq and Pervez Musharraf. The study explores similarities and differences in their military-led governments and political strategies, contributing to an understanding of military influence on Pakistan's political development. Faiz et al. (2023) investigated the history of US economic assistance to Pakistan between 1950 and 1988, focusing on the role of economic support in bilateral relations. The study offers historical insights into the relationship between American aid, strategic interests, and Pakistan's economic and foreign policy priorities.

This article adds to the discussion of strategic autonomy, and on the ways in which middle powers adapt their foreign policies. What is significant about Pakistan's location is how it helps to understand how small states manoeuvre through the competing global influences. Moreover, the study also helps to explain cooperation and conflict between the Muslim states on the basis of their external relations. It argues that Pakistan's foreign policy is an adaptation to the changing geopolitical scene in which economic and identity issues are intertwined with security issues.

Research Questions

These are the key research questions that focus discussion in the study.

1) What is the impact of great power competition on Pakistan's diplomacy towards Muslim world?
2) How has Pakistan managed to maintain relations with Muslim countries and even with key powers?
3) What are the challenges and opportunities in front of Pakistan's diplomacy in the changing world?

Theoretical Framework

This research adopts realism and neorealism approach to examine the Pakistani diplomatic choices in the post-2001 world to their current regional participation through mediatory efforts in the US-Iran dispute of 2026. Realism posits that states conduct their foreign policy under the condition of security, power and national interest in an anarchy state situation (Morgenthau, 1948; Hudson, 2014). In this regard, Pakistan is keeping its balance in diplomacy with the US, China, and Muslim nations for the security sovereignty and the protection of strategic interests. Neorealism elucidates Pakistan's foreign policy by highlighting the impact of international power dynamics and alterations in the global power equilibrium. Pakistan's strategic estimates have been affected by the security environment after 9/11, the counterterrorism hurdles, the rising roles of China, and regional dynamics. The manner in which it has been interacting with its major players and Muslim friends are a pointer that the world is going through a change into an order that does not fit into a single power structure.

The study of decision makers, institutions, national interests and the tools of diplomacy can also be discussed through the lens of the analysis of foreign policy of Pakistan and the instruments of diplomacy in order to obtain an idea of what impact these factors have on the behaviour of Pakistan in the international affairs.The strategies assist in clarifying methods by which Pakistan strive to solve the problems and enhance its diplomatic relevance by means of conversation, mediation and regional affiliations. It analyses how it will deal with the middle-power diplomacy in the year 2026 when it was engaged in the US-Iran disputes, the extent of the civic engagement, and regional legitimacy and national interest. Thus, the meshing of realism, neorealism and foreign policy analysis offers a holistic perspective towards comprehending the changing diplomacy of Pakistan as it deals with great power competition.

Historical Evolution of Pakistan–Muslim World Diplomacy (1947-2001).

The historical development of Pakistan–Muslim World diplomacy from 1947 to 2001 is a reflection of the changing political, strategic, and economic priorities of Pakistan. After independence, Pakistan has been trying to improve its ties with Muslim countries on the basis of religious unity, diplomatic efforts, and mutual security interests. Oil politics, regional conflicts, and economic cooperation had a significant impact on its relationship with the Middle East. Pakistan was also actively involved in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and other forums of the Muslim world. These developments can be analyzed in various historical periods and show the continuity and change in Pakistan's diplomatic priorities.

Foundations of Relations with Muslim States: Identity, Solidarity, and Strategic Cooperation

Since the inception of Pakistan in 1947, the foreign policy has been more or less oriented towards the Muslim countries. The establishment of Pakistan was a result of the political demand for a separate identity of the Muslims of South Asia, which had an impact on Pakistan's foreign policy towards the Muslim world. The first foreign policy was based on Islamic solidarity, support for Muslim causes and co-operation based on common historical, cultural and religious links. But Pakistan's relations with the Muslim countries were also determined by strategic and geopolitical factors. Pakistan's location between South Asia, Central Asia and Middle East made it important for Pakistan to have good relations with the Muslim countries from security, economic and diplomatic perspectives.The early governments established close relations with Iran, Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Arab countries to improve Pakistan's regional standing and to solve security issues, especially the rivalry with India (Rizvi, 2000).

Pakistan's participation in Muslim multilateral diplomacy further strengthened these relations. It was actively involved in the promotion of cooperation among the Muslim States and was a founding member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in 1969. Such platforms were used by Pakistan to promote the collective political interests and preserve its national strategic goals.

Cold War Diplomacy: Alignment Choices and Relations with Global and Muslim Powers

The competition between the United States and the Soviet Union had a major impact on Pakistan's foreign policy during the Cold War. Pakistan joined the Western bloc in the wake of security threats and to get economic and military aid. It became a member of the US-supported military alliances, such as SEATO (1954) and CENTO (1955), which also influenced Pakistan's foreign policy orientation (Kux, 2001). Although Pakistan was oriented towards the West, it had good relations with Muslim countries. Close ties were established with Iran and Türkiye, both of which had similar strategic interests and were also members of CENTO. Pakistan also strengthened ties with Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries, with growing cooperation in defense, economic aid, and labour migration. The economic and social cooperation between Pakistan and the Gulf region was further strengthened when the oil boom occurred in the Arab countries in the 1970s. However, Pakistan's Cold War policies had their share of ups and downs in relations with the Middle East

nations. In the 1960s, Pakistan became an ally of the United States and its allies, and established a strategic partnership with China. Common security interests and regional considerations were behind the partnership, and it reflected Pakistan's effort to diversify its foreign relations.

Post-Cold War Adjustments: Regional Security Challenges and Changing Priorities

The Strategic scenario of Pakistan has changed after the end of Cold War. The Soviet Union's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 brought fresh security threats to Pakistan, such as the influx of Afghan refugees, political instability and the proliferation of weapons and the effects of long years of war in Afghanistan. The waning U.S. interest in the area also affected the Pakistan-U.S. relationship. During the 1990s, Pakistan sought to redirect its foreign policy agenda in favour of bolstering relations with Muslim countries and exploring new opportunities in the region. Economic cooperation and diplomatic support continued to be important and relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states continued. Pakistan also looked to engage with the newly independent Central Asian countries for cooperation in trade, energy connectivity and regional cooperation. However, Afghanistan continued to be a significant security threat to Pakistan's relationship with its neighbours and international actors. The post-Cold War challenges showed the complex relationship between regional security and domestic stability and foreign policy options.

By 2001 Pakistan's foreign policy towards the Muslim world was not limited to religious solidarity. It was a question of identity, of national interest, of security and of economics. The cold war and post-cold war experience has shaped the manner in which Pakistan has handled big powers and Muslim countries and has laid the groundwork for its post-2001 foreign policy.

Transformation of Pakistan's Diplomatic Strategy after 2001

September 11, 2001, changed the face of Pakistan's diplomacy and its relations with the major powers and the Muslim world. With the advent of the United States-led global counterterrorism campaign, the war in Afghanistan, and later on regional security challenges, Pakistan became a focal point of international strategic calculations. Meanwhile, the evolving power dynamics in the world, including the rise of China and the gradual shift towards a multipolar world, prompted Pakistan to diversify its diplomatic engagements (Samad, 2025). Thus, Pakistan's foreign policy after 2001 was based on the three pillars of security cooperation, economic interests, and strategic autonomy.

Theoretical perspectives of realism and neorealism help explain this transformation. Realistically speaking, Pakistan's diplomatic decisions were driven more by national security needs, regional threats, and strategic interests. Neorealism also emphasizes the impact of shifts in the distribution of power in the international system on the behavior of Pakistan's foreign policy, which had to adapt to changing alliances and competing influences in the world (Waltz, 1979).

Security Environment After 9/11

The 9/11 attacks brought a significant change in Pakistan's strategic posture. The United States initiated a worldwide war against terrorism, and Pakistan was one of the major allies in the US-led war in Afghanistan. During the tenure of President Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan became a member of the international coalition against terrorism and offered logistical support, intelligence cooperation, and access to strategic facilities. This partnership provided diplomatic and economic advantages, as well as domestic and security issues (Fair, 2014). The post-9/11 security environment influenced Pakistan's participation, given its geographical location and historical political and security interests in Afghanistan. The Afghan war had a tremendous effect on Pakistan, as refugees came into Pakistan, and militant attacks and instability in the border region. The rise of extremist groups and internal security threats has emerged as a serious problem in Pakistan's national security policy.

US relations after 2001 were still tricky. The two countries worked together on counterterrorism but had differences on a number of matters, including drone operations, Afghanistan policy and expectations. These tensions drove Pakistan to seek more strategic diversification through enhanced relations with other global and regional actors. Meanwhile, Pakistan had diplomatic relations with Muslim-majority countries. The importance of cooperation with Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Iran and Gulf states continued to be significant, given the shared security interests, economic relations and regional developments. Pakistan was keen to be flexible in its diplomacy and not depend on any foreign partner.

Strategic Partnership with China

Since 2001, one of the key elements of Pakistan's foreign policy change has been the growing strategic partnership with China. Pakistan and China have always been good friends since the Cold War era, but in the 21st Century, their friendship is becoming more economically and strategically significant. China's emergence as a big power and its increasing involvement in South Asia has created new opportunities for Pakistan. The partnership ranges from security cooperation to trade, infrastructure, energy and economic connectivity. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was introduced into Pakistan's geo-economic strategy in 2015 as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). It was designed to enhance connectivity, investment, and regional economic integration

According to the neorealist view, Pakistan's tilt towards China is a response to the shifting balance of power in the world. China's significance for Pakistan's economic and strategic interests grew as the competition between the two countries grew (Surahio et al., 2022). But Pakistan has tried to keep its diplomatic ties with the U.S. and other powers, which is a balancing act instead of one-sidedness. The growing ties of China with Muslim-majority countries, especially in the Gulf and Middle East, also opened new avenues for Pakistan's diplomacy. The increasing role of Beijing in regional economic and political activities has had an impact on the overall context of Pakistan's diplomacy with Muslim countries.

Relations with Muslim-Majority States

The ties with Muslim-majority countries continued to be a key component of Pakistan's post-2001 foreign policy. Historical ties, security cooperation, economic interests, and regional diplomacy all played a role in shaping these relations.

Saudi Arabia and Gulf Countries

The strategic significance of Saudi Arabia and Gulf states remained unchanged for Pakistan. The areas of cooperation were energy security, labor migration, investment, and defense relations. The Pakistanis working in the Gulf countries made a substantial contribution to the economy of Pakistan through remittances. Political ties were also enhanced by frequent diplomatic contacts and cooperation on regional matters. But Pakistan's ties with the Gulf countries had to be handled with care as there were regional rivalries, especially between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Pakistan wanted to keep ties with both sides without getting entangled in any conflict that might have an impact on the domestic and regional stability of Pakistan.

Türkiye

The relations between Pakistan and Turkey have grown in leaps and bounds since 2001, with political understanding, economic cooperation, and defense collaboration. Both countries have highlighted historical and cultural ties in their cooperation in trade, technology, and security issues. The growing role of Türkiye in the region also provided opportunities for coordination on issues that concern the Muslim world.

Iran

The ties between Pakistan and Iran have been marked by cooperation and difficulties. Borders, trade, and security issues in the region facilitated interaction, but political disagreements in the region and Pakistan's ties with the Gulf countries necessitated diplomacy. Pakistan has tried to keep its relationship with Iran constructive and has been managing its strategic relationship with Iran. In sum, the post-2001 era shows Pakistan's attempt to adopt a flexible diplomatic approach in an era of great-power competition. Pakistan has been trying to balance its relations with the United States, China and Muslim-majority countries to safeguard its security interests, increase economic opportunities and remain relevant in the changing international order.

Pakistan, Security and Regional Stability

Since 2001, Pakistan's foreign policy has been closely linked to the security issues of the region and the country's attempts to ensure stability in a strategically sensitive region. Pakistan is situated between South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia and is confronted with a complex security environment, characterized by terrorism, conflicts in neighbouring countries, great power rivalry, and tensions among Muslim-majority countries (Rizvi, 1993, 2000; Sattar, 2020; Lodhi, 2011). Thus,

Pakistan's diplomacy has been gradually shifting from traditional security issues to diplomatic efforts for conflict management, regional dialogue, and strategic cooperation.

Realism and neorealism are the theories that explain Pakistan's security policies through the prism of an uncertain international system in which states strive for survival, security, and strategic gains. But foreign policy analysis also shows that diplomacy, leadership decisions, and institutional choices play a crucial role in determining Pakistan's response to regional crises (Shah, 2014; Hudson, 2014; Waltz, 1979).

Traditional Security Challenges

The traditional security concerns of Pakistan have been further complicated in the post-2001 period. The United States led a military intervention in Afghanistan after the tragedy of 9/11, which had a direct impact on the internal security of Pakistan and its external environment. Pakistan emerged as a frontline state in the war on terror, facing militancy and political instability at home and border insecurity while collaborating with the international community. The facilitation of political dialogue in Afghanistan by Pakistan was one of the key diplomatic initiatives. Islamabad has been demanding an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process from the beginning. It has declared that political reconciliation is the only way to achieve long-term stability in Afghanistan and that military solutions are not sufficient. Furthermore, Pakistan helped the Afghan Taliban to meet with the international actors, including through the US-Taliban Doha Agreement of 2020. This was a demonstration of Pakistan's commitment to ensuring regional peace and security through diplomacy and safeguarding its security interests.

Pakistan also employed bilateral diplomacy to control the tensions between Muslim-majority countries. Pakistan was trying to act as a neutral and to pave the way for dialogue between Saudi Arabia and Iran. In 2016, when tensions flared up between Riyadh and Tehran, the Pakistani leadership reached out to both countries and stressed the importance of de-escalating the confrontation in the Muslim world. This was to demonstrate the balancing and mediating role of Pakistan and not with one side (Anwar et al., 2025).

The other big security problem was Afghanistan. Pakistan's diplomatic efforts have involved its involvement in regional talks with China, Qatar, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and other stakeholders to enable Afghan stakeholders to hold dialogue. However, the current border tension between Pakistan and Afghanistan and the militant attacks persisted to hinder the efforts.

Non-Traditional Security Issues

In addition to military threats, Pakistan's security diplomacy has also increasingly focused on non-traditional security issues like energy security, climate change, economic vulnerability, migration, and maritime security. These issues are more important than ever, as regional stability is not only reliant on military power but also on economic strength and social development. Energy security has been a major component of Pakistan's diplomacy with Muslim-majority countries. Cooperation

in energy supplies, investments, and economic assistance has been included in relations with the Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar (Abbas, 2019). Pakistan's reliance on energy imports has led to increased diplomatic ties with energy-rich Muslim nations.

Climate change is also becoming a security issue. Pakistan has pointed out the susceptibility of developing countries to climate-induced disasters, especially after the devastating floods of 2022. Pakistan highlighted the importance of climate justice, financial support, and global responsibility in tackling environmental issues through international diplomacy.

Economic connectivity is now a part of security diplomacy. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is an example of the transition from military security to geo-economic security. Pakistan has been investing in infrastructure and regional connectivity, aiming to enhance economic security and foster greater regional integration (Small, 2015).

Pakistan's Diplomatic Role in Conflict Management and Mediation

Pakistan's security diplomacy has shifted from a purely military-centric paradigm to a more comprehensive one that encompasses defence, economic development, regional dialogue, climate diplomacy, and conflict management. However, the instruments' effectiveness is contingent on the linkage between external diplomatic efforts and domestic institutional capacity. To achieve long-term stability in the region, Pakistan will need to demonstrate consistent policy goals, credible diplomatic efforts, economic strength, and better coordination between security institutions and civilian policymakers (Lodhi, 2011; Sattar, 2020).

Pakistan has been trying to project itself as a diplomatic player that can help in dialogue between competing states. It has a geographical location, relations with great powers, and relations with Muslim countries that can be used for mediation diplomacy. In the past, Pakistan has also been involved in diplomatic efforts in major regional conflicts, such as the facilitation of US-China relations in the 1970s and the Afghan peace process. Given the US-Iran tensions in 2026, Pakistan's involvement was viewed in the context of its ties with both Washington and Tehran, emphasizing the need to keep communication lines open and promote negotiations. According to reports, Pakistan's role was limited to diplomatic communication and support for de-escalation. This is a part of Pakistan's overall policy of strategic balancing. Pakistan has been careful to keep its security ties with Saudi Arabia and China intact while also trying to stay out of conflicts that could impact regional stability. Its diplomatic efforts show an effort to turn geopolitical limitations into diplomatic opportunities.

In general, Pakistan's security diplomacy has shifted from a purely military-centric strategy to a more comprehensive one that incorporates defense, economic, and diplomatic tools. The country's participation in regional security cooperation, mediation, and non-traditional security cooperation is an effort to remain relevant in a new international security landscape. But internal security issues,

economic constraints, and the conflicting interests of major powers and Muslim countries still influence Pakistan's diplomatic role.

Great-Power Competition and Future Challenges

Great power competition has intensified, resulting in a complex diplomatic situation for Pakistan. Pakistan is a strategically important state, and it has to deal with competing global actors while safeguarding its national interests, as it is a connecting state between South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East. The current international order is witnessing a growing rivalry between the United States and China, Russia's re-emergence in Eurasia and the Middle East, and the realignment of Muslim-majority countries. All these have added to the opportunities and limitations of Pakistan's foreign policy. The concept of strategic balancing or hedging is used to explain Pakistan's diplomatic policy, which is to keep good relations with more than one power, and not with one external power alone (Haqqani, 2013).

Balancing Relations with the United States and China

The diplomacy of Pakistan has encountered several issues and one of the major issues is the stability in the relationship with the United States and China. Throughout history, Pakistan and the United States have gone through the waves of cooperation and enmity, now and then. During the post attacks of September 11, Pakistan became a significant ally of the United States in fighting the war on terrorism; however, there were a few differences between the two nations with regards to the policy in Afghanistan, the security factor, and even expectations. The United States of America is increasingly seeing South Asia through the lens of strategic competition with China as a result of the changing global landscape.

Meanwhile, China has emerged as one of the key strategic and economic allies of Pakistan. The China–Pakistan relationship has gone beyond defense cooperation to economic connectivity, especially with the launch of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2015 under the umbrella of China's Belt and Road Initiative. CPEC encompasses infrastructure, energy, and connectivity initiatives designed to enhance Pakistan's economic capabilities and regional connectivity (Samad, 2025; Surahio et al., 2022). Thus, Pakistan has pursued a careful and balanced foreign policy by not completely siding with any major power. Islamabad has always maintained that its close and strategic relationship with China is not directed against any other country. Rather, Pakistan wants to have friendly as well as constructive relationships with all the major powers of the world. This approach reflects a realistic understanding of international politics and reflects Pakistan's desire to maintain strategic flexibility in an increasingly competitive global environment.

Bridging the Divergence in the Muslim World

The increasing differences in the political and strategic goals of countries whose population consists of predominantly Muslim individuals offer the foreign policy of Pakistan another challenge that

they have to surpass. Nevertheless, the Muslim world cannot be seen as a one and the same geopolitical bloc, even though much of the Muslim governments have always been on good and friendly terms with Pakistan. Having diplomatic connections may be challenging due to the presence of national priorities and regional conflicts. Considering the fact that foreign policy of Pakistan would need to consider a diverse array of antagonistic interests and delicate security concerns, Pakistan would need to make judgements that would balance cautiously. The most apparent example of this issue is in the relations of Pakistan with Saudi Arabia and Iran. Saudi Arabia can be a trusted economic and strategic partner to Pakistan. The two countries have had a close cooperation in critical areas such as defence and energy investments. Due to their location as a close neighbor to each other and the fact that the two share a border, Iran is also extremely important to Pakistan. Specifically, peace in the region and the ability to conduct business across the borders are impossible without good relationships with Iran.

Nevertheless, Pakistan's relations with both Saudi Arabia and Iran have been in a tricky situation because of their historic rivalry. Hence Pakistan has adopted a prudent and moderate approach for good relations with both countries. In 2019, Pakistan made a determined effort to ease tensions between the two regional powers. PM Imran Khan has paid visits to Saudi Arabia and Iran to foster understanding and peaceful dialogue. These diplomatic efforts clearly demonstrated Pakistan's stance to ensure constructive engagement and avoid aligning with any party in regional conflicts. Pakistan was trying to come across as a responsible regional player and a potential peace broker.

Likewise, Pakistan has also improved its cooperation with Muslim nations like Turkey, Qatar and other Muslim nations in the areas of economic, political, and security cooperation. However, there are variations in regional conflicts and relations between these states and great powers that limit the opportunities for a common Muslim diplomacy.

Economic and strategic restrictions

Economic issues also haunt Pakistan's foreign policy efforts. Economic strength is closely tied to clout in foreign policy. Pakistan is dependent on foreign financial aid, energy imports and international economic institutions and has constraints on its strategic autonomy. Economic problems could constrain Pakistan's capacity to undertake foreign policy initiatives of its own.

Thus, geopolitics has now morphed into geo-economics, and it is now an important objective of foreign policy. In this context, Pakistan's initiatives are visible in the economic pillars it is laying for its diplomacy, such as CPEC, trade relations with the Gulf nations and attracting foreign investment. But security issues, political unrest and infrastructure problems remain an impediment to these objectives. Security issues also have an impact on Pakistan's diplomatic agenda and image. Diplomatic engagement with neighbouring countries and with international partners is required to deal with issues of militancy, border management and regional instability. Pakistan's ability to achieve greater internal stability is critical to its efforts to promote regional connectivity and conflict resolution.

Future Directions

Despite these challenges and complexities, Pakistan has tremendous opportunities to improve its diplomatic standing in the changing world order. It has key strategic advantages because of its geographical location and strong nuclear power. It also has strong relations with the countries of the Muslim world, and its well-established relations with the leading powers of the world make its diplomatic potential manifold. Pakistan is an active member in many influential international organisations, including United Nations and Organization of Islamic Cooperation. It also engages with Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Such platforms offer great opportunities for international cooperation and fruitful dialogue.

The potential and capacities by virtue of which Pakistan manages its security and economic interests will determine its future diplomacy. It can have a tremendous impact on its international visibility if it can connect with the region and improve its trade relationships. Likewise, more energy cooperation and peaceful dialogue in the region can yield new economic opportunities. Pakistan needs to be careful in its engagements with rival global powers and safeguard its national interests.

Furthermore, Pakistan must have a flexible and pragmatic foreign policy stance to address the new challenges in the international arena. It should be able to deal with differences among Muslim countries judiciously and effectively with the economic and security problems at home. Pakistan needs to have a more stable economy and effective institutions besides strategic alliances. These will lead to a more autonomous and effective foreign policy, over time.

The Future Diplomacy of Pakistan

The shift from a unipolar to a multipolar and fluid international system has brought both opportunities and challenges for Pakistan's foreign policy. Great-power competition, geo-economic connectivity, and the increasing role of regional organizations have broadened the scope of diplomacy beyond military security. The future of diplomacy for Pakistan lies in the capacity to balance, engage, cooperate, and participate effectively in the multilateral arena. Pakistan is a geopolitically important state, which is located between South Asia, Central Asia, China, and the Middle East and has geographical and diplomatic benefits which can be leveraged to improve its international profile (Cohen, 2018).

Expanding Geo-economic Diplomacy

One of the most important opportunities for Pakistan is the development of a geo-economic foreign policy approach. Security issues, especially with India, Afghanistan's instability, and relations with major powers, have traditionally dominated Pakistan's external relations. But global trends show that economic connectivity, trade networks, investment flows, and technological cooperation are increasingly shaping international power and state influence (Blackwill & Harris, 2016). Pakistan's geographical position offers great potential for the country to become a regional connectivity hub

between China, Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. One of the biggest examples of Pakistan's efforts to move from geopolitical competition to economic cooperation is the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) launched in 2015 under China's Belt and Road Initiative. The CPEC encompasses various sectors such as infrastructure development, energy projects, transportation networks, and industrial cooperation, all aimed at fostering regional connectivity (Small, 2015; Wolf, 2020).

Economic diplomacy also offers a chance for deeper interaction with Muslim countries. Gulf states, especially Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar, continue to be significant economic partners due to their investment potential, energy resources, and large Pakistani expatriate communities. Pakistan has been trying to increase cooperation with these countries through investment agreements, energy partnerships, and trade relations. Likewise, increased economic engagement with Turkey, Iran, and Central Asian countries can help in the process of regional integration and diversifying Pakistan's economic ties (Kugelman, 2019). Nonetheless, for geo-economic diplomacy to be successful, domestic economic reforms, political stability, better infrastructure, and institutional capacity are needed. Economic vulnerability can constrain the ability to make independent diplomatic decisions, as states with less robust economic bases may have less room to make independent foreign policy decisions (Zakaria, 1998).

Strengthening Multilateral Engagement

Multilateral diplomacy is also an important avenue for Pakistan to increase its influence in the world. In a world that is becoming more and more interconnected, states are frequently pursuing their interests through international and regional organizations, where cooperation, negotiation, and coalition-building are important instruments of foreign policy (Keohane & Nye, 2012). Pakistan's relations with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) continue to be a key part of its diplomatic efforts with the Muslim world. Pakistan has been involved in political, economic, and humanitarian issues of Muslim-majority societies through the OIC. At times, the differences between the member states prevent collective action, but the organization provides Pakistan with the chance to meet with a broad spectrum of Muslim countries and develop diplomatic coordination.

Besides, its membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) since 2017 has also further enhanced its diplomatic prospects. The SCO serves as a forum for cooperation between China, Russia and Central Asian nations on counterterrorism, regional security, the economy and energy. Such forums can help Pakistan to develop relations outside the old Western alliances and increase its relations with the Eurasian countries (Cooley, 2012). Pakistan's participation in UN peacekeeping operations also gives it a positive international image. Since the 1960s, Pakistan has actively participated in UN peacekeeping operations, signifying its place in global security mechanisms and raising its diplomatic stature.

Pakistan as a Middle Power and Diplomatic Facilitator

The changing international order provides Pakistan with an opportunity to enhance its status as a middle power. Though generally less well-armed than the major powers, middle powers can nonetheless exert influence in international affairs via diplomacy, mediation, coalition-building and participation in multilateral institutions. Pakistan has multiple regional and global actors with which it can engage in such diplomacy. Pakistan's diplomatic initiatives in Afghanistan reflect its potential in conflict management. Islamabad hosted talks between Afghan stakeholders and helped international actors communicate with the Taliban, which led to the 2020 Doha Agreement between the United States and the Taliban (Gul, 2020). Despite the political and security issues in Afghanistan, Pakistan's participation shows how regional countries can play a role in conflict resolution.

Pakistan has also tried to project itself as a facilitator of dialogue between Muslim-majority countries. It was also seen to be actively involved in diplomatic activities during times of Saudi-Iran tensions, which seemed to be aimed at fostering dialogue and mitigating polarization in the region. These efforts reflect Pakistan's commitment to fostering stability through diplomatic engagement and regional ties. Moreover, Pakistan can play a greater role in the diplomatic arena by participating in debates on new security issues such as climate change, energy security, food security, and cyber governance. These issues are now increasingly impacting global politics and are a chance for states to show leadership outside of traditional military means (Buzan & Hansen, 2009).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the paper has found out that the issue that influenced diplomatic choices of Islamabad were national interest, security, economic interest, and International Dynamics. The paper has used a realist and neorealist approach and foreign policy as an explanation on how Pakistan aims at ensuring its own security yet strategic autonomy is experienced. The cord between Pakistan and the Muslim nations has been taken to a new level of religious unity. Ordinary legacy and history do not cease to be important. Nonetheless, diplomacy is increasingly being based on trade, energy security, economic cooperation and regional stability. Pakistan has nurtured relationships with a wide circle of Muslim states regardless of their different geopolitical positions, and alliances with the big powers. This malleability is evidenced in its relations with Saudi Arabia, Türkiye, Iran and the Gulf nations. These alliances are opportunities and have to be handled in consideration of opposing interests. The rivalry between China and the United States has posed its challenge and opportunities to Pakistan. The growing engagement in international development with China, especially through China-Pakistan Economic Corridor is an indicator of Islamabad recognizing the opportunity to strengthen its ties with China both strategic and economic. Pakistan, meanwhile, continues negotiations with the United States and the other players of the world. The mode of thinking implies the wish not to become overdependent on one source of power. Security, however, is the main component of foreign policy. The post-election turmoil in Afghanistan, terrorism, and regional wars continue to dominate the diplomatic agenda of Pakistan.

The importance of conflict management and mediation in Pakistan can be seen from the fact that the government is encouraging dialogue and cooperation in the region. The acceptance of international forums such as the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization provides a platform of diplomacy. These institutions help Pakistan establish relationships and further its interests. Being a member may, however, not imply power or even sustainable development. In the end, the success of the diplomatic efforts of Pakistan will be based on its ability to connect the economic growth to the strategic thought and institutional ability. Its importance will not be based on geography or military importance. Rather, Pakistan must establish regional relationships and build balanced relations in the multipolar world. The way it has been able to strike a balance between conflicting interests yet not compromising on national priorities will help to characterize its position in the Muslim world and the international system.

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