

The dynamics of Pakistan-US relations after US withdrawal from Afghanistan: challenges and opportunities

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Abstract:

The dynamics of Pakistan-US relations have witnessed significant changes following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. This paper explores the complexities and nuances of this bilateral relationship through the lens of dependency theory, which highlights the inherent power imbalances that characterise interactions between developed and developing nations. Pakistan's strategic importance to US interests reflects a longstanding pattern where the powerful exert influence over the weaker, shaping the latter's policies and actions. The relationship oscillates between collaboration and conflict, illustrating the multifaceted nature of international relations defined by national interests rather than fixed notions of friendship or enmity. By examining the implications of the US exit from Afghanistan, this study underscores the resultant uncertainties that have emerged in both regional and global contexts. It critiques the notion of Pakistan as a "strategic partner," revealing the core-periphery dynamics that dominate the relationship. Ultimately, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the evolving geopolitical landscape, showcasing how dependency theory can elucidate the strategies employed by powerful nations to exploit the vulnerabilities of those on the periphery. Through this analysis, the paper aims to provide insights into the future trajectory of Pakistan-US relations in a rapidly changing world.

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1. Introduction

According to Lord Palmerston, there are no permanent friends or enemies in international relations; only permanent interests are usually followed by those involved in foreign affairs (Young, 2021, January 26). The nature and shape of international relations between world states are neither black nor white, neither binary, nor yin nor yang. Instead, the relations form a complex web of grey areas, defined by the interests and externalities involved. This is particularly evident in the case of Pakistan-US relations, which have historically been shaped according to mutual interests. Since the 1950s, ties between Pakistan and the United States (US) have seen many highs and lows. The dynamics after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan have opened room for the phenothra of challenges, complexities, and developments with substantial implications on the global and regional landscape. (Ullah et al., 2023). However, the crucial element that shapes US-Pakistan relations is the dominance of the powerful over the weaker.

1.2. Significance of research

The study of US-Pakistan relations is highly pertinent to International Relations, particularly in the realm of Security Studies, because these relations have played a significant role in shaping world politics, be it during the Cold War, the Global War on Terror, or, most importantly, the Afghanistan withdrawal. Afghanistan's withdrawal in 2021 holds the most cruciality, making it a significant area of research because the US, for decades, has seen Pakistan through the lens of Afghanistan, and the withdrawal left a vacuum and room for a lot of uncertainties in relationships. Moreover, this research is of crucial importance because it analyses the relations between two countries through the lens of dependency theory to explain the unequal power dynamics that shaped the policies of both countries. It further challenges the notion of Pakistan being a “strategic partner” to the USA because, in partnership, there's a balance and equality among relations, which, in the case of Pakistan-USA relations, was invisible; instead, there were core-periphery relations between the two.

1.3. Theoretical framework

The paper uses dependency theory to analyze US-Pakistan relations. The dependency theory explores the unequal power balance between core and peripheral nations. The idea behind this theory is that powerful or developed nations exploit the vulnerabilities, be they political or economic, of weaker nations to their benefit. The theory was first proposed in the late 1950s by the Argentine economist and statesman Raúl Prebisch; dependency theory gained prominence in the 1960s and '70s (Munro, 2024). Moreover, Theotonio Dos Santos is considered to be the founding father of this theory. According to theorists credited with the development of dependency theory, development is neither unidirectional nor does economic growth in developed countries automatically translate to the development of less developed ones. Instead, underdevelopment results from obstacles created by ‘centre nations’ through the

integration of 'peripheries' into the world capitalist system, leading to the periphery's economic reliance on center nations (Oyetunde, 2022).

Primarily, the theory is about economic dependency and development as it is an approach to understanding economic underdevelopment that emphasizes the putative constraints imposed by the global political and economic order (Munro, 2024). Moreover, the theory focuses on unequal exchange relationships between developed and developing countries, which were viewed as contributing to poor economic growth (Shrum, 2001). However, the dependency theory is also an important tool to analyze the inequality and imbalance between core and periphery nations through the lens of politics because there is a security-development-economic nexus prevailing in world politics, which implies that security, economics, and development are interlinked. Powerful nations like the US are using this interlinkage to execute their policy goals by asserting their dominance over weaker nations like Pakistan by exploiting internal weakness and instability to their benefit.

2. Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative methodology to explore the evolving dynamics of Pakistan-US relations in the wake of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. The primary method of investigation is a qualitative content analysis, which allows for an in-depth examination of the relationship through various textual sources. Data is collected from a range of primary and secondary sources, including official government documents, diplomatic communications, and statements from key policymakers in both countries. Additionally, academic literature, news articles, and reports from think tanks are incorporated to provide context and depth. This diverse data set ensures a comprehensive understanding of the bilateral relationship and allows for the identification of underlying power dynamics as articulated by dependency theory. Furthermore, the methodology involves systematic coding and categorization of themes related to power imbalances, national interests, and geopolitical implications, facilitating a more straightforward interpretation of how the US exerts influence over Pakistan and the strategic manoeuvres each country employs in response to changing circumstances.

To support the analysis, the study applies dependency theory as the analytical framework, highlighting the unequal power dynamics that characterize interactions between the core (the US) and the periphery (Pakistan). This theoretical lens is crucial for understanding the historical context of the relationship, as well as the contemporary challenges and opportunities arising from the US exit from Afghanistan. Employing a comparative historical analysis, the research evaluates key events and shifts from the Cold War to the Global War on Terror, examining how these developments have shaped the expectations and strategies of both nations. The analysis focuses on identifying patterns of behaviour and decision-making processes, paying special attention to how the vulnerabilities of Pakistan have been influenced by its strategic importance to US foreign policy. By combining these methods and theoretical frameworks, the study aims to develop a nuanced understanding of the complex realities of

Pakistan-US relations, providing insights into the future trajectory of this critical bilateral relationship.

3. Historical overview of Pakistan-US relations

This research section presents a brief overview of US-Pakistan bilateral relationships since the inception of Pakistan in 1947, with particular sub-sections dedicated to the Cold War and the Global War on Terror. Military assistance needed to the USA, Pakistan in need of economic aid, and unequal relationships are three cornerstones that define the historical dimensions of US-Pakistan relationships. Historically, furthermore, we observe fluctuations in relations that oscillate between convergence and divergence. The pattern of history shows that there was convergence in relationships during the military regimes of Ayub Khan, Zia ul Haq, and Pervez Musharraf, and there was divergence of interest during civil rule, particularly of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. The musical chair era of Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, an era marked by the dominance of Pakistan's People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz. In the contemporary and current era, we have seen the complexity of relations between the two countries during Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf, which sparked debates and conspiracies on US involvement in internal matters of Pakistan, leading to political and economic instability. Whatever the dynamics may be both nations find each other to be critically important to one another according to Jinnah ““America needs Pakistan more than Pakistan needs America ... Pakistan is the pivot of the world, as we are placed’ — he revolved his long forefinger in bony circles — ‘[on] the frontier on which the future position of the world revolves’” (*Journey to a Different Place*, 2012).

The United States, in the initial years of Pakistan, was less interested in getting involved in the emerging conflicts in South Asia (Javaid & Mushtaq, 2014); therefore, Pakistan was of no benefit to the USA. But Pakistan’s paralyzed state after independence put her in a position to require economic assistance. Consequently, it sought help from wealthy countries, such as Canada and the USA, and other Western nations (Mugheri, 2023). However, during the first military regime under Ayub Khan, history witnessed a relationship between the two countries. Ayub’s policies were pro-western, pertinently aligning with the USA. Ayub stated that “Pakistan had become America’s most allied ally in Asia”. The bilateral Defence Cooperation Agreement was signed between Pakistan and the United States on 5th March 1959, in accordance with which the United States agreed to cooperate with Pakistan to deal with defence requirements and help with security threats. It decided to provide aid in defence issues and economic development. After this alliance, the United States declared that if any country attacked Pakistan, then it would be considered an attack on America and that country would face American aggression (Mugheri, 2023).

There was a change of fate due to the 1965 Indo-Pak war, in which the US-Pakistan alliance was put to rest. The Security Council passed Resolution 211 on September 20, calling for an end to the fighting and negotiations on the settlement of the Kashmir problem. The United

States and the United Kingdom supported the UN decision by cutting off arms supplies to both belligerents (Office of the Historian, n.d.). Pakistan and the USA entered the era of divergence under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's regime, pertinently due to his socialist approach. He persuaded the USSR to invest in Pakistan, which in turn resulted in Pakistan's reduced reliance on the US. President Jimmy Carter of the United States disagreed with Bhutto's socialist economic theories and intensified sanctions against Pakistan in 1976-77. Furthermore, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's friendly foreign policy towards the USSR irritated the US, as he was tasked with providing a bridge to the USSR for access to warm water, which the US had never desired at any cost. When Pakistan sought normal relations with the USSR during the Cold War, the US calculated that it might have lost an ally (Naeem, 2023).

With the military regime of Ziaul Haq, the relationship was rekindled based on common enmity, i.e., communism during the Cold War. For that, Ronald Reagan strengthened the ties with Pakistan economically and militarily (PakPAC, n.d.). However, with the death of Ziaul Haq, the dynamics transformed with the 1988 general elections, which held crucial importance for the USA for several reasons. Pertinently due to the war in Afghanistan, because "for the entire history of Pakistan, the relationship with the United States has been a love-hate one, at times had made the most-allied-ally and others axes-of-evil" and due to US foreign policy concern of facing Islamic Fundamentalism 1988-1990 was the era when the US heavily aided Pakistan which in turn flourished Pakistan's economy. The main reason for massive aid was to grow its economy, to threaten the perception of the expansion of the Soviet Union's communism in the region in the past (Khuhro & Bukhari, 2010).

The era of the 1990s until the next military regime witnessed another period of divergence. The US suspended nearly \$621 million in military and economic aid over the nuclear program (Shakoor, 1992). In the aftermath of the 9/11 incident, the security environment affected Pakistan's foreign policy, particularly in the US-led war against terrorism. Pakistan's strategic location and to safeguard its national security, Islamabad was not in a position to remain neutral. Pakistan changed its stance towards the Taliban, became an ally in the war on Terror, and worked together with the US to create a new government in Kabul. It also took steps to reduce extremism in Pakistan and stopped supporting insurgents. Pakistan-US relations entered into a new phase of cooperation and alignment. Islamabad supported the military operation in Afghanistan to safeguard its security. It was a new challenge for Pakistan-US relations to cooperate and fight together against terrorism after a decade of detachment before 9/11 (Munshi, 2022).

3.1. US-Pakistan relations during the Cold War

The era of the Cold War was a period of bitter relations between Pakistan and the USA, with a multitude of complaints coming from Pakistan. Pertinent of all complaints was Washington's refusal to help Pakistan during the 1965 war with India when it desperately needed assistance against its stronger enemy, the United States discarding Pakistan when it was no longer

required after the Afghan war to promote the US agenda in the region and the sometimes discriminatory nature of U.S. nuclear sanctions, which have had a strongly negative impact on Pakistan's economy and were targeted towards Pakistan only and did not affect India (Sunawar & Coutto, 2015).

3.2. US-Pakistan relations: post-Cold War era

The end of the Cold War and the presidency of George H. W. Bush gave rise to numerous uncertainties in world politics. Pakistan was at the core of this shift. In the post-Cold War era, the two countries witnessed bitterness in bilateral relations with the USA putting Pakistan under sanctions following the nuclear issue in 1990. Furthermore, with the disintegration of the USSR, we have witnessed Pakistan's strategic value diminishing in the eyes of the US. The US abandoned commitments with Pakistan, and the bilateral relations between the two countries declined rapidly, opening a century of mutual disagreements on the nuclear issue, terrorism, democracy, and human rights. Notwithstanding the willingness of Pakistan to collaborate with the US and take advantage of the US support to the civil governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in the 1990s, the bilateral relationship has not improved. Bilateral relations between the US and Pakistan quickly deteriorated after the communist forces in Afghanistan were removed entirely. The US Congress applied the Pressler Amendment in 1990 to punish Pakistan after President G. H. W. Bush stopped guaranteeing the Pakistan nuclear program. In September 1990, Pakistan President Ghulam Ishaq Khan received a letter from Robert B. Oakley, the U.S. Ambassador in Pakistan, notifying them of these sanctions. Later, in October 1990, the United States suspended \$700 million in aid to Pakistan for the 1988–1994 period (VAN, 2020).

3.3. US-Pakistan relations during the Global War on Terror

The US-Pakistan alliance in the War on Terror was essentially a complex web of challenges, collaboration, and geopolitical concerns. Even if the coalition was successful in combating terrorism, the story was moulded by ongoing hostilities and evolving regional dynamics (Ali & Anwar, 2023). The 9/11 attack created a new security dilemma for Pakistan (Hussain, 2018). The incidents of September 11 were like a paradigm shift that turned the world upside down. In the words of then-COAS Musharraf, "9/11 came as a thunderbolt" that presented acute challenges (Ahmad, 2013). Most analysts consider Pakistan a strategically sensitive and geographically complicated country, with no exception, whose fate has been disrupted since 911 (Lieven, 2012). Strategically sensitive and geographically at a crossroads of South Asia, Pakistan was not an exception to witnessing unprecedented consequences for the war she never called (Lieven, 2012). Pakistan was caught in a catch-22 situation (Salik, 2020). Keeping in mind the national interest and the US's 'either with Taliban or with us,' Pakistan had to be a non-NATO ally to the US, else the state would have bombed back to the stone age. The 911 attacks hit Pakistan with equally savage forces, putting Pakistan in a position where it faced threats on many fronts, both within and outside (Musharraf, 2006).

With the US's ultimatum of either with us or against us, in the words of Richard Armitage, not only did Pakistan have to decide whether the state was with America or with terrorists, but if Pakistan chose to side with terrorists, it would have witnessed itself bombed back to the Stone Age. Richard Armitage threatened the then DG ISI General Mehmud Ahmed to bomb Pakistan back to the Stone Age (Musharraf, 2006). According to Barnett Rubin: "Pakistan could only be a full partner or a target" and did not have a third option (Ahmad, 2013). When the Global War on Terror started, Pakistan, under pressure from the US government, participated in the war. Pakistan was declared a non-NATO ally by the American government, which provided Pakistan with financial as well as military aid. NATO troops used Pakistan to reach Afghanistan. Moreover, Pakistan's air bases were also given to NATO for attacking Afghanistan (Shahzad et al., 2017). Pakistan's support to the US in the War on Terror, in the short term, bore her long-term consequences like a declining economy, poor law & order situation, and deteriorating relations with the West (Yamin, 2015). Moreover, and worst of all, it tarnished the soft and national image of Pakistan, acknowledged Musharraf that Pakistan now has a serious image problem (Ahmad, 2013) due to its participation in the Global War on Terror as well as due to the policies implemented during the time. The total of Pakistan's post-9/11 foreign policy developed a new identity on the global radar screen as a "hotbed of terrorism" (Ahmad, 2013). The war on terror in Pakistan required a whole nation approach from a highly polarized society.

4. Pakistan-US relations: post-Afghanistan withdrawal (2021 onward)

August 2021 marked the moment when the USA under the Biden administration exited from Afghanistan, concluding its decade-long war on terror. The withdrawal culminated in the Abbey Gate terrorist attack on August 26, 2021, which killed 13 U.S. servicemembers, wounding another 45, and killing more than 170 Afghan civilians. The withdrawal concluded on August 30, 2021, when the last U.S. military aircraft left Afghanistan (House Foreign Affairs Committee, n.d.). The end of the war and withdrawal from Afghanistan brought a new shift to the dynamics of Pakistan-US relations. From history, we have witnessed that due to Pakistan's strategically sensitive geographical location, the USA has seen Pakistan through the lens of Afghanistan. On seeing Pakistan through the lens of Afghanistan, an expert at the Wilson Center, Michael Kugelman told VOA "Afghanistan has long been the lens through which Washington views its relations with Islamabad" (Dawi, 2022).

Now that the war ended, Pakistan was of no strategic importance to the US; hence, a vacuum was created, and the US turned its back on Pakistan. The last time US-Pakistan relations turned cold was in the early 1990s after Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan, and the U.S. no longer needed Pakistan's support and regional intelligence. Following the withdrawal, Washington and Islamabad again appeared to be at a distance from each other on significant issues (Dawi, 2022). Since the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, both countries have been facing challenges like divergent policy approaches, security concerns, political differences, varying mutual distrust, and different strategic priorities. The past resentment, ill

will, trust deficit, and suspicion in Pakistan-US relations were identified as major challenges during the President Joe Biden Administration and in the post-withdrawal period from Afghanistan (Munshi, 2022).

4.1. Perspectives of US-Pakistan relations: the post-Afghan withdrawal

Pakistan-U.S. relations have been described as a tale of broken promises and disastrous misunderstandings (Sunawar & Coutto, 2015), where each country has a messed-up perception of the other. On one hand, the USA finds Pakistan dishonest and distrustful (Dawi, 2022), accusing it of playing a double game. This mistrust led US Congressman Scott Perry, on March 2022 to introduce a bill in which Pakistan is being called out to be a state sponsor of terrorism (Dawi, 2022). On the other hand, Pakistani authorities feel they are being taken for granted for their sacrifices. As a result, they accused the U.S. government of being opportunistic and abusive. According to the former prime minister Imran Khan, "Whenever the U.S. needed us, they established relations and Pakistan became a frontline state, and then abandoned it and slapped sanctions on us" (Dawi, 2022). The Afghan withdrawal left a vacuum that was later filled by emerging global security challenges, which further deteriorated Pakistan-US relations under the Obama administration, primarily due to three significant factors. Firstly, the emerging situation in Afghanistan, secondly, the Pakistan-India relations, and thirdly, the China-US conflict (Ahmar, 2021).

4.2. New dimensions of US-Pakistan relations

The withdrawal opened a new arena of global developments that would serve to be a new lens through which US would conduct its bilateral relationships particularly with Pakistan. The most important factors are those of China and Russia, as the US focus has shifted from security to great power competition. China is a rising power in terms of economy and military strength. US, being a global hegemon, has been stuck in a Thucydides trap as it feels threatened by the rise of China as an emerging superpower. Pakistan, being a strong ally of China, finds itself stuck in a quagmire of complicated bilateral relations in which taking sides with either one would dampen its relations with the other. The intensity at which the rivalry between the US and China is emerging is changing the world order, in which the bipartisan nature of US opposition to China has created an especially precarious situation for Pakistan (Ali, 2020). Russia's invasion of Ukraine not only reshaped Eurasia, but it is also transforming the world order. The vacuum left by the Afghanistan withdrawal has been filled by the Russia-Ukraine war, attracting the attention of the USA. This scenario redefines how bilateral relationships will be affected between countries due to the USA's hegemonic nature.

5. Opportunities and challenges in the light of dependency theory

The dependence hypothesis contends that Pakistan and the US have historically had unbalanced relations in which Pakistan is treated as a dependent or peripheral nation (Ali & Anwar, 2023).

5.1. Opportunities

5.1.1. Security cooperation

Security cooperation presents an opportunity to foster relations between Islamabad and Washington. Joint military exercises and significant foreign military sales were prompted by mutual interests to combat terrorism and maintain regional stability. Despite the periodic turbulence, strategic alignment was illustrated by US support for the defence capabilities of Pakistan with substantial investments (Fayyaz, 2024). In the light of dependency theory, this opportunity highlights power asymmetry in which Pakistan is dependent on the USA for its stability and security. Moreover, the security cooperation serves more to the interest of the USA as Pakistan is an important area for the USA to execute its interests.

5.1.2. Economic liberalization

The economic liberalization of Pakistan is a catalyst for the relations to continue to grow by organizing business-to-business trade relations, promoting business opportunities, and providing technical assistance to develop commercial partnerships. The current diplomatic progressions reflect the diversity of partnerships with mutual goals of economic prosperity and regional stability. The current examples include the US-Pakistan Knowledge Corridor, whereby education and exchange programs seek to enhance capability in both countries (Fayyaz, 2024).

5.1.3. Counterterrorism

In terms of counterterrorism and internal security, Pakistan has implemented specific measures against the militants and the UN-designated terrorist organizations as required by its national action plan on terrorism. However, the application of the sanctions of the United Nations on these entities remains quasi-judicial. The United States has persisted in encouraging and pressuring Pakistan to act against these groups; at the same time, the United States seeks collaborative opportunities with Pakistan, such as counterterrorism and border security (Fayyaz, 2024).

5.2. Challenges

5.2.1. Pakistan's polycrisis 2023

In May 2023, we witnessed Pakistan being stuck in a situation of "polycrisis," which arose due to issues like political instability, economic crisis, domestic security under threat and non-secular traditional problems like climate change and human rights violations (Kronstadt, 2023), which created a situation of alarm at the international level and increased volatility. The situation arose due to the controversy of the 2024 elections being delayed to create a hindrance

for PTI to participate (Tiezzi, 2023). The polycrisis situation rose in the wake of regime change, in which the then Prime Minister was given a vote of no confidence.

Imran Khan's foreign policy approach during his tenure as Pakistan's Prime Minister (2018-2022) was characterized by a blend of pragmatism, idealism, and an emphasis on sovereignty to move away from a purely security-centric outlook towards one focused on economic diplomacy and regional peace. The shift was driven by his vision of an independent foreign policy that sought to reduce Pakistan's reliance on traditional Western allies, particularly the United States, and instead, cultivate diverse and balanced relations with global and regional powers such as China, Russia, and the Middle Eastern countries. Moreover, his government focused on strengthening ties with China, viewing it as a critical ally in its pursuit of economic stability and development (Ahmed, 2022). Khan's foreign policy also emphasized Pakistan's role as a facilitator of regional peace, especially in Afghanistan, advocating for a political solution in Afghanistan, opposing military interventions, and urging the international community to support peace-building efforts. However, the chaotic US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 tested this diplomatic success, as Pakistan faced criticism for its alleged ties with the Taliban and the perceived instability that followed (Qarni et al., 2024).

5.2.2. Pakistan's alliance with China

The Biden Administration's fulsome engagement with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or "Quad," along with India, Japan, and Australia), and central focus on countering China combined with a reduction in U.S. government attention to Afghanistan has led some Pakistani leaders to express anxiety that their country's salience to Washington has been diminished and undermined in part by perceptions that Islamabad is falling into Beijing's geopolitical "camp." (Kronstadt, 2023). The intensifying U.S.-China competition has repercussions for Pakistan-U.S. relations. While China is a strategic partner of Pakistan, the U.S. has been a long-standing ally and friend. Islamabad has always worked to maintain good relations with both Beijing and Washington. Despite the deepening of the China-U.S. rivalry on the global stage, Pakistan has strived to sustain mutually beneficial relations with both sides. However, the fallout from this competition remains especially important for Islamabad, given the already fraught security dynamics in South Asia (Khan, 2024).

5.2.3. Biden Administration's National Security Strategy (NSS) and great power competition

Russia-Ukraine conflict has directly and indirectly impacted the tone of the relations between Pakistan and the US, as Pakistan has maintained neutrality over the issue regardless of the heightened geopolitical tensions. The US has shared its sentiments over Pakistan's neutrality on the issue and cautioned Pakistan over the impact that Russia's actions against Ukraine could have on regional and global security (Khan, 2024). Biden Administration's National Security Strategy (NSS) underscores the importance of solidifying alliances in the Indo-Pacific region

to outmanoeuvre China and contain Russia. The withdrawal from Afghanistan was a call for a renewed approach that extends beyond security concerns. With the USA's focus on great power competition, Pakistan's close ties with China have become a key consideration in Washington's strategy (Fayyaz, 2024). With the US now seeing Pakistan through the lens of great power competition, its close relationship with China has factored into Washington's regional calculus. The US cannot risk overlooking Pakistan as a potential economic partner, else it would push Pakistan into China's sphere of influence (Chaudhry, 2023).

5.3. Analysis in the light of dependency theory

Pakistan, due to its strategically sensitive geographical position, neighbouring enemy state India, internal and economic weakness, and being a nuclear-armed state, is bound to maintain relations with powerful nations, particularly with the USA. The US, being in the position of power, committed more than \$32.5 billion in civilian and military aid to Pakistan from the start of the war in Afghanistan to its 2021 conclusion (Dawi, 2022). From 2001 until the second Obama Administration, Pakistan was among the leading recipients of U.S. foreign assistance, with Congress appropriating \$11 billion in economic, development, and humanitarian aid, as well as nearly \$8 billion in security-related aid for FY2002-FY2016. Pakistan also received about \$14.6 billion in Pentagon military reimbursements during this period (Kronstadt, 2023). However, this investment was never for free, as in return, the USA exerted its dominance by demanding that Pakistan "do more," for which Pakistan had to provide its bases and military services to the USA, or else Pakistan would be threatened back to the Stone Age.

Moreover, Imran Khan's vision of independent foreign policy pertinently, his visit to Moscow in 2022 attracted criticism from the United States, highlighting the complexities of being a periphery nation with high dependence on a powerful nation to the extent that it leaves no room to exercise foreign policy independently (Syed, 2022). The USA's involvement in the internal matters of Pakistan, being a weaker nation to execute an independent foreign policy, reflected the hegemonic nature of the USA, where it dominates the weaker nation to maintain its power, which was manifested by the event of the removal of Mr Khan. In the context of great power competition, a robust U.S.-Pakistan relationship could prevent Pakistan from becoming overly reliant on China and safeguard U.S. interests in South Asia. Washington has excluded Pakistan, and Gwadar by extension, from its Indo-Pacific strategy, which aims to outcompete Pakistan; it might not have the road map for that yet. Still, Washington's political willingness will shape the level and scope of future engagements. Concurrently, Washington could consider funding capacity-building projects and making Pakistani entrepreneurs more investable as a means to foster an innovation culture and develop expertise in Pakistan (Chaudhry, 2023).

6. Future of Pakistan-US Relations 2024 under Trump 2.0

Pakistan's increasingly close ties with U.S. competitor China, its decades-long rivalry and conflict with U.S. strategic partner India, and its troubled relations with the Taliban government

in Afghanistan are likely to be among the many factors influencing the likelihood and ability of the United States to attain its foreign and regional policy goals, including future levels of regional stability and security. Legislation and congressional oversight have and can continue to affect the course of U.S.-Pakistan relations. Congress can set levels of U.S. foreign assistance, consider whether or not to facilitate expanded bilateral trade and investment, and whether or not to assist efforts to strengthen Pakistan's democratic institutions and rule of law, stabilize its economy, secure its nuclear weapons arsenal, and improve its human rights record (Kronstadt, 2023).

The return of Trump opened doors for debates on the implications of his policies on US-Pakistan relations. It's essential to have a background of US-Pakistan relations under Trump's 2017 presidency to have a basis for substantial predictions of the future because its history defines the future. During his first term as President from 2017 to 2021 the bilateral relations between the two countries suffered fragility as Trump had cut \$1.3 billion in security aid, accusing Pakistan of harbouring militant groups, including the Taliban (Rizvi, 2024). It is likely for Trump to continue his "America First" approach, which would make Pakistan irrelevant due to the absence of security concerns (Waheed, 2024). However, with Trump's antagonism towards China, Pakistan will likely be put in a precarious situation due to being a key player in China's BRI (Rizvi, 2024).

Generally, Trump's foreign policy, particularly towards developing countries, is expected to continue, meaning that prioritizing U.S. interests will be at the expense of international cooperation and aid. His first administration focused on reducing foreign aid, emphasizing bilateral trade deals over multilateral agreements, and confronting economic practices he viewed as unfair, particularly from countries like China. Pakistan's historical alliance with China in the region will likely put Pakistan in a tough spot where it will have to balance its relationship with the US and maintain its alliance with China. The US approach under Trump could lead to less support for development initiatives in the Third World and Pakistan, as the focus shifts towards protecting American jobs and industries. This means that not only will Pakistan be sidelined economically, but its irrelevance in the American security calculus will make it further insignificant to the US (Waheed, 2024). According to Foreign Policy expert Muhammad Faisal, "The presidency will be more focused on domestic policy and global trade issues. Pakistan's domestic politics is not a topic of mutual interest for the incoming Trump administration" (Hussain, 2024).

7. Conclusion

The Cold War era, the post-Cold War era, and the era of the Global War on Terror are the key events in history that predominantly defined complex US-Pakistan relations. The common theme witnessed is the lens through which the US perceived to carry out relations with Pakistan, i.e. the lens of Afghanistan. The relation between the two countries, therefore, was security-centric, with Pakistan holding high strategic importance. However, with the

withdrawal from Afghanistan, the dynamics entered a new era in which there was a shift from a security-centric approach to global development, moulding the relationships. Evolving global and regional dynamics, a changing global geostrategic landscape, and major-power competition are among the new determinants of Pakistan-US relations (Khan, 2024). However, the power dynamics we witness between the two countries are neither equal nor a partnership, instead, they are core-periphery relations in which the USA, being powerful, dominates and exploits Pakistan, the weaker state, to its benefit.

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