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## **Regional dynamics of Foreign Policy: Pakistan’s balancing Foreign Policy with her neighboring States**

**Muhammad Adil Nawaz Khan**

Deputy Director (Electronic Media) Directorate General Public Relations,  
Information & Culture Department, Government of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

**Corresponding:** [madilnawazkhan@gmail.com](mailto:madilnawazkhan@gmail.com)

**Dr. Mubeen Adnan**

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University, of the Punjab,  
Lahore, Pakistan

**Email:** [mubeenadnan.polsc@pu.edu.pk](mailto:mubeenadnan.polsc@pu.edu.pk)

### **Abstract**

Striking the delicate balance in Pakistan's foreign policy amidst regional complexities, the researcher thoroughly investigated Pakistan's foreign policy towards its neighbouring countries and how it shifts from one nation to another. The researcher shed light on global leaders' challenges and crises regarding geopolitical complexities. Moreover, the role of Pakistan was discussed to bring stability to the region, particularly in the Muslim world, as a significant Muslim state of the Organisation of Islamic States(OIC). The researcher also studied the current research about ideologies of foreign policies and how these policies may help build firm and working international foreign policy, leading to attaining specific goals and objectives. However, it is a sensitive matter, and any negligence will result in severe consequences. The researcher correlates the two major foreign policy approaches, realism and rationality, and their practical implementation of ineffective foreign policy. The research made a correlation between the foreign policy of Pakistan-Iran and Iran-Saudi Arabia foreign policy, as the two states, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran, faced tension in their foreign affairs for an extended period, and this tension reflected in the political scenario in the region as a whole as well. However, the researcher emphasises that good working foreign policy between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran will bring political stability in this region and positive developments at the end of the Muslim World to make a strong unity bond between the Muslim states. However, it analysed Pakistan’s tentative foreign policy and action plan in this spectrum. The research aims, and objectives are to advise a policy action plan that helps them build a solid, practical, friendly foreign policy with the neighbouring countries with sustainable economic growth and balance the foreign policy to achieve strategic goals in this region.

**Key Words:** Pakistan, Foreign policy, Muslim World, Neighbours, Iran, Saudi Arabia.

## Introduction

In recent years, Pakistan's foreign policy dynamics towards its neighbouring countries and Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, India, and China have been subjected to evolving regional and global dynamics. This research article critically analyses the complicated interplay of geopolitical, security, economic, and historical factors that shape Pakistan's choices in balancing foreign policy with its neighbours and pursuing strategic goals. In the changing world, countries across the globe are facing different sets of challenges. Regarding foreign policy towards peace, stability, growth, and development, the leaders of nations try to develop smooth working foreign policy globally. Besides smooth working foreign policy, every country has specific roles that combine to create strategies for foreign policies. It is challenging for leaders to incorporate the complexities of the state's domestic affairs and international working strategies to ensure development, progress, and smooth international foreign policy (Ahmad, 1982). Practical strategies to design foreign policy can help the nation to ensure smooth international working foreign policy with a road map towards national development, growth, and progress. Meanwhile, negligence and challenges in foreign policy can ruin the country's future. Depending on the mistake, a country may pay for it in the short or long term and even eliminate it from the map. For a region, neighbouring countries, and close allies, it is essential to ensure that they maintain good working foreign policy with each other and agree to cooperate in an open border trade system that may help the public of the countries to make close terms that lead to peace, harmony and most importantly mutual economic growth (Ahmad, 1982).

The sudden US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 precipitated a profound shift in the regional dynamics of South Asia, as the Taliban's swift resurgence plunged the country into renewed crisis. Amidst this tumult, Pakistan, China, and India have emerged as critical players vying for influence in post-withdrawal Afghanistan, each driven by distinct historical, cultural, economic, and strategic imperatives. As these nations navigate the complex landscape of Afghan politics, security, and economics, Pakistan's delicate balancing act between its interests, regional rivalries, and international expectations has come under intense scrutiny. This study delves into the intricate web of relationships and motivations shaping Pakistan's foreign policy towards its neighbouring states, focusing on its engagement with Afghanistan, China, and India. By examining the interplay of cooperation, competition, and strategic positioning in the region, this research aims to illuminate Pakistan's challenges and opportunities as it seeks to assert its role in Afghanistan and the broader regional landscape.

The indicators of foreign policy set by the nation or country lead to defining the foreign policies the country wants to build with other countries. The foreign policy strategies and determinants change from one country to another, one region to another, one block to another, and even one continent to other continents. Different factors combine to form the foreign policy of a country; these factors include international trade affairs, international bilateral foreign policy, neighbouring countries, joint alignment, common religion, shared beliefs, historical context, and diplomacy are significant factors. Moreover, foreign affairs are not only based on the ruling elites of the country however; there are some other factors too that contribute towards the effective foreign policy of the country that may be considered as the stakeholders of the foreign policy, but they play a pivotal role in shaping the

foreign affair policies. These factors are the armed or military forces and the country's political leadership (Ahmad,1988). By critically analysing Pakistan's foreign policy dynamics towards Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, India, and China, this research aims to provide valuable insights into the drivers, challenges, and implications of Pakistan's regional engagements. The findings contribute to a subterranean thought of the evolving dynamics of Pakistan's foreign policy and its implications for regional stability, security, and cooperation in recent years.

Since its inception in 1947, Pakistan has navigated a complex and challenging trajectory, grappling with domestic and foreign policy dilemmas that have often hindered its progress. The country's chequered history of civil-military relations has led to divergent views on strategic interests. At the same time, normative ideals, corporate elites, public opinion, and the information revolution have all influenced foreign policy. Furthermore, Pakistan faces a multitude of non-traditional security threats, including climate change, terrorism, political uncertainty, and financial instability, which have significantly impacted its foreign policy in the current era. Amidst this backdrop, the shifting global landscape is transitioning towards a multipolar world order, with emerging regional economies presenting valuable opportunities for Pakistan to secure its national interests through effective foreign policy manoeuvring. This study examines the regional dynamics of Pakistan's foreign policy, exploring how the country can balance its relationships with neighbouring states to capitalize on these opportunities and mitigate the challenges that have historically hindered its progress.

### **Demystifying Foreign Policy Analysis: A Multifaceted Approach**

The researcher in this paper will shed light on foreign policy analysis (FPA). FPA is considered the crucial subject line in International Affairs research, as it leads to the design of a country's foreign policy toward a specific country, region, or organisation to achieve particular objectives.

#### ***Research Objectives***

The researcher's objective in this research is to identify the foreign affairs strategies that may help Pakistan establish a smooth working foreign policy and a friendly environment with neighbouring countries. Moreover, the researcher in this article also aims to analyse the importance of balanced foreign policy with neighbouring countries. One of the research's objectives is to investigate the potential role and strategies towards balancing foreign policy with all the neighbouring countries.

#### ***Research Questions***

- RQ01:** What foreign affairs strategies can help Pakistan establish a smooth, working foreign policy and a friendly environment with neighbouring countries?
- RQ02:** What is the importance of balanced foreign policy with neighbouring countries?
- RQ03:** Is Pakistan facing a complex situation in their independent foreign policy?
- RQ04:** How can Pakistan develop good foreign policy in India? What is the importance of maintaining peace with India?

**RQ05:** How can Pakistan redefine their friendly foreign policy with Afghanistan?

### **Literature Review**

Practical strategies to design foreign policy can help the nation to ensure smooth international working foreign policy with a road map towards national development, growth, and progress. Neglect and challenges in foreign policy can ruin the country's future, depending on the mistake, and a country may pay for the mistake in the short term or long term, and it can even bring about disastrous impacts. One of the neighbours of Pakistan, Iran, remained in a conflict situation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, Pakistan can reduce the tension between the two countries, Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. When it comes to the religious beliefs of both countries, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia tends to promote a religious sect of Muslims that is known as Wahabism. Whereas, under the leadership of their supreme leader Khomeini, Iran tends to believe and spread the concept of one of the religious sects in Muslim *Wilayat-al-Faqih* and Shi'ism (Alden & Jeremy 2011).

South Asian region comprises the largest Muslim population, and its strategic location globally enhances its worthiness. Therefore, Saudi Arabia and Iran in the past remain in a strategic war to influence the region with their influential role in the region and vital status in the Muslim world. Moreover, during their rivalry, both countries set foreign policies that may help them capture the monopoly in the region's marketplaces and build solid allies to ensure their active presence in different places of the South Asian region (Ali, 2008). Moreover, Saudi Arabia and Iran have kept their efforts to engage in the region's economic activities to extend their influence. The researcher concluded that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia made considerable investments in development projects related to infrastructure development in these regions. In contrast, Iran's significant investment was focused on trade activities and business. Parallel to this, both countries tried to utilise their different resources to reach the public of the countries located in the South Asian region to win the hearts and minds of the masses (Ali, 2008).

#### ***Pakistan's Foreign Policy Approach with Neighbours***

The researcher analyzed that both countries have ideological differences; however, these two countries have common interests in South Asia. The researcher evaluated Saudi Arabia's vision of 2023, which was not restrained to reducing the influence of Iran in the region. In contrast, the vision emphasises gaining dominance in the South Asian region and enhancing their economic involvement. On the other hand, the Iranian government's foreign policy towards the South Asian region remained to enhance secure borders with Pakistan and Afghanistan, which may lead Iran to enhance its economic factor to counter the influence of Saudi Arabia (Mani & Goniewicz, 2024).

In this situation, Pakistan faces a crucial situation of building a solid and friendly foreign affairs foreign policy with the neighbouring country Iran. In contrast, the Government of Pakistan cannot bear to ignore or overrule the foreign policy and terms with Saudi Arabia; hence, building a friendly foreign policy with Iran and Saudi Arabia simultaneously is essential to Pakistan's national growth and development. Pakistan maintains an excellent working foreign policy with both countries simultaneously, where it has built economic terms with Saudi Arabia and

Regional dynamics of Foreign Policy: Pakistan's balancing Foreign Policy with her neighboring States effective working foreign policy with one of its neighbouring countries, Iran (Gross & Patrick 2008).

The researcher in this article investigates the challenges Pakistan faces in its foreign policy with neighbouring countries. In the past, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran remained rival states. However, Pakistan's foreign policy remained balanced towards both these Muslim countries. In this way, Pakistan managed to maintain an excellent working foreign policy with both countries, which led to securing good foreign policy with one of its neighbouring countries, Iran. Although Pakistan is a solid strategic nation in the region, it is a developing country; therefore, it faces enormous challenges and restraints towards its independent foreign policy decisions. The two significant issues that Pakistan is dealing with intense care are the foreign affairs policy matters towards eastern neighbour India and Pakistan's foreign policy with Iran, keeping in view the parallel factor of foreign policy with Saudi Arabia two and the rivalry between them (Hakim, 1998).

### **Pakistan's Foreign Policy with India**

The foreign affairs foreign policy story between Pakistan and India is full of conflicts, wars, crises and complexities. Although both nations have one of the longest histories of shared past geography, heroes and struggle, they still have differences in the past and present. Since the freedom of both countries from British rule, Pakistan and India have been in a continuous state of war and conflicts due to their tension relating to beliefs and the partition of the Subcontinent. Both nations got freedom from British rule in 1947; the creation of a separate independent Muslim state was not acceptable to the Hindu majority newly formed India, but the Muslim majority Pakistan was happy with the creation of a separate state as they thought their rights were suppressed in the United India. Later on, the crisis converted into a war when, in 1948, the Kashmir dispute arose. Since then, the Kashmir issue has remained a core issue and unfinished agenda of partition in their diplomatic and foreign affairs policies. Since the creation of Pakistan, Pakistan and India have fought three wars on the Kashmir issues, which are 1948, 1965 and 1999. Parallel to this, military and border forces often got war alerts on the international borders and line of control. On Pakistan's stance over the Kashmir issue, the authorities and foreign affairs officers are consistently engaged with the international community to seek support and assistance for the public and masses of Kashmir. Contrary to this, India claims that the matter of Kashmir is their internal matter (Khara & Raed, 2018).

Despite challenging scenarios, Pakistan sends positive development signals to India to maintain a working foreign policy. In February 2021, India tried to launch an air strike in Pakistan, but the Pakistan Air Force intervened in the plan and captured one of their pilots, Abhinandan Varthaman. Mr. Abhinandan praised the behaviour and attitude of the military forces towards him. Mr. Abhinandan was returned to India via the Wahga border as a gesture of peace to maintain an excellent working foreign policy despite all the odds and abrogation of Article 370. He reiterated the resolution of all the problems, including the issue of Jammu and Kashmir. Contrary to this, the foreign affairs policy matters are being dealt with by India in a way that they try to cash all the situations towards their benefit and blame Pakistan for all of the infortunes they are facing due to their negligence. One of the case studies is of

Mr Kulbhushan Jadhav, who was spying in Pakistan for a very long time and confessed as well. He was arrested from the borderline of Baluchistan, located between Pakistan and Iran. Initially, India tried to prove situations that may disturb Pakistan's foreign policy with Iran. India claimed that Mr Kulbhushan Jadhav was not their resident but was admitted at a later stage. Later on, the case was dragged to the International Court of Justice - ICJ. Pakistan again tried to show a positive gesture towards India by defending the case in the International Court of Justice – ICJ. In contrast, the issue was related to the matter of killing and terrorism to bring instability to Pakistan. Unfortunately, the positive gesture was again taken negatively, and they tried to put pressure on Pakistan. Therefore, the foreign policy of Pakistan remains critical on its Eastern Border with India due to their non-cooperation policy with the state of India. Instead, India competes in their election campaigns on hatred against Pakistan (Khara & Raed, 2018).

Although Pakistan and India have tense and difficult backdrops, both countries have had good diplomacy moments in their history of foreign affairs as well. One of the situations was the signing of the Shimla Agreement in 1972. The Shimla Agreement of 1972 was signed between Pakistan and India that may help both countries to maintain peace and stability in the region and resume mutual talk and dialogues after the significant war of 1971 between Pakistan and India that led to the separation of Bengal province from Pakistan to form new and independent country Bangladesh. The Shimla Agreement was signed by then Pakistan's Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Indian Premier Indira Gandhi. Another diplomatic move was the Lahore Declaration in 1999. The Lahore Declaration 1999 was signed by Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, and then Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The core aim of the Lahore Declaration 1999 was to improve culture and trade exchange programs and reduce tension between both countries. However, these diplomatic moves that may have helped in the reduction of tension between both countries were ruined by different state-level terrorist attacks. These attacks include an attack on *Samjhota* Express, suicide murder attempt on then President of Pakistan Gen. Pervez Musharraf in Karachi, an attack on the fighter jet of Chief of Air Staff Air Chief Marshal Mushaf Ali Mir in Rawalpindi, bomb blast in Pakistan Stock Exchange in Karachi, bomb blast o security gate of Pakistan Naval Academy in Lahore, Indian Pilot Abhinandan Varthaman adventure in Pakistan, spying of Indian Navy Officer Kulbhushan Jadhav caught in Balochistan and many other attacks in Pakistan were investigated to explore that these attacks were directly or indirectly based from Indian soil. At the same time, India claimed that the 2008 Mumbai attacks and 2019 Pulwama attacks were planned in Pakistan. These allegations brought hurdles in progressing diplomacy between India and Pakistan (Khan & Naazer, 2023).

In 2015 and 2020, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met the Prime Ministers of Pakistan, Mr Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif and Mr Imran Khan, respectively. However, in April 2024, Indian Home Minister Rajnath Singh claimed that the Indian Government successfully killed multiple citizens of Pakistan. These stances can ruin the peace process and may lead to a constant position of war and conflict (Abbasi, 2023).

## **Foreign Policy of Pakistan towards China**

Over the years, Pakistan-China-friendly foreign policy has been an ideal example of friendship in the real world. The foreign policy between Pakistan and China has been going on for over seven decades. During this foreign policy, many fluctuations passed; however, the friendship bond grew with time. The foundation of the friendly foreign policy between Pakistan and China is based on mutual interests, respect, trust, understanding and compromise, which led them to develop exemplary foreign policy. During the 1950s, friendly foreign policy between both countries was initiated, and since then, both countries have progressed hand-in-hand. It has been studied that both countries remained on each other's side during the crisis, and China remained the best partner in foreign investments in developmental projects in Pakistan. The only dispute between the two countries was the border dispute, which was resolved in a friendly manner in 1963 to proceed with their friendly terms. This friendly foreign policy aims to bring stability and harmony to the neighbouring countries and ensure border security. Both countries supported each other unconditionally; for instance, China remained in support of Pakistan on the issue of the Kashmir dispute, and Pakistan always supported the cause of China when it came to the Taiwan issue. The People's Republic of China showed interest in economic cooperation with Pakistan, and the authorities of Pakistan warmly welcomed that interest. The economic cooperation from China led to different projects, including CPEC – China Pakistan Economic Corridor, the One Belt One Road initiative, and other projects that brought colossal capital investment from China in Pakistan that helped Pakistan combat the economic crisis. With the help of China's One Belt One Road initiative, the benefit that Pakistan can capitalise on is the reach of the marketplaces in different regions of Pakistan. The project will connect Middle East Asia, South East Asia, Central Asia, Arab Countries and Europe through a centralised project. Eventually, this project will bring a lot of economic, trade, and commerce developments to the region and its stakeholders. The CPEC – China-Pakistan Economic Corridor project is not only an investment that China made in Pakistan but also brings about different small-scale investments and many employment opportunities in Pakistan. The small-scale investments associated with the CPEC include power projects, railway tracks, link roads, solar power projects and many more indirect investments (Rahman, 2019).

Pakistan was the first country to accept the existence of China and build the foundation stone of a firm, friendly foreign policy with them. Therefore, it can be stated that Pakistan has enjoyed a friendly working foreign policy with their Northern neighbour, China, since its independence in 1949. Both countries stood with each other in different periods of crisis and stability. The People's Republic of China has always played a crucial role in the Kashmir policy of Pakistan and raised their voices in solidarity with Pakistan. Recently, the crisis period that Pakistan faced after the COVID-19 crisis is a sign of it. The coronavirus pandemic disease that spread across the globe in 2019 was termed COVID-19. The pandemic brought enormous health challenges along with the economic crisis, leading to a two percent downward impression on the global economic indicators. Hence, every country in the world is affected by this negative impression because, in the modern age, the world is termed a global village where every country is connected with the rest of the world. Therefore, any impression may have led to a global impact due to the

global village factor and global trade. The crucial period led Pakistan to take the International Monetary Fund – IMF loan program. The IMF program supported the economy of Pakistan. However, Pakistan could not pay the loan instalment, and Pakistan's foreign policy strategy helped them ease the situation. China was the neighbour that granted Pakistan the sufficient and required funds to pay back the loan instalment and stabilise Pakistan's economy. Pakistan also enjoys vast investments by the People's Republic of China in Pakistan's mega development projects. One game-changer project that China gifted was the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor – CPEC. Besides CPEC, China is investing in Pakistan to strengthen and grow it. Therefore, Pakistan's investment in 1949 is capitalising at its peak in the current era. Foreign policy strategies, which may include different sectors, are crucial for global and international foreign policy. The foundation of Pakistan's foreign policy was gifted by its founder and father of the nation, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The focus of the father of the nation was to build a friendly foreign policy with all of its neighbouring courtiers, including India, and from a global perspective, to enhance working foreign policy across the globe. Moreover, it was the vision of former Prime Minister of Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto that the country must maintain an effective foreign policy to spread Muslim unity and work as a dispute resolution state that makes good foreign affairs with all the nations on the world map (Mintz & John 2010).

The China-Pakistan foreign policy also enjoys good mutual security and defence cooperation. In the last few decades, China assisted Pakistan in uplifting its defence capacity by sharing its experience in manufacturing modern-age tanks, fighter jets, and other arms and ammunition that Pakistan depended on in other countries. In this way, China assisted Pakistan in not only their solid defence but also helped Pakistan in controlling the drain of its massive budget. Pakistan and China have a foreign policy not restricted to cooperation and assistance; however, their mutual foreign affairs policy has spread into different dimensions, including regional, multilateral, and international forums. Different examples to elaborate and explain their multilateral cooperative foreign policy include the international platforms of SAARC – South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the UNO – United Nations Organisation. In this way, Pakistan and China share, protect and promote their mutual interests, which may include global challenges like regional peace and combating terrorism. The cooperation and friendly foreign policy between Pakistan and China reflect the power structure of cooperation and diplomacy (Rahman, 2019).

### **Pakistan-Iran Foreign Policy**

Pakistan enjoys an excellent working foreign policy with Iran; however, the foreign policy between Pakistan and Iran sometimes converts to complex scenarios. Both Muslim states have a close working foreign policy; however, the multifaceted foreign affairs policy led to the spread of confusion that may cause trouble in a smooth working foreign policy. The researcher in this research made a correlation between the foreign policy of Pakistan-Iran with a factor of Iran-Saudi foreign policy, as the two states, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran, faced tension in their foreign affairs for an extended period, and this tension reflected in the political scenario of Asia. However, the researcher during this research emphasises that good working foreign policy between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran will bring political stability in the Asian region along with positive



developments on the end of the Muslim World to make a strong unity bound between the Muslim states however the research will have remained focused on analysing the tentative foreign policy and action plan of Pakistan in this whole spectrum. Practical strategies to design foreign policy can help the nation to ensure smooth international working foreign policy with a road map towards national development, growth and progress. Meanwhile, negligence and challenges in foreign policy can ruin a country's future. Depending on the mistake, a country may pay for the mistake in the short term or long term, and it can even bring about disastrous impacts. One of the neighbours of Pakistan, Iran, remained in a conflict situation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, Pakistan can manage to reduce the tension between the two countries, Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. When it comes to the religious beliefs of both countries, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia tends to promote a religious sect of Muslims that is known as Wahabism. Under their supreme leader, Khomeini, Iran tends to believe and spread the concept of one of the religious sects in Muslim *Wilayat-al-Faqih* and Shiism (Rahman, 2019).

South Asian region comprises the largest Muslim population, and its strategic location globally enhances its worthiness. Therefore, Saudi Arabia and Iran in the past remain in a strategic war to influence the region with their influential role in the region and vital status in the Muslim world. Moreover, during their rivalry, both countries set foreign policies that may help them capture the monopoly in the region's marketplaces and build strong allies to ensure their active presence in different places of the South Asian region. Moreover, Saudi Arabia and Iran have kept their efforts to engage in the region's economic activities to extend their influence. The researcher studied the fact that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia made considerable investments in development projects related to infrastructure development in these regions. In contrast, Iran's significant investment is focused on trade activities and business. Parallel to this, both countries tried to utilise their different resources to reach the public of the countries located in the South Asian region to win the hearts and minds of the masses (Neustadt, Richard & Ernest, 1986).

Being common religious beliefs and cultural values, Pakistan and Iran have common interests that led to a close bond between the government and the masses. During the 1950s and 1960s, Pakistan and Iran cooperated to safeguard their national interests. Iran showed their solidarity with Pakistan in the conflict of Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India. Whereas Pakistan unconditionally supported Iran in their regional issues. During the decade of 1980s, when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (currently Russia) invaded Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran took a bold stance to initiate their support and aid for Afghanistan. However, it has been studied that during the 1990s, both countries suffered from a complex foreign policy between Iran and Pakistan. The reason for the rough foreign policy was religious beliefs, as both significant Muslim countries have sectarianism in their respective countries. The Shia Muslim majority is in Iran, whereas in Pakistan, the majority of Muslims belong to the Sunni sect of Muslim beliefs. In 2013, Iranian President Mr Hassan Rouhani visited Pakistan and brought about different projects relating to security, energy, trade and other MoUs. The Memorandum of Understanding led to continuous brotherly foreign policy between Pakistan and Iran (Rahman,2019).

## **Foreign policy of Pakistan and Afghanistan**

Pakistan's foreign policy with Afghanistan remains rough and tough, although both countries share interests, strategies, geography, and, most importantly, history. History reflects that their mutual foreign policy kept swinging in different situations and scenarios. During the 1950s and 1960s, both Pakistan and Afghanistan enjoyed friendly and cooperative foreign policy with each other. During that era, Pakistan kept supporting developments in Afghanistan, whereas Afghanistan kept raising its voice in solidarity with Pakistan on the Kashmir dispute. In 1978, when the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics invaded Afghanistan, Pakistan took a bold stance to initiate its support and aid for Afghanistan (Neustadt, Richard & Ernest, 1986). Moreover, Pakistan opened its border to welcome the Afghan refugees into their country to help Afghanistan in combating the scenario by sharing the burden. Those Afghan *mujahedeen* later converted to the Taliban. After the 9/11 attacks, the military forces of the United States of America and its alliance landed in Afghanistan for a military operation against the Taliban. Pakistan supported the operation against the Taliban and *Al-Qaeda*. Eventually, Pakistan beard and paid a high price to join the US-led forces alliance. At one time, Pakistan was reporting a suicide blast every day or an alternative day that led to the spread of anxiety, tension, and disturbance in public. Recently, the Government of Pakistan faced a difficult position and took the tough decision to deport illegal Afghan residents in Pakistan. On this righteous stance of Pakistan, Afghan analysts and foreign affairs officials point to Pakistan as it made the situation quite intense and complex (Rizwan & Muhammad, 2008).

One economic, trade, and social project Pakistan shares with Afghanistan is the Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Turkmenistan Trilateral Trade Agreement 2017. The broader picture of the canvas reflects that the foreign policy of Pakistan and Afghanistan revolves around different situations; therefore, their foreign policy is complex and dependent on different factors. Pakistan has the most extensive boundary line of the Durand line, the borderline that Pakistan shares with Afghanistan. Although Afghanistan and Pakistan are Muslim countries, besides their shared religious beliefs, their mutual foreign policy kept swinging (Younas, 2022).

### **Research Methodology**

The researcher used a mixed research methodology containing quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The researcher aims to conduct research that may help further studies in this field. Therefore, the research contains interviews with experts in the field with open-ended questions to let the respondents freely express their opinions. The research also comprises a systematic literature review to analyse the research topic and subject matter. Moreover, the research also comprises a questionnaire for the general public that helps record answers from the masses about the research.

### **Discussion and Analysis**

The subject matter of the research is the regional dynamics of foreign policy-balancing foreign policy with neighbours and Pakistan's strategic goals. In this research, the researcher analysed Pakistan's foreign policy with its neighbouring countries and its strategic goals. Pakistan maintains an excellent and friendly foreign policy with its northern neighbour, China. The foreign affairs of Pakistan with their Western neighbouring Afghanistan and South-Western neighbour Iran remain swinging in different eras. Whereas the neighbouring country in the East of Pakistan, India, remains in a war-like situation. Considering the situation of the borders, Pakistan needs to enhance its working foreign policy with China as they are not only a friend but also an asset to Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan must not compromise China at any stage and face the risks boldly. Pakistan needs to work with Afghanistan in foreign affairs and foreign policy. The foreign policy between Pakistan and Afghanistan was disturbed after Pakistan took the side of the United States of America after the 9/11 incident. However, Pakistan must balance its foreign policies to protect and safeguard its border. An excellent working foreign policy with the Western border neighbour will help in reducing terrorism and cross-border military violations. Moreover, Pakistan must try to bring Iran into its close circle by reducing the tension that may arise due to sectarianism. However, the foreign policy with Eastern neighbour India must also be aligned; both countries need to show seriousness on the issue, resolve all of their differences on the table, particularly the issue of occupied Jammu and Kashmir, and not allow any third party to benefit from their traditional rivalries in the shape of terrorism and different attacks.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, this research article has provided an inclusive and critical analysis of Pakistan's foreign policy dynamics toward its key regional neighbours: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, India, and China. Through in-depth scrutiny of historical contexts, geopolitical considerations, and policy decisions, the research has emphasised the complexities and challenges inherent in Pakistan's pursuit of a balanced regional foreign policy amidst shifting global and regional dynamics.

International agents should facilitate dialogue to normalize relations between Pakistan and India, addressing outstanding issues while maintaining both states' solidarity, sanctity, honour, justice, and territorial integrity. Pakistan should reconsider its external balancing policy and explore internal balancing strategies to reduce asymmetric capabilities. Economic development and regional interdependence are crucial for a peaceful environment, and India's foreign policy should prioritize economic affairs. Trained leaders are essential for a fruitful peace process, capable of overcoming existing ideologies and making bold decisions.

To improve its role in Afghanistan, Pakistan should adopt a multilateral approach to resolving the Afghan crisis, engaging international coalitions and avoiding unilateral recognition of the Taliban government. Facilitate international socialization of the Taliban through conditional membership in global forums like the United Nations. Pursue constructive relations with the Afghan government, addressing concerns and supporting economic development and regional integration.

Pakistan and China should leverage their influence to urge the Taliban government to adopt an inclusive political dispensation and respect human rights, leading to international recognition and alleviating Afghanistan's financial crisis. The three nations should continue cooperating on security and economic issues, recognizing their shared interests in a stable Afghanistan. The US and China should prioritize economic interdependence over conflict and acknowledge the benefits of cooperation in the regional market. Pakistan, China, and the US should cooperate to promote regional connectivity and economic projects, ensuring a stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

To overcome these challenges and capitalize on emerging opportunities, Pakistan must adopt a holistic approach to foreign policy formulation, seeking inputs from independent think tanks and launching policy dialogue forums to counter harmful elements and perceptions. The government must hire skilled diplomatic staff to brand Pakistan's image internationally and engage with academia and mass media to raise awareness and counter negative propaganda. Civil institutes must minimize civil-military divergence over strategic interests, and Pakistan must leverage its capabilities to benefit from emerging markets in Central Asia, Bangladesh, and India, mainly through CPEC. By adopting these measures, Pakistan can strengthen its economy, secure national interests, and protect its sovereignty in the multipolar world.

The analysis unveils that Pakistan's foreign policy towards Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, India, and China is characterized by a multifaceted interplay of interests influenced by many factors, including security imperatives, economic considerations, historical legacies, and geopolitical rivalries. Pakistan's strategic goals, including ensuring national security, promoting economic development, and enhancing regional influence, shape its engagements with these neighbouring countries. Moreover, the research highlights the evolving nature of Pakistan's foreign policy with each of these countries, often marked by collaboration, competition, and conflict. For instance, Pakistan's foreign policy with Iran is influenced by shared cultural and religious ties, as well as strategic imperatives such as energy cooperation, IPI gas pipeline, and counter-terrorism strategies and cooperation against the common enemy, particularly in recent up and down of foreign policy in 2023-2024, but are also complicated by regional rivalries and divergent interests in conflicts such as those in Syria and Yemen. Similarly, Pakistan's foreign policy with Saudi Arabia is characterized by close economic, commercial and security ties, including cooperation in the realm of counterterrorism, but are also subject to geopolitical tensions and divergent strategic priorities, particularly in the context of Pakistan's foreign policy with Iran as modern changing dynamics in the region is moving towards more diverse regional block that supported China, Russia and Turkey centric approach against the traditional US western-centric approach.

Furthermore, Pakistan's foreign policy with Afghanistan is shaped by common ethnic, cultural, and historical linkages and security imperatives such as border management and counterterrorism cooperation. However, the presence of insurgent groups and divergent interests in the Afghan peace process has sometimes strained bilateral foreign policy, particularly after the arrival of the Taliban regime in August 2021, as the ongoing Taliban regime has changed its pro-Pakistan outlook since its inception of first term approach.

In the case of India, Pakistan's foreign policy is dominated by longstanding geopolitical tensions and conflicts, particularly over the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir, which have hindered meaningful cooperation and perpetuated a cycle of hostility, doubt and distrust.

Finally, Pakistan's foreign policy with China is characterized by a deepening strategic partnership driven by shared benefits and interests in regional stability, economic cooperation, and infrastructure development, exemplified by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). However, this strategic arrangement also tests the balance of Pakistan's foreign policy with that of other regional actors, particularly India and the United States.

Great leaders try to develop smooth working foreign policy internationally regarding foreign policy toward peace, stability, growth, and development. Besides smooth working foreign policy, every country has specific roles that combine to create strategies for foreign policies. It is challenging for leaders to combine the complexities of the state's domestic affairs with international working strategies to ensure development, progress, and smooth international foreign policy. Practical strategies to design foreign policy can help the nation to ensure smooth international working foreign policy with a road map towards national development, growth, and progress. Meanwhile, negligence and challenges in foreign policy can ruin the country's future. Depending on the mistake, a country may pay for it in the short or long term. For a region, neighbouring countries, and close allies, it is essential to ensure that they maintain good working foreign policy with each other and agree to cooperate in an open border trade system that may help the public of the countries to make close terms that lead to peace, harmony and most importantly mutual economic growth.

Pakistan enjoys good foreign policy with China and effectively implements its desired goals and strategies. However, one of the neighbouring countries, India, has faced trouble since its independence. India is considered a rival state to Pakistan; when it comes to international affairs, Pakistan must design a strategic policy that may help reduce the tensions between both countries to run foreign affairs smoothly. Afghanistan, the western neighbour to Pakistan, is considered a mouthpiece of India and assisting in destabilizing Pakistan. Pakistan needs to build such a foreign policy that Afghanistan turns out to be a strong ally of Pakistan. Pakistan needs to ensure a solid and friendly foreign policy with Iran and also help the Muslim world to unite.

Practical strategies to design foreign policy can help the nation to ensure smooth international working foreign policy with a road map towards national development, growth, and progress. Neglect and challenges in foreign policy can ruin the country's future, depending on the mistake, and a country may pay for the mistake in the short term or long term, and it can even bring about disastrous impacts. One of the neighbours of Pakistan, Iran, remained in a conflict situation with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. However, Pakistan can reduce the tension between the two countries, Iran and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as they recently reopened their embassies and normalized foreign policy by sending delegations to each other countries. When it comes to the religious beliefs of both countries, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia tends to promote a religious sect of Muslims that is known as Wahabism. Whereas, Iran, under the leadership of their supreme leader Khomeini, tends to believe and

spread the concept of one of the religious sects in Islam, Wilayat-al-Faqih, and Shiism.

In the past, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran remained rival states. However, Pakistan's foreign policy remained balanced towards both these Muslim countries. In this way, Pakistan managed to maintain an excellent working foreign policy with both countries, which led to securing good foreign policy with one of its neighbouring countries, Iran. Although Pakistan is a solid strategic nation in the region, it is a developing country; therefore, it faces enormous challenges and restraints towards its independent foreign policy decisions. The two significant issues that Pakistan is dealing with intense care are the foreign affairs policy matters towards eastern neighbour India and Pakistan's foreign policy with Iran, keeping in view the parallel factor of foreign policy with Saudi Arabia and the rivalry between them.

The foreign policy of Pakistan works in different dimensions simultaneously. Pakistan focuses on foreign policy with Muslim countries at the state level and tries to play its role in strengthening the Muslim nations as a unit. Pakistan's foreign policy is not unique and is different from that of any other country. The core aim of Pakistan's foreign policy revolves around maintaining good foreign policy and playing its role in bringing stability, peace, and harmony to the region and the globe. However, the other parameters that are included in the foreign policy of Pakistan include maintaining excellent and friendly foreign policy with all Muslim countries, strengthening the national interest and defence matters, building close liaison with the neighbouring countries, and being an active player in the United Nations Organisation to maintain their neutral foreign policy in international dynamics.

The research concludes that Pakistan's foreign policy towards its neighbouring countries has been complex since its independence. Particularly when it comes to Pakistan's foreign policy towards India, it is analysed that the country is in a complex situation due to conflict and rivalries between them. This rivalry led both countries to remain in a war-like position; since their independence, both countries fought four significant wars; moreover, during the rest of the period, both countries remained in a cold war-type position. In light of these complexities, the research underscores the importance of an interestingly nuanced and pragmatic approach to Pakistan's regional foreign policy, which seeks to maximize opportunities for collaboration while mitigating risks of conflict and competition. Moving forward, policymakers in Pakistan must remain vigilant and proactive in navigating the region's ever-changing dynamics, leveraging diplomatic engagements, economic partnerships, and engagements at multilateral forums to advance Pakistan's strategic interests while contributing to regional peace, stability, and prosperity.

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