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## **The Dynamics of Pakistan-US Relations after US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: Challenges and Opportunities**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*There are no friends and foes in international relations and world politics; the national interest defines the relations between two states. However, in the case of powerful and inferior, it is the power that dominates the inferior to execute its national interest, this concept is explained under dependency theory which says how developed nations use undeveloped nations for their interest. Pakistan-US relations are a manifestation of this where US national interest and Pakistan's strategic importance define the relations which are beyond two binaries of friendship and foe rather it's a complex web. The Pakistan-US relationship swings between fight and flight, hot and cold, love and hate, marriage and divorce, highs and lows in which the powerful i.e. US exercises its hegemon and inferior i.e. Pakistan is bound to do what they say. The paper explores the complex nature of US-Pakistan relations particularly after the withdrawal of Afghanistan in 2021 using dependency theory to analyze how powerful exercises its hegemony on weaker by exploiting its vulnerabilities.*

**Keywords:** Dynamics, Pakistan-US Relations, US Withdrawal, Afghanistan.

### **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 international relations between states are neither black nor white, neither binary, neither yin nor yang. Rather the relations are a complex web of grey area in which relations are defined based on interests and externalities involved. This is very evident in the case of Pakistan-US relations which historically has been molded as per interest. 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 strong 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.

### **2. Significance of Research**

The study of US-Pakistan relations is of great pertinence in International Relations, particularly in the realm of Security Studies, because these relations have played a significant role in shaping world politics, be it in the Cold War, the Global War on Terror, or, most importantly, 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 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 rather there were core-periphery relations between the two.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The paper uses dependency theory to analyze US-Pakistan relations. The dependency theory explores the idea of unequal power balance between core and periphery nations. The idea behind this theory is that powerful or developed nations use or exploit vulnerabilities be it political or economic of weak 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 to the work of dependency theory development is neither unidirectional nor economic growth in developed countries automatically translates to the development of less developed ones. Instead, underdevelopment results from obstacles created by ‘center nations’ through the integration of ‘peripheries’ into the world capitalist system, leading to the economic reliance of the periphery 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 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 infers that security, economics, and development are interlinked. This interlinkage is being used by powerful nations like the USA to execute its policy goals by asserting its dominance over weaker nations like Pakistan by exploiting internal weakness and instability to its benefit.

### **4. 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 assistance, and unequal relationships are three cornerstones that define the historical dimensions of US-Pakistan relationships. Historically, furthermore, we see the fluctuation of relations between oscillating from convergence to divergence. The pattern of history shows that there was convergence in relationship during the military regimes of Ayub Khan, Zia ul Haq, and Pervez Musharraf and there was divergence of interest during civil rule pertinently of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Musical chair era of Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto, the era of Pakistan's Peoples 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. So, it moved to get help from wealthy countries for economic loans like Canada, the USA, and other Western countries (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 towards the USA. Ayub stated that “Pakistan had become America’s most allied ally in Asia”. The bilateral Defense 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 defense requirements and help with security threats. It agreed to provide aid in defense 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, and the United States and the United Kingdom supported the UN decision by cutting off arms supplies to both belligerents (*Milestones in the History of U.S. Foreign Relations*, n.d.).

Pakistan and the USA entered the era of divergence under Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's regime pertinently due to his socialist approach. He persuaded USSR to invest in Pakistan which in turn resulted in Pakistan’s reduced reliance on the US. President Jimmy Carter of the United States did not agree with Bhutto’s socialist economic theories and intensified sanctions against Pakistan in 1976-77. Furthermore, the friendly foreign policy of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto towards the USSR irritated the US when he was tasked with providing a bridge to the USSR for access to warm water, which the US 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 Zia ul Haq relationship rekindled based on common enmity i.e. communism during the Cold War. For that, Ronald Reagan strengthened the ties with Pakistan economically and militarily (*US-Pakistan Relations*, n.d.). However, with the death of Zia ul Haq dynamics transformed with the 1988 general elections that 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 USA heavily aided Pakistan which in turn flourished Pakistan’s economy. The main reason for massive aid was to flourish

its economy just to threaten the perception of the expansion of the Soviet Union's communism in the region in the past (Khuhro & Bukhari, 2010).

The era the of 1990s until the next military regime witnessed another period of divergence. The US suspended nearly 621 million 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 to Pakistan-US relations to cooperate and fight together against terrorism after a detached decade before 9/11 (Munshi, 2022)

#### **4.1. 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 the 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 needed 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).

#### **4.2. US-Pakistan relations post Cold War Era.**

The end of the Cold War and the Bush Presidency gave birth to a lot of 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 getting diminished in the eyes of the USA. The U.S. 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 U.S. and take advantage of the U.S. support to the civil governments of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif in the 1990s, the bilateral relationship has not improved. Bilateral relations between the U.S. and Pakistan quickly deteriorated after the communist forces in Afghanistan were completely removed. The U.S. 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)

#### **4.3. 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 alliance was successful in combating terrorism, the story was molded 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 she 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, she would have witnessed herself bombed back to 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 R. 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 the pressure of 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 (Shehzad et al., 2017). Pakistan's support to the US in the War on Terror, in the short, 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 her 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 entered in Pakistan required a whole nation approach from a highly polarized society.

### **5. Pakistan US Relations post Afghanistan Withdrawal 2021**

August 2021 marked the moment when the USA under 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 killed more than 170 Afghan civilians. The withdrawal concluded on August 30, 2021, when the last U.S. military aircraft left Afghanistan (*Getting Answers on the Afghanistan Withdrawal*, 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 USA hence a vacuum was created and the USA turned the cold shoulder to Pakistan. The last time U.S.-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 on distance from each other on major issues (Dawi, 2022).

Since withdrawal in 2021 both the 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 termed major challenges during the President Biden Administration and post-withdrawal from Afghanistan (Munshi, 2022).

#### **6. Perspectives of US-Pakistan Relations 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 each other. On one hand, the USA finds Pakistan dishonest and distrustful (Dawi, 2022) accusing her 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 to be taken for granted for their sacrifices. Because of this, 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 due to which Pakistan-US relations further deteriorated under the Obama administration pertinently due to three major factors. Firstly, the emerging situation in Afghanistan, secondly, the Pakistan-India Relation, and thirdly, the China-US conflict (Ahmar, 2021).

#### **7. 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 USA would conduct its bilateral relationships particularly with Pakistan. The most important factors are that of China, and Russia as USA focus has been shifted from security to great power competition

China is a rising power in terms of economy and military strength. USA being a global hegemon has been stucked in a Thucydides trap as it feels threatened with rise of China as a an emerging superpower. Pakistan being a strong ally of China finds herself stucked in a quagmire of complicated bilateral relations in which taking side of either one would dampen its relations with the other. The intensity at which the rivalry between US and China is emerging it is changing the world order in which the bipartisan nature of U.S. opposition to China have created an especially precarious situation for Pakistan (Ali, 2020)

Russia's invasion of Ukraine not only reshaped Eurasia rather it is 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.

## **8. 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 Pakistan's dependent or peripheral nation (Ali & Anwar, 2023).

### **8.1 Opportunities**

#### **8.1.1. Security cooperation**

Security cooperation is a source of opportunity to flourish 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 defense 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.

#### **8.1.2. Economic Liberalization**

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. Current examples include the US-Pakistan Knowledge Corridor, whereby education and exchange programs seek to enhance capability in both countries (Fayyaz, 2024).

#### **8.1.3. Counterterrorism**

In terms of counterterrorism and internal security, Pakistan has implemented certain 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 to be 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).

## **8.2. Challenges**

### **8.2.1 Pakistan's Polycrisis 2023**

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

### **8.2.2 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 an ally and long-standing friend. Islamabad has always worked to maintain simultaneously 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 of this competition remains especially important for Islamabad concerning the already fraught security dynamics in South Asia (Khan, 2024).

### **8.2.3 Biden Administration's National Security Strategy (NSS) and great power competition**

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has directly and indirectly impacted the tone of the relations between Pakistan and the U.S., as Pakistan has maintained neutrality over the issue regardless of the heightened geopolitical tensions. The U.S. 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 outmaneuver China and contain Russia. The withdrawal from Afghanistan was a call for a renewed approach that extends beyond security concerns. With 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 USA now seeing Pakistan through the lens of great power competition, her close relationship with China has factored into Washington's regional calculus. USA cannot risk



overlooking Pakistan as a potential economic partner, else it would push Pakistan into China's sphere of influence. (Chaudhry, 2023)

### **9. Analysis in the light of dependency theory**

Pakistan due to its strategically sensitive geographical position, neighboring enemy state India, internal and economic weakness, and being a nuclear-armed relation is bound to maintain relations with powerful nations, particularly with the USA. The USA 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, and 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 USA exerted its dominance by demanding Pakistan to "do more" for which Pakistan had to provide its bases and military services to the USA else Pakistan had to witness itself being threatened back to stone age.

Moreover, Imran Khan's vision of independent foreign policy pertinently his visit to Moscow in 2022 attracted criticism from United States, highlighting the complexities of being periphery nation with high dependence on power nation to the extent that leaves no room to exercise foreign policy independently (Syed, 2022). The USA involvement in internal matter of Pakistan being a weaker nation to execute an independent foreign policy reflected the hegemonic nature of USA where it dominates the weaker nation to maintain its power which was manifested by the event of removal of Mr Khan.

In the light of great power competition a strong U.S.-Pakistan relationship could ensure that Pakistan does not become overly reliant on China and could protect U.S. interests in South Asia. Washington has excluded Pakistan, and Gwadar by extension, from its Indo-Pacific strategy that aims to outcompete Pakistan might not have the road map for that yet, but 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 way to build an innovation culture and know-how in Pakistan (Chaudhry, 2023).

### **10. 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 important 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 harboring 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 absence of security concerns (Waheed, 2024). However with Trump's antagonism towards China, it is likely that Pakistan will 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 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)

## 11. Conclusion

Cold War era, post-Cold War era, and the era of The Global War on Terror are the key happenings 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 molding the relationships.

Evolving global and regional dynamics, changing global geostrategic landscape, and major-power competition are some of the new determinants of Pakistan-U.S. relations (Khan, 2024). However, the power dynamics we witness between the two countries are neither equal nor partnership rather 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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