

**CHALLENGES TO PAKISTAN’S FOREIGN POLICY AMIDST
GREAT POWER COMPETITION (2013-2022)**



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Challenges to Pakistan's Foreign Policy Amidst Great Power Competition
(2013-2022)

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Lists of Abbreviations

APAPPS	Afghanistan Peace Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CAREC	Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation
CASA-1000	Central Asia-South Asia
CMEC	China Machinery Engineering Corporation
MCC	China Metallurgical Group Corporation
COPHC	China Overseas Ports Holding Company
CASCF	China-Arab States Cooperation Forum
CAWAEC	China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor
CMREC	China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor
CPEC	China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
CINC	Composite Index of National Capabilities
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
CTBT	Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty
CBM	Confidence-Building Measures

CVE	Counter Violent Extremism
ECO	Economic Cooperation Organization
FGCM	Field General Court Martial
FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FOCAC	Forum on China-Africa Cooperation
GSP	Generalized System of Preferences
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HELE	High-Efficiency Low-Emission
HSK	Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi
HVDC	High Voltage Direct Current
IUU	Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated
ICBC	Industrial and Commercial Bank of China
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
ISGS	Inter State Gas Systems
IGC	Inter-Governmental Commission
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency

ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
KANUPP	Karachi Nuclear Power Plant
KKH	Karakoram Highway
LAC	Line of Actual Control
LoC	Line of Control
MIIT	Ministry of Industry and Information Technology
NACTA	National Counter Terrorism Authority
NDRC	National Development and Reform Commission
NIC	National Incubation Center
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSS	Nuclear Security Summit
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
OEF	Operation Enduring Freedom
PRSS-1	Pakistan Remote Sensing Satellite
PSQCA	Pakistan Standards and Quality Control Authority
CNPC	Pakistan's National Petroleum Corporation
NEECA	Pakistani's National Energy Efficiency and Conservation Authority

QUAD	Quadrilateral Strategic Alliance
QCCM)	Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism
RATS	Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
R&AW	Research and Analysis Wing
TDAP	Trade Development Authority of Pakistan
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TAPI	Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNMIK	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
USMCA	United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement

Abstract

This research work examines the complex foreign policy dynamics of Pakistan from 2013 to 2022, focusing on its strategic relationships with global powers ranging from the US, China, and Russia. The study explores how the resurgence of Great Power competition, primarily involving the United States, China, and Russia, has presented multifaceted challenges for Pakistan. This period witnessed a strategic pivot in global politics, with the US focusing on countering China's rise and Russia's assertiveness, leading to a complex international environment for Pakistan. The research examines the historical context of Pakistan's foreign policy, highlighting its longstanding alliances and strategic choices. It scrutinizes the impacts of Great Power competition on Pakistan's security, economic interests, and regional stability. The thesis identifies key challenges, including balancing relationships with major powers, managing economic dependencies, and addressing regional conflicts, particularly with India and Afghanistan. Furthermore, the study analyzes Pakistan's responses to these challenges, emphasizing diplomatic strategies, economic reforms, and military alliances. It evaluates the effectiveness of these measures and explores alternative policy options. The thesis also includes case studies to provide in-depth insights into specific events and decisions that exemplify the broader challenges and responses. To conclude, the research highlights the need for an inclusive and adaptive foreign policy that can navigate the complexities of Great Power competition. It offers recommendations for policymakers to enhance Pakistan's strategic autonomy and resilience in an increasingly multipolar world. This study contributes to the broader understanding of developing state diplomacy in the context of global power dynamics and provides a comprehensive analysis of Pakistan's foreign policy challenges and strategies from 2013 to 2022.

INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy refers to the approach and strategy of a nation adopted in interacting with other countries and international organizations to protect its interests, achieve its goals, and maintain its sovereignty (Hill, 2016). It encompasses various aspects such as economic relations, diplomacy, public diplomacy, international law, multilateralism, regional policy, bilateral relations, and crisis management (Kegley & Wittkopf).

An effective foreign policy requires clear objectives and goals, a clear understanding of global dynamics and trends, multi-stakeholder engagement, strong diplomacy and negotiation, adaptability and flexibility, cultural understanding and sensitivity, and strategic communication (Nye, 2015). Foreign policy is shaped by various factors including political ideology, national interests, security concerns, economic conditions, public opinion, international law and norms, bureaucratic and institutional framework, and global events and crises (Roskin & Berry, 2018).

Padelford and Lincoln defined foreign policy as “A state’s foreign policy is the totality of its dealings with the external environment. Foreign Policy is the overall result of the process by which a state translates its broadly conceived interests and goals into specific courses of action to achieve its objectives and preserve its interests.” In Hume Gibson’s insight, “foreign policy is a well-rounded comprehensive plan based on knowledge and experience for conducting the business of government with rest of the world. It is aimed at promoting and protecting the interests of the nations. This calls for a clear understanding of what those interests are and how far we hope to go with the means at our disposal. Anything less than this falls short of being a foreign policy.”

The foreign policy of Pakistan is shaped by a variety of determinants such as its historical conflicts, geographical location, security concerns, and financial considerations. Historical

conflicts, particularly irredentist claims of Afghanistan over the Durand line, the unresolved Kashmir issue, and cross-border infiltration with India further impact the foreign policy approach of Pakistan (Shah, 1997). Geopolitically, the strategic location of Pakistan bordering rising China, resilient Afghanistan, diverse India, and assertive Iran plays a significant role in shaping its diplomatic priorities (Bhagal, 1989; Sayeed, 1968).

Security concerns related to cross-border terrorism, cross-border infiltration from respective regional countries, and challenges to regional stability are of utmost importance as Pakistan strives to protect its national interests and security (Ahmed, 2010). Additionally, energy security such as the Huaneng Shandong Ruyi-Sahiwal Coal Power Plant and Port Qasim Coal-fired Power Plant, and trade partnerships such as the successful materialization of the CPEC are critical drivers of Pakistan's foreign policy (Chattha, 2023). Former Foreign Secretary of Pakistan, Shamshad Ahmed sums up that "Pakistan's foreign policy has been determined by its volatile geopolitical environment and an exceptionally hostile neighborhood, leaving it with inescapable compulsions of preserving its sovereign independence and territorial integrity."

The foreign policy of Pakistan encompasses several crucial objectives that include promoting regional peace by engaging in conflict resolution and diplomatic efforts, maintaining national sovereignty by safeguarding its national integrity, and achieving economic development through international trade and cooperation (Bhagal, 1989; Mohammad, 2016). Strengthening strategic alliances with important countries such as rising China, the democratic US, and oil-rich Saudi Arabia is a priority (Sayeed, 1968; Makarevich, 2022). Additionally, Pakistan aims to continue its verbal support for the Kashmiri cause, enhance defense and deterrence capabilities to ensure a balance of power in the region and bolster its influence in the Muslim world, aligning with its broader national interests (Mohammad, 2016).

From 2013 to 2022, Pakistan faced numerous foreign policy challenges influenced by the evolving dynamics of Great Power competition. This period was marked by significant geopolitical shifts, primarily driven by the rising influence of China and the resurgence of Russia, juxtaposed against the established dominance of the United States. These global powers significantly impacted Pakistan's strategic environment, compelling Islamabad to navigate a complex and often conflicting international landscape (Goodson, 2014).

One of the most profound influences on Pakistan's foreign policy during this period was the intensifying rivalry between the United States and China. This competition was primarily economic and strategic, as both powers sought to expand their influence in Asia. The US, through its 'Pivot to Asia' policy under the Obama administration and subsequently the Indo-Pacific strategy, aimed to counter China's growing assertiveness. In contrast, China advanced its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as its flagship project.

CPEC also presented a significant opportunity for Pakistan, promising substantial investments in infrastructure and energy. However, it also presented several challenges. Aligning too closely with China risked alienating the US, which was a critical source of military aid and international support for Pakistan. Conversely, distancing itself from China could jeopardize the economic benefits derived from CPEC. This dual dependence created a subtle balancing act for Pakistan's policymakers, who had to carefully manage relations with both superpowers (Hassan, 2022).

Simultaneously, the strategic partnership between India and the US posed another significant challenge for Pakistan. This partnership was rooted in shared democratic values and mutual concerns about China's rise. The US support for India's bid for a permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and the Civil Nuclear agreement (2008) between the

two countries exemplified this deepening relationship (Saleem & Mian, 2014). These developments were perceived as threats by Pakistan, which feared strategic encirclement and a shift in the regional power balance in favor of India.

Pakistan's response to these growing threats included strengthening its strategic ties with China and seeking support from other countries like Russia and Turkey. However, this was not without complications. The growing proximity between China and Pakistan further strained US-Pakistan relations, leading to reduced military and economic aid from Washington. This reduction in aid impacted Pakistan's defense capabilities and economic stability, exacerbating the challenges posed by its volatile security environment (Grare, 2013).

The situation in Afghanistan also heavily influenced Pakistan's foreign policy during this period. The US-led war in Afghanistan and the subsequent negotiations with the Taliban placed Pakistan in a difficult position. As a neighbor with significant influence over the Taliban, Pakistan was expected to facilitate peace talks. However, its alleged support for the Taliban factions also drew criticism from the Afghan government and the international community, including the US

The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in 2021 and the rapid takeover by the Taliban further complicated Pakistan's foreign policy. While Pakistan had historically maintained ties with the Taliban, the group's return to power raised concerns about regional stability and the potential for increased insurgency within Pakistan's borders. Managing the fallout from Afghanistan's changing political landscape required delicate diplomacy, and balancing relations with the new Taliban government while addressing international concerns about terrorism and human rights (Zamaraeva, 2023).

Similarly, Pakistan's relationship with India remained fraught with tension throughout this period. Incidents such as the 2016 Uri attack and the 2019 Pulwama attack, followed by retaliatory strikes, escalated hostilities between the two nuclear-armed neighbors. These incidents highlighted the volatility of Indo-Pak relations and the perpetual threat of conflict, which significantly influenced Pakistan's foreign policy decisions making process.

The revocation of Article 370 and 35-A by the Indian government in August 2019, which stripped Jammu and Kashmir of its special status, further strained relations. Pakistan condemned this move, viewing it as an attempt to alter the demography of the Muslim-majority region and undermine its claim on Kashmir. This development led to heightened diplomatic tensions and military alertness along the Line of Control (LoC), diverting Pakistan's diplomatic focus and resources towards managing this bilateral conflict (Ahmad & Ebert, 2020).

Economically, Pakistan faced significant challenges, exacerbated by its foreign policy choices. The heavy reliance on Chinese investments through CPEC created concerns about debt sustainability and economic sovereignty. Critics argued that CPEC projects, while beneficial in the short term, could lead to a debt trap, compromising Pakistan's financial autonomy. Balancing the economic benefits of Chinese investments with the need to maintain broader international financial support, including from institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), required wise economic diplomacy (Hassan, 2022).

Moreover, the economic sanctions and financial aid restrictions imposed by the US in response to Pakistan's perceived lack of cooperation in counterterrorism efforts further strained Pakistan's economy. Navigating these economic pressures necessitated a multifaceted approach, including seeking alternative sources of aid and investment, implementing economic reforms, and attempting to improve relations with important international stakeholders (Hassan, 2022).

Pakistan's internal security landscape also significantly impacted its foreign policy. The presence of various militant groups within its borders, including the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) and other extremist organizations, drew international scrutiny and criticism. The US, in particular, pressured Pakistan to take decisive action against these groups, linking military and economic aid to progress in counterterrorism efforts (Khan, 2018).

Balancing the need for inclusive counterterrorism measures with the risks of domestic backlash was a persistent challenge. Military operations against militant groups, such as Operation Zarb-e-Azb and Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad, were launched to address these threats. While these operations achieved some success in curbing militancy, they also resulted in significant internal displacement of the natives and increased human rights concerns, further complicating Pakistan's international image and relations (Rafiq, 2016).

During this period, Pakistan also faced episodes of diplomatic isolation, particularly in the context of its relations with crucial regional players and international organizations. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey-listing of Pakistan in 2018, due to persistent concerns about money laundering and terrorist financing, highlighted the challenges Pakistan faced in aligning its domestic policies with international standards (Petersen, 2019). Addressing these issues required comprehensive domestic reforms and sustained diplomatic efforts to reassure the international community of Pakistan's commitment to combating financial crimes and terrorism (Chattha, 2023; Ullah & Tahir, 2020).

Additionally, strained relations with neighboring countries like India and Afghanistan limited Pakistan's regional influence and economic opportunities. Efforts to improve ties with Iran, despite US sanctions, and managing complex relations with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states added

to the diplomatic challenges. Pakistan's foreign policy had to constantly adapt to these shifting dynamics, balancing regional alliances and international expectations (Ahmed, 2010).

In response to these multifaceted challenges, Pakistan undertook several strategic realignments in its foreign policy. Strengthening ties with China remained a cornerstone, not only through CPEC but also by deepening military and diplomatic cooperation. The strategic partnership with China provided Pakistan with a counterbalance to the Indo-US axis and bolstered its position in regional geopolitics (Hassan, 2022).

Simultaneously, Pakistan sought to diversify its international relationships. Improved ties with Russia, marked by increased military cooperation and economic engagements, reflected this strategic shift. Pakistan also engaged with Turkey and Malaysia, seeking to build alliances based on shared interests and mutual support. These efforts aimed to reduce Pakistan's dependence on any single power and enhance its strategic autonomy (Ibrahim & Rauf, 2022).

1. Problem Statement

From 2013 to 2022, the world witnessed a dynamic era of Great Power competition, where global giants like the United States, China, and Russia vied for dominance, employing diverse strategies to bolster their global influence. This fierce competition not only reshaped global politics and security but also influenced the behavior of smaller states and non-state actors. Pakistan, nestled amidst this intense rivalry, faced a myriad of challenges in its foreign policy during this period. The challenges for Pakistan were multifaceted, spanning security, economic, and regional dynamics. Security threats, including terrorism and cross-border infiltration and attacks, posed significant challenges.

To counter these threats, Pakistan intensified its counterterrorism efforts and bolstered border security, while also engaging in diplomatic initiatives aimed at fostering peace and stability, particularly with neighboring Afghanistan. Economically, Pakistan faced constraints such as inflation and slow growth rates. To address these issues, Pakistan implemented economic reforms and austerity measures. Additionally, Pakistan also diversified its economic partnerships and trade relations to reduce dependence on any single partner. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) played a crucial role in this diversification strategy, highlighting Pakistan's efforts to leverage its strategic location for economic gains. Amidst the Great Power competition from 2013 to 2022, Pakistan faced the complex challenge of strategic balancing between major powers, particularly the United States and China.

Historically, Pakistan has maintained a close relationship with the United States, especially in the context of security and defense cooperation. However, the growing strategic partnership between Pakistan and China, exemplified by projects like the CPEC, presented a new dynamic. As the strategic influence of China in the region expanded, Islamabad sought to deepen its ties with Beijing to enhance its economic and strategic position. This shift was viewed with caution by the United States, leading to strains in the Pakistan-US relationship. Pakistan's delicate balancing act involved maintaining its strategic partnership with the US while also strengthening its ties with China. This required deft diplomacy and careful navigation of the geopolitical landscape to ensure that Pakistan's interests were protected amidst the competing interests of major powers. Navigating the complex web of relations with global powers like China, the US, and regional players was paramount for Pakistan. The country sought to strike a subtle balance to safeguard its sovereignty, security, and economic stability. This involved not only managing relationships but also actively engaging in economic diplomacy to attract investment and mitigate risks. Hence, Pakistan's

response to the challenges posed by Great Power competition from 2013 to 2022 reflects its resilience and strategic acumen. By adopting a multifaceted approach, Pakistan aimed to safeguard its interests and maintain stability amidst the shifting sands of global politics.

2. Significance of the Study

Though Pakistan's geographical location is an asset however it has tied the country to events that are beyond its control and continues to face regional and global challenges and difficulties in balance in its relations with other states. This research work will be beneficial in several ways such as:

- a. The study provides insights into the nature and impact of Great Power competition from 2013 to 2022, shedding light on the strategies and actions of major powers such as the United States, China, and Russia.
- b. It explores how Great Power competition shaped global politics and security, influencing the behavior of middle power, fragile states, and non-state actors.
- c. The study assesses how competition among major powers impacted Pakistan's foreign policy decisions, offering valuable lessons for policymakers.
- d. It highlights the security challenges, economic constraints, and regional dynamics that Pakistan faced during this period.
- e. The study examines Pakistan's foreign policy strategies, including counterterrorism efforts, economic reforms, and diplomatic engagements, providing an inclusive understanding of how Pakistan addressed these challenges.
- f. It contributes to the academic discourse on the Great Power competition, offering a comprehensive analysis of the strategies and actions of major powers and their implications for global order.

- g. The findings of the study can inform policy decisions, helping policymakers formulate strategies to navigate similar challenges in the future.

3. Research Objectives

- a) To examine major powers' strategies in response to Great Power competition, focusing on foreign policy, military strategies, and efforts to counter rivals.
- b) To analyze the security challenges faced by Pakistan, including terrorism, insurgency, and cross-border issues, in the context of Great Power competition.
- c) To explore Pakistan's responses to the challenges posed by Great Power competition, including diplomatic, economic, and security measures.

4. Research Questions

- a) What were the main characteristics and consequences of the Great Power competition from 2013 to 2022, including the main players, strategies employed, and global ramifications?
- b) How did the competition among major powers impact Pakistan's foreign policy decisions and actions from 2013 to 2022?
- c) What strategies did Pakistan employ in its foreign policy to address and overcome challenges posed by Great Power competition during this period.

5. Theoretical Framework

The importance of theory in research work cannot be overstated, as it provides a foundational framework that guides the research process, shapes the interpretation of data, and enhances the overall understanding of complex phenomena. This research work employs the Hedging theory from international relations as its theoretical framework. Hedging theory has become a significant concept in International Relations (IR), particularly relevant for states

navigating the complex dynamics of global power politics. It provides a flexible strategy that enables states to manage their security and economic interests amidst uncertainties stemming from Great Power rivalries. Unlike traditional strategies such as balancing or bandwagoning, hedging offers a multifaceted approach allowing states to maintain autonomy and leverage in an unpredictable international environment.

Hedging can be defined as a strategic behavior where states avoid rigid alignment with any single major power while engaging with multiple powers to maximize their security and economic benefits. This approach involves a blend of cooperation and competition, risk mitigation, and opportunity maximization, characterized by a dual strategy of soft balancing, military modernization, diplomatic maneuvering, and economic diversification (Tessman & Wolfe, 2011).

The theoretical foundations of hedging are rooted in both realist and liberal paradigms of IR. Realists emphasize the anarchic nature of the international system, necessitating states to ensure their survival through various strategies (Waltz, 1979). Liberals highlight the importance of economic interdependence and international institutions in shaping state behavior (Keohane & Nye, 1977). Hedging theory synthesizes these perspectives by acknowledging the anarchic structure while also recognizing the role of economic and diplomatic engagement in enhancing state security.

The concept gained prominence in the post-Cold War era, particularly with the rise of China and the relative decline of US unipolarity. States in Asia, especially Southeast Asia, have adopted hedging strategies to navigate the competing influences of China and the United States (Cheng-Chwee, 2008). These countries seek to benefit from economic ties with China while relying on security guarantees from the US, thereby avoiding over-reliance on either power.

The main components of hedging include economic diversification, military modernization, diplomatic engagement, and strategic ambiguity. Economic diversification involves states seeking to diversify their economic partnerships to reduce dependency on any single major power (Tessman, 2012). Military modernization entails investing in military capabilities to enhance national defense and deterrence, ensuring strategic autonomy (Roy, 2005). Diplomatic engagement includes active participation in regional and international forums, fostering bilateral relations, and engaging in multilateral diplomacy to build a network of supportive states. Strategic ambiguity allows states to maintain a level of uncertainty in their foreign policy, preventing clear alignment with any major power and enabling adjustments to changing geopolitical dynamics (Korolev, 2019).

Applying hedging theory to Pakistan's foreign policy from 2013 to 2022, it is evident that Pakistan has employed a hedging strategy to navigate the complex dynamics of Great Power competition involving the United States, China, and Russia. Pakistan has maintained strong economic ties with China, exemplified by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), while also seeking security and economic assistance from the United States. Simultaneously, Pakistan has engaged with Russia through military cooperation and economic agreements, diversifying its partnerships to avoid over-reliance on any single power.

Pakistan's military modernization efforts, including acquisitions of advanced weaponry and enhancement of its nuclear capabilities, reflect its commitment to maintaining strategic autonomy and deterrence (Khan, 2012). Diplomatic engagement has been evident through Pakistan's active participation in regional organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and its efforts to foster bilateral relations with important regional and global players. Strategic ambiguity is also apparent in Pakistan's foreign policy rhetoric and actions, balancing its relations

with major powers while navigating domestic challenges and regional conflicts. This hedging approach has enabled Pakistan to manage its security and economic interests amidst the uncertainties of Great Power rivalries.

6. Literature Review

A literature review is crucial in research as it helps researchers understand what's already known about the topic, identifies gaps in existing knowledge, and shows how the researcher's research work fits into the bigger picture. It also helps researchers to build a strong foundation, avoid duplicating efforts, and develop a focused research question (Knopf, 2006).

Andrew Small's book, "The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics," offers an in-depth analysis of the strategic and multifaceted relationship between Pakistan and China. This relationship, often described as an "all-weather friendship," has evolved significantly since its inception during the Cold War era. Small explores the historical context, strategic imperatives, and the contemporary dynamics shaping this alliance. The book details how Pakistan and China have forged an inclusive partnership driven by economic interests, mutual security concerns, and regional geopolitical dynamics. Initially formed to counterbalance the Soviet Union and India, the alliance has matured into a comprehensive partnership encompassing economic, military, and diplomatic dimensions. Small highlights the critical role of military cooperation in this bilateral relationship. China has been a consistent supplier of military hardware to Pakistan, contributing to its conventional and nuclear capabilities. This military collaboration is pivotal for Pakistan, given its security concerns vis-à-vis India. Economically, the CPEC is a cornerstone of the relationship. CPEC, a collection of infrastructure and energy projects, aims to enhance economic integration and connectivity between the two countries. It is part of China's broader BRI, seeking to expand its influence across Asia and beyond. Diplomatically, Pakistan and China support each other on

important international issues. China has consistently backed Pakistan in its disputes with India, including on Kashmir, while Pakistan has supported China on issues such as Tibet and Taiwan. However, the book also discusses challenges within this partnership. These include regional instability, internal security issues in Pakistan, and the complexities of balancing relations with other major powers, particularly the US. The strategic insights from Small's book are highly relevant when analyzing the challenges to the foreign policy of Pakistan. During this period, Pakistan has navigated a complex international environment marked by the rivalry between the US and China, with Russia also reasserting its influence. The China-Pakistan axis, as detailed by Small, highlights the pivotal role of China in Pakistan's foreign policy strategy. The deepening economic and military ties with China, particularly through CPEC, have provided Pakistan with significant economic benefits and strategic leverage. Pakistan faced the delicate task of balancing its strategic partnership with China while maintaining cooperative ties with the US. The security concerns and regional instability highlighted by Small also resonate with the broader challenges in Pakistan's foreign policy during this period. Pakistan's security landscape, influenced by its relations with India, and Afghanistan, and internal security issues, has necessitated a strategic alignment with China for military and diplomatic support. Moreover, the economic dependency on China through CPEC projects brings both opportunities and risks. While CPEC promises economic development and infrastructure improvements, it also raises concerns about debt sustainability and economic over-reliance on China, impacting Pakistan's economic sovereignty and flexibility in foreign policy (Small, 2015).

In an insightful interview with Dr. Sami Raza, a renowned expert in Security Studies and Associate Professor in University of Peshawar shed light on the various challenges to Pakistan's foreign policy amidst the great power competition from 2013 to 2022. Dr. Raza emphasized that

the global power dynamics, particularly the intensifying rivalry between the US, China, and Russia, significantly influenced strategic decisions process of Pakistan. He noted that Pakistan found itself in a difficult position, having to balance its historical alliance with the US while fostering a burgeoning partnership with China under the CPEC. He explained that this balancing act was fraught with complexities, as the US viewed Pakistan's closeness with China with increasing suspicion, leading to strained relations and a reduction in economic and military aid from Washington. Similarly, Pakistan's ties with Russia saw a cautious improvement, but this new alignment demanded careful navigation to avoid antagonizing either of the other great powers. Dr. Raza highlighted that the geopolitical landscape necessitated Pakistan to adopt a more multidimensional foreign policy approach. The challenges included managing internal security concerns, economic instability, and regional tensions, particularly with India. The shift in US policy under the Trump administration, with its unpredictable stance on South Asia, further complicated Islamabad's diplomatic calculus. Additionally, he pointed out that Pakistan's reliance on Chinese investment created dependencies that limited its foreign policy autonomy, compelling it to align more closely with Beijing's regional ambitions. To conclude, Dr. Raza asserted that the period from 2013 to 2022 was marked by a relentless struggle for Pakistan to maintain its strategic autonomy while navigating the intricate web of great power competition (S. Raza, personal communication, February 24, 2023).

In a comprehensive interview with Dr. Maria Malik, Director of Research at the Balochistan Think Tank Network (BTTN), she elaborated on the instability in Baluchistan, emphasizing the roles of India, Iran, and the CPEC. Dr. Malik pointed out that Baluchistan's instability is deeply rooted in historical grievances and economic marginalization. She highlighted India's involvement, citing evidence of India's covert operations aimed at destabilizing the region.

According to Dr. Maria, India perceives Baluchistan as a strategic pressure point against Pakistan, leveraging the insurgency to undermine Islamabad's stability and security. Dr. Malik also discussed Iran's role, explaining that Tehran's interests in Baluchistan are driven by its own security concerns and regional ambitions. She noted that Iran has been wary of any destabilizing activities along its border, often leading to a complex interplay of both cooperative and antagonistic actions with Pakistan. She mentioned that Iran's involvement is not as direct as India's but still significant in the broader regional context. Turning to CPEC, Dr. Maria described it as a double-edged sword for Baluchistan. On one hand, it promises significant economic development and infrastructure improvements. On the other hand, it has intensified the region's strategic importance, attracting both local insurgent groups and international actors seeking to influence the corridor's development. She stressed that the influx of Chinese investment has led to heightened security measures, often exacerbating local discontent due to perceived economic inequities and lack of local inclusion in decision-making processes. In conclusion, Dr. Malik emphasized that Baluchistan's instability is a complex issue requiring a nuanced approach, balancing regional geopolitics with genuine efforts to address local grievances and ensure equitable development (M. Malik, personal communication, June 3, 2023).

Zahid Hussain's book, "No-Win War: The Paradox of US -Pakistan Relations in Afghanistan's Shadow," provides an insightful analysis of the complex and often contentious relationship between the US and Pakistan, particularly in the context of the war in Afghanistan. Hussain explores the mutual distrust, intricate dynamics, and conflicting interests that have characterized the US -Pakistan partnership over the past two decades. The book investigates the historical backdrop of US -Pakistan relations, highlighting the strategic alliance formed during the Cold War and its transformation in the post-9/11 era. The US' need for bilateral cooperation with

Pakistan in the War on Terror, particularly in Afghanistan, led to a complex relationship marked by cooperation and deep-seated mistrust. Hussain examines how the strategic interests of Pakistan in Afghanistan often diverged from those of the US. While the US focused on counterterrorism and stabilizing Afghanistan, the concerns of Pakistan were primarily driven by its rivalry with India and the desire for a friendly government in Kabul. This divergence resulted in the support of Pakistan for certain militant groups, complicating US efforts in Afghanistan. The book also addresses the impact of US economic and military aid to Pakistan, which has been both a tool of a source of contention and cooperation. The relationship has seen cycles of estrangement and engagement, influenced by events such as the discovery of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan and drone strikes within Pakistani territory. Hussain argues that the US -Pakistan relationship is characterized by a paradox: both countries need each other, yet their mutual suspicions and conflicting interests hinder a genuinely cooperative partnership. The book highlights the broader regional implications of this troubled relationship, particularly in terms of stability and security in South Asia. Hussain's analysis of the US-Pakistan relationship provides a critical lens through which to examine the challenges to Pakistan's foreign policy amidst Great Power competition. During this period, Pakistan has had to navigate the complex dynamics of its relationships with the US and China, alongside other regional and global powers. The US -Pakistan relationship, as described by Hussain, highlights the strategic dilemma Pakistan faces in its growing partnership with China and balancing its alliance with the US. The conflicting interests and mutual distrust with the US, especially regarding Afghanistan, have necessitated an inclusive approach to maintain cooperation while also addressing Pakistan's regional security concerns. The end of the US military presence in Afghanistan in 2021 added a new dimension to the foreign policy challenges of Pakistan. Pakistan's role in the Afghan peace process and its relations with the Taliban have been critical in

shaping its interactions with the US and other international actors. The withdrawal has also intensified the strategic competition between the US and China in the region, placing Pakistan in a delicate position. Pakistan's alignment with China, highlighted by initiatives such as the CPEC, offers significant economic benefits but also complicates its relations with the US. The US views China's expanding influence in Pakistan and the broader region with concern, which has implications for US-Pakistan ties (Hussain, 2021).

In an insightful interview with Dr. Saeed Uzzaman, a lecturer at NUML University Rawalpindi, he explained the shifting dynamics of warfare between India and Pakistan post-2013. Mr. Saeed highlighted that the nature of conflict between the two nuclear-armed neighbors has undergone significant transformation, moving beyond conventional military engagements to include more sophisticated and multifaceted strategies. He explained that both nations have increasingly focused on hybrid warfare, which integrates conventional military tactics with cyber warfare, information warfare, and the use of proxy groups. This shift is particularly evident in the heightened use of social media and digital platforms for propaganda and psychological operations aimed at undermining each other's political stability and social cohesion. Mr. Saeed noted that the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir remains a flashpoint for skirmishes, but the frequency and intensity of these confrontations have been complemented by cyber-attacks and disinformation campaigns. He emphasized that India's strategy has evolved to include surgical strikes and the doctrine of 'Cold Start,' aimed at swift and limited conventional warfare, while Pakistan has bolstered its defensive capabilities and developed tactical nuclear weapons to counterbalance these threats. The lecturer also discussed the role of external influences, such as the US pivot to Asia and China's strategic interests in the region, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). These developments have added layers of complexity to the India-Pakistan

rivalry, as both nations navigate their relationships with major global powers while trying to assert their regional dominance. To conclude, Mr. Saeed highlighted that the post-2013 period has seen a marked evolution in the India-Pakistan conflict, considered by the adoption of hybrid warfare tactics and the influence of broader geopolitical shifts. This changing warfare landscape necessitates adaptive strategies and a keen understanding of both traditional and non-traditional security threats (S. Uzzaman, personal communication, July 13, 2023).

"Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics," edited by Ghulam Ali, provides a comprehensive analysis of Pakistan's foreign policy, focusing on the strategic imperatives and the evolving geopolitical landscape driving the international relations of the country. The book comprises contributions from various scholars who offer insights into the historical context, key developments, and the multifaceted challenges that have shaped Pakistan's foreign policy. The book covers a wide range of topics, including Pakistan's relations with neighboring countries such as Afghanistan, India, Iran, and China, as well as its interactions with major global powers like the US and Russia. It also examines the role of Pakistan in international organizations and its strategies for dealing with transnational issues such as economic development, terrorism, and regional stability. There are several important themes in the books such as historical context and strategic culture emphasizing the impact of colonial legacies, partition, and the Cold War. It highlights the strategic culture that has evolved in response to security threats, regional rivalries, and ideological factors. The book also presented detailed analyses of Pakistan's bilateral relations revealing the complexities of its interactions with important countries and the fluctuating nature of Pakistan-India relations, the strategic partnership with China, the cautious engagement with Iran, and the challenges in Afghanistan. The book explores Pakistan's relationships with major global powers, particularly the United States and

China. It discusses the strategic imperatives that have driven these relationships, the challenges posed by shifting geopolitical alignments, and the implications for Pakistan's foreign policy. The contributors address the regional and global challenges Pakistan faces, including economic instability, terrorism, and the pressures of globalization. The book also discusses the efforts of Pakistan to balance its security concerns with economic development needs. Ghulam Ali's edited volume offers valuable insights into the challenges Pakistan faced in its foreign policy amidst Great Power competition from 2013 to 2022. During this period, Pakistan had to navigate complex geopolitical dynamics, balancing its strategic relationships with major powers like the US and China while addressing regional security concerns and internal political dynamics. One of the central themes of the book is the strategic partnership between Pakistan and China, particularly through the CPEC. Moreover, the book's analysis of the US-Pakistan relationship, characterized by periods of cooperation and tension, was influenced by the US's strategic pivot to Asia, its ongoing military presence in Afghanistan, and counterterrorism objectives. The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in 2021 and the subsequent rise of the Taliban presented significant challenges for Pakistan, necessitating a careful balancing act to maintain cooperation with the US while managing its strategic interests in Afghanistan. Domestic factors, including political instability, economic vulnerabilities, and the role of the military in foreign policy formulation, also played a critical role (Ali, 2022).

Shuja Nawaz's book, "The Battle for Pakistan: The Bitter US Friendship and a Tough Neighborhood," offers a detailed examination of the geopolitical landscape of Pakistan, focusing on its fraught relationship with the US and the challenges posed by its volatile regional environment. Nawaz provides an insider's view of the complex dynamics that have shaped Pakistan's foreign policy, drawing on his extensive experience and access to important military

and political figures. The book traces the historical roots of the US -Pakistan bilateral relationship, marked by strategic alliances during the Cold War and the War on Terror. Nawaz highlights the fluctuating nature of this partnership, characterized by periods of cooperation and estrangement. The US' counterterrorism objectives and strategic interests in Afghanistan have often clashed with the regional security concerns of Pakistan, particularly regarding Afghanistan and India. Nawaz investigates the domestic and external pressures faced by Pakistan's leadership. He discusses the impact of military and civilian governments on foreign policy decisions and the role of Pakistan's military establishment in shaping strategic directions. The book also addresses the influence of regional players, including China, India, Iran, and Afghanistan, on the security and foreign policy of Pakistan. A significant portion of the book focuses on the post-9/11 era, detailing how the US - Pakistan relationship evolved in the context of the War on Terror. Nawaz examines the consequences of US drone strikes, the discovery of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, and the subsequent strains on bilateral relations. He also explores the military and economic aid dynamics, highlighting the divergent priorities and mutual suspicions that have complicated cooperation. Nawaz emphasizes the strategic importance of China as an ally for Pakistan, particularly through initiatives like the CPEC. He outlines how Pakistan has sought to balance its relations with the US and China while navigating regional challenges and internal security issues. Shuja Nawaz's analysis provides crucial insights into the challenges Pakistan faced in its foreign policy. During this period, Pakistan's foreign policy was shaped by its need to balance relations with the US and China while addressing internal political dynamics and regional security concerns. One of the central themes in Nawaz's book is the complex and often contentious relationship between Pakistan and the US influenced by the US's strategic pivot to Asia, its ongoing military presence in Afghanistan, and its counterterrorism objectives. The withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan

in 2021 and the rise of the Taliban presented significant challenges for Pakistan, which had to manage its relationship with the new Afghan government while maintaining cooperation with the US on counterterrorism. Nawaz's exploration of Pakistan's internal political and security dynamics is particularly relevant to understanding the foreign policy challenges during this period. The political instability, economic vulnerabilities, and the ongoing threat of Islamist militancy required Pakistan to adopt a pragmatic approach to its foreign relations. Balancing its strategic partnerships with major powers, managing regional conflicts, and addressing internal security issues were central to Pakistan's foreign policy strategy (Nawaz, 2019).

Sanjeev Kumar's book, "The India–Pakistan Sub-conventional War: Democracy and Peace in South Asia," provides an in-depth analysis of the ongoing sub-conventional conflict between Pakistan and India, which includes proxy wars, low-intensity warfare, and acts of terrorism. Kumar examines the historical context, important incidents, and strategic doctrines that have shaped the sub-conventional war between these two nuclear-armed neighbors. The book begins with a historical overview of the India-Pakistan conflict, tracing its roots back to the partition of British India in 1947. Kumar highlights the major wars and conflicts between the two nations, with a focus on the sub-conventional warfare that has persisted since the 1980s. He discusses how both countries have used proxy forces and non-state actors to achieve their strategic objectives, leading to a cycle of retaliation and violence. Kumar delves into the strategic doctrines of Pakistan and India, particularly how the military strategy of Pakistan has relied on asymmetric warfare to counter India's conventional military superiority. This strategy includes the use of militant groups to wage proxy wars in regions like Kashmir. On the other hand, counter-insurgency operations and strategic responses of India are analyzed in the context of countering cross-border terrorism and maintaining internal security. The book also explores the impact of sub-conventional warfare on

the peace process between both countries. Kumar argues that the persistent state of low-intensity conflict undermines efforts towards achieving lasting peace and stability in South Asia. He examines the role of political leadership, democratic governance, and international diplomacy in addressing these challenges. Kumar's analysis provides critical insights into the challenges Pakistan faced in its foreign policy. During this period, the foreign policy of Pakistan had to navigate the complexities of its sub-conventional conflict with India while managing its strategic relationships with major powers like the US and China. One of the key themes in Kumar's book is the use of asymmetric warfare by Pakistan to counter the conventional military superiority of India. The sub-conventional conflict with India also impacted the US -Pakistan bilateral relationship. While the US has been a key ally in terms of military and economic assistance, its concerns over terrorism and militancy in South Asia have complicated the bilateral relationship. The US's strategic interests in counterterrorism often clashed with Pakistan's strategic use of militant proxies, leading to periods of tension and mistrust (Kumar, 2023).

Almas Haider Naqvi's book "Pak-Russia Rapprochement: Challenges and Prospects: Evolving Regional Dynamics" provides a detailed exploration of the evolving relationship between Russia and Pakistan. The book delves into the historical context, recent developments, and prospects of this bilateral relationship, emphasizing the economic, strategic, and geopolitical factors driving the rapprochement. Naqvi begins by tracing the historical roots of the Pakistan-Russia relationship, highlighting the Cold War era when the two countries were on opposite sides of the global ideological divide. Russia's support for India and Pakistan's alignment with the United States defined much of their early interactions. The book then transitions to the post-Cold War period, examining how the dissolution of the Soviet Union and changing global dynamics created opportunities for a reset in bilateral relations. There are several main themes in the book

such as strategic realignment in which he discusses the strategic imperatives that have driven the rapprochement between Russia and Pakistan. Both countries have recognized the need to diversify their foreign policy options in response to regional security challenges and shifting global power dynamics. The book highlights the potential for economic collaboration, particularly in the defense, energy, and infrastructure sectors. The expertise of Russia in energy and the growing energy needs of Pakistan present significant opportunities for mutually beneficial projects. Moreover, the evolving security dynamics in Central Asia and South Asia have brought Russia and Pakistan closer. Both countries share concerns about instability in Afghanistan, terrorism, and the rise of extremist groups, leading to increased cooperation in security and defense. Likewise, Naqvi explores how global geopolitical shifts, including the rise of China and the changing nature of US engagement in the region, have influenced Pakistan-Russia relations. The growing strategic partnership between China and Pakistan and Russia's interest in balancing US influence in the region are significant factors in this rapprochement. Hence, Naqvi's analysis offers crucial insights into the challenges Pakistan faced in its foreign policy amidst Great Power competition. During this period, the foreign policy of Pakistan had to balance its relationships with major global powers, including the US, China, and increasingly, Russia. One of the central themes of Naqvi's book is the strategic realignment driven by changing regional and global dynamics. This rapprochement was influenced by several factors, including shared security concerns and the need to diversify foreign policy options in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. The evolving partnership with Russia provided Pakistan with an additional strategic partner as it navigated its complex relationships with the US and China. The book's discussion on economic cooperation between Pakistan and Russia is particularly relevant to the energy needs of Pakistan (Naqvi, 2015).

"The Islamic State in Afghanistan and Pakistan: Strategic Alliances and Rivalries" by Amira Jadoon and Andrew Mines provides an in-depth analysis of the emergence, strategies, and impact of the Islamic State (IS) in the regions of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The authors examine the rivalries, the group's alliances, and the broader implications for regional security and geopolitics. The book begins by tracing the origins of the Islamic State's presence in South Asia, particularly the establishment of the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) in 2015. Jadoon and Mines highlight the factors contributing to ISKP's formation, including the local grievances, the influx of foreign fighters, and the fragmentation of militant groups in the region. There are several main themes of the book such as strategic alliances and rivalries in which the authors explore the complex network of alliances and rivalries that ISKP navigates in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This includes relationships with local militant groups, tribal factions, and international jihadist organizations. Jadoon and Mines analyze ISKP's operational tactics, including its use of violence, propaganda, and recruitment strategies. Moreover, the presence of ISKP has significant implications for regional security in South Asia. The authors discuss the group's impact on sectarian violence, Afghanistan, and Pakistan's security landscape, including the increase in terrorist attacks, and destabilization efforts. The insights from Jadoon and Mines's book are particularly relevant to understanding the challenges of Pakistan. During this period, the foreign policy of Pakistan had to contend with the complex dynamics of regional militancy, the rise of ISKP, and the shifting geopolitical landscape. One of the central challenges for Pakistan was the threat posed by ISKP and its impact on domestic and regional security. The emergence and activities of ISKP exacerbated existing security concerns and necessitated inclusive counterterrorism measures. This challenge was compounded by the need for Pakistan to navigate its strategic relationships with major powers such as the US and China, as well as manage its

complex relationship with Afghanistan. The book's analysis of ISKP's strategic alliances and rivalries underscores the complexities Pakistan faced in addressing regional militancy. ISKP's competition with the Taliban and other militant groups added layers of complexity to the security landscape of Pakistan. This rivalry influenced the counterterrorism strategies of Pakistan and its broader foreign policy objectives, particularly concerning its efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and manage cross-border security threats. The impact of ISKP on regional security also had significant implications for Pakistan's foreign policy. The increase in terrorist attacks and sectarian violence fueled by ISKP required Pakistan to enhance its security cooperation with neighboring countries and international partners (Jadoon & Mines, 2023).

7. Research Gap

The research gap in this study lies in the limited analysis of how Pakistan has navigated its foreign policy amidst the evolving dynamics of great power competition, particularly between the US, China, and Russia, from 2013 to 2022. While existing literature focuses on bilateral relationships and global power shifts, few areas remained unexplored such as:

- a) Limited analysis of Pakistan's balancing strategy between the US, China, and Russia in the context of shifting global power dynamics.
- b) Insufficient exploration of how economic dependencies, particularly through CPEC, have constrained or shaped Pakistan's foreign policy autonomy during the great power competition.
- c) Minimal focus on the internal political and economic challenges within Pakistan that have influenced its foreign policy choices amidst the intensifying great power rivalry.
- d) Few studies analyze the role of regional actors (like India, Iran, and Afghanistan) in complicating Pakistan's foreign policy during this period of global competition.

- e) Insufficient investigation into how Pakistan's relationships with secondary powers (e.g., Gulf States, Turkey) have evolved in the context of this great power competition.
- h. Gaps in understanding the broader geopolitical consequences for South Asia due to Pakistan's foreign policy strategies in navigating US-China-Russia rivalry from 2013 to 2022.

8. Scope of the Study

The scope of the study in the dissertation is a critical component that outlines the boundaries, limitations, and focus of the research. It serves as a roadmap for both the reader and researcher, defining the expectations and extent of the investigation for what will be included within the research. By clearly delineating the scope of the study, the researcher establishes a framework for the research methodology, objectives, and findings, ensuring that the research remains relevant and manageable. The following are the scope of this research work:

- a. The study focuses on the period from 2013 to 2022, examining the dynamics of Great Power competition during this time frame.
- b. It primarily considers global dynamics, with a specific focus on how Great Power competition impacted Pakistan's foreign policy.
- c. The study analyzes the strategies and actions of major powers, including the United States, China, and Russia, in response to Great Power competition.
- d. It examines the role of major powers in shaping global politics and security, with a particular emphasis on their interactions and strategies.
- e. The study assesses the impact of Great Power competition on Pakistan's foreign policy decisions and strategies, providing insights into how Pakistan navigated these challenges.

- f. It includes a comparative analysis of the strategies employed by major powers, offering an inclusive understanding of their approaches to Great Power competition.
- g. The study draws on insights from international relations, strategic studies, and geopolitics to provide an interdisciplinary approach and comprehensive analysis of the Great Power competition and its implications.

9. Limitations of the Study

The limitations of a study in a thesis are essential aspects to address, as they acknowledge the challenges and constraints inherent in the research process. This section serves to transparently communicate the imperfections and the boundaries of the study, emphasizing the need for a realistic interpretation of the findings. Discussing and identifying these limitations are crucial steps in scholarly research, as they offer insights into the potential sources of bias, the scope of the study, and areas where further research might be needed. This research work has the following limitations such as:

- a. The study primarily focuses on the impact of Great Power competition on Pakistan's foreign policy, which may limit the generalizability of its findings to other regions.
- b. The study's focus on the period from 2013 to 2022 may limit its ability to capture long-term trends and developments in Great Power competition.
- c. While the study touches upon economic aspects, it may not investigate deeply the economic drivers and implications of Great Power competition, which could be a significant limitation.
- d. Rapid advancements in technology during the study period may not be adequately addressed, potentially overlooking their impact on Great Power competition dynamics.

- e. The study may not extensively cover the cultural and social factors that influence Great Power competition, which could provide additional insights into the topic.
- f. The study may not fully consider the historical context of Great Power competition, potentially overlooking long-standing rivalries and alliances that shape current dynamics.

10. Delimitations of the Study

The delimitations in the research are the boundaries and parameters set by the researcher that certain elements will not be taken into consideration during action. The delimitations help researchers clarify what falls outside its scope and establish the context of their study, ensuring that research remains manageable and focused. This research work has the following delimitations such as:

- a. The study primarily examines Pakistan's foreign policy challenges within the context of Great Power competition, potentially overlooking other significant aspects of its foreign relations.
- b. Due to the extensiveness of the topic, this research work may provide a general overview of challenges and responses, rather than an exhaustive analysis of each response or challenge.
- c. The study also relies primarily on publicly available sources of information, which may limit access to sensitive or classified information that could provide additional insights.
- d. The study adopts a qualitative approach, focusing on analyzing events and policy documents from 2013 to 2022, which may not extensively capture statistical trends or quantitative data related to foreign policy challenges.
- e. This research work is conducted in the English language, which may result in the exclusion of varying perspectives and sources that are available in other languages.

11. Research Methodology

Research methodology is the systematic, theoretical analysis of research methods. It includes qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, each with distinct approaches and techniques. The important components include research design, sampling, data collection, analysis, and ethical considerations. The process begins with identifying a research problem, conducting a literature review, and formulating hypotheses or research questions. It involves choosing an appropriate research design, collecting data systematically, analyzing data rigorously, and interpreting results accurately (Garg, 2016).

The methodology ensures validity, reliability, and adherence to ethical standards, guiding researchers in organizing and executing their studies effectively. It provides a structured approach to produce credible, reliable, and generalizable findings, thereby contributing valuable knowledge to the field. First understanding and later applying the right methodology is crucial for addressing research questions and achieving meaningful outcomes.

The scholars while pursuing their research generally implement two eminent techniques in their research: Inductive Method and Deductive Method. Inductive reasoning in social sciences involves developing general theories or conclusions from specific observations and empirical data. Researchers collect qualitative or quantitative data from various case studies, surveys, or experiments and analyze patterns, trends, and correlations within these data. This approach is instrumental in forming hypotheses and constructing theoretical frameworks that can be tested and refined through further research. Inductive reasoning is particularly valuable in exploring new areas of inquiry or understanding complex social phenomena where initial data can reveal insights that guide subsequent investigation (Patel & Patel, 2019).

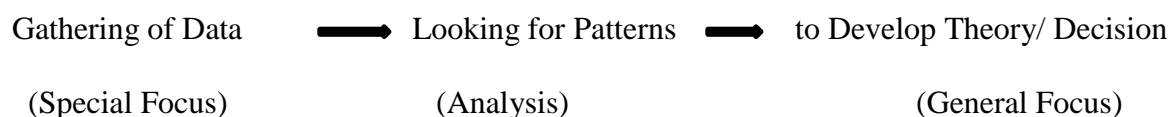
Theories/ Hypothesize **➡** Analyze Data **➡** Hypothesis Supported or not

(General Focus)

(Analysis)

(Special Focus)

Similarly, Deductive reasoning in social sciences entails testing hypotheses and theories by applying them to specific cases and observing whether the outcomes align with the predicted results. Researchers start with established theories or general principles and design studies to confirm or refute these through empirical observation and data analysis. This method is critical for validating existing theories, refining theoretical models, and ensuring that generalizations hold across different contexts. Deductive reasoning provides a systematic research approach that can produce reliable and consistent findings, contributing to the credibility of social science knowledge (Sarma, 2012).



This research utilizes deductive reasoning by starting with the broad premise that the foreign policy of Pakistan is influenced by its internal dynamics, strategic location, and external pressures from major powers. From this foundational premise, specific challenges faced by Pakistan from 2013 to 2022 can be deduced. These challenges include the elusive task of balancing relations between China and the United States, managing diplomatic and security ties with neighboring countries like India and Afghanistan, and addressing security concerns related to terrorism and regional stability.

Furthermore, the research also deduces that Pakistan's foreign policy challenges were influenced by global trends such as the evolving role of the United States in South Asia, the rise of China, and the impact of regional conflicts on Pakistan's security and interests. By employing deductive reasoning, the research systematically analyzes how these general premises translate

into specific challenges and policy responses. This approach provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the foreign policy behavior of Pakistan in the context of Great Power competition, demonstrating how broader geopolitical dynamics shape national policy decisions.

William Zikmund (1984), a professor at Oklahoma State University, argues that research design is essentially a master plan outlining the important procedures and methods for collecting and analyzing research data. According to Zikmund, a well-conceived research design is organized and systematically arranged to provide logical and coherent answers to research questions. It serves as a blueprint for the entire research process, ensuring that each step is clearly defined and methodically executed to achieve valid and reliable results.

When applied to the study of foreign policy, especially in the complex context of Pakistan, an inclusive research design is crucial. Foreign policy is influenced by a multitude of factors, including internal dynamics, strategic location, and external pressures from major powers, making it a particularly complicated subject to investigate. To comprehensively evaluate these factors, this research predominantly employs qualitative methods. Qualitative methods, such as interviews, case studies, and content analysis, are well-suited for exploring the multifaceted roles of great powers in Pakistan's foreign policy. These methods allow for an in-depth understanding of the motivations, perceptions, and interactions that shape policy decisions.

However, understanding the influence and status of major powers also requires a quantitative analysis to complement the qualitative insights. Quantitative methods involve statistical inquiry to quantify the status and impact of these powers. This can include analyzing economic data, military expenditures, trade statistics, and other measurable indicators that contribute to a country's power and influence on the global stage. By incorporating quantitative analysis, the research can provide a more comprehensive and balanced view, combining qualitative depth with quantitative precision.

For your thesis on "Challenges to Foreign Policy of Pakistan Amidst Great Power Competition: 2013-2022," adopting a qualitative research design, specifically a case study approach, is particularly effective. This approach allows for an in-depth examination of the complex and multifaceted nature of Pakistan's foreign policy during a period marked by significant global power dynamics.

The research design begins with the selection of Pakistan's foreign policy as the primary case of study, focusing on the years 2013 to 2022. This period is crucial due to the increasing competition among major global powers, such as the United States, China, and Russia, and their varying influences on Pakistan. By concentrating on this specific timeframe, the research provides a detailed analysis of how these great powers' strategic maneuvers impact Pakistan's foreign policy decisions and strategies.

Data collection in this research involves several important sources. Primary sources, including official documents, speeches, and statements from Pakistani government officials, are gathered to provide direct insights into the government's stance and policy decisions. These documents are essential for understanding the official narrative and the rationale behind Pakistan's foreign policy actions. Secondary sources such as academic articles, books, and reports from think tanks and research institutions supplement this data by offering scholarly analyses and interpretations that contextualize the primary information. These sources help place Pakistan's foreign policy within a broader academic and historical framework.

In addition to these sources, expert interviews are conducted with diplomats, policymakers, and scholars who have specialized knowledge of Pakistani foreign policy. These interviews are invaluable as they provide firsthand accounts and expert perspectives on the challenges and

strategic considerations faced by Pakistan. The insights from these experts add depth to the analysis and help clarify how various factors influence Pakistan's foreign policy during this period.

Data analysis in this research is carried out using multiple methodologies to provide a comprehensive understanding of Pakistan's foreign policy in response to the Great Power competition. Each methodology offers distinct insights into different aspects of the policy-making process and its implications.

Thematic analysis is employed to identify recurring patterns and themes within Pakistan's foreign policy responses. This method involves systematically reviewing qualitative data such as interview transcripts, official statements, and policy documents to pinpoint common threads and significant patterns. By categorizing and organizing data into themes, thematic analysis helps reveal the underlying strategies and priorities that shape Pakistan's approach to the Great Power competition. For instance, recurring themes might include strategic partnerships, balancing acts between competing powers, or national security concerns, economic diplomacy, security concerns, or regional alliances etc. Understanding these themes provides insight into the core elements driving Pakistan's foreign policy decisions and how these elements align with broader national objectives.

Content analysis is used to scrutinize official documents and statements issued by Pakistani government officials. This method involves a detailed examination of the content within these documents to extract meaningful information about Pakistan's official positions and the evolution of its policy stances over time. Content analysis is systematic and quantitative, focusing on the frequency and prominence of specific topics or terms. For example, analyzing speeches or policy briefs may reveal shifts in Pakistan's stance towards major powers or changes in its strategic priorities. By evaluating the content, researchers identify how Pakistan articulates its foreign

policy objectives and responds to the pressures and opportunities presented by global power dynamics.

Discourse analysis further investigates the language and narratives used by Pakistani officials to frame and communicate their foreign policy decisions. This method examines how language shapes and reflects policy positions and strategic intentions. Discourse analysis goes beyond the content to explore how certain terms, phrases, and rhetorical strategies are employed to influence public perception and diplomatic discourse. For instance, analyzing the rhetoric used in speeches and official statements reveals how Pakistani officials construct their foreign policy narrative, justify their actions, and engage with international audiences. This approach helps to understand the persuasive techniques and ideological underpinnings that guide the communication of policy decisions.

The research work involves analyzing the impact of independent variables such as Great Power Competition dynamics (US-China rivalry, US-Russia tensions, China-Russia cooperation), regional and global events (Afghan conflict, Indian-Pakistani tensions, Middle Eastern conflicts, global economic trends), and domestic factors (political instability, military-civilian relations, economic conditions) on Pakistan's foreign policy responses (alignment with great powers, non-alignment, hedging strategies, diplomatic efforts) and policy outcomes (success or failure in achieving objectives, impact on regional stability, effects on Pakistan's economy). Intervening variables include economic dependence on great powers, security concerns, international organizations' influence, and public opinion, while control variables comprise Pakistan's historical foreign policy orientation, regional geopolitical dynamics, and global governance structures.

The impact of these variables on Pakistan's foreign policy is the following: The interaction of Great Power Competition dynamics, regional and global events, and domestic factors has

profoundly impacted Pakistan's foreign policy, leading to a complex and challenging environment. The country's shifting alliances and hedging strategies have been necessitated by the evolving dynamics between the US, China, and Russia, with Pakistan seeking to maintain a subtle balance between these great powers. Regional tensions, particularly with India and Afghanistan, have affected Pakistan's foreign policy, with the country grappling with security concerns, including terrorism and border disputes.

Meanwhile, domestic political instability, military-civilian tensions, and economic challenges, such as debt and inflation, have also influenced foreign policy decisions. Furthermore, Pakistan's economic dependence on China, particularly through CPEC investments, has brought significant benefits but also raised concerns about debt and dependence. The influence of international organizations, such as the IMF and UN, on economic and security policies has added another layer of complexity. Ultimately, Pakistan's foreign policy has become increasingly shaped by a multitude of factors, requiring careful navigation to advance the country's interests in a rapidly changing global environment.

Theoretical framework, such as Hedging Theory, is applied to interpret the findings of this research. Hedging Theory explains how states navigate uncertainty and balance their relationships with competing great powers. By applying this framework, the research gains a structured approach to analyzing Pakistan's foreign policy responses and strategic decisions. Specifically, Hedging Theory helps in understanding how Pakistan manages its interactions with major powers like the United States, China, and Russia, while simultaneously addressing regional and global uncertainties.

This theoretical lens provides insight into the strategic calculations and policy maneuvers Pakistan employs to mitigate risks and optimize its position amidst the competitive pressures from

these global actors. The structured approach offered by Hedging Theory enables a thorough examination of Pakistan's strategic decisions, revealing how the country balances its alliances and adjusts its foreign policy to maintain stability and leverage opportunities in a complex international environment.

This qualitative case study approach is justified due to its ability to capture the complexity of Pakistan's foreign policy landscape. It offers a detailed and contextual understanding of how Pakistan navigated the challenges posed by the Great Power competition. By combining in-depth qualitative analysis with theoretical insights, this research design will contribute to a comprehensive examination of the subject, highlighting the complex factors that influenced Pakistan's foreign policy from 2013 to 2022.

The ontology of this thesis posits that international relations are characterized by an anarchic system, where states are unitary actors driven by self-interest and security concerns. Pakistan, as a sovereign state, exists within this system, navigating complex web of interactions with great powers. This realist ontology assumes that states' actions are shaped by their relative power, interests, and geopolitical position. The international system's structure, comprising multiple great powers, influences Pakistan's foreign policy decisions.

Furthermore, this ontology acknowledges the significance of non-state actors, such as international organizations and NGOs, but emphasizes the primacy of state agencies in shaping foreign policy. The thesis also recognizes the role of human agency, particularly policymakers' perceptions, interpretations, and decision-making processes, in mediating the impact of systemic factors on Pakistan's foreign policy. This ontology provides a foundation for analyzing the challenges and opportunities arising from great power competition and its implications for Pakistan's foreign policy.

This research work employs a mixed epistemological approach, combining positivist and interpretivist perspectives to understand the complexities of Pakistan's foreign policy amidst great power competition. Positivism informs the quantitative analysis of state interactions, power dynamics, and policy outcomes, assuming objective reality and empirical verifiability. Concurrently, interpretivism guides the qualitative examination of policymakers' perceptions, interpretations, and decision-making processes, recognizing the subjective and context-dependent nature of foreign policy. This eclectic epistemology acknowledges the interplay between objective structural factors and subjective human agency.

Data collection and analysis integrate primary sources (interviews, documents) and secondary literature, facilitating a nuanced understanding of the complex interactions between Pakistan and great powers. By bridging the positivist-interpretivist divide, this research work provides a comprehensive and contextualized understanding of Pakistan's foreign policy challenges, shedding light on the intricacies of international relations and the agency-structure dynamic. This approach ensures a rich, multifaceted exploration of the research question.

12. Organization of the Research

The research work starts with the introduction of the study. This section of the thesis comprises a brief account of introductory details like; a statement of the problem, research objectives, research questions, and significance of the study. Then there is a discussion on the literature review and research methodology of the study.

Chapter I of this research investigates the theoretical framework, hedging strategy where states avoid exclusive alignment with a major power, instead balancing between cooperation and cautious distance to manage risks and uncertainties. This approach allows states to maximize

benefits while mitigating potential downsides from over-reliance on any single power. This chapter explores the application of hedging strategy in analyzing the challenges faced by Pakistan amidst Great Power competition from 2013 to 2022, shedding light on the factors that shape the decision-making processes and behavior of the country.

Chapter II of this research centers on the Great Power Competition from 2013 to 2022, analyzing the strategic interactions among major global players. It begins with an overview of the geopolitical landscape and explains the significance of Great Power competition. The chapter examines the United States' strategies, focusing on foreign policy goals and efforts to counter strategic rivals Russia and China. Additionally, it also examines the economic ascendancy of China including the Belt and Road Initiative, and military assertiveness, alongside Russia's resurgence, Crimea annexation, military modernization, and involvement in Syria. The chapter also scrutinizes the dynamics of the competition, including economic, technological, and diplomatic aspects, and their repercussions on regional and global orders.

Chapter III of this research explores the foreign policy challenges of Pakistan amidst the Great Power Competition from 2013 to 2022. It provides an overview of the foreign policy objectives of Pakistan within the context of this competition. The chapter examines security challenges such as cross-border attacks and terrorism, and their implications for the relations of Pakistan with neighboring countries and major global powers. It also considers economic constraints like low growth rates and inflation. Regional dynamics, including the situation in Afghanistan, are also analyzed, as well as the efforts of Pakistan to maintain a balance in its relationships with important international players. Furthermore, the chapter discusses the US-Pakistan relations, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the re-engagement of Pakistan

with Russia, and the shifts in global power dynamics impacting the foreign policy decisions of the country.

Chapter IV of this research focuses on the responses of Pakistan to these challenges. It examines the security measures of Pakistan, including its diplomatic engagements and counterterrorism efforts. The chapter also examines the regional engagements of Pakistan, particularly with Afghanistan and major global powers, and its involvement in various forums promoting stability. It discusses economic responses such as economic partnerships and subsequent reforms. Additionally, the chapter explores the strategies of Pakistan in its relations with the US, including realigning priorities. It also covers responses to the CPEC, emphasizing economic diplomacy and security. Furthermore, it addresses the re-engagement of Pakistan with Russia, management of involvement in the Middle East, and adaptation to global power shifts, including the rise of China and its relations with the United States and Russia.

Chapter V of this research explores the future of the foreign policy of Pakistan within the ongoing Great Power competition. It discusses potential forecasts and trajectories on how Pakistan might manage its foreign relations amidst the changing dynamics of global power rivalries. This analysis considers factors like emerging challenges and opportunities, evolving geopolitical landscape, and the effects of the strategic decisions of Pakistan on regional and international dynamics. By examining these prospects, this chapter aims to offer an understanding of the potential directions of the foreign policy of Pakistan and its role in the complicated network of global power relations.

The concluding chapter will provide recommendations for policymakers based on the analysis presented in the preceding chapters. These recommendations will focus on addressing the challenges and seizing the opportunities identified in the foreign policy of Pakistan during the

Great Power Competition from 2013 to 2022. They will be designed to enhance the security of Islamabad, maximize the benefits of its economic initiatives, and bolster its regional engagements. By offering practical suggestions, this chapter aims to assist policymakers in navigating the complexities of the global geopolitical landscape and advancing the national interests of Pakistan in the future in an increasingly competitive international arena.

CHAPTER 1

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theories are considered the cornerstone of any subject, and social sciences aren't an exception. It provides conceptual frameworks to understand and analyze complex international phenomena. Theories also perform several critical functions, including understanding and explanation, analytical frameworks, prediction, setting research agendas, policy guidance, and fostering critique and debate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Theories also allow us to explain why certain events occur, actions are taken, and behaviors transpire in the international political system. Theories help readers and researchers of global politics to find discerning patterns, causal relationships, and underlying factors. Theoretical frameworks bestow researchers with the capacity to predict what will happen in international relations (Bryman 2016). This form of theory provides researchers and policymakers with the terms and concepts necessary to interpret historical patterns and developments, and thus in principle to anticipate the direction the international system might take and the sorts of behavior that states might exhibit. Policymakers and analysts benefit from this predictive power preparation for possible future opportunities and constraints (Festinger, 1957).

Theories also provide a structured approach to analyzing and interpreting empirical data in social science. They offer concepts, categories, and tools that help researchers organize collected data and make sense of complex information. Theories guide the selection and interpretation of evidence, facilitating a systematic analysis of international phenomena. Theoretical insights inform policy formulation and decision-making processes. By shedding light on state motivations, strategies, and interests, theories help researchers and policymakers understand the potential

consequences of different policy options in international relations. Theories can also offer normative guidance to researchers by evaluating the ethical implications of various policy choices (Blumer, 1969).

Theories also shape research agendas by identifying important questions, puzzles, and research gaps in our understanding of international relations. They stimulate further investigation by highlighting areas where existing social sciences theories may be insufficient or where new phenomena challenge established frameworks. Theories encourage scholars to develop new concepts, refine existing theories, and generate empirical evidence to advance knowledge in the field (Ogata, 2010). Theories stimulate critical thinking by generating debate within the social sciences. Scholars engage in discussions and critiques of theories to challenge established assumptions, refine conceptual frameworks, and expand the theoretical landscape. This process of discussions and critiques encourages diverse perspectives, enhances intellectual objectivity, and contributes to the continuous development of social science disciplines.

Hence, theories in the social sciences are considered essential for advancing knowledge, generating insights, and providing frameworks to understand and analyze the complexities of global politics. They stimulate debate and dialogue, inform and guide policy and research, and contribute to the continuous development of social science disciplines.

1.1. Importance of Theory in Research Work

The importance of theory in research work cannot be overstated, as it provides a foundational framework that guides the research process, shapes the interpretation of data, and enhances the overall understanding of complex phenomena. Theory serves as a lens through which researchers view their subject matter, offering explanations for observed patterns and predicting

future occurrences. By applying theoretical frameworks, researchers can structure their investigations systematically, ensuring that their studies contribute meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge.

One of the primary roles of theory in research is to offer a conceptual framework that helps in formulating research questions and hypotheses. Theoretical frameworks guide researchers in defining the scope of their study, identifying relevant variables, and establishing relationships between them. For instance, the application of Hedging Theory in international relations research enables scholars to explore how states balance their relationships with competing powers to manage uncertainty (Karns & Mingst, 2010). By using theory to inform the development of research questions, researchers ensure that their investigations are grounded in established academic discourse, thereby enhancing the relevance and rigor of their work.

Moreover, theory plays a crucial role in data interpretation and analysis. It provides researchers with the tools to make sense of their findings and to relate them to broader concepts and principles. Theories offer explanations for why certain patterns occur and help in understanding the implications of research results. For example, in studying the impact of global power competition on a country's foreign policy, theories such as Neorealism or Constructivism offer frameworks for interpreting how international dynamics influence state behavior (Waltz, 1979; Wendt, 1999). By applying these theoretical perspectives, researchers can draw meaningful conclusions from their data and contribute to theoretical advancements in their field.

Additionally, theories contribute to the development of generalizable knowledge. They provide a basis for comparing and contrasting findings across different studies, thereby facilitating the accumulation of knowledge over time. Theoretical frameworks allow researchers to build upon previous work, refine existing theories, and propose new theoretical perspectives. For instance, the

application of various theories in political science research helps in developing a more nuanced understanding of electoral behavior, policy-making, and governance (Smith, 2012). This cumulative process of theoretical refinement and expansion is essential for advancing academic knowledge and addressing emerging research questions.

Furthermore, theories help in contextualizing research findings within a broader academic and practical context. They enable researchers to relate their work to existing literature and theoretical debates, thereby situating their findings within the larger discourse of their field. This contextualization is important for demonstrating the significance of research results and for highlighting their contributions to theoretical and practical knowledge. By framing their studies within established theories, researchers can effectively communicate the relevance of their work to both academic and non-academic audiences.

Hence, theory is integral to research work as it provides a conceptual framework for formulating research questions, interpreting data, and contributing to the broader body of knowledge. Theoretical frameworks guide researchers in systematically exploring their subject matter, making sense of their findings, and situating their work within the existing academic discourse. By applying and refining theories, researchers advance their fields and enhance the practical implications of their research. Thus, theory is not just a passive element but a dynamic and essential component of the research process.

1.2. Conceptual Framework of Power in International Relations

Power is considered a fundamental concept in international relations, significantly influencing the behavior of countries and other global actors. It is commonly defined as the capacity to influence the actions of others to achieve desired outcomes, which can be achieved

through diverse means such as economic strength, military might, diplomatic tactics, and cultural appeal. However, power in international relations extends beyond dominance and coercion; it also includes the ability to shape values, norms, institutions, and ideas (Nye, 2004). For instance, a state can project soft power by promoting its culture, values, and ideology, thereby influencing the behaviors of other states without resorting to force.

Moreover, power is inherently context-dependent and relative, meaning that the power of the state can vary depending on the actions and circumstances of other actors. The concept of power encompasses various dimensions that states use to influence others. (Lukes, 2005) Hedging, as a strategy, allows states to manage their interactions with major powers, balancing cooperation with deterrence, reducing risks, and maintaining autonomy by diversifying their relationships. This inclusive approach enables states to navigate a complex and often unpredictable international landscape. To summarize, it is a dynamic and multidimensional concept in international relations, and understanding power's complexities is crucial for comprehending the complexities of global politics.

1.3. Hedging in International Relations

Hedging is a strategic approach in international relations used by states to manage their bilateral relationships with major powers without committing fully to any single alliance. It is an inclusive and flexible strategy aimed at maximizing benefits while minimizing risks in an uncertain and complex global environment. There are several foundational principles of hedging such as strategic ambiguity, diversification of alliances, economic and military engagement, risk management, and buffer state uncertainty. Strategic ambiguity is a principle in which states deliberately maintain a non-committal and vague stance to avoid full opposition or alignment with

any major power. This approach enables countries to keep their options open, providing flexibility to change and adapt to evolving geopolitical landscapes (Tessman & Wolfe, 2011).

By not firmly committing to any major power, states can leverage bilateral relationships with multiple major powers, thereby minimizing potential risks and maximizing their strategic benefits. This strategic ambiguity also allows smaller states to navigate the complexities of the international political system without provoking a strong reaction from any dominant power. It also serves as a deterrent against coercion and force, as potential adversaries remain uncertain about the state's true alliances and intentions of the state. Furthermore, strategic ambiguity can be a pragmatic tool for small states to secure security and economic advantages from multiple sources, thereby enhancing their national interests (Cheng-Chwee, 2008).

The second foundational principle of hedging is the diversification of alliances. In this strategy, a state simultaneously cultivates bilateral relationships with multiple major powers. This approach prevents dependency on any single power, thereby enhancing the strategic autonomy of the state. By building a network of partnerships and alliances, states create a safety net that cushions them against sudden shifts in the changing international order. If the influence of one major power wanes or becomes adversarial, the state can comfortably lean on its other alliances for support, ensuring continuous political, economic, and security benefits. This approach also enables states to access a broader array of technologies, and markets, resources, promoting economic growth and resilience (Jackson, 2014).

It allows states for more balanced foreign policy options, enabling countries to play major powers against each other to extract concessions on favorable terms. Moreover, having multiple alliances enhances diplomatic leverage, as states can act as brokers or intermediaries in international negotiations, increasing their respective global influence. Ultimately, this strategy

enhances the stability and security of the state in an unpredictable global environment. It also provides a buffer against coercive tactics and mitigates risks associated with over-reliance on a single power, ensuring that the state remains resilient and adaptable amidst changing geopolitical uncertainties.

The third foundational principle of hedging is economic and military engagement. This approach is a dual strategy where states actively engage in economic activities with one or more major powers while simultaneously fostering military ties with others. This approach allows states to balance their national interests and secure strategic support from diverse sources, enhancing their resilience and strategic autonomy. Economic engagement involves investment, trade, and economic cooperation, fostering global interdependence and benefiting from the economic strength of major powers. By engaging economically, states can access technology, markets, and investment, bolstering their economic development and inclusive growth (Korolev, 2016).

This economic interdependence can also serve as a deterrent against various conflicts, as major powers have a vested interest in maintaining beneficial and stable economic relations. Simultaneously, military engagement with different powers ensures security and defense cooperation. By developing military ties, including defense agreements, joint exercises, and arms acquisitions, states enhance their security assurances and defense capabilities.

This military cooperation provides a counterbalance to any economic dependencies, ensuring that developing states are not overly reliant on a single power for their security needs. This dual engagement strategy diversifies a country's portfolio of international relationships, providing multiple avenues for economic and economic support and reducing vulnerability to the pressure or policies of any single major power. It enables states to navigate complex geopolitical

environments by maintaining a balanced approach, securing both military security and economic prosperity (Koga, 2018).

The fourth foundational principle of hedging is risk management. This approach also states to spread their bets by engaging with multiple major powers. This approach also minimizes the risk of becoming overly dependent on any single major power, thereby reducing coercion to vulnerability or abandonment. By maintaining a balanced array of bilateral relationships, states can avoid putting all their economic, strategic, and security eggs in one basket. Spreading their bets allows states to diversify sources of partnerships and support. If bilateral relations with one power sour or if a major power becomes more coercive or less reliable, the state can pivot to other established relationships to secure support and maintain stability (Salman and Geeraerts, 2015)

This flexibility is essential in a dynamic international political system where geopolitical alliances and power shifts can change rapidly. Risk management also enables states to tailor their foreign policy to mitigate threats and take advantage of opportunities as they arise. By not committing fully to any single power, states preserve the ability to adjust their strategies based on current geopolitical realities, maintaining maneuverability and autonomy. This flexibility in risk management ensures that states can respond to global changes more effectively, avoiding the pitfalls of a rigid alliance structure.

The fifth foundational principle of hedging is indigenous capability building. Investing in military and economic capabilities is a critical component of a hedging strategy. By enhancing these capabilities, states ensure they can defend their interests independently if necessary, thereby reducing reliance on external powers for security. This self-reliance not only fortifies national defense but also strengthens the state's bargaining position in international affairs. Robust military capabilities deter potential aggressors, while a strong economy attracts diverse partnerships and

investments. Together, these elements provide the state with greater leverage and flexibility in its foreign policy, enabling it to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes more effectively. Thus, capability building is essential for maintaining strategic autonomy and resilience in a multipolar world (Jones and Jenne, 2021).

The sixth foundational principle of hedging is the state's multilateral engagement. Multilateral engagement is a vital component of a hedging strategy. By actively participating in multilateral organizations and initiatives, states can engage with multiple powers across various platforms, fostering cooperation and reducing the risk of diplomatic isolation. This involvement allows states to build diverse alliances and partnerships, enhancing their strategic flexibility. Additionally, multilateral frameworks provide a structured environment for addressing global issues collectively, such as climate change, trade regulations, and security threats. Through these platforms, states can influence international norms and policies, ensuring their interests are considered. Multilateral engagement not only strengthens diplomatic ties but also contributes to a more stable and cooperative international system, supporting the broader goals of a hedging strategy.

The seventh foundational principle of hedging is a balancing act. The important aspect of hedging strategy is the art of balancing relationships with competing powers. States must navigate the delicate line between aligning too closely with one major power and maintaining sufficient distance to keep their options open with others. This careful management ensures that states do not become overly reliant on a single power, which could compromise their strategic autonomy. By cultivating balanced relationships, states can leverage the benefits of cooperation with multiple powers while avoiding entanglement in their rivalries. This balancing act provides the flexibility

to shift alliances and partnerships as geopolitical dynamics evolve, thereby enhancing the state's ability to protect its interests and adapt to changing international conditions.

The eighth foundational principle of hedging is diplomatic maneuvering. Skilled diplomacy is crucial for a successful hedging strategy. States must adeptly navigate the complexities of international relations with tact and negotiation skills to secure favorable outcomes while avoiding the provocation of major powers. This involves maintaining a delicate balance in communications and actions, ensuring that engagements with one power do not alienate others. Effective diplomatic maneuvering allows states to build and sustain diverse alliances, enhance their strategic options, and mitigate risks. By leveraging diplomatic channels, states can address disputes, negotiate beneficial agreements, and influence international norms and policies. This nuanced approach ensures that states can pursue their national interests and maintain strategic flexibility in an increasingly multipolar world (Ciorciari, 2010).

The ninth foundational principle of hedging is maintaining sovereignty. A core component of hedging is preserving national sovereignty and decision-making autonomy. By not fully aligning with any single power, states can avoid compromising their independence. This approach allows them to retain control over their domestic and foreign policies, ensuring that their national interests are prioritized. Maintaining sovereignty involves a careful balance of engagements with multiple powers, preventing any one from exerting undue influence. This autonomy is crucial for states to adapt their strategies based on changing geopolitical dynamics without external pressures. By safeguarding their sovereignty, states can make independent decisions that best serve their security, economic, and political goals, enhancing their resilience and strategic flexibility in a complex international environment.

The tenth foundational principle of hedging is adapting to changes. The international environment is dynamic, and a successful hedging strategy necessitates the ability to adapt to shifting power dynamics, emerging threats, and new opportunities. States must continuously assess and respond to geopolitical changes to maintain their strategic positioning. This adaptability involves updating alliances, diversifying partnerships, and recalibrating economic and security policies in response to new developments. By remaining flexible, states can mitigate risks associated with rapid changes in the international landscape and capitalize on new opportunities for growth and cooperation. This proactive approach ensures that states can navigate uncertainties effectively, maintain their strategic autonomy, and sustain their long-term national interests. Adapting to changes is essential for the resilience and effectiveness of a hedging strategy in a constantly evolving global arena.

The eleventh foundational principle of hedging is a buffer against uncertainty. This approach is an important strategy for states navigating the unpredictable landscape of international politics. By not fully committing to any single major power, states create a flexible stance that allows them to adapt to unforeseen developments and sudden shifts in global affairs. This approach offers several advantages to the states. First, it provides states with the ability to pivot quickly in response to changes in the international environment. Whether facing economic disruptions, shifting alliances, or emerging threats, a hedging strategy ensures that states are not caught off guard or overly dependent on the stability and goodwill of a single power (Stiles, 2018).

Second, this buffering strategy also enhances diplomatic leverage. States can comfortably engage in balancing acts, leveraging their bilateral relationships with multiple powers to extract favorable terms and mitigate pressure from any one power. This increases a state's bargaining power and reduces the risk of coercion in international negotiations. Furthermore, by spreading

their engagements across multiple powers, states can draw on diverse sources of support military, economic, and diplomatic. This diversification mitigates risks associated with the aggressive behavior or decline of any one power, ensuring a more resilient and stable national strategy (Dar, 2021)

1.3.1. Scholar's Contribution

Several scholars have contributed to the domain of conceptual framework of hedging such as:

1. **Evelyn Goh:** His seminal work on the strategic responses of Southeast Asia to the rise of China provides a comprehensive analysis of how countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam employ hedging strategies by maintaining inclusive ties with both the US and China. The research of Goh highlights the critical role of flexibility and strategic ambiguity in the foreign policies of these states, allowing them to maximize security and economic benefits from both powers while minimizing the risks of overdependence on either. By adopting a hedging approach, these countries have navigated the shifting dynamics and uncertainties of the international political system, ensuring their strategic resilience and autonomy amidst the growing influence of China (Goh, 2013).
2. **John H. Ciorciari:** His research on the hedging strategies of developing states in the Asia-Pacific region investigates how these countries manage their bilateral relationships with larger powers like the US and China. Ciorciari emphasizes that hedging allows these states to secure both security and economics without fully committing to any single power, thereby maintaining their strategic autonomy. By engaging with multiple major powers simultaneously, smaller states can reduce their vulnerability to coercion or dependency and diversify their sources of support in the international political system. This approach

ensures that these states can protect their interests, provide the flexibility to adapt to changing geopolitical circumstances and navigate the complexities of regional power dynamics effectively (Ciorciari, 2010).

3. **Kuik Cheng-Chwee:** His writings offer detailed insights into inclusive hedging strategies employed by Southeast Asian states to navigate the region's complex dynamics. He examines how regional countries simultaneously pursue economic engagement with China while strengthening security ties with the US and other regional powers. By maintaining flexibility in foreign policy and avoiding exclusive alignment with any single power, Southeast Asian states can better manage regional uncertainties and tensions, contributing to overall regional stability. Kuik's seminal work highlights the importance of strategic maneuvering in preserving autonomy and fostering a stable geopolitical environment (Chwee, 2016).
4. **David Kang:** His contributions to the understanding of hedging in East Asian security dynamics shed light on how regional states balance their relationships with the US and China. Kang's analysis reveals that East Asian countries adopt hedging strategies to navigate the complex power dynamics between these two major powers. By maintaining strong security ties with the United States while engaging economically with China simultaneously, these states seek to maximize their benefit through strategic flexibility. Kang's work highlights the adaptive and pragmatic nature of East Asian foreign policies, where countries avoid exclusive alignment with either power to manage uncertainties and risks, thereby maintaining autonomy and stability in a region marked by significant geopolitical shifts (Kang, 2010).

1.2.2. Empirical Examples

The empirical examples include many Southeast Asian countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam, and Singapore, which exemplify hedging strategies. These countries strengthen ties with the US while simultaneously engaging economically with China due to its economic influence to counterbalance the assertiveness of China in the South China Sea. Similarly, the foreign policy of India towards the US and China demonstrates hedging. India has maintained significant economic ties with China and engaged in multilateral forums like BRICS and the SCO while deepening its strategic partnership with the US through initiatives like the Quad (Korolev, 2016).

Moreover, the foreign policy approach of Australia to its significantly improve economic relationship with China while balancing its strong security alliance with the US and engaging in multilateral forums like Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (AUKUS) is another example of hedging. Lastly, the foreign policy of Pakistan from 2013 to 2022 reflects hedging as it navigated relationships with the US, China, and Russia. Pakistan engaged economically with China through the CPEC while maintaining military cooperation, securing aid from the US, and exploring defense ties with Russia (Grossman, 2018).

1.2.3. Challenges and Criticisms

The hedging as a conceptual framework faces several criticisms such as complexity and ambiguity, risk of overextension, dependency risks, and strategic calculations. Starting from complexity and ambiguity, the complexity of hedging lies in its demand for sophisticated diplomacy, requiring small nations to balance multiple, often conflicting, interests and alliances. This balancing act requires a deep understanding of changing international dynamics and the ability to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes (Medcalf, 2020).

Furthermore, the inherent ambiguity in hedging strategies can lead to significant misunderstandings and misinterpretations. When the intentions of a country are unclear, it may confuse adversaries and allies alike, potentially complicating diplomatic efforts and escalating tensions. These misunderstandings can undermine cooperation and trust, leading to unpredictable and unstable international relations. Consequently, while hedging can be a valuable strategy for maximizing economic benefits and national security, it also demands a high degree of diplomatic clarity and skill to avoid the pitfalls of miscommunication and the resultant complications in global affairs.

Moreover, engaging with multiple powers simultaneously, a hallmark of the hedging strategy can strain the diplomatic and economic resources of the state, leading to the risk of overextension. This occurs when the demands of maintaining balanced bilateral relationships with various influential nations exceed the capacity of the state, causing economic burden and diplomatic fatigue. Manipulating diverse interests and alliances can stretch a diplomatic corps of states thin, limiting its ability to respond effectively to negotiations and crises (Tessman, 2012).

Economically, supporting multiple engagements may divert resources from sustainable growth to domestic needs, creating internal dissatisfaction and pressure. Additionally, overextension can also lead to conflicting obligations, making it challenging to maintain credibility and fulfill commitments. As a state struggles to uphold balanced bilateral relationships, the likelihood of diplomatic missteps also increases, potentially alienating important partners. Ultimately, the risk of overextension highlights the need for a sustainable and well-calibrated approach to hedging, ensuring that the resources of the states are not overstretched.

Similarly, hedging aims to avoid dependency by balancing bilateral relationships with multiple powers, yet the risk of military and economic dependency remains significant if the

strategic balance is not carefully managed. A state may inadvertently become reliant on one power for critical security and economic needs, compromising its strategic autonomy. For instance, substantial investments from a single dominant power can create economic and security dependencies, influencing domestic policies and limiting the ability of the state to act independently (Korolev, 2019).

Likewise, reliance on defense partnerships and military aid with one power can restrict the strategic options of the state, making it vulnerable to coercion or pressure. If the interests of the dominant power diverge from the states, the latter may find itself compelled to align its policies accordingly, undermining its sovereignty. Thus, hedging requires continuous and vigilant management to ensure that no single relationship outweighs others, preserving the ability of the state to maneuver independently on the global stage.

Lastly, hedging requires continuous strategic adjustments and calculations, making it a demanding and complex approach in a rapidly changing international environment. States must constantly evaluate the risks and benefits of their diverse engagements with competing powers, ensuring that their actions align with national interests. This dynamic assessment also involves analyzing economic trends, geopolitical shifts, and security developments, all while predicting the potential responses of other states. The rapid pace of global events, such as political upheavals, sudden economic crises, or military conflicts, adds to the challenge, requiring decisive and swift recalibrations (Pant, 2019).

Hence, failure to accurately assess and respond to these strategic changes can lead to strategic missteps, undermining the position and credibility of the state. Moreover, the necessity for ongoing economic and diplomatic balancing acts demands significant expertise and resources (Korolev, 2019). Thus, the complex nature of hedging highlights the importance of flexible policy-

making and adept strategic planning to navigate the complexities of international relations effectively.

1.3. Hedging in Pakistan's Foreign Policy amid Great Power Competition (2013-2022)

Hedging has emerged as a pivotal strategy in the foreign policy of Pakistan, particularly amidst the complex network of Great Power competition from 2013 to 2022. This decade had been marked by a dynamic geopolitical landscape, with the US striving to maintain its global leadership, Russia seeking to re-establish its influence, and China asserting its rise as a major power. Pakistan, situated at the crossroads of Central Asia and South Asia, has had to navigate these complex international waters with an inclusive approach. Hedging, characterized by maintaining a balance between competing powers without committing fully to any side, had become a cornerstone of the diplomatic maneuvers of Pakistan during the said period.

The US-Pakistan bilateral relationship, historically marked by strategic alliance, faced considerable challenges, prompting an inclusive hedging strategy from 2013 to 2022. The US war in Afghanistan and its eventual withdrawal in 2021 significantly influenced foreign policy dynamics and strategic calculations of Pakistan. Despite strains, Pakistan continued its bilateral cooperation with the US on counterterrorism. Operations like Zarb-e-Azb (2014) and Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017) highlighted the commitment of Pakistan to combating militant groups, which aligned with the US interests. However, the US remained skeptical of the alleged dual policy of Pakistan towards militant groups, particularly the Haqqani Network and other militant factions perceived as Pakistan's strategic assets for influence in Afghanistan.

In the backdrop, the bilateral relationship experienced notable strains, particularly after the 2011 Abbottabad raid that killed Osama bin Laden (OBL). The US often accused Pakistan of providing sanctuaries to militants, a claim that Pakistan vehemently denied. This mistrust was exacerbated during President Trump's administration, which in 2018 suspended military aid to Pakistan, citing the Do More mantra and insufficient action against terrorist groups operating from Pakistani soil.

Faced with these challenges of providing terrorists with sanctuaries and the Indo-US strategic partnership, Pakistan adopted a hedging strategy to prevent a complete rupture in relations with the US while also exploring other strategic partnerships. This approach included strengthening ties with China through the CPEC, a key component of China's BRI. CPEC brought significant foreign direct investment into Pakistan, bolstering its economic development and infrastructure. China-Pakistan trade volume has experienced a rollercoaster ride, surging from \$9 billion in 2013 to \$24 billion in 2021, but plummeting to \$14 billion in 2023. This downward spiral in 2023 raises concerns about the sustainability of their economic partnership, despite the impressive growth earlier in the decade. Additionally, Pakistan re-engaged with Russia, culminating in joint military exercises and defense agreements like the Druzhba series.

This diversification of alliances provided Pakistan with alternative sources of economic and military support, reducing its overall dependence on the US. However, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 further complicated the bilateral relationship. Pakistan played a crucial role in facilitating negotiations between the Taliban and the US, leading to the Doha Agreement in 2020. However, differences over the handling of the Taliban and the future of Afghanistan persisted, highlighting the complexity of the bilateral relationship.

Simultaneously, Pakistan significantly deepened its bilateral ties with China, often referred to as its "all-weather friend" from the start of the 21st century. This relationship reached new heights through the CPEC, a flagship project under China's ambitious BRI. CPEC, launched in 2015, epitomizes the strategic convergence between the two nations, promising substantial economic benefits for both countries such as extensive energy projects, infrastructure development, and enhanced connectivity. Important infrastructure development such as the construction of railways, highways, and the Gwadar Port, are designed to boost economic growth and regional connectivity in Pakistan. Similarly, Energy projects, including hydro, coal, and solar power plants, aim to address chronic energy shortages in Pakistan, fostering industrial development and growth.

The alignment with China through CPEC provided Pakistan with crucial economic leverage. The inflow of Chinese foreign direct investments, estimated at around \$62 billion, not only stimulated economic growth but also reinforced the regional strategic significance of Pakistan. The Gwadar Port, for instance, enhances the geopolitical importance of Islamabad by offering Beijing a strategic outlet to the Arabian Sea, thus augmenting its maritime footprint. However, the deepening ties of Pakistan with China came with inherent risks. The strategic alignment raised concerns in Washington and among its allies, who view the expanding influence of China with apprehension. The US, in particular, perceives CPEC as a manifestation of the strategic encirclement of China, potentially undermining US influence in South Asia.

To navigate these complexities related to the China-Pakistan strategic partnership, Pakistan employed a hedging strategy. Pakistan also sought to assuage US concerns, while leveraging its partnership with China for economic gains. This involved maintaining cooperation with the US on security in general and counterterrorism issues in particular, exemplified by the role of Pakistan

in facilitating the US -Taliban negotiations that led to the Doha Agreement in 2020. Additionally, Pakistan also engaged in strategic ambiguity, balancing its bilateral relations with both major powers to avoid alienating either side. This balancing act aimed to maximize benefits from China's Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) while ensuring that relations with the US did not deteriorate beyond repair.

Similarly, the re-emergence of Russia as a global player from 2013 to 2022 provided Pakistan with a strategic opportunity to diversify its bilateral relations and reinforce its hedging strategy amidst Great Power competition. Historically, the relations of Pakistan with Russia were strained due to the Cold War antagonisms and the conflict in Afghanistan. However, the period from 2008 onwards marked a significant thaw in their Russia-Pakistan bilateral relationship. The shift in Pakistan-Russia relations began with high-level diplomatic engagements. In 2014, the visit of Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu to Pakistan marked a pivotal moment, signaling a renewed interest in military cooperation. This visit was followed by other high-level exchanges, including the visit of then-Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to Moscow in 2015 and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov's visit to Islamabad in 2018.

A notable aspect of the improved relations was enhanced military cooperation. Russia and Pakistan conducted joint military exercises, such as the Druzhba (Friendship) series, starting in 2016. These exercises aimed to foster military-to-military ties and improve counterterrorism capabilities. Additionally, Pakistan also acquired military hardware from Russia, including Mi-35M helicopters, diversifying its sources of defense procurement beyond traditional suppliers like the US Energy Security Dialogue¹ also played a critical role in cementing the relationship. In 2015,

¹ The US and Pakistan concluded the Dialogue on March 15, 2023, chaired by Pakistani Federal Minister for Energy Khurram Dastgir Khan and US Department of State Assistant Secretary for Energy Resources Geoffrey Pyatt.

Russia-Pakistan signed a \$2 billion agreement for the North-South gas pipeline, which aimed to transport imported liquefied natural gas (LNG) from Karachi to Lahore. This project highlighted the interest of Russia in expanding its energy footprint in South Asia and the need for Pakistan to address its energy crisis through diversified sources.

Moreover, Russia-Pakistan trade volume has witnessed a remarkable upsurge, skyrocketing from a modest \$439 million in 2013 to a substantial \$7.6 billion in 2020, and continuing its upward trajectory to reach \$974 million in 2023. This significant growth underscores the strengthening economic ties between the two nations. For Pakistan, strategic engagement with Russia served as a crucial component of its hedging strategy. This engagement reduced its dependency on the United States, providing Pakistan with an alternative source of military hardware. It also offered diplomatic support in international forums, where the backing of Russia counterbalanced pressures from other global powers. For example, the support of Russia was significant in the context of the inclusion of Pakistan in the SCO in 2017, enhancing its regional standing. As US -Pakistan bilateral relations fluctuated, especially during periods of heightened tension over the Afghan conflict and counterterrorism policies, the Russia-Pakistan bilateral relationship acted as a stabilizing factor. This diversification of alliances also allowed Pakistan to avoid over-reliance on any single power and maintain strategic flexibility.

In addition to managing bilateral relations with global powers, the hedging strategy of Pakistan from 2013 to 2022 also involved navigating complex regional dynamics, particularly its fraught relationship with India. This period was marked by significant incidents that highlighted the volatility between the two nuclear-armed neighbors. The important events such as the Pulwama

Pakistan and the United States affirmed a mutual commitment to advance the transition to renewable energy and promote a more stable, secure, and prosperous energy future for both nations.

attack in February 2019 and the subsequent Balakot airstrikes in March 2019 significantly escalated bilateral tensions between the two countries. The Pulwama attack resulted in the deaths of 40 Indian paramilitary soldiers and was attributed by India to Pakistan-based militant group Jaish-e-Mohammed. In retaliation, India conducted a surgical strike on what it claimed were terrorist training camps in Balakot, Pakistan, marking a rare instance of direct air engagement between the two countries. The subsequent downing of an Indian fighter jet and the capture of its pilot by Pakistan further intensified the crisis.

Amidst these heightened tensions, the regional hedging strategy of Pakistan aimed to balance its adversarial relationship with India by engaging actively in regional organizations. This multifaceted approach was designed to open multiple diplomatic and economic avenues and prevent inclusive isolation. Pakistan also sought to enhance its bilateral relationships with neighboring countries such as Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh through economic cooperation and diplomatic engagement. For instance, Pakistan offered extended trade agreements and humanitarian aid to foster economic interdependence and goodwill. Strengthening ties with Afghanistan also remained a priority for Pakistan, although it was complicated by the resurgence of the Taliban and the ongoing conflict.

Similarly, the active participation of Pakistan in regional organizations, particularly the SCO, was a crucial component of its hedging strategy. Joining the SCO as a full member in 2017 provided Pakistan with a platform to engage with major regional players, including Russia and China, and to collaborate on economic, security, and political issues. The SCO also offered Pakistan an avenue to seek support on international platforms and address its security concerns

Pakistan secured several benefits of regional hedging strategy such as by engaging in regional organizations and fostering closer ties with other South Asian countries, Pakistan sought

to create a regional balance that would provide diplomatic leverage in its dealings with India. Moreover, it enhanced economic cooperation with regional neighbors e.g. China helped Pakistan mitigate the economic challenges posed by its strained relations with regional arch-rival and provided alternative investment and market opportunities.

Economically, Pakistan sought to diversify its investment and trade partnerships to avoid dependency on a single nation. For instance, Pakistan enhanced trade relations with the EU, which granted it Generalized System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) status in 2014. This GSP+ status provided Pakistani exports with preferential access to EU markets, significantly boosting trade volumes. Moreover, Pakistan also strengthened economic ties with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Remittances from the Pakistani diaspora in the Gulf and investments from these states, particularly in infrastructure and energy, played a crucial role in the economy of Pakistan.

Militarily, Pakistan's procurement strategy reflected a deliberate hedging approach as despite fluctuating political relations, Pakistan continued to procure military hardware from the US, including F-16 fighter jets and other advanced weaponry such as night vision goggles. Moreover, the military relationship with China also deepened, with Pakistan acquiring advanced defense equipment such as naval vessels, JF-17 Thunder fighter jets, and drones. The joint defense production projects further solidified this partnership. In a significant shift, Pakistan also engaged with Russia to acquire military equipment. This included the purchase of Mi-35M helicopters enhancing defense cooperation and providing Pakistan with an alternative source of military hardware.

Culturally, Pakistan leveraged its soft power and diaspora to promote its heritage and project a balanced image globally. The Pakistani diaspora in Europe, North America, and the Middle East played a vital role in cultural diplomacy. Through investment, remittances, and

cultural exchanges, the diaspora helped enhance the global economic and cultural footprint of Pakistan. Ancillary, Pakistan actively promoted its rich cultural heritage, participating in international exhibitions and cultural festivals. The initiatives such as the Pakistan Cultural Week highlighted traditional crafts, arts, cuisine, and music enhancing its cultural visibility. Lastly, Pakistan utilized public diplomacy such as media outreach and local communities to counter negative stereotypes and promote a positive image.

However, despite the strategic logic behind the hedging strategy of Pakistan from 2013 to 2022, this approach was fraught with significant challenges, requiring constant diplomatic finesse and balancing acts to maintain favorable relations with competing great powers. Starting from the diplomatic tightrope, balancing relations between the US, Russia, and China involved a continuous and subtle diplomatic effort. Each of these relationships came with its own set of expectations and complexities such as maintaining cooperation on security and counterterrorism while addressing US concerns about Pakistan's alleged support for militant groups' required careful diplomacy. Striking this strategic balance was essential to avoid severe repercussions, such as aid cuts and sanctions.

Similarly, while China provided substantial economic investments through the CPEC, aligning too closely with China risked alienating the US and other Western allies. Pakistan had to navigate this relationship carefully to maintain its strategic autonomy and avoid over-dependence on any major power. Likewise, engaging with Russia, particularly in the military and energy sectors, provided Pakistan with diversification benefits. However, this bilateral relationship had to be managed without provoking NATO and US concerns, which required an inclusive approach to joint military activities and defense procurement.

The hedging strategy carried inherent risks of both under-commitment and over-commitment such as the over-reliance on any single partner, particularly China, raised concerns about economic debt and sovereignty. CPEC investments, though beneficial, led to fears of a "debt trap," where Pakistan might face financial challenges in repaying rising interests and loans, thereby compromising its economic independence. Conversely, insufficient engagement with any of the major powers could lead to strategic disadvantages and lost opportunities. For example, failure to adequately maintain relations with the US had resulted in reduced diplomatic support and military aid, impacting the security and international standing of Pakistan.

Moreover, economic vulnerabilities and domestic political dynamics also constrained the ability of Pakistan to effectively hedge. For instance, internal political turmoil and frequent changes in government often diverted attention from long-term strategic planning. The economic challenges, including high levels of inflation, debt, and a struggling industrial base, limited its ability to maneuver on the international stage. Economic dependence on foreign investment and aid constrained the diplomatic flexibility of Pakistan. Ancillary, domestic nationalism and public opinion sometimes pressured the government in Islamabad to take a harder stance in international relations, limiting the room for diplomatic flexibility and compromise.

For instance, CPEC investments exemplify the dual-edged nature of the hedging strategy of Pakistan. CPEC promised energy security, significant infrastructure development, and job creation, crucial for the economic growth of Pakistan. However, the strategic concessions and financial obligations required for these projects raised concerns about economic sovereignty. The issues such as debt repayment schedules and loss of control over strategic assets like the Gwadar Port became points of contention, both domestically and internationally.

To summarize, Pakistan employed a multidimensional hedging strategy to navigate the complexities of regional and international relations amidst Great Power competition from 2013 to 2022. This strategy extended beyond mere diplomatic balancing to encompass military procurement, economic diversification, and cultural diplomacy. By engaging with regional actors and multiple global powers, Pakistan aimed to mitigate risks, enhance its strategic autonomy, and secure security and economic benefits.

CHAPTER 2

GREAT POWER COMPETITION (2013 – 2022)

The Great Power competition is referred to as a system-level political contest impacting regional security and the world order from 2013 to 2022. In essence, this period marked the emergence of a new trend of strategic rivalry involving the major players with distinct foreign policy aims and endeavors incorporating the US, China, and Russia. Great Power competition was the fundamental aspect of international relations highlighting issues of influence, control, and dominance over resources in different regions, including Asia-Pacific, Europe, and the Middle East. This contest was not only limited to the military and diplomatic realm but also extended to economic and technological domains, incorporating cyber warfare and technological innovations.

The years from 2013 to 2022 saw the United States as an important actor in the continuing Great Power competition, focused on strategic rivalry with Russia, China, and other competitors. After that, the United States entered into various international commitments such as security pacts, trade relations, and technological development to maintain its position as a dominant global power. Increasing the influence of Russia and China in the context of Great Power competition, the US engaged in the signing of various treaties and agreements, as well as the adoption of relevant policies aimed at limiting the activity of its peer competitors.

The US also initiated a strategy to rebalance its military forces towards the Indo-Pacific region and has acted to amplify its physical, overt presence in the region and interact more intimately and closely with partner and allied states as a reaction to the growing influence of China worldwide. This was achieved through enhancing activities that involved military training and mobilization in the Indo-Pacific zone. The US revived the membership of the Quadrilateral

Security Dialogue (Quad) in the form of Australia, Japan, and India with the aims of establishing an open and free Indo-Pacific region and checking the rising dominance of China in the region. The US also backed NATO initiatives to boost the militaries' readiness to counter Russian threats, including through increased troop exercises and deployments in Eastern Europe (Brewster, 2019).

The US also introduced tariffs on Chinese manufactured products as a series of measures during a trade dispute with China seeking to address factors such as unfair trade practices and distortion of trade balances. The US strengthened export control rules regarding certain technologies and products to deny such supplies to Russia and China as they were considered a threat to US national security. The development of the Clean Network Initiative was aimed at protecting 5G networks from Chinese interference and swayed allied countries to eliminate Chinese firms like Huawei from operating in their 5G networks. The strategies set by the US included policies for the protection of intellectual property, boosting the innovation of technologies at home, and restrictions on technologies that are significant to China (Bown & Kolb, 2021).

In addition, the US cemented an agreement to prolong the New START treaty with Russia; maintaining strategic nuclear arms control, arms race prevention, and a positive minimalist signal of nuclear arms control irrespective of the US -Russian conflicts in various fields. The US also backed European partners against Russian actions, supplied the Ukrainian military with food, and equipment, and formulated economic penalties for the aggressive actions of Russia in Crimea (2014) and Eastern Ukraine (2022). The US undertook several steps to address cyber threats posed by China & Russia which include efforts to strengthen the security measures against potential cyber threats & indictments of individuals involved in cyberattacks (Gottemoeller, 2022).

China had actively countered the influence of the US on a global scale, altering the nature of the international relations system. In the context of the Asia-Pacific region during this period,

China extended its power through proxy organizations such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Military modernization and assertiveness of China in the South China Sea (SCS) and other regional conflicts demonstrate how China intended to contest the international norms of global politics. China also participated in many treaties, agreements, and policies that demonstrated the challenge for the US in the Great Power competition.

China also persisted with its military expansion in the SCS as well as moved to assert sovereignty over disputed areas and built artificial constructs thereby infringing the right to free navigation as supported by the US and its allies. Larger military patrols and military exercises were carried out even naval exercises in the Pacific that were showcasing the military power of China to the world and challenging the hegemony of the US as the supreme military power in the Asia Pacific. Through the BRI project, China endeavored to expand its power by financing and constructing infrastructure in the African, Asian, and European regions, which counterbalanced the American economic dominance in such regions (Nguyen, 2020).

China also locked horns in different regional trade agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) comparable to the US-led free trade agreements for consolidating American dominance. China vigorously invested in promising technological developments and Research and Development (R&D) to the point of surpassing the US in certain fields such as artificial intelligence and fifth-generation technology. As an alternative to the World Bank and the IMF, the AIIB was established by China with the vision of using the institution to challenge the US dominion as well as alter the mechanisms that underpin global economic governance in multilateral financial institutions. The allegation was made after China was accused of espionage through cyber-attacks on US soil, competing for dominance in cyberspace, and

raising credibility concerns on the same. Sino-Russia strategic partnership in various sectors such as the energy and military sectors created a counterbalance to the US influence and challenged US-led alliances (Petri & Plummer, 2020).

In the same way, the resurging Russia is also flexing muscle and attempting to challenge the hegemony of the US in the changing global power dynamics. Russia also continued to be involved actively in the Great Power competition during this period by forging alliances with like-minded countries such as China, military interventions, and diplomatic maneuvers. Moscow's annexation of Crimea, active military involvement in Syria and Eastern Europe, along with its attempts to expand its strategic partnership with Beijing, was an affirmation of the assertive Russia, ready to combat the US hegemony.

Russia intervened directly with military force regarding the civil war in Syria; supporting the current President Assad regime against the rebels while negatively affecting the US dominance in the region. Russia also staged military exercises, such as the Zapad exercises, in the close vicinity of NATO borders and showcased its massive military firepower and potential to threaten the US -led alliances. Thus, Russia annexed the Crimean territory in 2014 defying international law, restraining European and US influence over the region. Moreover, Russia had further intensified its bilateral relations with Iran and China, emerging as a powerful antagonist of the United States and complicating US -led efforts to isolate countries like Tehran and Beijing (Trenin, 2018).

Moscow also leveraged energy assets specifically natural gas to counterbalance the American efforts for energy security diversification and secure a more strategic position in Europe. To reduce dependence on Western markets and strengthen its economic ties with neighboring countries, Russia sought to develop economic integration, including the Eurasian Economic Union

(EEU). Russia launched cyber-attacks against European nations and the US with cyber terrorism and cyber sabotage that provoked democratic processes and threatened US cyber security measures. Likewise, Russia also launched a disinformation campaign aimed at spreading confusion and doubt towards the dominant Western narrative led by the United States. It also acted positively on its discretion of veto power to stop resolutions favored by the US and its allies, challenging US diplomatic initiatives (Mitrova & Boersma, 2018).

2.1. Definition and Significance of Great Power Competition

The discussion on “Great Power Competition” is pervasive, yet policymakers often lack clarity or consistency regarding which nations qualify in its criteria. The US policy circles have widely accepted the fact, that contemporary global politics has entered a new phase of “Great Power competition.” This is evident from the significant increase in the usage of this term in books, nearly doubling between 2012 and 2019 according to Google Books. The phrase “Great Power Competition” gained prominence when President Trump’s administration released its inaugural National Security Strategy (NSS) in 2017, stating that “after being dismissed as a phenomenon of an earlier century, Great Power Competition has returned.”

This consensus has remained strong not only in the US policy circle but has been emphasized in reports from various think tanks spanning the political spectrum. Despite the President Biden administration's attempt to shift towards the terms "Major Powers" and "Strategic Competition," the underlying sentiment remains unchanged. The term “Great Power Competition” has been ambiguous, leaving it unclear who exactly qualifies as a “Great Power.” The US is typically included, with China and Russia consistently seen as a significant rival. For example, the 2017 NSS initially suggests that Russia “seeks to restore its Great Power status,” but later identifies

it as a Great Power rival alongside China. While the term “Great Power competition” has traditionally focused on state rivalries, there are also occasional mentions of the European Union (EU) as an emerging pole in this new multipolar world.

This assortment of actors lacks a clear definition of Great Power. The term “Great Power” implies that these actors are distinct from less powerful states. They perceive their national interests and behave differently than, for instance, a “Regional Power,” a “Middle Power,” and “Small Powers.” However, defining Great Power's status is challenging, as evidenced by the disparate array of candidates in recent literature. Power dynamics vary across issues and domains, which is overlooked when international politics is simplified to Great Power competition (Stuster, 2023).

2.1.1. Too Many Definitions

While the policymakers may have given insufficient consideration to defining Great Power status, however, the academic community appears to have investigated too deeply. There is no doubt that the fact that literature on the Great Power Competition is extensive and impossible to review comprehensively, with each political scientist seemingly adding their amendment to the definition of Great Power status. Nevertheless, there are fundamental criteria.

At the very minimum, a security prerequisite exists: A Great Power is a nation capable of mounting a substantial defense against its rival globally even if not guaranteed victory, it could sustain a prolonged conflict. In a world with nuclear-weapon states, possessing nuclear weapons is a necessary but not sufficient condition for Great Power status (thus, North Korea does not qualify). Some political scientists, like the late Nuno Monteiro, have contended this as an inclusive definition and have advocated for an “offensive” criterion.

In addition to being sufficient at self-defense against its adversary, a Great Power must also possess the ability to “unilaterally engage in sustained politico-military operations in at least one other significant region of the world, comparable to the most dominant state in the system.” Under this definition, the Great Powers' capability for independent action exhibits global reach. This ability significantly narrows down the candidates of Great Power Monteiro employs it to argue that the US stands as the sole Great Power in a unipolar world, though others may also qualify depending on the scale of their interventions. For instance, Russian proxies have undertaken similar endeavors across Africa, France recently concluded a limited but protracted intervention in Mali, and the expansion of military presence from China has bolstered its capacity to project force.

Other definitions extend beyond mere military capacity. According to distinguished political scientist Kenneth Waltz, Great Powers must not only ensure their security but also sustain their defense capacity over time. This necessitates having a defensible territory, an economy capable of supporting the other essential government and military expenditures, a population to fill both the national defense and private sector roles and the political competence and stability to ensure effective functioning.

Additional foundational political scientists introduce further criteria. According to Jack Levy, Great Power status is not solely dependent on military prowess but also on a self-perception of the country in the global order. In his view, great powers “define their national interests to include systemic interests as well and are therefore concerned with global order maintenance in the international system.” He argues that Great Power's status also depends on how a state is perceived by its peer competitor and whether it is treated as an equal in terms of respect, attention, negotiations, protocol, and alliance agreements.

For instance, the decision of the United Kingdom to join the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2015 is seen as affirming the status of China as a Great Power, while the expulsion of Russia from the Group of Eight in 2014 was a rejection of Moscow's aspirations for Great Power status. To summarize, A Great Power must possess the capability for international action but must also view itself as an influential state with global interests, and this role and influence must be acknowledged by its peer competitors (Nye, 2011).

2.1.2. Measuring Power

Even with these different definitions, there remains considerable leeway for subjective interpretation. The primary criterion of a capable defense is largely theoretical, as no such scenario has arisen since the advent of nuclear weapons, and any test of this would be catastrophic. In the absence of clear examples, scholars and policymakers must rely on estimations of surprisingly inaccurate military capability. Moreover, few of these definitions establish clear benchmarks. What size must an economy be to sustain Great Power status? How much independent action abroad is necessary for qualification? How broad must a state's global interests be, and what level of recognition from its peers is significant?

In attempting to quantify Great Power's status, academics often use simplified proxy metrics that may overlook these fundamental conditions. Studies in international security frequently employ the Composite Index of National Capabilities (CINC), which evaluates state capacity based on six material components: military expenditure, military size, energy consumption, steel and iron consumption, total population, and urban population. Others use gross domestic product (GDP) or GDP per capita as rough indicators of state power. While military strength often correlates with economic size, research by Michael Beckley suggests that GDP has historically been a poor predictor of actual military capacity. Beckley argues that this is because

GDP does not account for the portion of economic output that must support the population of the state, and he suggests that a more accurate metric would emphasize the size of a state's population.

The GDP serves as a notable example of how national-level statistics oversimplify the inclusive concepts typically referenced in definitions of Great Power status. In 2014, the GDP of China surpassed that of the United States when adjusted for purchasing power, leading to sensational news coverage heralding a dramatic shift in global power dynamics. However, there are multiple ways to evaluate GDP, resulting in varying predictions about the actual trend. Just in the past year, estimates of when China would surpass the United States in non-adjusted GDP have shifted from 2030 to 2035, to 2060, or perhaps never.

A metric that shows a 31 percent advantage for the United States when calculated one way, and a 19 percent advantage for China when calculated another, indicates a significant margin of error when extrapolating its implications for overall state power. Not only do different GDP versions produce inconsistent rank orders, but the disparity between the United States and China is substantial and even more pronounced for other actors sometimes included in discussions of Great Power competition. The entire European Union has an economy comparable to that of China, yet the largest economy in the Eurozone, Germany, has an economy less than one-fifth the size of the United States'. Russia is an even more extreme example: ranking 11th globally in terms of GDP, its economy is less than one-tenth the size of the United States'. If this is the standard for Great Power status, the threshold has been set remarkably low.

Simplified national-level indicators overlook crucial nuances, prompting the development of alternative metrics. A thorough review of state power metrics conducted by RAND in 2000 observed that while indices such as CINC and GDP yield similar rankings of countries, they fail to capture factors critical in the postindustrial era. For example, they offer limited insight into

countries' excellence in innovative research or their ability to protect intellectual property, both of which are pivotal in assessing the strength of a modern national economy. Other studies have emphasized the relative nature of power and have devised indicators such as the Foreign Bilateral Influence Capacity (FBIC) index to evaluate power dynamics in specific relationships between pairs of states (Nye, 2004).

2.1.3. Great Powers and Relative Power

National-level statistics overlook how power leads to the creation of self-reinforcing institutions that provide distinct advantages to powerful countries. The United States and Western Europe's historical dominance in the international financial system means that many institutions supporting global trade fall under their jurisdiction. Consequently, the United States and its allies have a better vantage point for monitoring international financial activities than other nations. They can leverage this position to isolate entities by imposing sanctions and cutting off access to the global financial network.

This unequal power dynamic has frustrated countries like China and Russia, prompting them to seek alternative networks to bypass US dominance. However, these efforts have struggled to gain traction. For example, China's alternative to the SWIFT international banking system has limited reach, and attempts to evade sanctions using cryptocurrencies still face detection and legal repercussions from the US government. Institutions tend to be resistant to change and are rarely replaced entirely. Yet, the institutional power embedded in the international system is not captured by conventional metrics of power.

Recent research has begun to analyze state power by breaking it down into issue areas. For instance, Russia and Saudi Arabia wield significant influence in oil markets that is disproportionate to their share of other indicators of state power, such as their military capabilities and economies.

They can be considered great powers in terms of oil production. However, even this classification comes with nuances. As noted by Emily Meierding, the exercise of power in the realm of oil production intersects with other power networks. The sale of oil necessitates engagement with international financial networks, where the United States holds dominant influence, and the energy transportation network, where power is dispersed among the countries through which oil pipelines pass, China's substantial tanker fleet, and the United States, which has unmatched capabilities to monitor and control access to international sea routes.

This approach to conceptualizing state power suggests that it can be deconstructed in various domains. Taiwan, for example, could be considered a semiconductor great power, while China could be seen as a manufacturing great power. These comparative advantages are intertwined with networks of transit and exchange that exhibit different distributions of power. According to the FBIC index, France could be seen as a diplomatic great power, exerting more influence in diplomacy than its military and economic strength would imply. This nuanced view of the global power distribution adds complexity but sacrifices simplicity. The concept of Great Power competition it presents involves context-specific powers that may be great only in particular domains among a growing number of such areas (Stuster, 2023).

2.1.4. Great Power Competition in the 21st Century

The task for policymakers is to simultaneously hold two conflicting ideas and still operate effectively. Great Power competition is a feature of the international system, describing how countries perceive and interact with one another. It also characterizes specific issue areas, where the lineup of influential countries may vary significantly from the broader international context. The ability to switch between these two perspectives, although challenging, serves as an important safeguard against oversimplifying which countries qualify as great powers.

The United States qualifies as a Great Power. It boasts the world's largest economy in absolute terms and has solidified its central position in the global economic system over the past 80 years. As of the first quarter of 2024, the United States economy demonstrates resilient growth. The GDP stands at approximately \$29 trillion, with a GDP nominal per capita of about \$85,373, reflecting the country's high standard of living. Foreign reserves are substantial, totaling around \$120 billion, ensuring a robust buffer against external economic shocks. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows remain strong, with an estimated \$500 billion annually, highlighting the country's attractiveness to global investors. The unemployment rate is low at 3.5%, and inflation has moderated to 3.2% year-over-year, following effective monetary policies (Statista, 2024). The US annual defense budget of approximately \$877 billion has surpassed that of any other nation. (Mohan, 2022).

However, the distribution of power is changing. China's power has undeniably grown over the past two decades, leading to increased regional influence. The GDP stands at approximately \$18 trillion, with a GDP per capita of about \$12,500, reflecting ongoing development and increasing living standards. China holds the largest foreign reserves in the world, totaling around \$3.2 trillion, which provides a substantial buffer against external economic fluctuations. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows remain robust, with annual figures reaching approximately \$200 billion, underscoring China's attractiveness to international investors (Statista, 2024). It may be considered a Great Power in some areas and a regional power in others.

Europe could be seen as a Great Power in areas where it can act collectively but as a collection of middle and small powers in areas where it lacks unity. Regarding Russia, including it as a Great Power in the international system requires significant conceptual stretching in my view. The GDP is approximately \$2.06 trillion, with a GDP per capita of about \$11,600, reflecting

the nation's economic conditions and living standards. Russia's foreign reserves are substantial, amounting to around \$550 billion, providing a robust cushion against external shocks and economic instability. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows are modest, averaging around \$30 billion annually, indicating selective investor interest amid geopolitical and economic uncertainties. Despite any objections from Vladimir Putin, President Obama's characterization of Russia as a "Regional Power" and a secondary player in the global Great Power competition seems more fitting (Trenin, 2018).

Figure 2.1. Nominal GDP of the US, China, and Russia as of Q1 2024

Country	Nominal GDP (in trillions)	PPP Adjusted GDP (in trillions)	Annual Growth (%)	GDP Per Capita
United States	\$28.78	\$28.78	2.7	85,370
China	\$18.53	\$35.29	4.6	13,140
Russia	\$2.06	\$5.47	3.2	14,390

Source: (Silver, 2024), <https://www.investopedia.com/insights/worlds-top-economies/>

2.2. The United States: Strategies and Actions

From 2013 to 2022, the foreign policy of the United States was shaped by a combination of conventional national objectives and unconventional approaches under the Trump administration. The US prioritized core interests such as asserting global leadership, promoting free trade, and addressing challenges from rising China and resurging Russia. President Obama's pivot to Asia policy, initiated in 2011, aimed to counter the growing influence of China by increasing economic engagement through the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and repositioning its military forces to the Asia-Pacific. President Trump withdrew from the TPP but maintained a strong military presence in the region, particularly to address the aggression of North Korea, while

also taking a confrontational stance towards China on trade and security (Sanger & Haberman, 2017).

The US historically pursued a rules-based international order and global leadership, with President Obama prioritizing multilateralism and President Trump putting more accent on unilateral and transactional approaches. The promotion of free trade was crucial for the US foreign policy that seeks to advance the globalization agenda, continue with America's world domination, and respond to the emerging growing influence of China through the protectionist trade policy executed by President Trump's administration. In response to the growing influence of China, the US used available economic, military, and diplomacy measures in promoting power projection through the expansion of active engagement in Asia-Pacific, alteration of trade policies, and establishment of bilateral partnerships with countries wary of China (Miller, 2018).

2.2.1. Pivot to Asia

The "Pivot to Asia" or the "Rebalance to Asia" strategy was a vital part of the US foreign policy from 2013 to 2022, aimed to address the growing influence of the Chinese and the resurgence of Russia in the Asia Pacific. This strategy was based on transferring more focus to Asia with regard to both military deployment and diplomacy to address the intensification of China's activity and to strengthen allies and friends in the process.

The US strategy of pivoting to Asia was announced by Barack Obama in 2011 motivated by the shifting in global politics, characterized by increasing assertiveness and rapid economic growth of China in the region. It intended to ensure that the US was as committed as ever to the Asia-Pacific region and its important partners and allies and to help ensure the security and stability of the region. In this speech, Obama outlined the United States' strategic shift towards increasing its focus on the Asia-Pacific region: "As the United States puts our fiscal house in order, we are

reducing our spending. And yes, after a decade of war, our military is being reorganized. We'll continue to reduce our footprint in Iraq and draw down our forces in Afghanistan. But as we end today's wars, I have directed my national security team to make our presence and mission in the Asia Pacific a top priority. As a result, reductions in US defense spending will not - I repeat, will not - come at the expense of the Asia Pacific." (The White House, 2011, p. 10).

This means that diplomatic intercourse was seen as part and parcel of the implementation of the pivot to Asia strategy with regional countries as a way of fostering relations and cooperation. This includes diplomatic initiatives, high-level visits, and multilateral engagements to solve existential issues and maintain a rules-based system (Clinton, 2011).

For instance, in recent years, the US has ramped up its interactions with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as it sought to expand economic cooperation and enhance regional stability. This engagement involved getting involved in other forums within ASEAN for instance being involved in the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the East Asia Summit (EAS). Apart from that, the US also built up its partnerships with other significant countries in the region including South Korea, Japan, India, and Australia through which economic cooperation, security networks, and diplomatic ties were furthered (Campbell & Andrews, 2013).

However, another important component of the US strategy was the promotion of regional collective security as well as the US military presence to counter potential adversaries, Chinese and Russian, and assure partners and allies of American support. Under these circumstances, the US increased its rotational deployments of regional assets and troops, including in the Philippines and Australia. This was to increase the capability of the U. S military when it comes to contingencies such as in the South China Sea and also foster deeper cooperation with its counterparts in the region. Also, the US continued to conduct several military drills with allies and

associates in the area to increase preparedness and exercise cooperation on security matters (Green, 2017).

Likewise, economic interaction was also a part of the pivot to Asia strategy that was aimed at the economic development and integration of the region and to check the economic power of China. For instance, the US was at the forefront of the negotiation of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP)², which is a trade agreement between 12 countries in the Asia-Pacific region (Kaplan, 2014). The TPP was viewed as an opportunity to establish a high level of trade and investment and to advance the process of economic liberalization in the region. The US also offered economic aid to regional countries to develop infrastructure and fund developmental projects. This was in a bid to foster bilateral relations and advance economic cooperation with important partners (Petri & Plummer, 2016).

Although the pivot to Asia strategy was intended to respond to the strategic threats of Russia and China, it faced several challenges and criticisms. Some critics pointed out that the “pivot of Asia” strategy was unfocused and under-resourced. Some critics argued that the strategy would lead to a new round of tensions with Russia and China (Rhodes, 2018). “Putin has criticized the "Pivot to Asia" strategy stating that Russia will not be "pivoted" against, and will instead pursue its interests in Asia (Putin, 2016).

”Moreover, “Xi Jinping has emphasized the need for Asian countries to take charge of their security and destiny, rather than relying on external powers (Xi, 2014).” Therefore, in conclusion, the US pivot to Asia strategy was a multifaceted approach to counter the threats posed by the

² The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) is a trade agreement among 12 Pacific Rim nations, aiming to reduce tariffs, promote economic integration, and establish common trade standards, now rebranded as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).

emerging power of Russia and the growing dominance of China in the Asia-Pacific region. Although the strategy encountered several problems and criticisms, it aimed at the US engagement in the region and its efforts to enhance security and stability through military, diplomacy, and economics (Campbell & Ratner, 2018).

2.2.1.2. Maintaining Global Leadership

The United States employed different strategies to sustain its dominance and counter the threat of China and the resurgent Russia from 2013 to 2022. These strategies have included economic, diplomatic, military, and ideological means to promote American interests and spread American values across the world.

One of the important strategies to maintain global leadership of the US had been to build coalitions and ententes with other countries that share the same vision as the US to counterbalance Russia and China. This has entailed strengthening relations with traditional partners in Asia and Europe and establishing new regional relationships where the US presence was considered to be diminishing. For example, the US sought to establish a network of partners and allies in the Indo-Pacific region to respond to the aggressive actions of China. This includes the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)³, AUKUS⁴, and deepening cooperation with the Southeast Asian countries through the ASEAN-US Strategic Partnership. The US remained a steadfast NATO member and cooperated with European partners to counter threats originating from Russia. This involved raising the military profile in Eastern Europe and backing initiatives to improve the deterrence posture of NATO (Nye, 2022).

³ QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) is a strategic forum between Australia, India, Japan, and the US, promoting cooperation on security, trade, and technology to counterbalance China's influence in the Indo-Pacific.

⁴ AUKUS (Australia, UK, US) is a trilateral security pact enhancing cooperation on defense technology, AI, cyber warfare, and nuclear-powered submarines, aiming to counter China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

Economic-related measures are also believed to be essential for preserving the leadership in the international political system. The US employed economic integration and trade policies to promote its strategic goals and contain Russia and China. For instance, the US-sponsored TPP was viewed as a strategic economic project to contain China's rise in the Asia-Pacific region. However, after the US pulled out of the agreement in 2017, it demonstrated a willingness to influence the rules governing trade in the region to reflect the US's preferences (Katz, 2017). On January 23, 2017, President Donald Trump signed an executive order withdrawing the United States from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) trade deal calling it a "Potential Disaster," and the withdrawal a "great thing for the American worker." (Trump, 2017)

Furthermore, the US has also employed the policy of sanctions against China and Russia for different reasons such as cyberattacks, human rights violations, and territorial expansionism. These sanctions were employed as a means of preserving the US hegemony and to discourage other peer competitors from engaging in undesirable actions. The military strategies are the core of the U. S. policies to retain dominance in the world (Miller, 2018). On September 17, 2019, President Donald Trump announced a new round of sanctions on China in response to Beijing's intellectual property theft and forced technology transfer practices.

Trump emphasized his administration's tough stance on China, stating, "We're taking a very tough stance on China." He accused China of stealing American intellectual property, saying, "China has been stealing our intellectual property for years." Trump criticized China's forced technology transfer practices, stating, "China forces American companies to give them their technology." He announced a new round of tariffs on \$300 billion worth of Chinese goods and additional sanctions on Chinese companies. Trump emphasized the need to protect American

businesses and workers, saying, “We're protecting our businesses, and we're protecting our workers.” (Hufbauer & Jung, 2020, p. 17)

The US sought to enhance its power projection capabilities to deter potential adversaries by maintaining a strong military presence in important regions. For instance, the US shifted its strategic focus towards the Asia-Pacific region to counter military expansion of China primarily in the South China Sea. This included conducting joint military exercises with allies, increasing regional military presence, and enhancing defense cooperation with partners. And, in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine and elsewhere, the US increased its military presence in Eastern Europe and supported the efforts of NATO to enhance its deterrence capabilities (Nye, 2004).

Lastly, the US also relied on its soft power and ideological appeal to maintain global leadership. This included promoting human rights, democratic values, and the rule of law, which were seen as core elements of the US -led international order. For example, the US supported democracy promotion and cultural diplomacy in authoritarian countries, such as in Southeast Asia and Eastern Europe. This included promoting free and fair elections, providing assistance to civil society groups, and providing the Fulbright Program through cultural exchange initiatives (Congressional Research Service, 2020).

2.2.1.3. Promoting Free Trade

The US policy of promoting free trade, particularly in the context of challenging the resurging power of Russia and the rising influence of China, was a significant aspect of American foreign policy. This period witnessed various efforts by the US to maintain its strategic influence and economic dominance, especially in the face of growing competition from these two countries. The US has long championed the promotion of free trade as an important pillar of its foreign

policy. The rationale behind this approach is based on the belief that free trade increases prosperity, fosters economic growth, and promotes peace and stability among nations.

Some do not directly relate to China, but the TPP was a significant financial deal that was aimed at forging closer cooperation in the trade domain to emphasize the nation's collective efforts to counterbalance China's expansion in the Asia-Pacific. However, the withdrawal by the US in 2017 from the TPP after Donald Trump assumed the presidency was viewed as a step backward regarding the organization's objectives of free and fair trade in the region. Similarly, in the case of Russia, the US policy of promoting free trade was complicated by geopolitical tensions, particularly in the aftermath of the annexation of Russia in Crimea in 2014. The US also sought to compel Russia to change its behavior by denying it funds for sensitive activities by restricting its access to the global financial system, aiding vital sectors it has flagged as strategic such as energy and finance into decline while at the same time supporting directives aimed at enhancing liberalization and economic reforms in Russia (Petri & Plummer, 2016).

The US also aimed at helping countries of the European East, especially Ukraine, and Georgia, to decrease dependence on Russia for energy requirements and to diversify their economy through programs such as infrastructure rebuilding, and energy security. However, even if the sanctions were applied, the US still faced several impediments which could slow down the extension of President Putin's assertiveness in his neighborhood. To conclude, the policy on free trade continued to be an aspect of the overall American strategy of containing peer competitors like China and Russia. However, such efforts faced some constraints as both countries worked towards achieving their respective strategic plans and sought to protect their national interests. Moving forward, the activity of the US, as a hegemon, will remain focused on maintaining freedom

and fairness in trade as part of the general policy designed to maintain the strategic and economic dominance of the US in the world (Mitrova & Boersma, 2018).

2.2.1.4. Diplomatic Strategies

The United States employed various diplomatic strategies to address the challenges posed by its peer competitor such as China and Russia. These diplomatic strategies were aimed at countering perceived threats to American national interests and maintaining its strategic position as a global leader. The United States faced increasing challenges from Russia and China in the diplomatic arena, as both countries sought to challenge the US-led international order and assert their influence worldwide. Subsequently, the US adopted a range of diplomatic strategies to address these challenges and protect its interests (Blinken, 2021).

One of the important strategies employed by the US was to strengthen its partnerships and alliances around the world. This involved deepening economic, diplomatic, and military ties with important allies in regions such as Europe and Asia. By building a strategic coalition of like-minded countries, the US sought to present a united front against Russian and Chinese assertiveness such as the specimen of the Quad Alliance. This group of Quad sought to promote a free and open Indo-Pacific region initiated diplomatic initiatives and conducted joint military exercises to counter Chinese growing regional influence. Moreover, the US worked closely with its European allies and NATO allies to address security challenges posed by Russia. This involved imposing various sanctions on Russia, increasing military presence in Eastern Europe, and supporting efforts to strengthen democratic institutions in the region.

In addition to bilateral engagement, the US also used multilateral forums to address challenges posed by Russia and China. This involved working through international organizations

such as the World Trade Organization (WTO), the United Nations, and the G7/G20 to coordinate responses to common challenges and promote US interests. For instance, the US worked with its allies to pass several UN Security Council resolutions condemning the actions of Russia in Ukraine and calling for a peaceful resolution to the conflict. These resolutions helped to isolate Russia diplomatically in the world system and emphasized the opposition of the international community to its actions.

The US used forums such as the G7 and G20 summits to coordinate with its allies on issues such as climate change, trade, and security. These summits also provided a platform for the US to rally support for its policies and counter Russian and Chinese influence. Moreover, economic diplomacy was also used as an important tool in the US strategy to address the challenges posed by American's peer competitor. This involved using economic leverage such as sanctions to pressure these countries to change their aggressive posture and comply with international norms (Ikenberry, 2011).

The US also sought to use trade agreements to promote its national interests and counter Chinese influence. For instance, the US negotiated the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) to replace the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and sought to negotiate other trade agreements in the Indo-Pacific region to counter the growing influence of China (Schott, 2018). To conclude, the US employed a range of diplomatic strategies to address the challenges posed by Russia and China. These strategies involved multilateral diplomacy, diplomatic engagement with allies, economic diplomacy, and the use of sanctions and trade agreements. Moving forward, the US will likely continue to use a combination of these strategies to protect its interests and maintain its position as a global leader.

2.2.4. Impact of US Policies on Global Dynamics

The period from 2013 to 2022 was marked by significant shifts in global dynamics, influenced heavily by US policies. The United States, as a leading global power, implemented various strategies that had far-reaching effects on economic systems, international relations, security alliances, and geopolitical stability. Starting from the US economic policies, the US adopted a combination of policies that aimed at reshaping global trade relations. The most notable among these was the initiation of trade wars and, the renegotiation of trade agreements, particularly with China such as TPP.

However, the US withdrawal from the TPP in 2017 significantly altered the regional trade landscape. In response, the remaining member countries forged ahead with the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), a revised version of the original TPP. Meanwhile, the US pursued a trade war with China, imposing tariffs and trade restrictions. This led to a seismic shift in the global supply chain, as companies scrambled to adapt to the new trade environment. The repercussions were felt worldwide, with changes in trade patterns, investment flows, and economic growth. The US withdrawal from TPP and subsequent trade war had far-reaching consequences, reshaping the global trade landscape and forcing businesses to reconfigure their strategies (Ciuriak, 2018).

The US security and defense policies assisted it in maintaining global leadership by rebalancing its defense posture and bolstering military alliances to address emerging threats from both Russia and China. For instance, the US pivot of Asia policy aimed at countering the growing military and economic influence of China, involving increased military presence and cooperation with regional allies such as South Korea, Japan, and Australia. Moreover, in response to Russian aggressive posture, particularly following the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the US reinforced its

commitment to NATO, conducting joint exercises and increasing military deployments to reassure European allies (Galeotti, 2018).

The US continued its counterterrorism efforts and military involvement in the Middle East, impacting regional stability and global security. For example, the US-led coalition played an important role in combating militant groups such as ISIS in Iraq and Syria. The ongoing military presence and operations in the Middle East influenced local dynamics and the broader geopolitical environment. Similarly, the US' troop's withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 also marked a significant shift in the US foreign policy and had profound implications for regional stability and global perceptions of the US commitment.

The US also showcased diplomatic engagement and soft power, and its policies oscillated between unilateral actions and multilateral engagement, affecting global diplomatic dynamics. For instance, the US initially withdrew from the Paris Climate Agreement under President Trump's administration, affecting inclusive global climate change efforts. However, the subsequent re-entry under President Biden in 2021 signaled a renewed commitment to multilateral environmental initiatives. Similarly, the US unilaterally withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, and the re-imposition of economic sanctions on Iran also had significant implications for regional security and global non-proliferation efforts (Nader & Brewer, 2019).

The US extensively used and imposed economic sanctions to exert pressure on adversarial states and peer competitors to influence global financial systems such as in response to aggressive actions in Ukraine and other destabilizing activities, the US imposed various economic sanctions on Russia, affecting its economy and global financial transactions. For instance, the US sanctions targeted 150 Russian officials and oligarchs were sanctioned, freezing their assets and restricting travel, sanctions targeted Russia's financial, energy, and defense sectors, limiting access to US

markets and technology, and sanctions were also imposed on Russian banks, energy companies, and defense firms, restricting their ability to conduct international transactions. Similarly, the US continued to use sanctions policy to address human rights abuses and nuclear proliferation concerns in North Korea and Iran, impacting their economies and international relations (Nephew, 2017).

The US policies aimed at addressing cybersecurity threats and maintaining technological leadership had significant global impacts such as the US seeking to counter advancements of China in 5G technology, particularly through the ban on the sale of Huawei in the US, affecting technology standards and global telecommunications markets. Also, the US enhanced its cybersecurity policies and cooperation with important allies to address growing cyber threats from both state and non-state actors, influencing global cybersecurity norms and practices (Segal, 2018).

Lastly, the US continued to promote human rights and democratic values, influencing political systems and global governance. For instance, the US for human rights initiatives and pro-democracy movements in regions such as Belarus and Hong Kong impacted local political dynamics and highlighted the US commitment to democratic principles. The use of targeted sanctions against individuals and entities involved in human rights abuses, such as the Global Magnitsky Act⁵, highlighted the US efforts to hold human rights violators accountable and promote global human rights standards worldwide (Carothers & Samet-Marram, 2019). Hence, to conclude, these US policies not only shaped international relations but also influenced security architectures, global economic systems, and ideological landscapes, leaving a lasting imprint on the world order.

⁵ The Global Magnitsky Act is a US law allowing sanctions against foreign individuals and entities committing human rights abuses and corruption, freezing assets and restricting travel, promoting global accountability and justice.

2.2.4.1. Multilateralism vs. Unilateralism

The start of the 21st century saw significant shifts in the US foreign policy, with vary impacts on multilateralism and unilateralism. These policies had profound implications on global governance, international relations, and the US's role on the world stage. Starting from the US efforts to strengthen alliances and international organizations, the US showed a commitment to multilateralism by actively engaging in and strengthening international organizations and alliances. This approach was particularly evident during the President Obama and President Biden administrations.

For instance, the US reinforced its full commitment to NATO, especially in response to Russian aggression in Ukraine in 2014. By participating in joint military exercises and increasing military support, the US strengthened the collective defense capabilities of its various alliances. For instance, Operation Atlantic Resolve (2014): US-led exercises in Poland and the Baltic states, Saber Strike (2015): US-led exercises in Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia, Trident Juncture (2018): NATO's largest exercise since the Cold War, involving 50,000 troops. Moreover, the US also continued to engage with the UN on various fronts, including humanitarian aid, peacekeeping, and addressing global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change (Smith, 2019).

The US' approach to climate change also illustrated its commitment to multilateral solutions for global issues. For example, President Obama's administration played an important role in the formation of the Paris Agreement (2015). It was considered a landmark multilateral effort to combat climate change. The US also initially committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and providing financial support to developing countries for climate adaptation and mitigation. Moreover, the US also showed its active involvement in trade agreements to foster

economic integration and cooperation such as in the case of TPP by enhancing economic ties among 12 Pacific Rim countries (Davenport, 2021).

However, President Trump's administration adopted a policy of de-globalization by marking a significant shift towards unilateralism, characterized by the withdrawal from several important international organizations and agreements such as the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)⁶, adoption of protectionist trade policies and rejection of multilateral forums such as retreat from WHO in 2020. These moves were criticized worldwide and seen as a retreat from multilateral efforts to address climate change, preventing Iran's nuclear proliferation, triggering a trade war with China, and undermining global health cooperation at a critical time respectively (Schwab, 2019).

Nevertheless, President Biden's administration signaled a return to a multilateral approach, reversing several unilateral decisions made by the previous administration such as rejoining the Paris Agreement and reaffirming US commitment to global climate action. Moreover, Biden's administration revitalized alliances with international organizations, emphasizing the importance of collective action on issues like global health issues, climate change, and security. Lastly, Biden's administration sought to re-engage in multilateral economic initiatives such as trade agreements and economic cooperation. Consequently, while not rejoining the TPP, the administration indicated a willingness to work with important partners on financial issues and

⁶The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is a landmark nuclear agreement between Iran and world powers, limiting Iran's nuclear program in exchange for relief from economic sanctions and diplomatic normalization.

consider new frameworks for economic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)⁷, US-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS)⁸, etc.

The US policies fluctuated between unilateralism and multilateralism, significantly impacting global dynamics. The commitment to multilateralism under President Obama and President Biden administrations helped to address global challenges collaboratively by strengthening various alliances and reinforcing international norms. However, in contrast, the unilateral actions under the Trump administration highlighted a more isolationist and protectionist approach, leading to disruptions in global governance structures. Hence, the overall impact of these policies emphasized the importance of US engagement in multilateral frameworks for addressing transnational issues and maintaining stability worldwide (Jentleson, 2022).

To summarize, the impact of US unilateralism on global multilateralism from 2013 to 2022 was substantial, particularly in the context of a resurgent Russia and a rising China. The unilateral actions by President Trump's administration often undermined multilateral institutions, eroded US credibility, and provided strategic opportunities for Russia and China to expand their strategic influence worldwide. These policies weakened collective responses to global challenges, strained global economic governance, and highlighted the complex interaction between multilateralism and unilateralism in shaping international relations. Moving forward, the balance between these two varying approaches will continue to influence the effectiveness and stability of the global order.

⁷ The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) is a US-led initiative launched in 2022, aiming to promote economic cooperation, trade, and investment in the Indo-Pacific region, with a focus on digital trade, supply chains, and clean energy.

⁸ The US-South Korea Free Trade Agreement (KORUS) is a bilateral trade pact signed in 2012 and updated in 2018, increasing trade and investment between the two nations, covering goods, services, and intellectual property.

2.3. China's Rise as a Global Power

The 21st century has been termed as an Asian century courtesy of the rise of China as a major global power which is challenging the long-standing US hegemony. The period from 2013 to 2022 saw China expanding its influence economically, militarily, economically, and diplomatically, prompting significant global shifts global balance of power. Starting from economic expansion, Chinese President Xi Jinping 2013 launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project aimed to stimulate economic growth and enhance global trade across Asia and beyond through infrastructure investments.

The initiative included various projects like highways, railways, ports, and energy pipelines, spanning over 60 countries. By funding these projects, China established itself as a central player in global trade. The BRI challenged the US influence by creating new economic corridors that bypassed traditional US-dominated trade routes, reducing US leverage in global trade. Moreover, the BRI also established China as a primary builder and lender in many developing nations, shifting these economic dependencies of various countries towards Beijing (Rolland, 2020).

Similarly, China also established the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in 2015 which is seen as a rival to International Monetary Funds (IMF) and World Bank (WB), which have traditionally been dominated by the US and its allies. With the numerous US allies, joining the AIIB such as the UK, Germany, Canada, Australia, etc., the influence of China in global financial governance increased. The creation and success of the AIIB also challenged and undermined the US -led financial order and provided member countries with an alternative source of loans and funding that often came with fewer political terms and conditions than those of Western institutions. Related to People's Liberation Army (PLA) modernization, China invested heavily in

modernizing its military, focusing on advanced technologies such as aircraft carriers, stealth fighters, cyber warfare, and hypersonic missile capabilities. For instance, Liaoning and Shandong aircraft carriers, Chengdu J-20 and Shenyang J-31 Stealth Fighters, DF-17 and DF-ZF Hypersonic Missile Capabilities. This continuous modernization aimed to close the technological gap with the US military (Hussain, 2017).

The military strategies of China included strengthening its capabilities in the South and East China Sea, asserting territorial claims, and establishing an active military presence on artificial islands. This assertiveness challenged the US regional naval dominance and threatened the security of the important US allies. Not limited to economic and military modernization, China also deepened strategic alliances and partnerships with countries like Iran and Russia such as the China-Iran Strategic Partnership (2016)⁹, China-Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2014)¹⁰, China's \$400 billion deal with Russia to import natural gas over 30 years, increasing arms sales and conducting joint military exercises. These alliances served to create a multipolar world order and counterbalance US influence worldwide. For instance, China expanded its military presence globally, including the establishment of its first overseas military base in Djibouti in 2017. This move signaled the ambitions of China to project power far beyond its immediate region, directly challenging the US global military presence (Dollar, 2019).

Moreover, China took various diplomatic initiatives such as the promotion of cultural diplomacy like the Confucius Institutes, which promoted Chinese culture and language worldwide. This effort aimed to enhance the soft power of China and influence global public opinion. In the

⁹ The China-Iran Strategic Partnership (2016) is a 25-year agreement for comprehensive cooperation, including energy, trade, infrastructure, and defense, solidifying China's presence in the Middle East and countering US influence.

¹⁰ The China-Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2014) strengthens bilateral cooperation in energy, defense, trade, and technology, fostering a strategic alliance to counterbalance US influence and promote Eurasian integration and multi-polarity.

context of global leadership, China positioned itself as a defender of free trade and globalization, contrasting with the more protectionist policies of the US under President Trump's administration. The speeches of President Xi Jinping at various forums such as the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in which he advocated globalization, commitment to multilateralism, and opposition to protectionist policies portrayed China as a responsible global leader committed to multilateralism. China also increased its regional influence and played a significant role in regional organizations such as ASEAN and SCO, using these platforms to counter US influence and build consensus on regional issues (Laskai, 2018).

For instance, China's aggressive posture of pursuing territorial claims in the South China Sea by rejecting international arbitration rulings,¹¹ China demonstrated its willingness to assert its dominance in regional waters and challenge the US-supported international norms. In technological and industrial areas including tech giants and innovations, China's leadership in Huawei and 5G technology raised cybersecurity concerns and posed a direct challenge to US tech companies and technological dominance. For instance, China made significant strides in emerging technologies such as quantum computing and artificial intelligence (AI), aiming to surpass the US in critical tech fields. China's government investment and policies supported the growth of Beijing's tech giants, enhancing the global tech influence of China (Petri & Plummer, 2020).

China's strategic plan and industrial policies aimed to reduce dependency on foreign technology and upgrade its manufacturing capabilities. By focusing on high-tech industries like aerospace, robotics, and electric vehicles, China sought to become a global leader in advanced manufacturing. Beijing's industrial dominance aimed to position China as a competitor in

¹¹ The 2016 international arbitration ruling rejected China's claims to historic rights in the South China Sea, upholding the Philippines' sovereign rights and challenging China's expansive maritime claims in the region.

industries traditionally dominated by the US and challenged the US' technological and economic supremacy. China's assertive posture in various areas also impacted global governance efforts. While the US under the President Trump administration often adopted a more de-globalized and unilateral approach such as its withdrawal from TPP and the Paris Climate Accord, China presented itself as a champion of multilateralism, participating actively in global agreements and institutions by filling the leadership vacuum, enhancing its influence in global governance (Dollar, 2019).

Lastly, the geopolitical shifts such as the US-initiated pivot of Asia policy aimed to counter the rise of China but the policy faced several challenges due to regional tensions and inconsistent policy implementation. China leveraged diplomatic and economic tools to strengthen its strategic position in the Asia-Pacific, challenging the US's efforts to maintain regional dominance (Swaine, 2019). To conclude, from 2013 to 2022, the rise of China as a major global power fundamentally challenged the US hegemony worldwide. Through military modernization, economic expansion, technological advancements, diplomatic initiatives, and strategic positioning, China asserted its influence on the global stage. This period marked a significant global shift in the balance of power, with China emerging as a formidable competitor to the US dominance.

2.3.1. China's Economic Growth and Expansion of Influence

The 21st century witnessed the massive growth and expansion of China which significantly challenged the US hegemony, restructuring global economic dynamics and geopolitical influence. Starting from rapid economic growth, China maintained an inclusive GDP growth rate, averaging around 6-7% annually, despite global economic uncertainties courtesy of COVID-19. As of 2024, China has the world's second-largest nominal GDP in current dollars and the largest in terms of PPP. China's nominal GDP in Current US Dollars is \$18.53 trillion, PPP Adjusted GDP in Current

International Dollars is \$35.29 trillion, GDP Growth is 4.6%, and the nominal GDP Per Capita in Current US Dollars is \$13,140 (Silver, 2024).

This sustained growth bolstered the position of China as the second-largest economy in the world, narrowing the gap with the US. Moreover, China also initiated the process of innovation and industrial upgradation such as "Made in China 2025" aimed to transform Beijing from a manufacturing hub to a global leader in high-tech industries, including aerospace, robotics, and electric vehicles. This shift was crucial in reducing dependency on foreign technology and moving up the value chain.

For instance, Companies like ZTE and Huawei became global leaders in telecommunications, particularly in the deployment of 5G technology. The advancement in 5G posed a direct challenge to the US tech giants, prompting the US to impose various sanctions and restrict its access to critical technologies. Moreover, the e-commerce boom in Chinese firms such as Tencent and Alibaba revolutionized digital payments, expanding their reach globally. The annual Singles' Day sales of Alibaba's exceeded Black Friday and Cyber Monday combined, showcasing the dominance of China in the digital economy.

China also initiated global infrastructure investment by launching the BRI project in 2013, aimed to stimulate economic growth and enhance global trade through investments in infrastructure projects across Africa, Asia, and Europe. It included over 140 countries and international organizations. The initiative also created new economic corridors, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), linking China's Xinjiang region to Gwadar Port in Pakistan, enhancing trade routes and connectivity. China also invested heavily in African infrastructure, including ports, railways, and highways. Chinese Projects like the Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway in Kenya showcased the serious commitment of China to enhance trade links and

modernize African infrastructure. Likewise, the investments of China in European infrastructure, including the Greek port of Piraeus, positioned it as an important player in the European transport network. These investments facilitated the flow of goods between Asia and Europe, challenging traditional US-dominated trade routes (Kastner & Pearson, 2021).

Not to rely on Western financial institutions, China founded AIIB in 2015 aimed to complement existing multilateral financial institutions like the WB and the IMF, focusing on leasing loans and infrastructure development in Asia. The AIIB with 103 member countries, including many US allies became a significant player in the global finance system. Similarly, the AIIB also provided an alternative to Western-dominated financial institutions, offering loans with fewer political conditions. For example, the AIIB-financed projects such as the Karachi Bus Rapid Transit project in Pakistan and the Bangladesh-India Friendship Pipeline, demonstrated its role in infrastructure enhancement and regional development (Hussain, 2017).

To ensure economic growth, China also became a party to trade agreements and partnerships such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), signed in 2020, developed the largest free trade agreement in the world, covering approximately 30% of the global population and GDP. It included major economies like South Korea, Japan, and Australia, further integrating China into regional trade networks. The impact of RCEP was exceptional as it reduced standardized trade rules, tariffs and non-tariff barriers among member countries positioning China as a central player in regional trade and enhancing economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region.

Tech giants and industrial leadership ensure future development by enhancing connectivity, driving innovation, and streamlining processes across various sectors. Consequently, China's advancements in Huawei and 5G technology made it a global leader, with its technology being adopted in many developed countries. Despite the US sanctions, Huawei continued to

expand its 5G networks, challenging the US tech dominance. Moreover, Chinese companies like Tencent, WeChat Pay, and Alibaba led the e-commerce and Fintech revolutions. The expansion of Alibaba into Southeast Asia through its subsidiary, Tencent, and Lazada's investments in global gaming companies' cabinet the growing influence of China in the global digital economy.

China adopted diplomatic and soft power strategies to enhance its cultural influence worldwide through initiatives like the establishment of over 500 Confucius Institutes. Beijing also expanded its media outreach through its various outlets such as CGTN and Xinhua providing global news and varying perspectives from a Chinese viewpoint, countering Western narratives and promoting the development model of China. Beijing responded to Washington's economic policies such as economic decoupling and trade wars with the imposition of tariffs leading to a significant economic confrontation. For instance, the US restrictions on semiconductor exports to China impacted Chinese tech firms, but these restrictions also spurred China to accelerate its semiconductor development to reduce dependency on US technology (Dollar, 2019).

2.3.3.1. Military Modernization and Assertiveness in the South China Sea

The military modernization and assertiveness of China in the South China Sea significantly challenged the US Pivot to Asia policy. This period also witnessed the strategic military enhancements and territorial assertiveness of China, which aimed to consolidate its overall regional influence and counter the US efforts to maintain its dominance. Starting from inclusive military modernization and technological advancement of China, it embarked on an extensive modernization program for the People's Liberation Army (PLA), focusing on transforming it into a world-class military by 2049.

This included upgrading equipment, restructuring its command and control, and enhancing overall capabilities across all military branches. Moreover, the PLA Navy (PLAN) saw significant

growth, with the commissioning of advanced submarines, warships, and aircraft carriers. The commissioning of the Shandong aircraft carriers and the development of the Liaoning demonstrated the growing naval capabilities of China.

For instance, the deployment of the J-20 stealth fighter jet marked a significant leap in the air combat capabilities of China, positioning it closer to the technological levels of the US fifth-generation fighters like the F-35 and F-22. Similarly, China also made strides in developing hypersonic missiles, which can evade traditional missile defense systems by traveling at speeds exceeding Mach 5. This capability posed a direct challenge to the US defense strategies and military technology (Mastro, 2019).

China also invested heavily in cyber warfare, enhancing its ability to conduct defensive and offensive cyber operations. The cyber espionage activities targeted sensitive US commercial and military information, challenging US security and technological advantages. China's PLA space capabilities also grew with the development of anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons and advancements in satellite technology. These developments highlighted the intent of China to counter the US space assets and secure space dominance (Thayer, 2019).

The assertiveness of China was evident from infrastructure development and territorial claims such as Beijing's claims over the majority of the South China Sea (SCS) through the controversial nine-dash line¹², which overlapped with the territorial waters of several Southeast Asian nations, including the Philippines, Vietnam, Brunei, and Malaysia. China also undertook large-scale land reclamation projects, transforming atolls and reefs into artificial islands equipped

¹² China's nine-dashed line claim in the South China Sea (SCS) asserts sovereignty over nearly 90% of the region, overlapping with neighboring countries' EEZs and sparking territorial disputes and tensions.

with airstrips, military installations, and ports. These islands enhanced the strategic reach of China and served as bases for power projection.

For instance, China constructed radar systems, military-grade runways, and missile defense installations on artificial islands in the Spratly archipelago. These developments significantly bolstered the ability of China to monitor and control regional maritime traffic. Similarly, the standoff and subsequent control over Scarborough Shoal exemplified the willingness of China to assert its territorial claims aggressively, challenging the sovereignty of the Philippines and undermining the US influence (Ramadhani, 2019)

China's military modernization and assertiveness of China also included strategic military exercises and patrols such as naval drills and Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOPs). China conducted regular naval exercises with strategic allies, including joint drills with Russia, to demonstrate its military readiness and capabilities. These exercises highlighted the ability of China to operate in contested project powers and waters. Moreover, in response to US FONOPs aimed at challenging China's territorial claims of China, it increased its active military presence and patrolling, leading to tense standoffs between the US naval forces and China.

For example, the military exercises of China in the Paracel Islands involved amphibious assault training and live-fire drills, signaling its resolve to completely defend its territorial claims against external challenges. Auxiliary, incidents such as the 2018 close encounter between a Chinese destroyer and the USS Decatur near the Spratly Islands highlighted the growing risk of military confrontation (Erickson, 2020).

China aimed to balance the rebalancing approach of the US announced in its Pivot to Asia policy by the Obama administration. The US approach included strengthening alliances, deploying

more naval assets, and enhancing regional security partnerships. The economic engagement involved various economic initiatives such as TPP, designed to counter the economic influence of China by creating a trade bloc that excluded China. However, China leveraged its economic power to build stronger ties with neighboring countries through investment, trade, and infrastructure projects under the BRI. This economic diplomacy also aimed to weaken the US influence and create dependencies on China (Friedberg, 2015).

In the context of military deterrence, China modernized its military and continued to assert its presence in the South China Sea, China sought to deter the US intervention in the region and challenged the credibility of the US security commitments to its regional allies. For instance, the CPEC and investments in Southeast Asia demonstrated China's strategy of winning over regional partners through economic means, challenging US attempts to isolate China economically. Moreover, the participation of China in regional forums like the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area and the SCO aimed to counterbalance US-led alliances and create a parallel regional order (Erickson, 2020).

The impact of China's military modernization impacted the regional security dynamics in several ways such as shifts in security arrangements and regional alliances. Starting from the dilemma of ASEAN, Southeast Asian nations faced a strategic dilemma, balancing their economic ties with China against their security reliance on the US (Medcalf, 2020). The economic leverage of China often translated into political influence, complicating the US efforts to build a unified front against the assertiveness of China. For instance, the Philippines oscillated between reaffirming its security alliance with the US and seeking closer ties with China, reflecting the broader regional tensions and the impact of the assertiveness of China (Zhu, 2017).

2.3.4.2. Diplomatic Engagement

Since the start of the 21st century, the diplomatic engagement of China also challenged the US hegemony through a multidimensional approach that included forging strategic partnerships, expanding its global influence, and participating in multilateral institutions. This period marked the proactive efforts of China to reshape international norms and create a multipolar world order. China's diplomatic efforts started with economic connectivity and the building of strategic infrastructure such as the BRI project initiated by President Xi Jinping in 2013, which aimed to stimulate economic growth and enhance global trade growth through investments in infrastructure projects across Africa, Asia, and Europe.

China created the CPEC venture and considered it as a flagship project to enhance connectivity and foster economic interdependence. Other projects of the BRI included the Addis Ababa-Djibouti Railway and Mombasa-Nairobi Standard Gauge Railway. China also constructed high-speed rail links between Belgrade and Budapest and invested in the Greek port of Piraeus which showcased the efforts of China to integrate European transport networks with its trade routes (Zhu, 2017).

Moreover, China's diplomatic efforts also included the establishment of AIIB founded in 2015 to challenge Western-backed financial institutions such as the IMF and the WB. By 2022, it had 103 member countries, including many US strategic allies, offering an alternative source of infrastructure financing with fewer political conditions. The AIIB focused on sustainable infrastructure projects, transport, and energy, emphasizing regional connectivity and green development. For example, the AIIB supported the development of renewable energy projects in countries like the Philippines and Indonesia, promoting sustainable development in the region (Petri & Plummer, 2022).

China also participated in multilateral institutions to ensure active engagement and ascend to leadership roles. China increased its economic and military contributions to the UN peacekeeping missions and assumed leadership roles in various UN agencies. This enhanced its influence in shaping international policies and norms. For instance, in 2022, China had become one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations, with personnel deployed such as 2,438 personnel to UN peacekeeping operations in conflict zones such as Mali and South Sudan. Moreover, China also actively participated in WTO negotiations, defending its trade-related interests and advocating for the rights of developing countries. The efforts of China to protect its status as a developing country within the WTO framework were a point of contention with the US. During the COVID-19 pandemic, China played a prominent role in the WHO, providing expertise and medical supplies to countries in need, which also bolstered its soft power.

China's bilateral engagement also included enhancing strategic bilateral and regional partnerships such as strengthening ties with important nations such as Russia, and African and Latin American countries. Sino-Russia Strategic Partnerships (2014) deepened characterized by joint military exercises, increased economic cooperation, and coordinated diplomatic stances on global issues. The two countries also shared a mutual interest in countering the US influence in Asia (McConnell & Woon, 2023).

For instance, the signing of the \$400 billion gas deal between Russia and China in 2014 and joint military exercises such as the Vostok-2018 demonstrated the deepening of their strategic alliance. Similarly, China also expanded its economic and diplomatic presence in Latin America and African countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Venezuela through trade agreements, high-level visits, and investment projects. These efforts also aimed to secure access to natural resources and build strong bilateral relationships.

China's economic diplomacy and trade agreement included promoting trade and economic integration such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). The RCEP signed in 2020 amongst 15 Asia-Pacific countries reduced tariffs and standardized trade rules, and created the largest free trade agreement in the world, encompassing about 30% of global GDP. The RCEP enhanced economic integration in the region and positioned China at the center of Asia-Pacific trade networks. Moreover, China also strengthened its economic ties with ASEAN countries through infrastructure projects and trade agreements, such as the China-Laos railway, which ultimately enhanced regional connectivity (Zhang, 2023).

China also enhanced its cultural diplomacy through the establishment of Confucius Institutes worldwide to promote Chinese culture and language, and expanded its international presence through its indigenous media outlets such as Xinhua and CGTN, offering news and perspectives from a Chinese viewpoint. This aimed to promote the development model of China and counter the Western narratives. Lastly, China countered the US influence by building a narrative through high-level diplomacy. This included hosting international forums such as the China International Import Expo and the BRI, which attracted global leaders and businesses. Moreover, Beijing also promoted the AIIB as an alternative to US -led economic frameworks, offering countries in need of infrastructure investment and development financing without the political conditions often associated with Western aid (Hartig, 2016).

2.4. Russia: Resurgence and Assertiveness

Russia under the Presidency of Vladimir Putin resurged as a major power that significantly challenged the US hegemony through a combination of strategic partnerships, military interventions, economic measures, and diplomatic maneuvers. This period manifested the efforts of Russia to assert its influence on the global stage and counter the US dominance, particularly in

important regions such as the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia. Starting from Russia's military intervention and strategic moves, Moscow's intervention of Crimea in 2014 marked a pivotal moment in its resurgence because annexation demonstrated its willingness to challenge the post-Cold War European order and secure control over the Eastern Mediterranean and Black Sea region. Russia's moves led to significant tensions with the EU and the US, resulting in sanctions against Russia and a deterioration of relations.

Moreover, Russia's military intervention in Syria in 2015 was aimed at supporting the Assad regime against extremist groups and opposition forces. This intervention reasserted Russia's influence in the Middle East and altered the dynamics of the Syrian conflict. Russia deployed advanced military assets, including aircraft, air defense systems (S-400), and naval vessels, to its bases in Tartus, Syria, establishing a strong military footprint. Similarly, Russia's active presence in Syria directly challenged the US regional policies and positioned Moscow as an important player in Middle Eastern geopolitics. For instance, the role of Russia in the Astana peace talks¹³, alongside Iran and Turkey, highlighted its influence in shaping the post-war political settlement in Syria (Gvosdev, 2016).

Russia's resurgence and assertiveness were also accentuated by strategic partnerships and alliances such as strengthening ties with China. Sino-Russia Bilateral Partnership deepened significantly characterized by joint military exercises, increased economic cooperation, and aligned diplomatic stances on global issues. China and Russia conducted joint naval exercises such as the Vostok-2018 and the Naval Cooperation-2019 to enhance coordinated military capabilities and strategic alignment. This bilateral partnership served as a counterbalance to the US influence.

¹³ The Astana Peace Talks aim to resolve the Syrian Civil War through diplomatic negotiations between Iran, Turkey, and Russia, promoting regional stability and cooperation since 2017. The result of the talks include establishment of de-escalation zones, ceasefire agreement, and provision of humanitarian aid.

The economic cooperation-related initiatives of both countries included infrastructure projects like the Power of Siberia pipeline¹⁴ and energy deals such as the \$400 billion gas agreement signed in 2014, which highlighted the growing economic interdependence between the two countries (Gabuev, 2020).

Russia also continues to maintain and expand its strategic partnerships with India, engaging in joint military exercises and supplying advanced military equipment. For instance, they have engaged in joint military exercises such as the Indra Navy drills and the Aviaindra air force exercises, demonstrating their military cooperation. Additionally, Russia has supplied advanced military equipment to India, including the S-400 Triumf air defense system, AK-203 assault rifles, and MiG-29K fighter jets. Furthermore, Russia and India have also collaborated on defense production, with the joint manufacture of BrahMos cruise missiles and plans to co-produce Kamov Ka-226T helicopters.

Moreover, despite historical differences, Russia also developed a pragmatic relationship with Turkey, marked by collaboration in Syria and cooperation on energy projects like the Turk-Stream pipeline. In this context, the sale of the S-400 air defense systems by Russia to Turkey, despite active opposition from NATO and the US, highlighted its ability to forge strategic bilateral partnerships that challenge US policies. Moreover, Russia also actively participated in multilateral frameworks like BRICS and the SCO, promoting alternative models of economic cooperation and global governance that reduce reliance on Western-dominated institutions (Basu, 2019).

Russia's assertiveness was also heightened by economic measures and energy diplomacy such as leveraging energy resources that included energy exports and pipeline diplomacy. In the

¹⁴ The Power of Siberia pipeline is a 3,000-mile gas pipeline from Russia to China, strengthening energy ties and increasing Russia's gas exports, with a 30-year supply deal worth \$400 billion.

framework of energy exports, Russia utilized its vast hydrocarbon resources¹⁵ as a tool of economic statecraft. By supplying natural oil and gas to Europe and other regions, Russia maintained significant leverage over energy-dependent countries such as Germany. For instance, the completion of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline¹⁶ in 2021, which connects Germany and Russia directly to Russia, exemplified the strategy of Russia to solidify its role as an important energy supplier to Europe, despite geopolitical opposition and the US sanctions. Projects like Nord Stream 2, despite opposition from the US, aimed to increase gas exports from Russia to Europe, enhancing its strategic influence and bypassing traditional transit countries (Mitrova & Boersma, 2018).

Russia faced various Western sanctions such as in response to its interventionist posture in the Ukraine and other regions to target important sectors of the Russian economy, including energy, finance, and defense. However, Russia implemented counter-sanctions, focusing on economic diversification and import substitution. These measures aimed to bolster domestic industries and mitigate the impact of Western sanctions. For instance, the focus of Russia on agricultural self-sufficiency and the development of its agricultural sector reduced its reliance on food imports from arch-rivals and turned it into a leading grain exporter. Moreover, Russia also sought to expand its trade relations with non-Western countries, increasing exports to the Middle East, Asia, and Latin America (Connolly, 2018).

Diplomatic Maneuvers and Soft Power also contributed to Russia's assertiveness in the 21st century. Diplomatic maneuvers included its permanent seat on the UN Security Council to influence international decisions, often vetoing resolutions that opposed its national interests or

¹⁵ Russia boasts vast hydrocarbon resources, with the world's largest natural gas reserves (49 trillion cubic meters), 8th-largest oil reserves (11 billion barrels), and significant coal deposits (173 billion tonnes).

¹⁶ The Nord Stream 2 pipeline is a 1,230-kilometer underwater gas pipeline from Russia to Germany, doubling Russia's gas export capacity to Europe, with a capacity of 55 billion cubic meters annually.

those of its allies, such as blocking the UN resolutions¹⁷ concerning the Syrian conflict and sanctions. Similarly, Russia advocated for a multipolar world order, challenging the US-led unipolar system and emphasizing the need for diverse centers of power. For instance, the involvement of Russia in the Astana peace process on Syria and the Normandy Format talks on Ukraine¹⁸ highlighted its role as an important diplomatic actor in resolving regional conflicts.

To enhance soft power and media influence, Russian state media such as Sputnik and Russia Today expanded its global reach for alternative viewpoints, promoting narratives that challenge Western media dominance and offering alternative perspectives on international events. Moreover, Russia also engaged in cultural diplomacy, promoting its culture, language, and education through initiatives like the Russkiy Mir Foundation¹⁹ and increased international scholarships for foreign students (Rawnsley, 2015).

2.4.1. Russia's Economic Growth and Expansion of Influence

Russia pursued an inclusive strategic agenda aimed at enhancing its economic growth and expanding its influence, challenging the US hegemony through a variety of initiatives. This period was marked by efforts to increase its global trade relationships, diversify the Russian economy, and leverage its energy resources to assert its geopolitical influence. Starting from economic diplomacy and resource leverage, Russia utilized its vast reserves of natural gas and oil as an important instrument of economic and geopolitical influence.

¹⁷ Russia has repeatedly blocked UN resolutions on Syria, vetoing 16 resolutions since 2011, including those on ceasefire, humanitarian aid, and chemical weapons investigations, and opposing sanctions on the Syrian regime.

¹⁸ The Normandy Format talks involve Ukraine, Russia, Germany, and France, aiming to resolve the Ukraine conflict through diplomatic negotiations, focusing on ceasefire, troop withdrawal, and political settlement in eastern Ukraine.

¹⁹ The Russkiy Mir Foundation promotes Russian culture, language, and influence globally, supporting Russian-speaking communities, education, and arts, with a mission to strengthen Russia's soft power and cultural diplomacy worldwide.

As one of the largest energy exporters in the world, Russia supplied a significant portion of energy needs to Europe via the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project, which ultimately gave it substantial leverage in international affairs. As stated above, Russia also invested in major pipeline projects to expand and secure its energy markets. Projects like Nord Stream 2 aimed to provide direct energy routes to important European markets, circumventing traditional transit countries and increasing Russian influence in the region (Connolly, 2018).

Russia faced several sanctions from the West subsequently it diversified its energy exports by pivoting towards Asia. This diversification included signing long-term energy deals with India, China, India, and other Asian countries. For instance, in 2014, China and Russia signed a \$400 billion gas deal, which facilitated the construction of the Power of Siberia pipeline and ensured a steady flow of Russian gas to China for 30 years. Moreover, Russia also expanded its liquefied natural gas (LNG) capacity, allowing it to diversify its customer base by further tapping into global LNG markets. In this framework, the Yamal LNG project,²⁰ operational since 2017, positioned Russia as a significant player in the global LNG market, with exports reaching Asia, Europe, and other regions (Movchan, 2017).

Russia's economic growth was further accentuated by strengthening ties with China as both countries expanded their bilateral trade, aiming to reach \$200 billion in trade volume by 2024. This bilateral relationship was characterized by cooperation in energy, infrastructure, and technology. Moscow also collaborated on infrastructure projects that facilitated trade and economic integration, such as transport corridors and cross-border bridges. For instance, The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which includes Armenia, Russia, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and

²⁰ The Yamal LNG project is a liquefied natural gas (LNG) production facility in Russia's Arctic Yamal Peninsula, operated by Novatek, with total capacity of 17.4 million tonnes per annum, exporting to global markets.

Kazakhstan, sought to facilitate trade and promote economic integration within the region. China's BRI projects also intersected with EAEU infrastructure plans, fostering cooperation. Similarly, the opening of the first highway bridge between China and Russia over the Amur River in 2019 enhanced trade and connectivity between the two countries (Kobzeva, 2019).

Russia also expanded its influence in Latin America and Africa through investment and trade agreements, investment, and strategic partnerships. The trade agreements included joint ventures in energy, mining, and infrastructure sectors. For instance, the first Russia-Africa Summit held in Sochi in 2019 was attended by leaders from 43 African countries, resulting in numerous investment agreements and trade deals aimed at bolstering economic ties. Similarly, Russia offered development aid and debt relief to several African countries such as Latin American engagement, strengthening its bilateral ties and expanding its influence on the continent.

Russia also showed economic resilience and responded to Western sanctions through important substitutions and agricultural self-sufficiency. In response to various Western sanctions, Russia implemented counter-sanctions that banned the import of certain agricultural products²¹ from the US and the EU. This spurred the development of the agricultural sector of Russia, aiming for self-sufficiency. For instance, Russia became a leading grain exporter, with significant increases in wheat production. Russia was one of the top wheat exporters globally by 2022, enhancing its export revenues and food security. Moreover, the import substitution efforts led to increased production in sectors such as electronics, automotive, and defense, fostering economic resilience (Nitoiu & Pasatoiu, 2023).

²¹ Russia banned imports of US and EU agricultural products, including meat, fish, dairy, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and wine, in retaliation for sanctions over Ukraine and Crimea.

Russia also took strategic financial measures such as National Wealth Funds to manage the impact of Western-backed sanctions and support its economy. The National Wealth Fund was utilized to stabilize the economy during downturns and invest in important infrastructure projects. Moreover, Russia also adopted Ruble internationalization and currency swap agreements with China and India, allowing trade transactions to be conducted in yuan and rubles, thereby reducing exposure to the US dollar sanctions and fluctuations. Similarly, Russia also engaged in multilateral institutions such as BRICS, SCO, and the EAEU, promoting economic and strategic cooperation and integration among member states and providing an alternative to Western-dominated institutions (Gabuev, 2018).

Lastly, Russia also strengthened bilateral relationships through strategic partnerships such as Middle Eastern engagement. In the framework of strategic partnerships, Russia strengthened its bilateral relationships with important countries, often through military cooperation, energy deals, and infrastructure projects. These partnerships were considered crucial in countering the US influence in various regions. For instance, the support of Russia for the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2015 and its continued engagement with Iran despite the US withdrawal from the deal in 2018 highlighted its commitment to a multipolar world order. Moreover, Russia's active involvement in Middle Eastern politics, particularly through its military presence in Syria and strategic partnerships with countries like Turkey and Iran, provided leverage against the US policies and enhanced its geopolitical influence in the region (Gabuev, 2020).

2.4.2. Russia's Military Modernization and Assertiveness in Its Backyard

Russia also exhibited assertiveness in its geopolitical sphere by undertaking significant military modernization, challenging the US hegemony. This period saw Russia engaging in strategic interventions, enhancing its military capabilities, and asserting its regional influence

critical to its geopolitical interests and national security. Starting from military modernization, Russia introduced reformation and re-equipment of its armed forces by significantly focusing on modernizing its military hardware, increasing its defense budget, and improving the overall readiness of its armed forces (Kopp, 2012).

For instance, the development and deployment of the Sukhoi Su-57 fifth-generation stealth fighter jet enhanced the air superiority capabilities of Russia, challenging the US and its allies' dominance in air combat technology. Moreover, Russia also introduced a range of advanced weaponry such as the Armata T-14 main battle tank to represent a significant upgrade in armored capabilities of Russia, featuring mobility, advanced armor protection, and firepower (Renz, 2018).

Russia also prioritized the modernization of its strategic nuclear forces, developing and deploying new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) such as the development of the RS-28 Sarmat (SS-30 Satan 2) ICBM, submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and Borei-class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs), and strategic bombers to evade missile defenses and strengthened strategic deterrent of Moscow. Similarly, Russia's military doctrine emphasized the significance of nuclear weapons in its national defense strategy, maintaining a credible deterrent against arch-rivals, including the US (Podvig, 2017).

Russia's military modernization was also accentuated by assertiveness in the geopolitical sphere such as the annexation of Crimea in 2014. The annexation as a strategic move marked a significant assertion of Russian power. This move further strengthened Moscow's strategic foothold in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea through the enhancement of the Black Sea Fleet's capabilities and demonstrated its ability to use military force to protect its interests. Moreover, the annexation had severe regional impacts such as increased tensions with NATO and the US, resulting in economic sanctions from the West and a military buildup in Eastern Europe.

However, it also solidified the control of Russia over a critical region and highlighted its military capabilities (Galeotti, 2016).

Supporting the separatist forces in Eastern Ukraine, including military training, equipment, and personnel also enhanced the inclusive military capabilities of Russia. This active support of separatists intensified the conflict and challenged the EU and the US efforts to stabilize the region. For instance, the involvement of Russia in the Donbas conflict,²² including the provision of advanced weaponry to separatist forces, highlighted its ability to challenge Western-backed governments and influence regional conflicts. Moreover, the use of hybrid warfare tactics by Russian actors targeted Ukrainian infrastructure and government institutions through disinformation campaigns, cyber operations, and irregular forces, complicated Western counter-responses and demonstrated a new dimension of modern warfare.

Russian intervention in Syria in 2015 and its active military presence was considered a strategic move to support President Assad's regime, to counter the US influence, and to secure its national interests in the Middle East. This intervention involved ground operations, airstrikes, and naval deployments. In this framework, Russia established and expanded military bases in Syria, including the airbase at Hmeimim and the naval facility at Tartus, ensuring a long-term military presence in the region. Moreover, Russia also strengthened its ties and regional allies through bilateral agreements, and joint military exercises such as Zapad Exercises with Belarus to defend its interests in Eastern Europe. Russia also played an active role in CSTO Drills such as the "Interaction" series, demonstrating the interoperability of member states' forces and collective defense capabilities (Trenin, 2016).

²² Russia's involvement in the Donbas conflict includes providing military support, weapons, and mercenaries to separatist forces, as well as diplomatic and economic backing, fueling ongoing violence in eastern Ukraine.

Russia's engagement with non-Western powers such as China and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) also facilitated its assertiveness on the world stage. For instance, Sino-Russia military cooperation increased significantly, involving arms sales, strategic consultations, and joint military exercises e.g. Vostok exercises to deepen military cooperation and conduct large-scale joint operations. This partnership served to counterbalance the US policy of pivot of Asia in the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, Russia also expanded its strategic and military partnerships via the sale of advanced weaponry including the S-400 air defense system, to countries like India and Turkey demonstrating its role as a major strategic partner and arms supplier in the region (Podvig, 2020).

Russia remained actively involved in offensive cyber and information warfare by developing and deploying cyber capabilities and conducting operations that targeted government networks, critical infrastructure, and electoral systems in various countries. These operations were aimed at projecting power and undermining adversaries in the cyber domain such as Russia's cyber operations, including the dissemination of disinformation and the hacking of political party emails, which were alleged to have interfered in the 2016 US presidential election and other electoral processes in Western countries.

Similarly, Russia's defensive measures related to cyber warfare included protecting its critical infrastructure and enhancing its cyber defenses, and military networks from potential cyberattacks. For instance, Cyberattacks on Ukrainian infrastructure, including the 2015 attack on the power grid, demonstrated the ability of Russia to conduct disruptive cyber operations (Connell & Vogler, 2017).

2.4.3. Diplomatic Engagement

Since the start of the 21st century, the diplomatic engagement of Russia has been characterized by efforts to challenge the US hegemony and establish itself as a major global power. Through active regional influence, strategic alliances, and inclusive participation in international organizations, Russia sought to counterbalance the US influence and reshape the global order. Russia strengthened its bilateral relationship with China and Middle Eastern countries through strategic partnerships, and economic and military cooperation such as the Sino-Russian bilateral relationship evolved into a comprehensive strategic partnership. High-level meetings between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin highlighted the deepening ties between the two nations. For instance, the power of the Siberia pipeline was initiated in 2019 and the Vostok military exercise in 2018 highlighted economic interdependence and military cooperation between both countries (Stent, 2020).

Similarly, Russia's active military presence in Middle Eastern politics such as its intervention in Syria (2015) was also accompanied by diplomatic efforts to support the Assad regime via the Astana peace process to de-escalate conflict in Syria, countering the Western and the US influence in the region. Moreover, Russia also maintained a strategic partnership with Iran, collaborating on military and nuclear issues such as Moscow continued its support of the JCPOA. This bilateral relationship challenged the US efforts to isolate Iran economically and diplomatically.

Russia continued its diplomatic engagement by engaging in regional organizations such as the EAEU, to promote economic integration among former Soviet states and countering the US and the EU in the region. The EAEU also expanded towards Kyrgyzstan and Armenia and signed trade agreements with countries such as Vietnam and Laos to further strengthen the leadership of

Russia in regional economic integration. Moreover, Russia also strengthened its military alliances through the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)²³ of the former soviet states.

To enhance defense cooperation and collective security mechanisms through regular military exercises such as the Indestructible Brotherhood²⁴ to improve readiness and interoperability to respond to regional security threats. The involvement of CSTO in addressing regional crises, such as the 2022 unrest in Kazakhstan, highlighted the influence of Russia in maintaining stability in its near abroad (Lo, 2021).

To counter Western influence, Russia used energy resources as a tool of diplomacy, leveraging oil and gas supplies to influence European countries and challenge the US energy policies. For instance, the controversial Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project was an important component of the energy diplomacy of Russia, aiming to reduce Ukraine's role as a transit country and increase gas supplies to Germany. Similarly, Russia also cultivated strong political alliances with Eurosceptic and populist political movements in Europe, likewise seeking to undermine the US influence and the EU cohesion. In this framework, the engagement of Russia with European populist leaders, such as Matteo Salvini in Italy and Marine Le Pen in France, aimed to foster political allies who could influence the EU policies in favor of Russian interests (Gvosdev, 2020).

Russia used its influence in international organizations such as its permanent seat on the UN Security Council to veto resolutions that threatened its national interests and those of its allies, thereby challenging the US-led initiatives. For example, Russia's repeatedly use of its veto power

²³ The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is a Russia-led military alliance of 6 former Soviet states (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan) aimed at collective defense and regional security.

²⁴ Russia's "Indestructible Brotherhood" military exercises involve joint drills with allies, including CSTO member states, to enhance combat readiness, interoperability, and cooperation, showcasing Russia's military influence and regional security presence.

in the UN Security Council to block resolutions on Syria and Ukraine. Moreover, Russia also played an active role in the BRICS and the SCO, to promote economic and security cooperation, multi-polarity, and alternative frameworks for international cooperation, and offered a counterbalance to Western-dominated institutions.

Russia's diplomatic engagement in various conflicts such as its annexation of Crimea in 2014 was accompanied by diplomatic efforts to justify the move, citing the will of the local population and historical ties. The annexation challenged the EU and the US policies aimed at containing Russian influence. Consequently, Russia organized a controversial Crimea referendum, claiming overwhelming support for annexation, despite non-recognition by the US and EU and international condemnation. Moreover, Russia also participated in the Normandy Format talks with Germany, Ukraine, and France, maintaining its strategic interests while seeking a diplomatic resolution to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. In this context, Russia's involvement in the Minsk agreements aimed to resolve the conflict in Eastern Ukraine on terms favorable to Russian interests, highlighting its role as a key negotiator (Gabuev, 2018).

Not only to showcase an assertive posture in its backyard, Russia also engaged in diplomatic efforts to mediate the conflict in Libya, challenging Western influence and positioning itself as an important player in the peace process. For instance, its involvement in Libyan peace talks in Moscow and Berlin aimed to broker a political settlement and ceasefire in Libya, highlighting its diplomatic influence. Instead of relying on diplomatic support, Russia also provided support to the Libyan National Army (LNA) led by General Khalifa Haftar, countering the European and US -backed forces in the region. For instance, the presence of Russian private military contractors in Libya highlighted the dual approach of Moscow in combining military engagement with diplomatic engagement (Kaczmariski, 2020).

2.4.4. Sino-Russia Strategic Partnership

From 2013 to 2022, the Sino-Russia strategic partnership evolved into a significant force challenging the US hegemony worldwide. This collaboration was marked by military, economic, and diplomatic cooperation, aimed at counterbalancing the influence of the US and promoting a multipolar world order. Started with economic cooperation that included energy collaboration such as oil and gas agreements and infrastructure development. Russia's Gazprom and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) signed several long-term energy agreements such as the Power of Siberia Pipeline worth \$400 billion in 2014, ensuring a stable supply of Russian oil and gas to China.

These bilateral agreements reduced the dependency of China on other regions and subsequently provided Russia with a reliable market for its energy exports. Moreover, Sino-Russia joint projects such as cross-border infrastructure and pipeline schemes also facilitated the energy trade between the two countries. For instance, the Russian oil company, Rosneft, entered into agreements with several Chinese firms to supply millions of tons of crude oil annually (Gabuev, 2018).

The bilateral trade between both countries grew significantly, reaching new highs each year. By 2022, bilateral trade volume between Russia and China surpassed \$140 billion, showcasing a steady increase from previous years. This growth in bilateral trade was driven by complementary economies, with China providing manufactured goods and Russia supplying natural resources. Similarly, China also invested in various sectors of the Russian economy, including agriculture, mining, and technology e.g. Russian mining projects in Siberia. Conversely, the investments of Russia in China focused on infrastructure and energy projects such as the BRI project (Kim, 2022).

Sino-Russia military cooperation included joint military exercises such as bilateral and multilateral drills such as Vostok 2018 held in the Far East of Russia to demonstrate their strategic alignment and enhance interoperability. These drills included naval, land, and air force operations. Similarly, both countries also coordinated their defense strategies and policies, sharing intelligence reports and conducting joint research and development of military technologies. In this context, regular naval drills, such as the Joint Sea series, aimed to counter the US naval presence in important regions and demonstrated combined maritime capabilities (Kashin, 2018).

Sino-Russia military cooperation also included arms sales and technology transfers such as defense contracts and technology sharing. In the framework of the defense contract, China purchased advanced Russian military equipment such as S-400 Missile Systems and Sukhoi Su-35 Fighters to boost its aerial defense capabilities. This cooperation helped modernize the Chinese military and strengthen its capabilities. Moreover, both China and Russia engaged in joint development projects and technology transfers such as hypersonic missile technology, enhancing their defense industries (Weitz, 2020).

Sino-Russia also challenged the US hegemony through diplomatic coordination that included shared geopolitical goals and enhancing regional influence. The shared geopolitical goals included opposition to the US policies of intervention. Both countries also coordinated their stances on various international issues, including North Korea, Syria, and Iran. For instance, China and Russia vetoed the UNSC resolutions related to Venezuela and Syria. Sino-Russia advocated for a multipolar world order through the promotion of multilateralism and also strengthened its position in several international organizations such as the UN, SCO, and the BRICS. Consequently, regular BRICS summits provided a platform for Russia and China to promote political dialogue and economic cooperation among emerging economies (Lo, 2021).

Both Russia and China also emphasized integrating their regional initiatives through security cooperation and Eurasian integration. In this framework, the initiatives included the BRI to enhance trade routes and infrastructure, the EAEU to create synergies between the two projects, and the SCO to enhance economic development through, connectivity, and ensure regional stability and security, countering threats such as separatism and terrorism. Similarly, Sino-Russia cooperation also enhanced their cybersecurity cooperation through cybersecurity agreements, focusing on protecting their critical infrastructure from cyber threats and developing offensive cyber capabilities, and both countries coordinated disinformation campaigns that targeted Western narratives, aiming to sow discord and undermine democratic processes (Polyakova & Meserole, 2020).

To challenge the US hegemony, Russia and China also promoted the concept of internet sovereignty, resisting US-led initiatives for an open and global internet and advocating for greater control over their domestic internet infrastructure. For instance, Moscow supported Beijing's World Internet Conference,²⁵ which promoted greater state control over the Internet and the idea of Internet sovereignty within their respective countries. Similarly, both countries also pushed for changes in international internet governance, seeking to reduce the influence of Western-dominated organizations.

To maintain a strategic counterbalance, Sino-Russia cooperation also countered the US influence in the Asia-Pacific region. In this framework, Russia supported the territorial claims and assertiveness of China in the South China Sea (SCS) and participated in joint naval exercises in the SCS, demonstrating solidarity against the US influence. Moreover, both countries coordinated

²⁵ Beijing's World Internet Conference (WIC) is a annual gathering of global tech leaders, policymakers, and experts to discuss internet governance, innovation, and cybersecurity, promoting China's vision for a digital future.

their policies on North Korea through joint proposals for a “double freeze” (the US halting military exercises and North Korea halting its missile tests) showcasing their collaborative approach to regional security.

Lastly, the Sino-Russia strategic alliance also supported authoritarian regimes that opposed US policies, providing military assistance, economic aid, and diplomatic backing to countries like Syria, Venezuela, and Iran. For instance, the military intervention of Russia in Syria, backed diplomatically by China, helped stabilize President Assad’s regime and counter the US efforts to support opposition forces. Moreover, both countries worked to mitigate the impact of the US - imposed economic sanctions on their allies by increasing financial and diplomatic support to countries like the Venezuelan government, challenging the US attempts to destabilize and isolate the Maduro regime (Charap, Drennan, & Noel, 2017).

2.6. Impact of Strategic Competition on Regional Dynamics and Global Order

The Great Power competition among China, the US, and Russia from 2013 to 2022 has had a profound impact on the regional dynamics and the global order, leading to the emergence of new power centers and significant shifts in power dynamics. One of the most important impacts has been the decline of uni-polarity, marked by the diminishing dominance of the US as the sole superpower. This has been accompanied by the rise of multi-polarity, with other countries such as Russia and China asserting themselves on the global stage. The emergence of new power centers has led to a more fragmented and complex international system, characterized by competing alliances and interests.

These dynamics have had a profound impact on multilateralism and international organizations. The challenges to international institutions have been evident, with countries such

as China, the US, and Russia questioning the legitimacy and efficacy of existing institutions. This has led to an erosion of multilateralism, as countries increasingly pursue their interests through bilateral or regional arrangements.

Regionally, the Great Power competition has had varied implications. In terms of security dynamics, the competition has led to increased tensions and militarization in regions such as Eastern Europe and Asia-Pacific. Economically, the competition has had mixed effects, with some regions benefiting from increased trade and investment, while others have experienced economic disruptions (Chatzky & McBride, 2020).

For developing states, the competition has presented both opportunities and challenges. The smaller states have faced security challenges as they navigate between competing great powers. However, they also had opportunities to benefit from diplomatic maneuvering and economic partnerships to advance their interests (Allison, 2014).

2.6.1. Shifting Power Dynamics and the Decline of Uni-polarity

The strategic competition among great powers primarily China, the United States, and Russia profoundly influenced regional dynamics and the global order from 2013 to 2022. This period witnessed the assertive rise of China, marked by its BRI, aggressive territorial claims in the South China Sea courtesy of the nine-dashed line, and efforts to enhance its strategic influence in global institutions.

The economic and military expansion of China challenged the US dominance, leading to a trade war and heightened tensions that disrupted global markets. Concurrently, Russia, under President Vladimir Putin, pursued a revisionist agenda aimed at countering NATO's eastward expansion and reasserting its strategic influence over former Soviet states. The annexation of

Georgia, Crimea, and Ukraine in 2008, 2014, and 2022 respectively, intervention in Syria, and alleged interference in Western elections highlighted the strategic ambitions of Russia and its role as a destabilizing actor in the Middle East and Europe (Sanger, 2018).

The United States, aiming to counter these arch-rivals, adopted a more unilateral approach under President Trump's administration, such as withdrawing from international agreements like the Iran nuclear deal and Paris Climate Accord, while emphasizing an "America First" policy. President Donald Trump addressed the nation in his American First speech stating: "It's time to shake the rust off America's foreign policy. It's time to invite new voices and new visions into the fold, something we have to do. The direction I will outline today will also return us to a timeless principle. My foreign policy will always put the interests of the American people and American security above all else. It has to be first. Has to be" (MacDonald, 2018, p. 413)

In President Trump's "America First" speech, he employs a discourse that revolves around the notion of revitalizing America's foreign policy, emphasizing the need for new perspectives and a return to fundamental principles. He asserts that his foreign policy will prioritize American interests and security above all else, employing a nationalist and protectionist tone. The use of phrases like "shake the rust off" and "timeless principle" creates a sense of nostalgia and urgency, implying that America's foreign policy has become stagnant and needs a radical overhaul. By stating that American interests must come "first."

Trump reinforces a binary opposition between America and the rest of the world, positioning the country as a singular entity with unique needs and concerns. This discourse legitimizes Trump's subsequent policies, framing them as necessary to restore America's greatness and ensure its security. Furthermore, the emphasis on "new voices and new visions" can be seen as a populist appeal, suggesting that Trump's administration will bring fresh perspectives to the

table, untainted by the perceived failures of previous administrations. Overall, Trump's speech sets the stage for a foreign policy approach that is isolationist, unilateral, and unapologetically America-centric (Restad, 2020).

President Trump's "America First" approach strained traditional US alliances and contributed to a more fragmented international order. The Biden administration sought to strengthen alliances and restore multilateralism, particularly in response to the growing influence of China in the Indo-Pacific region. The various initiatives such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) were important elements of this strategy and AUKUS (a trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK, and the US) (Panda, 2021).

Moreover, the strategic competition also had significant impacts on regional dynamics. In Asia, the US and its allies worked to counterbalance the rising influence of China through economic partnerships and military presence. In Europe, the renewed focus of NATO on deterring Russian aggression led to military readiness and increased defense spending among member states. The Middle East also witnessed a complex relationship of power, with the US and Russia supporting opposing factions in conflicts such as the Syrian and Yemen civil war, while China sought to expand its economic footprint through energy deals and investments (Biscop, 2019).

This era of Great Power competition from 2013 to 2022 was thus been characterized by a struggle for dominance and influence across multiple domains economic, military, economic, ideological, and technological resulting in an uncertain and more multipolar global order. The actions and interactions of these major powers not only shaped their bilateral relations but also had far-reaching implications for economic development, global stability, and the international rules-based order (Ulrichsen, 2020).

2.6.1.1. Rise of Multilateralism

From 2013 to 2022, the international political system experienced a notable shift towards a decline in unilateralism, reshaping economic dynamics and global politics. This period was marked by the resurgence of Russia, the rise of emerging powers such as China and India, and the increasing assertiveness of regional powers, all of which contributed to a more diversified global power structure. The unipolar moment, characterized by the US' unparalleled dominance following the Cold War, gave way to a more competitive and complex international environment.

The rapid economic growth of China and expanding geopolitical ambitions were central to the rise of multilateralism. Through initiatives like the BRI, China sought to extend its strategic influence across Africa, Asia, and Europe, forging strategic partnerships and investing in infrastructure projects. The assertive policies of China in the SCS and its growing military capabilities further challenged the US hegemony and signaled a shift towards a more balanced distribution of power (BoP). Additionally, the active participation of China in global institutions and its efforts to create new ones, such as the AIIB, highlighted its role as an important player in the emerging multipolar order (Chatzky & McBride, 2020).

The assertiveness of Russia also contributed significantly to the decline of unilateralism. The annexation of Georgia and Crimea in 2008 and 2014 respectively and military interventions in Ukraine and Syria demonstrated the willingness of Russia to challenge Western influence and assert its national interests aggressively. These strategic moves prompted a recalibration of NATO's strategy and a renewed focus on collective defense among its members. The strategic partnerships of Russia with countries like Iran and China further illustrated the multilateral trend, as these alliances sought to counterbalance European and US influence in various regions.

The decline of unilateralism was also evident in the shifting policies of the US under President Trump's administration, there was a pronounced shift towards de-globalization and a retreat from multilateral agreements, such as the Iran nuclear deal and the Paris Climate Accord. This approach led to strained bilateral relationships with traditional allies and diminished the US' role as a world leader. However, President Biden's administration attempted to reverse this trend by reaffirming commitments to alliances and re-engaging with international institutions, though the legacy of unilateralism continued to impact perceptions of US reliability (Regilme, 2023).

In Europe, the rise of multilateralism was reflected in the efforts of the European Union to assert greater strategic autonomy. The EU sought to reduce dependence on US security guarantees by strengthening its defense capabilities and reducing dependence on US security guarantees, particularly in response to uncertainties about US commitments over perceived threats from Russia. The emphasis of the EU on strategic autonomy was also driven by economic factors, as it navigated trade tensions with both China and the US.

The other regions such as Asia and the Middle East experienced similar dynamics, with regional powers like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and India pursuing more independent foreign policies. These countries increasingly hedged and balanced their relations with major powers to maximize their strategic advantages. For instance, the strategic partnerships of India with both the US and Russia exemplified its approach to navigating the multipolar landscape (Allison, 2014).

To summarize, the period marked a clear shift towards a multipolar world, characterized by a decline in the dominance of any single country and the rise of new power centers. This transition brought about greater competition and complexity in international relations, necessitating new approaches to alliance-building, diplomacy, and global governance. The rise of

multilateralism and the decline of unilateralism thus reshaped the global order, reflecting a more interdependent and interconnected world where power is more evenly distributed.

2.6.1.2. Erosion of Unilateralism

The erosion of multilateralism became a defining feature of the changing international political system, exacerbated by intensifying Great Power competition from 2013 to 2022. This period saw significant strains on international cooperation, with major powers increasingly prioritizing bilateral deals and unilateral actions over collective solutions. The growing rivalry between China, the US, and Russia played a pivotal role in undermining multilateral institutions and frameworks, leading to a fragmented global order.

The US, traditionally a champion of multilateralism, adopted a more unilateral and de-globalized stance under President Trump's administration. The "America First" policy led to the withdrawal from several important international organizations and agreements, including the Iran nuclear deal (JCPOA) and the Paris Climate Accord, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). This retreat from multilateral commitments weakened the effectiveness and credibility of global institutions and created severe vacuums that other powers, particularly China and Russia, sought to fill. The US approach to trade, characterized by trade wars and tariffs, further disrupted established multilateral trade institutions and norms, such as the WTO (Xiong, 2024).

The rise of China as a global power also contributed to the erosion of multilateralism, albeit in different ways. While Beijing actively participated in and benefited from existing multilateral institutions, it simultaneously sought to create parallel structures through the AIIB and the BRI that reflected its national interests and priorities. The assertive actions of China in the SCS and its disregard for international rulings, such as the 2016 decision of the Permanent Court of Arbitration

on maritime disputes, further highlighted the tensions between its rise and the principles of multilateralism.

The actions of Russia under President Vladimir Putin also strained multilateralism. The annexation of Georgia and Crimea in 2008 and 2014 respectively and the subsequent conflict in eastern Ukraine violated international treaties and norms, leading to significant geopolitical tensions in the region and across the globe. The active involvement of Russia in Syria, support for separatist movements in various countries, and interference in Western democratic processes demonstrated a clear challenge to the multilateral order. These actions prompted the imposition of various sanctions and countermeasures by the US backed by its allies, further polarizing international relations.

The European Union (EU), as an important advocate for multilateralism, faced its own set of challenges during this period. Brexit, the decision of the UK to leave the EU, was a significant blow to European integration and also highlighted the fragility of multilateral commitments even within well-established frameworks. Additionally, the EU also struggled with internal divisions over issues such as economic policy, migration, and relations with external powers like China and Russia. These external and internal pressures weakened the ability of the EU to act as a cohesive force for multilateralism on the global stage (Mendes, 2023).

In response to these changing dynamics, many countries and regions adopted more pragmatic and flexible approaches to international relations. Bilateral and regional agreements also gained prominence as states sought to navigate the complex landscape of Great Power competition. This strategic shift often resulted in a patchwork of overlapping and sometimes conflicting partnerships and alliances, which further complicated the prospects for effective multilateral cooperation.

The COVID-19 pandemic, which began in 2019, highlighted the critical need for inclusive multilateral responses to global challenges but also underlined the shortcomings and deficiencies of the existing international system. The initial responses to the pandemic were largely nationalistic, with countries prioritizing their national interests to protect their health infrastructure over collective action. The competition for medical supplies, vaccine nationalism, and uneven economic recovery efforts exemplified the limitations of multilateral cooperation in the face of a global crisis (Walt, 2019).

Hence, the period from 2013 to 2022 marked a significant erosion of multilateralism, driven by the shifting priorities of important global actors and the strategic competition among great powers. This trend has led to a more uncertain and fragmented international order, where the principles of cooperation and collective action are increasingly challenged by unilateralism and bilateralism. The future of multilateralism will likely depend on the ability of the international community to reinvigorate the institutions and norms that underpin global governance and reconcile these competing dynamics.

2.6.1.3. Challenges and Opportunities for Developing States

The developing states faced a complex landscape shaped by intensifying Great Power competition, presenting both opportunities and challenges from 2013 to 2022. As the global order shifted towards multi-polarity, with China, the US, and Russia vying for influence, developing states had to navigate a more competitive and turbulent international environment. This period also highlighted the vulnerabilities of developing states however provided them with strategic opportunities to enhance their strategic influence and overall resilience in the international political system.

The developing states faced several challenges such as geopolitical rivalries, economic vulnerabilities, security dilemmas, and diplomatic marginalization. Starting from geopolitical pressures, developing states found themselves caught in the crossfire of Great Power rivalries. For instance, countries in the South China Sea region and Eastern Europe experienced direct geopolitical pressures as China and Russia pursued aggressive strategies. These pressures often forced developing states to make difficult choices regarding alignments and alliances, risking retaliation and alienation from one or more great powers (Mearsheimer, 2014).

Similarly, in the economic vulnerabilities, the economic sanctions and trade wars imposed by great powers disrupted global markets and supply chains, disproportionately affecting developing states. Countries heavily reliant on international trade, such as those in the Caribbean and Southeast Asia, faced economic instability due to investment flows, fluctuating tariffs, and access to critical markets. Moreover, the developing states often lacked the military capacity to defend themselves independently and relied on security guarantees from major powers. The uncertainty of US commitments under the "America First" policy and the aggressive postures of Russia and China heightened security anxieties. This was particularly evident among US allies in the Asia-Pacific and the eastern flank of NATO (Rolland, 2019).

In a highly polarized global environment, developing states risked being sidelined in international decision-making processes. The preference for bilateral agreements by major powers and the erosion of multilateralism reduced the influence of developing states within traditional multilateral forums like the UN and the WTO. However, amidst the Great Power competition, there were several opportunities for developing states such as strategic balancing, economic diversification, multilateral diplomacy, innovation and diplomacy, and soft power and niche diplomacy. The following section will explain the opportunities in detail.

The Great Power competition created several opportunities for developing states to engage in strategic balancing. By maintaining non-aligned and flexible foreign policies, developing states could leverage their strategic positions to gain security and financial benefits from multiple powers. Countries like Finland and Singapore adeptly navigated this balancing act to enhance their strategic autonomy. Moreover, the developing states increasingly sought to diversify their economies to reduce dependency on any single great power. The initiatives to attract diverse foreign investments, expand trade partnerships, and develop niche sectors like finance and technology-enabled small states to mitigate the economic risks associated with Great Power competition (Ahlbrandt, 2019).

Despite the erosion of multilateralism from the international political system after the end of the Cold War, small states continued to advocate for and participate in multilateral institutions to amplify their voices. Groupings such as the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS) allowed small states to collectively address issues like sustainable development and climate change, often with more impact than acting individually.

Moreover, the rapid technological advancement provided developing states with opportunities to punch above their weight. By investing in innovation, education, research and development, and digital infrastructure, developing states could enhance their economic resilience and competitiveness. The success of Estonia in cybersecurity and digital governance is a prime example of how small states can leverage technology to enhance their global standing. Ancillary, developing states often excelled in niche diplomacy, using soft power to influence international policies and norms. Countries like Costa Rica and Norway utilized their reputations for human rights, peacebuilding, and environmental sustainability to play influential roles in global diplomacy, despite their limited hard power (Acharya, 2018).

To summarize, the developing states faced significant challenges amidst Great Power competition, including economic vulnerabilities, geopolitical pressures, and security dilemmas from 2013 to 2022. However, they also found opportunities through economic diversification, strategic balancing, technological innovation, multilateral diplomacy, and niche diplomacy. By seizing opportunities and navigating these challenges, developing states could enhance their influence and resilience in a multipolar world, demonstrating that even in a competitive international environment, small states can play pivotal roles in shaping global affairs.

CHAPTER 3

CHALLENGES TO PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY AMIDST GREAT POWER COMPETITION (2013 – 2022)

3.1. Introduction

From 2013 to 2022, Pakistan navigated a complex and shifting global landscape manifested by intensifying competition among major powers, particularly the US, Russia, and China. This period was characterized by significant strategic maneuvering and geopolitical realignments, which posed both challenges and opportunities for the foreign policy of Pakistan. The important challenges stemmed from balancing relations with these great powers while addressing economic dependencies, internal and regional security concerns, and evolving international norms.

Historically, Pakistan has been an important strategic ally of the United States, particularly in the context of the War on Terror. However, post-2013, bilateral relations became strained due to divergent strategic interests, particularly concerning counterterrorism and the incessant war in Afghanistan (Markey, 2013). The US's growing alignment of the US with India under its Indo-Pacific strategy further complicated the position of Pakistan, addressing security and economic dependencies while maintaining a working relationship leading to a need for careful diplomatic navigation (Fair, 2014).

Similarly, the CPEC became a cornerstone of the foreign policy of Pakistan. While CPEC promised substantial infrastructure development and economic benefits, it also led to increased dependency on China, raising concerns about economic leverage and sovereignty. Balancing this burgeoning partnership with China against US interests and regional dynamics was a significant diplomatic challenge. Moreover, Pakistan sought to diversify its foreign relations by improving

bilateral ties with Russia, particularly in the energy and defense sectors. However, hedging required careful diplomacy from Pakistan to avoid alienating the US and navigating the complexities of the contentious relationship between Russia with Western powers (Small, 2015).

In the context of regional security concerns, the perennial tension with India, exacerbated by issues such as cross-border terrorism and the Kashmir conflict, remained a significant challenge. The revocation of Article 370 and 35A by India in 2019 further strained bilateral relations, requiring Pakistan to intensify its diplomatic efforts to garner international support against the aggressive actions of India in Kashmir. Moreover, the evolving situation in Afghanistan, especially following the US withdrawal and the return of the Taliban to power in 2021, posed major diplomatic and security challenges. Pakistan had to navigate its role in the Afghan peace process, manage the influx of refugees, and address concerns about international recognition of the Taliban regime and stability in Afghanistan (Ganguly, 2016).

Concerning domestic challenges, the economic vulnerabilities of Pakistan, including a high debt burden and reliance on external financial assistance, limited Islamabad's foreign policy maneuverability. The persistent need for IMF bailout packages and financial aid from friendly countries such as China, Saudi Arabia, and U.A.E, often influenced the foreign policy decisions of Pakistan, constraining its strategic autonomy. Likewise, the trade imbalance with China, despite the CPEC investments, and the limited diversification of trade partners posed significant economic challenges. Pakistan had to balance its issues of balance of payment and trade relations to avoid over-reliance on any single country while seeking new markets and trade agreements (Hussain, 2018).

Lastly, Pakistan also faced continuous pressure to address concerns related to cross-border militancy and terrorism. Despite efforts to counteract these issues, including several military

operations against militant groups, the international image of Pakistan remained affected, complicating its diplomatic efforts. The military operation affected the human rights in Pakistan. The international scrutiny over human rights governance issues and practices also posed various challenges. Addressing these concerns while countering external criticism and maintaining sovereignty required an inclusive and proactive diplomatic approach (Riedel, 2012).

Hence, navigating the Great Power competition from 2013 to 2022 required Pakistan to engage in a sophisticated balancing act, managing its relationships with major powers while addressing internal and regional challenges. The strategic complexities of aligning with China, exploring new partnerships with Russia, and maintaining a cautious relationship with the US, demanded a high level of diplomatic adaptability and skills. Additionally, economic dependencies, regional security concerns, and international pressures on issues like human rights concerns and counterterrorism added layers of complexity to the foreign policy of Pakistan. Successfully addressing these multidimensional challenges was crucial for ensuring the strategic interests and regional stability of Pakistan in an increasingly multipolar world.

3.1.1. Brief Overview of Pakistan's Foreign Policy Objectives

The foreign policy of Pakistan has been shaped by its historical experiences, unique geopolitical location, economic aspirations, and security needs. The objectives of the foreign policy of Pakistan have evolved in response to changing regional and global dynamics. However, certain core objectives have remained consistent, reflecting the enduring national interests of Pakistan (Fair, 2014). The following section explains the core objectives of Pakistan's foreign policy including national security and sovereignty, regional stability and peace, economic development and trade, strengthening bilateral and multilateral relationships, counterterrorism and internal security, Islamic solidarity and leadership, advocacy for Kashmir non-alignment and

strategic autonomy, humanitarian and developmental assistance, and evolving objectives in a changing world.

The foreign policy of Pakistan is deeply rooted in the goal of safeguarding its sovereignty and ensuring national security. This objective is driven by its concerns about the security of its borders, the country's history of conflict with India, and the threat of terrorism. For example, the support of Pakistan for the Afghan Taliban in the 1990s was partly driven by its desire to prevent Indian influence in Afghanistan and secure its western border. Similarly, Pakistan seeks to promote regional peace and stability, particularly in South Asia. This objective is motivated by the desire to create a conducive environment for economic development and avoid conflict with its neighbors. For instance, Pakistan has been an important player in efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and has supported peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban (Small, 2015).

Moreover, Economic development is also considered an important pillar of Pakistan's foreign policy. The country seeks to promote trade, attract foreign investment, and enhance economic cooperation with other countries. For example, Pakistan has sought to deepen its economic ties with China through the CPEC, which aims to connect the two countries through a network of infrastructure projects. In the context of regionalism, Pakistan places a high priority on building and strengthening its relationships with other countries, both bilaterally and through participation in multilateral forums. For example, Pakistan has sought to deepen its ties with Russia in recent years, including through energy projects and military cooperation (Hussain, 2018).

Pakistan is also committed to combating militancy, and terrorism and ensuring internal security. This objective is driven by the country's own experiences with extremism and terrorism. For example, Pakistan has conducted various military operations against terrorist groups operating within its borders, such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Likewise, Pakistan aims to play

an active role in the Muslim world and seeks to promote Islamic solidarity. This objective is driven by the identity of the country as an Islamic republic and its desire to support Muslim causes.

For example, Pakistan has been a vocal supporter of the Kashmir and Palestinian cause and has called for a peaceful resolution to these incessant conflicts, because Kashmir holds a special significance in Pakistan's foreign policy objectives of Pakistan. Pakistan has consistently advocated for the rights of self-determination of the Kashmiri people and has sought international support for a resolution to the Kashmir conflict under the UN resolutions. For example, Pakistan has raised the Kashmir issue at various regional and international forums, including the SAARC and the UN.

The former Prime Minister Imran Khan reiterated support for the Kashmir issue on the occasion of Right to Self-Determination Day, which is observed on January 5 in the following words: “The importance of the inalienable right to self-determination has been acknowledged in all important human rights covenants, decisions of the United Nations General Assembly and Security Council. While observing January 5 as Right to Self-Determination Day for the Kashmiris, we reiterate our commitment to uphold the fundamental human rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir and pay homage to Kashmiris’ just struggle spanning more than seven decades. We are commemorating this day to remind the world community that it cannot abandon its moral and legal responsibilities towards the Kashmiri people. Three generations of Kashmiris have waited for the world community and the United Nations to honor their solemn commitments made to Kashmiris. The recent surge in oppression of the people of IIOJK through arbitrary detentions, coercion, harassment and humiliation, and extra-judicial killings in staged encounters and cordon-and-search-operations is a matter of grave concern for the international community” (Aamir, 2022, p. 6).

Pakistan has also traditionally pursued a policy of non-alignment in international affairs. This objective is driven by the desire of the country to maintain its self-independence and avoid being drawn into conflicts between major powers. For example, Pakistan has sought to balance its relationships with the US, Russia, and China while also maintaining its independence. It is important to mention that the foreign policy objectives of Pakistan are not static and evolve in response to changing global dynamics. For example, in response to the changing geopolitical landscape in the Middle East, Pakistan has sought to deepen its engagement with the Gulf countries in recent years (Ganguly, 2016).

3.1.2. Relevance of Great Power Competition to Pakistan's Geopolitical Context

The Great Power competition, particularly involving the US, Russia, and China significantly impacted the geopolitical context of Pakistan. The strategic location of Pakistan at the crossroads of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East made it a crucial player in regional and global power dynamics. The deepening US-China strategic rivalry shaped the security strategies and foreign policy of Pakistan. The significant investments of China in Pakistan, particularly through the CPEC, highlighted the economic and strategic partnership between the two nations.

Sino-Pakistan bilateral partnership provided China with critical access to the Arabian Sea and enhanced Pakistan's infrastructure and economic development of Pakistan. However, this growing alliance with China required Pakistan to carefully balance its relations with the US, a traditional ally and significant source of economic and military aid. The US Indo-Pacific strategy, which strengthens ties with India, complicated this balancing act and heightened the security concerns of Pakistan (Markey, 2013).

In response to the Indo-US strategic partnership, Pakistan had fortified its military ties with China, reflecting the broader geopolitical contest in South Asia. Furthermore, Pakistan also sought to diversify its international partnerships by enhancing relations with Russia. Cooperation with Russia in energy and defense sectors offered Pakistan an alternative to its traditional reliance on the US and aligned with the strategy of Russia to expand its influence in South Asia. This hedging approach allowed Pakistan to assert its strategic autonomy and navigate the complexities of Great Power competition. Regional dynamics, particularly the longstanding rivalry with archrival India, were heavily influenced by this competition. The heightened US-India strategic partnership exacerbated the security dilemma for Pakistan, prompting it to deepen its strategic ties with China (Small, 2015).

The stability of Afghanistan was another critical factor in this geopolitical equation. The US withdrawal and the Taliban's resurgence of Taliban in 2021 created a complex security environment in Afghanistan, directly affecting the overall security of Pakistan and regional stability. The role of Pakistan in the Afghan peace process and its influence in Afghanistan were pivotal in the broader context of Great Power competition in the region. Economically, Great Power competition also affected the trade and investment landscape of Pakistan. Chinese investments through CPEC were vital for the economic growth of Pakistan, but they also raised concerns about economic sovereignty and debt dependency. Maintaining economic ties with the US and other Western countries was essential for accessing global markets and trade diversification (Ganguly, 2016).

Diplomatically, Pakistan engaged in multilateral diplomacy to navigate Great Power competition. Participation in international organizations such as the United Nations, the SCO, and the OIC enhanced the diplomatic leverage of Pakistan. By maintaining a non-aligned stance where

possible, Pakistan managed to benefit from its strategic partnerships without becoming overly dependent on any single great power, thus preserving its strategic autonomy. To conclude, the Great Power competition was highly relevant to the geopolitical context of Pakistan, influencing its overall security, foreign policy, and economic strategies. By balancing its relationships with major powers and engaging in multilateral diplomacy, Pakistan sought to traverse the complexities of this competition to secure its national interests and regional stability (Hussain, 2018).

3.2. Security Challenges

Pakistan faced a multitude of security challenges, shaped by both internal and external factors from the start of the 21st century. Internally, militancy and terrorism posed significant threats. Despite successful military operations such as Operation Al Mizan (2002–2006), Operation Zalzala (2008), Operations Sher Dil, Rah-e-Haq, and Rah-e-Rast (2007–2009), Operation Rah-e-Nijat (2009–2010), Zarb-e-Azb (2014) and Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017), aimed at eradicating terrorist sanctuaries, groups like TTP and Baloch separatists continued to launch attacks. For instance, the tragic Army Public School (APS) attack in Peshawar in 2014, which resulted in the death of over 150 people, highlighted the persistent threat of terrorism. Additionally, sectarian violence also remained a critical issue, with Sunni-Shia conflicts occasionally erupting into deadly confrontations in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan (Yusuf, 2018).

Externally, the bilateral relationship between Pakistan with India remained fraught with tension, particularly over cross-border terrorism and the disputed Kashmir region. The revocation of Article 370 and 35A by India in 2019, which granted special autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), intensified the mutual conflict, leading to heightened diplomatic strains and military engagements. Incidents such as the Uri attack (2016), the Pulwama attack (2019), and the subsequent Balakot airstrike by India further exemplified the volatile nature of India-Pakistan

relations. These events not only strained bilateral ties but also brought the two nuclear-armed neighbors perilously close to full-scale conflict (Kronstadt & Katzman, 2019).

In Afghanistan, the evolving security situation post-2013, especially following the US withdrawal in 2021, directly impacted Pakistan. The resurgence of the Taliban and the chaotic withdrawal led to an influx of volume of refugees and heightened security concerns along the Pak-Afghan border. The efforts of Pakistan to manage refugee flows and cross-border militancy were critical but challenging, as seen in the frequent cross-border clashes and the struggle to balance humanitarian needs with security imperatives (Jones & Fair, 2022).

The CPEC, while economically beneficial, also introduced many security challenges. The infrastructure projects associated with the CPEC became frequent targets for various militant groups operating in Baluchistan, aiming to disrupt the growing Sino-Pak cooperation. The attack on the Chinese consulate in Karachi in 2018 and the bombing in Gwadar in 2021, targeting Chinese nationals, highlighted the growing security risks linked to these developmental initiatives. Ensuring the safety of Chinese workers and protecting CPEC projects required significant strategic planning and security investments by Pakistan.

Moreover, the involvement of Pakistan in counterterrorism efforts also brought international scrutiny and pressure, particularly from the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).²⁶ In 2018, Pakistan was placed on the FATF grey list due to concerns over money laundering and terrorist financing. This status necessitated stringent measures and extensive reforms to curb

²⁶ The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is a global organization that sets standards and promotes effective implementation of legal, regulatory, and operational measures to combat money laundering, terrorist financing, and proliferation financing.

financial support for militant groups, negatively impacting the international standing and financial systems of Pakistan (Johnson & Zambernardi, 2021).

Cybersecurity also emerged as a critical area of concern for Pakistan. As Pakistan increased its digital footprint, the risks of cyberattacks grew. The incidents of data breaches and cyber espionage highlighted the vulnerabilities in the cyber infrastructure of Pakistan. Addressing these challenges required building resilient digital defenses and enhancing cybersecurity protocols to protect critical infrastructure and sensitive information.

3.2.1. Terrorism and Insurgency

Pakistan faced significant security challenges due to insurgency and terrorism, requiring inclusive responses and comprehensive strategies from 2013 to 2022. The period was marked by ongoing insurgent activities, high-profile terrorist attacks, and complex internal and external dynamics.

In 2014, the Pakistani military launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb in North Waziristan, a major offensive operation aimed at dismantling terrorist networks, including TTP. This operation led to a decrease in large-scale attacks and significantly degraded the operational capabilities of terrorist groups. However, the TTP and other militant groups, such as Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP)²⁷ and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ),²⁸ continued to pose serious threats. The tragic attack on the APS in Peshawar in December 2014, which resulted in the deaths of over 150 people, mostly children, highlighted the persistent and brutal nature of these groups. This massacre

²⁷ The Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) founded in 2015 is a militant group operating in Afghanistan and Pakistan, affiliated with the Islamic State, engaging in violent attacks, terrorism, and sectarian clashes.

²⁸ Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) founded in 1996 is a Sunni extremist group in Pakistan, notorious for sectarian violence, targeting Shia Muslims, and involved in terrorist attacks, bombings, and assassinations, with alleged ties to Al-Qaeda.

galvanized national resolve against terrorism, leading to the National Action Plan (NAP)²⁹ to combat extremism and terrorism comprehensively (Small, 2015).

Despite several military operations, terrorism remained a formidable challenge. The resurgence of the TTP in 2020, following its regrouping in Afghanistan, led to a series of deadly attacks inside Pakistan, including an assault on the Karachi Stock Exchange³⁰ in June 2020. This incident underlined the capability of the TTP to strike high-value targets and its ongoing threat to the security apparatus of Pakistan. Additionally, the revival of Baloch insurgent activities, driven by groups like the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA)³¹ and Baloch Republican Army (BRA)³², continued to destabilize the region. High-profile attacks, such as the bombing near the Serena Hotel in Quetta in April 2021, which targeted Chinese nationals, highlighted the intersection of local insurgencies with broader geopolitical issues, particularly the CPEC (Fair, 2020).

The CPEC, while economically transformative for Pakistan, also became a focal point for insurgent attacks. The infrastructure projects of the corridor and the presence of Chinese nationals in Pakistan made it a prime target for militant groups. The 2018 attack on the Chinese consulate in Karachi and the 2021 bus bombing in Dasu, killing several Chinese engineers' soured Sino-Pakistan relations, and illustrated the ongoing security challenges linked to these developmental

²⁹ Pakistan's National Action Plan (NAP) is a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy launched in 2015, aiming to combat extremism, terrorism, and sectarian violence through military, legal, and administrative measures, with 20 key points.

³⁰ In June 2020, the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed responsibility for a brazen attack on the Karachi Stock Exchange, killing 4, and injuring several, in a targeted assault on Pakistan's financial hub.

³¹ The Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) founded in 2000 is a separatist militant group seeking independence for Baluchistan from Pakistan, engaging in armed attacks, bombings, and targeted killings, with a strong anti-state and nationalist ideology.

³² The Baloch Republican Army (BRA) founded in 2010 is a militant organization fighting for Baluchistan's independence from Pakistan, led by Brahumdagh Bugti, engaging in guerrilla warfare, sabotage, and targeted attacks on security forces.

initiatives. The successful materialization of the CPEC projects required extensive security measures, including the establishment of dedicated security forces.

Similarly, the counterterrorism efforts of Pakistan, aimed at addressing internal security threats, continued to depict a hard image of the country internationally. These measures, while necessary for maintaining the internal stability of the country, attracted significant international scrutiny. In 2018, the FATF placed Pakistan on its gray list, citing concerns over money laundering and terrorist financing. This placement highlighted deficiencies in the financial system of Pakistan and efforts to combat illicit financial activities. The gray-listing by FATF accentuated the persistent challenges Pakistan faces in aligning its counterterrorism and financial regulations with international standards. Despite efforts to address these issues, the international image of Pakistan remained impacted, reflecting ongoing struggles in fully demonstrating and implementing effective measures against financial crimes and terrorism (Warraich et al., 2023).

Sectarian violence significantly complicated the security landscape of Pakistan, with Sunni-Shia tensions occasionally escalating into deadly conflicts. Regional geopolitical rivalries, such as Saudi-Iranian strategic competition, further fueled these tensions. For example, In 2013, bombings in Quetta and Karachi killed over 200 Shias. In 2014, an attack on a Shia mosque in Peshawar killed 21. In 2015, 43 Shias were killed in a bus attack in Karachi. In 2016, a bombing at a Shia shrine in Sehwan killed 88. In 2017, an attack on a Shia mosque in Peshawar killed 25. In 2018, a bombing in Mastung killed 149, mostly Shias. In 2019, a Shia mosque in Quetta was attacked, killing 15. In 2020, 11 Shia Hazaras were killed in a targeted attack in Quetta. In 2021, a bombing at a Shia mosque in Peshawar killed 12. In 2022, a Shia mosque in Peshawar was attacked, killing 63. These attacks have been claimed by various Sunni extremist groups, including

Lashkar-e-Jhangvi and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan. Subsequent attacks continued to highlight this issue.

To address sectarian violence, Pakistan launched the National Action Plan (NAP) in 2014 to combat extremism and terrorism. Military operations, such as Operation Zarb-e-Azb, have targeted militant groups, while law enforcement agencies have cracked down on banned organizations, including Sipah-e-Muhammad³³ and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi.³⁴ The National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) was established to coordinate counter-terrorism efforts, and Provincial Apex Committees were formed to implement NAP at the provincial level. Additionally, initiatives promoting sectarian harmony and counter-narratives have been introduced, alongside legislative measures to curb hate speech and extremism. Enhanced security measures have been implemented for vulnerable targets, and community engagement efforts aim to build trust with Shia and minority communities. While these efforts have shown progress, critics argue that more needs to be done to address root causes and effectively implement these measures to fully eradicate sectarian violence (Johnson & Zambernardi, 2021).

The evolving situation in Afghanistan had a direct impact on the security environment of Pakistan. The US withdrawal in 2021 and the return of the Taliban to power created a complex and volatile situation. An example of the security challenges that arose was the August 2021 suicide bombing in Quetta, claimed by the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISIS-K), which killed several and injured many more. This attack highlighted the threat of cross-border militant activities (Akram & Asif, 2022).

³³ Sipah-e-Muhammad is a Shia militant group in Pakistan, formed in 1990, aiming to protect Shia interests and counter Sunni extremist groups, with alleged ties to Iran and involvement in sectarian violence.

³⁴ Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) is a Sunni extremist group in Pakistan, founded in 1996, notorious for sectarian violence, targeting Shia Muslims, and involved in terrorist attacks, bombings, and assassinations, with Al-Qaeda ties.

Moreover, the influx of Afghan refugees further strained the overall resources of Pakistan and heightened security concerns along the Pak-Afghan border. To manage this situation, Pakistan increased military patrols, strengthening border security by fencing the Durand Line, and employing surveillance technologies. Diplomatic engagements with the factions of the Taliban aimed to secure cooperation in preventing militant infiltrations. Simultaneously, Pakistan had to balance humanitarian concerns by providing aid to refugees living in the country while implementing stringent security checks to prevent militant infiltration, thereby navigating the intricate security landscape created by the evolving situation in Afghanistan (Ullah et al., 2023).

3.2.2. Cross-border Attacks and Border Security Issues

Pakistan faced significant security challenges due to cross-border attacks and border security issues, driven by longstanding geopolitical tensions and complex regional dynamics from 2013 to 2022. The challenges primarily stemmed from its borders with India and Afghanistan, both of which have been hotspots for military confrontations and security incidents.

The Pak-Afghan border, also known as the Durand Line, has been a major source of security concerns. The porous nature of this border allowed various militant groups, including the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP),³⁵ to establish sanctuaries in Afghanistan and launch cross-border attacks into Pakistan. Following several military operations including Zarb-e-Azb in 2014, many TTP militants fled to Afghanistan, from where they continued to orchestrate attacks in Pakistan. In this context, The Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has carried out numerous devastating attacks in Pakistan, including the 2008 Islamabad Marriott Hotel bombing, killing 53; the 2009 Lahore police academy attack, killing 18; the 2010 Lahore Ahmadi mosque attacks, killing 94; the 2011

³⁵ Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is a militant Islamist group, formed in 2007, seeking to establish a hardline Islamic state in Pakistan, engaging in terrorist attacks, bombings, and targeted killings.

Mehran naval base attack, killing 10; the 2012 Peshawar airport attack, killing 10; the 2014 Peshawar Army Public School massacre, killing 151; the 2015 Peshawar Imambargah attack, killing 21; and the 2022 Peshawar mosque bombing, killing 63. These attacks have targeted civilians, security forces, and minority groups, causing widespread fear and destabilization in Pakistan. The TTP has also been responsible for countless other bombings, shootings, and kidnappings, making it one of the most dangerous terrorist groups in the region. These cross-border attacks highlighted the persistent threat posed by militants operating from Afghan soil (Yousaf & Ponzio, 2022).

Pakistan has taken several initiatives to manage its border with Afghanistan, including the construction of a 2,611-kilometer fence along the Durand Line, which is expected to be completed by 2025. Additionally, Pakistan has established 853 border posts and deployed over 200,000 troops to secure the border. The country has also launched the "Pak-Afghan Border Management System" to regulate cross-border movement and trade. Furthermore, Pakistan has proposed the establishment of "peace gates" at major crossing points to facilitate trade and travel while preventing illegal activities.

Pakistan has also engaged in diplomatic efforts with Afghanistan to enhance cooperation on border management and counter-terrorism. These initiatives aim to prevent cross-border terrorism, smuggling, and illegal migration, while also facilitating legitimate trade and travel between the two countries. Despite border fencing, challenges persisted, particularly after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and the subsequent Taliban takeover. The chaotic situation led to an increase in cross-border attacks, exemplified by the 2022 attack on Kurram Agency, where militants from Afghanistan targeted the security forces of Pakistan, resulting in multiple

casualties. These incidents underlined the ongoing volatility and the need for inclusive border security measures from both countries (Nisar et al., 2023).

On the Eastern Front, the border of Pakistan with India remained a major flashpoint, particularly over the cross-border infiltration and disputed Kashmir region. The cross-border shelling and skirmishes along the Line of Control (LoC) were frequent, often resulting in military and civilian casualties. The revocation of Article 370 and 35-A by India in 2019, which stripped J&K of its special status, significantly escalated tensions. In retaliation, both nations engaged in heavy artillery exchanges. A notable case was the Balakot airstrike (2019), where Indian fighter jets crossed into Pakistani airspace and targeted a site in Balakot, claiming it was a militant camp. Pakistan's subsequent capture of an Indian pilot Abhinandan Varthaman highlighted the high stakes and the potential for escalation between the two nuclear-armed neighbors (Mukherjee, 2021).

Beyond Kashmir, India and Pakistan's mutual border security concerns have manifested in other regions, leading to violent incidents and tensions. The working boundary near Sialkot has witnessed frequent skirmishes, such as the 2016 battle that killed several soldiers and civilians, and the 2019 exchange of fire that left multiple dead. Similarly, the international border in the Thar Desert has seen recurring cross-border firing, smuggling, and infiltration attempts, including a 2019 incident where Pakistani Rangers and Indian BSF personnel clashed, resulting in casualties. The Sir Creek and Rann of Kutch region has also been a flashpoint, with a 2013 standoff between Indian and Pakistani troops. Furthermore, the Punjab Border has experienced cross-border firing and shelling, such as the 2018 incident that killed several civilians. These incidents demonstrate the need for effective border management and diplomacy to prevent escalation and ensure peace along the India-Pakistan border, which spans over 3,190 kilometers (Chattha, 2023).

Consequently, India and Pakistan have taken several steps to address border incidents, including the establishment of a Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) hotline to facilitate communication and defuse tensions. In 2018, the two countries agreed to revive the 2003 ceasefire agreement along the Line of Control (LoC) and Working Boundary. Regular flag meetings between local commanders have also been held to resolve issues and prevent escalation. Additionally, India and Pakistan have strengthened their border infrastructure, including fencing and surveillance systems, to prevent infiltration and smuggling. In 2021, the two countries reaffirmed their commitment to the 2003 ceasefire agreement and agreed to observe a mutually agreed ceasefire along the LoC and all other sectors. These measures aim to reduce tensions, prevent cross-border firing, and promote peace along the India-Pakistan border.

Pakistan's western border with Iran has posed substantial security challenges due to rampant cross-border smuggling and militant activities. Smuggling of narcotics, arms, and contraband goods has been a persistent issue, with Iranian and Pakistani authorities frequently seizing large quantities of smuggled goods. For instance, in 2020, Pakistani authorities seized over 1,000 kg of narcotics worth millions of dollars near the Iran-Pakistan border. Moreover, militant groups such as Jaish-al-Adl³⁶ and the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) have exploited the porous border to launch attacks on Pakistani security forces and civilians. In 2019, a suicide bombing in the Sistan-Baluchistan province killed 27 Pakistani troops, highlighting the threat posed by militant groups operating from Iranian territory. To address these challenges, Pakistan and Iran have strengthened border security cooperation, including joint patrols, intelligence sharing, and construction of border fencing. However, more needs to be done to effectively curb

³⁶ Jaish-al-Adl is a Sunni militant group operating in southeastern Iran and southwestern Pakistan, seeking greater autonomy for Balochistan, and engaging in attacks on Iranian and Pakistani security forces.

smuggling and militant activities in the region. This attack highlighted the ongoing threat posed by militant groups operating across the border (Barrech et al., 2023).

In response, likewise, Durand Line, Iran, and Pakistan have taken several steps to address border incidents, including the establishment of a joint border commission to resolve disputes and enhance cooperation. In 2017, they launched a joint operation to combat militant groups, such as Jaish-al-Adl, and have since conducted regular joint patrols along the border. The two countries have also agreed to enhance intelligence sharing and coordinate efforts to prevent cross-border smuggling and terrorism. Additionally, Iran and Pakistan have invested in border infrastructure development, including the construction of border fencing and checkpoints, to improve security and facilitate legitimate trade and travel. In 2020, they signed a memorandum of understanding to strengthen border security cooperation, demonstrating their commitment to addressing shared security challenges and promoting regional stability. (Pant & Joshi, 2020).

To address these complicated border security issues, Pakistan implemented a range of measures. These included the deployment of advanced surveillance technologies, the establishment of new border outposts, and increased military patrols. Additionally, diplomatic engagements with neighboring countries were also crucial to managing cross-border threats and enhancing cooperation. For instance, Afghanistan and Pakistan initiated bilateral talks to address border management, while India and Pakistan maintained a hotline for direct communication to de-escalate tensions (Joshi, 2020).

3.2.3. Impact on Pakistan's Relations with Neighboring Countries and Major Powers

The security challenges faced by Pakistan significantly impacted its relations with neighboring countries and major powers from 2013 to 2022. These challenges included cross-

border attacks, terrorism, and regional instability, which shaped the foreign policy and diplomatic engagements of Pakistan.

The bilateral relations with Afghanistan were heavily influenced by security dynamics along the Pak-Afghan border. The persistent threat of cross-border infiltration and terrorism, exemplified by attacks from groups like the TTP operating from Afghan territory, strained bilateral ties. Despite various efforts such as Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014 to root out militants, the porous border allowed insurgents to regroup in Afghanistan and launch attacks on Pakistani soil (Pant & Joshi, 2019). The situation was further complicated after the US withdrawal and the takeover of the Taliban in 2021, leading to heightened security concerns and an influx of refugees in Pakistan. The involvement of Pakistan in facilitating peace talks between the Taliban and the US demonstrated its strategic importance, but the ongoing security challenges in the bordering areas continued to create friction and necessitated a complex balancing act in its Afghan policy (Bashir, 2023).

Moreover, the India-Pakistan bilateral relationship was also marked by heightened tensions, particularly over the disputed Kashmir region. Indian government's revocation of Article 370 and 35-A in 2019 stripped J&K of its special status, led to a significant escalation in hostilities. The subsequent Balakot airstrike by India in February 2019, in response to a suicide bombing in Pulwama claimed by Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM),³⁷ and the retaliatory actions by Pakistan highlighted the volatility of the situation. These incidents not only strained diplomatic relations between both countries but also brought the two nuclear-armed neighbors perilously close to full-

³⁷ Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) is a Pakistan-based Deobandi jihadist group, founded in 2000, seeking independence for Kashmir, and responsible for numerous terrorist attacks in India, including the 2019 Pulwama attack.

scale conflict. Persistent ceasefire violations along the LoC further exacerbated tensions, highlighting the impact of security challenges on bilateral relations (Mukherjee, 2021).

China emerged as a critical partner for Pakistan, especially in the context of the CPEC. While CPEC brought significant infrastructure development and economic investments, it also attracted security threats. Attacks targeting China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) projects and Chinese nationals have posed a significant threat to the multibillion-dollar infrastructure initiative. In 2017, Pakistani separatist group Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) attacked a CPEC-linked labor camp in Gwadar, killing 10 workers. In 2018, a suicide bombing in Quetta targeted a bus carrying Chinese engineers, killing 3 and injuring 9. In 2019, BLA militants stormed the Pearl Continental Hotel in Gwadar, killing 5 people, including a Pakistani naval officer. In 2020, a terrorist attack on the Karachi Stock Exchange killed 4 people, including a policeman, with BLA claiming responsibility.

These incidents demonstrate the vulnerability of CPEC projects and Chinese nationals to terrorist attacks, highlighting the need for enhanced security measures to protect the initiative. Chinese nationals have also been targeted in kidnappings, such as the 2021 abduction of two Chinese nationals in Quetta. The commitment of Pakistan to ensuring the security of CPEC projects and safeguarding Chinese interests was pivotal in maintaining strong bilateral ties. This bilateral partnership also positioned Pakistan as an important player in China's Belt and Road Initiative, enhancing its strategic significance in the region (Surahio et al., 2023).

The US also remained a crucial, yet complex, partner for Pakistan. The bilateral relationship was significantly impacted by the evolving situation in Afghanistan and counterterrorism efforts. While the role of Pakistan in facilitating the US-Taliban peace talks was acknowledged, the presence of militant sanctuaries in Pakistan remained a contentious issue

between both countries. The US frequently expressed concerns about counterterrorism measures in Pakistan, particularly regarding groups like the Haqqani Network.

The former President of the US Donald Trump criticizes Pakistan for “lies and deceit” in his tweet: “He was living in Pakistan, we’re supporting Pakistan, and we’re giving them \$1.3bn a year, which we don’t give them anymore. By the way, I ended it because they don’t do anything for us, they don’t do a damn thing for us. The United States had received “nothing but lies and deceit” in return for “foolishly” giving Pakistan more than \$33 billion in aid in the last 15 years to fight terrorism. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!”

Donald Trump's tweet was an example of critical discourse, where he strongly condemned Pakistan's actions. He used harsh language, calling Pakistan's behavior "lies and deceit", and accused them of taking advantage of the US. Trump emphasized that the US had given Pakistan a large amount of money (\$33 billion) to fight terrorism, but Pakistan had not held up their end of the deal. Instead, they provide a safe haven for terrorists that the US was trying to catch in Afghanistan. Trump's tone was angry and disappointed, using words like "foolishly" to express his frustration. He also used "we" and "us" to include himself and the US, and "they" to distance himself from Pakistan, showing his disapproval. The tweet's purpose was to publicly criticize Pakistan and announce a change in US policy, signaled by the strong statement "No more!" Overall, Trump's discourse was confrontational and accusatory, revealing a breakdown in the US-Pakistan relationship.

Subsequently, former Prime Minister Imran Khan hit back at Trump’s ‘tirade’ against Pakistan in a series of statements on Twitter/X by saying that the record needs to be put straight

on Mr. Trump's tirade against Pakistan: "No Pakistani was involved in 9/11 but Pak[istan] decided to participate in the US War on Terror. 2. Pakistan suffered 75,000 casualties in this war and over \$123bn was lost to the economy. US "aid" was a minuscule \$20bn, Instead of making Pakistan a scapegoat for their failures, the US should do a serious assessment of why, despite 140,000 NATO troops plus 250,000 Afghan troops and reportedly \$1 trillion spent on war in Afghanistan, the Taliban today are stronger than ever before. Can Mr Trump name another ally that gave such sacrifices?"

Imran Khan's response to Trump's criticism is a defensive discourse, aiming to correct the record and shift the blame. Khan presents a series of facts to counter Trump's accusations, highlighting Pakistan's contributions to the War on Terror, including the high number of casualties (75,000) and economic losses (\$123bn). He downplays the US aid (\$20bn) as "minuscule" compared to Pakistan's sacrifices. Khan also questions the effectiveness of the US-led war in Afghanistan, pointing out the Taliban's growing strength despite massive NATO and Afghan troop presence and huge financial investment (\$1 trillion). By asking Trump to name another ally that made similar sacrifices, Khan seeks to turn the tables and portray Pakistan as a loyal and dedicated partner, rather than a scapegoat for US failures. Khan's tone is assertive and justified, using Twitter to reach a global audience and challenge Trump's narrative. His discourse aims to restore Pakistan's reputation and counter the negative image portrayed by Trump.

Pakistan's placement on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list in 2018 increased tensions in its relations with other countries. The grey list designation indicated concerns about Pakistan's ability to prevent terrorist financing. As a result, Pakistan had to implement strict financial reforms and oversight, affecting its international financial transactions and requiring closer monitoring of its counterterrorism efforts. This meant Pakistan faced increased scrutiny and

pressure to demonstrate its commitment to combating terrorist financing, adding to the strain on its relationships with other nations, particularly the US, which had already expressed concerns about Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts. (Kugelman, 2019). Hence, the wobbly security situation in Pakistan overall impacted the positive image of Pakistan worldwide.

3.3. Economic Constraints

The ever-worsening economic crisis has placed Pakistan at a crossroads as the stability of the country is dependent on its financial health. Amidst, political instability, polarization, and an election year; the economic problems of Pakistan will grab much attention in 2024. The country turned into political instability in April 2022 when then-PM Imran Khan was ousted from office through a dramatic no-confidence vote in parliament. Since then, Pakistan's economic indicators are swamped at an all-time low as the country is trapped in high inflation, unemployment, excessive fiscal deficit, falling investment, deteriorating external balance, trade, and budget deficit, low foreign capital inflow, dwindling foreign exchange reserves, heavy debt repayment, low foreign capital inflows, devaluation of the currency, weak production sector, over-reliance on aids, loans and bailout packages (Horowitz, 2023).

Similarly, structural imbalances are also a hindrance to the sustained economic growth and development of Pakistan that include excessive political involvement in economic activities, non-documentation of the economy, over-reliance on agriculture which is heavily dependent on floods and climate change, ambiguous and higher taxation policies, neglect towards SMEs, dysfunctional accountability sector, detachment from industrialization characterized by the persistent energy crisis and ineffective governance and institutional structure (Azad, 2023).

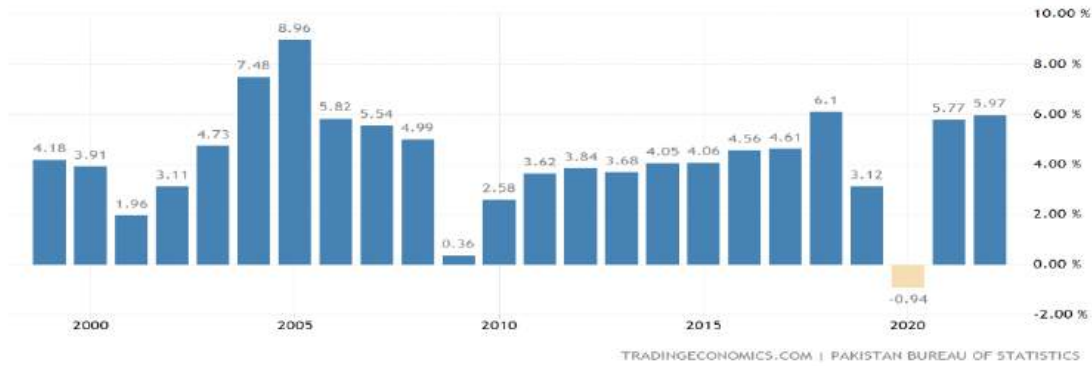
To remove structural imbalances and improve macroeconomic variables, deep-rooted reforms are needed to increase efficiency, stimulate entrepreneurship, and improve competitiveness, and technological progress. It is pertinent to mention that structural reforms remain the last refuge for economic managers when cynical economic measures stop producing desired outcomes. The following sections of this research paper discuss the economic outlook of Pakistan's economy, its causes and implications, several government initiatives, and solutions to address the economic crisis of the country.

3.3.1. Pakistan Economic Outlook

According to the World Bank, the growth of Pakistan's economy remained at 0.4 percent in the fiscal year ending June 2023. The slower growth of Pakistan's economy indicates that the economic activities of the private sector are subdued in the backdrop of deteriorating investor confidence, belated fiscal tightening, import control, and the impact of the unprecedented summer flood of 2022 (*Sustained Reform Commitment Is Needed to Overcome Pakistan's Economic Crisis*, 2023). The foreign reserves have fallen to a precariously low level of \$4.3 billion, enough to cover imports for one month further raising the possibility of default (Shahzad & Niyyar, 2023).

According to the reports, due to higher energy and food prices, inflation in the country rose to 29.5 percent in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023. Moreover, downward spiral on exports, the Current Account Deficit (CAD) swamped by 2 percent of GDP in Fiscal Year 2023 but is expected to rise to 2.1 percent of GDP in FY 2024 of GDP and 2.2 percent of GDP in FY25 as import control is expected to ease. Similarly, the fiscal deficit of Pakistan shrunk by 6.7 percent of GDP in FY23 (*Sustained Reform Commitment Is Needed to Overcome Pakistan's Economic Crisis*, 2023). The following indicators will determine whether Pakistan can recover from this economic abyss in the future or not:

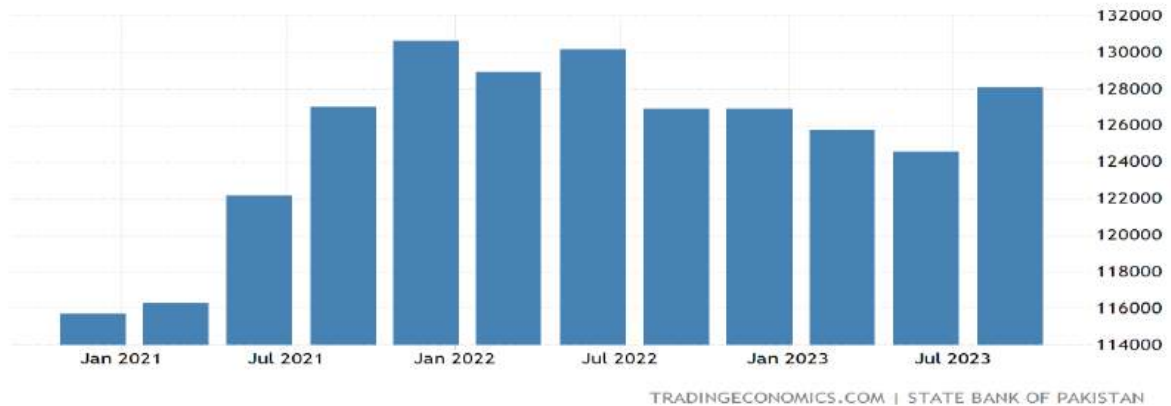
1. **Pakistan's Macroeconomic Variables:** Pakistan's GDP annual growth rate swamped under -1.90 percent in 2023 in comparison to the annual GDP growth rate of 5.74 percent and 5.97 percent in 2021 and 2022 respectively (Pakistan GDP Annual Growth Rate, 2022). The inflation rate of Pakistan skyrocketed to 31.5 percent in the first three months of 2023 in comparison to 9.5 percent and 23 percent in 2021 and 2022 respectively (Inflation Rates in Pakistan, 2022). Pakistan's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was \$376 billion in 2022, with an annual growth rate of 5.79 percent in comparison to \$348 billion with a 5.74 percent growth rate in 2021 (O'Neill, 2023). Similarly, the GDP per capita of Pakistan was \$1450 in the first four months of 2023, whereas it remained constricted to \$1460 in 2022 and \$1473.9 in 2021 (Pakistan GDP per Capita, 2022). The Unemployment rate in Pakistan rose steeply to 6.40 percent in 2023 and is expected to reach 8.50 percent in 2024 (Pakistan Unemployment Rate, 2022) in comparison to 6.20 percent and 4.3 percent in 2022 and 2021 respectively (O'Neill, 2023). The interest rate of Pakistan was set all-time high by the central bank at 21.98 percent in April 2023 which was 16 percent and 9.75 percent in 2022 and 2021 respectively (Pakistan Short Term Interest Rate, 2023). The Foreign Remittances of the country swamped to \$6365 million in 2023 in comparison to \$8260 million in 2022. The above-mentioned indicators are not keeping pace with debt repayment equations and increased the chances for the country to default on its debt (Pakistan Remittances, 2022).



Source: Trading Economics, at <https://tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/gdp-growth-annual>

- The composition of Overall External Debt of Pakistan:** The statistics show the volume of external debt and liabilities amounting to \$126.3 billion by the end of December 2022 which is nearly 77 percent of this debt worth \$97.5 billion is directly owed by the government of Pakistan and an additional amount of \$7.9 billion is owed to multilateral creditors by government-controlled public sector enterprises. These multilateral creditors fall into four broad categories: multilateral debt, Paris Club debt, private and commercial loans, and Chinese debt. The multilateral institutions include the World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and IMF to whom Islamabad owes \$18 billion, \$15 billion, and \$7.6 billion respectively (Rana, 2023). Pakistan currently owes \$10 billion to the Paris Club which Islamabad mostly owes to Germany, Japan, the US, and France (Pakistan Seeking Rescheduling \$10 Billion Debt Owed to Paris Club: Report, 2022). Pakistan also owes a large amount of private debt in the form of Sukuk bonds and Eurobonds amounting to \$7.8 billion moreover an amount of \$6.3 billion is owed to Chinese financial institutions. Pakistan also owes China \$27 billion in debt as well (Pakistan’s Foreign Loan Inflows Slow Down: Ministry of Economic Affairs, 2023) moreover China’s State Administration

of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) has placed a foreign deposit worth \$4 billion with the central bank of Pakistan (Jain, 2023).



Source: Trading Economics, at <https://tradingeconomics.com/pakistan/external-debt>

3. **Debt Repayment Pressure:** Pakistan faces considerable repayment pressure characterized by large external debt syndrome as the country is expected to repay \$77.5 billion by June 2026 to private creditors' including Chinese financial institutions, and Saudi Arabia. This repayment will surely become a hefty burden for a country worth a GDP of \$350 billion (Pakistan Needs to Pay \$77.5 Billion in External Debt; Risk of Default “Real”, Says US Think Tank, 2023).
4. **Pakistan’s Repayment Calculus from Exports, FDI, and Remittances:** Pakistan is dependent on remittances and Foreign Direct Investment for debt repayment and to avoid a financial default. However, the earnings from FDI and remittances are not keeping pace with Islamabad’s expectations as import bills are further mounting pressure on the country. For instance, Pakistan’s remittances and export earnings were a total of \$164 billion in comparison to \$170 billion worth of imports over the last three years. The said scenario has led to a persistent current account deficit for Pakistan.

3.3.2. Causes of Economic Crisis in Pakistan

There are several causes of economic crisis in Pakistan such as external debt and borrowing, incessant inflation, energy crisis, political instability, corruption and inefficiencies, and geopolitical influences. The following section will explain these causes at length:

1. **External Debt and Borrowing:** Pakistan's financial crisis is the result of excessive external debt and borrowing, which has unfortunately reached \$126.3 billion. There are multiple stakeholders and creditors to whom Islamabad owes this mounting debt such as multilateral organizations, commercial and private lenders, Paris Club nations, and the neighboring China. Pakistan's persistent mounting debt is attributed to several factors such as abysmal financial growth, excessive international borrowing, currency depreciation, and lack of exports. Islamabad's foreign reserves are currently around \$4 billion, which has placed the country at the crossroads of ineligibility to pay one month's worth of imports. Subsequently, Pakistan might not be able to pay its recurring debt in the near future (Sajjad, 2023).
2. **Persistent Trade Deficit:** Pakistan has been prey to a persistent trade deficit for decades. The trade deficit rose to an alarming \$48 billion in FY2022, putting extreme pressure on foreign exchange reserves. Structural weaknesses, lack of product diversification, narrow export base, and weak competitiveness have stimulated the slow export growth of Pakistan. The country's exports amounted to only \$32 billion in FY2022, which is equal to 10% of the GDP. Whereas the exports continued to remain concentrated in low-value-added, labor-intensive segments like basic textiles. However, the imports in Pakistan have grown rapidly driven by rising consumer demands, high oil prices, and capital goods imports. In the past five years, import growth of 10% annually has far outpaced export growth of around 3%.

The imports amounted to \$80 billion in FY2022, dominated by machinery, petroleum, metals, and chemicals. Hence, the continuous trade deficit has contributed to the current account deficit of the country (Ali, 2023).

3. **Inflation:** The residents of Pakistan are facing severe problems with purchasing power and an incessant increase in country-wide poverty due to an unprecedented 25% inflation rate. The unending increasing costs of fuel, food, imported goods, and electricity are the immediate cause of this inflation. The implemented monetary and fiscal policy of the government of Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI) to boost the financial health of the country in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, has further weakened the economic strength and challenged the mechanism of regulatory measures (Shahid, 2023).
4. **Energy Crisis:** Pakistan is currently dealing with an incessant energy crisis including a power shortage that has seriously hampered to expansion and diversification of its economy and produce goods. The country continues to rely on external-cum-imported hydrocarbons, which are prone to continuous price volatility. Moreover, corruption, poor management, and deficit of good governance, and an investment discrepancy in renewable energy sources have led the country into inefficient and insufficient domestic energy production. Consequently, the millions living in the country are affected emotionally and financially by the power outages and load shedding, According to different statistics, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Pakistan has reduced by up to 4% as a result of relentless energy shortages (Ayaz & Masoom, 2023).
5. **Political Instability:** The common wisdom suggests that political stability leads to financial stability but unfortunately in the case of Pakistan, democratic dearth, political unrest, and depraved governance have negatively affected the confidence of domestic and

foreign investors. Subsequently, this has led to a decrease in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), lowering the likelihood of economic growth and ultimately causing capital flight from the country. The volatility in the exchange rate caused by incessant political instability and lack of expected governance have continued to harm businesses that depend on stable and somehow static exchange rates for international trade. The budgetary constraints and inconsistent economic growth led to an increase in external borrowing and budget deficits elevating the risk of debt crises of the country. Furthermore, Pakistan's insecurity is characterized by political instability including a lack of rule of law, terrorism, civil unrest, deterring foreign investment, disruption of economic activities, and damage to infrastructure, collectively contributing to the financial and economic stability of the country. Hence, socio-economic and political instability undermines the faith of investors, creditors, and the public in the regime's ability to address the ongoing challenge in the country (Ghalib, 2023).

6. **Corruption and Inefficiencies:** The populace of the country has been facing a vicious circle of corruption and inefficiencies for decades. According to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2021 report, Pakistan ranked 124th out of 180 countries, indicating a high level of perceived corruption. The Economic Survey of Pakistan testifies that corruption costs billions of dollars annually. The World Bank report estimated that corruption in the country could be siphoning off around 2% to 3% of Pakistan's GDP each year. Inefficiencies within the public sector and tax collection systems lead to substantial revenue losses. The incessant corruption and institutional inefficiencies have also negatively impacted attracting FDI. Several reports suggest that the ranking of Pakistan in the Ease of Doing Business Index has been affected by red tape, bureaucratic

hurdles, and corruption, making it less attractive for foreign investment. Hence, the survey conducted by independent observers often reveals a lack of trust in public institutions due to perceived corruption and inefficiencies (Kirsanli, 2023).

7. **Geopolitical Influences:** Pakistan has continued to face substantial security challenges due to its geopolitical position. The cost of combating terrorism and maintaining security has been significantly high. Several reports suggest that the military expenditure of Pakistan is among the highest in the region, sometimes exceeding 3% of its GDP. Moreover, the changing geopolitical situations in the region, especially persistent tensions and conflicts with neighboring countries like Afghanistan and India have created uncertainties that affect investment, trade, economic stability, and regional economic cooperation. Similarly, Pakistan has been hosting millions of refugees over the years has put pressure on infrastructure, resources, and the economy. It impacts employment, social services, and overall economic stability (Khan, 2023).

3.3.1. Impact of Economic Challenges on Foreign Policy Objectives

The economic challenges of Pakistan had a profound impact on its foreign policy objectives, influencing its international alliances, diplomatic strategies, and regional engagements from 2013 to 2022. The need to secure financial assistance and stabilize the economy often dictated the foreign policy decisions of Pakistan

One of the important impacts was the strengthening of economic ties with China, primarily through the CPEC. As part of China's BRI, CPEC brought billions of dollars in Chinese foreign direct investments into Pakistan, aimed at energy projects and infrastructure development. This bilateral partnership not only provided critical financial support but also enhanced the strategic importance of Pakistan. For instance, projects like the Gwadar Port and various power plants

helped alleviate some economic pressures by addressing energy shortages and infrastructure deficits. However, the excessive reliance on Chinese investments and loans also led to concerns about economic sovereignty and debt sustainability.

The economic constraints also influenced Pakistan's relations with the IMF and other international financial institutions. Facing persistent balance of payments and fiscal deficit crises, Pakistan repeatedly turned to the IMF for financial assistance. The Extended Fund Facility agreement in 2019 is a notable specimen, where Pakistan secured a \$6 billion bailout package. The stringent conditions of the IMF, including subsidy cuts, fiscal austerity measures, and structural reforms, often led to public discontent and significantly impacted domestic economic policies. These conditions also influenced the foreign policy of Pakistan by necessitating economic reforms that aligned with international financial norms and standards, thereby affecting its economic diplomacy (Ahmed, 2019).

The economic challenges of Pakistan also impacted its relations with the Gulf countries, particularly the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. These countries provided crucial financial investment and aid to Pakistan during times of economic distress. For example, in 2018, Saudi Arabia extended a \$6 billion financial package, including \$3 billion in balance of payments support and a deferred payment facility for oil imports. Similarly, the UAE also offered a \$3 billion support package. These financial aids were essential for stabilizing the economy of Pakistan but also required Islamabad to navigate its foreign policy carefully, balancing relations between its Gulf allies and other major powers like Turkey and Iran (Khan, 2020).

The economic situation also influenced the approach of Pakistan to trade and regional cooperation. Efforts to reduce trade deficits and boost exports led to initiatives to strengthen economic ties within South Asia. However, strained relations with India, particularly over the

Kashmir issue and cross-border infiltration, limited the potential for regional economic cooperation through the SAARC. Conversely, Pakistan sought to enhance economic relations with Central Asian countries through initiatives like the CASA-1000 power project,³⁸ aiming to import electricity from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to mitigate energy shortages.

The economic challenges also had implications for military diplomacy and defense spending in Pakistan. Despite economic constraints, maintaining an inclusive defense capability remained a priority, given the security apparatus of the region. This necessitated a careful allocation of resources, often leading to domestic debates on the trade-offs between development needs and defense spending. Additionally, economic constraints also influenced military procurement strategies, leading to increased defense cooperation with countries like Turkey and China, which offered favorable terms compared to Western suppliers (Husain, 2021).

3.3.2. Inflation, Debt Levels, and Low Growth Rates

Pakistan grappled with significant economic challenges, including rising debt levels, high inflation, and low growth rates from 2013 to 2022. These issues had a profound impact on the social welfare, economic stability, and overall development trajectory of the country.

Inflation was a persistent issue throughout this period, exacerbating poverty levels and eroding the purchasing power of the population. Inflation rates frequently surpassed government targets, driven by factors such as currency depreciation, energy price hikes, and supply chain disruptions. For instance, in 2018, inflation reached 6.8%, primarily due to a devalued Pakistani rupee and increased fuel prices. The situation worsened in 2020, with inflation peaking at 10.7%, partly due to the global economic disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. High inflation

³⁸ CASA-1000 (Central Asia-South Asia) is a regional power transmission project connecting Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, aimed at promoting energy cooperation, economic development, and regional stability.

particularly affected lower and middle-class-income households, increasing the cost of essential goods and services and leading to greater economic hardship (Pakistan Economic Survey, 2021).

Rising debt levels posed another significant challenge for Pakistan. By 2022, the total public debt of the country had exceeded 70% of its GDP, with external debt crossing \$130 billion. The mounting debt was a result of reliance on foreign loans, chronic budget deficits, and borrowing to address balance of payments crises and finance development projects. For example, the \$6 billion bailout package from the IMF in 2019 stabilized Pakistan's economy. However, the IMF program required Pakistan to implement stringent structural and fiscal reforms, including subsidy reductions and tax reforms. While these measures were aimed at achieving economic stability and fiscal discipline, they also led to short-term social unrest and economic pain due to increased utility prices and reduced public spending (IMF, 2022).

Low economic growth rates further compounded the economic woes of the country. The GDP's slow growth rate fluctuated during this period, often failing to keep pace with population growth, which led to underemployment and increased unemployment. For example, in 2013, the GDP growth rate was 3.7%, which was insufficient to generate enough jobs for the burgeoning youth population. Although there were several periods of relatively higher growth, such as 5.8% in 2018, these gains were not sustained, and growth slowed down significantly by 2020, largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic contraction in 2020, with GDP growth falling to -0.4%, highlighted the vulnerability of Pakistan's economy to structural weaknesses and external shocks (World Bank, 2021).

The case studies of the energy sector demonstrate the relationship of these economic challenges. Chronic energy shortages, caused by financial imbalances and an outdated infrastructure, severely impacted economic growth and industrial productivity. The circular debt

in the energy sector, which exceeded \$2 billion by 2020, reflected the financial struggles of the power generation and distribution companies. Efforts to address these issues included investments in energy infrastructure through the CPEC projects, such as the construction of new power plants. However, these projects also contributed to the rising external debt, necessitating careful management of financial resources.

Another example is the agricultural sector, which employs almost 40% of the population. Despite its importance, the sector faced numerous challenges, including outdated farming techniques, water scarcity, and low productivity. These issues were exacerbated by debt levels and inflation, which limited the government's ability of the government to invest in modernizing the sector. Programs aimed at supporting farmers, such as subsidies for seeds and fertilizers, were often cut due to fiscal constraints, further hampering rural livelihoods and agricultural productivity in the country (Asian Development Bank, 2021).

Hence, the socio-economic impact of these economic challenges was profound. Low growth rates and high inflation increased poverty and inequality while rising debt levels constrained the ability of the government to invest in critical social sectors like education and health. The economic hardships led to political instability and social discontent, as seen in the widespread protests against economic mismanagement and rising costs of living.

3.3.3. Efforts to Leverage Economic Potential in Foreign Policy

Pakistan made concerted efforts to leverage its economic potential in foreign policy to attract investment, enhance economic stability, and strengthen international partnerships from 2013 to 2022. These efforts were characterized by initiatives aimed at trade enhancement, infrastructure development, regional connectivity, and diplomatic engagements focused on economic cooperation.

One of the most significant initiatives was the CPEC, launched in 2013 as part of China's BRI. CPEC aimed to transform the infrastructure and energy sectors of Pakistan through multi-billion-dollar investments. The important projects included road and rail networks, the development of Gwadar Port, and numerous energy projects like the Karachi Nuclear Power Plant (KANUPP)³⁹ and the Sahiwal Coal Power Plant.⁴⁰ These projects not only provided critical infrastructure but also stimulated economic activity and created job opportunities. For instance, the development of Gwadar Port aimed to position Pakistan as an important regional logistics and trade hub, potentially boosting trade with the Middle East, Central Asia, and beyond. The successful materialization of the CPEC was a cornerstone of economic diplomacy in Pakistan, highlighting its potential as a strategic economic partner to other nations (Wolf, 2019).

Efforts to enhance trade relations were also evident in an active engagement of Pakistan with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)⁴¹ countries. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia also provided significant financial support to Pakistan during economic crises, reflecting the strong strategic and economic ties. For example, in 2018, Saudi Arabia extended a \$6 billion financial package to Pakistan, which included a \$3 billion loan and a deferred payment facility for oil imports. The UAE also announced a \$3 billion support package in the same year. These financial aids were crucial in stabilizing the economy of the country and were leveraged to secure further investments in sectors like infrastructure and energy, strengthening bilateral economic ties (Khan & Khan, 2020).

³⁹ The Karachi Nuclear Power Plant expansion, a CPEC project, adds two 1,100-megawatt reactors, K-2 and K-3, to the existing facility, increasing Pakistan's nuclear power capacity and energy security through Chinese collaboration.

⁴⁰ The Sahiwal Coal Power Plant is a 1,320-megawatt coal-fired power station in Punjab, Pakistan, built under CPEC, using supercritical technology, and operated by Huaneng Shandong Ruyi Energy.

⁴¹ The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a regional organization comprising six Middle Eastern countries - Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates - promoting economic and political cooperation.

The efforts of Pakistan to enhance trade and regional connectivity were further demonstrated through initiatives like the Central Asia-South Asia (CASA-1000) power project. This project aimed to transmit surplus electricity from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Afghanistan and Pakistan, fostering regional cooperation and addressing energy shortages. The project highlighted the strategic role of Pakistan in regional energy dynamics and its potential as a transit hub for energy resources, thereby enhancing its economic and geopolitical significance.

Diplomatic engagements focused on economic cooperation also played a critical role. The participation of Pakistan in international forums such as the SCO emphasized its commitment to regional economic integration and cooperation. The SCO provided a platform for Pakistan to engage with major economies like Russia and China, exploring opportunities for investment, trade, and security cooperation. These engagements were aimed at diversifying the economic partnerships of Pakistan and reducing reliance on traditional allies.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government also undertook various reforms to improve foreign direct investment (FDI) and business environment. Initiatives to enhance ease of doing business, streamline regulatory processes, and offer incentives for foreign investors were part of these efforts. For example, the Board of Investment (BOI) launched several programs to promote investment in key sectors such as energy, manufacturing, and information technology. The Special Economic Zones (SEZs) established under CPEC also aimed to attract investment by offering modern infrastructure and tax incentives. These reforms were designed to make Pakistan a more attractive destination for investors, leveraging its economic potential and strategic location (Saifullah & Qaisrani, 2022)

Another example of leveraging economic potential was the engagement of Pakistan with the European Union (EU) under the Generalized System of Preferences Plus (GSP+) scheme. The

GSP+ status granted by the EU in 2014 provided Pakistani exporters with preferential access to the EU market, significantly boosting exports, particularly in the garment and textile sectors. This access helped Pakistan to increase foreign exchange earnings and diversify its export markets, demonstrating how trade agreements and collaboration could be effectively utilized to enhance economic potential (Siddiqui, 2021).

3.4. Regional Dynamics

Regional dynamics pose significant challenges for Pakistan, particularly concerning the US presence in Afghanistan, and other regional powers as the situation in Afghanistan continued to have direct implications for the stability and security and stability of Pakistan. The presence of militant groups in Afghanistan, such as various factions of the Taliban and the Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP), led to increased instability and cross-border attacks in the border regions of Pakistan. For example, after the Taliban takeover in August 2021, there was a notable increase in cross-border militant activity. Pakistan responded by enhancing border management, including the construction of a border fence, and engaging in diplomatic initiatives to stabilize the region. However, the persistent threat from groups like TTP continued to pose significant security challenges.

Pakistan's bilateral relationships with the US and Afghanistan were complex and often fraught with tension. The US-Pakistan relationship experienced diplomatic friction due to allegations that Pakistan provides safe havens for militant groups such as the Haqqani Network targeting the US and Afghan forces. Despite these challenges, Pakistan sought to maintain a strategic balance by cooperating with the US on counterterrorism while also engaging with Afghan authorities to foster peace and stability. The recent emphasis on the role of Pakistan in facilitating the US-Taliban peace talks highlighted this subtle balancing act (Javed, 2020).

The Iran-Saudi strategic rivalry presented significant challenges for Pakistan, which has historical ties with both countries. The efforts of Pakistan to remain neutral were complicated by its geographical proximity to Iran and the sectarian dimension of the Saudi-Iran conflict. For example, Pakistan hosted mediation efforts, such as the Islamabad meeting in 2019 aimed at reducing tensions between Tehran and Riyadh. Consequently, then Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Saudi Arabia and Iran in October 2019 aimed at de-escalating tensions between the two rivals. However, incidents like the sectarian violence in Pakistan and attacks on Shia Muslims, perceived to be influenced by the broader Saudi-Iran rivalry, continued to test the internal security and diplomatic stance of Pakistan (Ahmed & Akbarzadeh, 2020).

The withdrawal of NATO forces, particularly the US, from Afghanistan in 2021 created a power vacuum and heightened instability in the region. This situation had significant implications for the security of Pakistan, as the lack of a stable governance structure in Afghanistan could have led to increased militant activities along the border. Subsequently, Pakistan sought to play a constructive role in promoting peace by calling for an inclusive government and supporting intra-Afghan dialogues in Kabul. However, managing the diverse array of interests and actors involved in Afghanistan remained a daunting task for Pakistani policymakers of Pakistan (Ullah et al., 2023).

3.4.1. Afghanistan's Situation and its Implications for Pakistan

The situation in Afghanistan from 2013 to 2022 has had profound implications for Pakistan, impacting its diplomatic relations, security apparatus, and internal stability. The period saw significant events, including the resurgence of the Taliban, the rise and fall of the ISKP, and the eventual withdrawal of NATO and US forces. These developments influenced the

counterterrorism efforts, border management, and diplomatic and strategic positioning of Pakistan in the region.

The resurgence of the Taliban and the emergence of ISKP had heightened security threats along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Militant groups like TTP had exploited the instability in Afghanistan to launch attacks within Pakistan. For instance, the December 2014 Peshawar school massacre, which resulted in the deaths of 151 citizens including school children, was orchestrated by the TTP with bases in Afghanistan. This attack led Pakistan to launch Operation Zarb-e-Azb, a major military offensive targeting militant sanctuaries in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA).

Not relying solely on military operations, Pakistan focused on improving border management to address the issue of cross-border militancy. The Fall of Kanduz (2015)⁴² prompted Pakistan to construct a fence along the Durand Line, spanning approximately 2,600 kilometers, which has been a significant measure. Completed around 2023, the fence aimed to enhance security and prevent illegal cross-border movement. Additionally, Pakistan also implemented biometric systems at border crossings and increased patrols and surveillance (Anwar et al., 2023).

Moreover, both countries signed The Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) is a bilateral agreement aimed at promoting peace, stability, and cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Launched in 2018, APAPPS focuses on seven key areas: counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, border security, Afghan refugees, trade and commerce, education, and people-to-people exchanges. The plan seeks to address long-standing issues and mistrust between the two nations, promoting a constructive dialogue and collaborative approach

⁴² The Fall of Kunduz in 2015 marked a brief Taliban capture of the strategic Afghan city, showcasing their strength and exposing weaknesses in Afghan security forces and US-led coalition efforts.

to regional security. Through APAPPS, both countries commit to joint efforts in combating terrorism, securing borders, and promoting economic development. The agreement also emphasizes the importance of people-to-people ties, education, and cultural exchanges in fostering greater understanding and cooperation. By addressing the complex and interrelated challenges facing the region, APAPPS provides a framework for Afghanistan and Pakistan to work together toward a more peaceful and prosperous future (Biographies, 2018).

In the context of diplomatic and strategic implications, the US-Pakistan bilateral relationship was tumultuous, often influenced by the situation in Afghanistan. The alleged support of Pakistan for the Haqqani Network and other militant groups has been a point of contention. For example, in 2018, the US suspended security assistance such as Coalition Support Funds (CSF) to Pakistan, citing insufficient action against militant groups. Despite these tensions, Pakistan played a crucial role in facilitating the US-Taliban peace talks, leading to the Doha Agreement⁴³ in February 2020. This agreement ultimately paved the way for the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Similarly, Afghanistan-Pakistan bilateral relations have been marked by mutual, blame-game, distrust and accusations. Likewise from the start of the 21st century, the successive Afghan government had often accused Pakistan of providing safe havens to Taliban fighters. Conversely, Pakistan also accused Afghanistan of harboring TTP militants. The efforts to improve bilateral relations included various diplomatic initiatives, such as the Afghan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS), launched in 2018 to enhance cooperation on counterterrorism, cross-border infiltration, and security apparatus (Faheem et al., 2022).

⁴³ The Doha Agreement (2020) is a peace deal between the US and Taliban, aiming to end the Afghan conflict, with provisions for troop withdrawal, Taliban commitments on terrorism, and intra-Afghan talks.

The US withdrawal prompted the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan to deteriorate since the Taliban takeover, with economic collapse and widespread food insecurity. Subsequently, Pakistan provided humanitarian assistance, including medical and food supplies, and also called for international support to avert a humanitarian disaster. This assistance aimed to foster inclusive stability in Afghanistan and prevent further destabilization that could impact Pakistan (Zamaraeva, 2023).

To neutralize the hard image of the country, Pakistan shifted its focus from a security-centric approach to a more diplomatic and economic-oriented one. Pakistan's participation in international forums, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), increased, showcasing its commitment to regional cooperation. The country also launched initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), attracting foreign investment and promoting economic growth. Furthermore, Pakistan's efforts in combating terrorism, such as Operation Zarb-e-Azb, were recognized globally. These steps helped to project a softer image of Pakistan, highlighting its potential as a key player in regional trade, economic development, and global affairs.

Pakistan also acknowledged the role of China in Afghanistan through Beijing's growing influence in Kabul, particularly through the BRI, had constructive implications for Pakistan. China-Pakistan cooperation on regional stability had intensified, with both countries advocating for an inclusive political settlement in Afghanistan. The investment of China in infrastructure and development projects in Afghanistan was seen as a stabilizing factor that aligns with the strategic interests of Pakistan (Ahmed & Bhatnagar, 2021).

3.4.2. Balancing relations with Afghanistan, the US, and other Regional Powers

Pakistan faced the complex task of balancing its bilateral relations with Afghanistan, the US, and other regional powers from 2013 to 2022. This period was marked by significant geopolitical shifts, including the US drawdown in Afghanistan, the rise of China, and increased regional rivalries. The foreign policy of Pakistan aimed to navigate these dynamics to maintain stability and advance its strategic interests.

Afghanistan-Pakistan bilateral relations were characterized by mutual distrust and periodic cooperation. Afghanistan often accused Pakistan of harboring Taliban fighters, simultaneously Pakistan blamed Afghanistan for sheltering anti-Pakistan militants like the TTP. Despite these challenges, both countries engaged in diplomatic initiatives to improve relations. For instance, the APAPPS, launched in 2018, aimed to enhance cooperation on counterterrorism and the security apparatus of the country (Akhtar, 2018).

However, the capture of Kabul by the Taliban in August 2021 significantly impacted Pakistan-Afghanistan relations. Pakistan faced the dual challenge of addressing security threats from TTP militants operating from Afghan territory while engaging diplomatically with the new Taliban regime. Pakistan advocated for international engagement with the Taliban to ensure stability and prevent Afghanistan from again becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups.

For the reason that the protracted conflict in Afghanistan led to periodic influxes of Afghan refugees into Pakistan. Following the Taliban takeover, Pakistan prepared for a potential new wave of refugees, though the expected surge of refugees did not fully materialize. The approach of Pakistan combined humanitarian assistance with calls for international support to manage the refugee situation (Naz & Jaspal, 2021).

Balancing relations with the US on the chess of Afghanistan remained a challenge for Pakistan. The US-Pakistan relationship during this period was marked by both tension and cooperation. While Pakistan was an important ally in the US-led War on Terror, it was also accused of providing sanctuaries for groups like the Haqqani Network. In response to the growing threat of militancy, Pakistan launched Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014, targeting militant sanctuaries in the FATA. However, the US suspension of security assistance to Pakistan in 2018 highlighted these tensions. However, despite the strains, Pakistan continued to play a crucial role in facilitating the US -Taliban peace talks that culminated in the Doha Agreement in February 2020 (Zamaraeva, 2023).

Balancing relations with China, the relationship of Pakistan with China deepened significantly during this period, particularly through the CPEC, a flagship project of China's BRI. CPEC aimed to enhance economic development and regional connectivity, with projects spanning infrastructure, energy, and trade. The alignment of Pakistan with China had strategic implications, providing a counterbalance to US influence and support against Indian regional aspirations. However, India-Pakistan bilateral relations remained tense, with periodic escalations, such as the Pulwama attack in February 2019 and the subsequent Balakot airstrike. Pakistan sought to highlight the Kashmir issue on international platforms after the revocation of articles 370 and 35-A while maintaining a deterrent posture through its conventional and nuclear capabilities (Ahlawat & Izarali, 2020).

Moreover, Pakistan's balancing act between Iran and Saudi Arabia has been subtle, given its historical ties and geopolitical interests. Pakistan maintained a neutral stance in the Saudi-Iran rivalry, despite pressures from both sides. For example, Prime Minister Imran Khan's visits to Riyadh and Tehran in October 2019 aimed to mediate tensions and prevent conflict spillover into

Pakistan. Likewise, Pakistan's bilateral relationship with Russia saw a gradual improvement, with increased strategic dialogue and military cooperation. The annual Pakistan-Russia military exercises, Druzhba, initiated in 2016, signify a growing defense partnership aimed at enhancing regional stability (Khan, 2019).

3.4.3. Iran-Saudi Strategic Rivalry

Iran-Saudi Arabia strategic rivalry has been a defining feature of Middle Eastern geopolitics. This rivalry, rooted in historical, geopolitical, and sectarian factors, has significant implications for Pakistan. Maintaining internal stability and pursuing its strategic interests while balancing relations with both countries posed substantial challenges for Pakistan from 2013 to 2022. Historically, the Iran-Saudi rivalry was deeply entrenched in the Sunni-Shia divide, with Iran as the vanguard of Shia Islam and Saudi Arabia positioning itself as the leader of the Sunni Muslim world. This sectarian competition was exacerbated by geopolitical conflicts, including the wars in Yemen and Syria, where both countries supported opposing sides. Pakistan, with its significant Shia and Sunni populations and strategic ties to both Tehran and Riyadh, had to navigate this complex landscape carefully.

The sectarian dimension of the Iran-Saudi rivalry had spilled over into Pakistan, which has a significant Shia minority. The incidents of sectarian violence in Pakistan have often been linked to the broader regional competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran. For instance, Quetta bombings targeting Hazara Shias, killing over 200 people, and the 2015 Imamia Mosque attack in Peshawar, killing 20. In 2018, a suicide bombing in Mastung killed 149 people, mostly from the Shia community. In 2022, an ISIS attack on a Shia mosque in Peshawar killed 63 worshippers. These incidents highlighted the vulnerability of Pakistan to sectarian strife influenced by external

rivalries because both countries have engaged in proxy conflicts in various parts of the Middle East, Syria, Yemen, and Syria (Faheem et al., 2021).

Pakistan has faced pressure from both sides to take a stance in these conflicts. For instance, in 2015, Saudi Arabia sought support from Pakistan for its military intervention in Yemen against the Iran-aligned Houthi rebels. However, the parliament of Pakistan voted to remain neutral, saying “Pakistan should maintain neutrality in the conflict to be able to play a proactive diplomatic role to end the crisis” emphasizing the need to avoid exacerbating sectarian tensions within Pakistan and to maintain balanced relations with both regional arch-rivals (Rizvi, 2017).

Economically, Saudi Arabia has been a significant source of financial investment and aid for Pakistan. Remittances from Pakistani workers in Saudi Arabia also play a crucial role in Pakistan's economy. For instance, in 2018, Saudi Arabia provided Pakistan with a \$6 billion aid package, including loans and deferred oil payments, to help address its balance of payments crisis. Moreover, in 2019, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman announced investments worth \$20 billion in Pakistan, including the development of an oil refinery in Gwadar. On the other hand, Iran shares a long border with Pakistan, and as an immediate neighbor, there is huge potential for economic cooperation, particularly in energy. For example, the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project,⁴⁴ though stalled due to the US sanctions on Iran, symbolizes the economic interdependence between the two countries.

Maintaining neutrality between both countries remained a challenging task for Pakistan. Pakistan consistently sought to maintain a neutral stance in the Iran-Saudi rivalry, despite pressures from both sides. This neutrality was crucial for the internal security of Pakistan, given its diverse

⁴⁴ The Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project can supply 21.5 million cubic meters of gas per day, reducing Pakistan's energy deficit by 30%, saving \$1.5 billion annually, and generating \$1 billion in transit fees.

sectarian demographics. However, maintaining this balance remained challenging. For instance, the decision of Pakistan to join the Saudi-led Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAFT) in 2017 was perceived as aligning with Saudi interests, despite the assurances from Pakistan that the alliance was not sectarian in nature.

Moreover, the strategic rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran exacerbated sectarian violence in Pakistan. Groups such as Sipah-e-Sahaba and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi had targeted Shia Muslims, often with alleged external support. This violence undermined the internal security of Pakistan and complicated its foreign policy. The killing of prominent Shia cleric Allama Nasir Abbas in 2013 and the 2019 Hazara Shia community attacks in Quetta are stark reminders of the sectarian challenges Pakistan faces.

However, Pakistan had actively tried to mediate between Saudi Arabia and Iran to reduce regional tensions. In October 2019, Prime Minister Imran Khan visited both countries to de-escalate tensions and facilitate dialogue following attacks on Saudi oil facilities, which were blamed on Iran. Although these efforts highlighted the commitment of Pakistan to regional stability, the deep-rooted nature of the Iran-Saudi rivalry has limited the effectiveness of such mediation (Qaisar et al., 2022).

3.4.4. Challenges in the aftermath of US and NATO Forces' Withdrawal from Afghanistan

The withdrawal of NATO and the US forces from Afghanistan, culminating in the complete pullout in August 2021, had profound implications for Pakistan. This significant geopolitical shift presented both immediate and long-term challenges for Pakistan in terms of diplomacy, security, economic stability, and regional dynamics. Starting from cross-border militancy, the withdrawal led to increased instability in Afghanistan and created a security vacuum that various militant groups, including the TTP, sought to exploit. The TTP, which had found

sanctuary in Afghanistan, intensified its cross-border attacks on Pakistani security forces and civilians such as the APS Peshawar school-like attack that took place in 2014.

Similarly, the Durand Line remained a hotbed of insurgent movement, smuggling, and refugee flow. Post-withdrawal, managing this porous border became increasingly challenging. Pakistan took several measures such as increasing patrols and erecting a border fence, but these efforts met resistance and have not fully stemmed the flow of militants and illegal activities in Pakistan. Moreover, the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan emboldened domestic extremist groups within Pakistan. The spillover effects included a rise in sectarian violence and targeted killings, particularly in regions like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. The Quetta bombing in August 2021, targeting the Hazara community, accentuated the ongoing internal security challenges exacerbated by the Afghan situation (Zahid, 2021).

In the post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan, the response of the international community to the Taliban takeover was cautious, with many countries, including Pakistan, advocating for engagement with the Taliban regime to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a pariah state. The diplomatic challenge for Pakistan was to balance its relationship with the Taliban while ensuring not to alienate other regional and global powers. Islamabad also called for humanitarian aid and international recognition for Afghanistan, emphasizing the need to prevent a humanitarian crisis.

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan posed several economic challenges for Pakistan such as the impact on trade and transit and economic aid and assistance. The instability in Afghanistan has disrupted traditional transit and trade routes. Pakistan faced challenges in ensuring the smooth flow of goods and services through Afghan territory. The closure of the Torkham border crossing in 2021 due to security concerns exemplifies these disruptions, affecting the trade of Pakistan with Central Asian states (Hussain, 2022).

Moreover, the withdrawal led to fears of a new wave of Afghan refugees entering Pakistan. While the expected large-scale influx did not fully materialize, Pakistan remains host to over 3 million Afghan refugees. The economic instability in Afghanistan had direct implications for Pakistan. The reluctance of the international community to recognize the Taliban regime and the resulting sanctions had affected the economy of Afghanistan, leading to reduced economic and trade engagement with Pakistan. However, Islamabad had advocated for humanitarian aid and the unfreezing of Afghan assets to financially stabilize the region.

The evolving situation in Afghanistan had significantly impacted Iran-Pakistan bilateral relations, prompting enhanced cooperation. Both nations shared concerns about the proliferation of extremist groups like the Taliban and ISIS along their borders. In response, both countries had implemented joint security measures to address these threats. Notable examples include the opening of new border crossings, such as the Mand-Pishin crossing, which facilitates trade and strengthens border management. Additionally, the establishment of a joint border security mechanism highlighted their commitment to combating smuggling and cross-border terrorism. This collaboration not only aimed to stabilize the region but also improve bilateral relations and foster economic ties, demonstrating a pragmatic approach to shared security challenges (Zahid, 2021).

3.5. US-Pakistan Relations

The US-Pakistan relations experienced a range of challenges, influenced by various strategic and geopolitical factors such as counterterrorism cooperation, the strengthening of US-India strategic ties, the Iran-US rivalry, the evolving situation in Afghanistan, and broader US strategic interests in the region. These factors collectively contributed to a strained and often

complex bilateral relationship, with each aspect presenting its own set of difficulties and implications for both nations.

Counterterrorism cooperation has been a cornerstone of the US-Pakistan bilateral relations since the early 2000s. However, the period from 2013 to 2022 saw increasing friction in this area. The US consistently pressured Pakistan to “Do More” against militant sanctuaries operating within its borders, particularly those targeting American interests in Afghanistan. The killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad in 2011 had already cast a shadow over the reliability of Pakistan as a counterterrorism partner.

This skepticism persisted, with the US frequently accusing Pakistan of providing safe havens to the Haqqani network and the Taliban. For instance, in 2018, then-President Donald Trump accused Pakistan of giving "sanctuaries to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan" and subsequently suspended significant military aid. Pakistan, on the other hand, contended that it had suffered enormous losses due to its involvement in the US-led War on Terror and sought recognition and support for its counterterrorism efforts (Khan, 2022).

Moreover, the strengthening of US-India strategic ties posed another significant challenge to US-Pakistan bilateral relations. The US-India partnership, particularly in economic and defense areas, grew substantially during this period, driven by shared concerns over the strategic rise of China. The important agreements such as the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)⁴⁵ in 2016 and the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement

⁴⁵ The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) is a 2016 pact between India and the US, facilitating mutual logistics support, simplifying procedures for refueling, spare parts, and maintenance, enhancing bilateral defense cooperation.

(COMCASA)⁴⁶ in 2018, symbolized the deepening of US-India military cooperation. For Pakistan, this partnership was perceived as a direct threat, exacerbating its strategic insecurities. The US's endorsement of India's bid for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and its support for India's entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) further strained bilateral relations with Pakistan, which viewed these moves as efforts to undermine its strategic parity with India (Shahid, 2018).

Similarly, the role of Afghanistan in US-Pakistan relations also remained pivotal and contentious. As the US sought to withdraw from Afghanistan and end its longest-running war in history, the role of Pakistan in facilitating peace talks with the Taliban became crucial. Despite various efforts from Pakistan to broker peace, the US often expressed frustration over the perceived duplicity of Pakistan in dealing with the Taliban.

The complex relationship between managing its own security concerns and facilitating the US-Taliban negotiations led to a tenuous dynamic. The US's sudden and chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, and subsequently the swift takeover by the Taliban, further complicated matters. While Pakistan welcomed the end of US military presence in Afghanistan, it faced renewed security challenges from an emboldened Taliban and various militant groups, creating a precarious security environment along its western border.

Likewise, the Iran-US strategic rivalry also influenced US-Pakistan relations. The economic and geographical ties of Pakistan with Iran, particularly through projects like the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline, often conflicted with the US sanctions and its broader policy of isolating

⁴⁶ The Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) is a 2018 pact between India and the US, enabling secure communication between their militaries, facilitating interoperability, and enhancing cooperation in defense and security.

Iran. The need for Pakistan to balance its relationship with Iran against its dependence on US military and economic aid created a challenging diplomatic tightrope. For instance, President Trump's administration's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran,⁴⁷ which included stringent sanctions, forced Pakistan to delay and reconsider its energy cooperation with Iran, highlighting the constraints placed on the foreign policy autonomy of Pakistan courtesy of US-Iran tensions.

The US strategic interests in the region, particularly its pivot to Asia strategy aimed at countering the growing influence of China, also had implications for the US-Pakistan relations. The US' growing alignment with India as a counterbalance to China, coupled with its criticism of China's BRI, placed Pakistan in a strategic testing position. Pakistan, a key participant in the BRI hosted the CPEC project, found itself navigating a subtle balance between maintaining its historically significant relationship with the US and its strategic alliances with China. The US skepticism towards the CPEC, which it viewed as a strategic maneuver by China and a debt trap for Pakistan, further strained relations (Jabeen et al., 2020).

3.5.1. Strengthening of US-India Strategic Ties

The strengthening of US-India strategic ties since the early 2000s posed significant challenges to Pakistan, deeply impacting its diplomatic stance, security environment, and economic stability. This period witnessed a marked intensification in the US-India partnership, driven by shared concerns over the growing rise of China, the resurgence of Russia, and a mutual interest in securing the Indo-Pacific region. For Pakistan, these developments altered regional

⁴⁷ Trump's administration's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran aimed to isolate the country economically and diplomatically, imposing severe sanctions, withdrawing from the JCPOA nuclear deal, and targeting Iran's oil exports, military, and proxy networks to force regime change or compliance.

power dynamics, exacerbated its strategic insecurities, and compelled it to reassess its defense strategies and foreign policy.

One of the most profound impacts of the US-India strategic partnership on Pakistan was the shift in the regional security paradigm. Historically, Pakistan has viewed India as its conventional adversary, with a focus on maintaining strategic parity. The deepening of Indo-US defense relations threatened this paradigm. The significant agreements such as the LEMOA in 2016 and the COMCASA in 2018, which facilitated greater intelligence sharing and interoperability between India and the US armed forces, were perceived as direct threats by Pakistan. These above-stated agreements enabled India to access advanced US military equipment and technology, thereby enhancing its strategic and conventional capabilities. For instance, the sale of sophisticated weaponry like the P-8I maritime surveillance aircraft and AH-64 Apache helicopters to India significantly bolstered the military strength of India, compelling Pakistan to enhance its own defense capabilities in response (Mahmood et al., 2022).

Moreover, the US endorsement of India's bid for a permanent seat on the UNSC and its support for India's entry into the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG)⁴⁸ further strained the US-Pakistan relationship. Pakistan viewed these moves as efforts to consolidate the position of India on the global stage while sidelining Pakistan. The US's backing of India's NSG membership bid was particularly contentious, as it undermined the regional nuclear balance.

Despite being a non-signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), India received a waiver from the NSG in 2008, enabling it to engage in nuclear commerce. Pakistan, also a non-signatory, has since sought similar recognition to India but faced resistance, largely due

⁴⁸ The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) is a 48-member forum that regulates global nuclear trade, aiming to prevent proliferation by controlling exports of nuclear materials, equipment, and technology to non-nuclear states.

to the strategic preferences of the US in the region. This disparity not only heightened the security concerns of Pakistan but also reinforced its perception of the US-India partnership as a strategic alliance aimed at isolating Pakistan (Shahid, 2018).

Economically, the growing US-India relationship also posed challenges to the aspirations of Pakistan for regional trade and connectivity. The US-India strategic partnership promoted initiatives that favored the economic rise of India, such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Corridor (IPEC). This initiative aimed to enhance economic integration and development across South and Southeast Asia, positioning India as a pivotal player. For Pakistan, already struggling with inclusive economic instability, the marginalization from such regional projects hampered its efforts to boost economic and trade growth.

Furthermore, the alignment of US-India interests often translated into diplomatic pressure on Pakistan. For instance, the FATF placed Pakistan on its gray list in 2018, citing deficiencies in its counter-money laundering and terror financing measures. Although Pakistan made significant efforts to comply with FATF recommendations, it perceived the move as influenced by US and Indian lobbying, which aimed to diplomatically pressure and economically isolate Islamabad.

Moreover, the US-India strategic ties also impacted Pakistan's stance on the Kashmir conflict, a bone of contention in India-Pakistan relations. The abrogation of Articles 370 and 35-A by the Indian government in August 2019, which revoked the special status of J&K, was a significant flashpoint. Pakistan vociferously opposed this move, calling for international intervention.

However, the US response was notably muted, largely viewing the issue as a bilateral matter between Pakistan and India. The lack of a strong US stance against the aggressive actions

of India in Kashmir was seen by Pakistan as indicative of the US' prioritization of its strategic relationship with India over regional stability and human rights concerns. This perception further strained the diplomatic efforts of Pakistan to garner international support on the Kashmir issue (Rashid et al., 2023).

Subsequently, in response to the strengthening of US-India strategic ties, Pakistan sought to bolster its own alliances, particularly with China. The CPEC, a flagship project under China's BRI, became central to the economic and strategic calculus of Pakistan. CPEC aimed to enhance connectivity and infrastructure development in Pakistan, offering an economic lifeline amidst regional isolation. However, this alignment with China also had several complexities. While CPEC promised economic benefits, it also increased the excessive dependence of Pakistan on China, which came with its own set of economic risks and strategic vulnerabilities, such as limited economic diversification and debt dependency (Iqbal, 2020).

3.5.2. Counterterrorism Cooperation and its Challenges

The US-Pakistan counterterrorism cooperation presented a complex array of challenges for Pakistan, influencing its diplomatic relations, internal security dynamics, and regional stability from 2013 to 2022. This period saw fluctuating levels of contentions and collaboration, driven by diverging strategic priorities, mutual distrust, and the evolving nature of terrorism threats. These factors collectively shaped a challenging environment for Pakistan as it navigated its role as an important player in the global counterterrorism landscape while grappling with its own geopolitical interests and security concerns.

A significant challenge in the US-Pakistan counterterrorism partnership was the persistent issue of mutual distrust. The killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad in 2011 had already strained relations, with the US questioning the inclusive commitment of Pakistan to

counterterrorism. This skepticism persisted throughout the subsequent years, with the US frequently accusing Pakistan of harboring terrorist groups like the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network, which targeted the US and NATO forces in Afghanistan.

For instance, in 2018, then-President Donald Trump accused Pakistan of providing a "safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan," leading to the suspension of significant military aid to Pakistan. This accusation reflected a broader pattern of US frustration over what it perceived as a double game from Pakistan publicly supporting counterterrorism efforts while allegedly maintaining covert links with certain militant groups to secure its strategic interests in Afghanistan (Ibrahim et al., 2021).

For Pakistan, these allegations were not only complicating its domestic counterterrorism efforts but also diplomatically damaging its international image abroad. Pakistan argued that it had suffered enormous losses due to its involvement in the US-led War on Terror, both in terms of economic costs and human lives. The country faced a relentless wave of terrorism, with numerous attacks on civilians and security forces, particularly by groups like the TTP. For example, the devastating attack on the APS in Peshawar in December 2014, which killed over 151 people, mostly children, highlighted the severe internal security threats Pakistan faced. Despite these challenges, the aid suspension and public criticisms from the US often overshadowed counterterrorism sacrifices and efforts of Pakistan, straining bilateral trust and cooperation.

Another major challenge was the divergent strategic priorities of Pakistan and the US in the region. The US primarily focused on ensuring a managed withdrawal of its troops and stabilizing Afghanistan on its own terms, which involved negotiating with the Taliban. Pakistan, while playing a crucial role in facilitating the US-Taliban peace talks, had its own strategic concerns in Afghanistan, particularly regarding the growing influence of India. Pakistan feared

various segments of Afghanistan that align with India, potentially encircling it strategically. This divergence was evident during the chaotic withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan in 2021 (Nawab et al., 2021).

While Pakistan supported the peace process, the rapid Taliban takeover post-withdrawal led to a complex security situation for Islamabad. Pakistan faced the dual challenge of dealing with a potential resurgence of militant groups emboldened by the Taliban's victory and managing its border security on the Western front. The situation also reignited several debates within Pakistan about the costs and benefits of its strategic alliance with the US, especially considering the abrupt policy shifts of the latter.

Similarly, the issue of drone strikes also posed significant challenges for Pakistan. The US drone operations targeting militant leaders in the tribal areas of Pakistan were a contentious aspect of counterterrorism cooperation. While these strikes were effective in eliminating high-value targets, they also resulted in widespread anti-American sentiment among the Pakistani populace because of civilian casualties.

For example, the 2013 drone strike that killed Hakimullah Mehsud, the leader of TTP, was a tactical success for the US but sparked outrage in Pakistan, where it was seen as a sovereignty violation and an act that undermined the internal security operations of Pakistan. The persistent civilian casualties and the perception of unilateral US actions fueled public anger and complicated the domestic political landscape of Pakistan, where successive governments had to balance counterterrorism cooperation with the US against nationalist sentiments and sovereignty concerns (Kronstadt, 2015).

Moreover, the suspension of US security aid to Pakistan, particularly the CSF and the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act, created financial strains on the military operations of Pakistan against terrorist groups. The CSF was supposed to reimburse Pakistan for its counterterrorism efforts, but the aid suspension in 2018 significantly impacted the military budget and operational capabilities of Pakistan. This financial strain coincided with broader economic challenges for the country, including a balance of payments crisis and debt repayment, forcing the country to seek financial support from alternative sources, such as the IMF and friendly nations like Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and China. The aid suspension highlighted the volatile nature of US-Pakistan relations, where strategic disagreements could quickly translate into operational and financial setbacks for counterterrorism initiatives in Pakistan.

However, despite these challenges, there were moments of strategic alignment and cooperation between both countries. The military operations of Pakistan, such as Zarb-e-Azb launched in 2014 and Radd-ul-Fasaad in 2017, targeted various militant groups and demonstrated commitment to counterterrorism by Pakistan. These operations were acknowledged by the US and Western countries as significant contributions to regional stability. However, the broader narrative of strategic divergence and mutual distrust often overshadowed these cooperative efforts, leaving the US-Pakistan counterterrorism partnership fraught with tension (Ahmed, 2020).

2.5.3. Trump Policy of the South Asia

President Trump's administration's South Asia policy, unveiled in August 2017, also posed significant challenges for Pakistan, affecting its diplomatic relations, strategic calculations, and regional security dynamics. This policy, which emphasized a strategic partnership with India and a tougher stance on Pakistan, reshaped the overall geopolitical landscape of South Asia and compelled Pakistan to navigate a complex and often adversarial environment.

A central element of the Trump administration's South Asia policy was its explicit criticism of counterterrorism efforts of Pakistan. President Trump accused Pakistan of providing sanctuaries to terrorists who targeted the US forces in Afghanistan, despite receiving substantial US aid. This accusation was a departure from the more meticulous public stance of previous administrations and signaled a shift towards a more confrontational approach. In his policy speech, Trump stated that Pakistan often provided "sanctuaries to agents of chaos, violence, and terror," a claim that deeply strained US-Pakistan relations. This rhetoric was also followed by tangible actions, including the suspension of approximately \$2 billion in security assistance to Pakistan in January 2018. This aid suspension created significant operational and financial constraints for the military of the country, which relied on US funds for the maintenance of military equipment and counterterrorism operations (Tellis, 2017).

The aid suspension was also accompanied by increased pressure on Pakistan to take decisive action against terrorist groups like the Haqqani network and the Taliban, which the US claimed operated from Pakistani territory. The FATF placed Pakistan on its grey list in June 2018, citing deficiencies in its counter-terror financing and anti-money laundering measures. While Pakistan made considerable efforts to comply with FATF recommendations, including tightening financial regulations and enacting new laws, the grey-listing had substantial economic repercussions. It hindered the access of Pakistan to foreign investments and international financial markets, exacerbating its financial challenges and contributing to a balance of payments crisis.

Moreover, President Trump's administration's closer alignment with India also presented another significant challenge for Pakistan. The US-India strategic partnership, particularly in the areas of economic and defense cooperation, was a cornerstone of Trump's South Asia policy. This alignment was driven by shared concerns over the rise of China, the resurgence of Russia, and a

mutual interest in promoting security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. The important bilateral agreements such as the COMCASA in 2018 and the US supporting India's bid for a permanent seat on the UNSC and NSG were perceived by Pakistan as efforts to enhance regional dominance of India and marginalize Pakistan, exacerbating its strategic insecurities (Arian & Haqbeen, 2020).

President Trump's South Asian policy also had significant implications for the Kashmir conflict. The abrogation of Article 370 and 35-A by India in August 2019, which revoked the special status of J&K, was a critical moment. While Pakistan vociferously opposed this move and sought international intervention, the US response was relatively muted. President Trump offered to mediate the Kashmir issue, but his administration did not take a strong stance against the aggressive actions of India. This perceived indifference added diplomatic challenges for Pakistan, as it struggled to rally international support against the unilateral decision of India. The situation in Kashmir further deteriorated, with increased military presence and human rights violations, leading to heightened tensions between Pakistan and India and frequent skirmishes along the LoC.

Moreover, the role of Afghanistan in Trump's South Asia policy further complicated the strategic environment of Pakistan. The US sought support from Pakistan in facilitating peace talks with the Taliban, aiming to end its longest-running war. Subsequently, Pakistan played a crucial role in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table, culminating in the US-Taliban peace agreement signed in February 2020 (Ishaque et al, 2020).

However, the peace process was fraught with challenges, including the exclusion of the Afghan government from initial negotiations and the complex dynamics of intra-Afghan talks. The insistence of the US on a rapid withdrawal of troops created a security vacuum in Afghanistan, leading to concerns about a potential resurgence of militant groups and instability along the

western border of Pakistan. The subsequent Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 posed additional security challenges for Pakistan, including managing refugee flows and countering the influence of militant groups like TTP, which could exploit the situation to launch attacks within Pakistan.

Economically, the trade policies of President Trump's administration also impacted Pakistan. The focus of the US on bilateral trade deals and tariffs vis-à-vis China created an uncertain global trade environment. Although Pakistan was not directly targeted by US tariffs, the broader impact on global trade dynamics affected its economic and export stability. Furthermore, the economic pressures and aid suspension from FATF gray-listing constrained the ability of Pakistan to secure international financial assistance and investments, compounding its economic difficulties. However, in response to these challenges, Pakistan sought to diversify its strategic and economic partnerships. The CPEC, a flagship project under China's BRI, became central to the economic strategy of Pakistan (Singh et al., 2021).

3.5.4. Afghanistan and Pakistan's Role in the Region

The turbulent and often complex US-Afghanistan relations from the start of the 21st century posed significant challenges for Pakistan, impacting its diplomatic efforts, security landscape, and regional strategy. The role of Pakistan in the region, shaped by its geographical proximity and strategic interests, demanded a careful balancing act as it navigated the shifting dynamics between the US and Afghanistan. This period was marked by peace negotiations, escalating tensions, and the eventual withdrawal of the US troops, each phase presenting unique challenges for Pakistan.

One of the primary challenges for Pakistan was managing the security spillover from Afghanistan. The enduring presence of various factions of the terrorist groups such as the TTP and

the Haqqani Network, along with cross-border infiltration and militant activities, remained a persistent threat. The tribal areas of Pakistan along the Afghanistan border became hotspots for militant operations, often resulting in instability and violence within Pakistan. For instance, the APS attack in Peshawar in December 2014, orchestrated by TTP militants based in Afghanistan, was a stark reminder of the interconnected security threats. The attack, which claimed the lives of over 151 children, highlighted the severe implications of Afghan instability for the internal security of Pakistan (Mustafa et al., 2020).

The US's counterterrorism operations and military strategy in Afghanistan have significantly complicated Pakistan's security situation. For instance, the CIA's drone program, which aimed to eliminate high-value targets in Pakistan's tribal areas, has been a major source of contention. Drone strikes, such as the 2011 killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, and TTP leader Mullah Omer and Hakimullah Mehsud in 2013, have sparked widespread anti-American sentiment in Pakistan, fueling public anger and protests. Additionally, the US military's presence in Afghanistan has led to a surge in terrorist attacks in Pakistan, as militant groups like the Taliban and Haqqani Network have launched cross-border attacks. The US's reliance on military force has also led to civilian casualties, further straining bilateral relations. For example, the 2011 Salala incident, in which US airstrikes killed 24 Pakistani soldiers, led to a prolonged diplomatic crisis. These developments have created a complex security environment in Pakistan, where the government must balance its own counterterrorism efforts with growing public opposition to US involvement in the region (Hussain & Latif, 2020).

Diplomatically, the role of Pakistan as a key interlocutor in the Afghan peace process was both an opportunity and a challenge. The US sought assistance from Pakistan in facilitating negotiations with the Taliban, recognizing the strategic depth of Pakistan over the group. The

efforts of Pakistan culminated in the US-Taliban peace agreement signed in February 2020, which outlined the withdrawal of US troops and the start of intra-Afghan talks. However, the peace process was fraught with several challenges. The exclusion of the Afghan government from initial talks created tensions, and the subsequent intra-Afghan negotiations were plagued by violence and mistrust. Pakistan had to navigate these complexities, advocating for a peaceful resolution while maintaining relations with various Afghan factions and managing its strategic interests in the region (Hussain, 2020).

The instability in Afghanistan has had far-reaching economic consequences for Pakistan, particularly in terms of trade and connectivity. For instance, the closure of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border due to security concerns has resulted in significant losses for Pakistani traders and businesses, who rely heavily on the Afghan market for exports such as textiles, food, and construction materials. Additionally, the insecurity has disrupted the flow of goods and supplies, leading to increased transportation costs and delays. The proposed Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline, which aims to connect Central Asia with South Asia, has also been impacted by the instability, with construction delays and security concerns threatening the project's viability. Furthermore, the lack of stability has hindered Pakistan's access to Central Asian markets, limiting its potential for regional trade and economic integration. For example, the Pakistan-Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA), signed in 2010, aimed to boost bilateral trade, but its implementation has been hindered by the security situation, resulting in lost opportunities for economic growth and development.

The US-Pakistan bilateral relationship was severely strained by mutual distrust and divergent strategic priorities during this period. For instance, the US perceived Pakistan's reluctance to take decisive action against the Haqqani Network and other militant groups as a lack

of commitment to counterterrorism efforts, leading to frustration and suspicion. On the other hand, Pakistan felt that the US was not adequately addressing its concerns about India's growing influence in Afghanistan and the region, leading to feelings of betrayal and mistrust. The Raymond Davis incident in 2011, where a CIA contractor killed two Pakistani civilians, further exacerbated tensions, as did the US's unilateral raid that killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad in 2011, which Pakistan saw as a violation of its sovereignty. Moreover, the US's decision to suspend military aid to Pakistan in 2018, citing a lack of progress in combating terrorism, was seen as a punitive measure, widening the rift between the two nations. These incidents and perceived betrayals have created a deep-seated mistrust, making it challenging for the two countries to align their strategic priorities and cooperate effectively on regional security issues. (Khan & Sherazi, 2021).

3.5.5. Impact of US-Iran Rivalry on Regional Dynamics and Pakistan

The strategic rivalry between the US and Iran from the start of the 21st century posed significant challenges for Pakistan, influencing its economic stability, foreign policy, and regional security dynamics. Pakistan, sharing borders with both Afghanistan and Iran, found itself in a precarious position, trying to balance its bilateral relations with these neighboring countries while navigating the pressures and strategic interests of a dominant global power like the US. The US-Iran rivalry exacerbated the security concerns of Pakistan, strained its diplomatic efforts, and affected its economic prospects.

The important challenge for Pakistan was maintaining a subtle diplomatic balance between the US and Iran. The historical ties of Pakistan with both countries complicated its foreign policy stance. The US, a longstanding ally, provided substantial economic and military assistance, crucial for economic stability and counterterrorism efforts of Pakistan. Conversely, Iran, sharing a long border with Pakistan, was also an essential regional partner, particularly in matters related to trade,

border security, and cultural ties. The 2015 Iran nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), initially provided some respite, reducing tensions and opening economic opportunities. However, the US withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018 under President Trump and the subsequent imposition of stringent sanctions on Iran reignited tensions, forcing Pakistan to recalibrate its diplomatic strategies (Qaisar & Khan, 2020).

The re-imposition of the US sanctions on Iran had significant economic implications for Pakistan. Iran was considered a crucial source for the energy-strapped economy of Pakistan. In this context, the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline, envisioned to transport Iranian natural gas to Pakistan, faced numerous obstacles and delays, primarily due to the incessant US sanctions on Iran. Despite being crucial for the energy needs of Pakistan, the pipeline project remained stalled, as Pakistan could not afford the diplomatic and economic costs of defying the US sanctions.

The economic strain was further compounded by own financial crises of Pakistan, including a balance of payments and debt repayment crisis, making it heavily reliant on financial assistance from institutions like the IMF, where US influence was significant. This reliance constrained the ability of Pakistan to engage with Iran economically, affecting its broader economic stability and limiting its access to much-needed energy resources (Bokhari, 2019).

The US-Iran rivalry also affected the regional security environment of Pakistan. The deteriorating security situation in the Middle East, particularly in the Persian Gulf, had direct implications for Pakistan. The killing of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani by the US drone strike in January 2020 escalated bilateral tensions dramatically, raising fears of a broader conflict in the region. Pakistan, with a significant Shia population, also faced internal sectarian tensions that could be exacerbated by heightened US-Iran hostility. The potential for increased sectarian

violence within Pakistan was a significant security concern, requiring careful management of internal dynamics and external pressures.

Additionally, the US-Iran rivalry further complicated the efforts of Pakistan to maintain stability along its western border with Iran. Drug trafficking, cross-border militant activities, and refugee flows were persistent challenges. The presence of militant groups, including Baloch separatists, who operated across the Pakistan-Iran border, required cooperative security measures between the two countries. However, the broader geopolitical tensions between both countries often hindered effective collaboration. For instance, the attack on the Iranian border guards in 2019, attributed to militant groups operating from Pakistani territory, strained relations and required diplomatic efforts to de-escalate tensions. Ensuring border security in such a volatile environment necessitated a subtle balancing act for Pakistan, involving both diplomatic engagement and inclusive security measures.

The geopolitical rivalry also impacted the broader regional strategy of Pakistan, particularly its relations with the Gulf States in general and Saudi Arabia in particular. The strategic alignment of the US with Saudi Arabia against Iran created additional pressures for Pakistan. Saudi Arabia, an important political and financial ally, expected Pakistan to align with its anti-Iran stance, particularly in conflicts like the Yemen war. However, the reluctance from Pakistan to participate militarily in the Yemen conflict, despite Saudi pressure, highlighted its desire to avoid entanglement in the US-Iran rivalry and maintain a neutral stance. This decision, while preserving the diplomatic balance of Pakistan, strained its relations with Saudi Arabia, affecting economic investments and financial aid at a time when Pakistan was grappling with severe economic challenges.

Moreover, the efforts of Pakistan to foster regional trade and connectivity were undermined by the US-Iran rivalry. The CPEC, a flagship project under China's BRI, aimed to enhance regional connectivity, including potential linkages with Iran. However, the geopolitical tensions and sanctions on Iran limited the scope of these initiatives. For instance, the development of the Chabahar port in Iran, which India supported as a counterbalance to the Gwadar port of Pakistan under CPEC, reflected the complex relationship of regional rivalries. Pakistan had to navigate these competing interests carefully, ensuring that its strategic projects like CPEC were not adversely affected by the broader US -Iran tensions (Raza, 2020).

3.5.7. Pakistani Perspective on the US Policy and Influence

Anti-Americanism in Pakistan has deep roots and has significantly influenced the bilateral relations between both countries over the years. This sentiment, fueled by historical grievances, socio-cultural factors, and political developments, has led to periodic tensions and mistrust, complicating cooperation on various fronts. Understanding the causes and impacts of anti-Americanism is crucial to comprehending the dynamics of US-Pakistan relations.

One of the primary causes of anti-Americanism in Pakistan is the historical context of US involvement in the region. During the Cold War, Pakistan allied with the US, receiving substantial military and economic aid. However, this bilateral relationship was largely transactional, centered on strategic interests rather than mutual understanding and respect. The support of the US for military regimes in Pakistan, particularly during the dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s, fostered a perception that the US prioritized its strategic interests over democratic values and human rights. This perception was further entrenched when the US abruptly cut off aid and imposed sanctions following Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998, leaving Pakistanis feeling betrayed and abandoned (Jabeen et al., 2020).

The US-led war on terror, initiated after the September 11, 2001 attacks marked another significant phase in the evolution of anti-American sentiments in Pakistan. Pakistan became an important ally in this global effort, receiving billions of dollars in military aid and support. However, the collaboration came at a high cost. The presence of US forces in Afghanistan and the subsequent military operations in tribal areas of Pakistan led to widespread displacement and destruction of infrastructure.

The US drone strikes became a new norm, targeting militant leaders but often causing civilian casualties, which were particularly contentious. These strikes, perceived as violations of the sovereignty of Pakistan, fueled resentment and anger among the Pakistani populace. Between 2004 and 2018, the United States carried out a total of 430 drone strikes in Pakistan, primarily targeting militant groups in the country's tribal regions. The majority of these strikes, 374, were conducted during the presidency of Barack Obama, with a significant peak of 117 strikes in 2010. The strikes killed an estimated 2,500-3,500 people, including both militants and civilians.

The frequency and intensity of the strikes decreased significantly in 2015, with only 13 strikes recorded that year. The last reported drone strike in Pakistan occurred in 2018, during the presidency of Donald Trump. The strikes were largely carried out by the CIA, using Predator and Reaper drones, and were concentrated in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), particularly in North Waziristan and South Waziristan. The strikes targeted various militant groups, including the Taliban, Al-Qaeda, and the Haqqani Network. While the US viewed it as a counterterrorism success, many Pakistanis saw it as an overreach, exacerbating anti-American sentiments.

Public discourse and media portrayal have also played a crucial role in shaping anti-Americanism in Pakistan. Pakistani media often highlighted the US actions and policies perceived

as detrimental to Muslim countries, reinforcing negative stereotypes. The depiction of the US as an imperial power, interfering in the internal affairs of sovereign nations, resonated deeply in a country with a colonial past. Additionally, conspiracy theories, such as those suggesting the US involvement in various social and political upheavals in Pakistan, further fuel hostility and distrust. The widespread belief that the US orchestrated events to undermine the sovereignty and stability of Pakistan exacerbated anti-American sentiments.

The impact of anti-Americanism on US-Pakistan relations was profound in nature. Politically, it created a challenging environment for policymakers in both countries. The successive governments had to navigate a delicate balance between cooperating with the US and addressing domestic opposition to such cooperation. For instance, the covert US operation that killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad in 2011 strained bilateral relations. The operation, conducted without informing Pakistani authorities, was seen as a blatant disregard for the sovereignty of Pakistan. The political fallout and public outcry from this incident forced the leaders of Pakistan to adopt a more critical and cautious stance towards the US, complicating cooperation on intelligence and security matters (Nawaz, 2020).

Economically, anti-Americanism had affected the dynamics of the US aid and investment in Pakistan. While the US had provided substantial financial assistance, public opposition to perceived US interference had sometimes led to the rejection of conditional aid and projects associated with American interests. This dynamic was evident in the mixed reactions to the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act of 2009, which aimed to provide \$1.5 billion annually in civilian aid to Pakistan. While the aid was intended to support development, many Pakistanis viewed the conditions attached to it as intrusive and undermining the sovereignty of the country. The

skepticism surrounding US aid sometimes limited its impacts and effectiveness, as projects face resistance or lack of local support.

Security cooperation, a cornerstone of the US-Pakistan bilateral relations, was adversely affected by anti-Americanism. Mutual suspicions and trust deficits had hampered joint efforts against extremism and terrorism. The divergent narratives on the fight against terrorism, with Pakistan often feeling it bears the brunt of the consequences while the US dictates the strategy, had created friction. The Salala incident in 2011, where a NATO airstrike killed 24 Pakistani soldiers, exemplified the strain on security cooperation. The incident led to a severe backlash in Pakistan, with public outrage compelling the government to temporarily block NATO supply routes to Afghanistan and review its cooperation with the US (Soherwordi & Khattak, 2020).

Furthermore, anti-Americanism influenced the foreign policy orientation of Pakistan. As public sentiment towards the US soured, Pakistan sought to diversify its international partnerships, strengthening ties with countries like Russia, China, and Saudi Arabia. The CPEC is a prime example of this shift, reflecting the strategic pivot of Pakistan towards China in response to perceived US unreliability. While this diversification has provided Pakistan with strategic leverage and new economic opportunities, it has also complicated its bilateral relationship with the US, which views the growing influence of China in the region with concern (Fair, 2014).

3.5.8. Cipher Controversy

The Cipher Controversy represents one of the most complex and contentious issues in the recent history of US-Pakistan relations. The controversy began in March 2022, when former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan claimed that a cipher message from the Pakistani ambassador to the US contained evidence of a foreign conspiracy aimed at ousting his government. This allegation, involving accusations of US interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan, had

profound implications for the bilateral relationship, triggering a series of challenges for Pakistan both domestically and internationally.

At the heart of the Cipher Controversy was the claim by former Prime Minister Imran Khan that the US was meddling in the domestic politics of Pakistan. According to Khan, the cipher, a coded diplomatic message detailed conversations suggesting that the US was unhappy with the foreign policy decisions of his government, particularly its growing closeness with China and its neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This narrative resonated deeply within Pakistan, where anti-American sentiments are historically entrenched due to perceptions of US interference in domestic politics. The allegations of Khan led to widespread public outcry and demonstrations, further polarizing an already divided political landscape.

Domestically, the Cipher Controversy exacerbated political instability in Pakistan. Khan's accusations were seen by his supporters as vindication of their belief that foreign powers were manipulating Pakistan's political system. This led to a surge in nationalist fervor and increased polarization between Khan's supporters and his political opponents. The controversy also intensified scrutiny of the security and intelligence agencies of Pakistan, raising questions about their role in managing and monitoring foreign influence. The political turmoil created an environment of uncertainty, hindering policy implementation and effective governance (Grim & Hussain, 2023).

The controversy also had significant implications for the diplomatic relations of Pakistan with the US. The allegations of a US-led conspiracy to topple the Pakistani government strained bilateral ties, fostering suspicions and mistrust on both sides. The US categorically denied the allegations, emphasizing its commitment to democratic processes and sovereignty of Pakistan. However, the diplomatic fallout was evident. High-level interactions between the two countries

became more cautious, and collaborative efforts on various fronts, including economic aid and counterterrorism, faced hurdles. The controversy highlighted the fragile nature of US-Pakistan relations, which have historically oscillated between periods of deep mistrust and close cooperation.

One of the immediate impacts of the Cipher Controversy was on the foreign policy of Pakistan. The allegations forced Pakistan to navigate a subtle diplomatic balance. On one hand, Pakistan needed to maintain its strategic partnership with the US, essential for military support and economic aid. On the other hand, it had to address public sentiment and domestic political pressures against perceived foreign interference. This balancing act was evident in the diplomatic engagements of Pakistan, where it sought to reassure the US of its commitment to bilateral relations while simultaneously addressing domestic concerns about external influence and sovereignty (Khan, 2023).

Economically, the Cipher Controversy accentuated challenges for Pakistan. The controversy came at a time when Pakistan was already grappling with economic instability, including high inflation and the gravity of debt repayment, a widening fiscal deficit, and a looming balance of payments crisis. The uncertainty surrounding the political landscape of Pakistan and its relations with the US impacted economic stability and investor confidence. The controversy also affected negotiations in Pakistan with international financial institutions, where the US influence is significant. Any perceived deterioration in US-Pakistan relations could complicate the efforts of Pakistan to secure financial investment and assistance critical for its economic recovery.

Security cooperation, a cornerstone of US-Pakistan relations, was also affected by the Cipher Controversy. Joint efforts in intelligence sharing and counterterrorism, essential for addressing mutual security threats, faced challenges due to the erosion of trust. The controversy

created an environment of suspicion, complicating collaboration on intelligence exchanges and security operations. This was particularly concerning given the volatile security situation in the region, including the instability in neighboring Afghanistan and the persistent threat of terrorism. Effective security cooperation was crucial for addressing these challenges, and the Cipher Controversy hindered these collaborative efforts.

The controversy also highlighted the role of media and public perception in shaping bilateral relations. In Pakistan, media coverage of the cipher allegations was intense, often sensationalizing the claims and contributing to a narrative of foreign interference. This media portrayal reinforced public distrust of the US, further complicating diplomatic efforts to address the controversy. The role of social media was also significant, with widespread dissemination of nationalist rhetoric and conspiracy theories amplifying the impact of the controversy on public opinion.

Despite the challenges posed by the Cipher Controversy, there were efforts on both sides to mitigate the fallout and stabilize bilateral relations. Diplomatic dialogues continued, aimed at addressing mutual concerns and rebuilding trust. The bilateral visits including high-level meetings were part of these efforts, emphasizing the importance of cooperation on security, economic, and regional issues. The controversy also highlighted the need for greater communication and transparency in diplomatic engagements, to prevent misunderstandings and build a more resilient bilateral relationship (Khan, 2022).

3.6. China-Pakistan Relations

From 2013 to 2022, the China-Pakistan bilateral relationship experienced significant developments, marked by the deepening of economic and strategic ties through the CPEC and

other collaborative ventures. Despite the pronounced partnership, this period also presented several challenges for Pakistan in navigating its relations with China. These challenges were multifaceted, encompassing security concerns, economic dependencies, domestic political dynamics, and regional geopolitical tensions.

A cornerstone of China-Pakistan relations during this period was the CPEC, an ambitious infrastructure development project aimed at boosting economic growth and enhancing connectivity across the region. While CPEC brought substantial investment and development opportunities to Pakistan, it also introduced numerous economic challenges. The heavy reliance on Chinese financing for infrastructure projects led to concerns about debt sustainability. By 2022, the debt of Pakistan to China had become a significant portion of its total external debt, raising alarms about the potential for a debt trap. Critics argued that the terms of Chinese loans were opaque and often more favorable to Chinese interests and companies, which exacerbated the economic vulnerabilities of Pakistan. For example, the Gwadar Port development, a flagship CPEC project, faced criticism for the perceived lack of local economic transparency and benefits (Ali, 2020).

Security concerns also emerged as a critical challenge in the China-Pakistan bilateral relationship. The safety of CPEC projects and the security of Chinese nationals working in Pakistan became paramount. The Baluchistan region, an important area for CPEC investments, witnessed several attacks targeting Chinese infrastructure and workers. In April 2021, a deadly attack on the Serena Hotel in Quetta, where the Chinese ambassador was staying, accentuated the persistent security threats. These incidents strained bilateral ties as China demanded enhanced security measures, leading Pakistan to deploy additional police and military forces to protect

Chinese interests. However, this increased security presence often exacerbated local resistance and grievances, particularly in regions with ongoing insurgencies.

Domestically, the implementation of CPEC projects also led to social and political challenges within Pakistan. There were concerns about the uneven distribution of CPEC benefits across the country, with some regions feeling marginalized. For instance, the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan expressed grievances about not receiving a fair share of CPEC benefits and investments. This perceived inequity fueled regional opposition and tensions to CPEC projects, complicating their implementation. Additionally, civil society groups and political party groups raised issues related to land acquisition, environmental impacts, and displacement of local communities, further challenging the smooth execution of CPEC initiatives (Irfan & Khan, 2021).

The China-Pakistan relationship also faced several challenges stemming from broader regional geopolitical dynamics. The growing strategic alignment between Pakistan and China was viewed with suspicion by other regional actors, particularly India. India perceived CPEC as a strategic threat, given that it passes through the contested region of Gilgit-Baltistan, which India claims as part of the J&K. This aspect of CPEC exacerbated India-Pakistan bilateral tensions and contributed to the broader Sino-Indian rivalry. Additionally, the increasing closeness between Pakistan and China complicated US-Pakistan bilateral relations, especially as US-China relations deteriorated during this period. Pakistan had to carefully manage its ties with the US while balancing its strategic partnership with China and navigating the complex dynamics of Great Power competition.

Another significant challenge in China-Pakistan relations was related to trade and economic-related disparities. While CPEC aimed to boost the economy of Pakistan, the trade balance remained heavily skewed in favor of China. Pakistani industries struggled to compete with

the influx of Chinese goods, leading to concerns about job losses in local sectors because of deindustrialization. For example, the textile industry of Pakistan, a significant contributor to its economy, faced competitive pressures from cheaper Chinese imports. This trade imbalance raised questions about the long-term sustainability of the economic relationship and the potential for Pakistan to benefit equitably from its partnership with China (Adnan & Fatimais, 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic further tested China-Pakistan bilateral relations. While China provided substantial support and aid to Pakistan during the pandemic, including medical supplies and vaccines, the economic impact of the pandemic strained the financial resources of Pakistan and exposed the vulnerabilities of its economic dependence on China. The pandemic disrupted CPEC projects, delayed construction timelines, and led to labor shortages in the country, compounding existing challenges. Additionally, the global economic downturn affected trade and investment flows, highlighting the need for Pakistan to diversify its economic partnerships and reduce its reliance on any single country (Abdullah et al., 2020).

Despite these challenges, the China-Pakistan relationship remained resilient, underpinned by strong military and strategic cooperation. Both countries continued to emphasize the importance of their partnership, with diplomatic engagements and frequent high-level visits reinforcing their bilateral ties. For example, during Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to China in February 2022, both countries reiterated their commitment to CPEC and explored new areas of cooperation, including agriculture and technology. This strategic alignment was crucial for Pakistan, particularly in the context of its regional isolation and security concerns (Papageorgiou & Melo, 2022).

3.6.1. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

The CPEC, launched in 2013, represents a monumental investment and infrastructure development project designed to enhance economic cooperation and connectivity between Pakistan and China. While CPEC has brought substantial opportunities for economic development and inclusive growth to Pakistan, it has also introduced several significant challenges that have impacted the bilateral relationship between both countries from 2013 to 2022. These challenges encompass security concerns, economic dependencies, political dynamics, regional geopolitical tensions, and local opposition, which collectively have shaped the trajectory of CPEC and the broader China-Pakistan relationship.

One of the primary challenges associated with CPEC has been the issue of economic dependency. The reliance of Pakistan on Chinese financing for CPEC projects has raised several concerns about financial sovereignty and debt sustainability. By 2022, Pakistan's debt to China had ballooned to approximately \$25 billion, accounting for around 30% of its total external debt of \$85 billion. This significant portion of the debt owed to China has raised concerns about Pakistan's vulnerability to a potential debt trap. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has been a major contributor to this debt accumulation, with Pakistan borrowing heavily from China to finance infrastructure projects such as roads, railways, and power plants. The debt has grown exponentially, with a 50% increase in just two years, from \$16 billion in 2020 to \$25 billion in 2022. This has led to fears that Pakistan may struggle to repay the debt, potentially leading to a loss of sovereignty and increased Chinese influence over Pakistan's economic and political decisions. The situation is further complicated by the fact that the terms of the loans are often opaque, and the interest rates are reportedly high, ranging from 5-7% per annum.

Critics have long argued that Chinese loans to Pakistan come with opaque terms that favor Chinese interests, exacerbating Pakistan's economic vulnerabilities. The construction of Gwadar Port, a flagship project under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), exemplifies these concerns. While the port is strategically vital, providing China with a critical outlet to the Arabian Sea, the financial terms of the project have raised eyebrows. For instance, the port's operating contract was awarded to a Chinese company for 40 years, with Pakistan receiving only 9% of the revenue generated, while China took 91%. Moreover, the loan for the project's construction carries an interest rate of 6%, significantly higher than international standards. This has sparked debates about the long-term economic implications of CPEC for Pakistan, with many arguing that the country is mortgaging its future to China. The lack of transparency in the project's financial dealings has also fueled concerns about corruption and nepotism, further eroding trust in the government's ability to negotiate fair deals with China. As Pakistan's debt to China continues to balloon, these concerns are likely to intensify, casting a shadow over the future of CPEC and Pakistan's economic sovereignty (Gul et al., 2020).

Security concerns have also been a major challenge in the implementation of CPEC projects. The safety of CPEC infrastructure and the security of Chinese nationals working in Pakistan have been paramount issues. The Baluchistan region, where several important CPEC projects are located, has been particularly problematic due to its volatile security situation. Insurgent groups, including the BLA and BRA, have targeted CPEC infrastructure and Chinese workers in their campaign against what they perceive as exploitation of local resources. For example, on May 11, 2019, armed BLA militants stormed the Pearl Continental (PC) Hotel in Gwadar, a key port city in CPEC. The attack resulted in the deaths of five people, including four hotel employees and a soldier (Javaid & Rashid, 2021).

Moreover, on June 29, 2020, The BLA, along with the Majeed Brigade, attacked the Karachi Stock Exchange (PSX), which is partly owned by a Chinese consortium. Likewise, on August 20, 2021, a suicide bomber targeted a vehicle carrying Chinese workers in Gwadar. The bomber targeted the convoy on the East Bay Expressway project under CPEC. Resultantly, two children were killed, and several others were injured, including a Chinese national. These incidents have strained the bilateral relationship as China demanded enhanced security measures, leading Pakistan to deploy additional police and military forces to protect Chinese interests.

Domestically, the implementation of CPEC projects has led to political and social challenges within Pakistan. There have been concerns about the uneven distribution of CPEC benefits across the country, with some regions feeling marginalized. Additionally, civil society groups and political parties have raised issues related to land acquisition, environmental impacts, and displacement of local communities. The construction of the Orange Line Metro Train in Lahore, for instance, faced significant opposition due to concerns over the impact on historical sites and the displacement of residents, reflecting broader challenges of managing local stakeholder interests (Ishaque, 2016).

Regional geopolitical dynamics have also presented challenges for the China-Pakistan relationship in the context of CPEC. The strategic alignment between both the countries through CPEC has been viewed with suspicion by other regional actors, particularly India which perceives the contested region of Gilgit-Baltistan as part of Jammu and Kashmir. Additionally, the increasing closeness between Pakistan and China has complicated Islamabad's relations with Washington, especially as US-China relations deteriorated during this period. Pakistan has had to carefully balance its strategic partnership with China while managing its ties with the US and navigating the complex dynamics of Great Power competition (Small, 2020).

Economic and trade disparities between Pakistan and China have also been a significant challenge. While CPEC aims to boost the economy of Pakistan, the trade balance has remained heavily skewed in favor of China. Pakistani industries have struggled to compete with the influx of Chinese goods, leading to concerns about job losses in local sectors because of deindustrialization. For example, the exports of Pakistan to China are significantly lower than their imports from China. In 2020, Pakistan's exports to China were around \$2.1 billion, while imports from China were approximately \$12.6 billion, resulting in a substantial trade deficit. This imbalance puts pressure on the overall economy and foreign exchange reserves of Pakistan (Wolf, 2020).

3.6.2. Debt Sustainability

The China-Pakistan relationship experienced substantial growth, primarily driven by the CPEC, a flagship project of China's BRI. While CPEC promised significant economic benefits, however, it also brought considerable challenges related to debt sustainability. These challenges stemmed from the massive loans associated with CPEC projects, concerns about the ability of Islamabad to repay these loans, and the broader implications for Pakistan's economic sovereignty and fiscal stability of Pakistan.

One of the foremost challenges in the China-Pakistan bilateral relationship related to debt sustainability was the sheer scale of financial commitments involved in CPEC projects. By 2022, CPEC had attracted investments worth over \$60 billion, funding a wide range of energy projects and infrastructure across Pakistan. While these projects were expected to boost the economic growth of Pakistan, the reliance on Chinese loans raised concerns about the long-term debt sustainability of the country. For instance, the construction of railways, highways, and power plants often required substantial upfront investments, financed primarily through Chinese loans.

The repayment of these loans, with interest, placed a significant burden on the already fragile economy of Pakistan (Mahmood, 2023).

The challenge of debt sustainability was also exacerbated by the existing economic vulnerabilities of Pakistan. The economy of Pakistan faced numerous structural issues, including low foreign exchange reserves, a persistent trade deficit, and a high fiscal deficit. These economic challenges limited the ability of Pakistan to generate sufficient revenue to service its debts. For example, Pakistan's trade deficit, driven by higher imports than exports, strained its foreign exchange reserves, making it difficult to meet external debt obligations. As a result, the financial commitments under CPEC added to the pressure on the balance of payments issue, raising the specter of a debt crisis (Wolf, 2019).

The issue of debt sustainability in the China-Pakistan relationship was highlighted by credit rating agencies and international financial institutions. Organizations like the IMF and the World Bank frequently raised concerns about the potential for a debt trap, where Pakistan might struggle to repay its loans and be forced to seek debt restructuring or additional financial assistance. In 2019, Pakistan secured a \$6 billion bailout package from the IMF, partly to address its mounting external debt and balance of payments crisis. This reliance on external financial assistance highlighted the vulnerabilities associated with high levels of Chinese debt and the broader implications for the economic stability of Pakistan.

Moreover, the terms and conditions of Chinese loans under CPEC often lacked transparency, further complicating the debt sustainability issue. Many CPEC-related loans were extended through state-owned Chinese banks with conditions that were not always made public. This lack of transparency raised concerns about the true cost of these loans and the potential for unfavorable terms that could exacerbate Pakistan's debt burden of Pakistan. For example, some

CPEC projects involved loans with higher interest rates compared to those available from multilateral financial institutions, further adding to the financial strain on Pakistan (IMF, 2019).

The strategic implications of debt sustainability also posed a challenge to the China-Pakistan relationship. Critics argued that high levels of Chinese debt could lead to a loss of economic sovereignty for Pakistan, as it might have to cede control over an important asset or make strategic concessions to China in the event of debt repayment difficulties. The example of Sri Lanka, where the government leased the Hambantota Port to a Chinese company for 99 years after struggling to repay Chinese loans, often served as a cautionary tale in discussions about CPEC and debt sustainability. The fear of similar outcomes heightened concerns about the long-term impact of CPEC on the economic and strategic autonomy of Pakistan.

Despite these challenges, China and Pakistan made efforts to address the issue of debt sustainability and ensure the long-term success of CPEC. Both governments engaged in high-level dialogues to review the progress of CPEC projects and explore ways to manage financial risks. For instance, in 2018, Chinese and Pakistani officials agreed to re-evaluate and prioritize certain CPEC projects to ensure they were financially viable and aligned with Pakistan's development needs. This included a shift in focus from socio-economic development initiatives to large-scale infrastructure projects that could deliver more immediate benefits to local communities (Sheikh & Chin, 2021).

Furthermore, Pakistan sought to reduce its reliance on Chinese loans by diversifying its sources of funding. This included seeking investments from other countries and multilateral financial institutions to complement Chinese financing. In 2020, Pakistan secured a \$1.5 billion loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to support its COVID-19 response and economic recovery efforts. Diversifying funding sources provided Pakistan with more flexibility in

managing its financial obligations and helped mitigate the risks associated with high levels of Chinese debt.

The issue of debt sustainability also prompted discussions about improving the governance and transparency of CPEC projects. Both China and Pakistan recognized the need for better oversight and accountability to ensure that CPEC investments delivered sustainable economic benefits. This included enhancing coordination between federal and provincial governments in Pakistan, strengthening institutional frameworks for project implementation, and ensuring that local communities benefited from CPEC projects. Improved transparency and governance were seen as critical to ensuring the long-term success of CPEC and addressing concerns of debt sustainability (Naseer et al., 2022).

3.7. Russia-Pakistan Relations

The Russia-Pakistan bilateral relationship underwent significant transformation as both countries sought to rebuild and reengage bilateral ties after decades of Cold War-era antagonism from 2013 to 2022. This period marked a departure from historical hostility and a move towards strategic partnership. However, this re-engagement was fraught with numerous challenges, including overcoming historical mistrust, navigating geopolitical complexities, aligning strategic interests, and addressing economic constraints.

One of the foremost challenges in the Russia-Pakistan reengagement was overcoming the deep-seated trust deficit rooted in their Cold War history. During the Cold War, Pakistan was a staunch ally of the US, while Russia (then the Soviet Union) was aligned with India, Pakistan's arch-rival. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and the role of Pakistan in supporting the Mujahedeen resistance further entrenched this adversarial relationship. The legacy of this period

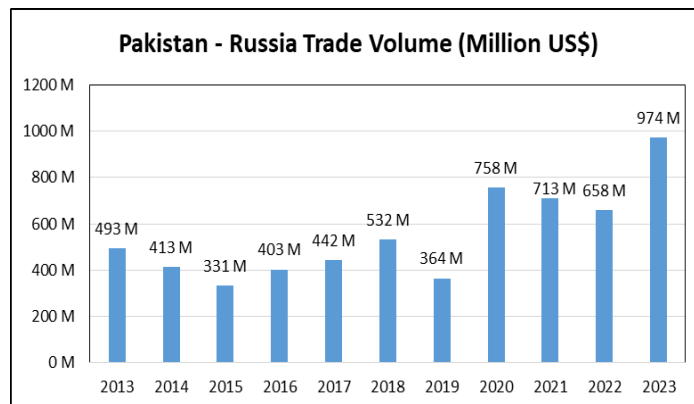
left a residue of distrust and suspicion, complicating efforts to build an inclusive bilateral relationship in the post-Cold War era. Overcoming this historical baggage required confidence-building measures and sustained diplomatic efforts from both sides (Khan, 2016).

Strategically, aligning the interests of Pakistan and Russia proved challenging. While both countries recognized the benefits of closer ties, their strategic priorities did not always converge. For instance, the strategic interests of Russia in South Asia were historically aligned with India, its major defense partner and long-time ally. Although Russia aimed to diversify its regional partnerships, its relationship with India remained a significant factor in its South Asia policy. This created a subtle balancing act for Russia as it sought to engage with Pakistan without undermining its strategic partnership with India. On the other hand, the increasing reliance of Pakistan on China, particularly through the CPEC, required it to manage its relations with Russia in a way that complemented rather than conflicted with its ties to Beijing (Rafiq, 2017).

Geopolitical complexities further complicated the Russia-Pakistan reengagement. The shifting dynamics of global power politics, characterized by increasing US-China rivalry and strained relations of Russia with the West, influenced the strategic calculus of both Pakistan and Russia. The US pivot to India, exemplified by the deepening of US-India defense and strategic cooperation, created an impetus for Russia to seek closer ties with Pakistan as a counterbalance. However, this geopolitical realignment also introduced complexities. For example, Pakistan had to carefully navigate its relationship with the US while strengthening ties with Russia, a task made more difficult by the often divergent interests of these major powers. Moreover, the growing ties of Russia with China added another layer of complexity, as Moscow had to ensure that its engagement with Pakistan did not disrupt its broader strategic alignment with Beijing (Kugelman, 2019).

Economic constraints posed another significant challenge in the Russia-Pakistan reengagement. Despite the potential for economic cooperation, the trade volume between Russia and Pakistan remained relatively low. Both countries faced structural economic challenges that hindered the realization of their full economic partnership potential. For instance, the economic instability in Pakistan, characterized by low foreign exchange reserves, high debt burden, and structural inefficiencies, limited its capacity to attract significant Russian investments. Conversely, the economy of Russia, heavily reliant on energy exports and constrained by Western sanctions, had limited bandwidth for large-scale investments in Pakistan. Additionally, logistical challenges, such as inadequate trade infrastructure and connectivity, further impeded economic engagement (Pant & Bommakanti, 2020).

Similarly, Russia-Pakistan trade volume has witnessed a remarkable upsurge, skyrocketing from a modest \$439 million in 2013 to a substantial \$758 million in 2020, and continuing its upward trajectory to reach \$974 million in 2023. This significant growth underscores the strengthening economic ties between the two nations.



Source: UNcomtrade, 2024

3.7.1. Pakistan in Russia-Ukraine War

The Russia-Pakistan bilateral relationship, while historically limited, has seen significant developments in recent years. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has introduced new complexities and challenges. The invasion not only strained relations of Russia with Western countries but also posed dilemmas for Pakistan as it navigated its economic interests and foreign policy priorities amidst this global crisis.

One of the primary challenges for Pakistan stemming from the Russian invasion of Ukraine was the need to balance its relations with major global powers. Historically, Pakistan has maintained a strategic partnership with the US, which, along with its Western allies, strongly condemned the aggressive actions of Russia and imposed severe economic sanctions. These sanctions aimed to isolate Russia economically and diplomatically, putting countries with growing ties to Russia, like Pakistan, in a difficult position. For example, the abstention of Pakistan from the UNGA resolution condemning the invasion highlighted its subtle balancing act. This abstention reflected the need for Pakistan to avoid antagonizing either the Western bloc or Russia, maintaining a neutral stance to safeguard its broader foreign policy interests (Yusuf, 2022).

The economic sanctions imposed on Russia by Western countries also created significant challenges for Russia-Pakistan relations. These sanctions targeted crucial sectors of the Russian economy, including energy, finance, and defense, leading to a contraction in the economic growth of Russia and reducing its ability to engage in international trade and investment. For Pakistan, this meant that the potential economic benefits of its bilateral partnership with Russia were constrained. For instance, the proposed defense cooperation initiatives and energy projects between the two countries faced hurdles due to the limited availability of financing and the risk of secondary sanctions. The North-South Gas Pipeline project, a major energy collaboration between

Pakistan and Russia, experienced delays partly due to these complexities arising from the sanctions on Russia (Grare & Burke, 2022).

The Russia-Ukraine war also impacted global energy markets, influencing Russia-Pakistan energy cooperation. Pakistan, grappling with energy shortages, emerged as a potential partner, and Russia, as a major global energy supplier, sought new markets in response to sanctions. However, the restrictions due to international sanctions and the volatility in global energy prices complicated these efforts. Despite signing an agreement in 2017 to build a gas pipeline from Karachi to Lahore, the project faced financial uncertainties and numerous delays. The fluctuating global oil and gas prices, driven by the geopolitical tensions surrounding the invasion, further exacerbated the challenges in realizing energy cooperation between the two countries.

Geopolitically, the Russian invasion of Ukraine influenced the strategic dynamics in South Asia, adding complexity to Russia-Pakistan relations. The deepening ties of Russia with China, partly as a counterbalance to Western pressure, had implications for Pakistan, which is an important ally of China. While this trilateral alignment seemed beneficial, it also required careful diplomatic maneuvering. For instance, Russia had to ensure that its growing partnership with Pakistan did not antagonize India, which maintained strong historical ties with Russia and was also a strategic competitor of Pakistan. The balancing act was evident in the diplomatic engagements of Pakistan, where it sought to enhance its cooperation with Russia while simultaneously managing its relations with China and India (Khatoon et al., 2023).

Moreover, the invasion of Ukraine prompted significant global shifts, with countries reassessing their economic and strategic alliances. For Pakistan, the challenge was to navigate these shifts without compromising its national interests. The economic challenges of Pakistan, such as fiscal deficits, high inflation, and dependency on external financial assistance, limited its

ability to maneuver freely. The need to maintain strong economic ties with the West, particularly in securing financial aid from institutions like the IMF, influenced the stance of Pakistan on the Russia-Ukraine conflict. For instance, Pakistan had to balance its economic dependency on Western aid while engaging with Russia for defense and energy cooperation, a challenging diplomatic tightrope.

The domestic political dynamics within Pakistan also influenced its engagement with Russia amidst the Ukraine crisis. The persistent economic challenges, internal political instability, and security concerns in Pakistan affected its ability to fully capitalize on the opportunities presented by its re-engagement with Russia. For instance, the fluctuating political landscape in Pakistan, marked by frequent changes in government and policy priorities, often resulted in inconsistencies and delays in executing bilateral agreements with Russia. The need to address domestic economic challenges, such as fiscal deficits and inflation, also limited the capacity of Pakistan to invest in and sustain long-term projects with Russia (Hussain, 2022).

CHAPTER 4

RESPONSES TO PAKISTAN'S CHALLENGES (2013-2022)

Pakistan faced significant foreign policy challenges amidst intense Great Power competition, particularly between the US, Russia, and China. Navigating this complex geopolitical landscape required diplomatic engagement, strategic maneuvering, and pragmatic policy adjustments to safeguard the national interests of the country and enhance its regional and global standing.

Pakistan's strategy of strengthening its alliance with China has been a cornerstone of its foreign policy, with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) emerging as a flagship project under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Launched in 2015, CPEC aimed to transform Pakistan's economy by enhancing energy, infrastructure, and economic connectivity between the two countries. For instance, the development of Gwadar Port, a deep-sea port in southwestern Pakistan, has improved the country's logistical capabilities and provided a critical outlet to the Arabian Sea. Additionally, the construction of energy projects, such as the Sahiwal Coal Power Plant and the Quaid-e-Azam Solar Park, has helped address chronic energy shortages in Pakistan, increasing the country's power generation capacity and reducing its reliance on imported fuels.

Furthermore, CPEC has facilitated the establishment of special economic zones, such as the Rashakai Special Economic Zone, which offers tax incentives and investment opportunities to attract foreign investors. By deepening economic ties with China, Pakistan has not only bolstered its economic development but also ensured a reliable strategic partner in the region, providing a counterbalance to India's growing influence. The alliance has also enabled Pakistan to diversify its

trade relationships, reducing its dependence on the US and other Western countries (Javaid & Rashid, 2021).

However, the alignment of Pakistan with China necessitated careful balancing of its relations with the US, a long-time ally whose strategic interests often diverged from China's. Despite periods of tension, particularly over issues like counterterrorism and alleged support for the Taliban by Pakistan, Islamabad sought to maintain a functional relationship with Washington. Pakistan also leveraged its geopolitical significance, particularly its role in facilitating the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, to remain relevant to the US strategic interests. For example, the assistance of Pakistan in the Doha peace talks and its role in enabling the safe evacuation of allied personnel in general and the US forces in particular during the chaotic withdrawal in August 2021 highlighted its indispensable position in regional security dynamics.

Simultaneously, Pakistan expanded its diplomatic outreach to Russia, recognizing the shifting global power dynamics. The deterioration of US-Russia relations and the increasing isolation of Russia from the West opened opportunities for Pakistan to engage with Moscow. Defense cooperation agreements and high-level visits highlighted this growing relationship. In 2015, the two countries signed a landmark defense cooperation pact, and in subsequent years, joint military exercises such as "Druzhba" (Friendship) reflected a deepening military collaboration. This diversification of alliances helped Pakistan to enhance its strategic autonomy and mitigate overreliance on any single power (Yusuf, 2022).

Another challenge for Pakistan was managing its regional relations amidst Great Power competition, particularly with Afghanistan and India. The strategic partnership of the US with India, especially under President Trump's administration's "Indo-Pacific Strategy," aimed at countering the growing influence of China, posed a significant challenge. Pakistan viewed the

growing US-India economic and defense ties with concern, fearing strategic encirclement (Khan, 2018). In response, Pakistan intensified its diplomatic efforts to highlight the Kashmir issue internationally, seeking to counterbalance the influence of India. The abrogation of Articles 370 and 35-A by India in August 2019, which revoked the special status of J&K, further escalated tensions, leading Pakistan to mobilize diplomatic support from China and other allies (Tariq & Mustafa, 2022).

In Afghanistan, the dynamics were equally complex. Pakistan's bilateral relationship with Afghanistan has been historically fraught, characterized by conflicting interests and mutual suspicion. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent Taliban takeover in August 2021 brought new opportunities and challenges for Pakistan. Pakistan, with its historical ties to the Taliban, played a crucial role in facilitating US-Taliban mutual dialogues and supporting the peace process. However, it also had to manage the potential cross-border terrorism, the influx of Afghan refugees, and the humanitarian crisis, requiring a subtle balance between security concerns and humanitarian assistance. The proactive engagement of Pakistan in regional forums such as the SCO and its trilateral dialogues with China and Afghanistan aimed to stabilize the situation and promote regional cooperation (Zamaraeva, 2023).

Economically, Pakistan faced significant challenges, including fiscal deficits, high debt levels, and dependency on external financial assistance. To address these issues, Pakistan sought to attract foreign investment and economic partnerships. The CPEC projects, while beneficial, also raised concerns about economic sovereignty and debt sustainability. Pakistan also engaged with international financial institutions like the IMF to secure necessary financial support while implementing economic reforms to stabilize its economy. Pakistan's economic strategy also leveraged the significant contributions of its diaspora community, with remittances from overseas

Pakistanis playing a vital role in stabilizing the country's foreign exchange reserves. In 2020, Pakistan received a record \$23 billion in remittances, a 17% increase from the previous year, with the majority coming from Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar.

The government's efforts to enhance trade relations with these countries also yielded positive results, with Pakistan's exports to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries increasing by 15% in 2020, reaching \$1.3 billion. Moreover, the country's trade deficit with the GCC narrowed by 20% in 2020, thanks to increased exports of food items, textiles, and petroleum products. The strategic use of remittances and enhanced trade relations with Gulf countries helped Pakistan's economy weather external shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic, and maintained a stable foreign exchange reserve position, with reserves reaching \$13.4 billion in 2022. (Hassan, 2022).

Domestically, Pakistan faced numerous governance challenges and political instability, which further complicated its foreign policy landscape. Frequent changes in government created an environment of uncertainty and inconsistency. Internal security issues, such as sectarian violence and terrorism, required constant adjustment and resilience from the government. For instance, the 2014 Peshawar school massacre and the 2019 Pulwama attack in Indian-administered Kashmir led to increased tensions with India and necessitated a strong diplomatic response from Pakistan. Moreover, policy inconsistencies and power struggles between civilian and military leadership often hindered a unified stance on important foreign policy issues.

Despite these challenges, Pakistan's political leadership sought to leverage the country's strategic location and role in regional security to enhance its bargaining power on the international stage. For example, Pakistan's crucial role in the Afghan peace process and its participation in the

Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) alongside China, the US, and Afghanistan, demonstrated its ability to navigate complex geopolitical dynamics and project influence beyond its borders. By doing so, Pakistan aimed to mitigate the impact of domestic instability on its foreign policy and maintain a strong position in regional and global affairs. (Asian Survey, 2023).

4.1. Security Challenges

Pakistan faced multifaceted security challenges amidst Great Power competition, primarily involving the US, Russia, and China from 2013 to 2022. Addressing these challenges required a multidimensional approach that combined military modernization, strategic alliances, diplomatic engagement, and counterterrorism efforts.

A crucial element of Pakistan's counter-security strategy was its strengthening alliance with China, particularly through the CPEC. This initiative, a flagship project under China's BRI, offered significant security and economic benefits to Pakistan. The development of infrastructure projects, such as Gwadar Port, enhanced Pakistan's logistical capabilities and strategic depth. For instance, Gwadar Port provided a strategic advantage by offering an alternative trade route, reducing Pakistan's dependency on the volatile Strait of Hormuz, and enabling access to the Arabian Sea.

This enhanced economic connectivity with China also translated into military cooperation, with technology transfers and joint exercises, such as the Shaheen series, strengthening Pakistan's defense capabilities. The alliance also enabled Pakistan to diversify its military hardware, with China becoming a major supplier of arms and equipment. However, this deepening alliance required careful management to avoid antagonizing the US, which viewed the expanding influence of China with suspicion. Pakistan walked a fine line, maintaining a subtle balance between its

relationships with China and the US, while also leveraging its strategic location and geopolitical significance to maximize benefits from both relationships. (Baloch, 2024).

The US-Pakistan bilateral relationship, despite periods of strain, remained crucial. Post-2013, Pakistan continued to receive military support and aid for counterterrorism operations. The US drone campaign in the tribal areas of Pakistan, while controversial, played a significant role in targeting high-profile militants. For example, the killing of TTP leader Hakimullah Mehsud and Mullah Omer in a drone strike in 2013 highlighted the tactical benefits of US-Pakistan cooperation. However, these operations also sparked domestic unrest and anti-American sentiments, complicating the internal security landscape of Pakistan. To balance this, Pakistan sought to maintain inclusive communication channels with US military and intelligence agencies, emphasizing its role in counterterrorism efforts and regional stability (Zahid, 2020).

The evolving situation in Afghanistan posed another significant challenge. The US withdrawal and the resurgence of the Taliban to power in 2021 created a security vacuum with profound implications for Pakistan. Historically, Pakistan maintained strategic ties with the Taliban, hoping to secure a friendly regime in Kabul that could act as a buffer against Indian influence. However, the resurgence of the Taliban also raised fears of an influx of refugees and cross-border militancy, which could exacerbate internal security issues. The approach to Pakistan involved a combination of enhanced border security measures and diplomatic engagement with the Taliban. The fencing of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, completed in 2021, was a significant step towards mitigating terrorist infiltration and controlling illegal crossings.

The increasing engagement of Russia in South Asia, driven by its desire to counter the US influence, offered both challenges and opportunities. Pakistan capitalized on the deteriorating US-Russia relations by enhancing its economic and military ties with Moscow. The procurement of

advanced military hardware from Russia and joint military exercises, such as the "Druzhba" series diversified the defense portfolio of Pakistan. However, aligning with Russia required balancing its ties with the US and managing regional dynamics, particularly Moscow's historical defense relationship with New Delhi. The diplomatic efforts of Pakistan focused on ensuring that its growing ties with Russia did not trigger a negative response from India or undermine its own security interests.

Internally, Pakistan faced persistent security threats from separatist movements, terrorist organizations, and sectarian violence. The National Action Plan (NAP), launched in 2014 following the Peshawar school massacre, represented a comprehensive counterterrorism strategy. This plan included various military operations such as Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad, targeting militant strongholds in the tribal areas and across the country. These operations significantly weakened terrorist networks, with the Pakistan Army reclaiming control over previously anarchical regions. However, the long-term success of these efforts required addressing the root causes of extremism, such as illiteracy, poverty, and political marginalization. The security strategy of Pakistan thus encompassed socio-economic development initiatives aimed at fostering resilience and stability within affected communities (Jadoon, 2021).

Economic stability was also considered integral to addressing security challenges. The economic vulnerabilities of Pakistan, including fiscal deficits and high debt levels, threatened national security by limiting resources available for defense and development. Engagement with international financial institutions like the IMF and securing investments through CPEC were critical components of the strategy of Pakistan. For example, infrastructure improvements under CPEC not only boosted economic growth but also facilitated military mobility and logistics,

enhancing overall security. However, reliance on external financial support also raised concerns about the long-term economic sustainability and sovereignty of the country.

Pakistan's regional diplomacy played a vital role in navigating the complex landscape of Great Power competition, where the country's strategic location and geopolitical significance made it a crucial player. Active participation in forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) provided Pakistan with platforms for cooperation and mutual dialogue with regional powers, including China, Russia, and Central Asian states. By leveraging these forums, Pakistan promoted economic connectivity, addressed security concerns, and enhanced its strategic clout.

For instance, Pakistan's engagement in trilateral dialogues with Afghanistan and China focused on countering terrorism and promoting stability in the region, reflecting a pragmatic approach to security and foreign policy. Similarly, Pakistan's participation in the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) enabled it to collaborate with regional partners to combat terrorism and extremism. By engaging in these regional forums and initiatives, Pakistan effectively navigated the Great Power competition, balanced its relationships with multiple powers, and advanced its national interests. (Hassan, 2022).

4.1.1. Counterterrorism Efforts and Military Operations

Pakistan navigated a complex security landscape characterized by persistent internal threats and evolving Great Power competition. To address these challenges, Pakistan implemented inclusive military operations and counterterrorism efforts, leveraging its regional diplomacy and strategic alliances.

A significant component of the security strategy of Pakistan was its counterterrorism efforts, particularly the implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP) in 2014. This

comprehensive framework was a direct response to the devastating Peshawar school massacre by the TTP, which resulted in the deaths of over 151 children and staff. The NAP outlined a multi-pronged approach to eradicate terrorism, including measures to dismantle terrorist infrastructure, curb hate speech, and reform the criminal justice system. One important aspect was the revival of military courts for trying terrorism-related cases, which expedited the judicial process of terrorists and delivered swift justice to perpetrators. These revivals of military courts played a crucial role in addressing the backlog of terrorism-related cases and ensuring that justice was served swiftly and effectively.

Military operations were also central to the counterterrorism strategy of Pakistan. Operation Zarb-e-Azb, launched in June 2014, targeted militant strongholds in North Waziristan, a region long considered a sanctuary for various terrorist groups, including Al-Qaeda and TTP. This military operation significantly weakened these groups, dismantling their networks and restoring state control over previously lawless areas. The success of Zarb-e-Azb was reflected in the reduction of terrorist attacks across the country, as the military reclaimed important choke points and destroyed militant infrastructure across the region. The success of the operation was underpinned by the strategic use of airstrikes by the Pakistan Army, intelligence-led operations, and ground offensives which disrupted the operational capabilities of terrorist groups and forced them into retreat (Ahmed, 2020).

Following Zarb-e-Azb, another military operation known as Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad was launched in February 2017 to eliminate residual terrorist threats and consolidate the gains of previous operations. Unlike Zarb-e-Azb, which was geographically concentrated, Radd-ul-Fasaad was a nationwide effort aimed at enhancing internal security by rooting out sleeper cells. This operation included intelligence-based actions, combing operations, and border security measures

to prevent cross-border infiltration. The comprehensive nature of Radd-ul-Fasaada also ensured that terrorist networks could not regroup or reestablish their presence in Pakistan, thereby contributing to a sustained decline in terrorist incidents.

The counterterrorism efforts of Pakistan were also bolstered by its strategic alliances, particularly with the US and China. Despite periods of strained relations, the US remained a crucial partner in counterterrorism. The US drone strikes in the tribal areas of Pakistan, although controversial, played a pivotal role in eliminating high-value targets. For instance, the killing of TTP leaders like Mullah Omer, Baitullah Mehsud, and Hakimullah Mehsud disrupted the leadership and operational capabilities of the group. Pakistan also received intelligence support and substantial military aid from the US, which enhanced its counterterrorism capabilities. The collaboration between Pakistani and US intelligence agencies facilitated the sharing of actionable intelligence, enabling precision strikes and successful counterterrorism operations (Islam et al., 2020).

The support of China was equally significant, particularly through the CPEC. While primarily an economic initiative, CPEC had substantial security implications. Economic opportunities and improved infrastructure under CPEC contributed to stabilizing restive regions by providing alternatives to militancy. Additionally, Beijing supported the counterterrorism efforts of Islamabad through military aid and technology transfers, strengthening the defense capabilities of Pakistan. The strategic dialogues and joint military exercises further deepened the security cooperation between the two countries, ensuring a coordinated approach to regional stability.

Pakistan also engaged in regional diplomacy to address security challenges. Its role in facilitating the US-Taliban peace talks highlighted its strategic importance in regional security dynamics. By leveraging its influence over the Taliban, Pakistan positioned itself as an important

mediator in the Afghan peace process, which was crucial for regional stability. However, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and the subsequent Taliban takeover presented new security challenges for Pakistan, including potential cross-border terrorism. The response of Pakistan involved enhanced border security measures, including the fencing of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, to prevent militant infiltration and control illegal crossings.

Internally, the counterterrorism strategy of Pakistan extended beyond military operations. Efforts to counter extremism and radicalization included the regulation of madrassas (religious schools), educational reforms, and initiatives to promote religious tolerance. The government also launched socio-economic development programs in conflict-affected areas to address the root causes of extremism, such as lack of education and poverty. These initiatives aimed to create a more resilient and inclusive society, reducing the appeal of militant ideologies.

Despite multidimensional efforts, Pakistan still faces ongoing challenges. The resurgence of the TTP and other militant groups, particularly after the return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan, requires continuous adaptive and vigilance strategies. Additionally, balancing its relations with major powers amidst Great Power competition necessitates careful diplomacy to avoid becoming entangled in geopolitical rivalries (Jawad, 2022).

4.1.2. Enhanced Border Security Measures and Cooperation with Neighboring Countries

As stated above, Pakistan faced significant security challenges amidst regional instability and Great Power competition. To address these challenges, Pakistan sought increased cooperation with neighboring countries and implemented enhanced border security measures. These efforts were crucial in managing regional tensions, mitigating cross-border terrorism, and ensuring national security.

One of the most significant measures was the fencing of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, a project aimed at preventing militant infiltration and curbing illegal crossings. This initiative, which began in 2017, was driven by the persistent threat of cross-border terrorism from Afghanistan, where the presence of various militant groups including the resurgence of the Taliban posed a direct threat to the security apparatus of Pakistan. The fencing project, involving the construction of over 2,600 kilometers of barrier, was complemented by the deployment of additional security personnel and the establishment of new border posts. This extensive effort significantly reduced the movement of militants between the two countries. For example, the fencing of important routes in Baluchistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces led to a noticeable decline in terrorist incidents in these areas, demonstrating the effectiveness of this border security measure (Parveen et al., 2020).

In addition to physical barriers, Pakistan enhanced its monitoring and surveillance capabilities along its borders. The use of advanced technology, such as surveillance cameras, drones, and electronic sensors, improved real-time monitoring and response capabilities. These technologies enabled the timely detection of suspicious activities in the bordering area and facilitated swift action by security forces. The integration of these technologies into the border security strategy of Pakistan was exemplified by successful interdictions of narcotics and arms smuggling, which are often linked to terrorist financing. For instance, in 2020, Pakistani forces intercepted a significant cache of arms and ammunition being smuggled across the Afghanistan border, preventing potential terrorist attacks within the country.

Pakistan's cooperation with neighboring countries also played a vital role in its security strategy. Bilateral relations with Afghanistan, despite being strained and often complex, included efforts to foster dialogue and collaboration on border security. The role of Pakistan in facilitating

the US-Taliban peace talks accentuated its strategic importance in regional stability. By leveraging its influence over the Taliban, Pakistan sought to promote a peaceful resolution to the Afghan conflict, which was essential for regional security. However, the takeover of the Taliban in 2021 presented several new challenges. Pakistan responded by engaging with the new Afghan administration to prevent the resurgence of cross-border militancy and address mutual security concerns.

Moreover, both countries signed The Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) is a bilateral agreement aimed at promoting peace, stability, and cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Launched in 2018, APAPPS focuses on seven key areas: counter-terrorism, intelligence sharing, border security, Afghan refugees, trade and commerce, education, and people-to-people exchanges. The plan seeks to address long-standing issues and mistrust between the two nations, promoting a constructive dialogue and collaborative approach to regional security. Through APAPPS, both countries commit to joint efforts in combating terrorism, securing borders, and promoting economic development. The agreement also emphasizes the importance of people-to-people ties, education, and cultural exchanges in fostering greater understanding and cooperation. By addressing the complex and interrelated challenges facing the region, APAPPS provides a framework for Afghanistan and Pakistan to work together toward a more peaceful and prosperous future (Biographies, 2018).

Another crucial aspect of the border security strategy of Pakistan was its bilateral relationship with Iran. The long and porous Pakistan-Iran border had been a conduit for militant movement and smuggling, necessitating cooperative measures. In recent years, Iran and Pakistan enhanced their border security cooperation through intelligence sharing, joint patrols, and the establishment of new border markets aimed at fostering economic ties and curbing illegal trade.

These efforts were part of a broader strategy to address security threats and stabilize the border region. For instance, in 2019, Iran and Pakistan agreed to set up a joint border rapid reaction force to enhance coordination between their security forces and counter-militant activity, reflecting a commitment to mutual security interests (Ali et al., 2021).

The relationship with India posed a different set of challenges. The LoC in Kashmir remained a flashpoint for ceasefire violations and military confrontations. Despite the adversarial relationship, Pakistan engaged in periodic diplomatic efforts to manage border security and de-escalate mutual tensions. In 2021, both countries reaffirmed their commitment to the 2003 ceasefire agreement along the LoC, leading to a reduction in cross-border firing and civilian casualties. This development was a significant step towards stabilizing the volatile border region, although underlying political disputes continued to fuel periodic escalations.

For instance, in February 2019, following a series of escalations between Pakistan and India, an Indian Air Force pilot, Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman, was captured by Pakistan after his aircraft was shot down during a dogfight. To de-escalate the situation, Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan announced the release of Abhinandan as a "peace gesture." This move was aimed at diffusing the rising tensions and demonstrating the commitment of Pakistan to peace and stability in the region. The decision was widely praised internationally, as it helped to prevent further military conflict between the two nuclear-armed neighbors. Abhinandan was handed over to respective Indian authorities at the Wagah border on March 1, 2019, which significantly calmed the situation and paved the way for diplomatic engagements. This strategic de-escalation highlighted the desire of Pakistan to avoid a full-scale war and emphasized the importance of diplomatic channels in resolving conflicts.

China-Pakistan engagement was another critical element of its security strategy amidst Great Power competition. The CPEC, while primarily an economic initiative, had substantial security implications. Pakistan enhanced security measures to protect CPEC personnel and infrastructure, recognizing the strategic importance of these projects. The establishment of a dedicated security force, the Special Security Division (SSD), ensured the safety of Chinese workers and CPEC assets. This initiative reflected the commitment of Pakistan to safeguarding Chinese investments and maintaining a strategic partnership with China, which was crucial for economic development and regional stability (Javaid & Sahrai, 2020).

Moreover, the collaboration of Pakistan with China extended to defense technology transfers and military cooperation, bolstering its inclusive security capabilities. Joint military exercises, such as the "Shaheen" series, and the procurement of advanced defense equipment from China enhanced the ability of Pakistan to address security threats effectively. These collaborative efforts also sent a signal to other regional powers about the strength of the Pakistan-China alliance, contributing to a strategic balance in South Asia.

Internally, Pakistan also faced security challenges from various militant groups operating within its borders. Enhanced border security measures were complemented by comprehensive counterterrorism operations targeting domestic militant networks. Operations such as Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad, as mentioned earlier, were integral to dismantling terrorist infrastructure and restoring state control in conflict-affected areas. These operations were similarly supported by improved border management, which curtailed the movement of militants and disrupted their supply lines (Ghosh, 2022).

4.1.3. Diplomatic Efforts to Address Security Concerns

Pakistan faced a myriad of security challenges exacerbated by regional stability and Great Power competition. To address these challenges, Pakistan employed a multifaceted diplomatic strategy that included participating in multilateral forums, fostering bilateral relationships, and engaging in regional diplomacy to maintain strategic balance and mitigate security concerns.

A pivotal aspect of Pakistan's diplomatic efforts of Pakistan was its relationship with China. The CPEC epitomized the deep economic and strategic ties between the two countries. Through CPEC, Pakistan aimed to secure Chinese investment in critical infrastructure and bolster its overall economic resilience. Diplomatically, China-Pakistan maintained close cooperation to ensure the security of CPEC projects against potential threats, particularly from militant groups. High-level visits and dialogues between respective officials highlighted a mutual commitment to safeguarding these investments. For instance, the establishment of an SSD dedicated to the protection of CPEC authority demonstrated Pakistan's resolve of Pakistan to address security concerns through a blend of practical measures and diplomatic assurance (Liaquat et al., 2022).

Simultaneously, Pakistan sought to balance its relationship with the US amidst shifting geopolitical dynamics. Despite periods of strained relations, particularly concerning US drone strikes and counterterrorism expectations, Pakistan recognized the importance of maintaining a functional relationship with Washington. Diplomatic engagement with the US included strategic dialogues and high-level visits aimed at ensuring continued military aid and intelligence cooperation and addressing mutual security concerns. For instance, during Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Washington in 2019, discussions focused on stabilizing Afghanistan through enhancing counterterrorism cooperation, reflecting a pragmatic approach to navigating bilateral tensions.

Afghanistan remained a critical focal point in the diplomatic efforts of Pakistan. The US-led war in Afghanistan and subsequent peace negotiations with the Taliban required Pakistan to play an inclusive role. The diplomatic engagement of Pakistan with the Taliban and the Afghan government was pivotal in facilitating the Doha Agreement in 2020, which aimed to end the long-standing conflict. By leveraging strategic depth over the Taliban, Pakistan positioned itself as an important mediator in the peace process, which was crucial for regional stability. The diplomatic success in facilitating these talks not only highlighted the strategic importance of Pakistan but also aimed to mitigate the spillover effects of Afghan instability on the security landscape of Pakistan.

India-Pakistan bilateral relationship posed continuous security and diplomatic challenges, particularly regarding the Kashmir conflict. Diplomatic efforts to de-escalate tensions included confidence-building measures and backchannel communications, even amidst periods of heightened conflict. For instance, the reaffirmation of the 2003 ceasefire agreement along the LoC in 2021 marked a significant diplomatic breakthrough, reducing civilian casualties and cross-border firing. However, underlying political disputes, such as the revocation of Article 370 by India in 2019, continued to strain bilateral relations and required sustained diplomatic engagement to prevent escalation (Mahmood et al., 2023).

In the broader regional context, Pakistan engaged in diplomatic efforts to strengthen ties with neighboring countries like Saudi Arabia and Iran, balancing these relationships amidst their rivalry. The neutral stance and mediation efforts of Pakistan aimed to prevent regional conflicts from exacerbating its security challenges. For instance, former Prime Minister Imran Khan's visits to Tehran and Riyadh in 2019 were part of a diplomatic initiative to ease tensions between both countries, reflecting Pakistan's strategic interest of Pakistan in regional stability.

Moreover, multilateral diplomacy also played a crucial role in the strategy of Pakistan to address security concerns. Participation in forums such as the SCO and the SAARC provided platforms for Pakistan to advocate for economic integration and regional security cooperation. In the SCO, Pakistan, along with Russia and China, promoted counterterrorism collaboration and regional stability. The SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) facilitated intelligence sharing and joint counterterrorism exercises, enhancing the inclusive capacity of Pakistan to address transnational security threats (Mustafa & Sattar, 2021).

The diplomatic engagement of Pakistan extended to leveraging its strategic location to enhance its role in connectivity and international trade initiatives. The Gwadar port, developed with Chinese assistance, was envisioned as an important node in regional trade networks, providing Pakistan with strategic leverage. Diplomatic efforts to integrate Gwadar into regional connectivity frameworks, such as the BRI, aimed to enhance economic stability and attract investment, indirectly contributing to security by reducing the appeal of militancy and fostering economic growth.

Furthermore, the diplomatic outreach of Pakistan included addressing non-traditional security threats, such as economic instability and climate change, which also had implications for national security. Participation in international climate forums and seeking foreign investment for sustainable development projects were part of a broader strategy to build resilience against these emerging challenges. For instance, the initiative of Billion Tree Tsunami initiative, supported by international partners, aimed to combat deforestation and mitigate the effects of climate change, contributing to environmental security.

However, despite these comprehensive diplomatic efforts, the security challenges of Pakistan were compounded by regional rivalries and Great Power competition. The need to

balance relations with major powers, address internal security threats, and navigate regional conflicts required continuous strategic foresight and diplomatic engagement. The ability of Pakistan to adapt its diplomatic strategies to evolving geopolitical dynamics was crucial in mitigating security risks and maintaining stability in the region (Ali, 2022).

4.2. Managing Regional Challenges

Pakistan navigated a complex landscape of regional dynamics and Great Power competition, facing numerous foreign policy challenges. The shifting geopolitical environment, characterized by the evolving strategies of the US, the rise of China, and the resurgence of Russia necessitated an inclusive and adaptive approach. The strategies of Pakistan included leveraging economic partnerships, fostering strategic alliances, engaging in regional diplomacy, and addressing internal and external security concerns to maintain its national interests and stability.

A cornerstone of the foreign policy of Pakistan during this period was its strategic alliance with China. The CPEC project significantly bolstered the economic infrastructure and regional connectivity of Pakistan. This partnership, however, extended beyond economics into defense and strategic cooperation. High-level visits between Chinese and Pakistani officials reinforced this alliance, with China providing critical support in military training and defense technology. For example, the joint military exercises and procurement of advanced defense systems like the JF-17 Thunder fighter jets highlighted the deepening military collaboration. This strategic partnership allowed Pakistan to counterbalance the influence of the US and India in the region, securing its strategic autonomy amidst shifting alliances (Maqsood, 2021).

The relationship with the US, however, was more complex and often fraught with challenges. The US -Pakistan bilateral relationship faced significant strain, particularly regarding

divergent strategic interests in Afghanistan and counterterrorism cooperation. Despite these challenges, Pakistan maintained a pragmatic approach, engaging in high-level dialogues to address mutual concerns. The visits of former Prime Minister Imran Khan to Washington in 2019 and subsequent strategic dialogues highlighted efforts to reset the bilateral relationship. These engagements aimed to secure continued economic support and military aid while addressing contentious issues such as US drone strikes in the tribal areas of Pakistan.

The evolving situation in Afghanistan also posed a significant foreign policy challenge for Pakistan. The US withdrawal and the resurgence of the Taliban in 2021 created a volatile security environment. The role of Pakistan as a facilitator in the US-Taliban peace talks, leading to the Doha Agreement in 2020, was a testament to its strategic importance in the Afghan conflict. This diplomatic effort aimed to stabilize Afghanistan, thereby reducing the spillover of militancy and violence into Pakistan. Despite these efforts, the rapid Taliban takeover presented new challenges for Pakistan, necessitating continued engagement with the Afghan administration to prevent cross-border terrorism and address mutual security concerns (Arshad & Ali, 2023).

The assertive foreign policy of India and the persistent Kashmir conflict remained perennial challenges for Pakistan. The revocation of Articles 370 and 35-A by India in 2019, which stripped J&K of its special status, escalated tensions. The diplomatic response of Pakistan included mobilizing international support against the aggressive actions of India and advocating for the right to self-determination of Kashmiris. This involved leveraging forums such as the UNGA and engaging with important allies like Turkey and China. For instance, former Prime Minister Imran Khan's speeches at the UN highlighted the human rights violations in Kashmir, aiming to apply diplomatic pressure on India by internationalizing the issue (Sargana & Hussain, 2023).

Pakistan also sought to strengthen its ties with regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Iran amidst their rivalry. Balancing these relationships was crucial for Pakistan, given its strategic interests and economic dependencies. Diplomatic initiatives included mediation efforts and economic cooperation agreements. Former Prime Minister Imran Khan's visits to Riyadh and Tehran in 2019 exemplified the efforts of Pakistan to foster stability and maintain neutrality in the region. These diplomatic engagements aimed to prevent regional conflicts from exacerbating the security challenges of Pakistan and to ensure continued economic support from both countries (Zehraa et al., 2020).

4.2.1. Engagement with Afghanistan and Support for Peace Efforts

The engagement of Pakistan with Afghanistan and support for peace efforts were central to its foreign policy, driven by the imperative to stabilize its western neighbor and address security threats emanating from Afghan soil. The period saw Pakistan traversing complex political landscapes, fostering dialogue between conflicting parties, and balancing its strategic interests amidst changing regional dynamics and Great Power competition.

One of the important strategies Pakistan employed was facilitating dialogue between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Recognizing that a stable Afghanistan was crucial for regional security, Pakistan played a pivotal role in bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table. This was evident in the initiation of the Murree talks in 2015, where representatives from the Taliban and the Afghan government met in Pakistan for the first time. Despite the temporary halt of these talks following the disclosure of Taliban leader Mullah Omar's death, Pakistan continued to advocate for dialogue as the path to peace.

The efforts of Pakistan culminated in its significant involvement in the Doha Peace process. Maintaining a channel of communication and hosting multiple rounds of discussions with both the

US and the Taliban, the diplomatic maneuvers of Pakistan were instrumental in the eventual signing of the Doha Agreement in February 2020. This agreement outlined the initiation of intra-Afghan talks and the withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan. The role of Pakistan in this process highlighted its influence over the Taliban and highlighted its commitment to a peaceful resolution in Afghanistan. The successful facilitation of the Doha Agreement was a diplomatic triumph for Pakistan, demonstrating its strategic importance in regional peace efforts (Mustafa et al., 2020).

Another critical aspect of Pakistan's engagement was its bilateral relationship with Afghanistan. Throughout this period, Pakistan sought to improve economic cooperation and diplomatic ties with successive Afghan administrations. High-level visits and dialogues were aimed at building trust and addressing mutual security concerns. The Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) was an important bilateral framework aimed at improving security and economic cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Moreover, former Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Kabul in 2020 marked a significant step towards fostering bilateral cooperation. During this visit, both countries agreed to enhance their economic ties and security cooperation, focusing on trade, transit, and connectivity.

Pakistan also actively participated in multilateral forums focused on Afghanistan. The Moscow Format Consultations and the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process were among the platforms where Pakistan advocated for an inclusive and comprehensive peace process. These multilateral engagements allowed Pakistan to align its efforts with regional and international stakeholders, ensuring a coordinated approach to the Afghan conflict. Through these platforms, Pakistan emphasized the need for a political settlement that included all Afghan factions, reflecting its stance against a military solution to the conflict.

The security dynamics along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border presented significant challenges. The porous border had long been a conduit for smuggling and militants, exacerbating security concerns. In response, Pakistan initiated the construction of a border fence in 2017, aimed at curbing illegal activities and cross-border terrorism. This extensive fencing project, complemented by the establishment of new border posts and enhanced surveillance, was a critical measure in securing the border. These efforts were part of a broader strategy to ensure that Pakistan could control the movement across its western frontier, thereby reducing the threat of militant infiltration.

Economic cooperation also played a crucial role in the strategy of Pakistan. The vision of integrating Afghanistan into regional trade networks through projects like the CPEC was a long-term strategic goal. The development of infrastructure projects and transit trade agreements aimed at improving connectivity highlighted the commitment of Pakistan to economic stability in Afghanistan. By promoting trade and economic development, Pakistan hoped to address some of the root causes of instability and provide alternative livelihoods to reduce the appeal of militant groups.

Furthermore, the humanitarian support of Pakistan to Afghanistan was a significant aspect of its engagement. Throughout the period, Pakistan hosted millions of Afghan refugees, providing them with shelter and access to basic food and health services. The continued presence of Afghan refugees highlighted the humanitarian dimension of engagement in Pakistan, accentuating its role in providing relief amidst ongoing conflict. Additionally, Pakistan also offered educational opportunities and scholarships to Afghan students, aiming to build human capital that could contribute to Afghanistan's future development.

Despite all these efforts, Pakistan faced numerous challenges in its engagement with Afghanistan. The persistence of mutual distrust, periodic border skirmishes, and allegations of harboring militant groups tested the bilateral relationship. However, the consistent push of Pakistan for dialogue and its strategic patience highlighted its commitment to a stable and peaceful Afghanistan (Mirza et al., 2020).

4.2.3. Participation in Regional Forums and Initiatives for Stability

The participation of Pakistan in regional initiatives and forums for stability was a central pillar of its foreign policy. During this period, Pakistan navigated a complex geopolitical landscape, leveraging its geo-strategic location and fostering regional cooperation to address security, economic, and diplomatic challenges. Through active engagement in various regional forums, Pakistan aimed to economic integration, and enhance regional stability, and collective security.

One of the important regional forums where Pakistan played a significant role was the SCO. Pakistan became a full member of the SCO in 2017, alongside India. The inclusion in this Eurasian economic, political, and security organization marked a strategic milestone for Pakistan, providing a platform to collaborate on issues of counterterrorism, regional security, and economic connectivity. The participation of Pakistan in SCO summits, such as the annual meetings in Qingdao (2018) and Bishkek (2019), highlighted its commitment to the objectives of the organization. These summits facilitated dialogues on drug trafficking, combating terrorism, and other transnational threats. Additionally, the emphasis of the SCO on economic cooperation aligned with the interests of Pakistan, particularly regarding the CPEC and broader BRI projects.

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) was another significant regional forum for Pakistan. ECO, which includes countries from South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East,

aims to promote technical, economic, and cultural cooperation. Pakistan, as one of the founding members, actively participated in ECO initiatives to enhance regional trade and connectivity. The 13th ECO Summit held in Islamabad in 2017 was a notable event, where Pakistan reiterated its commitment to regional economic integration. The focus of the summit on energy cooperation, infrastructure development, and trade liberalization resonated with the goals of Pakistan to boost its economic ties with neighboring countries. The Islamabad Declaration adopted at the summit emphasized the importance of regional connectivity, an important aspect of the economic diplomacy of Pakistan (Kuszevska & Nitza-Makowska, 2021).

Pakistan also engaged actively with the SAARC, despite the challenges to the organization due to Indo-Pak incessant rivalry. SAARC, comprising eight South Asian nations, aims to promote regional cooperation and integration. The participation of Pakistan in SAARC summits and ministerial meetings highlighted its commitment to economic cooperation and regional stability. For instance, the 18th SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in 2014 saw Pakistan advocating for increased regional connectivity and cooperation in areas such as energy, trade, and counterterrorism. However, the effectiveness of the SAARC was often hampered by political rivalries, particularly between Pakistan and India, limiting its potential as a platform for regional collaboration (Bishwakarma, 2022).

In addition to multilateral forums, Pakistan pursued regional stability through bilateral initiatives with neighboring countries. As stated earlier, the APAPPS was an important bilateral framework aimed at improving economic and security cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Launched in 2018, APAPPS provided a structured mechanism for dialogue on important issues, including counterterrorism, border management, and refugee repatriation. This initiative

reflected the strategic interest of Pakistan in a stable and cooperative relationship with Afghanistan, crucial for its own security and regional peace (Tahir & Hussain, 2021).

The engagement of Pakistan with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) also reflected its commitment to regional cooperation. As a Sectoral Dialogue Partner of ASEAN, Pakistan sought to enhance its cultural and economic ties with Southeast Asian countries. Participation in ASEAN forums, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), allowed Pakistan to contribute to dialogues on economic and security issues affecting the broader Asia-Pacific region. For instance, the involvement of Pakistan in ARF meetings facilitated discussions on counterterrorism, maritime security, and disaster management, aligning with its broader foreign policy goals of promoting regional stability and cooperation (Kamal et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the active involvement of Pakistan in the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process accentuated its commitment to supporting stability and peace in Afghanistan. The Heart of Asia initiative, launched in 2011, brought together regional and international stakeholders to address political, security, and economic challenges in Afghanistan. Pakistan hosted the fifth ministerial conference of the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process in Islamabad in 2015, reaffirming its role in facilitating regional dialogue and cooperation for Afghan peace. The conference emphasized the need for regional cooperation in combating narcotics trafficking, and terrorism, and enhancing economic connectivity, all of which were critical for stabilizing Afghanistan and the broader region.

Lastly, the participation of Pakistan in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) also played a role in its regional diplomacy. The OIC, comprising Muslim-majority countries, provided a platform for Pakistan to address issues affecting the Muslim world, including economic cooperation and regional conflicts. The engagement of Pakistan in OIC meetings and initiatives,

such as the Islamic Summit Conferences, highlighted its efforts to promote cooperation and solidarity among Islamic countries. This engagement was particularly relevant in addressing issues such as the Kashmir and Palestine conflict and advocating for the rights of Muslim minorities globally (Karahana & Karahan, 2020).

4.3. Addressing of Economic Constraints

Pakistan faced significant economic challenges amidst Great Power competition, necessitating a multidimensional approach to address these issues. The period saw Pakistan navigating a complex geopolitical landscape, fostering international partnerships, leveraging its strategic position, and implementing domestic reforms to stabilize and grow its economy.

One of the central strategies Pakistan employed was deepening its economic ties with China through the CPEC. Pakistan viewed CPEC as a critical opportunity to revitalize its economy by attracting substantial Chinese investment. Projects under CPEC included the development of extensive road networks, Gwadar Port, and energy projects that addressed the chronic electricity shortages in Pakistan. For instance, the construction of coal-fired power plants in Port Qasim and Sahiwal significantly boosted the energy capacity of Pakistan, contributing to economic stability. However, managing the debt associated with these projects remained a challenge, necessitating negotiations to ensure sustainability and careful economic planning (Ullah et al., 2022).

In parallel, Pakistan sought to balance its economic dependence on China by fostering ties with other major powers. The US, despite periods of strained relations, continued to be an important economic partner. Bilateral trade and aid from the US, particularly through various agencies including USAID, supported various development projects in Pakistan. During former Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Washington in 2019, discussions focused on enhancing

economic cooperation, with an emphasis on trade and investment. Additionally, the support of Pakistan for the US -led peace process in Afghanistan was partly aimed at improving bilateral relations and securing economic assistance, which had economic implications (Zweiri & James, 2021).

Pakistan also aimed to diversify its economic partnerships by engaging with the European Union (EU). The EU granted Pakistan Generalized System of Preferences (GSP+) status in 2014, allowing for duty-free access to European markets for various products in Pakistan. This status was crucial for the textile industry of Pakistan, which is a significant part of the country's economy. Increased exports to the EU helped mitigate some of the economic challenges, although maintaining compliance with the GSP+ criteria, particularly related to labor standards and human rights, posed ongoing challenges (Soomro & Ansari, 2022).

Regionally, Pakistan participated actively in economic cooperation forums to enhance trade and connectivity. The ECO, which includes countries from South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, was one such platform. The role of Pakistan in the 13th ECO Summit in Islamabad in 2017 highlighted its commitment to regional economic integration. The summit emphasized energy cooperation, infrastructure development, and trade liberalization, aligning with the goals of Pakistan to boost its economic ties with neighboring countries. Furthermore, the efforts of Pakistan to operationalize the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline aimed at securing energy supplies and fostering regional economic cooperation, although the project faced numerous delays and security concerns (Javaid & Siahmardy, 2020).

Domestically, Pakistan undertook various economic reforms to stabilize its economy and attract foreign direct investment. The government implemented policies to improve the business environment, such as enhancing ease of doing business, simplifying regulations, and offering

incentives to investors. The establishment of special economic zones (SEZs) under CPEC aimed to attract both domestic and foreign investment in manufacturing and services sectors. Additionally, the central bank of Pakistan such as the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), played a crucial role in managing monetary policy to control inflation and stabilize the currency. Reforms in the financial sector, including the introduction of more stringent anti-money laundering measures, aimed to improve investor confidence by aligning with international standards (Lakhan et al., 2021).

Pakistan also sought assistance from international financial institutions to address its economic challenges. The IMF provided several bailout packages during this period, with the most notable being the \$6 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) agreement in 2019. These agreements came with stringent conditions, including tax reforms, fiscal austerity measures, and reductions in public sector deficits. While these measures were aimed at stabilizing the economy, they also posed challenges such as public discontent due to reduced subsidies and increased taxation. The IMF programs necessitated significant structural reforms and policy adjustments, which were crucial for economic stabilization but also politically challenging to implement.

Moreover, the economic strategy of Pakistan included strengthening its agricultural sector, which is the backbone of the economy, employing a significant portion of the population. Initiatives to improve irrigation infrastructure, modernize agriculture, and enhance access to markets were aimed at increasing productivity and ensuring food security. Government programs provided subsidies and support to farmers, although challenges such as climate change, water scarcity, and outdated farming practices remained.

However, amidst these efforts, Pakistan faced the significant challenge of managing its external debt. The increasing debt burden of the country increased due to extensive borrowing for

infrastructure projects and to cover fiscal deficits. Debt sustainability became a critical issue, requiring careful negotiations with creditors and management of foreign exchange reserves. For instance, Pakistan engaged in debt rescheduling agreements with countries like Saudi Arabia and China and sought assistance from the IMF and other international financial institutions to manage its debt obligations (Bozdar et al, 2023).

4.3.1. Economic Reforms and Austerity Measures

As stated above, Pakistan faced significant economic challenges amidst Great Power competition, necessitating a series of economic reforms and austerity measures to stabilize and grow its economy from 2013 to 2022. These efforts were crucial in boosting investor confidence, addressing fiscal deficits, and securing international financial assistance. To address high fiscal deficits, inflation, and rising public debt, the government initiated several rounds of economic reforms, often in collaboration with the IMF. One of the most significant agreements was the \$6 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) program approved by the IMF in July 2019. This program came with stringent conditions aimed at fiscal consolidation, including broadening the tax base, reducing the budget deficit, and improving the efficiency of public spending.

One of the central aspects of the economic reforms of Pakistan was tax reform. The tax-to-GDP ratio of the country was historically low, hovering around 10-12%, which was insufficient to meet its administrative and developmental needs. The government took steps to increase this ratio by enhancing tax compliance and broadening the tax base. Measures included the introduction of reducing exemptions, a more progressive tax system, and improving tax administration. For instance, the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) launched initiatives to enhance tax collection and reduce evasion, resulting in a gradual increase in tax revenues. By the fiscal year 2021-2022, the

tax-to-GDP ratio of Pakistan had improved, reaching approximately 13%, although challenges remained in further broadening the tax base and ensuring compliance (Ashfaq & Bashir, 2021).

In addition to tax reforms, the government also implemented austerity measures to control public expenditure. These measures were aimed at reducing the fiscal deficit, which had ballooned to over 8% of GDP in the fiscal year 2018-2019. Austerity measures included reducing government expenditure, cutting subsidies on electricity and gas, and implementing stricter fiscal discipline across public sector entities. These steps were often politically challenging due to their impact on public services and the cost of living. However, they were necessary to bring the fiscal deficit down to more manageable levels. By the fiscal year 2021-2022, the fiscal deficit had been reduced to around 6.3% of GDP, reflecting the impact of these austerity measures.

Pakistan also focused on improving the business environment to attract domestic and foreign investment. The government launched the “Ease of Doing Business” initiative, which aimed to reduce bureaucratic hurdles, simplify regulations, and enhance the inclusive investment climate. Reforms included the introduction of one-stop shops for business registration, streamlining processes for improving access to credit and obtaining construction permits. These efforts were recognized internationally, with Pakistan’s ranking in the World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business Index improving from 147th in 2018 to 108th in 2020. This improvement was seen as a positive signal to investors, contributing to increased investment flows into the country.

Furthermore, Pakistan also undertook structural reforms in the energy sector, which had long been a drag on the economy due to financial losses and inefficiencies. The power sector was plagued by issues such as power theft, circular debt, and outdated infrastructure. The government implemented reforms to improve the financial sustainability of the power sector, including tariff adjustments to reflect actual costs, reducing subsidies, and enhancing the efficiency of power

distribution companies. These measures aimed to reduce the circular debt, which had reached alarming levels of approximately \$12 billion (PKR 2 trillion) by 2019. By 2022, these efforts had started to yield results, with reductions in power sector losses and improved financial performance of power companies, although challenges remained (Sheikh et al., 2023).

Another critical area of reform was the financial sector. The SBP played a pivotal role in implementing monetary policy reforms to stabilize the currency and control inflation. The SBP adopted a more flexible exchange rate policy, moving away from a managed float to a market-determined exchange rate system. This shift was aimed at rebuilding foreign exchange reserves and addressing the balance of payments crisis, which had fallen to precarious levels. The reforms included tightening monetary policy to curb inflation, which was running high at around 10-12% in the late 2010s. By 2022, inflation had been brought down to more manageable levels of around 8-9%, and foreign exchange reserves had been bolstered through a combination of improved export performance and IMF support.

The government also focused on enhancing social safety nets to mitigate the impact of austerity measures and economic reforms on the most vulnerable segments of society. Programs such as the Ehsaas Initiative, launched in 2019, aimed to provide targeted financial support to low-income households, improve education and healthcare access, and create employment opportunities. The program included interest-free loans for small businesses, cash transfer schemes, and scholarships for underprivileged students. These measures were crucial in maintaining social stability and ensuring that the benefits of economic reforms were more evenly distributed.

Additionally, Pakistan sought to diversify its economic partnerships to reduce dependence on any single country or bloc. While deepening economic ties with China through the CPEC was

a cornerstone of its strategy, Pakistan also pursued closer economic relations with the European Union, the Gulf countries, and ASEAN nations. Efforts included participating in regional economic forums, negotiating trade agreements, and attracting investment from a diverse range of sources. These economic and diplomatic engagements aimed to enhance the economic resilience of Pakistan and integrate it more fully into the global economy (Nishtar, 2023).

4.3.2. Diversification of Economic Partnerships and Trade Relations

To address economic challenges, Pakistan aimed to diversify its trade relations and economic partnerships. This period saw Pakistan striving to reduce its economic dependency on traditional partners and explore new avenues for investment and trade to stabilize and grow its economy.

During this period, one of the primary objectives of the economic policy of Pakistan was to diversify its trade relations beyond its traditional partners such as the US and China. This strategy was driven by the need to mitigate the risks associated with over-dependence on a few countries and to tap into new markets for exports. One of the significant steps in this direction was the engagement of Pakistan with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. The GCC region, with its oil-rich economies, presented lucrative opportunities for Pakistani exports, particularly in sectors like textiles, agriculture, and services. By 2022, Pakistan had significantly increased its exports to the GCC, with countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE becoming key trading partners. For instance, exports to the UAE alone accounted for approximately \$1.5 billion in 2021, highlighting the growing economic ties.

In addition to the GCC, Pakistan also sought to strengthen its trade relations with the European Union (EU) through the Generalized Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) status, which it secured in 2014. This status allowed Pakistan to export many goods to the EU at zero or reduced

tariffs, providing a substantial boost to its textile and apparel industry. The EU became one of the largest export destinations of Pakistan, with exports to the EU growing by 47% from 2013 to 2022, reaching around \$8 billion annually. This diversification helped Pakistan increase foreign exchange earnings and reduce its trade deficit, which was critical for stabilizing its economy amidst fluctuating global economic conditions.

Moreover, Pakistan made concerted efforts to enhance economic ties with ASEAN countries. Recognizing the growth potential and economic dynamism of the ASEAN region, Pakistan pursued several trade agreements and participated in regional economic forums. In 2015, Pakistan signed the ASEAN-Pakistan Free Trade Agreement, which aimed to reduce tariffs and promote trade in goods and services. This agreement facilitated an increase in trade with ASEAN countries, with exports to ASEAN growing by 35% from 2013 to 2022. Countries like Malaysia, Indonesia, and Thailand emerged as important trading partners, contributing to the diversification of export markets in Pakistan (Fazal et al., 2023).

Pakistan also aimed to FDI from a broader range of countries. The CPEC was a cornerstone of this strategy. While CPEC brought substantial Chinese investment into the infrastructure and energy sectors of Pakistan, Pakistan simultaneously sought to attract investment from other countries to avoid over-reliance on China. Efforts included bilateral investment treaties, investment roadshows, and the establishment of special economic zones (SEZs) to attract investors from countries such as Malaysia, Turkey, and the Gulf states. By 2022, these efforts had resulted in a more diversified FDI portfolio, with significant investments from non-traditional sources contributing to the economic development of Pakistan.

The participation of Pakistan in regional economic initiatives and forums further supported its diversification strategy. The country actively engaged with the SAARC and the ECO to promote

regional trade and economic integration. The leadership of Pakistan in these forums aimed to create new economic opportunities by fostering regional cooperation and connectivity. For example, the advocacy of Pakistan for the development of transport and trade corridors through SAARC and ECO was aimed at reducing trade costs and enhancing regional trade linkages, thus making the region more economically integrated and competitive.

Moreover, the efforts of Pakistan to diversify its economic partnerships extended to Africa under the "Look Africa Policy Initiative" launched in 2017. This initiative aimed to enhance economic and trade relations with African countries by exploring new markets for Pakistani goods and services. Trade delegations were sent to various African countries, resulting in increased exports to Africa. By 2022, the exports of Pakistan to Africa had grown by over 25%, with countries like Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa becoming important trading partners. This diversification was crucial in tapping into the reducing dependence on traditional export destinations and the growing African market.

Furthermore, Pakistan also sought to leverage its geographical location to become a regional trade hub. The development of the Gwadar port under CPEC was a significant step in this direction, aiming to transform Pakistan into a key transit point for trade between the Middle East, Central Asia, and beyond. The operationalization of Gwadar port facilitated increased trade and investment flows through Pakistan, contributing to its economic diversification strategy. By 2022, Gwadar had begun to attract significant international attention, with investments from countries such as the UAE and Saudi Arabia in the port and associated infrastructure projects (Fatima, 2023).

4.3.3. Leveraging Economic Potential for Foreign Policy Objectives

Pakistan faced significant economic challenges that were intricately linked with its foreign policy objectives amidst Great Power competition from 2013 to 2022. During this period, Pakistan

strategically leveraged its economic potential to enhance its foreign policy goals, aiming to secure its national interests while navigating complex geopolitical dynamics.

One of the important strategies employed by Pakistan was the development of the CPEC, which became a cornerstone of its economic planning and foreign policy. CPEC, a multi-billion-dollar project under China's BRI, was not only an economic venture but also a strategic move to strengthen ties with China, a major global power. By 2022, China had invested over \$25 billion in various energy and infrastructure projects across Pakistan, significantly improving the economic landscape of the country. This initiative not only addressed infrastructure deficits and energy shortages in Pakistan but also aligned with its foreign policy objective of deepening bilateral relations with China. The economic benefits of CPEC, such as the creation of approximately 75,000 jobs and the enhancement of transport networks across Pakistan, helped to solidify this crucial geopolitical partnership.

Moreover, Pakistan also sought to leverage its economic potential to balance relations with other major powers, notably the US. Despite occasional diplomatic tensions, economic ties between the US and Pakistan remained significant. The US was one of the largest trading partners of Pakistan, with bilateral trade amounting to approximately \$6.6 billion in 2021. Pakistan used this economic interdependence to maintain a pragmatic relationship with the US, ensuring continued access to US markets for its textiles and apparel, which constituted a significant portion of its exports. Additionally, remittances from the Pakistani diaspora in the US contributed substantially to the economy of Pakistan, with remittances amounting to around \$2.5 billion annually during this period.

Similarly, to leverage economic potential, Pakistan also focused on enhancing trade relations with the European Union (EU) by securing GSP+ status, Gwadar Port as a trade hub for

regional commerce, enhanced trade and economic relations with African countries, and strengthening economic ties with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, active involvement in the SAARC and the ECO aimed to promote regional trade and economic integration, and focused on improving domestic economic policies to attract foreign investment are already explained in former section of this research work (Fazal, 2023).

4.4. Realigning Priorities and Expectations US-Pakistan Relations

Pakistan navigated numerous foreign policy challenges amidst the complexities of Great Power competition, particularly in the context of its relations with the US from 2013 to 2022. The US-Pakistan bilateral relationship, historically marked by periods of tensions and cooperation, faced significant trials during this decade. The foreign policy efforts of Pakistan to address these challenges involved a multidimensional approach that included strategic realignments, diplomatic engagement, and economic cooperation, all while balancing its relations with other major powers such as Russia and China.

One of the primary foreign policy challenges for Pakistan was managing the fluctuating nature of its bilateral relationship with the US, which was influenced by the broader geopolitical rivalry between China and the US. During this period, the US pivot to Asia under the Obama administration aimed to counter the rising influence of China, impacting US-Pakistan bilateral relations. Pakistan responded by deepening its strategic partnership with China, particularly through the CPEC, a flagship project under China's BRI. CPEC, launched in 2015 with investments amounting to over \$60 billion, not only aimed at improving the energy and infrastructure sectors of Pakistan but also served as a strategic counterbalance to the US influence. By strengthening ties with China, Pakistan sought to secure an alternative source of military and economic support, thereby reducing its inclusive dependence on the US

The US-Pakistan relationship also faced significant strain due to differences in their approaches to Afghanistan and counterterrorism. The US often criticized Pakistan for allegedly providing sanctuaries to terrorist groups such as the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network. This led to a deterioration in bilateral ties, exemplified by President Donald Trump's tweet in January 2018 accusing Pakistan of "lies and deceit" and announcing the suspension of security assistance. Pakistan addressed this challenge by increasing diplomatic efforts to rebuild trust with the US. For instance, Pakistan played a crucial role in facilitating peace talks between the Taliban and the US, which culminated in the Doha Agreement in February 2020. This diplomatic initiative demonstrated the commitment of Pakistan to regional stability and helped partially restore its relationship with the US (Ali & Anwar, 2023).

In the context of Great Power competition, Pakistan also faced the challenge of balancing its economic and military partnerships with both the US and China. While CPEC solidified the strategic alignment of Pakistan with China, Islamabad continued to value its military cooperation with the US. The US remained a significant supplier of military equipment and aid to Pakistan. Despite the suspension of security assistance in 2018, the US approved \$125 million for technical support to Pakistan's fleet of F-16 fighter jets in 2019, indicating continued military ties. This dual alignment strategy allowed Pakistan to leverage its bilateral relationships with both powers to enhance its defense capabilities while maintaining strategic autonomy.

Economic cooperation was another crucial aspect of addressing foreign policy challenges with the US. Despite military and political tensions, the economic relationship between the two countries remained inclusive. The US was one of the largest trading partners of Pakistan, with bilateral trade reaching approximately \$6.6 billion in 2021. Pakistan leveraged this economic interdependence to maintain a pragmatic relationship with the US. For instance, the US provided

significant development aid to Pakistan, including over \$5 billion from 2002 to 2022, aimed at promoting education, economic growth, and health. This aid helped Pakistan address its socio-economic challenges and accentuated the importance of the bilateral economic relationship.

Moreover, Pakistan engaged in proactive diplomacy to address US concerns about its regional security and nuclear program. The Strategic Dialogue between Pakistan and the US revived in 2015, provided a platform for discussing mutual concerns and areas of cooperation, including trade, energy, and counterterrorism. Through this dialogue, Pakistan aimed to alleviate US concerns about nuclear proliferation and enhance mutual trust. Additionally, the participation of Pakistan in international forums such as the FATF demonstrated its commitment to combating terror financing and money laundering, addressing imperative US concerns, and improving its international standing (Khattak, 2023).

Balancing relations with other regional powers also posed a foreign policy challenge for Pakistan. The US-India strategic partnership, particularly in the defense sector, raised several concerns in Pakistan about regional security dynamics. In response, Pakistan strengthened its economic and strategic ties with China and sought to improve relations with Russia. The first-ever joint military exercises between Russia and Pakistan in 2016 and increased economic cooperation, including the signing of an agreement to build the North-South gas pipeline in 2015, illustrated the efforts of Pakistan to diversify its foreign relations. These moves aimed to counterbalance the US-India alignment and secure the strategic interests of Pakistan in the region.

Lastly, Pakistan also addressed foreign policy challenges by leveraging its geopolitical significance. Its facilitator role in the Afghan peace process highlighted its strategic importance to the US and other regional players. By facilitating dialogue and providing logistical support for peace efforts, Pakistan positioned itself as an important stakeholder in regional stability. This

strategic importance was acknowledged by the US, as reflected in the continued high-level engagements between the US and Pakistani officials (Pitafi, 2023).

4.4.1. Realigning Priorities and Expectations in the Relationship

The period from 2013 to 2022 required Pakistan to employ inclusive diplomatic engagements to address foreign policy challenges vis-à-vis the US and manage its strategic interests. By enhancing economic cooperation, leveraging high-level dialogues, and participating in regional security initiatives, Pakistan aimed to maintain a balanced relationship with the US while accommodating the influences of other major powers.

One of the important strategies employed by Pakistan was the use of diplomatic engagements to rebuild and sustain trust with the US. Following periods of strained relations, such as the aftermath of the 2011 Osama bin Laden raid, Pakistan sought to re-establish communication channels. The Strategic Dialogue, which was revived in 2015, played a crucial role in this regard. This platform facilitated discussions on a range of issues, including economic cooperation, security apparatus, energy, and education. By engaging in these dialogues, Pakistan aimed to address the US concerns, particularly related to nuclear security and counterterrorism, and to highlight its own economic needs and security concerns.

Counterterrorism cooperation remained a contentious issue between both countries, necessitating focused diplomatic efforts. The US frequently accused Pakistan of harboring militant groups that threatened regional stability, leading to significant friction. For instance, in January 2018, President Donald Trump accused Pakistan of providing "sanctuaries" for terrorists and subsequently suspended military aid. In response, Pakistan intensified its diplomatic outreach to convey its counterterrorism efforts and sacrifices, emphasizing its military operations against terrorist groups. The 2014 Zarb-e-Azb operation in North Waziristan and the 2017 Radd-ul-Fasaad

operation across Pakistan demonstrated the commitment of Pakistan to eliminating militant sanctuaries, which it communicated through diplomatic channels to the international community in general and the US in particular (Bukhari et al., 2024).

Economic cooperation including bilateral trade reaching approximately \$6.6 billion in 2021 also formed a cornerstone of diplomatic engagements between Pakistan and the US is already discussed in the former section. In addition to bilateral engagements, Pakistan actively participated in regional forums and initiatives to address mutual security concerns. The Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), involving Afghanistan, Pakistan, the US, and China, exemplified such efforts. This group aimed to facilitate the Afghan peace process, highlighting the role of Pakistan in regional stability. By actively participating in these forums, Pakistan aimed to demonstrate its commitment to counterterrorism and peace efforts, addressing US concerns while promoting its own strategic interests.

Nuclear security and non-proliferation also remained critical issues in US-Pakistan relations, requiring continuous diplomatic engagement. The US expressed concerns over the safety and security of the nuclear arsenal of Pakistan. To address these concerns, Pakistan engaged in dialogue through platforms such as the Nuclear Security Summits. The participation of Pakistan in these summits and its adherence to international non-proliferation norms aimed to reassure the US of its commitment to nuclear security. Additionally, the efforts of Pakistan to enhance its nuclear security infrastructure, including the establishment of a Nuclear Security Emergency Coordination Centre, were communicated to the US through diplomatic channels.

Moreover, the diplomatic efforts of Pakistan included addressing the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) concerns. The US played a significant role in FATF, and its concerns about terrorist financing and money laundering impacted the international standing of Pakistan. In response,

Pakistan undertook extensive diplomatic efforts to improve its financial regulatory framework and demonstrate compliance with FATF requirements. By February 2020, Pakistan had made substantial progress in addressing FATF's action plan, which was acknowledged by the international community, including the US. This progress was a result of sustained diplomatic reforms and engagements, highlighting the efforts of Pakistan to address mutual concerns (Iqbal, 2024).

Pakistan also employed diplomacy to manage the implications of the US-India strategic partnership. The deepening economic and defense ties between the US and India posed strategic challenges for Pakistan. In response, Pakistan engaged in diplomatic efforts to highlight its concerns regarding regional stability and to seek a balanced US approach in South Asia. For instance, Pakistan emphasized the need for a resolution of the Kashmir issue in its active dialogues with US officials, arguing that US mediation could help achieve regional peace. These diplomatic efforts aimed to ensure that the security concerns of Pakistan were considered in the broader US strategic calculus in South Asia.

Lastly, the evolving geopolitical landscape, marked by Great Power competition, required Pakistan to balance its relations with both China and the US. While deepening its strategic partnership with China through initiatives like the CPEC, Pakistan also sought to maintain a functional relationship with the US. Diplomatic engagements aimed at ensuring that China-Pakistan bilateral ties did not adversely affect its relationship with the US were crucial. For example, Pakistan assured the US through diplomatic channels that CPEC was an economic initiative focused on development and regional connectivity, rather than a strategic military alliance (Zamaraeva, 2023).

4.4.3. Leveraging Strategic Importance for Mutual Benefit

To address foreign policy challenges in its relationship with the US and China, Pakistan sought to leverage its strategic importance to achieve mutual benefits, balancing its alliances and navigating complex geopolitical dynamics. This period saw Pakistan utilizing its military cooperation, geostrategic location, diplomatic efforts, and economic potential to enhance its relationship with the US while managing the influences of other major powers.

The geostrategic location of Pakistan has always been a significant asset in its relations with the US. Situated at the crossroads of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East, Pakistan provides crucial strategic and logistical routes. During the US-led war in Afghanistan, the role of Pakistan as an important supply route for NATO forces highlighted its strategic importance. Even after the formal end of the combat mission in Afghanistan in 2014, the geographic significance of Pakistan remained vital for the US. The US relied on Pakistan for logistical support during the drawdown of troops and the evacuation of personnel in 2021. This dependence highlighted the leverage of Pakistan and enabled it to negotiate terms that served its interests, such as securing military and economic aid.

US-Pakistan military cooperation has been another cornerstone of their relationship. Despite periodic strains, military-to-military relations have often provided a stable channel of cooperation and communication. The US has provided Pakistan with significant military training and aid, which has been crucial for the defense capabilities and counterterrorism efforts of Pakistan. For instance, the US supplied Pakistan with F-16 fighter jets, enhancing its air defense capabilities. Additionally, joint military exercises, such as the "Iron Union" and "Inspired Gambit" have strengthened operational trust and compatibility between the armed forces of the two

countries. This cooperation has not only bolstered the defense capabilities of Pakistan but also reinforced the strategic importance of Islamabad to Washington in maintaining regional stability.

To leverage strategic importance for mutual benefits, Pakistan also sought to influence its potential for mutual benefit with the US, engaged in high-level dialogues to address mutual concerns and enhance cooperation, actively participated in regional forums and initiatives such as QCG to promote stability and address mutual security concerns, balanced its relationships with both the US and China amidst Great Power competition, addressed US concerns related to nuclear security and non-proliferation through diplomatic engagement are already explained in former section of this research work (Ullah et al., 2023).

4.4.4. Addressing Challenges Posed by Trump's South Asia Policy

From 2013 to 2022, Pakistan navigated significant foreign policy challenges in its relationship with the US, particularly in response to President Trump's administration's South Asia policy. This period was marked by Great Power competition, with Pakistan striving to balance its relations with the US and other major powers, notably Russia and China. Addressing the challenges posed by President Trump's South Asia policy required Pakistan to employ a multidimensional approach, involving military cooperation, diplomatic engagements, economic measures, and strategic realignments.

President Trump's administration's South Asia policy, unveiled in August 2017, significantly impacted US-Pakistan relations. President Trump criticized Pakistan for allegedly providing sanctuaries to terrorists and demanded greater action against militant groups operating within its borders. This rhetoric strained bilateral relations and led to the suspension of military aid to Pakistan in January 2018. In response, Pakistan intensified its diplomatic efforts to convey its counterterrorism achievements and address US concerns. For instance, Pakistan's Foreign

Minister Khawaja Asif visited the US in 2017 to engage in high-level talks with US officials, emphasizing the sacrifices of Pakistan in the fight against terrorism, which included over 70,000 casualties and economic losses exceeding \$120 billion.

Pakistan also took concrete steps to enhance its counterterrorism efforts, addressing one of the core concerns of Trump's South Asia policy. The military operations Zarb-e-Azb (2014-2017) and Radd-ul-Fasaad (launched in 2017) targeted terrorist safe havens and disrupted militant networks. These operations were highlighted in dialogues with US officials to demonstrate the commitment of Pakistan to counterterrorism. For example, Pakistan Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa's meetings with US military leaders in 2018 and 2019 highlighted the success of these operations and the need for continued cooperation. This approach aimed to rebuild trust and display the role of Pakistan as a reliable partner in regional stability (Zulfiqar, 2024).

Economically, Pakistan sought to diversify its partnerships to mitigate the impact of reduced US aid. The suspension of military aid by the Trump administration necessitated exploring alternative sources of support. Pakistan deepened its economic ties with China, primarily through the CPEC. CPEC brought substantial investments into the energy, infrastructure, and transport sectors of Pakistan. As stated earlier, China had invested over \$25 billion in CPEC projects, contributing to Pakistan's economic growth and job creation of Pakistan by 2022. This diversification reduced the economic dependence of Pakistan on the US and provided a buffer against the financial implications of Trump's policy.

Moreover, Pakistan engaged in regional diplomacy to address the broader geopolitical landscape shaped by Trump's South Asia policy. The policy's emphasis on India as a strategic partner and the calls for increased active Indian involvement in Afghanistan posed significant challenges for Pakistan. To counterbalance this, Pakistan strengthened its ties with regional powers

like Russia and China. The trilateral dialogue between China, Pakistan, and Russia on Afghanistan's peace process exemplified this approach. These dialogues aimed to promote a regional consensus on Afghan stability and counter the perceived US -India alignment against Pakistani interests.

The participation of Pakistan in international forums and multilateral organizations also played a crucial role in addressing the challenges posed by President Trump's policy. Pakistan actively engaged with the SCO and the OIC to garner support for its counterterrorism efforts and regional security concerns. For instance, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan's address at the SCO summit in 2018 emphasized the need for a cooperative approach to regional security, highlighting the contributions of Pakistan to peace and stability. These platforms allowed Pakistan to project its narrative and build alliances that could counterbalance the US -India strategic partnership.

In addition to economic and diplomatic measures, Pakistan leveraged its military capabilities and strategic location to maintain its relevance in US foreign policy. Despite the strained relations, Pakistan continued to facilitate logistics and supply routes for US forces in Afghanistan. This logistical support was crucial during the US troop withdrawal in 2021, highlighting the strategic importance of Pakistan. By providing this assistance, Pakistan maintained a degree of leverage and ensured that its strategic significance was acknowledged by the US, even amidst policy disagreements (Ali, 2024).

Pakistan also focused on enhancing public diplomacy and people-to-people ties to improve its image in the US. Initiatives such as the US -Pakistan Knowledge Corridor aimed to increase educational exchange programs and foster mutual understanding. By 2022, over 7,000 Pakistani students were studying in the US, contributing to educational and cultural ties between the two

countries. Additionally, Pakistan engaged with the Pakistani-American diaspora to advocate for stronger bilateral relations and counter negative perceptions arising from policy disputes.

4.4.5. Addressal of Anti-Americanism in Pakistan

Since its inception, Pakistan faced significant foreign policy challenges in managing its relationship with the US, especially in the context of pervasive anti-American sentiment within the country. These anti-American sentiments required Pakistan to navigate its domestic and international political landscapes carefully. Addressing anti-Americanism, which had deep roots in historical grievances, socio-political dynamics, and specific US policies, was crucial for maintaining a constructive bilateral relationship amidst evolving global and regional power structures.

Anti-American sentiment in Pakistan has long been fueled by a series of historical events, including perceived interference in Pakistan's internal affairs, US actions in the Muslim world, and the war on terror. The US drone campaign, which intensified under the President Obama administration and continued intermittently during President Trump's tenure, was a significant source of resentment. According to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism (BIJ), between 2004 and 2018, the US drone strikes in Pakistan resulted in approximately 430-1,000 civilian deaths. These strikes, viewed as violations of the sovereignty of Pakistan, inflamed public opinion and provided fodder for anti-American rhetoric (Gurjar, 2024).

To address these challenges, Pakistan adopted a multi-pronged approach, balancing diplomatic engagement with efforts to mitigate domestic discontent. One of the primary strategies was to communicate channels and strengthen diplomatic dialogue with the US. High-level meetings and visits were frequent during this period. For instance, former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's visit to Washington in October 2013 aimed to reset the bilateral relationship, focusing on

security, economic cooperation, and counterterrorism efforts. Such engagements were crucial in conveying concerns of Pakistan directly to US policymakers and in seeking assurances on issues like drone strikes and aid.

Economic cooperation and development assistance formed another critical aspect of the strategy of Pakistan to counter anti-American sentiment. The Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009, commonly known as the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act, pledged \$7.5 billion in civilian aid over five years. While the effectiveness of this aid was debated, its continuation into the following decade accentuated US commitment to the development of Pakistan. Pakistan leveraged this aid to address some of the socio-economic grievances that underpinned anti-Americanism. By focusing on education, infrastructure, and health projects funded through US assistance, Pakistan aimed to showcase the tangible benefits of the bilateral relationship to its populace.

Security and military cooperation, despite its controversies, remained a cornerstone of US -Pakistan relations. Pakistan highlighted its role as a frontline state in the war on terror, emphasizing the sacrifices made by its armed forces and civilians. Between 2013 and 2018, Pakistan received approximately \$3.5 billion in Coalition Support Funds (CSF) from the US, intended to reimburse Pakistan for its counterterrorism operations. While these funds were sometimes suspended due to policy disagreements, their resumption was often linked to the cooperation of Pakistan in regional stability efforts. This financial support was critical in bolstering the counterinsurgency capabilities of Pakistan and in demonstrating the mutual benefits of the security partnership.

Public diplomacy efforts were also intensified to address the roots of anti-Americanism. Pakistan engaged in cultural and educational exchanges to foster a better understanding of the US among its citizens. The Fulbright Program, one of the largest US-funded educational exchange

programs in Pakistan, continued to provide opportunities for Pakistani students and professionals. By 2018, Pakistan had sent the largest number of Fulbright scholars to the US from any country. These initiatives aimed to create a more inclusive and positive perception of the US, countering the often negative portrayal in local media (Quraishi, 2023).

Moreover, Pakistan sought to balance its relationship with the US by strengthening ties with other major powers, particularly China and Russia. The CPEC brought significant Chinese investment into Pakistan. By 2022, CPEC projects were valued at over \$60 billion, focusing on energy, infrastructure, and industrial development. This partnership provided Pakistan with an economic safety net, reducing its dependency on US aid and allowing it to negotiate with greater confidence. Additionally, the engagement of Pakistan with Russia, marked by joint exercises and increased military cooperation, signaled a diversification of its foreign policy options.

Addressing anti-Americanism also required internal policy reforms and adjustments. The government of Pakistan took steps to reduce corruption, improve governance, and enhance transparency, addressing some of the internal issues that fueled public discontent. Initiatives like the National Action Plan (NAP), launched in 2014, aimed to tackle extremism and terrorism, thereby creating a more secure and stable environment. By addressing these domestic challenges, Pakistan hoped to reduce the appeal of anti-American narratives that often thrived on internal instability and socio-economic disparities (Ahmed, 2023).

4.5. Addressing Challenges Related to China-Pakistan Relations

Pakistan navigated a complex foreign policy landscape to maintain and strengthen its bilateral relationship with China from 2013 to 2022. This period was marked by economic challenges and significant geopolitical shifts, requiring Pakistan to adopt multifaceted strategies

to address its foreign policy challenges. The cornerstone of the Pakistan-China relationship during this time was the CPEC, a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure and economic development project. By leveraging economic cooperation, diplomatic engagement, and strategic alignment Pakistan managed to sustain and enhance its ties with China amidst a rapidly evolving global order.

One of the primary challenges Pakistan faced was ensuring the successful materialization of CPEC projects. CPEC focuses on enhancing connectivity, infrastructure, connectivity, and economic integration between the two countries. By 2022, the estimated value of CPEC projects had surpassed \$60 billion, encompassing road and rail networks, energy projects, and special economic zones. However, the implementation of these projects faced numerous hurdles, including bureaucratic inefficiencies, security threats, and financial constraints. To address these challenges, Pakistan took several measures, such as establishing the CPEC Authority in 2019 to enhance coordination and streamline project execution between various stakeholders.

Security concerns also posed a significant challenge to the smooth progress of CPEC projects. The Baluchistan region, where many CPEC projects are located, experienced insurgent activities targeting infrastructure and Chinese nationals. To mitigate these threats, Pakistan established the Special Security Division (SSD) in 2016, a dedicated force of around 15,000 personnel tasked with protecting Chinese workers and CPEC assets. The Pakistani military, intelligence agencies, and law-enforcement support also intensified operations against insurgent groups, aiming to create a secure environment conducive to investment and development. These efforts were crucial in reassuring Chinese investors and maintaining the momentum of CPEC projects (Kaur, 2023).

The financial sustainability of CPEC investments was another critical issue. The economic situation of Pakistan during this period was marked by rising debt, fiscal deficits, and currency

devaluation. Ensuring that CPEC projects did not exacerbate the debt burden of Pakistan required careful financial planning and negotiations. Pakistan engaged in discussions with China to secure financial assistance and favorable loan terms. For instance, during former Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to China in 2018, agreements were reached to restructure some CPEC-related loans and enhance economic cooperation. Additionally, Pakistan sought to diversify its sources of foreign investment to reduce the financial strain and balance its economic dependencies associated with CPEC projects.

Diplomatic efforts played a vital role in addressing foreign policy challenges related to the Pakistan-China relationship. Frequent diplomatic exchange missions and high-level visits were essential in fostering mutual understanding and trust. Notable visits included President Xi Jinping's state visit to Pakistan in 2015, which marked the formal launch of CPEC, and multiple visits by Pakistani leaders to China. These interactions facilitated reinforced strategic ties, and the resolution of bilateral issues, and highlighted the commitment of both nations to their partnership. Furthermore, Pakistan consistently supported China on international platforms, including backing stance of China on the South China Sea and the One-China policy, which reciprocated China's support on issues such as Palestine and Kashmir.

The strategic alignment between China and Pakistan extended beyond economic cooperation to encompass security and defense collaboration. The two countries enhanced defense trade conducted joint military exercises, and cooperated on counterterrorism efforts. For example, the Pakistan Air Force collaborated with China on the development of the JF-17 Thunder fighter jet, while the Pakistan Navy inducted Chinese-built warships and submarines. These initiatives not only strengthened the defense capabilities of Pakistan but also reinforced the strategic partnership

between the two nations in the face of regional security dynamics, particularly concerning growing US ties with India (Spies, 2023).

Cultural exchange programs and public diplomacy were also crucial in fostering people-to-people connections and building a positive image of China in Pakistan. Educational initiatives, such as the establishment of Confucius Institutes in Pakistan, and scholarships for Pakistani students to study in China, played a significant role in this regard. These efforts helped to deepen cultural ties and mutual understanding, contributing to the long-term stability of the bilateral relationship.

Balancing its bilateral relationship with China while maintaining ties with other regional and global powers was another challenge for Pakistan. The growing US-India strategic partnership, the regional influence of Saudi Arabia and Iran, and Islamabad's complex relations with these countries required an inclusive foreign policy approach. The strategy of Pakistan involved leveraging its strategic partnership with China to counterbalance the growing influence of India while ensuring that its ties with other important players, such as the US and Gulf countries, remained constructive. This balancing act was evident in the diplomatic engagements of Pakistan, where it sought to address the concerns of other allies and partners while also reassuring China of its strategic partnership (Ali, 2023).

4.5.1. CPEC Related Challenges

The foreign policy of Pakistan faced numerous challenges, particularly regarding its bilateral relationship with China centered on the CPEC. Despite the immense potential for economic growth and development, the implementation of CPEC presented a series of complex challenges. The approach of Pakistan to addressing these challenges involved a combination of

security enhancements, strategic policy measures, financial negotiations, and diplomatic engagements.

One of the foremost challenges was ensuring effective coordination and governance for CPEC projects. The creation of the CPEC Authority in 2019 was a strategic move by Pakistan to streamline the management and execution of CPEC initiatives. This dedicated body was responsible for addressing bureaucratic hurdles, overseeing project implementation, and ensuring timely completion. By centralizing the authority, Pakistan aimed to enhance efficiency and accountability, thus fostering a more conducive environment for CPEC investments.

Additionally, Pakistan formulated long-term planning frameworks to align its national development goals with CPEC projects. The inclusion of CPEC in Pakistan's Vision 2025 development agenda highlighted the strategic importance of these projects. This alignment helped to integrate CPEC into the broader economic strategy of Pakistan, ensuring that the projects supported sustainable development and regional connectivity.

Security concerns posed a significant threat to the smooth progress of CPEC projects, particularly in regions like Baluchistan where insurgent activities were prevalent. To mitigate these risks, Pakistan established the Special Security Division (SSD) in 2016, comprising around 15,000 personnel dedicated to protecting CPEC infrastructure and Chinese nationals working in Pakistan. The efforts of SSD were complemented by increased military operations against insurgent groups, aiming to secure the regions where CPEC projects were being implemented.

Furthermore, Pakistan enhanced its intelligence-sharing and counterterrorism cooperation with China. This collaboration was crucial in preempting security threats and ensuring a safe working environment for Chinese investments. The proactive stance of the Pakistani military in

securing CPEC infrastructure and routes reassured Chinese investors and reinforced the commitment to protecting joint economic interests (Abdul Rab, 2023).

The challenges related to the financial sustainability of CPEC investments in the context of economic vulnerabilities of Pakistan and high-level diplomatic engagements were pivotal in addressing foreign policy challenges related to CPEC and were also critical challenges already discussed in the former section of this research work. In addition to bilateral engagements, Pakistan actively participated in regional forums and initiatives that supported CPEC. Engagements in platforms like the SCO provided Pakistan with opportunities to garner regional support for CPEC and reinforce its strategic ties with China within a broader multilateral context.

4.5.2. Economic Diplomacy to Attract Investment and Mitigate Risks

Pakistan faced significant foreign policy challenges amidst Great Power competition, particularly concerning its relationship with China from 2013 to 2022. Central to the strategy of Pakistan was economic diplomacy aimed at mitigating risks and attracting investment, primarily through the CPEC. This initiative was pivotal in shaping the economic and diplomatic landscape of Pakistan, offering both challenges and opportunities that required astute management and strategic foresight.

Economic diplomacy was the cornerstone of Islamabad's approach to managing its relationship with Beijing. CPEC promised substantial investment in Pakistan's infrastructure and energy sectors of Pakistan. Pakistan actively sought to maximize the benefits of this partnership during this period. One of the most notable aspects of CPEC was the development of infrastructure and enhanced connectivity within Pakistan and with neighboring regions, facilitating trade and economic growth. For instance, the construction of the Karakoram Highway (KKH), often referred

to as the "Friendship Highway," was a significant project under CPEC. This highway not only improved trade routes but also symbolized the deepening ties between China and Pakistan.

Energy projects were another critical component of CPEC. Pakistan faced chronic energy shortages, which hindered its economic growth. By 2022, CPEC had contributed to several important energy projects, including hydro, coal, and solar power plants, significantly enhancing the energy capacity of Pakistan. The Sahiwal Coal Power Project, completed in 2017, added 1,320 MW to the national grid, helping alleviate the energy crisis. Pakistan also focused on establishing Special Economic Zones (SEZs) to attract Chinese investment in manufacturing and industrial sectors. SEZs were designed to provide incentives such as tax breaks and simplified regulations to attract foreign investors. The Rashakai SEZ in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, inaugurated in 2021, was one of the first to start operations, symbolizing Pakistan's commitment of Pakistan to fostering industrial growth through Chinese investments.

The Central Asia South Asia (CASA) initiative also presented Pakistan with a strategic opportunity for economic diplomacy, offering a platform to attract investment and mitigate risks. By participating in CASA, Pakistan can enhance connectivity with Central and South Asian countries, fostering investment and trade opportunities. Energy cooperation, infrastructure development, and trade facilitation are important aspects that can boost the economic prospects of Pakistan. Moreover, engagement in CASA can help diversify the economic partnerships of Pakistan, reducing its dependence on any single country or region. This not only attracts investment but also mitigates risks associated with political and economic instability (Ashraf, 2023).

4.5.3. Balancing relations with China and other Stakeholders in the Region

Pakistan navigated a complex web of foreign policy challenges amidst Great Power competition, focusing significantly on balancing its relations with China and other stakeholders in the region. This period was marked by significant geopolitical shifts, necessitating an inclusive and strategic approach to secure national interests and maintain regional stability.

The cornerstone of Pakistan's foreign policy during this period was its deepening relationship with China courtesy of the CPEC project. This project not only promised economic revitalization for Pakistan but also symbolized a strategic alignment with China, offering an alternative to Western-dominated economic structures. As already stated, CPEC had attracted over \$62 billion in Chinese investments, significantly impacting Pakistan's energy, infrastructure, and industrial sectors by 2022.

However, China-Pakistan's growing proximity necessitated a careful balancing act with other regional and global powers. One important challenge was managing its bilateral relationship with the US, which viewed the expanding influence of China with apprehension. Historically a significant ally, especially in the context of the War on Terror, the US remained an essential partner for Pakistan. To maintain this relationship, Pakistan emphasized its strategic importance in the region, particularly its role in facilitating peace in Afghanistan. For instance, Pakistan played a crucial role in the US -Taliban peace talks, culminating in the Doha Agreement of 2020. By positioning itself as a mediator, Pakistan managed to retain its strategic relevance to the US while deepening ties with China.

India, another critical stakeholder, posed a significant challenge to the foreign policy of Pakistan during this period. The longstanding rivalry between the two nuclear-armed neighbors was exacerbated by the growing alignment of India with the US, particularly through economic

and defense partnerships. The US-India defense agreements, such as the LEMOA and the COMCASA, were perceived as counterweights to the growing influence of China in the region. In response, the alignment of Pakistan with China provided a strategic counterbalance to the assertive actions of India. The development of Gwadar Port under CPEC, for example, was seen as a strategic move to offset the growing influence of India in the Arabian Sea, where the presence of India was bolstered by its naval capabilities and agreements with the U.S (Hussain et al., 2024).

Additionally, Pakistan sought to maintain and enhance its relationships with other regional powers like Iran and Russia. The improvement of ties with Russia was particularly notable, as it marked a significant shift from the Cold War era's adversarial dynamics. In 2015, Russia and Pakistan signed a landmark defense cooperation agreement, followed by energy collaborations and joint military exercises. This diversification of partnerships aimed to reduce the over-reliance of Pakistan on any single country and to counterbalance the US -India strategic nexus. Similarly, relations with Iran were cultivated through initiatives like the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline, despite pressures from US sanctions. This project aimed to address the energy needs of Pakistan while strengthening bilateral ties with its western neighbor.

The broader Middle Eastern dynamics also played a crucial role in the foreign policy of Pakistan. The traditional alliance of Pakistan with the UAE and Saudi Arabia provided political and economic support, crucial for its economic stability. For instance, in 2018, UAE and Saudi Arabia pledged \$6 billion in financial assistance to Pakistan to help it navigate a severe balance of payments crisis. However, Pakistan had to carefully navigate these relationships, especially in the context of the Saudi-Iran rivalry. By maintaining a neutral stance and offering mediation, Pakistan aimed to balance its relations with both Tehran and Riyadh, avoiding entanglement in regional conflicts (Safdar, 2024).

4.6. Russia-Pakistan Re-engagement

The foreign policy of Pakistan saw a significant shift in its relationship with Russia, marked by a strategic reengagement amidst Great Power competition. Historically adversaries during the Cold War, Russia and Pakistan began to find common ground, driven by mutual interests in economic cooperation, regional stability, and balancing the influence of other major powers like the US and China.

The re-engagement between Russia and Pakistan was catalyzed by mutual recognition of strategic benefits and changing geopolitical dynamics. One of the most significant milestones in this renewed relationship was the signing of a defense cooperation agreement in 2014. This bilateral agreement laid the groundwork for increased military collaboration, including the exchange of military personnel and joint exercises. The Druzhba (Friendship) series of joint military exercises, initiated in 2016, became a symbol of the growing defense ties between the two nations. These exercises aimed to foster greater interoperability and enhance counter-terrorism capabilities between the two armies.

Economic cooperation also played a crucial role in the re-engagement process. In 2015, Russia agreed to invest \$2 billion in the North-South Gas Pipeline Project, which aimed to transport LNG from Karachi to Lahore. This project was significant for Pakistan as it addressed the chronic energy shortages of the country while also diversifying its energy sources. The economic collaboration was further bolstered by the interest of Russia in investing in the energy sector of Pakistan, including the development of hydroelectric projects and the modernization of the Pakistan Steel Mills.

The broader context of the Great Power competition significantly influenced Pakistan's approach to re-engagement with Russia. As the US pivoted towards India, strengthening economic and defense ties with New Delhi, Pakistan sought to counterbalance this by enhancing its relationships with other major powers. The growing US-India strategic partnership, highlighted by agreements like the LEMOA and the COMCASA, posed a strategic challenge for Pakistan. In response, Islamabad viewed closer ties with Moscow as a means to reduce its reliance on any single power and diversify its strategic partnerships (Khan et al., 2023).

The regional security environment, particularly the situation in Afghanistan, provided another impetus for Russia-Pakistan cooperation. Both countries shared concerns about the rise of extremism, terrorism, and the potential spillover effects of instability in Afghanistan. In 2016, Russia initiated the Moscow Format Consultations on Afghanistan, which included Pakistan among other regional stakeholders. This forum aimed to facilitate a political solution to the Afghan conflict, highlighting the role of Russia as an important player in the region and the strategic importance of Pakistan in facilitating dialogue and stability in Afghanistan.

Furthermore, the re-engagement with Russia was part of a broader strategy of Pakistan to enhance its economic integration and regional connectivity. The CPEC highlighted the importance of regional connectivity for the economic development of Pakistan. While CPEC primarily involved Chinese investments, Pakistan sought to expand this model by attracting Russian investments in infrastructure and energy projects. In 2019, Russia expressed interest in joining CPEC projects, signaling a potential trilateral cooperation involving Russia, China, and Pakistan.

The strategic reengagement of Pakistan with Russia also had implications for its bilateral relationships with other regional powers, notably Central Asian republics and Iran. Enhanced ties with Russia provided Pakistan with greater leverage in its interactions with these countries,

facilitating connectivity initiatives and regional cooperation. For instance, the Pakistan-Iran (IP) gas pipeline project, though delayed due to international sanctions, remained a critical component of the energy strategy of Pakistan. The support of Russia and involvement in regional energy projects offered a potential avenue to overcome some of the challenges associated with these sanctions.

Additionally, the improvement of bilateral relations was marked by high-level visits and diplomatic exchanges. In 2018, Pakistan's former Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif visited Moscow, which was followed by a reciprocal visit by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to Islamabad in 2019. These visits were instrumental in setting the stage for enhanced cooperation in various sectors, including energy, trade, and defense. The regular high-level dialogues highlighted the commitment of both countries to strengthen their bilateral ties.

Moreover, Russia-Pakistan diplomatic re-engagement was also facilitated by cultural and educational exchanges, aimed at fostering greater people-to-people connections. Initiatives such as cultural delegations and student exchange programs helped to build goodwill and mutual understanding between the two nations. These softer aspects of diplomacy complemented the economic and strategic dimensions of the bilateral relationship, contributing to a more comprehensive engagement (Hussain et al., 2023).

4.6.1. Russia-Pakistan Military Cooperation

The foreign policy of Pakistan underwent a strategic shift, emphasizing enhanced military cooperation with Russia amidst the broader context of Great Power competition. This period marked a departure from the Cold War antagonism, as both nations recognized the mutual benefits of strengthening defense ties to address regional security challenges and balance the influence of other major powers like the US and China.

The cornerstone of this burgeoning military cooperation was the signing of a defense cooperation agreement in 2014, a landmark event that set the stage for subsequent collaborations. This agreement opened avenues for joint exercises, increased military exchanges, and defense procurements, marking a new era in Pakistan-Russia relations. One of the most significant outcomes of this agreement was the initiation of the Druzhba (Friendship) series of joint military exercises focused on counter-terrorism operations. The Druzhba exercises became an annual feature, symbolizing the growing cooperation and trust between Russia and Pakistan.

In addition to joint exercises, the defense cooperation included significant military procurements. In 2015, Pakistan procured four Mi-35M attack helicopters from Russia, marking the first major defense deal between the two countries. The Mi-35M helicopters enhanced the counter-insurgency capabilities of Pakistan, particularly in its operations against militant groups in the tribal areas. This procurement highlighted the strategic depth of the military relationship, as Pakistan sought to diversify its sources of advanced military technology beyond its traditional suppliers.

The growing military ties between both countries were also reflected in high-level military visits and exchanges. In 2018, Pakistan's then Chief of Army Staff, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, visited Moscow, where he met with Russian defense officials to discuss avenues for further military cooperation. These visits facilitated a continuous dialogue on joint training, defense strategies, and intelligence sharing. They also provided a platform for both countries to align their military objectives, particularly concerning regional security issues such as extremism, terrorism, and the stability of Afghanistan (Khan et al., 2023).

The evolving geopolitical landscape, particularly the US pivot towards India, significantly influenced the military cooperation of Pakistan with Russia. The US-India defense agreements,

such as the LEMOA and the COMCASA, were perceived by Pakistan as efforts to counterbalance the influence of China in the region and to enhance the strategic capabilities of India. In response, Pakistan viewed closer military ties with Russia as a strategic necessity to counterbalance this growing Indo-US strategic partnership and diversify its defense partnerships.

The area of regional security environment, especially the situation in Afghanistan is already discussed in the former section of this research work. Furthermore, the military cooperation extended to naval collaboration, reflecting the comprehensive nature of the defense relationship. In 2018, Russian naval ships participated in the Aman naval exercises hosted by Pakistan in the Arabian Sea. These exercises, involving multiple countries, aimed to enhance maritime cooperation and security among participating navies. The participation of Russian naval forces highlighted the expanding scope of Pakistan-Russia military cooperation beyond land-based operations to include maritime security, a critical aspect of regional stability.

The strategic partnership also included discussions on potential joint ventures in defense production and advanced defense technologies. In 2019, Pakistan expressed interest in acquiring the Russian S-400 missile defense system, although no deal was finalized. Such discussions indicated the intent of Pakistan to strengthen its defense capabilities with state-of-the-art technology from Russia, further diversifying its defense procurement sources (Ali et al., 2023).

4.6.3. Economic Engagement

The foreign policy of Pakistan witnessed a significant shift with a pronounced focus on economic engagement with Russia amidst the backdrop of Great Power competition. One of the key milestones in this economic engagement was the signing of an agreement in 2015 for Russia to invest \$2 billion in the North-South Gas Pipeline Project to address chronic energy shortages in the country and diversify its energy sources. This pipeline was not only a symbol of

re-engagement but also a strategic move to reduce the energy dependence of Pakistan on the Middle East.

Further cementing their economic cooperation, Russia also expressed interest in revitalizing the Pakistan Steel Mills (PSM), which had been facing severe operational challenges. The modernization of this industrial giant, originally established with Soviet assistance in the 1970s, was an important priority for the industrial policy of Pakistan. The involvement of Russia in this sector indicated a revival of historic economic linkages and a commitment to long-term industrial cooperation.

Moreover, Pakistan sought to expand CPEC by attracting Russian investments in infrastructure and energy projects. In 2019, Russia showed interest in participating in CPEC projects, indicating potential trilateral cooperation involving China, Russia, and Pakistan. Trade between both countries also saw a notable increase from 2013 to 2022. Bilateral trade, though still modest compared to Pakistan's trade with other major powers, showed a steady upward trajectory.

In 2021, bilateral trade reached approximately \$800 million, reflecting a significant increase from previous years. Important exports from Pakistan included textiles, leather goods, and agricultural products, while Russia exported machinery, chemicals, and energy products to Pakistan. Efforts to further enhance trade included discussions on reducing tariffs and addressing non-tariff barriers, aiming to make bilateral trade more robust and diversified (Khan et al., 2023).

CHAPTER 5

FUTURE PROSPECTS

As the global geopolitical landscape continues to evolve, Pakistan faces several potential foreign policy challenges in the post-2022 era of Great Power competition. These challenges stem from regional security dynamics, shifting alliances, economic dependencies, and the implications of emerging technologies. Addressing these challenges will require strategic foresight, astute diplomatic maneuvering, and a balanced approach to maintaining national interests and regional stability.

One of the foremost challenges Pakistan might face is managing its relationship with the US amidst fluctuating US foreign policy priorities. Historically, Pakistan has been a frontline ally in the US-led war on terror, but relations have often been strained due to issues such as close ties of Pakistan with the Taliban and concerns over nuclear security (Fair, 2014). The focus of the Biden administration on countering the growing influence of China, as highlighted in the Pivot of Aisa strategy, could lead to further alignment with India, potentially at the expense of US-Pakistan relations (Mohan, 2021). Pakistan will need to navigate this complex dynamic, ensuring it remains a valuable partner to the US while safeguarding its strategic interests.

Another significant challenge is the balancing act between the US and China. The CPEC, a flagship project of China's BRI, has deepened economic ties between Beijing and Islamabad. However, this close relationship with China could complicate interactions of Pakistan with the US and its allies, who view the growing rise of China with increasing concern (Small, 2020). Pakistan will need to continue leveraging Chinese investments for economic growth while ensuring that its foreign policy does not alienate the US and other Western partners.

The evolving dynamics in the Middle East also present potential foreign policy challenges for Pakistan. The Abraham Accords, which have seen several Arab states normalize relations with Israel, are reshaping regional alliances (Guzansky & Marshall, 2021). Pakistan does not recognize Israel ideologically and has traditionally supported Palestinian statehood, may find itself under pressure to recalibrate its stance. Balancing relations with the Gulf States, which are important sources of energy supplies and energy supplies, while maintaining its historical position in Palestine, will require skillful diplomacy.

Regional security, particularly concerning Afghanistan, remains a perennial challenge for Pakistan. The Taliban's return to power in 2021 has significant implications for regional stability and security (Rashid, 2021). Pakistan must address concerns about the potential for refugee influxes, cross-border terrorism, and the impact of an unstable Afghanistan on its security landscape. Engaging with international stakeholders to support an inclusive and stable political process in Afghanistan will be crucial for the foreign policy of Pakistan.

Economic vulnerabilities and dependencies also pose challenges. The reliance of Pakistan on external financial assistance, particularly from institutions such as IMF and countries like Saudi Arabia and China, can constrain its foreign policy autonomy (Husain, 2020). Reducing dependency on external aid and ensuring sustainable economic growth will be essential to enhance the strategic flexibility of Pakistan. This may involve enhancing domestic economic reforms, diversifying trade partners, and attracting foreign direct investment from a broader range of sources.

The implications of cyber security threats and emerging technologies also present another layer of complexity. As cyber and digital domains become increasingly critical in the Great Power competition, Pakistan must bolster its cyber defenses and develop inclusive strategies to safeguard

its digital infrastructure (Taj, 2020). Collaborating with international partners to enhance cyber security capabilities and address threats such as cyber terrorism and cyber espionage will be crucial.

Furthermore, environmental challenges and climate change impacts could influence the foreign policy of Pakistan. Pakistan is highly vulnerable to climate change, facing threats such as water scarcity, glacial melting, and extreme weather events (Abid et al., 2019). Addressing these challenges will require regional engagement and cooperation with global initiatives on climate change. The active participation of Pakistan in international forums on climate policy can help secure the necessary support and resources to mitigate and adapt to climate impacts.

5.1. Balancing Amidst Great Power Competition

In the post-2022 era, Pakistan faces a complex web of foreign policy challenges as it strives to balance its relations amidst intensifying Great Power competition. The geopolitical landscape is becoming increasingly polarized, with major powers like the United States, China, and Russia vying for influence. Pakistan's strategic location and its economic and security interests make it a key player in this competition, but navigating these dynamics requires nuanced and agile diplomacy.

A primary challenge for Pakistan will be managing its strategic partnership with China while maintaining a functional relationship with the US. The CPEC has been a cornerstone of the economic development strategy of Pakistan. CPEC also aims to enhance Pakistan's energy capacity, infrastructure, and connectivity, promising significant economic benefits. However, as the US intensifies its efforts to counter the influence of China globally, Pakistan may face increased pressure to reassess its ties with Beijing. The Indo-Pacific strategy of the Biden administration,

which includes strengthening ties with India and other regional allies to contain China, could complicate the balancing act of Pakistan. For instance, the US might push Pakistan to reduce its defense cooperation with China and curtail its participation in CPEC, presenting a dilemma for Islamabad, which relies heavily on Chinese military support and investment.

Simultaneously, Pakistan must navigate its relations with India, an important partner in the US strategy to counterbalance China. The US -India strategic partnership has grown significantly, with trade, defense, and technological collaboration deepening over recent years. This partnership poses a direct challenge to Pakistan, especially given the longstanding tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad, particularly over the Kashmir issue. Enhanced US-India ties could embolden India in its regional ambitions, potentially escalating conflicts with Pakistan. In this scenario, Pakistan would seek diplomatic support and bolster its defense capabilities from other powers, such as Russia and China, to counterbalance the influence of India.

The re-emergence of Russia as a significant global player adds another layer of complexity to the foreign policy of Pakistan. Pakistan has been working to strengthen its ties with Moscow, particularly in the energy and defense sectors. However, India-Russia's historical relationship and its strategic calculations in the region pose challenges. While Russia has shown a willingness to engage more deeply with Pakistan, it remains a primary defense supplier to India. This dual engagement requires Pakistan to tread carefully to avoid straining its relationship with either country. Moreover, the confrontation of Russia with the West in the context of Moscow's resurgence particularly following its actions in Ukraine, further complicates the diplomatic landscape of Pakistan. Aligning too closely with Russia could jeopardize the bilateral relations of Pakistan with Western nations and impact its access to international financial institutions (Khattak, 2023).

The situation in Afghanistan remains a critical concern for Pakistan, with significant implications for its foreign policy. The return of the Taliban to power in 2021 has created a complex diplomatic and security environment. Pakistan has a vested interest in a stable Afghanistan to prevent the spillover effects of refugee influxes and terrorism. However, balancing its relationship with the Taliban regime while addressing international concerns about human rights and terrorism will be a complicated task. Additionally, major powers like China, the US, and Russia all have stakes in Afghanistan, and their interactions will influence the approach of Pakistan. For example, the support of Pakistan for the Taliban could strain its relations with the US and other Western nations, while cooperation on counterterrorism efforts might foster closer ties with Russia and China.

Economic vulnerabilities also pose a significant challenge to the foreign policy of Pakistan in the context of Great Power competition. The dependence of Pakistan on external financial assistance for debt repayment and its chronic balance of payments issues limit its strategic autonomy. Engaging with multiple major powers to secure economic investment and aid is crucial, but it requires careful management to avoid overdependence on any single actor. For instance, while Chinese investments under CPEC are vital, Pakistan must also seek diversified sources of investment and maintain good relations with Western financial institutions to ensure economic stability.

Furthermore, the internal political stability of Pakistan will be a critical factor influencing its foreign policy. Domestic political turbulence, governance issues, and economic instability can undermine the ability of Pakistan to effectively engage in the international arena. Ensuring effective governance and political cohesion is essential for Pakistan to project a reliable and stable

partner image to the world. Internal stability will also be crucial in managing external pressures and navigating the complexities of Great Power competition (Ahmed & Khan, 2023).

5.2. Anti-Americanism

The foreign policy of Pakistan will likely encounter significant challenges due to the pervasive sentiment of anti-Americanism within its society. This sentiment, rooted in historical grievances and contemporary geopolitical dynamics, can complicate the efforts of Pakistan to navigate the intensifying Great Power competition between China, the US, and other global players. Understanding and addressing the implications of anti-Americanism is crucial for Pakistan to effectively manage its foreign policy objectives.

One of the primary challenges posed by anti-Americanism is the potential strain on the diplomatic and economic relations of Pakistan with the US. Despite fluctuating bilateral ties, the US remains an important player in Pakistan's military, economic, and diplomatic spheres. Anti-American sentiment, often fueled by US foreign policies perceived as unfavorable to Muslim countries or Pakistan specifically, can undermine efforts to maintain a cooperative relationship. For instance, the US drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas, which have resulted in civilian casualties, have historically fueled anti-American sentiments and public anger. This public discontent can limit the ability of the Pakistani government to engage with the US openly and constructively, potentially leading to missed opportunities for military cooperation, economic aid, and diplomatic support.

Moreover, anti-Americanism can impact also the internal political landscape of Pakistan, influencing the decision-making process of its leaders. Politicians may exploit anti-American sentiment to garner domestic support, adopting populist rhetoric that criticizes US policies. This

can create a challenging environment for those in the government who seek to maintain pragmatic relations with Washington. For example, national leaders and political parties who capitalize on anti-Americanism for electoral gains may find themselves constrained in their ability to collaborate and negotiate with the US on critical issues, such as trade, counterterrorism, and regional stability. This domestic pressure can hinder the ability of Pakistan to pursue a balanced foreign policy that aligns with its national interests (Ahmed et al., 2024).

Anti-Americanism can drive Pakistan closer to rival powers such as Russia and China. While the strategic partnership of Pakistan with China is already inclusive, fueled by the CPEC, an overt reliance on Beijing at the expense of balanced ties with the US could limit the strategic autonomy of Pakistan. Similarly, deepening ties with Russia, as evidenced by increased energy agreements and military cooperation, could be seen as a counterbalance to US influence. However, overreliance on any single power can lead to dependency, reducing the leverage of Pakistan in international affairs. Furthermore, aligning too closely with Russia or China could exacerbate tensions with the US, leading to potentially reduced aid, economic sanctions, and diplomatic isolation.

Anti-American sentiment can also affect the role of Pakistan in regional security dynamics, particularly in Afghanistan. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 left a power vacuum that has significant implications for regional stability. The bilateral relationship of Pakistan with the Taliban and its efforts to facilitate a stable Afghanistan is critical to its national security. However, perceived alignment with anti-American factions within Afghanistan could complicate relations of Pakistan with the US and its allies. Balancing its strategic interests in Afghanistan while managing anti-American sentiments at home will require inclusive diplomacy to avoid alienating important international partners.

The economic implications of anti-Americanism are also significant. The US has historically been one of the largest trading partners of Pakistan and a major source of foreign aid. Anti-American sentiment can jeopardize this economic relationship, especially if it leads to policy decisions that alienate US investors or result in punitive economic measures. For example, any significant downturn in relations could affect access of Pakistan to US technology, markets, and financial assistance, further exacerbating its economic challenges. Additionally, the US also plays a crucial role in international financial institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank, and strained relations could impact the ability of Pakistan to secure favorable terms for financial assistance (Hussain, 2024).

5.3. Regional Stability

The foreign policy of Pakistan will also face substantial challenges related to regional stability, particularly within the context of intensifying Great Power competition in the post-2022 era. The shifting dynamics between major global players significantly impact the economic and security landscape of South Asia. Navigating these complexities requires a strategic approach that considers economic dependencies, historical tensions, and evolving geopolitical alliances.

One of the foremost challenges will be managing relations with India amidst the backdrop of Great Power competition. The long-standing rivalry between India and Pakistan, particularly over the Kashmir issue, continues to be a flashpoint in South Asia. Moreover, the Indo-US strategic partnership, aimed at counterbalancing the influence of China, has seen a significant deepening in economic and defense ties. This could embolden India to adopt a more assertive stance towards Pakistan, potentially escalating military tensions. For instance, incidents like the Pulwama attack in 2019 and the subsequent Balakot airstrikes highlight how quickly the situation can deteriorate.

Pakistan will need to balance its diplomatic initiatives with a deterrence posture to prevent conflicts from spiraling out of control.

Additionally, the evolving situation in Afghanistan presents a significant challenge for Pakistan's regional stability. The Taliban's return to power in 2021 and balancing its relations with the Taliban regime while addressing international concerns about terrorism and human rights will require inclusive diplomacy. For example, Pakistan's support for the Taliban could strain its relations with Western countries, potentially leading to economic and diplomatic repercussions. Ensuring that Afghanistan does not become a base for anti-Pakistan terrorist activities while maintaining positive ties with global powers is a subtle balancing act.

Moreover, Iran-Pakistan is another factor that influences regional stability. The geopolitical rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and by extension, strained relations of Iran with the US, impact the foreign policy of Pakistan. Pakistan shares a long border with Iran and has security and economic interests in maintaining stable relations. However, aligning too closely with either side in the Saudi-Iran rivalry could create diplomatic friction. For instance, the participation of Pakistan in the Saudi-led Islamic Military Alliance raised concerns in Iran about potential anti-Iranian sentiments. Navigating these complex dynamics requires Pakistan to adopt a balanced approach, promoting regional cooperation while safeguarding its national interests (Kiran, 2024).

The growing influence of militant groups and non-state actors in the region further complicates the quest of Pakistan for regional stability. Groups like ISIS-K in Afghanistan and various separatist movements within Pakistan pose significant security threats. Addressing these challenges requires inclusive counterterrorism measures and international cooperation. However, aligning counterterrorism efforts with regional and global powers can be politically sensitive. For example, cooperating with the US on counterterrorism could provoke domestic backlash due to

anti-American sentiments, while failing to effectively address terrorism could strain relations with neighboring countries.

5.4. Terrorism and Extremism

In the post-2022 era, the foreign policy of Pakistan will be significantly challenged by the issues of extremism and terrorism, which have long been sources of instability and international concern. As Great Power competition intensifies, the dynamics of extremism and terrorism in the region could become even more complex, affecting the economic, diplomatic, and security landscape of Pakistan. Addressing these challenges of extremism and terrorism requires a multifaceted approach that balances internal security needs with external diplomatic engagements.

A major challenge for Pakistan will be the resurgence of terrorist groups such as the TTP and the presence of ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K) in neighboring Afghanistan. The withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan and the subsequent Taliban takeover have created a power vacuum that various extremist groups may exploit. The TTP, which has historical ties to the Afghan Taliban, poses a direct threat to the internal security of Pakistan. Increased terrorist activities, such as the frequent attacks on military and civilian targets in Pakistan, necessitate inclusive counterterrorism efforts. However, engaging with the Taliban regime in Afghanistan to curb these groups without antagonizing the international community, especially the US, presents a significant diplomatic challenge (Bibi et al., 2024).

Moreover, the efforts of Pakistan to combat terrorism are closely scrutinized by global powers, particularly the US. The counterterrorism policies of Washington often demand do-more from Pakistan, including intelligence sharing and military operations against terrorist sanctuaries. However, such cooperation can provoke anti-American sentiment and domestic backlash,

complicating the internal politics of Pakistan. For instance, US drone strikes in the tribal areas of Pakistan, while targeting high-value terrorist operatives, have also resulted in civilian casualties, fueling anti-Americanism and undermining the Pakistani government's credibility. Balancing these dynamics is crucial for maintaining both internal stability and positive relations with the US.

In the broader context of Great Power competition, Pakistan's counterterrorism policies will also intersect with its strategic relationships with Russia and China. Both countries have their concerns about extremism and terrorism, particularly in their respective regions. China is wary of Islamist extremism in its Xinjiang province, and any perceived link between militants in Pakistan and Xinjiang separatists could strain Sino-Pakistani relations. Similarly, Russia is concerned about the spread of extremism from Afghanistan to Central Asia. Pakistan must navigate these concerns carefully, ensuring that its counterterrorism efforts are aligned with the interests of these major powers while also safeguarding its own security.

The economic implications of extremism and terrorism are another significant challenge. Persistent terrorist threats can deter foreign investment and tourism, hampering the economic growth of Pakistan. For instance, incidents such as the attack on the Pearl Continental Hotel in Gwadar in 2019, claimed by the BLA, highlight the risks to CPEC projects and other investments. Ensuring the security of such projects is essential for Pakistan's economic stability. This requires not only effective counterterrorism measures but also sustained diplomatic efforts to reassure international investors and partners about the safety and stability of their investments in Pakistan.

Furthermore, the engagement of Pakistan with international financial institutions, such as the IMF and the FATF, is influenced by its counterterrorism and anti-money laundering measures. The placement of Pakistan on the FATF grey list due to deficiencies in its measures to combat terrorist financing and money laundering has had significant economic repercussions. Addressing

FATF concerns in the future is critical for Pakistan to avoid economic sanctions and ensure continued access to international financial markets. This involves enhancing law enforcement capabilities, strengthening financial regulations, and demonstrating political will to combat financial crimes associated with terrorism.

Regionally, Pakistan's counterterrorism policies must also address the complex dynamics with its neighbors, particularly Afghanistan and India. India frequently accuses Pakistan of harboring and supporting militant groups that target Indian interests, a claim that Pakistan denies. These accusations, especially in the context of attacks like the Pulwama incident in 2019, hinder diplomatic relations and exacerbate bilateral tensions. Engaging in constructive dialogue with India to address mutual security concerns, while managing domestic and international perceptions, is a delicate balance that Pakistan must achieve.

Additionally, managing the ideological battle against extremism is a critical aspect of the foreign policy challenge of Pakistan. Extremist ideologies often find fertile ground in regions plagued by illiteracy, poverty, and political instability. The efforts of Pakistan to counter radicalization through economic development, education reforms, and inclusive governance are essential components of its broader strategy. Collaborating with international partners on initiatives aimed at countering extremist narratives and promoting socio-economic development can help Pakistan address the root causes of terrorism (Imran et al., 2024).

5.5. Economic Challenges

The foreign policy of Pakistan will confront significant economic challenges amidst the intensifying Great Power competition in the post-2022 era. Navigating these complexities will be crucial for advancing development goals and maintaining the stability of the country. The

strategic maneuvers of major global players directly impact the economic landscape of Pakistan, requiring an inclusive and proactive foreign policy approach.

One of the primary economic challenges for Pakistan will be managing its relationship with China, particularly concerning the CPEC. CPEC is a cornerstone of the economic strategy of Pakistan, promising significant energy projects, infrastructure development, and job creation. However, heavy reliance on Chinese investment also raises concerns about economic sovereignty and debt sustainability. As of 2022, the debt of Pakistan to China was substantial, contributing to its overall debt burden. Balancing the benefits of Chinese investment with the need to avoid a debt trap will require strategic economic planning and renegotiation of terms where necessary to ensure that projects remain mutually beneficial without compromising the long-term economic stability of Pakistan.

In parallel, maintaining a balanced relationship with the US amidst its strategic competition with China presents another economic challenge. Historically, the US has been a major source of military assistance, economic aid, and trade opportunities for Pakistan. However, the US's pivot to India as a strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific region has somewhat sidelined Pakistan. To mitigate this, Pakistan must actively seek to diversify its economic partnerships and not rely excessively on any single country. This includes enhancing trade relations with the European Union, exploring new markets in Africa and Latin America, and strengthening economic ties with regional neighbors. Diversification will help Pakistan reduce economic vulnerabilities associated with over-reliance on a few major powers.

The engagement of Pakistan with international financial institutions like the IMF and the FATF will also shape its economic policy. Ongoing compliance with FATF regulations to combat money laundering and terrorist financing is crucial for Pakistan to improve its financial reputation

and attract foreign investment. Similarly, the conditions imposed by the IMF for financial assistance often necessitate stringent economic reforms, which can be politically challenging but essential for long-term economic health. Effective engagement with these institutions requires diplomatic finesse to negotiate terms that support economic stability without imposing undue hardship on the population.

The economic impacts of regional instability, particularly in Afghanistan, pose another significant challenge. The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan has created a precarious situation for regional trade and economic cooperation. Pakistan has a vested interest in a stable Afghanistan to facilitate trade routes and reduce security threats along its western border. However, achieving this requires diplomatic efforts to engage with both the Taliban regime and the international community to foster stability and economic development in Afghanistan. Ensuring that Afghanistan does not become a hub for extremism and terrorism that could spill over into Pakistan is critical for regional economic stability (Bhowmick, 2024).

Energy security remains a pressing economic issue for Pakistan. The country faces chronic energy shortages that hamper industrial growth and economic development. Addressing this requires diversification of energy sources, including investments in renewable energy, and securing stable energy imports from neighboring countries. For instance, the proposed Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project could significantly alleviate energy shortages, but it faces geopolitical challenges, particularly due to US sanctions on Iran. Navigating these geopolitical constraints while pursuing energy security will be a delicate balance for Pakistan's foreign policy.

Moreover, climate change poses long-term economic challenges for Pakistan. The country is highly vulnerable to climate-related disasters such as floods, droughts, and extreme weather events, which can devastate agriculture, displace populations, and strain economic resources.

Engaging in international climate agreements and securing climate financing is crucial for Pakistan to build resilience against climate impacts. Effective foreign policy must prioritize collaboration with international partners to access green technology and funding for sustainable development projects.

Trade relations also present both opportunities and challenges for Pakistan. Expanding exports is essential for economic growth, but this requires addressing structural issues within the domestic economy, improving product quality, and meeting international standards. Bilateral and multilateral trade agreements can open new markets for Pakistani goods, but these must be negotiated in ways that protect local industries while promoting competitiveness. For example, enhancing trade with Central Asian countries through regional connectivity initiatives could provide new economic opportunities, but this requires stability and cooperation in a region often marked by political complexities.

Lastly, addressing socio-economic inequalities within Pakistan is crucial for long-term stability and economic growth. Economic policies that promote inclusive growth, reduce poverty, and create employment opportunities are essential. This involves not only domestic reforms but also leveraging international partnerships for development aid, technical assistance, and investment in human capital. Ensuring that economic benefits are distributed equitably across all regions and communities can mitigate social unrest and contribute to a more stable and prosperous society (Kozul-Wright, 2024).

5.6. Water Security

In the post-2022 era, water security is poised to become one of Pakistan's most pressing foreign policy challenges, particularly within the context of intensifying Great Power

competition. As climate change accelerates, population growth surges, and regional rivalries deepen, Pakistan's ability to ensure adequate water resources for its population and economy will be critical. Navigating this complex issue requires astute diplomacy, regional cooperation, and proactive engagement with global powers and institutions.

The Indus River Basin, which Pakistan shares with India, Afghanistan, and China, is the primary source of water for Pakistan's agricultural, industrial, and domestic needs. The Indus Waters Treaty (IWT) of 1960, brokered by the World Bank, has been the cornerstone of water-sharing arrangements between India and Pakistan. However, increasing water scarcity and changing climatic patterns are straining this agreement. India's construction of dams and hydroelectric projects on rivers that flow into Pakistan has sparked concerns about potential water shortages downstream. For instance, India's Kishanganga and Ratle hydroelectric projects have been contentious, with Pakistan arguing that they violate the IWT by reducing water flow into its territory. Addressing these disputes through diplomatic channels and international arbitration will be crucial to prevent water conflicts from exacerbating regional tensions.

Pakistan's engagement with Afghanistan is another critical aspect of its water security strategy. The Kabul River, which flows from Afghanistan into Pakistan, is vital for the water supply in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province. However, there is no formal water-sharing agreement between the two countries, leading to potential conflicts over water usage. Afghanistan's plans to build dams on the Kabul River could significantly impact water availability in Pakistan. Diplomatic efforts to negotiate a bilateral water-sharing treaty with Afghanistan, possibly with the involvement of international mediators, will be essential to ensure equitable and sustainable water management.

The role of China in regional water dynamics cannot be overlooked. China controls the headwaters of several major rivers in South and Central Asia, including the Indus. As China's geopolitical influence grows, its water policies and infrastructure projects, such as dam construction on the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra (which feeds into the Indus), could have downstream impacts on Pakistan. Strengthening strategic ties with China, while advocating for cooperative water management frameworks, will be important for Pakistan to safeguard its water interests. Leveraging China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to develop joint water management and conservation projects could also be beneficial.

Internally, Pakistan faces significant challenges in water management and distribution. Inefficient irrigation practices, over-extraction of groundwater, and inadequate infrastructure contribute to water wastage and scarcity. Addressing these issues requires substantial investment in water conservation technologies, modern irrigation methods, and infrastructure development. Engaging with international partners to secure funding and technical assistance for such initiatives is crucial. For example, collaboration with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank on water management projects can help Pakistan enhance its water use efficiency and ensure sustainable water supply for agriculture and other sectors (Mirza & Mahmood, 2023).

Climate change exacerbates the water security challenge by altering precipitation patterns, increasing the frequency of extreme weather events, and accelerating glacier melt in the Himalayas, which feed the Indus River system. These changes pose risks of both floods and droughts, impacting water availability and agricultural productivity. Engaging in international climate forums and agreements to secure climate adaptation funding and technology transfer is essential for Pakistan. Building resilient water infrastructure, such as dams and reservoirs, and

implementing comprehensive climate adaptation strategies will help mitigate the impacts of climate change on water resources.

Water security also intersects with Pakistan's broader economic and social stability. Agriculture, which accounts for a significant portion of Pakistan's GDP and employs a large part of the population, is heavily dependent on reliable water supply. Water scarcity can lead to reduced agricultural output, threatening food security and livelihoods. This, in turn, can drive social unrest and migration, further straining the country's resources. Ensuring water security is thus integral to Pakistan's economic stability and social cohesion. Promoting integrated water resources management and adopting policies that balance water use between agricultural, industrial, and domestic sectors will be critical.

Moreover, water security has significant implications for Pakistan's health and environmental policies. Access to clean and safe drinking water is a fundamental human right, and ensuring this is vital for public health. Contaminated water sources contribute to a range of health issues, including waterborne diseases, which disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. Strengthening water quality monitoring systems and investing in water treatment infrastructure are necessary steps to address these public health challenges. Additionally, protecting and restoring natural ecosystems that support water resources, such as wetlands and forests, can enhance water quality and availability (Khan & Raza, 2023).

5.7. Climate Change

In the post-2022 era, climate change presents a formidable challenge to Pakistan's foreign policy, deeply intertwined with Great Power competition and regional dynamics. The impacts of climate change—rising temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, and increased

frequency of extreme weather events threaten Pakistan's economic stability, food security, and public health. Navigating these challenges will require strategic engagement with global powers, regional cooperation, and robust climate adaptation and mitigation policies.

One of the foremost foreign policy challenges will be addressing the transboundary impacts of climate change, particularly concerning water resources. The Indus River, vital for Pakistan's agriculture and drinking water, is highly sensitive to climate-induced changes. Glacial melt in the Himalayas, which feeds the Indus River system, is accelerating due to rising temperatures. This not only threatens long-term water availability but also increases the risk of catastrophic floods. Effective management of transboundary water resources with India, under the Indus Waters Treaty, will become increasingly critical. Diplomatic efforts to ensure compliance with the treaty and to negotiate supplementary agreements on climate resilience and water management will be essential to avert water conflicts and ensure sustainable resource use (Khan et al., 2023).

Pakistan must also navigate its relationship with China concerning environmental and climate issues. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), of which the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a flagship project, brings significant infrastructure and economic benefits but also environmental concerns. Many CPEC projects, such as coal-fired power plants, pose risks of increased greenhouse gas emissions and local environmental degradation. Balancing economic development with environmental sustainability will require Pakistan to engage China in adopting greener technologies and ensuring environmental safeguards in CPEC projects. Collaboration on renewable energy projects and climate adaptation initiatives within the BRI framework could help mitigate adverse environmental impacts while promoting sustainable development.

Engaging with global climate governance institutions will be a crucial aspect of Pakistan's foreign policy. As a developing country highly vulnerable to climate change, Pakistan needs to

advocate for greater financial and technical support from developed nations. Participation in international climate negotiations, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conferences, is vital for securing climate finance and technology transfer. For example, Pakistan's active involvement in the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and other multilateral climate finance mechanisms can help mobilize resources for climate adaptation and mitigation projects. Effective diplomacy in these forums will be necessary to highlight Pakistan's needs and secure commitments from the international community.

Climate-induced migration and its geopolitical implications also pose a significant challenge. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and degradation of arable land due to climate change can lead to large-scale displacement of populations within and across borders. This could exacerbate existing socio-economic tensions and strain resources in receiving areas. For instance, the coastal areas of Sindh and Baluchistan are highly vulnerable to sea-level rise and cyclones, potentially displacing millions of people. Developing comprehensive climate migration policies and engaging in regional cooperation frameworks to manage cross-border migration will be critical to maintaining social stability and security.

Food security, closely linked to climate change, is another area where foreign policy must be proactive. Pakistan's agriculture sector, which employs a significant portion of the population, is heavily dependent on predictable weather patterns and water availability. Climate change-induced shifts in these patterns threaten agricultural productivity and food supply. Engaging with international agricultural research organizations and participating in global initiatives for climate-resilient agriculture can help Pakistan adopt best practices and technologies to enhance food security. Bilateral and multilateral cooperation on agricultural innovation and food security programs will be essential to address these challenges.

Additionally, Pakistan's energy policy must align with global climate goals while ensuring energy security and economic growth. The transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources is imperative for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and mitigating climate change impacts. However, this transition poses economic and technical challenges. Engaging with global powers and international organizations to secure investments in renewable energy infrastructure, such as solar, wind, and hydroelectric power, is crucial. For example, partnering with countries leading in renewable energy technology, like Germany and Denmark, can help Pakistan develop a sustainable energy sector. Negotiating favorable terms for technology transfer and financial support in international climate agreements will be key to facilitating this transition.

Finally, Pakistan must address the broader geopolitical implications of climate change. Climate-induced resource scarcity, such as water and food shortages, can exacerbate regional tensions and conflicts. Engaging in regional cooperation mechanisms, such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), to address shared climate challenges can promote peace and stability. Collaborative efforts on disaster risk reduction, early warning systems, and climate resilience can enhance regional security and foster trust among neighboring countries (Fida et al., 2023).

5.8. Human Rights and Diplomatic Pressure

In the post-2022 era, climate change presents a formidable challenge to Pakistan's foreign policy, deeply intertwined with Great Power competition and regional dynamics. The impacts of climate change—rising temperatures, altered precipitation patterns, and increased frequency of extreme weather events threaten Pakistan's economic stability, food security, and public health. Navigating these challenges will require strategic engagement with global powers, regional cooperation, and robust climate adaptation and mitigation policies.

One of the foremost foreign policy challenges will be addressing the transboundary impacts of climate change, particularly concerning water resources. The Indus River, vital for Pakistan's agriculture and drinking water, is highly sensitive to climate-induced changes. Glacial melt in the Himalayas, which feeds the Indus River system, is accelerating due to rising temperatures. This not only threatens long-term water availability but also increases the risk of catastrophic floods. Effective management of transboundary water resources with India, under the Indus Waters Treaty, will become increasingly critical. Diplomatic efforts to ensure compliance with the treaty and to negotiate supplementary agreements on climate resilience and water management will be essential to avert water conflicts and ensure sustainable resource use.

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example, Pakistan's active involvement in the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and other multilateral climate finance mechanisms can help mobilize resources for climate adaptation and mitigation projects. Effective diplomacy in these forums will be necessary to highlight Pakistan's needs and secure commitments from the international community (Kanwal et al., 2023).

Climate-induced migration and its geopolitical implications also pose a significant challenge. Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and degradation of arable land due to climate change can lead to large-scale displacement of populations within and across borders. This could exacerbate existing socio-economic tensions and strain resources in receiving areas. For instance, the coastal areas of Sindh and Balochistan are highly vulnerable to sea-level rise and cyclones, potentially displacing millions of people. Developing comprehensive climate migration policies and engaging in regional cooperation frameworks to manage cross-border migration will be critical to maintaining social stability and security.

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5.9. Technology and Cyber Security

Pakistan faces significant foreign policy challenges in the realm of technology and cybersecurity. The increasing importance of digital infrastructure and cyber capabilities in global power dynamics necessitates a robust response from Pakistan to safeguard its national interests, maintain regional stability, and participate effectively in the global economy. Addressing these challenges involves enhancing cybersecurity measures, managing technological dependencies, and navigating the geopolitical implications of technological advancements.

A primary challenge for Pakistan is the enhancement of its cybersecurity infrastructure. As cyber threats become more sophisticated and prevalent, Pakistan must develop robust

cybersecurity measures to protect its critical infrastructure, including financial systems, energy grids, and communication networks. The country has faced several high-profile cyberattacks in recent years, highlighting vulnerabilities that could be exploited by state and non-state actors. For instance, in 2020, Pakistan's banking sector experienced a major cyber breach that compromised the data of thousands of customers. Strengthening cybersecurity defenses, implementing comprehensive cybersecurity policies, and fostering international cooperation are crucial steps to mitigate such risks.

The geopolitical implications of technological dependencies also present a significant challenge. Pakistan's reliance on foreign technology, particularly from China and the United States, creates vulnerabilities and dependencies that can be strategically leveraged by these powers. For example, Pakistan's close technological cooperation with China, especially in telecommunications through Huawei, has raised concerns about potential espionage and cyber security risks. Simultaneously, Western countries may exert pressure on Pakistan to limit its technological ties with China, further complicating its foreign policy landscape. Navigating these dependencies requires a strategic approach to diversify technological partnerships and invest in indigenous technological development (Khan et al., 2023).

Emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, and 5G networks are reshaping global power structures and creating new arenas for competition. Pakistan must ensure that it is not left behind in this technological race. Investing in research and development (R&D) in these cutting-edge fields is essential for maintaining technological sovereignty and competitive advantage. However, limited financial resources and a nascent technological base pose significant hurdles. Pakistan needs to foster collaborations with

technologically advanced countries, attract foreign investment in technology sectors, and develop a skilled workforce to leverage these emerging technologies.

Another critical aspect of the technology and cyber security challenge is the regulation and control of cyberspace. The global debate over internet governance, data privacy, and digital sovereignty impacts Pakistan's ability to formulate effective cyber policies. As countries like the United States, China, and the European Union push for different models of internet governance, Pakistan must navigate these competing frameworks to protect its digital sovereignty while ensuring that it remains integrated into the global digital economy. Formulating clear and balanced cyber policies that align with international norms and standards while safeguarding national interests is crucial.

The role of cyber diplomacy is becoming increasingly important in addressing these challenges. Engaging in cyber diplomacy involves participating in international forums, negotiating cyber norms, and collaborating on cybersecurity initiatives. Pakistan must actively engage with multilateral organizations such as the United Nations and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) to shape global cyber norms and build alliances that enhance its cyber capabilities. Building strong cyber alliances can help Pakistan gain access to best practices, technical assistance, and capacity-building programs, thereby strengthening its cyber resilience.

Furthermore, addressing the digital divide within the country is essential for ensuring comprehensive cyber security and technological advancement. Significant disparities in digital access and literacy exist between urban and rural areas, and among different socio-economic groups in Pakistan. Bridging this digital divide requires targeted policies and investments to expand internet access, improve digital literacy, and promote inclusive technological growth. A

digitally inclusive society is better equipped to contribute to national cyber security efforts and leverage technological advancements for economic development (Warraich et al., 2023).

MAJOR FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The following section provides major findings, offers recommendations and concludes this research work:

Major Findings

In light of the above-stated characterization and conclusion, the key findings of this research work are the following:

1. The geographical location of Pakistan at the crossroads of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East made it a crucial player in regional and global geopolitics. Hence, the strategic significance and geopolitical relevance played a pivotal role in shaping its foreign policy amid Great Power competition.
2. Both the US and Pakistan shared an interest in countering regional militancy and terrorism, suspicions, and blame persisted due to past disagreements and divergent objectives, which subsequently led to limited trust and occasional tensions in their counterterrorism partnership.
3. Pakistan's facilitation of the Afghan peace process required walking a tightrope between maintaining regional stability and its influence over certain Afghan factions, amidst incessant evolving Taliban dynamics and changing the US policies in the region.
4. The several promises of CPEC including economic growth and infrastructure development were coupled with numerous concerns about overreliance on China. Pakistan sought to address the concern of overreliance on China by exploring the diversification of its economic sectors and partnerships.

5. As Pakistan deepened its bilateral economic ties with China under the CPEC project, Islamabad also needed to manage its long-standing bilateral relationship with the US, addressing potential concerns from each side and striking a balance between its obligations to both partners.
6. While Chinese investment through CPEC held massive potential, concerns about the equitable distribution of benefits and debt sustainability arose. Subsequently, Pakistan explored renewable energy initiatives, worked to negotiate favorable terms for economic and trade agreements, and aimed to promote local participation in CPEC-related initiatives.
7. To mitigate the environmental and social impacts and address public sentiments, Pakistan emphasized local participation, transparency, and environmental safeguards.
8. From 2013 to 2022, Pakistan navigated its bilateral relationship with India, addressed sectarian complexities and cross-border terrorism between Iran and Saudi Arabia, and sought to manage its diverse regional partnerships by promoting stability in the region.
9. Pakistan coordinated its position with Russia and China in several multilateral forums which required strategic diplomacy from Islamabad to align shared interests while also considering the sensitivities and divergent priorities of other global players.
10. The nuclear program of Pakistan brought both security challenges and assurances. Pakistan engaged in discussions with the international community about non-proliferation obligations and concerns while pledging its commitment to maintain a responsible nuclear posture.

11. Balancing the attraction of foreign direct investment, particularly from China, with maintaining strategic autonomy and sovereign decision-making capacity was critical for the long-term interests of Pakistan.
12. The challenges related to democratic values and human rights concerns required Pakistan's effort to balance domestic considerations with maintaining its global reputation.
13. The evolving and growing Indo-US strategic partnership prompted Pakistan to assess potential security implications, necessitated measures to promote regional stability and safeguard its national interests.
14. Balancing its engagement with Moscow alongside ties with other global powers such as Washington and Beijing required Islamabad to carefully navigate evolving geopolitical dynamics and historical challenges.
15. Fostering bilateral economic relationships with countries like Russia and China while navigating the complex dynamics of the region demanded strategic communication and diplomatic finesse.

Recommendations

This study has addressed the research questions and objectives and covered all factors on the proposed topic. In light of the conclusion and analysis, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Pakistan should have proactively addressed the US concerns about its commitment to countering militancy and regional terrorism, taking concrete steps to eradicate sanctuaries and hideouts of all forms of terrorists on its border.

2. Pakistan could have engaged more constructively with all the stakeholders in Afghanistan, to ensure an inclusive and stable political settlement, reducing the international community's suspicions about its intentions.
3. Pakistan could have consulted local communities and enhanced transparency and accountability to address concerns about the CPEC project, ensuring sustainable development and broader public acceptance.
4. To avoid excessive reliance on China, Pakistan should have actively introduced and pursued economic diversification by fostering partnerships with a range of countries to create a more balanced economic portfolio.
5. Pakistan should have balanced its bilateral relations with the US and China more effectively, maintaining close ties with both countries without allowing either relationship to overshadow the other.
6. Pakistan should have thoroughly assessed the repayment schedules and loan terms of the CPEC project to ensure economic viability and prevent future debt-related challenges
7. Pakistan should have addressed human rights concerns in Baluchistan more actively by strengthening democratic culture and institutions, working on clear communication and domestic reforms to improve its global image and avoid international criticism.
8. Pakistan could have communicated and addressed its nuclear policy to allay concerns about proliferation, emphasizing its commitment to international initiatives as responsible nuclear stewardship.
9. Pakistan should have worked more effectively to avoid zero-sum competition between Iran and Saudi Arabia, avoiding being drawn into their regional rivalry by mitigating sectarian tensions.

10. To reduce trade and economic vulnerabilities, Pakistan should have actively pursued initiatives related to trade diversification by expanding bilateral relationships with other regional and global potential partners beyond China.
11. Pakistan could have more effectively coordinated its positions with Russia and China in multilateral forums, including the SCO and the UN, to present a unified stance on global issues and conflicts while respecting their distinct interests.
12. Pakistan should have taken a more dynamic and proactive role demonstrating its commitment to regional stability, mediating regional conflicts, and solidifying its role as a responsible actor.

Hence, by implementing these suggestions, Pakistan could have enhanced its strategic position, navigated the complexities of its foreign policy more adeptly, and ensured sustainable development amid Great Power competition.

Conclusion

The foreign policy of Pakistan from 2013 to 2022 was significantly shaped by the dynamics of Great Power competition, particularly between the United States, China, and Russia. This decade has seen Pakistan navigating a complex geopolitical landscape, marked by economic dependencies, shifting alliances, and strategic recalibrations. The challenges to the foreign policy of Pakistan during this period can be understood through several key dimensions: strategic, economic, security, and diplomatic.

Strategically, the foreign policy of Pakistan was influenced by its longstanding alliance with the US, which experienced fluctuations due to diverging interests, particularly regarding counterterrorism and Afghanistan. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 and the

subsequent rise of the Taliban posed immediate security concerns for Pakistan, impacting its refugee management and border security. Despite these challenges, Pakistan sought to maintain a cooperative relationship with the US, emphasizing the importance of military assistance and economic aid. However, the increasing strategic partnership between the US and India, particularly through initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Strategy and the Quad, posed a significant challenge to Pakistan. This alignment not only heightened security concerns but also necessitated a recalibration of the strategic priorities of Pakistan.

Concurrently, Pakistan's relationship with China deepened, marked by the CPEC, a flagship project of China's BRI. CPEC has been pivotal in transforming the infrastructure and energy sectors of Pakistan, promising long-term economic benefits. However, it also posed challenges, including concerns over sovereignty, debt sustainability, and the potential environmental impact of large-scale projects. Additionally, the growing strategic convergence between Pakistan and China had led to increased US scrutiny and pressure, further complicating the diplomatic maneuvering of Islamabad. The evolving Sino-Indian rivalry also placed Pakistan in a subtle position, requiring careful balancing to avoid becoming entangled in broader regional conflicts.

Economically, Pakistan's foreign policy was heavily influenced by its need for financial stability and development assistance. The reliance on international financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, coupled with bilateral assistance from countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia, highlighted the economic vulnerabilities Pakistan faced. The economic challenges were further exacerbated by domestic issues, including fiscal deficits, inflation, and a burgeoning debt crisis. These economic dependencies often translated into limited foreign policy autonomy, constraining the ability of Pakistan to pursue an independent and proactive foreign policy agenda.

The pursuit of self-reliance and economic diversification remained an important yet elusive goal for Pakistan throughout this period.

In the realm of security, the foreign policy of Pakistan was heavily influenced by the evolving regional security dynamics. The persistent threat of cross-border militancy, terrorism, and internal security challenges necessitated a focus on maintaining stability and counterterrorism cooperation. The participation of Pakistan in the US-led War on Terror and its subsequent counterterrorism operations were significant in this regard. However, these efforts also led to domestic backlash and strained relations with neighboring India and Afghanistan. The rise of hybrid warfare and non-traditional security threats, including information warfare and cyber threats, further complicated the security calculus of Pakistan. Ensuring regional stability while managing complex security threats remained a cornerstone of the foreign policy strategy of Pakistan.

Diplomatically, the foreign policy of Pakistan faced challenges in balancing its relationships with major powers while safeguarding its national interests. China's rise as a global power, the growing US-India strategic partnership, and Russia's resurgence required Pakistan to adopt an inclusive and multi-faceted diplomatic approach. Engaging in multilateral forums, fostering regional cooperation through platforms like the SAARC and the SCO, and maintaining a proactive diplomatic presence were important elements of Pakistan's foreign policy. Additionally, Pakistan sought to leverage its geostrategic location to position itself as a regional connector, advocating for peace and stability in South Asia and beyond. However, diplomatic isolation, particularly regarding its stance on Kashmir and relations with India, remained a persistent challenge.

The historical overview of the foreign policy of Pakistan from 2013 to 2022 revealed a trajectory marked by efforts to adapt to changing regional and global dynamics. The challenges posed by Great Power competition necessitated strategic recalibrations and a pragmatic approach to diplomacy. The responses of Pakistan to these challenges were shaped by a combination of economic dependencies, strategic partnerships, diplomatic engagements, and security imperatives. The relationship between these factors highlighted the complexity of the foreign policy landscape of Pakistan and the need for an adaptive and balanced approach.

Moving forward, the foreign policy of Pakistan will continue to face challenges amidst Great Power competition. The rise of multi-polarity, characterized by the increasing influence of Russia and China, will require Pakistan to navigate a competitive and more complex international environment. Diversifying economic relations, strengthening strategic partnerships, and enhancing regional cooperation will be essential for Pakistan to safeguard its national interests. Additionally, addressing domestic security and economic challenges will be crucial in ensuring a resilient and stable foreign policy.

The prospects for the foreign policy of Pakistan will also depend on its ability to leverage its geostrategic location and foster regional stability. The evolving Sino-Indian rivalry, the ongoing developments in Afghanistan, and the broader geopolitical shifts in the Indo-Pacific region will have significant implications for Pakistan. Constructive engagement, proactive diplomacy, and major powers a focus on regional integration will be important to navigating these challenges. Furthermore, promoting economic reforms, enhancing domestic governance, and investing in human development will be critical in building a sustainable and resilient foreign policy framework.

In a nutshell, the period from 2013 to 2022 was a transformative and challenging decade for the foreign policy of Pakistan. The dynamics of Great Power competition, coupled with economic dependencies and regional security complexities, shaped the foreign policy trajectory of Pakistan. Navigating these challenges required diplomatic agility, strategic pragmatism, and a focus on safeguarding national interests. As Pakistan moves forward, the lessons learned from this period will be instrumental in shaping its future foreign policy direction. The evolving regional and global landscape will continue to present both opportunities and challenges for Pakistan, necessitating an adaptive and balanced approach to foreign policy. By leveraging its strategic location, fostering regional cooperation, and enhancing domestic resilience, Pakistan can navigate the complexities of Great Power competition and pursue a sustainable and proactive foreign policy agenda in the future.

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