

**GEO-STRATEGIC FACTORS IN PAKISTAN AND INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE
US: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS (2018-2023)**



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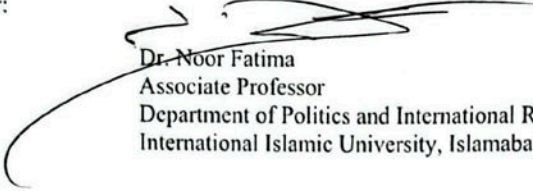
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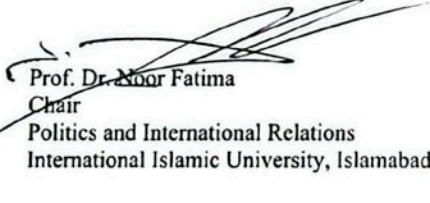

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|----------|--|
| ABD | Asian Development Bank |
| ACSA | Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement |
| APAPPS | Afghanistan and Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity |
| APAPPS | Afghanistan and Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity |
| AQ | Al-Qaeda |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| ASEM | Asia Europe Meeting |
| AUKUS | Australia United Kingdom United States Security Pact |
| AUSINDEX | Australia India Naval Exercise |
| BECA | Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement |
| BIMSTEC | Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation |
| BRICS | Brazil Russia India China South Africa |
| CAATSA | Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act |
| CARs | Central Asian Republics |
| CENTO | Central Treaty Organization |
| CEPA | Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement |
| CFR | Council on Foreign Relations |
| COMCASA | Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement |
| CPEC | China Pakistan Economic Corridor |
| CRPF | Central Reserve Police Force |
| CSF | Coalition Support Funds |
| CSP | Comprehensive Strategic Partnership |
| CTJWG | Counter Terrorism Joint Working Group |
| CT-TTX | Counter Terrorism Tabletop Exercise |
| DTTI | Defense Technology and Trade Initiative |
| EAEU | Eurasian Economic Union |
| EAEU | Eurasian Economic Union |
| ECTA | Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement |
| EU | European Union |
| FATA | Federally Administered Tribal Areas |
| FBI | Federal Bureau of Investigation |
| FBR | Federal Board of Revenue |
| FDI | Foreign Direct Investment |

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| FIA | Federal Investigation Agency |
| FTM | Flight Test Mission |
| FTO | Foreign Terrorist Organization |
| GCC | Gulf Cooperation Council |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GEOINT | Geospatial Intelligence |
| GEP | Generalized Export Preference |
| GREF | General Reserve Engineer Force |
| GSMOIA | General Security of Military Information Agreement |
| HM | HizbulMujahideen |
| HSPD-6 | Homeland Security Presidential Directive 6 |
| HuAHarkat-ul-Ansar | |
| IAEA | International Atomic Energy Agency |
| IBD | Islamic Development Bank |
| iCET | Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies |
| ICJ | International Court of Justice |
| IIOK | Indian Illegally Occupied Kashmir |
| IMEC | India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| INDAU ECTA | India Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement |
| INSTC | International North-South Transport Corridor |
| IORA | Indian Ocean Rim Association |
| IR | International Relations |
| IRSO | Indian Remote Sensing Organization |
| ISIS | Islamic State of Iraq and Syria |
| ISRO | Indian Space Research Organization |
| IT | Information Technology |
| JCPOA | Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action |
| JeMJaish-e-Mohammad | |
| JWG | Joint Working Group |
| JWGs | Joint Working Groups |
| LAC | Line of Actual Control |
| LeJ | Lashkar-e-Jhangvi |
| LEMA | Law Enforcement Mutual Agreement |

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| LEMOA | Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement |
| LeT | Lashkar-e-Taiba |
| LNG | Liquefied Natural Gas |
| MAC | Multi-Agency Centre |
| MENA | Middle East and North Africa |
| MLSA | Mutual Logistic Support Agreement |
| MTCR | Missile Technology Control Regime |
| NASA | National Aeronautics and Space Administration |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NISAR | NASA ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar |
| NPT | Non-Proliferation Treaty |
| NSG | Nuclear Suppliers Group |
| PIPS | Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies |
| PPE | Personal Protective Equipment |
| QTTA | Quadrilateral Traffic in Transit Agreement |
| QUAD | Quadrilateral Security Dialogue |
| RCD | Regional Cooperation for Development |
| RCEP | Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership |
| RCEP | Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership |
| SAARC | South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation |
| SAFTA | South Asian Free Trade Area |

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| SCEP | Strategic Clean Energy Partnership |
| SCO | Shanghai Cooperation Organization |
| SEATO | Southeast Asia Treaty Organization |
| SEZs | Special Economic Zones |
| SIFC | Special Investment Facilitation Council |
| SIPRI | Stockholm International Peace Research Institute |
| STA-1 | Strategic Trade Authorization Tier 1 |
| TAPI | Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India Pipeline |
| TRIPS | Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights |
| TSC | Terrorist Screening Centre |
| TTP | Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan |
| TTP | Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan |
| UAE | United Arab Emirates |
| UNSC | United Nations Security Council |
| US | United States |
| USD | United States Dollar |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| WFP | World Food Programme |
| WTO | World Trade Organization |

ABSTRACT

Foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US from 2018 to 2023 have been influenced by a number of geo-strategic factors such as; their geographical positioning, security concerns, strategic priorities, regional and global geo-strategic players such as China, Russia, Iran and Afghanistan, and their proximity with the Indian Ocean and other important trade routes and zones, offering them various challenges and opportunities in their relations with the US. This study comparatively analyses how these geo-strategic challenges and opportunities have shaped their foreign policies towards the US from 2018 to 2023. The study explores the divergent trajectories of the two states; India's strengthening defense and strategic ties with the US to contain China, and, Pakistan's endeavors to counter-balance this strategic shift by Pakistan-China multidimensional collaboration. Like China as an important geo-strategic factor determining Pakistan and India's foreign policies towards the US, other same geo-strategic factors have also differently influenced their foreign policies and that too, to varying extents. While Afghanistan factor has mainly shaped Pakistan-US counterterrorism collaboration, the same Afghanistan factor has emerged as a great opportunity for India to cooperate on Chabahar port in order to balance China-Pakistan Gwadar port. Iran and Russia as geo-strategic factors have also differently influenced Pakistan and India's foreign policies towards the US. India's Indo-Pacific strategy in collaboration with the US, Indo-US strategic cooperation and exchange, and Indo-US joint military and economic ventures are the opportunities India has grabbed over the time which has raised further challenges for Pakistan's foreign policy in general and particularly towards the US. This study offers an in-depth analysis of how various geo-strategic factors have shaped the foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US by applying Structural Realism which takes into account the global power structure dynamics and systemic forces that have significant say in a state foreign policy making. The study is a comparative case study and applies Qualitative Research Methodology in which the research gaps in the secondary data sources are filled with the primary data derived from in-depth interviews from foreign policy scholars and experts. It is a valuable addition to the existing literature.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

South Asia occupies a critical geostrategic location, bounded by Central Asia to the northwest, Southeast Asia to the east, the Middle East to the west, and the Indian Ocean to the south. The region is a gateway to the critical maritime trade routes of the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Strait of Malacca, making it an important corridor for world commerce and energy supply. It connects landlocked Central Asia to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, while serving as a strategic center for regional and global powers. The existence of critical chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz, as well as its closeness to the South China Sea, add to its strategic importance.

South Asia's geostrategic importance is further enhanced by its economic potential, safety issues, and two nuclear-armed neighbors (India and Pakistan), both of which have substantial foreign policy implications for regional stability. The region's strategic location places it as an important focal point in great power conflict, notably between the US and China. For the US, South Asia is critical for sustaining regional security, combating terrorism, ensuring maritime trade routes, and containing China's expanding influence in the Indo-Pacific region. The US ties, notably with India, are consistent with its overall strategic goals, but engagement with Pakistan remains critical owing to Pakistan's role in Afghanistan, counterterrorism operations, and nuclear security. Thus, the US has a strong interest in molding Pakistan and India's foreign policy to coincide with its geopolitical goals.

Pakistan's strategic location at the crossroads of South Asia, the Central Asia, Middle East, and along with its role in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has a considerable influence on US-China strategic rivalry. While India strengthens its strategic cooperation with the US, Pakistan's foreign policy calculation is shaped by its historical links to China and Russia, its nuclear weapons program, and concerns about regional security (Chaudhary and Nasr, 2021). The US fluctuating regional interests, its military presence, and economic policies—including sanctions—all have an impact on Pakistan's geopolitical collaborations. Furthermore, neighboring players such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, domestic security issues, and the role of Pakistan's military and diaspora impact US-Pak ties, as does India's growing global influence (Khalid, 2021).

The foreign policy of India towards the US is also influenced by its strategic Indo-Pacific position, economic, military and technological power, and mutual interests in containing China. It seeks US investment, technology, and support for global governance positions, including as

UNSC and NSG membership. India's partnership in the Quad and other such strategic and economic alliances is consistent with US regional objectives, while concerns over Pakistan's nuclear capabilities and terrorism further impact bilateral relations (Upadhyay, 2020; Mishra, 2019). Similar other important geostrategic considerations, such as geography, security issues, and significant global players like China, Russia, Iran, and Afghanistan, have influenced Pakistan and India's foreign policy posture to the US from 2018 and 2023 by offering various challenges and opportunities to them. It is imperative to explore these geo-strategic factors and comparative analysis of the effect these factors on the foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US.

1.1. Rationale of the Study

The complex structure of geopolitical and geostrategic imperatives has constantly influenced states' foreign policy trajectories, particularly in regions marked by historical rivalries, strategic competition and shifting power balances. South Asia, as a crucial geostrategic fulcrum, is at the core of global strategic rebalancing. This study seeks to elucidate the geostrategic determinants underpinning Pakistan and India's foreign policy orientations toward the US from 2018 and 2023, a period marked by global power structure transitions, construction of new geo-political alliances, recalibrations in great-power politics, and the reconfiguration of regional security frameworks. For example, US-China Trade War, US Sanctions on Iran and Withdrawal from JCPOA (2018), Indo-US strengthening ties as demonstrated in Indo-Pacific cooperation are some of the such developments. Moreover, QUAD, Trump-Modi Bromance and 'Howdy, Modi!' event, US-withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia-Ukraine war (2022), Pak-Russia closeness particularly marked with Imran Khan's visit to Russia in 2022 are also the structural transitions influencing Pakistan and India foreign policies towards the US during the era under study. Indo-Pak escalations, revocation of Art. 370 in Indian Occupied Kashmir, Pakistan FATF episode, China-India Galwan valley conflict, China-US trade war, COVID-19 are few of other developments that have implications for Pakistan and India's foreign policies. Thus, the study seeks its rational foundation from the imperative to comparatively study the influence of these factors which offer challenges as well as opportunities influencing the foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US during the period under study.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US from 2018 to 2023 have been influenced by a number of geo-strategic factors such as; their geographical positioning, security concerns, strategic priorities, regional and global geo-strategic players such as China, Russia, Iran and Afghanistan, and their proximity with the Indian Ocean, Indo-Pacific region and other

important trade routes and zones, offering them various challenges and opportunities in their relations with the US. These challenges and opportunities in turn shape the foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US. Formerly, inclined towards Pakistan, US over the recent years tilted towards India as its reliable geo-strategic regional partner, behind which there are mutual vested interests of the both, such as containment of China. Various geo-strategic factors taken common for Pakistan and India are influencing Pakistan-US and India-US relations variably. Given the Indo-US nexus, Pakistan and the regional strategic balance has been influenced, for which it is imperative to seek a way forward.

1.3. Objective of the Study

The research objectives of this study are;

- 1) To explore the geo-strategic factors that have influenced Pakistan and India's foreign policy towards the US between 2018 and 2023;
- 2) To identify the similarities and differences in the way these factors have influenced Pakistan and India's foreign policies towards the US from 2018 to 2023;
- 3) To analyze the factors behind US-India strategic cooperation and Pakistan's counter-balancing strategic scheme vis-à-vis US-India strategic cooperation.

1.4. Research Questions of the Study

The research questions of the study are as follows

- 1) What are the key geo-strategic factors that have shaped Pakistan and India's foreign policy towards the US from 2018 and 2023?
- 2) How have the different geo-strategic factors shaped the foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US from 2018 to 2023?
- 3) Why and how have India and the US developed strategic cooperation and how has Pakistan been endeavoring to counter-balance the US-India strategic cooperation during the era under study?

1.5. Significance of the Study

This study is a significant contribution to the field of international relations and foreign policy. The study seeks to explore the impact of geo-strategic factors on the foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US, taking into account the period from 2018 to 2023. It explores how various geo-strategic factors have presented various opportunities and challenges to Pakistan and India and how the resultant foreign policies of these states came out to be. US is of great significance for the South Asian region particularly Pakistan and India, so the significance of this study lies in its

potential to provide new insights into the complex relationship between Pakistan, India, and the US, which has been marked by both cooperation and conflict over the years from 2018 to 2023. The era from 2018 to 2023 is especially significant since it witnessed key global events such as the shifts in the US foreign policy in Trump and Biden administrations, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, increasing US-China tensions, and revived Indo-Pacific security arrangements. By examining the role of geo-strategic factors in shaping foreign policy decisions, the study can help to shed light on the underlying dynamics of this relationship, and provide a deeper understanding of the motives and interests that drive the foreign policies of these two nations; Pakistan and India.

Since the study is a comparative analysis of various geo-strategic factors influencing foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US, it is unique, as the existing literature, as pointed out in detailed literature review, has literature gap in this particular domain. The comparative analysis of various influencing geo-strategic factors shows how the foreign policies of these two states under study towards the US have shaped up over the span of 2018 to 2023, indicating opportunities and challenges the geo-strategic matrix offered them. This also highlights the strengths and weaknesses of each nation's approach, and offer recommendations for how they can improve their policies in the future. The study has practical implications for policymakers and analysts who are interested in South Asian geopolitics. Moreover, the significance of this study lies in the theoretical framework it applies. By elaborating different theories of foreign policies, the study points out appropriate theoretical framework, which takes into account various geo-strategic considerations, from the systemic forces and their influences to the challenges and opportunities the states under study encounter while taking foreign policy decisions. The study leads to new avenues of research and contributes to a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the complex regional and global politics of geo-strategics.

1.6. Delimitations of the Study

The study "Geo-Strategic Factors in Pakistan and India's Foreign Policy towards the US: A Comparative Analysis (2018-2023)" has certain delimitations that need to be acknowledged. Firstly, the study only focuses on the 2018-2023 era, and has very little historical analysis for contextual clarity. Secondly, it solely examines the geo-strategic factors (external factors) in determining the foreign policy of Pakistan and India towards the US and does not consider their foreign policies towards any other countries. The geo-strategic factors are taken into broader context and not limited to the traditional concept of geo-strategy and geo-strategic factors confined to military strategy and planning only. In this study, broader geo-strategic factors include socio-political, economic and strategic factors. Thirdly, the study is limited to the analysis of geostrategic factors, such as; South

Asian countries such as Afghanistan, Iran and China, the regional balance of power, strategic, and socio-economic interests. It does not include any other factors that may influence foreign policy decisions, such as foreign policy models, intra-state cultural or religious ideological considerations. Moreover, it is important to note that this study is comparative in nature and aims to identify similarities and differences in how various geo-strategic factors influence foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US. The study does not aim to provide a comprehensive analysis of each country's foreign policy in isolation. Lastly, it does not seek to determine which country's foreign policy is better or more effective.

1.7. Operational Definitions of Major Terms

- 1) **Foreign Policy:** Foreign Policy is the set of strategies, rules, and actions which a state pursues in order to seek its broadly conceived goals and interests.
- 2) **Geo-strategy:** Geo-strategy is a subfield of geopolitics that focuses on foreign policy, with an emphasis on geographical factors that influence political, economic, and military planning of a state. Geo-strategists approach geopolitics from a nationalist perspective and take into account historical roots, resources, national goals, political geography, and technological factors. Geo-strategy can be prescriptive, analytical, or predictive, and is closely related to strategic geography. It is relevant mainly in the context of the nation for which it was devised.
- 3) **Geo-strategic Factor:** Geo-strategic factor here taken in broader context. It refers to the geographical and strategic considerations that influence political, military, economic, and cultural engagement. These factors can include natural resources, geographic barriers, transportation networks and access points, population centers, and military bases. Other important geostrategic considerations may include historical and cultural ties, alliances and rivalries, and shifts in global power dynamics.
- 4) **Foreign Policy Analysis:** It is the organized study of the process of foreign policy making, the model and theoretical framework adopted for the process, the stakeholders involved therein, the present outcomes of the foreign policy decision and its possible future outcome/s.
- 5) **Comparative Foreign Policy Analysis (CFPA):** It is a dynamic subfield of international relations that examines foreign policy decision-making processes in response to significant global events, as well as patterns in the day-to-day foreign interactions of various states (in present study, Pakistan and India) and other international and nongovernmental organizations.

1.8. Literature Review

Foreign policy is a very broad and complex subject which can be analyzed from multiple angles. Particularly, as to foreign policy of Pakistan and India, there is a substantial amount of literature derived from primary and secondary sources such as, government publications, books, journal articles, surveys, personal interviews, websites, reports, case studies, and more. Different authors/sources have used different methodologies and techniques, theoretical frameworks and data bases to lay foundations of their findings regarding the domain of the study. Apart from critical findings these works present, there are certain gaps in these works which have been observed and need to be filled. The purpose of the literature review is, thus, to appreciate the work and identify gap in the existing literature regarding the topic under study.

The literature review essentially takes into account certain key terms and phrases such as; geo-strategics, foreign policy, comparative analysis, Pakistan, India, US, foreign policy of Pakistan towards the US, foreign policy of India towards the US, Pakistan-US ties, Indo-US nexus, geo-strategic factors shaping foreign policy and comparative foreign policy analysis as ground to build the literature review on. Keeping in view the research questions, research objectives, and methodological and theoretical approaches of the study, the literature review analyze the existing body of knowledge in this domain with some review questions in mind. While searching for the answers of these review questions in the available literature, the relevance of the literature with the study is measured and the literature gap is identified. In this interrogative literature review, combination approach with chronological overview and thematic analysis is performed. For each work of literature to be reviewed, the key questions it tends to address, major findings, thematic and theoretical approaches, data analyzed, strengths and weaknesses, and the gap it has with the present study is taken into consideration.

1.8.1. Historical Literature Review on Geo-strategic Factors in Foreign Policy of Pakistan and India Toward the US (1947 to 2017)

Since independence, US has been an important factor in South Asia's strategic environment apart from other factors. Due to the US core interests in the region, such as; containment of Communism (Cold War Era), balancing rise of China, ensuring its presence in the Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific region, post 9/11 war on terror and Afghanistan peace, and nuclear issues, it has always endeavored to maintain its presence in the region. For this purpose, it kept on engaging and disengaging with Pakistan and India however differentially throughout the history while offering them different incentives from financial assistance to strategic support time to time. A bulk of literature is available on US foreign policy towards these South Asian states. However, in response US quest for engaging in the region for its vested interests, the challenges, opportunities and choices

offered by US, and other factors (domestic and international) it is highly imperative to study the resultant foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US. Before diving deep into the study of contemporary (2018-2023) key geo-strategic factors as determinant of foreign policies of Pakistan and India, historical background literature review is essential to set ground for further debate.

“Pakistan's Foreign Policy: A Historical Analysis” by S. M. Burke originally published in 1973, is one of the most classic works on Pakistan’s foreign policy, which delves deep into the complexities of formulation of foreign policy of Pakistan. It takes into account the historical evolution of Pakistan’s foreign policy and key phases therein chronologically starting from independence of Pakistan in 1947. The work critically analyses Pakistan’s foreign policy at different levels, exploring domestic factors such as civil-military relations, regional dynamics, such as India’s influence and global power matrix with US and USSR as major powers. The later versions of the book also give similar critical overview of Pakistan’s foreign policy in the later years. The work is comprehensive; however, it examines the key drivers of Pakistan’s foreign policy at different levels with a sufficient focus on domestic factors, while the present study aims at exploring and analyzing systemic factors influencing foreign policies of Pakistan and India and that too in the era from 2018-2023. However, the work provides good foundation for studying complexities of Pakistan’s foreign policy which helps in understanding the contemporary dynamics of the same. Another work, *“Mainsprings of Indian and Pakistani Foreign Policies”*, by S. M. Burke (1974) critically compares factors influencing foreign policies of Pakistan and India post-independence. These factors such as; leadership role, China factor (India-China border dispute), Cold War preferences of Pakistan and India, Pakistan-India conflict, are quite important in shaping the later foreign policies of these states. The work presents comparative analysis of the factors which shaped Pakistan and India’s foreign policies after independence.

Abdul Sattar- Pakistan’s ex-foreign minister and permanent ambassador to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in his book, *“Pakistan's Foreign Policy, 1947-2019: A Concise History”* giving an objective analysis of Pakistan’s foreign policy since independence maintains that throughout the history, Pakistan has been a victim of structural compulsions and inherited security paranoia mainly offered by two opposing blocs during cold war. He also takes into account the pre-independence history of India and Pakistan to set ground for post-independence foreign policy debates. The most recent work on Pakistan’s foreign policy is Ghulam Ali’s book titled, *“Pakistan's Foreign Policy Contemporary Developments and Dynamics”*(2024) which includes historical background of Pakistan-US relations, the choices Pakistan has made, the geo-strategic compulsions Pakistan has been taking into account while making its foreign policy, the systemic influences, role

of great powers and the role of domestic factors particularly the military and the political elites in this matter. It employs mixed approach using both primary and secondary sources for the study. Pakistan's foreign policy towards main countries or entities such as; US, India, Iran, Afghanistan, China, EU and Russia, has been discussed in detail with a social, political, economic and strategic point of view. The India-US strategic partnership has been an important factor for Pakistan's tilt towards China and the recent tilt towards Russia. In the same book, chapter titled, "Pakistan-US Relations: Is Past the Prologue?" by Rabia Akhtar particularly focuses on changing Pakistan's foreign policy towards the US in the past as well as gives an account of contemporary developments in Pakistan-US relations. According to Akhtar (2024), the Cold War divide between two blocs, the USSR-led Communist and West-led Capitalist bloc was a challenge to both Pakistan and India as the nascent states to whether have an independent foreign policy and adopt non-alliance or be ally with any of the bloc. While India had chosen non-alignment policy, Pakistan had chosen Pro-Western foreign policy, though, officially a non-aligned country, with aspirations to maintain ties with US, USSR, and the newly established (and promptly recognized by Pakistan) Communist China, which is also highlighted by Sattar (2020). Though, Pakistan impliedly showed its tilt towards the US, but with US refusal to support Pakistan in Kashmir case, Pakistan decided not to stand by US in its cause in Korean war. With Liaqat Ali Khan's death, Pakistan saw civil-military turbulence, but eventually it became, 'America's most allied ally' in Asia and joined many pro-West US-led organizations such as SEATO and CENTO to contain Communist USSR, however, its basic objective was to seek US support against Indian--aggression more than Communist-aggression.

Although, Pakistan realized its concerns to the US during this period but events occurred in 1962 and onwards led to first breakdown between the two (Ali, 2024). From Indian perspective, this war tainted India's global image, as it was earlier active in diplomatic engagements and economic interactions widely at that time (Chaudhary, 2023). SumitGanguly, in his book, "*Engaging the World: Indian Foreign Policy since 1947*" using three levels of analysis by Kenneth Waltz and giving a detailed account of India's foreign policy towards different states including US, Russia, China, and other South Asian states also maintains the same. This work however, does not focus much on incorporating Pakistan as a significant factor in its strategic ties. Moreover, it also stresses India's diplomatic and economic engagements more than the strategic ones.

Pakistan's realization of the regional geo-political realities made it reorient its foreign policy to establish friendly ties with China and the Soviet Union (Khan, 1967). Particularly, the U-2 incident and subsequent Soviet threats to Pakistan were important factors in Pakistan-Soviet reproachment, and for China-Pakistan reproachment, the reason was China's rising power status.

With 1962 Sino-India war, US military assistance to India (regardless of the fact that Pakistan got much more military aid from the US as compared to India under Military Assistance Program 1954-65- to contain Communism), Pakistan tilted towards China for additional support. Meanwhile, as Sattar (2020) maintains, USSR also offered Pakistan economic and technical support which Pakistan rejected making a gross ‘diplomatic blunder.’ Ali (2024) maintains that in the wake of 1965 Indo-Pakistan war, US action to halt aid to both India and Pakistan were punitive one for Pakistan assisting India, as Pakistan had repeatedly called for US action which in turn referred case to UN, and regarded it US first betrayal as it altogether ignored Pakistan’s Indian threat. The US weapons being used as deterrence against India, when cut-off had put Pakistan in a perilous situation. 1971 crises, however, made Pakistan realize the significance of US and Pakistan dependence on it. There have been geostrategic and geopolitical factors in bringing US closer to Pakistan and it had benefits given the situation as stressed in “US-Pakistan Relations: The Geo-strategic and Geopolitical Factors” (Khan, 2010). The Pakistan-US reproachment in post 1971 era occurred also due to US-China rapprochement and US resumption of arms sale to Pakistan and India, which was selectively and unilaterally halted over and over again with imposing sanctions over Pakistan’s nuclear weapons designs, thus making Pakistan- ‘the most sanctioned US ally.’

For this particular era, from 1972 to early 90s, Hasan-Askari Rizvi’s book, “*Pakistan and the Geostrategic Environment: A Study of Foreign Policy*”, puts stress on the geo-strategic environment which drives Pakistan's interaction at the bilateral, regional and international levels. Balancing India is an important factor in Pakistan’s foreign policy towards the US and China along with other small states of South Asia and the Muslim states (Rizvi, 1993). In, “*Pakistan's Foreign Policy: A Reappraisal*”, Shahid M. Amin, (mainly depending on S. M. Burke’s work, “*Pakistan's Foreign Policy: An Historical Analysis*” 1992) presents chronological picture of Pakistan’s foreign policy, however adding more to it which are the lessons Pakistan should learn and adopt pragmatic approach and not ‘narrow minded’ approach in its foreign relations. Even, he insisted on developing ties with India along with supporting Kashmir cause and avoid imbalance ties with US and Soviet Union with a balance between economic and military ties (Amin, 2010).

Post 9/11, upon its need of Pakistan’s assistance in Afghanistan over US-led war on terror, US lifted sanctions from Pakistan. Ghulam Ali’s work does not dive deep into post 9/11 Pakistan’s policies much, this gap is filled by another scholarly work, “*Pakistan: The US, Geopolitics and Grand Strategies*” which takes into account different geo-strategic factors such as; India, Afghanistan, Pakistan’s regional relations, global order instead of analyzing US-Pakistan relationship in isolation (Butt & Schofield, 2012). However, the scope of this work is limited to a

decade after US inaugurated war on terror. Throughout the post 9/11 era till 2022, Pakistan had allied with the US, and it continued till US withdrawal from Afghanistan with US-Pakistan tensions over, US 'do more' and Pakistan's 'no- more' mantra. This is already envisioned in Daniel S. Markey's work, *"No Exit from Pakistan: America's Tortured Relationship with Islamabad"* that Pakistan's rapidly growing population, growing anti-US sentiments, nuclear arsenal might become a challenge for Pakistan (Markey, 2013). The book, *"Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America, and the Future of the Global Jihad,"* by Bruce Riedel (2012) also discusses Afghanistan as one of the single most important factors determining US-Pakistan ties. Afghanistan is the factor which brought about reproachment between these two states, and also a factor that were led to ways of these two splitting apart (Riedel, 2012). While Sattar (2020) in his in-depth case study analysis accounts opportunities, challenges and blunders it made in the history, Ali (2014) work has a devoted chapter to study Pakistan's foreign policy with a geo-strategic lens. However, both works lack comparative analysis of foreign policy of Pakistan and India towards the US taking into account the geo-strategic factors.

In order to understand the contemporary dynamics of India's foreign policy and holistic understanding of the factors behind it, the historical phases of its being dormant till eventually becoming a global player can be learned from DhruvKatoch book (2019), *"India's Foreign Policy Towards Resurgence."* The past plays vital role in future. The author maintains that the blueprints of India's foreign policy trace roots from the times of Chanakya, thousand years ago. This work is important in terms of its value in giving a chronological description of India's foreign policy history and connecting it with the present scenario. However, it does not solely deal with India's foreign policy towards the US with strategic point of view. It still gives the basic and foundational understanding of the present study for India's section. The report, titled, *"The United States and India: A Shared Strategic Future"* (2011) by The Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) envisions US-India nexus in the upcoming years considering Pakistan a key factor behind it along with China. It maintains that Pakistan used terrorism and Jihadist ideology to smash Indian sovereignty in the region and particularly its claims over Kashmir. Also, US seemed to be a lucrative incentive for India who can meet its energy needs in the future. A future plan of US-Indo strategic ties has been already in its ripen phases and only needed implementation which we can see today. In contrast to the above-mentioned report, the scholarly work by Tanvi Madan, *"Fateful Triangle: How China Shaped US-India Relations During the Cold War"* regards China as a main motivator behind Indo-US ties. Although, China is a common threat to both India and US, however, there are many other factors leading to this nexus (Madan, 2020). Additionally, according to a scholarly work, *"A Historical and Geo-Strategic Variables of India's Foreign: Policy Since Independence"* (Ellah&Etim, 2021), the Indian ideology of Panchsheel has been very much relevant in its conduct

of foreign policy, which includes, which encompasses the principles of “nonalignment, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, anti-racism, peaceful settlement of international conflicts and strengthening of the United Nations.” In his article, “A Brief Study on the Emerging Nature of India’s Foreign Policy”, Pramod Kumar Chaudhary has divided phases of Indian foreign policy into six parts as; 1st Phase (year 1946 to 62), 2nd Phase (year 1962 to 71), 3rd Phase (year 1971 to 91), 4th Phase (year 1991 to 99), and 6th Phase (2014 to 2023) while chronologically explaining the events yet without going to in-depth analysis. The main set of principles India has been adapting in its foreign relations is Panchsheel (5 principles) and India has shown its deviation from these principles only “momentarily” giving examples of various confrontational interactions of India with some countries.

It is important to see how India perceives Pakistan’s foreign policy throughout the history. Aparna Pande’s book, *“Explaining Pakistan’s Foreign Policy Escaping India”* fills this gap and portrays Pakistan’s foreign policy primarily shaped by its focus escaping from Indian South Asian Identity and seeking parity with India and survival. For the said purpose, Pakistan had adopted Jihadist identity and sought to develop ties with great powers such as US, USSR, China for economic-cum-strategic assistance. Islamic ideology in particular served an object of obtaining Muslim world’s support for a united “ideological front” against India (Pande, 2011). 20. As the post 9/11 era embarks upon, Ajay Darshan Behera and Mathew Joseph (2004) maintain in the book, *“Pakistan in a Changing Strategic Context”*, Pakistan had a different and evolving geo-strategic environment which presented Pakistan both challenges and opportunities. Geo-political location of Pakistan is one of the most important factors for this Pakistan-specific geo-strategic environment. Later, with the end of cold war, and the rise of China, US-India ties started strengthening whereby eventually both sides signed various defense agreements and strategic deals including US-India nuclear deal, aka “civil deal” which became one of the most important strategic factors in foreign policy of Pakistan towards the US. Pakistan’s contemporary foreign policy is thus, its quest for balancing US-India longitudinally as well as horizontally developing ties as Iqtidar Hussain in his article, “The Indo-US Strategic Nexus: Policy Options for Pakistan,” (2023) critically elaborates.

1.8.2. Geo-Strategic Factors in Foreign Policy of Pakistan (2018-2023)

The above section shows that throughout the history there has been many factors, both domestic as well as international that helped Pakistan shape its foreign policy towards different countries particularly the US. Pakistan’s foreign policy in general and in particular towards the US in contemporary era, is analyzed in Ghulam Alis’s book, *“Pakistan’s Foreign Policy Contemporary Developments and Dynamics”* (2024). Pakistan is a part of greater global system, where regional and global dynamics present challenges as well as opportunities. Shuja Nawaz, in his book, *“The*

Battle for Pakistan: The Bitter US Friendship and a Tough Neighbourhood” says that Pakistan- US relationship showcases ‘a marriage of convenience’ between two ‘unequal partners. Since Pakistan’s inception, the Pak-US relation is no less than a whiplash-inducing rollercoaster ride, however, this work focuses on era from 2007 to 2019 based on in-depth interviews with Pakistani military, political leaders, US diplomats, and joint force planners. Past, he says, is a preamble of future. To understand Pakistan’s complex foreign policy, it is important to understand its embedded tribal dynamics exacerbated by its complex geography and tough local neighborhood. Moreover, US leaders have been important co-conspirators in demising Pakistan’s civilian authorities by isolating the civilian government and super-empowering its military leadership. Pakistan’s taking time to adapt to counterinsurgency warfare in face of post 9/11 War on Terror is taken by US authorities as Pakistan’s reluctance to engage with the US, which is not the case (Nawaz, 2020). US-Pakistan relationship, after killing of Osama bin Laden when Pakistani military’s complex relationship with Islamic extremist groups was exposed, turned thin but, the insights from interview of Inter-Services Intelligence officer, named Eqbal Saeed Khan, a person who had been instrumental in the operation presented a different picture. Another trouble for Pakistan was to tackle overwhelming Pakistani population condemnation of US operation and resultant loss to Pakistan. Granting aid to Pakistan by US with an expectation of an immediate result also complicated the bilateral ties (Nawaz, 2020). This work is one of the most important works on Pakistan’s foreign policy, areas of convergence and areas of divergence in Pakistan-US relations, however, it primarily focusses on Afghanistan as a geo-strategic factor in foreign policy of Pakistan and US towards each other.

Afghanistan as a key geo-strategic factor in US-Pakistan relations is further elaborated in Zafar Iqbal Yousafzaibook published in 2020, titled, “*The Troubled Triangle: US-Pakistan Relations Under the Taliban's Shadow.*” Pakistan- Taliban relation was an informal alliance between a small state and a non-state actor to collectively combat USSR threat. Taking insights from Stephen M. Walt’s Balance of Threat (BoT) theory, he analyses this scenario by his own extension ‘New Balance of Threat Theory.’ From the rise of Taliban to government till the post 9/11 Taliban becoming casualty of US War on Terror and rise of neo-Taliban, relevance of Pakistan has been in place, with both sides avenging on Pakistan. The work also dwells light on Trump’s South Asia policy, Afghan peace process, and the US President Joe Biden final withdrawal from Afghanistan. Pakistan’s alleged support to Neo-Taliban, has been perceived by the US as a direct threat to its interests in Afghanistan (Yousafzai, 2020). Another important work focusing on Afghanistan as a key geo-strategic factor in US-Pakistan relations is “*No-win War: The Paradox of US-Pakistan Relations in Afghanistan's Shadow,*” (2021) by Zahid Hussain highlights the long-term consequences of US withdrawal from Afghanistan FOR Afghanistan and regional peace. The

implications of Taliban return on Pakistan-US-Afghanistan triangle is also highlighted in a book, “The Return of the Taliban: Afghanistan after the Americans Left” by Hassan Abbas.

Khan et. al., (2023) remark in the work, “Shifting Sands: Pakistan's Strategic Culture Amidst Regional and Global Flux” that it is important to understand Pakistan regional and global dynamics and historical development of Pakistan's strategic culture. Through a combination of historical research, content analysis and case studies, it is concluded that in order to have future insights of Pakistan foreign policy, the relevance of different factors in Pakistan foreign policy is essential. Amongst these factors are the; military, geo-geographic regional and world dynamics, Pak-China alliance, and the Great Game and Afghanistan. Lacking theoretic understanding of Pakistan’s foreign policy, this scholarly work however emphasizes the fact that geo-strategics is an important factor for Pakistan’s security oriented foreign policy. Similarly, FoziaBibi and others in their work, “The Impacts of International Structure on the Foreign Policy of Pakistan, (2019),” also stress the significance and relevance of international structure in foreign policy of Pakistan since 1947. Using structural realism, the work claims that the multipolar world order is a blessing for Pakistan and its high time for Pakistan to balance its relations with different structural powers such as; US, Russia, and China, on the basis of equality, equity and mutual benefits.

Instead, “*Evaluating Foreign Policy of Pakistan in the context of Strategic Coercion*” (2019) authors go further ahead and maintain that whatever strategic choices Pakistan has made throughout the history were out of ‘strategic coercion’ by UN, US, EU, India, IMF, and FATF, and grey hybrid war unleashed against Pakistan (Khaver et. al., 2019). Recognizing the fact that the system has been coercive, Pakistan should focus on its economy, strengthen participatory democracy and encourage positive media role to set its independent foreign policy. Particularly, US has been a key coercer in this regard. From its nuclear-related sanctions (the Symington Amendment and the Glenn Amendment) on Pakistan, its ties with India as a punishment to Pakistan for its alliance with China, war on terror and blame-blame game, India-US-Israel trio collectively forcing Pakistan to do more, and US under IMF forbidding Pakistan to not pay IMF loans with Chinese funds and more, US has been single-handedly influencing Pakistan’s foreign policy the most (Khaver et. al., 2019). UmbreenJavaid in her article titled, “Historical Perspective of Pakistan USA Relations; Lessons for Pakistan,” (2024) gives a similar account of events in the past that shaped foreign policy of Pakistan in general and particularly towards the US. US has not been a Pakistan’s reliable ally and it is evident in 1965, 1971, 1975 events when US suspended its military assistance to Pakistan. Later, with USSR invasion of Afghanistan and Pakistan enhanced significance for the US, and the nuclear episode with thaw in Pakistan-US relations and again post 9/11 Pak-US convergence, all

demonstrate that Pakistan- US relations are more like marriage of convenience. Pakistan should learn from the past experiences. Keeping in view the geo-strategic compulsions, challenges and choices, Pakistan should work internally and externally to derive good for itself from its US relation. There is no survival in isolation instead a balance approach keeping in view all other factors are inevitable required for Pakistan's survival (Javaid, 2024).

The argument that Pakistan did never have an independent foreign policy is further supported by Fauzia Darabu and Sayeda Daud (2021) in their article title, "New Era in Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Problems and Prospects." Not only national but foreign decisions of Pakistan served US national interests. Pakistan's US foreign policy is nothing but US desires fulfilled by Pakistan. Using qualitative method, an in-depth critical analysis and primary and secondary sources, the study sheds light on how US has been always thankless to Pakistan for the sacrifices the latter has been making since 9/11. In the given situation, Pakistan's inclination towards China is considered as deviation in Pakistan's foreign policy. The important question that the author addresses is can Pakistan afford such a deviation from the US and Inclination towards China. China is Pakistan's all weathers friend and Pakistan has in the form of China a very reliable partner. Economic stability is equivalent to state security, and stabilizing economy should be Pakistan's priority. Thus, economic incentives from China are worth a warm embrace for which US prior approval is not a condition precedent (Darabu&Daud, 2021).

It is important to see how US sees itself as a factor in Pakistan's foreign policy towards it. The recent book by Syed Tahseen Raza (2023), titled, "*United States and Pakistan in the 21st Century: Geostrategy and Geopolitics in South Asia*" incorporates the debate as to why and how has Pakistan been relevant in US strategic thinking after 2001. Pakistan's foreign policy has been significantly affected by the influence of the unprecedented rise of religious extremism in Pakistan stemming from War on Terror, India's offer to US to stand by it in US war in Afghanistan, Pakistan's military and its weak economic status, US administration to end fiscal aid to Pakistan, Pakistan's quest for nuclear weapons, and overall South Asian environment. Using a theoretical framework of grand strategy of primacy, the author has highlighted shortcomings of US foreign policy toward Pakistan. It also posits an important question here, that is, whether Pakistan's foreign policy is a part of greater US foreign policy pointing to dependent nature of Pakistan's foreign policy. This work is important as it lays ground for US understanding of the geo-strategic environment and significance of South Asia, which is important to analyze Pakistan's foreign policy towards the US. Western perspective on Pakistan's relevance and significance as a geo-strategic ally to the US in "*Pakistan: Can the United States Secure an Insecure State?*"- a book by Fair, et. al.,

(2010) also maintains that Pakistan's foreign policy is mainly shaped by its own problems and insecurities pointing towards problematic history of constitutionalism, military interventionism, its nuclear expedition, and perceived threats for India. It is not the US that is influencing Pakistan's foreign policies, instead, Pakistan itself leads certain US responses.

The scholarly work titled, "Pak-US Strategic Relations from Jimi Carter to Joe Biden and Foreign Policy of Pakistan: Analytical Study from Historical Perspective" by Muhammad Umar RiazAbbasi and others concludes that US-Pakistan relations, throughout the history, have been based on US national interests. US always tend to seek advantage of Pakistan, without caring much for latter's core concerns and sacrifices. This is the reason, Pakistan has been actively looking for other reliable partners in the region, reducing its reliance on the US (Riaz, 2023). The areas of Pakistan-US divergence after 9/11 are further analyzed in an article, titled, "Pakistan-US Relations after 9/11: Points of Divergence Historical narration of Pak-US relations," (2019) by Muhammad Imran Rashid and UmbreenJavaid. First of all, the drone operations in Pakistan to crush the militant groups like Al-Qaida, Haqqani Network, and the Taliban led to death of innocent civilians in Pakistan. This led to widespread hatred in Pakistan for the US. The other incidents adding fuel to this fire are US other covert military actions in Pakistan such as, Raymond Davis case, Operation Neptune Spear in Abbottabad (without informing or coordinating with Pakistani intelligence agencies and military) and attack on Salala Airbase (killing 24 Pakistani soldiers). Even after Pakistan's unilateral warnings that recurrent violation of Pakistan's sovereignty won't be tolerated, US started creating hurdles in other areas of US-Pakistan coordination such as economic aid etc. Above this, US-India strategic fire further exacerbated the Pak-US rift adding to Pakistan's regional security concerns. The US demand to 'do more' from Pakistan, its pressurizing tactics, US anti-Islamic agenda, Dr. ShakeelAfridi case, and ceaseless US concerns about Pakistan's nuclear weapons are some of the other factors leading to US-Pakistan divergence (Rashid &Javaid, 2019). Some of the other factors such as US-China rivalry, other regional factors such as India's geo-strategic threat and Iran element are not discussed, however, this study gives a comprehensive outlook on Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.

Iran, as a geo-strategic factor in Pakistan's US foreign policy, is critically view in an a very recent scholarly work titled, "An Analytical Discourse of US-Iran Politico-economic Conflict Post Islamic Revolution period: Effects and Way-forward for Pakistan" by Amir Jan and others (2023). Giving a historical background of how Iran has been an important friend of Pakistan during the Cold war era, the article explores areas of divergences between the two states. The areas of convergence range from establishing Regional Cooperation Development (RCD) to Iran's support for Pakistan

during the 1965 Indo-Pak War and 1971 crises, Iran and Pakistan joint dealing with Balochistan insurgency, and Pakistan's extending its hand in favor of newly Shia dominated administration of Ayatollah Khomeini after Iranian revolution. However, Iran-Pakistan ties touched the lowest point when Pakistan chose to side by US in its war against the USSR in Afghanistan and keep neutral stance on Iran-Iraq conflict. Moreover, Islamic Revolution also ignited Sunni-Shia conflict in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Iran has always disapproved US presence in the region. US factor also didn't let Pakistan-Iran ties strengthen up particularly the economic relations because of US sanctions on Iran over its pursuit of nuclear enrichment often calling it "Axis of Evil." Post 9/11, Pak-US strategic ties gave air to Iran-India ties eventually leading to developing Chabahar Port to counter CPEC (Jan et al., 2023). Hence, directly as well as indirectly, Iran is a very significant player in Pakistan's foreign Policy towards the US.

Pakistan's foreign policy, not only incur regional or systemic challenges but also non-traditional security challenges at domestic as well as international level. A scholarly work, "Challenges and Opportunities to the Foreign Policy of Pakistan in the Contemporary Era" by Dr. Mumtaz Hussain and others give an in-depth analysis of certain non-traditional security threats to Pakistan's independent foreign policy. Economic and political stability is inevitable for Pakistan to survive, and for this purpose, a balanced approach in foreign policy is desired. Iran and Russia extending hands towards Pakistan should be welcomed while maintain a balance with China and US (Hussain, et. al., 2023). This study is important for it highlights non-traditional security challenges, particularly mentioning COVID-19 and environmental crises of which Pakistan, lying at the tropical zone, has to bear tremendous calamity. Keeping the fact that there are other areas of Pakistan-US cooperation than security, NamraNaseer in her work, "Breaking the Mold: The Evolution of US-Pakistan Cooperation Beyond Security," (2024) calls for Pakistan-US multisectoral engagement in different domains such as trade, education, technology, health, environment and more.

1.8.3. Geo-Strategic Factors in Foreign Policy of India (2018-2023)

The extensive historical literature review of India's foreign policy towards the US demonstrates that the contemporary phase of India's friendly foreign policy towards the US traces back to 1990s when USSR disintegrated and rise of China started with India announcing economic reforms in 1991. These reforms were meant to establish stronger ties with the US leading to Agreed Minute on Defense Relations Between the US and India in 1995. The short-term thaw in relations owing to 1998 nuclear weapons tests and Kargil war soon disappeared with US engaging India as a trustable partner in the South Asian region (Schaffer, 2009). With the US-India Nuclear Deal in 2005, a new era of staunch Indo-US partnership embarked upon. Aspen Institute India, Council on Foreign Relations in "*The United States and India: A Shared Strategic Future*," (2011) gives a detailed

account of these growing relations. The era after 2005 developments saw further improvements in their mutual ties. D Dhanuraj in his article titled, “India-U.S.A. Relations| Change, Continuity and Transformation,” (2023) maintains that once turbulent during the Cold War era, Indo-US relations started improving. India portrayed itself as a pivot to Asia and Indo-Pacific region and a prominent element of US’s rebalancing strategy vis-à-vis rising China are significant factors explaining Indo-US foreign policy cooperation. Both realizing the relevance of China in their respective foreign policies, consider China a common threat. Thus, a long-term strategic cooperation discussing framework of future strategies and framework is inevitable (Dhanuraj, 2019). He also discusses future areas of divergence that could present hurdles to the Indo-US relations.

Moreover, India realizes its worth and importance to US, and believes to be a global power in the multipolar world. How India’s explosive economic growth with the Indian middle class rise over time is an important achievement and a ‘historic turning point’ India cherishes. Alyssa Ayres, in her book, “*Our Time Has Come: How India is Making Its Place in the World*” (2018) envisions India’s status on the global format in 2040. In her words, “India is not yet singularly vital to the rest of the world ... but India’s rise to become a major power as already underway....” Apart from the economic growth India has also improved its political conditions, hence, India calling itself world’s largest democracy. This is more about India’s inward to outward approach which makes it one of the top economies of the world. For this, she gives due credit to two aspects, first, the Indian leaders who portrayed this face of India to the world, secondly, India’s standing aloof from entanglements or ‘below the radar’ in the past when the world actually wanted India’s engagement. However, now the situation is different and requirement of the era is different. Endeavoring for more and more representation in international institutions, working for global cause such as climate change or furthering democracy, India finds itself at first place. Addressing US leaders, she concludes that “Washington’s moment of choice in South Asia has nearly arrived,” and “India should be better understood and better appreciated in its own terms.” Already on the way to strategic partnership, such as, the Indo-US nuclear deal, high technology cooperation, India-specific NSG waiver, joint military exercises, India’s standing by US-led Global War on Terror, joint strategic vision statement regarding the 2015 Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean, India-US “will not become formal treaty allies; they will align on many issues, but they will not be aligned” (Ayres, 2020). This work gives an in-depth analysis of how certain domestic factors helped India make its place in the global forum, however, its foreign policy towards the US is discussed in a chapter with it focusing on equality based mutual ties.

The idea that leadership has played a significant role in India's foreign policy is furthered in Ian Hall's book, *"Modi and the Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy"*, (2019) in which a critical appraisal of Modi government foreign policies is presented. There have been many drivers of this reinvention, however, leadership of Modi is central to all. Closely observing Modi's first term (2014-2019) he contends that, it is believed that it's the Hinduism ideology rather than realism or pragmatism in which Indian foreign policy is enrooted, however, results have shown more continuity in foreign policy than change. India still remains more protectionist than globalist, distrusted by its regional rivalries and wary of aligning explicitly with other powers (US) against China (Hall, 2019). B. M. Jain also discusses the same idea of India's mistrust of any power, here the case of the US, in his book, *"India-US Relations in the Age of Uncertainty: An Uneasy Courtship"*, (2016). Throughout the history, US-India relations have been uncertain and complex, which was primarily because of India's non-alignment ideology during Cold War era. This ideology was virtually replaced by sheer pragmatism as manifested in Indo-US strategic, military and security cooperation. The change was dramatic after 9/11. From US lifting sanctions from India to engaging India in War on terror, this dramatic change eventually led to Indo-US civil nuclear deal, NSG waiver, and supporting India's cause on institutional forums. However, uncertainty and complexity between their ties remain in place. Using theory of Complex Interdependence Jain (2016) points out those grey areas of the bilateral ties. The first element is of personality of the leaders on both sides, when some of them were more welcoming than others. For Indo-US reproachment, George. W. Bush, Barack Obama, Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi should be given due credit. The other element is global War on Terror, which furthered this interdependence, as the concerns of both states were similar i.e., to combat Islamic Jihadists worldwide. However, the uncertainty arises from socio-cultural differences and most importantly the China factor. Hence, this book discusses China as a main source of uncertainty and/or fallout in Indo-US ties in the future (Jain, 2016).

US perspective on growing Indo-US strategic partnership is noted in Stephen F. Burgess article, "The evolution of India-US relations and India's grand strategy," who sees this development with the theoretical lens of Structural Realism and maintains that this cooperation has stemmed out of changing power balances in the system, particularly stressing China's rise which propelled both countries to mutually engage. However, there are certain domestic factors behind it as well such as growth of Capitalism, democracy, and nationalism, for India-rise of Bhartatiya Janata Party (BJP). India's Grand Strategy is yet more complex. It aims at acquiring enough resources to have enough deterrence and defense capabilities against China and Pakistan and stabilize South Asia particularly Afghanistan and protecting its interests in Persian/Arab Gulf. Considering China as a mutual threat, both states endeavor to counter balance China in different regions particularly with an outreach of

China through OBOR to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Pakistan, and Maldives. This is considered as China's encirclement policy. Given this scenario, US and India cooperate to secure their interests in Southeast Asia, South China Sea and Asia Pacific region. Given this global structure, it is important to see how Pakistan perceives this US-India partnership. Ahmad Ejaz, in his scholarly work, "United States - India Relations: An expanding strategic partnership," (2020) maintains that apart from China factor, the other factors (India and US concerns) bringing closeness to India and US are, Russia's potential revival, emerging Russia-China partnership, expanding Islamic terrorism in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Central Asian Republics and certain Gulf states, economically unstable Pakistan where Islamists can take control of Pakistan's nuclear weapons, and Talibanization. This nexus has potentially deteriorated Pakistan's relations with the US. India-US nuclear deal, NSG waiver, India enjoying all benefits without signing Nuclear Non-Proliferation Policy (NPT) are the signs of US ignoring imperatives of strategic balance in South Asia and Pakistan's legitimate concerns. Given the situation, Pakistan has full right to pursue its nuclear journey and align itself wherever it can ensure its security (Ejaz, 2020).

Yet, still China's threat persists in India's foreign policy. The idea that, the global structural dynamics pose challenges and opportunities, is further elaborated by Ananth Krishnan, in his work "India's China Challenge: A Journey through China's Rise and What It Means for India." Giving a historical review of how has China been an important structural element in shaping its foreign policy. There have been pull and push factors in India's foreign policy considering China as a reference point. The push factors being unresolved Sino-India border dispute while the pull factors are the strategic, economic, technological incentives US has been offering to India. The challenge China poses to India are, political, military, economic and conceptual one. This work also takes US into account much to explain the complex Sino-India relations. While studying foreign policy, often the domestic dimension of India's foreign policy is missed out. Arvind Gupta and Anil Wadhwa (2020) further maintain that there is a close link between foreign policy and national security, and that soft power tactics should be incorporated in foreign policy of India in an essentially turbulent world. Science and technology, worldwide cooperation in non-traditional security threats, and economic integration, are some of the soft power tools and techniques which can ensure India's long-term survival. This work seeks to explore potential of soft power diplomacy with the Great powers, SAARC neighbors-particularly the rising China, Japan, Russia, Central Asian states, Southeast Asia, Indian Ocean region, Africa and Latin America. It suggests India to adopt a holistic approach in terms of scope of its foreign policy with as many countries as possible, plus in terms of tools and tactics it should adopt (Gupta & Wadhwa, 2020).

Observing with a Neo-Realist lens, Afghanistan factor come to be the most important of all factors determining Pakistan as well as India's foreign policy towards the US. In fact, during the Cold War and after Cold War, this 'Graveyard of Empires' has been significantly important part of different countries' strategic frameworks. During Cold War, it remained important for US and USSR, while post 9/11 era additionally brought in Pakistan and India as one of the prominent states for which Afghanistan mattered. Now Afghanistan has global significance as the War on Terror and episodes of Afghan Peace Process and Post Afghan Peace developments. Ganaie and Ganaie (2022) in their scholarly work title, "India's Afghanistan policy: a quest for strategic space post the US withdrawal", highlight the matter that for a smooth foreign policy of India, its Afghanistan policy should be in place and clear or India's long-term investments in Afghanistan post 9/11 would go in waste, including the rapprochement it created between US and India on War on Terror. The book titled, "*My Enemy's Enemy: India in Afghanistan from the Soviet Invasion to the US Withdrawal*," by Avinash Paliwal projects an idea of adapting Machiavellian approach in India's transactions with India targeting Pakistan as a common enemy to India as well as Afghanistan. This work does not expressly discuss Afghanistan as a geo-strategic factor in foreign policy of India towards the US; however, it does discuss Afghanistan as a key state in drafting its South Asia foreign policy. It demonstrates India's opportunist approach (Paliwal, 2017).

Iran is an important factor when it comes to foreign policies of Pakistan and India. Particularly, India's foreign policy heavily relies on Iran factor as it is important in India's quest to balance China. Sandeep Singh's work, "Geopolitics of ports: Factoring Iran in India's counterbalancing strategy for Sino-Pak Axis" sheds light on this perspective. While Pakistan provides Gawadar port, India, also seeks to take advantage of Iran's geo-strategic location which would help it to counterbalance China (and China-Pakistan nexus) in Indian Ocean with its Chabahar Port in Iran. This would also serve US interests in the region (Singh, 2019). A lot of scholarly work has been published demonstrating the geo-strategic significance of Indian ocean and Asia Pacific region in which India qualifies as one of the key actors. Shiv Kumar Yadav (2021) in his article, "Geo-strategic Dimension of India's Foreign Policy in Indian Ocean: Opportunities and Challenge in 21st Century" shows how Indian Ocean is a single most important factor in foreign policy of India, and how India can further make its prominent place in the world platform. US most important ally in this region is India, so the first opportunity lies in cementing US-India ties further, while the major challenges are China-a common threat to the both. But, the question, in the light of all above discussion arises here that whether US and India relations are sustainable in the long run or not. A. A. Davydov and A. V. Kupriyanov (2022) shed light on this side of the picture in their article "US-Indian Relations: Formation of an Alliance or a Temporary Partnership." US foreign policy

towards India has always been of an opportunist nature which depended on its interests in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, and US relations with USSR and China. Lacking an independent value near the US, the existence of common values has been used by both states to justify their mutual rapprochement. However, this rapprochement is necessity of India as well. There is an urgent need of transformational talks between the two for prolonged cooperative relationship in the future (Davydov&Kupriyanov, 2022). The CRS Report titled, “*India-US Relations: Issues for Congress*” (2023) also highlights that the common grounds for India and the US such as; their quest for economic and technological development and the potential they offer to each other and Indo-Pacific strategy.

1.8.4. Literature Gap

The comprehensive analysis of literature shows that there is a lot of scholarly work available on Pakistan and Indian foreign policy in general. Majority of the literature on foreign policy of these countries discusses historical context in too much details. Moreover, plethora of literature is available on India-US bilateral relations and Pakistan-US bilateral and with an exception of few works, US-Pakistan-India in trio are not discussed much. There is scarcity of research work on the “comparative analysis” of foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US in particular. Comparative analysis of foreign policy helps a state to understand its relative position/status on the global page, its capabilities, potential threats/challenges, opportunities it can hunt and grey areas of its foreign policy. Literature review illustrates that while discussing foreign policies of Pakistan and India, authors take into consideration domestic as well as systemic factors working together to shape up foreign policy choices of the states under study. Literature is available on domestic sources of foreign policy taking into account the factors such as leadership role, elite perceptions, military, ideology and culture role etc. This is important for deeper understanding of foreign policy, however, systemic forces as a major source of foreign policies of Pakistan and India have not been discussed, which is also very important given a dynamic geo-strategic landscape full of opportunities and challenges. Moreover, in systemic analysis, the geo-strategic factor in foreign policy of Pakistan and India is not much discussed. A lot of literature is available on US-India strategic ties, their policies in different world zones such as Asia pacific and Indian ocean, and the implications for Pakistan. Literature also talks much about Pakistan-China counter-balancing strategies, but not much in comparative manner.

Additionally, the major focus of the scholarly work is also on economic and political dimension of bilateral relations. In the highly globalized world, interaction and interdependence of states are highly inevitable. What a state gets out of the interaction and interdependence is important to see in order to foster better foreign policy strategies for the future. Studying geo-strategic perspective in

foreign policy of Pakistan and India towards the US will let explore areas of convergence and divergence between the two states of South Asia under study. This, in turn will help develop better understanding of the key dynamics in South Asia strategic environment.

Also, mostly scholarly works discuss one country as a geo-strategic factor in foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US, for example Afghanistan, Russia, Iran, Central Asian Republics and China factors. Literature also lacks work on India factor in Pakistan's foreign policy towards the US and Pakistan factor in India's foreign policy towards the US. It is highly imperative to study foreign policy keeping in view geo-strategic and systemic factors in foreign policy of Pakistan and India towards the US to fill this gap. No country has ties with one country at a time, instead, a country deals with or influenced by different countries simultaneously. In fact, studying this way, better picture of the complex system in which states are interacting be portrayed. It is important to see how the foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US are shaped while focusing on multiple geo-strategic factors simultaneously, which is one of the main objectives of the present study.

Additionally, the contemporary developments in this particular area of study are not much covered in the manner this study aims at employing, which is a prominent literature gap. Most of the literature covers historical background of Pakistan and India foreign policies with comparatively lesser focus on recent developments. Though, history is important to be learned as it has blueprint for future developments, however, analyzing contemporary dynamics is much more important as future's foundations lay out on contemporary dynamics. This study aims at filling this gap by identifying and analyzing geo-strategic factors in foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US and as the title of the study mentions, it covers era from 2018 to 2023. Another aspect noted in the existing literature is the scarcity of scholarly works with a theoretical understanding. In this particular domain, some of the works do apply theoretical framework such as Classical Realism, Constructivism and Neo-Classical Realism or even Neo-Realism-the applicable theory of the present study, however, very small weightage has been given. Scholarly works with Neo-Realism framework are particularly very scarce. As elaborated in theoretical framework section, it enhances the understanding of subject under study, giving it a meaning and structure. Hence, the theoretical gap identified in the existing literature will also be filled by the present study.

There are certain thematic gaps identified in the available literature. Some of the themes are not much discussed in the existing literature, which is predominantly descriptive and diagnostic and to lesser extent prescriptive in nature. To fill this gap, the study employs Mix Method approach which combines elements of qualitative as well as quantitative research, deriving insights from primary as

well as secondary sources. The value, authenticity and contribution the present study makes in the existing literature lie in interviews from ambassadors, military heads, officials, serving and retired bureaucrats, IR experts, and professors from Pakistan and India apart from other primary and secondary sources being used for insights. Hence, the study presents a comprehensive comparative analysis of various geo-strategic factors behind foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US during the era from 2018 to 2023, employing Mixed Method Approach and theoretical framework of Neo-Realism.

1.9. Research Methodology

This research is an analytical and comparative case study; hence the Qualitative Research Methodology is used. Qualitative research methodology analyzes and answers questions starting with "how, where, what, when, and why a person or entity would act in a certain way towards a specific matter" (Oun& Bach, 2014). According to one operational definition, qualitative research methodology is "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world." It is a collection of interpretative and material acts that make the world visible. These practices transform the world into a collection of representations, such as interviews, field notes, discussions, photographs, and recordings. At this level, qualitative research adopts an interpretative and naturalistic approach to the world. This means that Qualitative Research Methodology studies things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them(Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

1.9.1.Data Sources and Data Collection

This study used a combination of qualitative research, including main printed publications, notable 'key-informant' interviews, and complementary secondary literature. Interviews are used as a primary source of qualitative research because of their capacity for gathering factual data and views. Interviews provide "a vital resource to get behind official rhetoric and track the determinants of policy decisions which enables the author to uncover insights not disclosed in official public statements." Unstructured, semi-structured, and open-ended interviews with Pakistani and Indian ambassadors, military chiefs, officials, working and retired bureaucrats, IR specialists, and academics is performed to collect primary data on the issue at hand. Interviews were guided by key themes, including Pakistan and India's strategic orientation, global power competition (US–China–Russia), regional security dynamics, Afghanistan and Iran factors, Indo–US collaboration, economic and technological dimensions, global crises, and comparative strategic positioning. The data is analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns relevant to geo-strategic determinants shaping Pakistan and India's foreign policies during 2018–2023. Other data sources for the study include national archives and manuscript material, audio recordings, journals, speeches,

letters, oral histories, organizational documents, autobiographies and memoirs, and printed ephemera. Secondary sources for the research include scholarly books, journal articles, histories, critiques, reviews, commentaries, textbooks and encyclopedias.

1.10. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework gives structural, contextual and conceptual backbone to the study. It is a guide or blueprint for research that is borrowed by a researcher to lay foundation of his/her own research inquiry. It comprises theoretical constructs, concepts, principles, and tenets of a theory (Grant & Osanloo, 2014) and research design, kind of data to be accrued, analytical tools and procedures to be employed, and overall data analysis plan making research more meaningful (Lester, 2005; Akintoye, 2015). Keeping in view the significance and purpose served by the theoretical framework, the 2nd Chapter of the study presents an in-depth analysis of various theories that aim at explaining the complex domain of the foreign policy such as; Constructivism, Liberalism, Realism and its variants such as; Classical Realism, Neo-Classical realism, and Structural Realism. The section also discusses the grounds for non-applicability of certain theories and applicability of Neo-Realism as appropriate theoretical framework for the study.

The purpose of theoretical framework in this study is not to test or verify a theory, its postulate, or hypothesis, going for deductive reasoning, but the prime aim of theory in the study is to analyze the observed patterns and behaviors (of the states) and link them with few set guidelines under a theoretical framework. As inductive reasoning incorporates, this study uses theory for the sake of guidance. It is empirically driven theoretical research which employs both qualitative as well as quantitative evidences while operationalizing the theory. Waltz laid down macropolitical analysis scheme in his structural realist perspective, which emphasizes systemic patterns as determinant of foreign policy rather than individual or domestic factors. The title of the study, “Geo-Strategic Factors in Pakistan and India’s Foreign Policy towards the US: A Comparative Analysis (2018-2023)” expressly demonstrates that the focus is on the geo-strategic factors as determinants of the foreign policy of Pakistan and India towards the US which are essentially the system factors making it a systemic analysis- as Neo-Realist analysis emphasize. There main actors in the study are the states (Pakistan and India) and the US-which is a power in the international system-a source of influence, opportunities and challenges to the aforementioned states. States being the main actors is the postulate of the structural realists. Throughout the history, Pakistan and US relations have been characterized by "strange and bittersweet" dynamics (Banerjee & Commuri, 2014). Similar is the case with US-India relations which has been through ups and downs, although eventually becoming increasingly good (Raseed & Mehmood, 2019). It cannot be explained with simple realism, constructivism, or liberalism. Structure and structural powers having influence are the most

important factors to be considered while studying foreign policy. Neo-realism as a theoretical framework deals with great powers interaction in the system, however, in the study, this theory operationalizes with hedging strategy of middle and small powers with the great powers in the system.

1.11. Organization of the Study

The study consists of seven chapters.

Chapter I of the study titled, 'Introduction' of the study gives brief introduction of the topic, research questions, research objectives, research methodology, detailed literature review and research gap, brief discussion of theoretical framework, scope, limitations and delimitations of the study.

Chapter II of the study titled; 'Theoretical Framework' is dedicated section for the theoretical framework of the study keeping in view the significance of literature review in a study. It discusses different theories explaining the complex nature of foreign policy and then discusses and operationalize the applicable theory.

Chapter III of the study titled; 'Indo-US Strategic Partnership and the China factor' gives in depth analysis of various factors that led to Indo-US strategic partnership particularly the China factor. It also discusses how the Indo-US strategic partnership has influenced Pakistan's foreign policy vis-à-vis the US.

Chapter IV of the study, titled, 'Terrorism as a Geostrategic Factor in Pakistan and India's Foreign Policies towards the US' discusses the Afghanistan factor in the foreign policy of Pakistan and India towards the US. It analyses Pakistan and India's strategic choices amidst US-Afghanistan relations during the era under study giving a brief background.

Chapter V of the study titled; 'Iran as a Geostrategic Factor in Pakistan and India's Foreign Policies towards the US' discusses Iran factor influencing foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US, discussing issues such as Chabahar port and US sanctions on Iran.

Chapter VI of the study is titled, 'Comparative Analysis of Geo-strategic Factors Influencing Foreign Policies of Pakistan and India towards the US.' This section of the dissertation discusses key findings in a comparative manner demonstrating the way the foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US are shaped by various factors influencing the same differently during the era under study.

Chapter VII of the study is titled, 'Conclusion.' This chapter summarizes the findings and includes foreign policy recommendations for Pakistan given the geo-strategic environment of South Asia and the world.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Theory, as Gary Thomas defines in his book, 'Education and Theory', is "a body of knowledge that might or might not be connected with particular analytical models." Theorizing endows upon standards and aims to a study and helps build structure of knowledge necessary to resolve an issue (Thomos, 2007). It's both an analysis tools kit and an explanatory plan required for examination of an object. His definition of theory shows the significance and role of theory in scientific research. Theory performs similar function in international relations study. Using theory is not for the sake of finding a single theory that can explain everything regarding research question at hand. Instead, the primary object is about choosing such a theory that fits best to address specific problem under study. Keeping in view the fact that every theory has its own inherent strengths and weaknesses, it's the context of the research that adds up to the usefulness of the theory. The purpose of theory here is not to test, verify or apply it. Instead, this study uses a theory as guiding principle and methodological roadmap which gives structural, contextual and conceptual backbone to the study.

A theoretical framework is a guide or blueprint for research that is borrowed by a researcher to lay foundation of his/her own research inquiry. It comprises theoretical constructs, concepts, principles, and tenets of a theory (Grant &Osanloo, 2014). It is like a road map or travel plan (Sinclair, 2007; Fulton and Krainovich-Miller, 2010). It is about the aspects of human efforts for the sake of study of events (Brondizio et al, 2014). There should be a connection built between theoretical framework and the research topic along with all of its aspects. It shows a researcher's development of thought through his philosophical, epistemological, methodological and analytical understanding of the study (Grant &Osanloo, 2014). Contextualizing formal theories into a research study as a guide makes it appear scholarly and academic (Ravitch and Carl, 2016). It links to research problem and thus, it also guides research design, kind of data to be accrued, analytical tools and procedures to be employed, and overall data analysis plan making research more meaningful (Lester, 2005; Akintoye, 2015). Imenda (2014) points out that research without a theoretical framework lacks proper direction, and thus access to appropriate literature and scholarly discussion which eventually affects research findings. It persuades the researcher to consider alternative theories challenging his/her perspective to analyze the given research problem, which further broadens the horizons of his/her understanding of the research problem (Eisenhart, 1991). It deepens the essence of the study making it more organized, systemic and accurate (Eisenhart, 1991; Maxwell, 2004) and without this or with an inappropriate theoretical framework, a research scholar may go astray. Thus, a theoretical construct for research should be selected with great concern and care.

Before going to the theoretical debate and as the study revolves around geo-strategic factors, it is important to define the term ‘geo-strategy’ and elaborate its scope in the context first. Frederick L. Schuman was the first to use the term, “geo-strategy” in his 1942 article "Let Us Learn Our Geopolitics." The term is translated from a German term "Wehrgeopolitik" coined by Karl Haushofer- a German geo-strategist. Geo-strategy is defined as a subfield of geopolitics, and a type of foreign policy guided mainly by geographical factors as they influence, inform, restrict or direct political and strategic planning. In a narrower sense, or traditionally, the term ‘geo-strategy’ is confined to ‘military means’ to secure ‘military ends’ in the regional and global matrix, however, in the broader context, and in the contemporary era, it is defined as- all of the means; political, military, economic, ideological etc., chosen or implemented in order to deal with conflicting situation of any nature; political, military, economic, ideological etc. (Cebotari&Budurina-Goreacii, 2021). It is about the exercising power over some critical territories on the earth and ensuring a political presence in and impact on the international system. Thus, the geo- strategic factors mean geographical, strategic, political, and economic factors that influence a country's strategic interests and its foreign policy. Rooted in a country's location, resources, and relationships with other countries, these factors can shape its security concerns and responses, economic interests and priorities, and diplomatic engagements. Some of the examples of geo-strategic factors include; a country's neighboring states and their geo-geographical significance and domestic as well as foreign engagements, its proximity to important trade routes and natural resources, its nuclear or non-nuclear status, or other strategic military assets, its relationship with the regional and global powers, and its membership in international institutions or alliances. Some of the other factors may include; political environment (peace or conflict) of neighboring countries, environmental or public health challenges, and economic challenges and opportunities (Sloan, 2017). Hence, the elaboration as to the definition and scope of the term geo-strategy facilitates searching and applying appropriate theoretical framework for the study.

In the realm of social sciences and particularly in international relations, there is a plethora of theoretical frameworks to explain the complex interplay of various actors and the resultant environment created. Mainly derived from international relations theories, (and other fields of study as Marie, 2011 mentions such as, economics, sociology and psychology) the theories of foreign policy seek to provide a lens through which a research scholar can deeply understand the complex nature of international system, various factors influencing foreign policy and numerous stakeholders involved in foreign policy making process (Garrison et al., 2003). Ole Holsti portrays these theories as ‘colored sunglasses’ that enhance the sightedness of the user making him see the complexities of the states’ interactions on world forum (Carr, 1964). The main schools of thought regarding the foreign policy of a state such as realism, liberalism, constructivism seek to explain the causes of particular international events, role and relevance of individual and human nature,

policies, factors involved, level of analysis, role and relevance of international system (anarchic or hierarchic), role and relevance of non-state actors.

Keeping in view the wide array of various theoretical perspectives in foreign policy, the objectives served by these theories are also numerous. As said, theoretical perspective in any subject provides a tool kit, which helps to analyze the subject at hand in a more scientific, systematic and reliable manner. Hence, the foreign policy theoretical frameworks, firstly, aim at highlighting the nature of the international system in which different states act and interact with each other. Secondly, it highlights the main actors in foreign policy making process and their motives and the options available to these actors to act or refrain from acting in a particular direction. Also, the theoretical perspective critically elaborates the underlying domestic or unit level and international or systemic factors shaping the foreign policy. Last but not the least, this also help the foreign policy experts to fabricate futuristic approaches or prophecies regarding the world order, state behavior, or any international event, although, the prophecies might not be always true due to the complex, dynamic and uncertain nature of international relations and complex factors behind state behaviors.

There are three main approaches to the study of international relations, also known as “Three Doric Pillars of IR” which are Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism (Walt 1998). While realism has further sub-schools, such as; Classical Realism, Neo-Classical Realism, Neo-Realism, the theory applied in the study is Neo-Realism or Structural Realism. This section first explains these three schools of thought and their sub-schools in the realm of foreign policy, chalking out the most appropriate theory for the study. The section also sheds light on postcolonial and critical geopolitical perspective to elaborate the geo-politics of South Asia and role of the Great Powers. Also, the applicable theory and the reasons for its being the most appropriate and suitable approach is underwritten along with the operationalization of the theoretical framework.

2.1. Constructivism and Foreign Policy

Regarded as a social theory of International Relation constructivism rests its foundations on the ideological perception of ideas, norms and beliefs (Onuf, 1989; Kratochwil, 1989; Katzenstein, 1996; and Wendt 1999). It is premised on an argument that the actions of a certain actor towards other objects or actors are contingent upon the meanings they later carry for them (Hurd, 2009). Traced back in early to mid-1980s (Smith, 1995), it rapidly gained strength in 1990s and later till recently as an alternative approach to Realism and Liberalism with a conviction as, the world is what we make of it. It emphasizes that in contrast with Realism and Liberalism, ideational aspects can affect the opinion of the decision makers about other actors and the systemic structure and their policy choices (Smith et al., 2008).

The constructivists believe that the notion of ‘anarchy’ and ‘agent’ to be pivotal in international relations whereby anarchy is socially constructed and not given, and in the words of

Wendt, “anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt, 1992). The nature of the system being anarchic or hierarchic and conflictual or cooperative is not contingent upon anything but the ‘shared culture’ instantiated through ‘discursive social practices’ and “shared understandings” of the ideas, norms, and beliefs (Rynning&Guzzini, 2001). Agents, being the active participants of a society seek assistance from the rules, norms and ideas in defining a given situation chalking out their identity and make certain choices that eventually serve their interests (Onuf, 2013). These interests are based on identities which are in turn ideational or cultural and socially constructed rather than material phenomenon or set exogenously (Wendt, 1999). The constructivists see states as unitary actors with some coherent core identities and interests.

The Constructivist school does not align well with the study (Fiaz, 2013; Rahim & Ali, 2020). If the theme of ‘identity’ being ‘cultural and ideational’ is embraced, both India and Pakistan should have lesser cooperation with the US (and China) as there are little commonalities among the ‘cultural and ideational’ identities of the aforementioned countries (Kadir, 2019). Pakistan has an Islamic ideology, while the US is the proponent of the Western ideology, but throughout the history, there have been eras of staunch cooperation between the two, regardless of these ideational differences. While we can explain Indo-Pak rivalry, to an extent with constructivist approach, (Fiaz, 2013; Rahim & Ali, 2020), the same cannot explain the Indo-US partnership as India and US also have fewer commonalities between the two. For example, India repeatedly claims to be the world’s largest democracy- a political culture supported by the West, particularly the US). This single idea can never be decisive of India’s foreign policy towards the West, instead, it is one of the tool India is using to strengthen its ties with the US (Arrey, 2023). There is a China factor which also explain the India-US cooperation. The cursory review of the literature on foreign policy of Pakistan and India towards the US also reveals that the exogenous factors- the system, have had a more dominant influence on their respective behaviors than that of their ideologies, perceptions, identities, or culture (Fiaz, 2013).

The literature review also identifies Pakistan’s core issue as being security oriented making exogenous power politics and structure a significant source of foreign policy ideas often without the interference of its ideological foundations. Pakistan, in particular, has responded to global power structure changes by aligning or alienating vis-à-vis the dominant powers regardless of whether or not it has benefited Pakistan or not. Similarly, India has actively engaged in cooperation with the US on economic, strategic, technological fronts. It is the US systemic power and potential that is attracting India and influencing its pro-US foreign policies. Ideational factors here have no solid ground. China, being a significant structural power in the global political matrix, is also an important geo-strategic factor behind the foreign policies Pakistan and India. China and India rivalry has been acting as a ‘push factor’ bringing US and India closer. The tilt of Pakistan towards China also not based on their ‘cultural or ideational identities’, but to balance

Indo-US partnership. This balancing and bandwagon act of these states cannot be appropriately explained with the constructivist lens. Thus, the constructivists' claim that 'the identities and interests of the states being unitary actors are coherent' may also be not true always (Chacko, 2018).

Moreover, constructivism, at times can be overly deterministic ignoring the role of material factors in shaping foreign policy (Ültanır, 2011). As the study particularly focuses on geo-strategic factor in foreign policy of Pakistan and India toward the US, which are often analyzed through certain material realities such as geography, military capabilities and material resources, constructivism, dealing with the 'ideational factors' does not offer appropriate and sufficient theoretical framework.

2.2. Liberalism and Foreign Policy

Liberalism adds to our understanding of foreign policy by emphasizing the direct influence that social forces (markets, capitalism), political institutions (democracy, representation), and individuals and the ideas and ideals they uphold (freedom, human rights, and democracy) can have on international relations (Smith, 11). Liberalism supports rule-based system where states with sovereign equality rights, cooperate for mutual benefit. States are not the sole primary actors but there is a wide array of stakeholders (Mowle, 2003). It sees international system as inherently cooperative where states work together for mutual goals. Liberalism in foreign policy, looks into how institutions function and mitigate states' sometimes violent power. It analyzes issues other than self-interest in international affairs. Early scholars such as Adam Smith, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant advocated for good governance as a way to reduce violence in international politics. Liberalists see the institutions, in the international system, as very important actors performing different functions. They act as an adhesive force bringing and keeping states together. The League of Nations and the United Nations are examples of how countries are working together as rational actors under liberal ideology to promote peace and prevent conflict.

As Joseph Nye and Robert O. Keohane proposed in *Power and Interdependence* (2010), Liberalism developed into Liberal institutionalism or neoliberalism. Later, Keohane developed on this idea in 1984 in *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (2007). He maintained that the absence of a major hegemonic power in the world makes multilateral cooperation feasible. Realists point out that liberals are idealistic about state goals and that their argument—that all countries would be good states in a perfect world—is hollow. (Mearsheimer 2001). Liberalists assume that states can possibly create a stable system by overcoming constraints and restraining resort to use of power. This eventually ensures peace. It also believes that trade and exchange between the states, free flow of goods and services can foster cooperation and peace while reducing the likelihood of conflict. Economic integration and international economic regimes are they key aspects of liberalism which help in establishing stable

global order. For example, the post-World War II Bretton Woods system which primarily aimed at ensuring the same (Keohane & Nye, 2001). Although, it promotes both bilateralism and multilateralism, however, they emphasize more on multilateralism as it helps more in attaining collective goals and ensure global interdependence (Knio, 2022).

Another assumption is that domestic democratic setting also helps in establishing and maintain peace in the global community, a principle encapsulated in a theory known as, “Democratic Peace Theory.” This theory states that democracies do not go for war with each other. It treats distribution of interests and not power as an important systemic element (Mearsheimer, 2001) Moreover, there is an emphasis on diplomatic and economic tools, such as economic incentives and sanctions, as important tools for bringing reproachment amongst the states. It is important to see how the liberals perceive, portray and act towards an external situation. Liberals claim that in a given situation states take positions “based on their own welfare not that of others” and are “indifferent to the gains achieved by others”, i.e., without explicit concern for any differential effect on other states (Keohane, 1984; Grieco, 1988). Moreover, when it comes to whether a state would have primary concern with its own interest or collective norms and interests, the liberalists would strive for deriving longer-term interests for collective norms of an international community, often entrenched in formal institutions such as UN. Thus, collective security system where peaceful resolution of disputes is a community norm, is one of the important tenets of liberalist school of thought (Betts 1992). Liberalists take alliances and institutions as a goal of the state not as a tool of the state as the realists believe (Mearsheimer, 1995). States tend to maintain the institution, which, in turn, encourage them to work with a multilateral approach even where interests do not align with the states’ ideal policy choices (Stein, 1993).

The existing literature on the study reveals the complex interplay of several geo-strategic factors that shape the foreign policy of India and Pakistan towards the US. Pakistan as a vehicle state has always and evil to secure external security linkages in order to balance India's regional assertion. In contrast, India's foreign policy has been to maintain and grow its regional influence and establish itself as a key strategic partner of US vis-à-vis China-its regional rival. Indo-US growing partnership is leading Pakistan to focus on its defense and deterrence capabilities and searching for reliable alliances to counter India’s threat. Moreover, the long-standing unresolved issues between these two nuclear armed neighbors of South Asia, US-led War on terrorism and its strategic designs to contain China’s growing influence in particularly the Indi-Pacific region, have also enhance the Geo strategy complexities of the region (Rais, 1991). Thus, this situation is more about regional power politics, balancing and counter balancing which cannot be analyzed by liberalism lens, and can better be explained with realist school of thought.

Additionally, as said, states, according to the liberalists, are not the primary and unitary

actors, and there are many other actors involved, however, in the study, focusing geo-strategic factors in foreign policy of Pakistan and India towards the US, gives the states central position in foreign policy making and there is least and limited role of international institutions in the process. International institutionalism here has very weak standing and relevance. Security and quest for regional dominance seems to be the primary concern of the states, Pakistan and India respectively, which cannot be elaborated with this school of thought. Moreover, in case of Pakistan and in face of given geo-strategic environment, Pakistan's military has a dominant role in foreign policy making as against the democratic or civilian control over foreign policy decision making which is against the soul and spirit of liberalism (Hussain, 2012; Shafqat, 2019).

The international system does not seem to be inherently cooperative as the literature review and historical background demonstrate. Also, bilateralism and not multilateralism is in practiced, which shows, that selective and not collective prosperity is the goal, the fact that the liberalists do not embrace. This is demonstrated in US endeavors to treat India preferentially on different international forums such as US endeavors to help India become permanent member of UN security council and Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) This is destabilizing South Asian strategic environment and Pakistan more and more insecure thus striving for strategic balance by tilting toward China (Hussain & Sargana, 2018). The liberalism norm that states are inherently cooperative is not true in case of the study. Neither states appear to be cooperative always nor integrative, and their own interests prevails over collective interests. Thus, liberalism is not the suitable theoretical framework for the study and it is highly imperative to explore Realist perspective to analyze this trio of the states, India, Pakistan and the US under study.

2.3. Postcolonial and Critical Geopolitical Perspective

Postcolonialism challenges the dominance of major state actors and their perspectives on the globe. It questions common assumptions about state behavior and motivations. It raises issues about the origins of a hierarchical international order and undermines mainstream IR's assumptions about power dynamics (Sajed, 2022). Pakistan and India's foreign policy towards the US is shaped by historical colonial legacies, identity politics, and discursive constructs, as revealed by postcolonial and critical geopolitical perspectives. As former British colonies, both Pakistan and India interact with Western powers through intricate processes of strategic assertion, reliance, and resistance, as highlighted by postcolonial theory. By examining how institutions, media, and political elites frame the US as a danger, hegemon, or strategic ally, critical geopolitics provides depth by placing foreign policy choices within larger geopolitical narratives. These viewpoints,

however, are not very helpful in understanding material and strategic elements that are essential to geostrategic analysis, such as economic interests, military power, or security alliances. Postcolonial theory overemphasizes much on historical determinism while neglecting contemporary shifts in power politics. Moreover, critical geopolitics, which emphasizes rhetoric, ignore practical policy choices motivated by state interests and realpolitik that go beyond narrative building.

2.4. Realism and Foreign Policy

Realism, throughout the history, has been predominantly about advising, analyzing, and critiquing foreign policy. Realist perspective about foreign policy spans over 2500 years, viewed as 'power struggle among rival groups as a necessary evil for human existence' (Gilpin, 1996). Despite challenges posed by the mainstream theories of international relations such as Liberalism, Constructivism, and Critical theories, Realism still remains relevant, dominant and prominent theory and thus, it has a broad base supported by a number of political thinkers, historians and policy makers. It has also a wide range of theoretical variants, such as neo-realism and neo-classical realism, which are further subdivided, and that are developed over time to time to address changing global environment. Mainstream thinkers in this school include, Thucydides, Thomas Hobbes, Niccoló Machiavelli, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, E. H. Carr, George F. Kennan, Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz, Robert Gilpin, Samuel Huntington, John Mearsheimer and more (Wivel, 2017).

Realist give power politics a central position in foreign policy. In the words of Harold Lasswell, (1950) politics is about a struggle on who gets what when and how, and this power struggle is among various rival groups is central, fundamental and endemic characteristic of human life (Gilpin, 1996). However, conditions of power politics in domestic setting is quite different from that of international level owing to absence of legitimate monopoly over use of force or violence. This, in turn, is due to anarchy- a core assumption of Realist school of thought (Grieco, 1990). States, in such situation, do not rely on anyone but themselves for their survival (Mearsheimer, 2014, p. 33). While state itself is responsible for its survival and security, it focusses on its relative power vis-à-vis other states. Such a state, being uncertain of the intentions of the other states, design its foreign policy not on some 'ideational factors'-which could put state survival on risk, and rather it considers power calculations as determining factor of its foreign policy. This makes realism a top-down approach to foreign policy (Wivel, 2017).

In order to explain realist foreign policy, it is imperative to understand international conditions first and then the balance of power, down the explanatory ladder, which would add clarity as well as complexity in analyzing realist foreign policy. (Mouritzen&Wivel, 2012). As

against traditional foreign policy analysis which considers (first and more) the state level and human decision making, (as the study of public policy is) (Carlsnaes, 2002), it gives prime importance to global structure as a dominant determinant of foreign policy (Rynning&Guzzini, 2001; Hudson, 2008). However, Graham Allison's analysis of Cuban missile crises challenges the notion of the classical realists that external threats determine the foreign policy by pointing out how governmental politics and organizational processes are relevant (Allison, 1969). There are some intrinsic contradictions in the realist view of foreign policy. It sees foreign policy important for the state survival and security believing that bad decisions could lead to bad consequences while on the other hand they believe that the scope of action is narrow due to power struggle and nature of international politics (Mearshemer, 2014). Given such situation, state tend to protect its interest often through reckless means instead of some ideologically set standards (Wight, 1960).

Intentions may not always correspond to the outcomes when the world is anarchic-full of misconceptions, uncertainty and power abuses (Spirtas, 1996). Foreign policy is a complex process and thus, it needs to consider external environment, power distribution and anarchic structure as in case of neo-realism as well as acknowledge that the policy makers have to deal with issues of limited information, resources and moral choices while making foreign policy as expatiated by the classical realist and neo-classical realists. To sum up, there are certain recurrent themes of this empirical rather than a normative paradigm of realism that are, anarchy, power politics, state interest, security dilemma, states being the main actors, pessimist worldview, and evil human nature (Morgenthau, 1956; Buzan, 1997). However, keeping in view the aforementioned different aspects of realism, it is further divided into Classical Realism, Neo-Realism/Structural Realism and Neo-Classical Realism which embrace, incorporate and emphasize these postulates to varying degrees along with some other points.

2.4.1. Classical Realism and Foreign Policy

Classical realism dates back to 5th century BCE, primarily in the work of Thucydides, "History of the Peloponnesian War", and also found in the other Greek, Roman, Indian, and Chinese works. The Melain Dialogue by Thucydides shows the soul and spirit of classical realism, which says, decisions are made in human decisions only when there are two powers of different sizes, the weaker side is obliged to surrender what the stronger wants to get (Woodruff, 2014). Human, according to Thucydides are egoistic, self-centered, selfish and power hungry. Moreover, the world is anarchic in which principles of morality and ethics remain irrelevant in front of power (Woodruff, 2014). Kautilya's work Artgashastra is also one of the best illustrations of classical realism which maintains that the potential conqueror always tends to enhance its power even at the cost of the others (Griffits and Callaghan 2008). Nicholo Machiavelli's work, "The Prince" (1532) and Thomas Hobbes' work, "The Leviathan" (1651) also emphasize the fundamental points of this theory, that human tend to defend their ego and state-centered ambitions and ensure their

hegemony in the essentially anarchic world (where law of jungle applies) by whatever means they can adopt regardless of the moral norms (Sleat, 2016; Griffiths et al., 2016). Machiavelli particularly emphasizes that ‘everything is justified by the reason of state’ which means for the sake of state interest as a whole, even war is legal and permissible (Griffiths et al., 2016). This theory is true not only for the domestic level but also for international level.

Estrella (2012), further differentiates between two kinds of classical realism as given in Brian Orend Standard Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Orend, 2016) as Descriptive Realism and Prescriptive Realism. According to her, Descriptive realism is one which says states cannot (due to competition) act according to moral and ethical standards. While, in case of Prescriptive Realism, she says, states ought to act amorally and unethically in the world forum (otherwise its survival would be at stake) (Estrella, 2012). Thus, thus, classical realism, in short sees human nature most relevant in taking foreign policy decisions, and that human nature is evil, egoistic, immoral, insecure, lustful, ambitious, and power-centric and considers international system as anarchic (Morgenthau, 1946).

This study focuses on exploring geo-strategic factors in foreign policy of Pakistan and India towards the US, which incorporates the influence of global powers dynamics on foreign policy, and not human nature as expatriated by classical realism. Human nature, in this study is not much relevant. In the same line, this theory emphasizes the role of leaders in foreign policy making, however, the title suggests that exogenous factor, ‘geo-strategic factors’ are relevant and significant. Moreover, the theory casts less focus on the complex global structure and structural forces that have a huge say in foreign policies of Pakistan and India. While, this theory focuses much on power, primarily on military power, non-military power (soft power) is ignored, which is still relevant in the study (Brown, 2009). Also, this theory fails to incorporate account for socio-economic and strategic interdependence (integration) of states. Also, as this theory gives due importance to leadership role, this theory becomes less relevant for the study, as it focuses geo-strategic factors in foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US. As this theory may not incorporate regional and historical contexts adequately, this study requires understanding complex regional as well as global power dynamics as well as historical context of India-US and Pakistan-US ties. Thus, this theoretical framework fails to analyze the complex interplay of geo-strategic factors shaping foreign policy of the states under study.

2.4.2. Neo-Classical Realism in Foreign Policy

The scope of international relations is far wider than just dealing with the issues of war or peace (Kennedy, 1991). Neo-classical realism helps us in understanding the nature of state’s behavior in the complex international system employing a hybrid framework. This theoretical framework integrates both intrinsic as well as extrinsic factors while explaining foreign policy behavior of a state (Rose, 1968). Proponents of this school of thought claim that a state’s foreign

policy objectives are primarily determined by its position within the global matrix and is significantly influenced by its relative material power potential (Rose, 1968). However, the influence of these power capabilities on foreign policies manifests intricately and indirectly, making other factors at state (domestic) level also relevant and important. The reason they are called realist is because the interests and objectives of a state are primarily derived out of the international system and its material power capabilities (Rose, 1998). Thus, in order to study foreign policy with a neo-classical realist lens, one should give due attention to analytical strengths put forth by Waltz or Gilpin in Neo-Realism approach, as well as analytical power of unit level studies by Morgenthau, Kissinger or Wolfers under classical realism (Taliaferro, 2006). However, the incorporation of domestic level factors has made the neo-classical realist foreign policy analysis further complicated as different neo-classical realists recognize or embrace different domestic variables while ignore others.

There are three basic tenets of this theory in the light of above discussion. Firstly, this framework embraces importance and relevance of both, domestic as well as systemic factors in foreign policy of a state (Firoozabadi, 2016). It considers the systematic and structural incentives to be of indeterminant nature and believe that anarchy is a permissive condition (Walt, 2002). As Kitchen (2010) points out that the international system provides “states with information about the costs and benefits of particular courses of action, but how that information is processed and weighed depends on the way states understand the world, their preferences, their ideas and their ethics.” Thus, in line with the neo-realism claims, as will be elaborated in the next section, it incorporates impact of structural and systemic pressures, but not totally decisive or causal factors (Ripsman et al., 2016). It disagrees with the idea of neo-realists which says systemic pressure would promptly affect the unit behavior, instead this behavior, according to neo-classical realists, depend on relative power and domestic factors-perceptions and misperceptions of states and not the existing realities, which compel states to indulge in arms race (Schweller, 2003). There is proper distinction about the purpose of this militarization, whether it is for some offensive purpose or defensive. Here, perceptions of leaders become significantly relevant (Baylis& Smith, 2001).

Secondly, this framework takes into account the broader concept of "relative power" including strategic, economic, and political interests therein, as against narrow approach to power as military power only. Thus, in this context, states tend to maximize power (all types as mentioned) not just military power, - their key interest and in foreign policy, interests are the key motivators (Hermann, 1980).

Thirdly, the motivators behind state interests are complex and to an extent unpredictable. There are many factors such as leadership, societal composition and political environment etc. are different variables acting as domestic agent in the process. Moreover, systemic forces and power structure also compel actors to act in a particular way which is an important and central theme of

Neo-Realism, according to which states cannot perform independently as compared to the international power structure. Neo-Classical Realism gives a holistic and inclusive approach towards foreign policy, incorporating domestic as well as systemic forces in the foreign policy behavior and it believes that without considering all factors can lead to ineffective and unjust policies.

Keeping in view the above discussion about how Neo-Classical Realists identify and recognize various factors behind foreign policy of a state, there are certain issues that this sub-school fails to address in this study. Fort of all, this type of foreign policy analysis could lead to 'identity dilemma' making it complicated and at times contradictory while considering various factors at a time. Domestic and individual level factors outweigh effects of material power, which in this type of foreign policy study is quite relevant. However, Different factors may have varying effects, relevance and importance which further varies from case to case of foreign policies (Tang, 2009). This study is focused on geo-strategic factors in foreign policy of Pakistan and India towards the US, it requires considering the global structure and their core strategic interactions within that structure. Also, considering domestic factors in the study would deviate it from the main course which emphasizes taking into account the external 'geo-strategic' factors as determinants of foreign policy.

Moreover, this approach is predominantly state-centric in nature, focusing on how a state perceives and processes external information, threats and information, whereby state level factors are also considered relevant, dominant and decisive while this study requires focusing more on the international structure and influences. Although, the international structure and system is an important factor but ultimately, there is an overemphasis on domestic factors such as leadership role, political environment, cultural or social pressures etc., which ultimately shape foreign policy. The literature review shows that there are many global structural dynamics that are significantly shaping India and Pakistan foreign policy towards the US, where domestic and state level factors are not relevant. Thus, this study requires such a theoretical framework which take into account international structure, role of major powers in shaping world order and the influence it casts on other states compelling them shape their foreign policies in a particular way. For this purpose, it is highly imperative to explore the theoretical perspective of Neo-Realism or Structural Realism and see how it helps to analyze the complex interplay of geo-strategic factors shaping foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US.

2.4.3. Neo-realism or Structural Realism in Foreign Policy: The Applicable Theory

2.4.3.1. Conceptualization of Neo-Realism/Structural Realism

Neo-Realism/Structural Realism came as a realist sub-school to explain international relations with the work of Kenneth Waltz, "Theory of International Relations" in 1979. Drawing from economics, (Adam Smith's microeconomic model) he presented a structural model of

international relations helping understand the complexity of reality. In his words, “Reasoning by analogy is helpful where one can move from a domain for which theory is well developed to one where it is not. Reasoning by analogy is permissible where different domains are structurally similar” (Waltz, 1979). International structure, self-help, and anarchy are the main concepts that Waltz directly taken and converted from Adam Smith concept of ‘economic man’-a single minded profit maximizer. However, in Waltz theory, that profit maximizer is a state (basic unit of analysis) and not an individual. His main focus is on the processes occurring at international level that determine state actions while those at domestic and national level are omitted (Waltz, 1979). Although, this was criticized a lot but the fact is that he intentionally did so (omitting domestic/national level factors) as to him it is highly imperative to isolate, scrutinize and comprehend (international) reality, which would be difficult to approach or comprehend other ways as against Neo-classical realists who take into account domestic as well as international factors to analyze foreign policy (Waltz, 1979). This way, he actually led the foundation of macropolitical analysis of states’ interactions which is quite indispensable element of international relations even today (Wivel, 2017).

As said, states are the basic units of analysis and they strive for their own interests and survival. Moreover, in doing so, they believe themselves to be the most reliable entities (Waltz, 1979). Another central concept of this school is ‘anarchy’ as the ordering principle which assures ‘structural coherency.’ Here anarchy refers to lack of central authority that coordinates or governs the realm of international relations. In terms of foreign policy Beach says, “the core argument of structural realist theories is that the anarchical and conflictual international system pushes states to adopt survival as their most basic foreign policy goal” (Beach, 2012). Waltz has also included non-state actors in his strand of realism, and taken them simply as agents which tend to serve the objectives of their principles-the states (Waltz, 1979).

States being basic units of analysis, show profound differentiation in terms of their capabilities (economic, strategic, territorial size or more). However, these states are ‘functionally undifferentiated’ which means that these states act in a similar manner regardless of their size and wealth, thus duplicating each other’s’ activities on the international platform and show a uniform way of behavior in relation with each other. These states being ‘functionally undifferentiated’ make international system anarchic as against hierarchic where states are specialized and differentiated on the basis of their capabilities, size, or wealth. Uneven distribution of capabilities amongst states may lead to structural alterations. Thus, the resultant relation between the states and structure is reciprocal, where states may influence the structure and the structure may also influence states’ behavior- the distinguishing feature of structural realism) (Wivel, 2017). The structural conditions may offer opportunities or constraint to the states, may lead to practice deterrence or compellence, or go for competition or conflict. Having said that the structure

changes with the changes in capabilities of the states, Waltz set forth three level of analysis to analyze these changes; the individual level of analysis, the state level of analysis (aka state structure) and the international level (aka state system) (Özçelik, 2018). He defined first two levels as 'units' and third as 'structure' and employed system level of analysis at the expense of unit level of analysis, calling those scholars as 'reductionists' who emphasize unit level of analysis (Özçelik, 2018). According to Waltz, a good theory of international relations should be systemic as states' mutual relationship (the structure) strongly affect the behavior of the governments with one another (Waltz, 2010). Moreover, Waltz averred, theories deal in repetitions and regularities and cannot explain unexpected or accidental events (Waltz, 1990).

Keeping in view the core argument of structural realist theories, as Beach notes that "the anarchical and conflictual international system pushes states to adopt survival as their most basic foreign policy goal" (Beach, 2012) there are further two contrasting arguments; defensive realism and offensive realism, to demonstrate how states translate that 'goal' into foreign policy behavior. For defensive realists, the foreign policy behavior of a state is 'defensive positionalist' which means that a state tends to preserve its position within the international system and in doing renounce the chance of expansion. Expansionism is considered counterproductive to state survival because in doing so other states will respond by making alliances against the expansionist state (Grieco, 1990). In this process, its own security and survival within the international matrix will be undermined. Thus, defensive realist believe that balancing power is the safest option a state opts for its survival in the anarchic world as against expansionism (Waltz, 1979). International system being anarchic and lack of conditions or clear tendency for balancing are debatable (May et al., 2010; Little, 2007; Schroeder, 1994; Watson, 1992; Schweller, 1998). Moreover, some believe this balancing act to be 'soft' i.e., via institutional and diplomatic means and not necessarily military means (Paul, 2005; Pape, 2005; He, 2015; Saltzman, 2012). Security dilemma is a recurrent concept in defensive realism, and given this situation, balancing is a state's way to ameliorate its security and wars are unintended consequence of states' actions tending to secure their survival in the anarchic world (Glaser, 1997; Jervis, 1978). Thus, the typical (yet controversial) foreign policy advice postulated by defensive structuralism is 'controlled spread of nuclear weapons' thus making balancing more credible posing that the costs of war would be potentially unbearable. This way the likelihood of war is reduced (Waltz, 1981).

In contrast to the defensive realism, offensive realism maintains that while keeping the postulates of international anarchy and self-help in view, there are strong incentives for expansion. States apprehend the intentions of the other states and the best way they consider for self-help and survival is to be itself 'the most powerful state' in the system (Mearsheimer, 2014). Thus, as in case of defensive realism- the states being 'positionists', in case of offensive realism states are 'revisionists.' They tend to maximize their capabilities so that they could withstand any attack by

other states. States with offensive capabilities and intentions to expand, they do not feel secure until they achieve a hegemonic position within the anarchic system. They, instead of achieving 'balance of power' as is the case in defensive realism, tend to create 'imbalance of power' in their own favor (Layne, 1998), which can be translated to be political hegemon in the region, where that great powers geographically locate (as they can't afford wars on other continents). However, states employ various tools such as bait and bleed strategy (keeping the rival in a costly protracted conflict), blood-letting, balancing and buck-passing, blackmailing (threatening rival to make heavy concessions), in order to keep rivals in check (Toft, 2005; Mearsheimer, 2014).

2.4.3.2. Operationalization of the Theoretical Framework in the Study

The purpose of theoretical framework in this study is not to test or verify a theory, its postulate, or hypothesis, going for deductive reasoning, but the prime aim of theory in the study is to analyze the observed patterns and behaviors (of the states) and link them with few set guidelines under a theoretical framework. As inductive reasoning incorporates, this study uses theory for the sake of guidance. It is empirically driven theoretical research which employs both qualitative as well as quantitative evidences while operationalizing the theory. Waltz laid down macropolitical analysis scheme in his structural realist perspective, which emphasizes systemic patterns as determinant of foreign policy rather than individual or domestic factors. The title of the study, "Geo-Strategic Factors in Pakistan and India's Foreign Policy towards the US: A Comparative Analysis (2018-2023)" expressly demonstrates that the focus is on the geo-strategic factors as determinants of the foreign policy of Pakistan and India towards the US which are essentially the system factors making it a systemic analysis- as Neo-Realist analysis emphasize. There main actors in the study are the states (Pakistan and India) and the US-which is a power in the international system-a source of influence, opportunities and challenges to the aforementioned states. States being the main actors is the postulate of the structural realists. Throughout the history, Pakistan and US relations have been characterized by "strange and bittersweet" dynamics (Banerjee & Commuri, 2014). Similar is the case with US-India relations which has been through ups and downs, although eventually becoming increasingly good (Raseed & Mehmood, 2019). It cannot be explained with simple realism, constructivism, or liberalism. Structure and structural powers having influence are the most important factors to be considered while studying foreign policy.

Neo-realism as a theoretical framework deals with great powers interaction in the system, however, in the study, this theory operationalizes with hedging strategy of middle and small powers with the great powers in the system. While seeking his insights on theoretical framework an interview with Saeed Uzzaman, he puts light the subject as follows;

“Neo-realism, or structural realism, focuses on the international system's structure,

emphasizing the distribution of capabilities and the anarchic nature of the system. It posits that states safeguard their interests through balancing. While neo-realism is useful for analyzing great powers' foreign policies, it may not fully capture the dynamics of middle or small powers like India and Pakistan. In the case of India and Pakistan, hedging is a more appropriate framework. Both countries balance their relations with major powers to safeguard their interests. While neo-realism provides insights into the structural constraints and opportunities, incorporating the concept of hedging into your theoretical framework would better explain the foreign policy choices of India and Pakistan” (Uzzaman, 2024).

Firstly, the geo-strategic environment of South Asia, with China as a rising regional power, poses a great challenge to India, which in turn, in order to balance rising China, tilts significantly, towards the US, a rival and competitor of China in the global structure (Mahapatra, 2011). This India-US nexus has not been developed in the era under study, and has roots in the history, however, the different fronts of interaction and cooperation are continuing in the era under study, which are further being complicating with the advancing time (Jabeen&Alvi, 2023). The opportunities India is endeavoring to grab from the systemic great power-US, will be discussed later in this section. This cooperation between India and US has implications for Pakistan-adding to its security dilemma vis-à-vis India-US nexus. The regional power- the rising China, which comes to be the best option for Pakistan to balance its regional position by aligning with China (Hussain, 2023). However, the point that is emphasized here is that ‘anarchic international system’ with influential powers (however, no central power) is the single most important factor in the foreign policy of a state. The other point of structural realism emphasized here is that states tend to balance power and for this purpose they often opt for aligning themselves with the structural powers keeping in view their interests (survival and power maximization) in the given self-help environment.

Moreover, Afghanistan is also an important systemic geo-strategic factor in Pakistan’s foreign policy towards the US in particular. Both these states have been actively engaged in collective action in bringing peace in Afghanistan post 9/11. However, the era under study i.e., 2018-2023 is a period with a rift in US-Pakistan relations particularly when it comes to Pakistan’s role in war on terror (Khan, 2017). The challenges and opportunities the war on terror brought to Pakistan have significantly influenced Pakistan foreign policy towards the US. As long as challenges are concerned, there have been a lot of challenges ranging from lives loss to economic losses which Pakistan incurred within its territory (Shamshad et al., 2020). An important challenge was yet US accusing Pakistan of providing safe heavens to the terrorists and not doing anything to combat terrorism. Instead, US criticized Pakistan for giving it merely, ‘lies and deceits’ (Trump

tweet 2018) and announced the cancellation of \$300 million disbursement to Pakistan (Khan, 2018). US also moved Pakistan name to Grey List of FATF to pressurize it to take action against terrorist funding (Afzal, 2020). This was a time with thawed relationship between the two states. Though, the relations improved later during Trump-Imran era, however, after US withdrawal from Afghanistan, US distanced itself from Pakistan and thus, later Pakistan didn't attend US's 'Summit for Democracy' (The Express Tribune, 2021). US Pakistan relations further deteriorated with Imran Khan visit of Russia as the later invaded Ukraine and Imran Khan accusing US of its involvement in ousting his government (Butt & Ajaz, 2024). The systemic power influences on foreign policy of Pakistan, and its quest for an independent foreign policy is evident from Imran Khan's saying, "Are we your slaves? What do you think of us? That we are your slaves and that we will do whatever you ask of us? We are friends of Russia, and we are also friends of the United States. We are friends of China and Europe. We are not part of any alliance" (Grim & Hussain, 2023). However, apart from Afghanistan, there are other factors such as Russia that is quite relevant systemic power influencing Pakistan's foreign policy towards the US. The debate from here goes to elaborating systemic factors that won't let Pakistan have an independent (of the US) foreign policy.

Pakistan and India bear historical tensions between them, these tensions and the resultant threat perceptions of these states have led them towards military modernization, arms race and nuclear deterrence with their distinct nuclear doctrines. Militarily, India holds an advantage over Pakistan (Pande, 2021). Particularly, India's military spending in the year 2023, according to Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, is about \$83.6 billion in the year 2023, making it 4th largest spender globally, while Pakistan stands at 24th position with \$8.5 billion in the same year (SIPRI, 2014). This asymmetry is further aggravated by US-India strategic partnership, (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), US-India 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, civil Deal, US endeavors for India's NSG membership and permanent membership of UNSC) (Rashid et al., 2023). Moreover, in the realm of economy, there is also a huge gap between these two states, with India having GDP of \$3,737.00B in the years 2023 (Forbes India, 2024) standing amidst top 5 largest GDPs of the world while that of Pakistan is \$338.24 billion in the same year making it position quite low at 80 in the world GDP Index by IMF. With this, India has greater and stronger sphere of its international diplomatic ties and it is part of several multilateral economic alliances (Horimoto, 2017) such as, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation), QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), India-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), and Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), which exclude Pakistan. Keeping all this in view, it is evident that there is difference of capabilities. This

distribution of capabilities makes the international system more anarchic and leads to different foreign policies by Pakistan and India, particularly towards the US. However, there is functional similarities (for example, balancing and alliances making) in the state actions given the differential capabilities which is also a fundamental tenet of structural realism. In the light of above discussion, it is derived that Structural Realism assists in a possibly best way to elaborate the complex system influences on the foreign policies of Pakistan and India towards the US during the era under study (2018-2023).

Chapter 3

INDO-US STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP: THE CHINA FACTOR

3.1. Introduction

The words of the former US Secretary of the State, John Kerry underscore the importance of India in the policy making circles of the US. In a press conference, he stated that “India is not just a rising power; it has risen. And the US-India relationship is at the heart of our vision for the Indo-Pacific region and beyond” (Akhtar & Alan, 2023). On the other side, Indian policy makers have also highlighted the significance of the US-India partnership. The India Prime Minister is reported to have said that “the convergence of our values and interests has led to a growing bilateral partnership, which is one of the most defining partnerships of our time.” This increasing cooperation between the two states is a recent phenomenon in foreign policy domain. From 1947 to the early 1990s, the relations between the US and India had remained distraught, discordant and at times hostile. This period is marked by the Cold War between the US and the United Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Thus, the world was divided into two blocs: the US led capitalist bloc, and the USSR led communist bloc. However, during this period, India was committed to non-alignment, thereby avoiding siding with either bloc. Nevertheless, India and the USSR developed close diplomatic and defense ties despite India’s non-alignment mantra. As a result, Indo-US relations were marked by mutual distrust. This trend continued till the early 1990s, when the USSR was dismembered in 1991. As a result of the disintegration of the USSR, India lost its major strategic partner in Asia. This led towards a significant strategic and diplomatic change in India’s policy making circles. Resultantly, since 1990s India has emerged as a close US partner in Asia (Malhotra, 1995). Their increasing cooperation has resulted in multiple agreements, partnerships and alliances in the fields of diplomacy, defense, counter-terrorism, technology and climate change.

This cooperation between the US and India has been brought about by a large number of strategic, diplomatic and foreign policy factors. Amongst them, the chief factor is the rising dragon of China in the Asia-Pacific region. Both the US and India want to counter the increasing influence of China in the region. Therefore, they have launched a jointly assisted containment policy. Both the states have their respective interests in countering the rise of China (Farooq et al., 2018). On the one hand, the US is an established power at global level that enjoys unparalleled hegemony over international relations. It fears that the China’s rise to the status of global power will threaten its global interests and status. Realist paradigm in international relations highlights that when an established power faces a rising one, conflict becomes inevitable. This conflict becomes severe as both the US and China have divergent ideological worldviews. The US and its allies are oriented toward capitalist model of development, whereas China is oriented towards

communist model of development. Both the ideologies are diametrically opposite to each other. Therefore, the rise of China has been perceived by the US as a direct threat to its interests at global level. Therefore, the Sino-US rivalry is an unavoidable feature of the 21st century. Thus, to counter China, the US needs partners in Asia-Pacific region. India, therefore, emerges as a strategically important ally of the US against China in the region (Hu & Meng, 2020).

On the other hand, India has always dreamt of becoming a regional hegemon, particularly the region of South Asia. This dream has been shattered by the rise of India's neighbor, China. China with its military might, economic growth and technological advancement has emerged as the great power on the international stage. As a result, Indian march towards becoming a regional hegemon has been stymied, blocked and countered. This serves as a significant reason for Indian adversary against China. Thus, sharing a common threat of China, India and the US have been drawn to each other, resulting in various strategic agreements, economic partnerships and technology alliances (Sultan, 2025; Abbas, 2024). In this scenario, China has also partnered with regional states. It has developed strong ties with Pakistan. The Indo-US strategic cooperation is detrimental to both countries: China and Pakistan. Pakistan, as an economically weak country, has more to suffer from, as India and Pakistan also share a distraught past marked by various wars, diplomatic and strategic confrontations and border issues. Therefore, Indo-US strategic partnership is perceived as harmful to the Pakistani interests in the region as well as Pakistan's interests at the global level. One of the aspects of this Indo-US strategic partnership is that it has created a strategic imbalance in the region, a phenomenon that is directly antithetical to the strategic interests of Pakistan. With the provision of modern defense tactics predicated upon the cutting-edge technologies imported by the US, India has got an advantageous position in contrast to Pakistan. Worried by this strategic imbalance and partisan role of the US in the region, China and Pakistan have developed close ties to jointly deter the Indo-US onslaught (Hu & Meng, 2020).

In the following chapter, a brief history of India-US partnership has been enumerated. However, the major part of the chapter has been dedicated to numerous factors that have contributed to the development of Indo-US partnership. In the last part, the implications of this partnership on Pakistan have been discussed. And finally, the response of Pakistan to this partnership has been elucidated.

Historical background of the Indo-US partnership

As discussed briefly in the introduction, the partnership between India and the US is a recent phenomenon in the realm of foreign policy. Since its independence in 1947, India has primarily remained tilted towards the USSR, signing various agreements and developing defense ties through the importation of Soviet weapons. However, with the fall of the USSR in early 1990s, India lost its major partner. Therefore, in search of an equally powerful partner, India was drawn towards the US after the fall of the USSR in 1991. In order to understand the historical

relationship between the US and India, it is necessary to divide it into different periods: Early stage (1947-60s), Cold War era (1970s-1980s), Post Cold War realignment (1990s-2023).

The early stage of Indian independence is marked by a doubtful and shadowy commitment to non-alignment. As the world was divided into two blocs because of the ongoing Cold War between the US and the USSR, India remained non-aligned with either bloc. However, under the pretext of non-alignment, India developed strong diplomatic and defense ties with the erstwhile USSR (Sibel, 2008). The primary reason for the Indian-Soviet ties was the socialist ethos of the then Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru after inculcating socialist provisions in the Indian constitution, looked for socialist friends at international stage. Thus, the bonhomie between the USSR and India was a natural outcome. However, the US wanted India to join the US led capitalist bloc. Indian leaning towards the USSR left the US angered. Resultantly, the US joined hands with Pakistan by signing defense agreements during the 1950s, leaving India frustrated as well. Therefore, apart from ordinary diplomatic encounters and little US aid during the 1950s, there was a huge mutual distance between the US and India.

During the 1970s, mutual distrust between India and the US increased. It was primarily due to two factors. First, during the Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, that resulted in the independence of East Pakistan as a new state called Bangladesh, the US sided with Pakistan. On the other hand, the USSR supported India, resulting in the signing of Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation (Singh, 1979). Second factor that contributed to the deepening of mutual distrust between India and the US was the testing of India's nuclear weapons in 1974. The US placed various sanctions on India and vehemently opposed Indian nuclear testing. This opposition from the US estranged the two states for a long period. However, it is pertinent to mention that during the 1980s, thawing of the distraught relationship between the US and India was witnessed. It was witnessed with the US provision of agricultural aid to India, that contributed to its Green Revolution.

As soon as the erstwhile USSR disintegrated, India was left without a major strategic partner. India was in search of strategic partner. At the same time, the US saw India as a major strategic partner in Indo-Pacific region. Resultantly, both the states were drawn closer together. This was witnessed during the early 1990s when India, under the premiership of Narasima Rao, witnessed economic liberalization and opening up of its economy to global trade. Seeing the opportunity, the US poured in billions of dollars as investment, thereby making India favorite destination for the US businessmen and their investments. Later in 1990s, India tested another nuclear weapon in Pokhran. It brought the US wrath, but the relations soon thawed with the visit of the then US president Bill Clinton in 2000. The visit laid the foundations of the modern Indo-US partnership (Brookings, 2024). With the passage of time, India and the US have developed strong diplomatic and strategic ties. This has been witnessed in the signing of various agreements, starting from the

US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement 2005. The agreement was the beginning of strategic partnership between India and the US. This partnership is not restricted to security, but also encompasses various fields such as economy, technology, energy, climate change, health and education, diplomacy and counter terrorism. All of these aspects of their cooperation have been discussed below briefly

3.2. Areas of Cooperation Between the US and India

3.2.1. Indo-US Defense and Security Partnership

Defense and security cooperation has become a central point in the Indo-US partnership. They range from signing security agreements to conducting naval and military exercises. Recently, the US and India had collaborated in joint military exercises such as Malabar Naval exercises. These joint exercises aimed at increasing interoperability and collaboration between their forces. As a result, they have multiplied India maritime security and counterterrorism. Apart from these exercises, the US has signed various agreements with India. Three of the most recent and most important agreements include a) Logistics Exchange and memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) 2016, b) Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) 2018, c) Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) 2020 (Mukhtar, 2020). These agreements have brought a great change in the Indian defense capabilities, making it a strong regional power. Furthermore, Indian inclusion in another security pact called Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) has also contributed to Indian ability to develop strong security ties with the member countries, which include the US, Australia, Japan (Malhotra, 2023; Hall, 2024).

3.2.2. Indo-US Economy and Trade Ties

India is one of the largest trading partners of the US, as the bilateral trade volume exceeds 191 billion USD annually. Both the states trade in various sectors that include manufacturing, information technology, pharmaceuticals and agriculture. In 2023, Indian exports to the US stood at a whopping 75 billion USD (Trading Economics, 2023) Likewise, the US has been the largest source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India. This investment has been placed in various sectors such as defense, technology and medicine. Major US corporations and multinational companies (MNCs) like Google, Amazon, and Apple have increased their investments in India (CNBCTV18, 2022). In the same vein, India firms have also increased their presence in the US, particularly in the fields of medicine and technology. As a result of such huge FDIs from the US, India has emerged as a major exporting hub. The below graph shows US-India trade during the phase (Pande, 2025).



Source: IMF (2017-2024)

3.2.3. Indo-US Technology Collaboration

Technology is another major sector in which both the states have developed strong partnership. This is evident from the fact that a number of Indians are the CEOs of tech-giants. The examples include SundarPichai, Satya NudellaLeena Nair who are the CEOs of Google, Microsoft and Chanel, respectively (The Economic Times, 2023). The cooperation between the US and India in tech field is not only restricted to Indians being the CEOs of major US firms, but also includes cooperation in space technology, emerging technologies and digital economy. In the space field, Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and National Aeronautics and Space Agency (NASA) have collaborated in multiple space missions. At present both space agencies are jointly working on launching NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) satellite that is set to be launched in 2025 (The Hindu, 2024). Similarly, in the emerging technologies sector, the US and India have been collaborating in Artificial Intelligence (AI), cyber security, quantum computing and 5G

networks. This collaboration was formalized in the US-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) (Bhandari, 2024). In the digital economy field, the US and India have developed strong ties for the mutual sharing of information on e-commerce, financial-technology models (FTM) and digital infrastructure.

3.2.4. Indo-US Energy and Climate Change Cooperation

Apart from Indo-US cooperation in the fields of technology and defense, both states have also developed partnerships for clean energy. The US-India Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 is predicated on the commitment to reduce carbon emissions, enhancing collaboration in renewable energy capacity and sharing new clean energy technologies. The aim of this partnership is to launch projects on solar energy, wind energy and hydrogen energy. Likewise, the US has signed US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement with India in 2008 to assist India in the developing green nuclear energy for civilian purposes (Mian&Ramana, 2006). In the climate change sector, both India and the US have collaborated in promoting the cause of climate change. Their collaboration in the Paris Agreement testifies to their mutual commitment to reduce the effects of climate change, so that a sustainable future can be ensured for the posterity.

3.2.5. India's Offering Legal Clarity and Indo-US Health and Education Collaboration

One of the most important factors behind Ind-US nexus is the legal clarity it offers in different matters such as agreements that include dispute resolution mechanisms, ensuring transparency for investors. For example, India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (INDAU ECTA) between India and Australia in order to facilitates clearer trade rules, dispute settlement mechanisms for businesses and tariff reductions. Moreover, India's moves such as, TRIPS Agreement (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights), Bilateral Investment Treaty (BITs), and its commitment to many international bilateral and multilateral agreements as to international law and transparency. As Khurram Abbas remarks,

“Apart from economic, technological, and political factors, India offers legal clarity to the international platform, making it a favorable partner for trade and strategic technological transactions.” (Abbas, 2024).

Aside from working together in the fields of defense, technology, energy and climate change, the US and India have also developed strong ties in the fields of health and education. In the health sector, the US and India had collaborated in the production and distribution of Covid-19 vaccine during the Covid pandemic. The QUAD Vaccine Partnership that includes the US, Australia, India and Japan revolves around addressing global health issues and distributing vaccines in the Indo-Pacific region. In particular, India is a leading country in the production of pharmaceuticals. The US has helped India in this sector, resulting in the development of pharmaceutical industries across India. With this help, Indian pharmaceutical firms specialize in

HIV/ AIDS and other lifesaving drugs. Needless to say, that India and the US have also poured billions of dollars in medical research and innovation.

In the educational field, India is amongst the largest contributors of students to the US based universities. Each year, thousands of student study in the US universities through Indo-US exchange and research programs. As a result, strong academic and cultural ties have been developed between the two states. As per the US census published in 2023, 4.4 million Indians have been living in the US (United States Census Bureau, 2023). Such a huge number of India diaspora in the US indicates towards the growing bonhomie between the US and India, particularly in the field of education and IT.

3.2.6. Indo-US Diplomatic Ties and Counterterrorism Collaboration

Diplomatic ties between the two states are amongst the strongest in the world. This is evident from the fact the US places India in center of its Indo-Pacific Policy. Indian inclusion in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) is major source of India diplomatic outreach to the world. Likewise, the US also supports Indian ambition to become permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Both the states also collaborate in global governance institutions such as the United Nations Organization (UNO), G-20, World Trade Organization (WTO), and World Trade Organization (WTO). In addition to these partnerships, both the states also collaborate in peace-keeping and humanitarian aid missions. Another major indicator of strong Indo-US diplomatic ties is the fact that since the visit of the US president Clinton in 2000, all succeeding presidents have paid visit to India (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). The list includes the visits of George. W. Bush, Barak Obama (visited India two time in 2010 and in 2015), Donald Trump and Joe Biden (current president of the US). In contrast, since 2006 visit of the US president George. W. Bush has visited Pakistan; no other president has been to Pakistan.

As recent as March 2024, the US and India held a Security Dialogue to discuss the issues pertaining to increased terrorist activities in the South Asian Region. In Particular, the US guaranteed its support for Indian efforts to counter militant hues of Khalistan movement and committed to take actions against the US-based pro-Khalistan elements (The Hindu, 2024). Additionally, the US and India have also been cooperating in intelligence sharing, joint counter terrorism operations and curbing terror financing. The recent fall of Kabul in the hands of the Taliban has raised concerns over the rise of extremism in the region. As a result, the US and India have strengthened their ties in countering terrorism.

3.3. Factors Contributing to the Increasing Strategic Partnership Between the US and India

Over a few decades starting from the fall of the USSR, Indo-US strategic partnership has increased manifold. Both the states have collaborated in various fields as mentioned above. A large number of factors have contributed to strengthening of Indo-US strategic partnership.

However, this cooperation is not only limited to strategic sphere, but also encompasses other fields such as counter terrorism, regional realignment, diplomatic convergence and so on. In the following a number of factors, that have brought India and the US into close partnership, discussed in detail.

3.3.1. Containment of China

One of the fundamental causes for the alignment of India and the US is the rising assertiveness of China in global politics. It would not be an exaggeration to say that the rise of China can be qualified as the sole reason behind the increasing partnership of the US and India. The US, as the sole superpower and the hegemon of the world politics, perceives the emergence of China at international stage as a direct threat to the US interests. Greek historian Thucydides remarked that “when an established power faces a rising one, conflict becomes inevitable” (Malik, 2022). The dictum said more than two millennium ago is aptly applicable on the current geopolitical situation of the world. The US led containment of China at international stage vindicates the timeless wisdom of Thucydides. Professor Ian Hall highlights geo-strategic factors saying;

There are two main factors: India's growing economic weight and the multi-faceted strategic challenge to both countries posed by China. At the start, back in the early 2000s, there was also a third - militant Islamism - but this factor is no longer very important in the relationship, and in some ways, it has actually become an irritant, as India's angry reaction of the US pull-out from Afghanistan demonstrated. India now believes that the US is no longer as serious as it should be about militant Islamism. On the two main factors: first, India's relatively high rates of growth, its sheer scale as an economy, and the synergies with the US economy in things like IT and pharmaceuticals and potentially high-tech manufacturing make it a very attractive partner for the US. American capital and know-how, plus high-quality education institutions and a relatively open labor market, make the US very attractive to India's big conglomerates and the growing, aspirational middle class. Second, China's clear desire to displace the US from its current economic and security roles in Asia, plus its belief that Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific should be China-centric and hierarchical, with all others recognizing China's leadership, have pushed the US and India together. Neither DC nor Delhi wants to see a China-dominated Asia. That would not be in the interests of either country. So, working together to prevent that outcome makes sense (Hall, 2024).

Another dictum that has been repeated since time immemorial is that “enemy of my enemy is my friend”. That means common enemy unites the two or more factions. This has been proved throughout history of civilization. There are numerous examples to vindicate this dictum.

However, two famous examples would suffice, first the confederation of the thirteen US colonies against their common enemy: The Great Britain. And the alliance system of European powers against Napoleon in the battle of Waterloo. The present international scenario also presents that similar situation, as both the US and India deem the rise of China as detrimental to their interests. Thus, they have found common nemesis in the form of China. The obvious outcome is the development of strategic partnership between the two. On the one hand, the US is hell bent on containing the increasing clout of the Chinese dragon by forming alliance with the immediate neighboring/ peripheral countries (United States Institute of Peace, 2024). On the other hand, India wants to thwart Chinese rise in order to fulfil its dream of becoming a regional hegemon. Adding insult to injury, China and India also share border issues and have clashed over border issues in the regions of Doklam and Ladakh (Hussain, 2012). The latest clash occurred in 2020 at the Ladakh site. So, the mutual disdain of China by India and the US has resulted their partnership.

3.3.2. Pivot to Asia Policy and the Encirclement of China

The US launched Pivot to Asia Policy during the Obama administration. The policy indicated a major transformation in the US policy towards Asia. In other words, the US policy makers, feared by the enhancing influence of China, decided to encircle China by establishing alliances with Asian states in the South and East Asia (Ishaque et al., 2017). Resultantly, the already established Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) was strengthened. The dialogue is a strategic partnership amongst Japan, Australia, India and the US. Coincidentally, all of these states have non-cordial relations with China. Determined to hamper the rise of Chia, these countries joined hands together. This has been evident in their efforts to thwart, denigrate and scandalize Chinese projects in South Asia, Middles East and North Africa. India, thus, serves as a significant ally of the US in its pursuit of Pivot to Asia policy. For instance, in South Asia, China has signed a multi-billion dollars deal with Pakistan to construct China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In recent past, the foreign policies of the US and Pakistan have witnessed divergent trends. Pakistan has recently been tilted towards it neighboring country China, thus inviting the wrath of the US (Rogers, Arshad, & Ali, 2023). Resultantly, the US has raised various apprehensions against the CPEC. Simultaneously, it has also supported Indian stance on the CPEC, which is also against its construction. To punish both China and Pakistan, the US has signed various strategic and defense pacts with India. These include a) Logistics Exchange and memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) 2016, b) Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) 2018, c) Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) 2020. The signing of these agreements has given India strategic advantage over Pakistan, thereby compelling Pakistan invigorate its foreign policy and look for partners to abridge the strategic imbalance created by these agreements (Ahmad & Gul, 2021). Likewise, to counter Chinese influence in the Middle East and North Africa Region (MENA), the US has recently launched India-Middle East- Europe Corridor (IMEC). In this way

the US is tilted towards containing China both economically and strategically. In this way, China suffers from strategic encirclement due to the deepening of strategic partnership between India and the US.

3.3.3. The Pakistan Factor in Indo-US nexus and Indian Quest for Regional Hegemony

Another major factor contributing to Indo-US partnership is the mutual hatred and distrust of the US and India against Pakistan (Rashid et al., 2023). Since the decolonization and the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, that resulted in the emergence of India and Pakistan, both the states have been engaged in constant warfare with each other. Deeply wounded by the partition of the subcontinent, India never truly accepted the sovereign status of Pakistan. Both the states share a number of deep-rooted problems. They range from the core issue of Kashmir to water-sharing and border problems. They have fought three major wars (Indo-Pakistan Wars of 1965 and 1971 and Kargil war of 1999) on these issues. For US, its discontent with the Pakistan's endeavors against war on terror and Pak-China nexus are the leading factors motivating the US tilt towards India. From the aforementioned details, it becomes clear that mutual mistrust and suspicion reign supreme in Pakistan-India interactions. Due to this mistrust and suspicion of each other, both states have been engaged in security dilemma. The dilemma has led them to develop nuclear weapons and establish diplomatic and strategic ties with major powers of the world. Resultantly, in the last two decades, India has been drawn to the US, whereas Pakistan has tilted towards China. This compartmentalization has given birth to 'New Cold War' in which the Western bloc is led by the US and the Eastern bloc is headed by China.

Since its inception in 1947, India has been engaged in a constant struggle to dominant the South Asian region. It suffers from the regional power syndrome (Khanum, 2020). South Asian countries except India are financially and militarily in a weak position. Countries such as Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan and Afghanistan are either militarily weak, suffer from terrorism or both. Amongst these financially fragile and militarily weak states, India is a giant with its geographical expanse, demographic superiority and military prowess. These regional factors combined by the internal supporting features have led India to dream of becoming a regional hegemon, thereby dictating its wishes upon the much weaker regional nations. In order to materialize its dream, India has sought defense partnerships from major powers of the world (Sathasivam, 2025). During the Cold war (1945-1991), India remained a close ally of the then USSR, that provided it nuclear umbrella until India developed its own nukes in 1974. The development of nukes was a major step towards achieving regional hegemony. This placed regional countries, particularly Pakistan, in a disadvantageous position, resulting in Pakistan's quest for nuclear weapons in 1998. However, after the fall of Berlin Wall and ultimately the disintegration of the then USSR in 1991, India lost its major defense partner. It resulted in the

Indian quest for developing strategic partnership with the US. It is, therefore, can be argued that Indian quest for regional hegemony and its security concerns have led India to establish strategic partnership with the US, particularly in the last two decades.

3.3.4. The Afghanistan Factor

The fifth major factor that contributed to the Indo-US strategic partnership is the US anti-terrorism expedition in Afghanistan. This factor is discussed in detail in the 3rd Chapter. The US War on Terror, launched after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, led the US and its allies invade Afghanistan in 2001 (Wakil et al., 2022). The invasion began a long and perilous war that embroiled the US into a complicated warfare in Afghanistan. In order to win the war, it needed support from its regional partners. Pakistan and India enjoyed cordial relations with the US at the time of the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Both the states supported the US in its invasion both strategically and militarily. However, as the war lingered on, suspicion and skepticism between Pakistan the US was developed. The US policy makers accused Pakistan of double-game. They alleged that Pakistan is providing safe havens to the most wanted terrorists. The suspicion culminated in the killing of Osama Bin Laden in 2009 on the Pakistani soil. As a result, the acrimony deepened between the two states.

The mutual mistrust between the US and Pakistan proved a god-send for India, as she got a golden opportunity to replace Pakistan. She joined hands with the US and supported the US claims that Pakistan serves as a safe haven for the terrorist. The US presidents, particularly Barack Obama and Donald Trump, accused Pakistan of terrorism, declaring Pakistan the eighth most dangerous country in the world (Hameed et al., 2021). The US allegations were spurious and based on the Indian propaganda. Pakistan was sandwiched between non-friendly superpower and its regional staunch enemy India. As a result, the US failed to see that Pakistan suffered the most during the war on terror. Nevertheless, the straining of relations between the US and Pakistan resulted in the Indo-US strategic partnership.

Another aspect of Afghanistan that contributed to the Indo-US strategic bonhomie is the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. After waging a deadly, costly and fruitless war in Afghanistan for twenty years, the US decided to leave Afghanistan and hand over the country to the same Taliban whose government it toppled in 2001. This created a power vacuum in the region. In order to fill its absence in the region the US has been keen on developing defense and strategic ties with India (Constantino, 2020).

3.3.5. Indo-US Counterterrorism Collaboration

Besides Afghanistan factor, joint efforts to counter terrorism have also contributed to the Indo-US strategic partnership. As mentioned above, the US launched War on Terror in 2001 after the incident of 9/11 (Ahmad & Najish, 2020). The war still goes on. The war on terror has brought

India and the US close together in their mutual struggle to fight terrorism. Both the states have signed numerous agreements, participated in dialogues and issued joint statements against terrorism. The examples include: India Counterterrorism Joint Working Group (CTJWG), US-India Counter terrorism Designations Dialogue, Quad Counterterrorism Working Group, Global Counterterrorism Forum, and Anti-Terror Financing wing of Financial Action Task Force. Moreover, both nations have also launched various initiatives against cyber-terrorism. It is, therefore, can be summed up that anti-terrorism stance has resulted in the Indo-US strategic partnership.

3.3.6. Civil Nuclear Agreement

Indo-US strategic nexus has also been brought into fruition due to their mutual interest in using nuclear energy for civilian purposes. Energy is the backbone of a nation. Realizing its importance, India entered into a Civil Nuclear Agreement with the US in 2008 (Sargana, 2023). This was a landmark achievement of India, as it allowed India the access to the nuclear technologies. The treaty placed India in the cadre of major global nuclear power. Critically speaking, the treaty was unjustly signed with a malicious intent of both the states. In the first place, India is a non-signatory of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The signing of a nuclear agreement with a non-signatory country stands as clear violation of NPT treaty. By strengthening India in nuclear sector, the US placed Pakistan and China in a defensive mode. This brings in strategic imbalance in the region, ushering in an arms race between India and Pakistan and between India and China. Arms race in an already volatile region, incited by the US, may prove detrimental for international peace. Nevertheless, the nuclear cooperation between the US and India has resulted in deepening of Indo-US strategic partnership.

3.3.7. India's Increasing Role in Global Politics

Since the 1990s, India has been hyper active in engaging with international fora of governance. It has been endeavoring to seek after permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). It has participated in as well as hosted G-20 summit (Kumar, 2015). It has also been vibrant in BRICS forums. Recently, it has also participated in the in-person dialogue of the Quad countries. India's vibrant foreign policy, as its presence in the aforementioned fora shows, has made it a significant global actor. With strong diplomatic and defense ties with the US, India enjoys the status of major ally of the US. In sum, India's hyper active foreign policy has strengthened its strategic ties with the US (Pande, 2025). On the other hand, Pakistan suffers from diplomatic isolation. It should be highlighted here that no US president since George. W. Bush has been to Pakistan. The failure to engage successive US presidents showcases the foreign policy failure of Pakistan. Therefore, the failure of Pakistan on the foreign policy front serves as another contributor to the Indo-US partnership (Yaqoob&Sattar, 2021).

3.3.8. Energy Security and the Indo-US Partnership

Energy security is the indispensable requirement for the survival and growth of a state. India, being the largest country in terms of demographic figures, needs massive energy to run the state affairs in an efficient way. To meet the energy demand, India imports oil from different countries. This has led India to sign various energy pacts and agreements with the US. As a result, the US has become one of the largest suppliers of energy products to India. These products include petroleum such as crude oil and Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG). Moreover, India and the US have signed numerous agreements to boost energy sector. These agreements include India-US Energy Dialogue 2005, Partnership to Advance Clean Energy 2009, US-India Roadmap to Build Safe and Secure Global Clean Energy Supply Chains, Strategic Clean Energy Partnership (SCEP) and US-India Strategic Energy Partnership (Ahmad & Gul, 2021). These energy-oriented partnerships with the US have significantly increased India's energy prowess. Therefore, energy becomes another important sector in which India has got strategically advantageous position to Pakistan. Pakistan, on the other hand, suffers from energy shortages, resulting in unannounced power-cuts and loadshedding across the country. Thus, the purpose of the Indo-US cooperation in energy sector is to make India a strong bulwark against China, and its ally Pakistan. The energy supply to India from the US indicates towards the all-encompassing containment policy by the US. Thus, cooperation in energy sector is another factor that has contributed to the Indo-US strategic partnership.

3.3.9. Cybersecurity and Indo-US Partnership

Another significant area of cooperation between the US and India is that of cyber security. The US is considered as the superpower in cyber security. It has invested immeasurable sums of money to enhance its cyber security, especially after the horrendous experience of 9/11. India, being a close ally of the US since the late 1990s, has sought after cyber security cooperation from the US. Both the states have collaborated in the realm of cybersecurity. Resultantly, a number of agreements have been signed. They include Global Digital Development Partnership, Digital Defense Partnership, Joint AI and Quantum Research and Cyber Center of Excellence (Akram, 2023). As a result of these pacts, India has built a strong digital infrastructure that is largely impenetrable. Again, the US assistance of India in the cyber field is a result of the US' containment of China policy. India, therefore, serves as a proxy of the US against China. The cyber pacts, along with the aforementioned agreements in different fields, have been signed without paying any heed to the regional volatility. The US has brushed all of the grievances and apprehensions of Pakistan. The has consistently failed to understand that increasing strategic power on India is detrimental to regional peace in South Asia. In case of an escalation between India and Pakistan, India will most probably use these advantages against Pakistan. Therefore, increasing nexus between the US and India antithetical to Pakistan's interests in the region. In

sum, cybersecurity presents itself as another major area of cooperation between the US and India, and this factor, is one of the most important factors in Pakistan's foreign policy towards the US (Sathasivam, 2025).

3.3.10. Maritime Security and Indo-US Partnership

In addition to cyber security, collaboration in maritime security has also contributed to Indo-US strategic partnership. Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is the third busiest oceans in terms of sea trade. About 42 percent of global crude oil trade and about 30 percent of containerized cargo pass through the Indian Ocean. Such huge volume of trade in the IOR attracts piracy. In order to deter the threat of piracy maritime security collaboration between different countries in essential. India is no different, in order to increase its maritime security, India has collaborated with the US and entered into numerous agreements and initiatives. The agreements have not only helped India protect its sear trade, but also its sovereignty over its coastal region. India is a major sea-power in IOR. It has a large maritime presence in the region. With its huge naval power, that includes two aircraft carriers named INS Vikrant and INS Vikramaditya, India has established various naval bases across India Ocean. Indian naval bases such as Nicobar, Agalaga, Assumption Island and Andaman are strategically important bases. India naval bases are located near the important waterway and choke points such as Malacca and Palk Straits. Nearly 900,00 ships pass through the strait of Malacca alone. About 70 percent of China's petroleum trade pass through Malacca strait. Therefore, it becomes a significant choke point of the world and India has naval bases around the Malacca strait. This attracts the US as well, as it wants to contain China. As a result, both India and the US have collaborated in maritime security, the aim of this collaboration is to get hold of the Malacca strait in case of a global conflict. Holding the trade in Malacca strait alone is enough to break China's backbone, as nearly 70 percent of its energy trade passes through the strait. Therefore, India and the US have been eyeing on the strait by establishing nearby naval bases and strengthen India position in the region. In order to do that the US has signed The General Security of Military Agreement (GSMOIA) along with its sister agreements such as a) Logistics Exchange and Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) 2016, b) Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) 2018, c) Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) 2020. These agreements provide India with real-time information about maritime movements in IOR through US-based information systems (Thakker, 2019). The US has gone so far as to nuclearize the India Ocean by signing Australia- United Kingdom-United States (AUKUS) agreement that will provide nuclear submarines to Australia. The target, understandably, is to deter Chinese influence in the IOR. Therefore, it can be summed up that Indo-US strategic partnership is an outcome of their collusion to control IOR so as to curb Chinese clout in the region.

3.3.11. Space Collaboration and Indo-US Strategic Partnership

Indian-US partnership is also the result of their mutual interest in exploring the space. When the erstwhile USSR launched first satellite, called Sputnik I, in 1958, the US deemed it a threat and both the states entered into a space race, often dubbed as the Star Wars. Indian leadership, under the Prime Minister Nehru, inspired by the space exploration launched its own space program with the help of Indian physicists such as Vikrant Sarabhai and Homi J. Bhabha. As a result, Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) was formed. Forwarding to the first quarter of the 21st century, satellites have become one of the fundamental and essential features of global communications. Although there is a global consensus against the weaponization of space, big powers such as the US, Russia and China, have developed anti-satellite (a-sat) technology. Imitating these powers, India has also developed Asat technology. Committed to the ban on Asat technology, the US has raised concerns over the Asat technology of India. However, at the same time NASA and ISRO have been in collaboration to explore space and help each other in joint space programs. Recently, both the space agencies have been jointly working on launching NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) to be launched in 2025. The point is deepening space collaboration between India and the US is aimed at countering the rise of China even in the space. This battle for space superiority is reminiscent of Cold War Star Wars in 1960s and 1970s. Inspired by this motive, their strategic partnership has been strengthened more and more over a few decades (Khalid, 2021).

3.4. Implications of the Indo-US Strategic Partnership on Pakistan

The strategic partnership between India and the US has produced detrimental effects on Pakistan in particular and on the South Asian region in general. Already suffering from political polarization and strategic volatility, the region has been pushed towards security imbalance. Indo-US strategic partnership has not only threatened Pakistan militarily; it has also generated imbalance of power in the region. The US' undue strategic and economic support to India has deleterious effects on Pakistan. In particular, the signing of three agreements between India and the US that include a) Logistics Exchange and memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) 2016, b) Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) 2018, c) Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) 2020 have altered strategic balance altogether. In the following paragraphs, the implications of the Indo-US strategic partnership on Pakistan's security and strategic infrastructure have been analyzed in detail.

3.4.1. Strategic Imbalance and Shift in Balance of Power

The Indo-US strategic alignment has disturbed balance of power between India and Pakistan. The shift in balance of power has produced favorable position for India, and placed Pakistan in strategically disadvantageous place. The seeds of this strategic imbalance were laid

down in Logistics Exchange and Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) 2016 (Baig&Waheed, 2022). The agreement allowed India access to the US military bases for refueling and supplying of logistics. It was also agreed in the agreement that the US would also transfer advanced military technology to India to ensure interoperability of the US and Indian forces. Moreover, the agreement establishes single account for payment of for using each other's military facilities. And finally, it has also formed the reimbursement facility, meaning that either cash or logistics support can be used for using military facilities of each other. From the aforementioned features of LEMOA, it becomes clear that Pakistan has been placed in strategically disadvantageous position. Pakistan lacks such facilities. It neither has access to the US military bases, nor it can avail the facility of logistics replenishment. Thus, it is evident that the Indo-US strategic partnership has produced detrimental consequences.

Similarly, India has also signed Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018. The agreement provided India access to advanced military systems of the US. Chief among these systems is the secured communication system. The system helps in protected and secured communication without the threat of cyber breach, making Indian military communications lines impregnable (Ali, 2020). This advantage has again placed Pakistan on an insecure position. Military line of communications in Pakistan lacks the advanced technology that India has acquired through COMCASA. During an escalation between the two countries, India will have an upper hand while using its secured communication systems based on the imported communication equipment from the US.

Likewise, the signing of Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) in 2020 between India and the US has proved the final step in strategic imbalance between Pakistan and India. The pact has grave consequences for Pakistan. The US has disturbed the balance of power between India and Pakistan by agreeing to provide classified and unclassified real time map data to the Indian military. That means India will have a real time information of military movement through live streaming provided by the US satellites. In addition to the provision of real time map data, the agreement will also share classified geospatial products, topographical, nautical and aeronautical data services to Indian defense forces. It means that India will have high-level precision for aircrafts, drones, ballistic and cruise missiles, thereby targeting enemy contingents and equipment with super-accuracy (Khan, 2023).

From the features of the three aforementioned agreements, it is evident that India has got an edge over Pakistan military and security terms. Pakistan lacks access to US military bases for replenishment. It is short of secure communication systems and deficient in real time map data. Evidently, Pakistan's vital infrastructure has been in danger since the signing of these agreements (Khan, 2023). All of these deficiencies in the defense forces of Pakistan make South Asia region strategically imbalance. Pakistan, therefore, has felt the brunt of the US' undue building up India's

defense systems. In sum, the troika of these agreements has shifted the balance of power in India's favor, forcing Pakistan to look for security options in and around the region.

Increased Strategic Isolation

As evident from the above, the US has shifted its focus away from Pakistan and towards India. Such a transformation in the US foreign policy has left Pakistan strategically isolated (Elharathi et al., 2020). Historically, Pakistan has remained a significant strategic ally of the US. During the Cold War, Pakistan and the US were close allies. In the 1960s, Pakistan provided its airfield bases for the US-led reconnaissance missions against the then USSR. Likewise, in the 1980s when the USSR invaded Afghanistan, the US and Pakistan jointly launched guerilla warfare against the USSR by supporting Afghan Mujahideen. Their jointly led warfare forced the USSR to leave Afghanistan in 1988. With the dawn of the 21st century, the world was struck by the demon of terrorism. Al Qaeda's attack on World Trade Center on September 11 shocked the world. In response to the terrorist attacks, the US launched Global War on Terror. The war led the US and its allies to invade Afghanistan in 2001. Pakistan, once again, became a strong strategic ally of the US. The partnership was so strong that it led the then US president George W. Bush to declare Pakistan as a major non-NATO ally of the US.

However, as the war of terror lingered on and the US decided to stay in Afghanistan, misgivings between Pakistan and the US emerged. The US blamed Pakistan for its failure to counter terrorism in Afghanistan. It ultimately led towards a schism between the two states. As a result, the US' focus shifted away from Pakistan. Pakistan's place was immediately taken by India. The US policy makers deem India as a major ally in their mission to counter the rise of China. Thus, the ongoing New Cold War between the US and China has placed India in central place of the US strategic policy-making. Quite obviously, Pakistan has been sidelined, thereby making it a strategically isolated country. This has limited Pakistan's role in Asian politics. The US and its allied country in Europe and North Atlantic have also reduced their attention towards Pakistan. Resultantly, Pakistan has tilted towards China, its northern neighboring country. In short, the US has reduced Pakistan's role in its pivot to Asia policy.

3.4.2. Military and Defense Disadvantages

Another deleterious implication of the Indo-US strategic partnership on Pakistan is that of a disadvantageous position in terms of its security and defense (Elharathi et al., 2020). The Indo-US partnership has continued building India defense and military prowess. The agreements mentioned above have generated immensely detrimental effects on Pakistan's strategic outlook. Increasing Indo-US bonhomie has given India a huge advantage over Pakistan in terms of military technology and the advancement of defense arms and equipment. This is evident with India acquiring Apache Helicopters, S-400 missiles and P-81 Poseidon marine patrolling aircrafts. To the chagrin of Pakistan, the purchase of these advanced military equipment from Russia (with the

US approval) by India has improved India military and defense capabilities (Kronstadt, 2022).

Aside from these material and physical equipment, Pakistan's military disadvantage over India also stems from India's increased Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities. These are the result of its agreements that have been repeatedly mentioned above. Pakistan lacks encrypted military communication systems. There is also an absence of real-time geospatial satellite information in Pakistan's defense services. The lack of access to advanced defense technology has put Pakistan in a strategic disadvantage (Khan, 2023).

Another source of defense disadvantage of Pakistan comes from its lack of advanced naval and air force capabilities, as compared to India (Clary, 2021). With the help of the US, India has built a formidable naval force that include two air craft carriers: INS Vikrant and INS Vikramaditya. With two aircraft carriers supported by a fleet of destroyers, frigates and nuclear-powered ballistic submarines, India is set to rule the roost in the Indian Ocean. Such a huge naval power supremacy has the potential to limit Pakistan's naval operations in the Arabian sea and the Indian Ocean. It's because Pakistan's patrol aircrafts or fighter jets are not only much smaller in size but also in capability when compared to that of India's. Pakistan also lacks aircraft carriers that is potential disadvantage of Pakistan. Cutting the long story short, India-US strategic partnership has placed Pakistan in a disadvantageous position in terms of its defense and security capabilities.

3.4.3. Straining of Bilateral Ties between India and Pakistan

Another important implication of the US-India strategic partnership is the straining of Pakistan India bilateral relations (Bukhari, 2020). Pakistan has remained a major US ally since the visit of the US by Pakistan's first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan in 1950. Pakistan has provided support to the US during its containment of the USSR in the 1960s and in the 1980s and has also stood side by side in its post 9/11 war on terror. However, in the last two decades, the US has shifted its focus to India, leaving Pakistan in lurch. Additionally, the US has also given undue favoritism to India. Encouraged by the US support, India has been interacting with regional countries in an arrogant way. Its condescension peaked when it unilaterally abrogated the special status of Kashmir by revoking article 370 of the Indian Constitution. This unilateral move has deepened Indo-US rivalry. Pakistan's hue and cry was met with cold responses from the US and its allies. Thus, emboldened by the strategic partnership with the US, India has taken a harder stance over Kashmir. It has refused to engage in bilateral parleys with Pakistan over Kashmir issue. This intransigence by the India policy makers has resulted in the widening of trust deficit between the two states, making it unbridgeable in the short term.

On the part of the US, it has remained silent over Indian atrocities in the India Occupied Kashmir. This silence by the US and its allies made has left Pakistan in shock and awe. At the same time, India has been given a cart blanche in dealing with Kashmir issue. Pakistan resents the

US partiality towards India. Therefore, relations between the Pakistan and India and Pakistan and the US have been at logger's head, particularly for the last two decades.

3.4.4. Pakistan's Tilt Towards China

Threatened by the increasing Indo-US partnership, Pakistan has moved towards establishing strong diplomatic and security ties with its neighboring country and an emergent global power, China (Hussain, 2023). This leaning of Pakistan towards China is the direct result of the US-India nexus. Ditched by the US and isolated by the international community, Pakistan found it wise to strengthen its ties with China. As a result, it has signed multibillion dollar projects with China, important of these is China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The US sees closed relationship between Pakistan and China with suspicion. Simultaneously, India also perceives it detrimental to its interests. However, Pakistan was left with no choice than to join hand with China. The US has been involved in giving undue attention to India, helping India in its military built up and security advancement. The US has failed to see how it's unfair treatment with Pakistan has the potential to destabilize the region. The weapons it has been garnering India to counter China may also be used against Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan has been compelled to look for alternative options for securing defense and military assistance from China.

China, hence, becomes a natural partner for Pakistan due to its rivalry with India and the US. Resultantly, Sino-Pakistan partnership serves as a counterbalance for Pakistan against the increasing role of India in the Indo-Pacific region. Pakistan's foreign policy, therefore, is witnessing a realignment period, where the US is being replaced by China. So, in the Cold of the 20th century, Pakistan and the US were allies. However, in the New Cold War of the 21st century they stand opposite to each other. Both Pakistan and China consider it their primary duty to counter Indian influence in the region. One step towards this goal is the construction CPEC in Pakistan by China, so that China could avoid over dependence on the Malacca strait for its trade. CPEC provides an alternative route to China, making Chinese goods reach international market through a convenient, inexpensive and safe corridor. In a nutshell, disenchanted by the US, Pakistan has leaned over China for a sustainable diplomatic and strategic partnership. This partnership would not have been possible without the US' undue and unfair attention towards India.

3.4.5. Marginalization of Pakistan on International Forum

Another detrimental implication of the Indo-US strategic partnership is the reduction of Pakistan's role in international fora (Nawaz et al., 2019). This has been witnessed in multiple fronts: Diplomatic isolation, reduced support for Kashmir problem, lack of access to international institutions and lackadaisical support of Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts. Diplomatically, Pakistan has been suffering from isolation. With increased role of India in international

institutions, supported by the US, Pakistan has been sidelined. The US no longer see Pakistan its major strategic ally, particularly after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. The US has pivoted towards India. It has supported India's quest for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council, that is vehemently opposed by Pakistan. With the US, Pakistan has also lost US allies in diplomatic terms.

Another aspect of Pakistan's lost influence in international institutions is that of the waning of support for Kashmir cause (Gupta, 2024). The Indo-US partnership has also directly negatively impacted the Kashmir dispute. It is a core issue for Pakistan in its relations with India. In order to resolve it, Pakistan has consistently looked for international mediation on the Kashmir problem. It has called for a third-party intervention, in particular it has sought help from the US, so that the US may pressure India into resolving the dispute. However, with the strengthening of Indo-US ties, the US has shown little inclination to mediate or take a strong position on Kashmir. This was evident when following India's abrogation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status in August 2019, Pakistan sought international condemnation of India's actions. But it received a muted and lackadaisical response from the U.S and its allies. The absence of international support for Pakistan on the Kashmir problem is the result of India's growing influence in global politics. This influence has been increased by its strategic partnership with the US as a result, the rise of India's clout in economic and geopolitical terms makes countries, including Western powers, reluctant and cautious to take positions that might alienate India. Thus, Pakistan's efforts to bring attention to the Kashmir issue on global institutions like the United Nations or the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) have been thwarted by India's diplomatic outreach as it has been supported by the US, Pakistan's stance on Kashmir has been weakened by their nexus.

3.4.6. International Pressure to Counter Terrorism and Terror-Financing

The India-US strategic partnership has also generated immense pressure on Pakistan to expedite its efforts to combat terrorism and curb terror financing (Ahmad & Gul, 2021). As the US increasingly pivots towards India as a major partner in South Asia, Pakistan has found itself under increased international scrutiny in regard to its role in addressing terrorism. It has generated substantial implications for its domestic and foreign policy. One of the areas of collaboration between India and the US has been counterterrorism. Both the sates have suffered from significant threats from terrorism. On the one hand, India has suffered from terrorist groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Jaish-e-Mohammed, whereas the US from global terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Both the states have blamed that these groups have had operational links with groups in Pakistan. This common concern has resulted in a coordinated effort to pressure Pakistan to dismantle terrorist networks operating within its territory.

Likewise, Pakistan has long been accused of providing safe havens and supporting militant groups. It has been alleged that Pakistan has used terrorists as a tool of its foreign policy.

Moreover, it has failed to address the menace of terrorism due to the dynamics of its internal security complexities. Over the years, Pakistan's security establishment has been accused of protecting terrorist groups that carry out attacks in Afghanistan and India. However, India and the US have failed to see that Pakistan has also suffered from the curse of domestic terrorism from factions such as the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Baloch separatists. Such a complicated scenario has complicated Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts. On the one hand, it tries to balance its internal security needs, whereas on the other hand, it has been forced to fulfill external demands for action against cross-border terrorism.

The result of this pressure from India and the US has forced Pakistan to launch anti-terrorism operations. Thus, it has undertaken several high-profile military operations that include Operation Zarb-e-Azb and Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad. Both of them aimed at uprooting terrorist sanctuaries in tribal areas in the erstwhile FATA region. These operations have been met with some success, but Pakistan remains under constant international pressure to "do more". Apart from international pressure to counter terrorism, another significant area where the Indo-US nexus has generated pressure on Pakistan is through the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) (Parvaz, 2021). The FATF is an international watchdog aimed at curbing money laundering and terror financing. In recent years, Pakistan was placed on the FATF's "grey list.". The inclusion of Pakistan in the grey list increased scrutiny of the country's financial system. It was claimed that Pakistan has failed to completely comply with international standards on countering terror financing. India had played a central role in pushing for Pakistan's inclusion on the grey list. It alleged that Pakistan had not done enough to combat terror financing. The US has also supported this move by India. Resultantly, Pakistan has faced mounting pressure to enforce reforms and crack down on money laundering. However, despite international pressure generated by the Indo-US partnership, Pakistan was excluded from the grey list of the FATF in October 2022.

3.5. Policy Options for Pakistan in Face of Increasing Indo-US Nexus

As Pakistan has been sidelined by the US, it needs to look for more options in order to improve its security and defense capabilities. Moreover, it needs diplomatic backings to end its diplomatic isolation. It is, therefore, pertinent for Pakistan to diversify its international relations/interactions. Apart from efforts at international stage, Pakistan also needs to introduce various multisectoral reforms domestically. In short, Pakistan needs a vibrant foreign policy and active domestic policy to cope with the pressure generated by the Indo-US strategic partnership. In the following, a few policy-options have been suggested for the international and internal conduct of Pakistan.

3.5.1. Increasing Strategic Partnership with China

Pakistan's immediate and critical response to the Indo-US strategic collaboration is to

deepen its already robust ties with China (Hussain, 2023). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a significant part of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), serve as the strong pillar support for Pakistan's economic and strategic response to the region's shifting strategic dynamics. CPEC provides Pakistan with vital infrastructure investments that include roads, railways, energy projects, and industrial zones. All of these are expected to play pivotal role for its economic growth and stability. However, it is necessary that Pakistan expand CPEC beyond its current scope and include sectors like technology, digital infrastructure and defense cooperation.

In terms of defense, China remains most reliable partner of Pakistan. She is the major source for supplying advanced military equipment and technology that increases Pakistan's deterrence capability against India. Therefore, it is necessary that Pakistan acquires fighter jets, advanced missile technology, modern and sophisticated submarines, and air defense systems. It has become an obligation for Pakistan to expand this defense cooperation into areas like cyber security and intelligence sharing to help Pakistan maintain military equilibrium with India, even if India's defense ties with the US expand further.

In addition to this, Pakistan can take benefit from China's international influence to counterbalance India's diplomatic advantage. On Kashmir issue, China has invariably supported Pakistan in the United Nations and other international fora. China's support has helped Pakistan keep the issue in the global spotlight. Pakistan can also align itself with China's strategic aims in the Indo-Pacific region. Both countries have common interests in countering Indian influence in the Indian Ocean Region.

China's geo-political enmity with the US is also in line with Pakistan's desire to weaken the Indo-US partnership. By proving itself as a strong partner to China, Pakistan can ensure continued security and economic support, while also placing itself as a pivotal player in China's broader regional geopolitical strategy. In sum, deepening this partnership ensures that Pakistan has a powerful and influential partner. This partner is capable of helping Pakistan counter the mounting pressure from the Indo-US strategic alignment.

3.5.2. Recalibrating diplomatic and defense ties with the US

While the US has shifted its policy towards building a strategic partnership with India, Pakistan cannot afford to completely cut its ties with it. Rather, Pakistan needs to recalibrate its relations with the US (Khan, 2019). Pakistan needs to focus on areas of mutual interest. These areas may also include security and defense, countering terrorism, and maintaining regional power equilibrium. For instance, Pakistan's role in the US-led peace process in Afghanistan has been pivotal. Pakistan not only facilitated the parleys between the US and the Taliban, but also underscored the importance of peaceful transition of power for regional stability. This contribution has showed Pakistan's strategic importance to the US in South Asia, even though she continues to expand ties with India.

Although the relations between the US and Pakistan are the lowest at present, Pakistan must continue to place itself as a major player in maintaining regional peace and stability, in particular peace in Afghanistan and its peripheral areas. Pakistan should also continue to highlight its contribution in countering terrorism. Pakistan can also underscore its central role in preventing the rise of groups like Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and the Taliban, as it is major concern for both the US and international security. With this, Pakistan can ensure a rational and wise security partnership with the US, even though the later continue to tilt towards India strategically.

In economic field, Pakistan can continue developing trade relations and getting access to the US markets. It can capitalize on its textile and agricultural exports to the US markets. Moreover, it is pragmatic to engage in dialogues about human rights and economic reforms with the US. It will help Pakistan maintain a respectable level of diplomatic engagement with the US. Therefore, rather than perceiving the Indo-US partnership as a zero-sum game, Pakistan needs to recalibrate its ties with the US to continue to maintain a functional and mutually beneficial cooperation in important strategic regions.

3.5.3. Engagement with Russia

Another viable policy option for Pakistan is to strengthen its diplomatic and defense ties with Russia. Although Russia has been a traditional partner of India, it has begun to diversify its relations in the South Asian region (Khan, 2021). In recent years since 2010, Pakistan and Russia have made important strides in ameliorating their bilateral ties. As a result, cooperation in the fields of defense and security, countering terrorism, and energy has been developed. Both the sates need to find areas of mutual interests and so that their foreign policies converge on certain points. Recently, Pakistan's defense cooperation with Russia is of particularly significance. Joint military exercises like Druzhba and agreements for the procurement of Russian military weapons point towards the potential defense ties between the two states. This is a major transformation of policy from the Cold War-era dynamics when Russia was India's defense partner. Pakistan should continue this momentum and build on it to draw defense deals with Russia. It will help Pakistan in acquiring advanced air defense systems, state-of-the-art helicopters, and modern naval and marine technology. One the one hand, it would diversify Pakistan's defense procurements, whereas on the other hand, it would reduce its reliance on Western suppliers such as the US and its European partners.

Apart from defense cooperation, Pakistan can also explore energy partnerships with Russia. Russian expertise in natural gas and oil infrastructure can assist Pakistan fulfill its growing energy demands. Moreover, both the sates share common interest in countering terrorism in Central Asia and in Afghanistan. Their cooperation in this field can help bring security and stability in the aforementioned region and the state. In this way, a number of avenues between Russia and Pakistan can provide platform for deepening their diplomatic engagement. A successful

engagement with Russia in strategic and defense fields can serve as counterbalance to the Indo-US alliance. Thus, strengthening this relationship can provide Pakistan with a diversified set of international partners, thereby reducing its dependence on a single power or bloc.

3.5.4. Focusing on Economic Diplomacy

Pakistan should make economic diplomacy its priority to safeguard its national interests in the face of mounting regional and global competition (Salman & Ali, 2023). Economic efficacy is essential for maintaining strategic independence. Pakistan can increase this by developing stronger trade partnerships and by diversifying its economic partners. To do this, Pakistan must ensure an active participation in multi-lateral economic forums like the World Trade Organization (WTO), Asian Development Bank (ADB), and the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). Pakistan should also look for developing bilateral trade pacts with the nations in Middle East, Southeast Asia and Africa to lessen its reliance on traditional markets like the US and Europe.

For instance, Pakistan can focus towards emerging organization such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which includes major Asian states. Pakistan needs to pursue observer status and apply for an eventual membership in RCEP. This will increase regional trade that will boost Pakistan's exports and secure better trade agreements. Moreover, there is an immediate need to expand trade relations with countries in South East Asia such as Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand for export diversification.

In addition to this, Pakistan must also launch an overarching reformatory domestic campaign to improve its business environment so as to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). By simplifying tax laws, lessening bureaucratic redtapism, and enhancing its business infrastructure, Pakistan can make itself more attractive to international businesses. For example, Special Economic Zones (SEZs) under CPEC offer a excellent opportunity to attract foreign multinational firms that seek access both the Chinese and Pakistani markets. A recent commendable step to ensure ease of doing business in Pakistan is the establishment of Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) is a major step forward in the right direction (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2023).

In the same way, economic diplomacy also requires the promotion of Pakistan's interests in global financial institutions. Pakistan should engage in dialogues with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and other international financial bodies. In this way, Pakistan can secure favorable economic packages while, simultaneously, enforcing long-term structural and sectoral reforms. In sum, this multi-faceted approach to economic diplomacy will help Pakistan build a diversified economy that will help her navigate the geopolitical challenges presented by the Indo-US partnership.

3.5.5. Building Defense Capabilities

As the Indo-US defense alliance continues its expansion, Pakistan must also respond by bolstering its defense capabilities so as to maintain a credible deterrence against India (Khanum, 2020). Historically, Pakistan's strategic deterrence has been predicated on maintaining a balance of power with India. This has been achieved through nuclear parity. nevertheless, this defense symmetry has been eroded by the Indo-US strategic partnership, as India modernizes its military with advanced US technology. Therefore, Pakistan needs to invest in both conventional and non-traditional warfare capabilities to counterbalance strategic disadvantage emanating from Indo-US nexus.

In order to maintain balance of power with India, Pakistan must bring amelioration and upgradation in its air, naval, and missile forces. It has become essential for Pakistan acquire advanced fighter jets, state-of-the-art submarines, and strong missile defense systems from countries such as China and Russia. It can help Pakistan maintain a technological edge. For instance, China has garnered Pakistan with JF-17 fighter planes and naval frigates. Resultantly, it has bolstered Pakistan's air and marine capabilities.

Aside from conventional military upgradation, Pakistan must also pay attention to non-traditional defense capabilities. This includes building cyber warfare capabilities, strengthening intelligence gathering mechanism and improve missile system. Improvements in asymmetric capabilities are the sine qua non for countering India's larger conventional forces and ensuring Pakistan's strategic deterrence. The development of tactical nuclear weapons such as the Nasr missile has already improved Pakistan's credible deterrence option against Indian Cold Start Doctrine.

Furthermore, defense collaboration with states such as Türkiye and Russia can also increase Pakistan's military capabilities. On the one hand, joint military training exercises, intelligence sharing and defense technology transfers can transform Pakistan's military, whereas on the other hand, it will also diversify diplomatic ties of Pakistan. Thus, an immediate focus is needed on upgrading both conventional and non-conventional defense capabilities. With this, Pakistan can effectively curb the burgeoning Indo-US defense partnership and safeguard its national security.

3.5.6. Promotion of Regional Cooperation

Given that the Indo-US strategic partnership is constantly growing, Pakistan must start strengthening its diplomatic ties with other South Asian countries to balance Indian dominance in the region (Arif, 2018). Regional collaboration provides a platform for Pakistan to engage in fruitful dialogues on shared challenges in the fields of economic, security, and environment. This, hence, becomes a source of countering India's regional clout. One of the best platforms to materialize regional cooperation is that of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). It can provide Pakistan with a vehicle for regional economic and diplomatic

integration. Although SAARC has been largely dormant because of India-Pakistan tensions, Pakistan can advocate for revitalizing the organization. This will help address common issues like trade, climate change, and regional connectivity. Pakistan needs to vigorously collaborate with South Asian nations such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. These states have viewed India's regional ambitions with suspicion. Pakistan should present itself as a cooperative/collaborative and constructive partner in the region. In this way, it can dilute Indian influence on these states and promote a more equal regional order.

Apart from SAARC, Pakistan should also seek closer ties with Central Asian Republics (CARs) through organization such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). These countries possess rich energy resources and are strategically located. They offer Pakistan opportunities for trans-regional trade, energy exchange, and regional security collaboration. The geographical proximity of CARs to both Pakistan and China also present opportunities for economic and infrastructural integration under the flagship program of CPEC.

Finally, engagement Iran and Turkey on regional security and economic problems is necessary for helping Pakistan build strong alliances that counter growing influence on India. For instance, Pakistan and Iran want to stabilize Afghanistan. Therefore, cooperation on the problem of Afghanistan can strengthen their bilateral relations. Hence, by promoting regional integration and engaging with South Asian and Central Asian nations, Pakistan can create a multi-polar South Asian power structure that will help in mitigating the strategic challenges posed by the Indo-US strategic partnership.

3.5.7. Promoting Soft Power Image Internationally

Another way through which Pakistan can counter the growing influence of India is by focusing on enhancing its soft power image as a way to improve its international stature (Warraich, 2023). Soft power hinges upon cultural diplomacy, education and media outreach. It will allow Pakistan to project its soft values, norms and narratives on the global stage. In this way, it can counter India's diplomatic and cultural successes or present itself as a counter balance to India. Of many avenues of soft power, cultural diplomacy is the most effective. Pakistan has a rich history with excellent art and music complemented by its robust film industry. This offers ample opportunities to show the country's cultural inheritance to the world. It is, therefore, pertinent for Pakistan to promote Pakistani culture abroad through cultural festivities, art exhibitions and international media. These avenues will help build a positive posture of the country. The large Pakistani diaspora in the US, the UK and Gulf countries can play a pivotal role in these efforts by serving as cultural ambassadors.

Another way of showcasing soft image of Pakistan is that of expanding its educational opportunities to international students by offering scholarships and exchange programs. It has been universally acknowledged that hosting international students/scholars fosters goodwill,

thereby creating a positive image of a country. Through student exchange programs, Pakistan can become an educational hub. This will also help in collaborating with foreign universities, research institutions and think tanks.

Moreover, Pakistan should also proactively engage with international organizations like the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for highlighting issues of global concern that may include human rights, climate change and peacekeeping. In particular, Pakistan's constant advocacy on the Kashmir issue at international forums is an apt example of utilizing diplomatic platforms to showcase its key concerns to the global community. Thus, by through the promotion of its soft power image, Pakistan can get global influence and become a respectable member on the world stage.

3.5.8. Vibrant Multilateralism

Pakistan needs to pro-actively seek to build multi-lateral diplomatic and strategic partnerships with states outside South Asia that share common concern about the growing Indo-US partnership (Omeed, 2023). Multi-lateral alliances provide Pakistan with the opportunity to form partnerships with shared strategic and economic interests so as to create a coalition that counters the dominance of India. To materialize this objective, Pakistan should get help from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Although Pakistan and India both are full members of the SCO since 2017, the platform provides Pakistan with a massive opportunity to engage with major regional powers such as China, Russia and Central Asian Republics (CARs). The SCO focuses on regional security and integrity, countering terrorism, and developing strong economic cooperation amongst the member states. The objectives of the SCO align with Pakistan's interests and pro-active participation in the organization can help Pakistan strengthen its relations with member states while, simultaneously, countering India's influence. Pakistan should also engage with Türkiye, Malaysia, and Indonesia. These states share concerns about US foreign policies. In particular, Malaysia and Indonesia see Indo-US partnership with suspicion. As far as Türkiye is concerned, it has emerged as a key regional player with whom Pakistan has developed close diplomatic, military and cultural relations. Thus, ties with Türkiye in defense and economic fields can serve as a counterbalance to India's increasing influence in the region.

In the same way, Pakistan should also focus on Middle Eastern countries. It can explore alliances with countries in the Middle East like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). They have already been important economic partners of Pakistan. At present, Pakistan needs to explore security and defense ties with Gulf countries. In this way, Pakistan can ensure that it maintains its status of a key player in Middle East's geo-politics. It is also expedient for Pakistan to build multi-lateral alliances with emerging powers in African and Latin America continents. These regions provide new opportunities for economic and diplomatic engagements, thereby allowing Pakistan to diversify its global outreach. Thus, multilateral alliances can create a

more balanced and multifaceted foreign policy of Pakistan that invalidates strategic pressures presented by the Indo-US partnership.

3.5.9. Introducing Domestic Economic Reforms

Domestic economic reforms are essential for countering the increasing influence of Indo-US strategic partnership (Asian Development Bank, 2024). A strong economy not only necessary for Pakistan's strategic autonomy, but also for its greater leverage in global diplomacy. To materialize this, Pakistan must implement all-encompassing economic reforms aimed at addressing its structural and institutional challenges. These reforms should be primarily focused on addressing the issues of fiscal deficits, low tax returns, and reliance on external debt.

In the first place, Pakistan needs to revamp its tax collection infrastructure. At present, the menace of tax evasion and a limited tax radar hinders the government's ability to generate revenues. Therefore, reforms should must help broaden the tax net and enforce tax compliance. Pakistan needs to increase domestic revenues and reduce its dependency on global financial institutions like the IMF. For example, progressive tax reforms and improvement in tax administration can help boost tax revenues. It will help the state invest more in defense, infrastructural development and ameliorating education and healthcare sectors (Khan, 2025).

Secondly, Pakistan must focus on the betterment of its ease-of-doing-business to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). There is an immediate need to simplify bureaucratic procedures, reduce corruption by introducing stringent anti-corruption measures and fulfill infrastructural deficit. It will make Pakistan a more attractive destination for foreign investors. One step in the right direction is the development of Special Economic Zones (SEZs) under CPEC. They provide an excellent opportunity to attract FDIs in industries such as manufacturing, technology and logistics.

Thirdly, Pakistan should focus on human resource development by improving its educational and vocational training institutes. A well-educated and skilled workforce is the sine qua non for a sustainable and long-term economic growth. Sectors such as information technology, renewable energy and agriculture have an immense potential to create jobs opportunities and boost exports.

Finally, provision of uninterrupted energy serves as the backbone for the economic growth of a nation. Pakistan is no exception. It needs to prioritize energy reforms to resolve its chronic power shortages that often result in unannounced power cuts. Pakistan should also invest in renewable energy sources by exploring the avenues of solar energy and wind energy. Renewable energy will reduce Pakistan's reliance on imported oil-based energy and ameliorate its balance of payments. Thus, addressing these domestic economic challenges should be top priority of the state. With this Pakistan would be able to build a resilient economy that will be better equipped to handle the geo-political challenges presented by the Indo-US bonhomie.

Increased Role in Global Governance Institutions

To counter the diplomatic challenges posed by the Indo-US partnership, Pakistan needs to leverage international legal forums and multilateral global institutions such as the United Nations (UN). Furthermore, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and UN General Assembly provide platforms for Pakistan to raise issues of global concerns, particularly related to human rights, regional security and respect for international law (Abbasi, 2023). One key area where Pakistan can get benefitted from these institutions is to highlight Kashmir issue. By continuously showcasing India atrocious violations of human rights in Indian-occupied Kashmir, Pakistan can keep the issue in the global spotlight. Further, Pakistan can also lodge cases with international bodies like the ICJ. It can use legal arguments predicated on the UN resolutions that call for a plebiscite in Kashmir. On the one hand, it would reinforce Pakistan's stance on the issue, whereas on the other hand, it portrays Pakistan as the protector of human rights and promotor of self-determination.

Moreover, Pakistan can also use international forums to advocate global collaboration for countering terrorism and preventing nuclear proliferation. Likewise, Pakistan needs to pro-actively participate in UN discussions and deliberations on terror financing and extremism. In this way, Pakistan can counter spurious accusations of harboring terrorists, thereby demonstrating its commitment to global security narratives. For instance, Pakistan's full and successful compliance with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) regulations has already improved its image in global community. Similarly, Pakistan can also play a pivotal role in international legal frameworks to address environmental challenges. Pakistan contributes less than 1 percent to global carbon emissions. However, it is the 8th most vulnerable country to climate change. Climate change has generated detrimental impacts on Pakistan's agriculture and water resources. By participating in global climate change debates and environmental treaties, Pakistan can access international funds and technical assistance to mitigate the deleterious effects of climate change. Thus, international law and multi-lateral institutions can help Pakistan maintain a strong diplomatic presence on the international stage.

Chapter 4

TERRORISM AND NUCLEAR FACTORS IN PAKISTAN AND INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICIES TOWARDS THE US

4.1. Introduction

4.1.1. 9/11 And Post 9/11 US War on Terror: Actors and Factors

Tuesday, 9 November 2001, came out to be one of the most catastrophic incidents in the US history, which not only influenced US prompt reaction and course of action on the world platform but also inaugurated global War on Terror later on. Terrorism and nuclear terrorism came out to be one of the major concerns for the US for years to come and prompt decision was made to take actions (Woodward, 2002). It is important to discuss the context of 9/11 and post 9/11 developments because it carries blueprints of all the future regional and global matrix, in which South Asia, with a focus on Afghanistan and Pakistan would become the most relevant states in US War on Terror. The hijacking of planes by the 19 hijackers and then series of four coordinated terrorist attacks on World Trade Center and Pentagon by these terrorists besieged US administration (Rafiq, 2017). The set back was serious as it took 2977 lives posing challenge to US firefighters and law enforcing agencies to control and manage the situation. Many of the firefighters lost their lives in combating the havoc (Sugunakararaju, 2016). Moreover, a great loss of about \$10 billion occurred to the property and infrastructure. This situation put whole US defense and intelligence system into question. More concern aroused out of this vulnerability and insecurity. Hence, US Federal Bureau of Investigation launched one of the biggest investigations of its history in order to trace out factors and actors involved in the incident (Small, 2015).

Consequently, in days, US FBI identified Al-Qaida as the master mind and main culprit behind 9/11 attacks. Moreover, the nationalities of the terrorists, released by the bureau disclosed that 15 of the 19 terrorists belonged to Saudi Arabia, 2 of them had Egyptian nationality, 1 was from United Arab Emirates and 1 of them was Lebanon nationalist (Jacque, 2009). Thus, involvement of the non-state actors from various country soil made the US launch 'Global' campaign against Terror. Initially denied, however, later, Osama Bin Laden embraced the responsibility of the attacks in 2004 (Sunawar, 2015). Afghanistan came to be a harboring soil of terrorism as US agencies suspected that Al-Qaeda was connected with Taliban in Afghanistan (Jalil, 2018) hence, South Asia came to be in particular focus in this expedition. Afghanistan and Pakistan came to be frontline states in this regard. The complex interplay of different state actors as well as non-state actors and factors shape US war on terror (Pogoso, 2018). Later on, other factors, such as South Asian regional rivalries and relations (Pakistan-Afghanistan relations, Indo-Pak rivalry, India-China factor, Indo-Iran and Sino-Pak relations further shaped the dimensions of this war on terror. Sectarian crises and Middle East factor also contributed to further complicating

the War on Terror (Abbas & Syed, 2021). In short, Afghanistan has always been, since Russian invasion in Afghanistan, and particularly after 9/11 has come out to be, one of the most important geo-strategic factors in the US-Pakistan relation. The recent developments in US-Pakistan relation are the consequences of the 9/11 episode of the history as discussed below.

4.1.2. Pakistan's Foreign Policy vis-à-vis US War on Terror since 9/11

The 9/11 attacks in the US inaugurated a dramatic shift in world politics, especially for Pakistan, which was left with a difficult choice regarding its foreign policy. Pakistan was forced by the incident to decide quickly on its future alliance: it would either join or support the US in the 'War on Terror' or risk being perceived as an ally of Afghanistan, especially the Taliban government. Pakistan decided to stand with the US in the immediate wake of 9/11, mostly to prevent the consequences of being labeled as an 'adversary' (Ahmed, 2018). At the time, President Pervez Musharraf recognized how important it was to include Pakistan as a key ally in the US-led war against terrorism. As a result of this alignment, Pakistan was designated as a "major non-NATO ally" in 2004, signifying the strengthening military and commercial relations between US and Pakistan. Pakistan benefited from financial and military support as a non-NATO ally, which improved its economic stability and defense capacities (Khan, 2016). However, there were major domestic and strategic consequences to this cooperation. Pakistan, as a frontline state to war against terrorism was complex and multifaceted. Its access to military bases, information cooperation, and crucial logistical assistance made the nation an invaluable ally for US operations in Afghanistan. Pakistan conducted military operations in the tribal areas nearby Afghanistan, where it was thought that Al-Qaeda and Taliban militants sought refuge. But Pakistan's domestic instability was partly a result of its cooperation with the US. Terrorist attacks in Pakistan sharply increased as a result of the government's choice to side with the US which infuriated numerous militant organizations (Jalil, 2018). Growing anti-US sentiment was a result of this internal pushback, as sections of the population and political class saw the alliance with distrust and said that the government was sacrificing national sovereignty in return for foreign assistance.

Along these difficulties, Pakistan's foreign policy at that time was firmly based on its ties to the US. Pakistan was seen by the US as crucial to its strategy in Afghanistan, and significant assistance was given to guarantee sustained collaboration (Jalil, 2018). There were conflicts throughout the relationship, though. Mistrust emerged between the two countries as a result of Pakistan's dual status as an ally in the war against terrorism and a target of accusations that it supports extremist organizations. Pakistan has to continually control its behavior and image in order to maintain this delicate balance, particularly considering the domestic political environment. Although Pakistan's collaboration with the US dominated its early post-9/11 foreign policy, in the years that followed it started to take a more diverse stance. Pakistan's foreign policy witnessed a notable transformation with its increasing strategic collaboration with China (Cohen,

2001). A new era in Pakistan's international relations was initiated in 2015 with the opening of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). One of the main pillars of China's Belt and Road Initiative, the CPEC signified a major shift in Pakistan's foreign policy, especially with regard to economic alliances. In addition to supporting Pakistan's economic expansion, the multibillion-dollar energy and infrastructure projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) allowed Pakistan to lessen its reliance on Western nations, especially the US (Iqbal, 2018). Pakistan was able to pursue a more balanced foreign policy by taking advantage of its partnerships with both China and the US. With its promise of regional influence and economic stability for Pakistan, the CPEC came to represent this strategic shift. The US-Indian relationship, which had grown considerably over the same time period, was perceived as being counterbalanced by this expanding cooperation with China. Pakistan was concerned about the US-Indian cooperation because it represented a change in the balance of power in the region, especially in the areas of commerce and defense (Ahmed, 2018).

Pakistan's goal of expanding its ties in the region was part of its larger foreign strategy, which included the strategic realignment towards China. Pakistan started to establish closer connections with other significant regional actors, such as Turkey, Iran, and Russia. The Greater Eurasian Partnership (GEP), which pursued to strengthen regional cooperation by bringing BRI and EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union) closer and lessen the influence of countries, especially India, was a glaring example of this change (GREF, 2015). Pakistan aimed to mitigate India's increasing influence in the area by forming alliances with nations such as China, Iran, Turkey, and Russia. With the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and other regional organizations where Pakistan actively participated in security negotiations, the Greater Eurasian Partnership offered Pakistan new prospects for military and economic cooperation (Zulfikar, 2022). Hence, overall, Pakistan's foreign policy embarked upon new horizons to explore than the long-standing Western allies.

Pakistan's foreign policy during this period was also shaped by its ongoing rivalry with India. Pakistan's foreign policy decisions were heavily influenced by the strategic competition between the two countries, especially in their interactions with the US. Pakistan remained cooperative with the US in counterterrorism activities, but it was concerned about US increasing closeness to India. The growing alliance between the US and India in domains including defense, commerce, and nuclear cooperation presented a hurdle to Pakistan's strategic objectives within the region (Ahmad, 2021). In an effort to balance the "Indian factor," Pakistan aimed to strengthen its armed forces and expand its partnerships with China and other regional nations. In order to preserve its national security objectives, Pakistan has to strike a balance between the complicated dynamics of its ties with both the US and India. Pakistan's varied foreign policy allowed it to retain some degree of strategic autonomy in spite of the difficulties presented by its connections

with both the US and India (Khan, 2016). Pakistan's foreign policy has effectively progressed beyond its conventional dependence on the US by 2017, with notable achievements coming from the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Greater Eurasian Partnership. By expanding its economy, Pakistan was able to become less reliant on help from the West and establish closer military and economic connections with neighboring countries, especially China (Iqbal, 2018).

4.1.3. India's Foreign Policy vis-à-vis US War on Terror since 9/11

India's foreign policy has been realigned in the wake of the catastrophic events of September 11, 2001, to closely align with the US in the war against terrorism. As both countries have been targets of extreme violence, the terrorist acts brought attention to a common threat that both of them face. India made a change in its foreign policy goals when it saw that it needed to strengthen its collaboration with the US in this situation (Jabeen, 2014). India and the US have a strong foundation for partnership because of their common experience with terrorism. Former US Secretary of State Colin Powell and Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh jointly stated on October 17, 2001, in India that the US and India are "natural allies" in the war against terrorism, highlighting their respective roles as the two largest multiethnic democracies in the world (Jabeen, 2014). This recognition of shared interests in countering terrorism marked the start of a strategic alliance that would develop over the following years. An important step forward in this collaboration was the formation of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Counterterrorism at the start of the twenty first century. The Joint Working Group (JWG) enabled communication, intelligence sharing, and training initiatives against terrorism between the two countries (Advani, 2003). By 2002, high-level meetings had strengthened this cooperative framework even more, leading to talks on the sale of US electronic sensors for use along the Line of Control dividing Indian-occupied Kashmir from Pakistani-occupied Kashmir, as well as other military hardware to India. This collaboration highlights the US's recognition of the terrorism threat posed by Pakistan. In addition; the US-Indian military partnership grew significantly after 9/11, indicating a change in Indian foreign policy towards more alignment with US strategic goals. Joint military collaborations like "YudhAbhyas" and "Cope India" strengthened operational preparedness and demonstrated both countries' dedication to counterterrorism operations. Beginning in 2004, the biannual "Cope India" air force exercise and the yearly 'YudhAbhyas' exercise aimed to improve combined military capabilities for disaster relief and humanitarian assistance (Embassy of India, 2014).

In the backdrop of US-led counterterrorism efforts, this military cooperation shows a developing defense partnership that goes beyond simple tactical cooperation and represents an important aspect of India's foreign policy. India's foreign policy has been more in line with US foreign policy after 9/11, especially when it comes to defending against perceived threats from

China, which both countries see as a strategic rival (Jabeen, 2014). This alignment has been emphasized by a common threat about China's growing military and economic power in the region, which has led Japan, India's long-time ally, to raise similar concerns. Significant military hardware sales, such as the installation of the Aegis radar system to track Chinese military movements in vital maritime zones like the Malacca Straits and the ability to track Chinese submarines, are proof that India and the US are now working together more closely on a strategic level (Raghu, 2005). India is an essential ally of the US as it works to counterbalance China's influence because of its important strategic position in South Asia. India's development of missile capabilities shows its dedication to preserving regional security, even if it has been hesitant to test more weapons in order to prevent tensions with China from rising (Ahmed, 2005). As both countries understand how critical it is to control a strategic rival like China, India is becoming an increasingly important ally for the US in its larger goal to uphold peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. This is demonstrated by the developing defense connection and military cooperation between the two nations. Hence, Indo-US cooperation on terrorism has further paved way for Indo-US multilateral partnership from combatting terrorism to counterbalance China.

Indian foreign policy after 9/11 was focused on strengthening US-Indian counterterrorism cooperation. An important step by India to confront new security and cyber-terrorism issues was the formation of the US-India Cyber Security Forum in 2002. Regular action programs and high-level meetings were made possible by this forum, which improved bilateral discussions on important security concerns. Also, the Indo-US Defense Policy Group gained significance after 9/11 and developed into a major forum for military-to-military collaboration, especially in the areas of humanitarian aid, maritime security, and counterterrorism (Jabeen, 2014). This highlighted the wider reach of Indian foreign policy by coordinating military assistance with diplomatic initiatives meant to maintain regional stability. Beyond simply engaging in operational cooperation, India's relationship with the US on counterterrorism has evolved to target the ideological foundations of terrorism. As democracies, both countries understood how critical it was to strike a balance between fighting terrorism and upholding democratic principles. Indian leaders, such as former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal, emphasized that both countries had a shared duty for preventing terrorism and maintaining the rule of law. This shared knowledge paved the way for India's foreign policy to seek closer cooperation in combating extremist ideology (Jabeen, 2014).

Initiatives like the Counterterrorism Cooperation Initiative, which was signed in 2010, significantly enhanced the framework of cooperation between the US and India. This agreement supported India's foreign policy objectives of strengthening cooperative counterterrorism operations, especially by capacity building and intelligence sharing. When President Obama launched the Homeland Security Dialogue during his 2010 visit to India, it served as more

evidence of the strategic significance of such efforts. In addition to discussing short-term counterterrorism measures, this dialogue advanced long-term strategic collaboration, strengthening counterterrorism as a pillar of Indian foreign policy towards the US. Even the Indo-US relationship had improved after 9/11; there were still difficulties, especially with Pakistan (US Department of Defense, 2011). Though, the US has been important for India but complex relationship with Pakistan, which was frequently viewed as a secondary but essential ally for US objectives in the South Asian region, presented challenges for Indian foreign policy. India aimed to demonstrate that it was a partner on a level playing field in the war against terrorism. Pakistan was not treated equally by the US in its interaction with it, as evidenced by US's increasing acknowledgement of India's critical role in its counterterrorism policy. This change freed Indian foreign policy from Pakistan's influence on regional dynamics to more freely pursue national goals (Sattar, 2007).

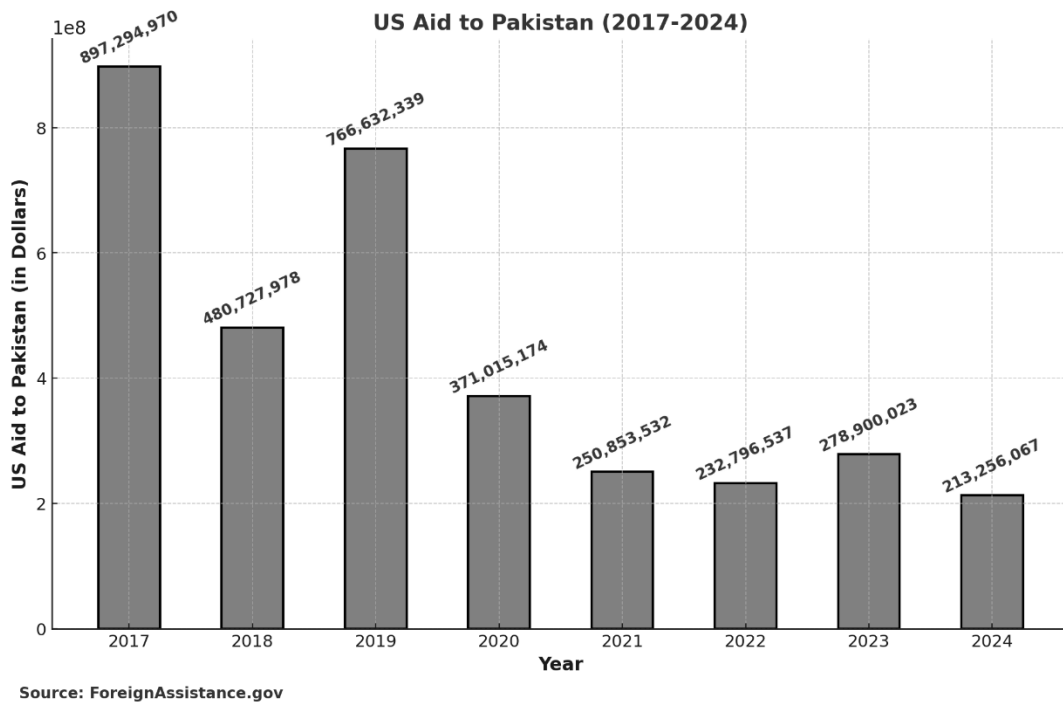
The US also backed India's bid for a permanent membership on the UN Security Council. US backing recognized India's contributions to international peace and security initiatives, especially in the area of counterterrorism. India's aim to have more influence in international governance systems was reflected in this attempt, and the US's support was consistent with India's foreign policy objectives of becoming a more prominent player in talks about global security (Jabeen, 2014). Counterterrorism remained a primary area of attention as both countries worked together on a number of fronts to enhance their respective responsibilities in global governance, demonstrating shared advantages. The US and India's increasing intelligence collaboration was another significant facet of this changing alliance. As a crucial part of their strategic cooperation, exchanging intelligence on terrorist threats improved both countries' capacity to react swiftly and effectively to new threats to international security. Both countries were able to share real-time intelligence by establishing intelligence-sharing procedures, which greatly enhanced their ability to proactively confront any terrorist threats and support their cooperative counterterrorism plans (Jabeen, 2014). This breakthrough strengthened India's position as a key pillar of US-Indian foreign policy in the post-9/11 age of intelligence collaboration. All these developments allowed India to benefit from various forms of assistance, including military and economic support, while also enhancing its capabilities in counter-terrorism.

4.2. Terrorism As a Geo-Strategic Factor in Pakistan's Foreign Policy Towards the US (2018 To 2023)

4.2.1. US Military Aid Cut-Off Under Trump Administration (2018) And Pakistan's Policy Responses

US President Donald Trump introduced Afghan policy in 2017, which marked an important turning point in Pakistan-US relations, resulting in the 2018 suspension of Pakistan's military assistance. The shift in the policy indicated the grievances of the Trump's administration regarding

Pakistan's role in giving refuge to terrorist groups, especially the Haqqani network and Taliban (Kaura, 2017). Trump's administration highlighted that Pakistan had not fully contributed to the US efforts in countering terrorism in Afghanistan even by receiving billions of dollars of aid. Trump's tweet on 1st January, 2017, denouncing Pakistan for cheating the US, while taking huge amounts of aid from the US, so military assistance was halted. Trump's South Asia policy emphasized a new approach that gave winning the war on terrorism first priority (Iqbal, 2017). Pakistan was required by the US government to take concrete action to close terrorist havens inside its borders. As part of this, the US took a clear stand against organizations such as the Haqqani network, which it suspected had connections to Pakistan's intelligence agencies. According to statements made by the Trump administration, Pakistan's neutrality is seen as a major obstacle to Afghanistan's security and, as a result, as a threat to US interests in South Asian region (Naz, 2023). The military assistance, which was worth more than \$300 million, signaled an increase in the sanctions against Pakistan. Trump's administration threatened Pakistan with severe consequences if it continued to aid terrorist organizations, warning to cut off all financial and military support. This hard stance was a reflection of US authorities' conviction that engagement measures had not succeeded in making Pakistan to take significant action against terrorism (Hathaway, 2019). The following graph shows US aid to Pakistan from 2017 to 2024.



The above graph shows decline in US aid to Pakistan in 2018 and then a little rise as the COVID-19 era embarked upon and then again decline. The US imposed more pressure and aid cut off on Pakistan in 2018 due in large part to concerns about terrorism, regional security, and Pakistan's nuclear aspirations. Due to Pakistan's alleged support for the Taliban and inability to live up to US counterterrorism standards, the US placed a great deal of pressure on the country in 2018 by enacting a number of sanctions. The Trump administration, in 2018, cut-off aid to

Pakistan by around \$300 million, signaling the end of all US military aid to Pakistan (Alex, 2018). This, aid cutbacks persisted in the Biden administration as well, with overall civilian aid falling to less than \$200 million by 2022 (Reuters, 2018; ForeignAssistance.gov). The suspension of military aid, which had been essential to Pakistan's military and counterterrorism operations, was one of the most prominent actions. Payments under the Coalition Support Funds (CSF), a US initiative to compensate Pakistan for military and logistical assistance in the war against terrorism, were also suspended. Since the early 2000s, the CSF alone has provided billions of dollars in financial aid, and Pakistan's military was under a lot of financial strain until it was suspended (Munshi, 2022). Apart from reducing military assistance, Pakistan was included to the Financial Action Task Force's (FATF) grey list in June 2019, which had a negative impact on the country's economy by restricting its access to global financial markets and making it more difficult for it to get loans or investments. Pakistan's already weak economy was further strained by estimates that being on the FATF grey list cost the country some \$10 billion a year. By denying Pakistan access to a number of military training programs, the US further curtailed military cooperation, limiting Pakistan's strategic military capabilities and isolating it diplomatically. These activities were a part of a larger US plan to pressure Pakistan to take more aggressive steps against terrorist organizations operating inside its borders, particularly those associated with the Haqqani network and the Afghan Taliban (Amin, 2022). A number of considerations influenced Pakistan's response to US. Sanctions, including the necessity to maintain a balance with other superpowers like China. Pakistan shifted further in favor of China as a result of mounting US pressure, using the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a buffer against US aid cut-off. Since the US placed sanctions on Pakistan after its nuclear tests in 1998, this geopolitical shift towards China had been developing (Khan, 2020). This change was cemented in 2018 as Pakistan kept fortifying its strategic alliances with China, which provided financial and military support free from the political restrictions imposed by the US.

With Pakistan searching for other economic partners than the US, it responded to US pressure by engaging diplomatically in an effort to mitigate US concerns while preserving its strategic independence. By highlighting its commitment and contributions to the war on terror and the sacrifices it had made, such as the loss of life and economic suffering, Pakistan aimed to maintain a balance in its ties with the US. Despite, being a crucial US ally in the war against terrorism, Pakistan had long maintained that it was unfairly blamed for not doing enough (Munshi, 2022). Pakistan's diplomatic attempts to interact with other international players, especially in the Muslim world and Europe, in order to diversify its sources of military and economic support, were another important component of its reaction to US aid cut-off. This approach was a key component of Pakistan's foreign policy since 2018 and had been employed effectively in the past, especially during US sanctions in the 1970s and 1990s (Munshi, 2022) Pakistan attempted to give

a multidimensional response to the US actions towards Pakistan. It involved expanding its foreign alliances, highlighting its contributions to global security, preserving its nuclear deterrent, and increasing ties with China and the Muslim world. The historical dynamics of Pakistan-US relations, when times of collaboration were usually followed by pressure and sanctions, especially in reaction to conflicting national interests, served as the basis for these activities.

This suspension of the US aid had a significant effect on US-Pakistan relations. The claims made by Trump and his team have been met with considerable opposition from the Pakistani government. Prime Minister ShahidKhaqanAbbasi and Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif, among other Pakistan officials, denied providing refuge to terrorists. They criticized the US for holding Pakistan accountable for its own shortcomings in Afghanistan and highlighted Pakistan's efforts made in the war against terrorism. Pakistan's national security committee publicly denounced the US charges, claiming that Pakistan had given US soldiers in Afghanistan as essential logistical support (Naz, 2023). Decline in US-Pakistan relations brought significant changes on their diplomatic relations also. US Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson visited Pakistan in October, 2017, met with a cold reception indicating the growing animosity between US and Pakistan. The Pakistani government sent a clear message to the US that it would not accede to requests for further action against terrorists. Pakistan reaffirmed its claim to sovereignty and declared that it would not submit to outside influence when determining its policies, especially when it came to questions of national security (Iqbal, 2017).

Pakistan responded to the US suspension of military aid with a complex diplomatic and geopolitical plan. Realizing that the assistance cutoff would have negative effects, Pakistan looked to increase and improve its relations with other regional countries, especially China and Russia. China positioned itself as a crucial ally in light of the US measures by restating its commitment to Pakistan through economic initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In addition to serving as a counterbalance to the US military's withdrawal, this strategic alliance with China gave Pakistan access to a new source of financial and military assistance (Naz, 2023). One of Pakistan's diplomatic initiatives was to encourage participation from regional states in the peace process in Afghanistan. Pakistan made an effort to present itself as an important participant in talks to stabilize Afghanistan. Pakistan sought to restore leverage in its relationship with the US and show that it was prepared to make a constructive contribution to regional security by mediating negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government. By using this strategy, Pakistan was hoping to refute the perception of its position as a destabilizing force and highlight its ability as a mediator (Sarwar, 2021). By redrawing its military purchase plans in reaction to the US military's withdrawal was another strategic priority for Pakistan. An important deal involving cutting-edge military technologies, such F-16 fighter planes, which had been a key component of Pakistan's defense plan, was also suspended along with the funding. Pakistan looked for alternate

sources for military support in light of these limitations, especially from countries like China and Turkey. This transformation was a part of a larger plan to lessen Pakistan's reliance on US military supply and look for new alliances that may improve its defense capabilities (Ali, 2020). In addition, the Pakistani government improved its internal security conditions, especially in the war against domestic terrorism. Even as it persisted in denying support to terrorist organizations, Pakistan made an effort to present itself as a country dedicated to combating terrorism. In an effort to demonstrate its will to fight terrorism and uphold its sovereignty, the military began conducting operations against several terrorist organizations inside its borders. Even while relations with the US remained high, part of the purpose of this domestic action was intended to ease US concerns about terrorism coming from Pakistan (Naz, 2023). An important turning point in US-Pakistan relations was the Trump administration's suspension of military aid, which was accompanied by allegations, denials, and a great deal of diplomatic tension. Pakistan attempted to manage the difficulties brought about by the withdrawal of US assistance and also by allegations, as seen by its reaction, which included diplomatic engagement with alternative allies, a focus on its involvement in the Afghan peace process, and a review of military acquisition (Naz, 2023). Despite significant obstacles, both countries acknowledged that they still had interests in common, particularly when it came to fighting terrorism and maintaining regional peace. The way-forward needed striking a careful balance between satisfying the concerns of an increasingly doubtful US administration and reaffirming Pakistan's sovereignty. Hence, Pakistan and US relation is thus, more a transactional one in nature, based on give and take and not a long term 'reliable' cooperation (Ali, 2025).

4.2.2. Pakistan's Foreign Policy During Imran Khan Premiership

Pakistan's foreign policy has changed significantly in the last few years, especially in reaction to the evolving nature of its relationship with the US. The transition from the "Do More" period, marked by US demands that Pakistan step up its counterterrorism efforts, to the "No More" age, when Pakistan has reaffirmed its sovereignty and challenged US pressure, is reflective of this shift. Prime Minister Imran Khan's firm "Absolutely Not" position, which rejects the idea of accepting US military bases following their exit from Afghanistan, is the demonstration of this change (Amjad, 2024). These events indicate a distinct shift in Pakistan's foreign policy, which has been influenced by its experiences, sacrifices, and strategic considerations. Donald Trump's election to the presidency resulted in Pakistan facing further pressure to "Do More." In a speech on August 2, 2017, Trump made simple how aggressively he felt Pakistan had to continue to destroy terrorist networks if it wanted to save its alliance with the US. Previous US administrations have made demands similar to those expressed by Trump, so his strategy was not the first of its nature (Khan, 2019). But his speech was especially harsh. Trump's focus on the "Do More" slogan stemmed from US's strategic dissatisfaction with Pakistan, particularly in case of the

Afghanistan. His government charged that Pakistan was giving refuge to terrorist organizations, especially those aiming at US soldiers in Afghanistan. Trump was firm in his assertion that maintaining US-Pakistan ties required Pakistan's support in dismantling these networks. Despite his aggressive behavior, Trump was simultaneously focused on reaching a political agreement in Afghanistan, especially in terms of encouraging peace negotiations with the Taliban as part of his larger plan to remove US forces from the country before his re-election campaign (Khan, 2019). Trump acknowledged Pakistan's clear role as a facilitator in these talks, particularly its influence over the Taliban. His public declarations that Pakistan would face harsh consequences were not followed through on because the US could not afford to cut all connections with a country that was so vital to the peace effort in Afghanistan. However, Pakistan remained the target of criticism from Trump's government, with the president taking to social media to express his disappointment. Trump posted the following tweet on New Year's Eve of 2018; "The US has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies and deceit." US funding to Pakistan was significantly reduced after this public criticism. The withdrawal of financial and military support, especially for counterterrorism initiatives, represented the relationship's declining status (Ministry of Finance, 2016).

Pakistan's leadership took a "No More" stance in reaction to Trump's aggressive remarks. Pakistan became more and more tired of being held responsible for the US mistakes in Afghanistan. Pakistan said that in the war against terrorism, it had already suffered heavy costs in terms of both human lives lost and financial damages. Pakistan's economy has lost more than \$150 billion due to its engagement in the war on terror, and the country has lost more than 70,000 citizens to terrorism over the years. The majority of this violence was concentrated in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), where terrorist strikes claimed the lives of 500 police officers (Amjad, 2024).

Pakistan's resources have been drained by these sacrifices and the long-term effects of hosting over 3 million Afghan refugees, leaving the nation open to more destabilization. The leadership of Pakistan started to break away from US demands after recognizing how longer it could bear these losses. It became ready to give up its security and sovereignty for a relationship that was becoming more and more one-sided (Amjad, 2024). As US proposals to host military bases in Pakistan following the withdrawal of US soldiers from Afghanistan were made, Prime Minister Imran Khan decisively responded, "Absolutely not," marking the culmination of this change in Pakistan's foreign policy. Imran Khan declined because he didn't want Pakistan, which had already suffered greatly as a result of its engagement in the Afghan war, to become even more unstable (Khan, 2019). He said "Absolutely not. There is no way we are going to allow any bases, any sort of action from Pakistani territory into Afghanistan. Absolutely not," the prime minister told Axios on HBO in an interview. There appeared a thaw in Pakistan-US relations during this period.

Pakistan have been a target for terrorist organizations seeking retaliation for US attacks in Afghanistan if it had hosted US military fields. Imran Khan's administration understood that such a step would result in a resurgence of violence and economic instability, which Pakistan could no longer afford. The decision was also driven by a desire to avoid further entanglement in the conflicts of global powers to reject US bases. Imran Khan's position included advocating for a more comprehensive vision of peace and stability in the region in addition to opposing US military intervention. He made it quite clear what Pakistan's stance was, saying that it would be happy to work with the US to promote peace, but not at the expense of its own security and sovereignty (Akhtar, 2023). Reactions to the "Absolutely Not" policy came from both foreign and domestically. In Pakistan, it was viewed as a strong declaration of the state's independence and sovereignty in the face of outside pressure. Globally, it denoted a change in Pakistan's strategy on its dealings with powerful states, especially the US. Pakistan reaffirmed its sovereignty to navigate its own foreign affairs, free from outside interference, by declining to accept US military bases. This action was a part of Pakistan's larger strategic realignment, which aimed to balance its ties to China, the US, and other regional powers (Khan, 2019). Even if it was skeptical of Pakistan's denial, the US eventually had to acknowledge that its relationship with Pakistan was evolving. The age of forceful diplomacy and unilateral demands had come to an end. Pakistan was unwilling to continue acting as an obedient ally. Rather, it was defining a new position for itself as a peaceful partner, ready to work together but only under its own conditions. Thus, the opening period of Imran Khan premiership brought about a shift in foreign policy of Pakistan, calling for criticism internally and externally.

4.2.3. Pulwama Attacks and Indian Counter Air Strikes: Pakistan's Response

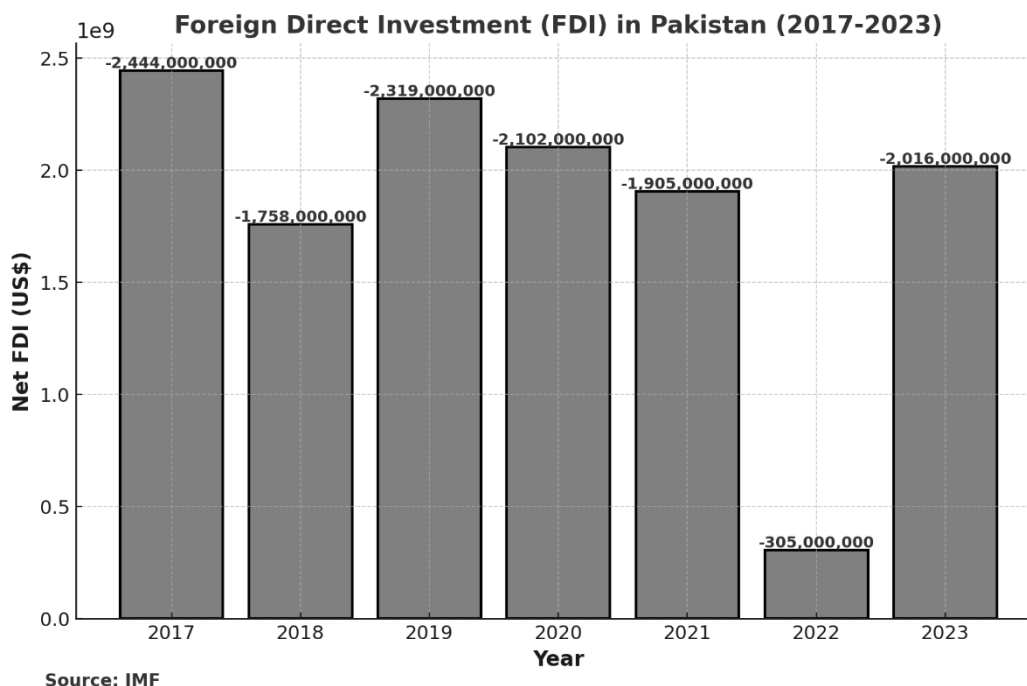
Tensions between India and Pakistan sharply increased following the Pulwama attack on February 14, 2019, in which a suicide bomber attacked an Indian paramilitary convoy in Indian-occupied Kashmir. Forty members of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) died in this attack, which was claimed by the extremist organization Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM), which is allegedly located in Pakistan. Without first conducting a comprehensive investigation, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Rajnath Singh threatened serious retaliation after India instantly accused Pakistan of being behind the attack. On February 26, 2019, this intensified into a string of airstrikes by India against what it claimed to be terrorist training centers in Balakot, Pakistan (Yasir&Abi-Habib, 2019). India's reaction to the incident in Pulwama changed the state's strategic approach towards Pakistan. To isolate Pakistan in the past, Indian administrations have mostly focused on diplomatic pressure and international forums. But after Pulwama, the Modi administration adopted a more assertive posture, using airstrikes on Pakistani territory in addition to diplomatic channels. This military action was a component of a larger plan to evaluate the degree of deterrence that exists between the two countries (Safi, 2019). It was determined by

Indian strategists that Pakistan would not likely use nuclear weapons in retaliation, a tactic they called "nuclear bluff". India combined conventional military actions with diplomatic attempts to isolate Pakistan internationally in its post-Pulwama strategy. For example, Pakistan's classification as a "Most Favored Nation" (MFN), which had been in effect since 1996, was withdrawn by India (Safi, 2019).

In response, Pakistan assertively denied any role in the Pulwama incident, claiming that residents of Kashmir were responsible for the attack and that India was trying to use Pakistan as a victim for its own internal problems in Kashmir. Pakistani officials made it clear that cross-border terrorism was not the cause of the crisis in Kashmir; rather, it was the outcome of India's ongoing oppression of the Kashmiri population (Siyech, 2019). Pakistan played down the impact of the Indian airstrikes in Balakot, saying that the planes had only slightly damaged wooded fields that was far from any terrorist training sites. In addition, Pakistan launched counterattacks into Indian-occupied Kashmir, downing an Indian fighter plane and taking the pilot hostage. This was a powerful declaration that Pakistan will not put up with invasions of its sovereignty as well as a noteworthy demonstration of military prowess (Siyech, 2019). Pakistan's position, meanwhile, remained firmly based on the desire for a peaceful and de-escalating outcome. In an effort to ease tensions and stop any military escalation, Pakistan decided to return the captured Indian pilot to his own country. This action helped Pakistan establish itself as the more responsible party in the crisis and was favorably commended worldwide. India mostly disregarded Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's repeated calls for talks to settle all unresolved matters, including the central disagreement over Kashmir (Elharathi et al., 2020). One thing to be noted and mentioned here is that India that has always been to an extent reluctant to use power in past, uses power against Pakistan, and this is because of its rise as an economic and military power, the point highlighted by a primary respondent Dr. Khurram Abbas in an interview.

How the Pulwama episode shaped Pakistan-US and Indo-US relations is important. Pakistan had difficulties on the diplomatic front even if it was able to defuse the immediate military situation. Using its expanding international alliances, particularly with the US, India aimed to further isolate Pakistan by designating it as a state sponsor of terrorism. India's counterterrorism activities aligned with the strategic cooperation it had developed with the US following the September 11 attacks. Although, their geographical centers were different, both states found common ground in this regard. President George W. Bush began the 'de-hyphenation' of US policy towards India and Pakistan, which made the US less willing to mediate disputes between the two states and made Pakistan's diplomatic attempts to win over other states even more difficult (Khan, 2017). Pakistan experienced economic difficulties at this time as well. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) to Pakistan has significantly decreased as a result of the diplomatic moves made by India and the worldwide fallout from the Pulwama operation. The graph below shows this

trend.



Pakistan's capacity to defend India's diplomatic push was undermined by this decrease, the global economic downturn, and pressure from international financial institutions (Perkovich, 2016). India's increasing influence hindered Pakistan's attempts to win over allies in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), as only China has ever reliably backed Pakistan's standing on the global page. Other permanent members of the UNSC, especially the US, supported India's account of Pakistan's alleged sponsorship of terrorism more (Elharathi et al., 2020). Pakistan's military strategy in the post-Pulwama crisis focused on showcasing its conventional military capabilities while avoiding further escalation that could lead to a full-scale war. Despite calls within India for more aggressive action, Pakistan remained confident that it could defend itself without resorting to the use of nuclear weapons. Pakistani officials dismissed India's "nuclear bluff" theory, emphasizing that Pakistan's nuclear arsenal was a credible deterrent and not merely a symbolic threat. However, Indian strategists, encouraged by their growing international support, viewed Pakistan's reluctance to escalate the conflict as a sign of strategic weakness, rather than restraint (Elharathi et al., 2020). Pakistan also used the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media arm of the armed forces, to refute India's hostile narrative and portray Pakistan as a law-abiding nation seeking peace. The narrative that Pakistan was not the aggressor in this war was greatly influenced by ISPR's attempts to control Pakistan's image, which were directed at both internal and foreign platform (Perkovich, 2016).

Following the Pulwama attacks and India's retaliatory airstrikes, Pakistan adopted a strategy that included denial, military deterrence, and diplomatic outreach. Pakistan maintained that it had nothing to do with the Pulwama incident and described India's military reaction as a needless escalation. Pakistan was more and more isolated on the world scene as a result of India's economic

might and geopolitical alliances, despite Pakistan's military reaction demonstrating its capacity to preserve its sovereignty (Elharathi et al., 2020). Despite these obstacles, Pakistan's efforts towards peace, such as the release of the Indian pilot who had been imprisoned—helped to lower tensions and keep the situation from becoming worse and turning into a full-scale conflict. Thus, the Pulwama episode once again clarified US support for India and India's overall global support regardless of Pakistan's efforts to promote peace under turmoil.

4.2.4. Towards Afghan Peace Process: Pakistan's Role

Pakistan has long been an important player in the Afghan peace process, especially in helping to get the Taliban and other important players to start peace negotiations. The 2018 release of top Taliban commander Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar from Pakistani custody was one important step. The US requested Baradar's release in an effort to facilitate peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Due to his popularity among the Taliban's ranks, Baradar was an essential mediator, and his participation in the peace negotiations significantly speed up the process (Idrees, 2019). This facilitation highlighted Pakistan's willingness to serve as a peace process mediator and facilitator. Pakistan was viewed as a crucial participant whose participation was required for any sustainable peace deal because of its historical links to the Taliban and its geographic and political closeness to Afghanistan. Therefore, Pakistan's release of Baradar was a crucial step that demonstrated its active participation in guiding the peace process towards discussions and settlement (Idrees, 2019).

Pakistan's contribution to the peace process in Afghanistan goes beyond only helping to free important Taliban figures. In the peace process, Pakistan has been instrumental in interacting with internal and foreign parties. One of the most important internal players in the peace process has been the Afghan government, which is headed by President Ashraf Ghani. Since the Taliban were the primary rebel group, any peace effort had to have their participation (Boni, 2021). Having started talks with the Taliban that resulted in the Doha Accord, the US was a crucial foreign player in the peace process. Russia and China have both expressed interest in Afghanistan's stability. Pakistan used its connections with these countries to present a unified front in favor of peace negotiations in Afghanistan. Saudi Arabia and Iran, both of whom have a stake in the future of Afghanistan, have also been included by Pakistan (Boni, 2021).

For example, despite continuing to engage with the Taliban, Pakistan has consistently maintained diplomatic ties with the Afghan government in Kabul. Because it established Pakistan as a mediator who could speak with all parties involved in the crisis, this dual involvement was essential. With many high-level discussions between US officials and Pakistan's leadership, the US in particular has acknowledged Pakistan's contribution in this respect and emphasized how crucial Pakistan is to getting the Taliban to the negotiating table (Kaura, 2018). Pakistan has also been crucial in ensuring China's participation in the peace process. China has depended on

Pakistan's influence over the Taliban and other Afghan parties since it is a significant regional power with a stake in keeping Afghanistan stable. Significant potential exists for fostering regional interdependence and enabling commerce between Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics (CARs) through Pakistan's seaports as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which includes the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Khatoon, 2018). But these attempts have been hampered by the ongoing war in Afghanistan, especially because of the US-led war on terror. China's engagement in the peace process in Afghanistan, including building relationships with the Taliban, is thought to be crucial for lowering regional security risks and assisting its economic initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative (Jan, 2019). Similar to this, Pakistan has been able to use its influence in the Islamic world and its strong links to Saudi Arabia to gain support from other important parties in the peace negotiations. Thus, throughout the process, Pakistan has been an important facilitator of peace negotiations, as it served not only its own security concerns but also US long going war on terror, from which it wanted to withdraw.

An important turning point in the Afghan peace process was the Doha Accord, sometimes referred to as the US-Afghanistan Peace Deal, which was signed on February 29, 2020 (US State Department). In exchange for assurances that Afghanistan would not be used as a base for terrorist attacks against the US and its allies, the US and the Taliban reached an agreement that intended to lessen violence and prepare the way for the ultimate withdrawal of US and NATO soldiers from Afghanistan. The agreement also called for intra-Afghan negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban, suggesting that the long-running conflict may come to a conclusion (Idrees, 2019). As it synchronized with Pakistan's long-standing wish for a diplomatic resolution to the Afghan conflict, Pakistan saw the Doha Accord as a positive step. But it also brought up a number of issues. The possibility of unrest if the withdrawal of US forces created a security void that terrorist organizations, especially the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which has ties to the Afghan Taliban, could take advantage of was one of Pakistan's main concerns (Idrees, 2019). Pakistan was also worried about the potential return of unrest and the impact it would have on its own border security. There have always been concerns that US withdrawal may make Pakistan's vulnerabilities to spillover violence worse due to the porous nature of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. As a result, Pakistan's role changed from only supporting peace negotiations to making sure that the Doha Accord's outcome would not disturb the area and would take Pakistan's security concerns into consideration (Kaura, 2018).

Intra-Afghan negotiations were the next crucial stage in the peace process after the Doha Accord was signed. Pakistan had a variety of roles in these negotiations. In the first place, Pakistan continued in using its power to continue the Taliban to engage in sincere talks with the Afghan government. One of the first nations to demand the start of intra-Afghan negotiations, Pakistan encouraged both parties to make concessions in order to achieve a long-lasting peace deal (Boni,

2021). Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan peace process grew more intense in 2020, especially as it interacted with the Taliban and the Afghan government. The China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan trilateral discussions demonstrated Pakistan's ongoing dedication to a peaceful resolution. Taliban commander Mullah Baradar met with China's special envoy for Afghanistan, Ambassador Liu Jian, in Doha in September 2020. Shortly after, Baradar met with Pakistan's special representative for Afghanistan, Ambassador Mohammad Sadiq. This series of discussions demonstrated Pakistan's vital role in mediating efforts between the Taliban and other parties. Pakistan also sought to increase (Idrees, 2019) the wider regional agreement on peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan sought to guarantee that all parties involved had a stake in preserving stability in Afghanistan by cultivating collaboration with China and preserving communication with the US and other regional nations. Pakistan worked to maintain the peace process despite obstacles like escalating violence and the Taliban's unwillingness to completely give up using force, as evidenced by the trilateral talks and Pakistan's participation in the China-Afghanistan-Pakistan vice Foreign Ministers' Strategic Dialogue (Boni, 2021).

Coordination with the US on the terms and timing of the US army withdrawal was another important part of Pakistan's 2020 role. Pakistan backed a responsible and orderly departure of foreign forces, highlighting the need to prevent a security vacuum that may be exploited by terrorist groups, as stated by China's Foreign Ministry. Pakistan's wider worries about the possible consequences of a fast withdrawal, including as the effect on its own national security and the prospect for further instability along its western frontier, were reflected in this position (Idrees, 2019). Pakistan's interactions with the Taliban at this time were marked by a careful balancing act. Pakistan aimed to persuade the Taliban to make concessions and participate positively in the peace negotiations. However, Pakistan had to make sure that its own security interests were protected, especially in light of the TTP's and other anti-Pakistan terrorist organizations' capacity to take advantage of any instability in Afghanistan (Boni, 2021). Pakistan also persisted in backing the Afghan government's attempts to hold peace negotiations with the Taliban, advising both parties to put the needs of the Afghan people first and come to an agreement on the country's future political structure. Pakistan's foreign ministry strengthened its position as a crucial mediator in the process by issuing many comments urging all sides to struggle for national unity and healing. The events that have occurred during the late 2010s have been heavily influenced by Pakistan's involvement in the peace process in Afghanistan. Pakistan has established itself as an essential mediator in the ongoing war, from negotiating the release of important Taliban commanders to interacting with all significant internal and global players (Khan, 2019). The Doha Accord's signature in 2020 was a significant milestone in the peace effort, but it also brought up fresh worries for Pakistan, especially in light of the threat presented by terrorist organizations operating along its border and the possibility of regional instability. The importance of Pakistan's

involvement increased as the intra-Afghan negotiations carried on. Pakistan has shown that it is committed to bringing about a durable peace in Afghanistan through its diplomatic efforts, collaboration with other regional countries, notably China, and ongoing engagement with the Afghan government and the Taliban (Kaura, 2018).

4.2.5. CovidPandemic: Temporary Shift inPakistan's US Policies

Relations between Pakistan and the US deteriorated during the Trump administration. US put allegations on Pakistan and halt aid and assistance. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the US once again supported Pakistan by providing aid and assistance in such a challenging time. The world was hit by the COVID-19 pandemic in the beginning of 2020, which affected everyone on the planet. The virus quickly spread like wildfire and made its way to every state. Tens of hundreds of individuals lost their lives and caused illnesses as a result of the pandemic. In addition, it caused social instability and an economic collapse. Additionally, Pakistan was impacted by the COVID-19 outbreak. The initial patient in Pakistan to infect by the virus was in the last days of February, 2020 (Abid et al., 2020).

The pandemic posed serious problems for Pakistan's already unstable economy and inadequate healthcare system. The US was one of the aiding nations, giving Pakistan 62.5 million doses of vaccinations to preserve people's life. In a same problem the US supported Pakistan throughout these testing times by offering medical supplies, diagnostic kits, and personal protection equipment tools to help Pakistanis preserve their lives. The US offered Pakistan more than only medical supplies; in order to help Pakistan deal with the pandemic, they gave US\$63 million (Ullah, 2023). A portion of the funding went towards providing medical equipment, lab supplies, and personal protective equipment (PPE). The US-Pakistan alliance amply demonstrates the value and necessity of international assistance and collaboration in trying and challenging times. The assistance not only help Pakistan in overcoming the pandemic's immediate difficulties but also strengthened the two nations' long-standing relationship, highlighting the need of consistent international assistance in overcoming obstacles across the world (Ullah, 2023). Thus, COVID-19 paved way for US support for health in Pakistan, with it offering civilian aid to the later.

4.2.6. Kabul Falls to Taliban: Challenges and Responses of Pakistan

Following the US withdrawal, Pakistan's top security concern remained the unstable Pakistan-Afghan border, which had been inadequately managed against the cross-border movement of extremist and terrorist groups. An expert claims that Pakistan's security establishment showed concerns the Taliban gaining complete control of Afghanistan because they thought that the Afghan Taliban's strength would lead to the TTP's growth and, as a result, an increase in their disruptive activities within Pakistan (Khan, 2022). Significant difficulties were

brought about for Pakistan by the Taliban's capture of Kabul in August 2021, especially with regard to ties with India, the US, and neighboring Afghanistan. Pakistan's foreign policy, national security, and worldwide reputation are all impacted by this geopolitical change, particularly with regard to alliances, counterterrorism, and regional stability (Mir, 2022). Concerns over the rebirth of terrorist organizations, especially those functioning along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, were immediately provoked by the capture of Kabul. As the US left Afghanistan, Pakistan, which was already a major actor in the US-led War on Terror, experienced difficulties, creating a power vacuum that would encourage terrorist activity in the area. Because of concerns about a spillover effect and the resurgence of groups like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which might destabilize its border regions, Pakistan's need for a strong counterterrorism framework grew under the Taliban's rule (Jan, 2022). There were 207 terrorist attacks in Pakistan in 2021, according to the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), a 42% increase over the number of attacks in 2020. 335 civilians of Pakistan lost their lives as a result of these incidents. Additionally, PIPS said that the TTP was the only group responsible for 87 attacks in 2018. Compared to 2020, this is an 84% increase (PIPS, 2021). The TTP claimed responsibility for over 283 attacks against Pakistani security personnel in November 2021. In the first quarter of 2022, the TTP also killed around 79 security personnel (Jan, 2022).

In an attempt to address these concerns, Pakistan has increased border control activities. Installing a fence along the Durand Line is one of these measures, which aims to increase security and decrease illegal crossings. Additionally, border-related behavior has been monitored using technological innovations including sensor systems and surveillance drones. This complex approach demonstrates Pakistan's planned response to border security concerns, which balances its goals of regional stability and domestic security (Monitor, 2022). Furthermore, Pakistan's previous cooperation with the US in terrorist operations has given it the expertise and influence to manage internal security concerns. But with the establishment of the Taliban, Pakistan found it increasingly challenging to combine advancing peace in Afghanistan with protecting its own security interests. Given this shift, its counterterrorism strategies must be reassessed, considering the Indo-US narrative of isolating extremist threats while recognizing the strategic importance of limiting terrorism across its borders (Jan, 2022). In order to counter specific TTP threats, Pakistan has implemented a number of operations, including exchanging intelligence with foreign allies, conducting security operations in TTP-active regions, and initiating military operations to knock down TTP networks. These actions show Pakistan's determination to maintain security despite shifting regional challenges brought on by the Taliban's rise to power (Jan, 2022).

India's engagement in Afghanistan has alarmed Pakistan. Since the Taliban came to power, Pakistan has been interested in India's efforts to maintain a presence in Afghanistan since it views them as a direct threat to its strategic goals. This aligns with the Indo-US counterterrorism

partnership and India's strategic focus on regional security, which often depicts Pakistan as a destabilizing factor. Pakistan has responded to this trend by asking China for help in balancing India's regional ambitions and enhancing diplomatic relations to reduce Indian influence in Afghanistan. The transformation of Afghanistan provided Pakistan with an opportunity to highlight the importance of its partnership with China, especially through programs like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This partnership serves as both an economic strategy and a geopolitical counterbalance to India-US cooperation, given the shifting security dynamics in the region since the Taliban takeover (Fazl-e-Haidar, 2022). As both countries are worried about Afghanistan's stability, the fall of Kabul further solidified Pakistan's strategic partnership with China. As China concentrates on limiting the impact of groups that may destabilize the Xinjiang region, China and Pakistan have found common ground in preventing Afghanistan from turning into a hub for terrorist activities. Evidence suggests that Pakistan has used its alliance with China to strengthen its position in the region and present itself as a stabilizing force that benefits China and the wider region (Jan, 2022). The US perception of China as a rising adversary, which resulted in more Indo-US collaboration, further intensified Pakistan's strategic response. Hence, Pakistan has embraced its alliance with China as a broader counterbalance to the US and India, emphasizing the need for both military and political collaboration with China in order to navigate the evolving security landscape. Pakistan has advocated for communication as the means of achieving regional stability while adopting a cautious approach to dealing with the Taliban. However, Pakistan finds it more challenging to sustain a positive relationship with Afghanistan due to concerns about Taliban authority and international legitimacy. Pakistan supports stability because it wants a secure border and recognizes that Afghanistan is crucial to carrying out a long-term counterterrorism plan (Khan, 2017). In an effort to foster political stability, Pakistan has worked with key allies, particularly China and Russia, to develop a framework that supports an Afghan government that is more inclusive and safer. This diplomatic alliance demonstrates Pakistan's commitment to regional peace and its proactive approach of collaborating with influential parties to promote a stable Afghanistan.

4.2.7. 2018-2022 FATF Episode: Pakistan's policy

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) incident in 2018 put Pakistan under a lot of tensions, which was indicative of the complexity of its geopolitical environment. The geopolitical dynamics among the FATF's member states frequently impact its judgments. In this instance, Pakistan was at the epicenter of a political crisis that was made worse by its ties to key countries, especially the US and India (Shah, 2023). The geopolitical influence of global financial institutions was one of Pakistan's most urgent problems. Due to repeated pressure by India, which has exploited its membership in the FATF to damage Pakistan's reputation internationally, the FATF grey listed Pakistan. In order to justify international attention, India's effort involved both

diplomatic pressure and strategic communications that portrayed Pakistan as a state supporter of terrorism. Imran Khan's claims that India actively opposed Pakistan's interests at international forums highlighting how India used its position to sway FATF rulings, brought attention to these efforts. (Saboor et al., 2022) In the past, Pakistan's interactions with global financial institutions have been significantly influenced by the US. Pakistan came under more criticism for its role in maintaining regional peace after the US withdrew from Afghanistan and the Taliban took power. President Trump's 2018 speech, in which he denounced Pakistan for allegedly aiding terrorist groups, marked a significant change in the dynamics of US-Pakistan ties. At this pivotal moment, Pakistan's support for the US started to decline, which resulted in its exclusion from the FATF talks. In order to hold Pakistan responsible for its financial and regulatory policies, the US used its influence in the FATF, which increased the pressure Pakistan was under internationally (Shah, 2023).

Pakistan's economic instability and problems with governance further exacerbated the country's domestic problems. The FATF recommended revisions in counter-terrorism funding legislation and financial monitoring, which the government found difficult to execute. A vicious circle of criticism from both local and foreign observers resulted from Pakistan's failure to meet the FATF's requirements, giving the impression that the country was unable to handle its internal security issues. As a result, Pakistan's leadership was under tremendous pressure to show development in order to prevent further isolation from other countries (Pervez, 2021). Pakistan used a multifaceted approach to addressing these issues. In order to balance off India's influence, the government worked to strengthen its diplomatic ties with other regional countries, especially China and Turkey. By reinforcing these connections, Pakistan sought to win over supporters who might support its stance at the FATF and other international forums. Additionally, Pakistan showcased its military actions and sacrifices in the battle against extremist organizations, underscoring its position as a major participant in the war against terrorism. This story was crucial in helping Pakistan change the conversation from its FATF listing to its contributions to international security (Shah, 2023). Significant action has been done by the Pakistani government to stop illegal financial flows and comply with international norms. To address issues that put Pakistan on the grey list, the parliament changed 14 legislations in September 2020 to comply with FATF regulations. Together with the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) and the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA), a FATF cell was created to carry out a 27-point action plan centered on human trafficking and money laundering (Qarar, 2019).

Leading the charge against prohibited groups, the National Counter Terrorism Authority (NECTA) has arrested Hafiz Saeed and frozen the assets of 70 organizations implicated in terrorism funding. The government has also tackled concerns relating to Benami accounts and land under the Benami Transaction Prohibition Act of 2017, and the State Bank of Pakistan fined

banks for violations (Shah, 2023). In addition, Pakistan's leadership used strategic communications to refute the narrative that India and other enemies were promoting. Pakistan sought to acquire assistance from countries that understood the complexity of its crisis by placing its difficulties in the framework of global politics and highlighting the politicization of the FATF process. This strategy aimed to show how the FATF may be used as a geopolitical instrument instead of just as an impartial financial supervision organization (Shah, 2023). Pakistan nevertheless had to deal with the repercussions of being on the FATF grey list in spite of these measures. Significant economic consequences resulted from the grey listing, which made it harder to access global financial markets and decreased foreign investment. Pakistan's reaction plans were made more urgent by this economic pressure as the government realized that noncompliance with FATF regulations may result in greater isolation (Pervez, 2021).

4.2.8. Pakistan-US Relations Amidst Taliban Resurgence

The US holds Pakistan accountable for Afghanistan's misfortunes, claiming that the Taliban's defeat was caused by its backing (Schroden, 2022). The US ignores the \$1 trillion it spent in Afghanistan in favor of \$33 billion in aid to Pakistan, deflecting attention from problems including poor planning, corruption, the shortcomings of the Afghan National Army, and the determination of the Taliban. Relations were further strained when President Biden called Pakistan "one of the most dangerous nations" (The White House, 2022). Although the National Security Council found no proof, former Prime Minister Imran Khan claimed the US had exploited and abandoned Pakistan on several occasions and that there was a plan by the US to remove him. Although Khan's travel to Russia was criticized, the US is applying pressure on Pakistan through the FATF and IMF, thus regime change is doubtful (Ullah, 2023). Economic sanctions have been placed on Pakistan as a result of its presence on the FATF grey list; if sufficient anti-money laundering and anti-terror-financing measures are not taken, the country might be blacklisted. Pakistan is still on the list even though it has complied with 26 of the 27 FATF criteria, raising questions about possible political motivations. According to reports, the US has pressed Pakistan on counterterrorism issues by using its clout in FATF, which serves US objectives (Hasan, 2021). Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that Pakistan had contradictory interests at a congressional hearing following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, claiming that the country supports the Taliban in their war against the US in Kabul. The foreign office of Pakistan said that these statements ignore the two countries' strong collaboration. Raouf Hasan, a former PM Imran Khan advisor, claims that distrust and irrational beliefs on both sides of the Pakistan-US relationship hinder security and economic collaboration and that both countries must restore confidence and deal with underlying problems in order to close this trust gap. US geostrategic interests are at odds with Pakistan's geo-economic objectives, which are frequently in line with China's. Pakistan's economic interests are influenced by China's substantial investments in the state, especially

through CPEC under the BRI, which causes tension with the US (Ali, 2022). In part because the US is increasing its alliance with India to balance China, Pakistan, which was formerly regarded as a crucial ally in the war against terrorism, now has strained relations with the US. As both states initiate a new era characterized by these divergent agendas, US-Pakistan relations were likely to experience difficulties in the future (Ali, 2021).

The US frequently ignored Pakistan's security concerns in favor of focusing on its strategic goals in Afghanistan. Pakistan had to deal with internal and regional problems as the US sought to eradicate terrorism and oppose China. With US and UN intelligence reporting more freedom for extremist groups like ISIS-K and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan following the US exit, the Taliban's comeback has sparked concerns about a rise in terrorist activities (Ullah, 2023). The US now calls on Pakistan to stop these organizations from using its land as a safe haven and to use its power over the Taliban to stop terrorist activities. US authorities are now more concerned about Pakistan's security, especially in relation to its nuclear weapons, as a result of the US exit from Afghanistan. President Biden was cautioned by the Pentagon that a sudden withdrawal may make Pakistan's security more vulnerable. There is a chance that instability would spread into Pakistan as non-state entities like the Taliban and ISIS-K occupy the power vacuum, creating major risks to regional and international security (Iqbal, 2021). Hence, in order to mitigate these dangers and stop more regional instability, the US and Pakistan cooperation is inevitable.

The region has seen an increase in terrorist activity since the US withdrew due to Pakistan and the US lack of counterterrorism cooperation. The absence of coordinated activities, training, and intelligence sharing has led to the free expansion of terrorist organizations in the region. Following the US withdrawal, Afghanistan's potential for a power vacuum led to instability and presented an opportunity. For extremist groups to re-establish themselves in the region. The number of terrorists in the year following the US withdrawal, strikes in Pakistan rose by a record 51% (Khan, 2022). The US and Pakistan have a stronger bilateral relationship since the US has always helped Pakistan in times of need. The US contributed \$510 million after the 2005 earthquake, which included \$110 million for military assistance and \$300 million for rehabilitation, and urged other countries to contribute \$6.2 billion (US Department of State, 2005). In order to help relief operations, evacuate people, and deliver supplies during the 2010 floods, the US sent \$81 million in military and civilian aid, as well as personnel and helicopters (Ullah, 2023). Moreover, the US has provided Pakistan with 62.5 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine and \$63 million for personal protective equipment (PPE), testing kits, and medical supplies during the pandemic (US Embassy Pakistan, 2020). The US most recently provided \$97 million in help following the devastating floods in 2022, with an additional \$100 million promised for humanitarian assistance in 2023. This continuous assistance strengthens Pakistan-US ties and emphasizes the value of cooperation, laying the groundwork for future cooperation.

The relationship between the US and Pakistan is asymmetrical and primarily motivated by security considerations rather than substantial strategic or economic goals (Mir, 2021). With an emphasis on trade, investment, and regional connectivity as avenues for mutual gain, Pakistan seeks to reorient its attention towards a geo-economics orientation (Jamal, 2021). The rise of terrorist organizations in Afghanistan is one of the security issues that both countries face. Addressing these risks requires establishing trust via regular communication and intelligence exchange. With both states committing to work together on projects like Pakistan's Ten Billion Trees Tsunami Program, climate change also presents a new field for cooperation. Furthermore, educational and cultural exchange initiatives such as Fulbright promote interpersonal relationships and increase understanding amongst individuals (Ullah, 2023).

4.3. Terrorism As a Geo-Strategic Factor in India's Foreign Policy Towards the US (2018 To 2023)

4.3.1. Trump Administration and Indo-US Counter-Terrorism Nexus

The relationship between the US and India has changed dramatically from the early 20th century. With India seen as a crucial ally in Asia, this cooperation under President Trump was centered on enhancing defense, growing economic ties, and guaranteeing a free Indo-Pacific. From the beginning of his term, Prime Minister Modi made close ties with the US a top priority. There are still strategic issues that stem from Cold War hostilities brought on by India's nonalignment, US backing for Pakistan, and US opposition to India's nuclear aspirations (Shahzad, 2023). President Trump and Prime Minister Modi, who share strategic and patriotic ideals, have improved US-Indian relations, strengthened by Congress and Indian trust in the Trump administration. Although strengthening relations with India is more difficult than with official allies, there are several benefits, particularly in opposing China and promoting India's interactions with other Asian countries (Hussain, 2023)

With programs like the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI) and the "India-US Joint Strategic Vision" for the Asia-Pacific, the US promoted India as a "major defense partner" and strengthened defense ties during the Trump administration. In order to position India as a counterbalance to China through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, the US supported India's "Act East" strategy and promoted its participation in regional forums, including ASEAN and the East Asia Summit (Kashish, 2020). In an effort to diversify India's energy supplies away from West Asia, US energy exports to India increased by 40%, while defense trade between the two countries increased significantly, reaching over \$18 billion by 2019. The Republican Hindu Coalition demonstrated their significant support for Trump's campaign by contributing US\$898,000 to the Trump Victory Fund. The US urged India to assist Afghanistan's development while putting more pressure on Pakistan to stop providing safe havens for terrorists (Shahzad, 2023). India's regional ambitions are still being challenged by China's political and economic

ascent, Pakistan's increased security, and tighter connections with China.

The Trump administration made increasing US-India defense ties, particularly strategic collaboration, a top priority between 2017 and 2021. The signing of the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018 marked a significant turning point and improved defense and security cooperation between the two countries (Raj, 2009). By emphasizing their mutual interests in stability and an international order based on norms, the Trump administration sought to strengthen defense and security cooperation with India in the Indo-Pacific. This solid and diverse collaboration strengthened military capabilities. However, disputes over immigration and commerce made economic cooperation difficult. The government-imposed tariffs on Indian exports, including steel and aluminum, in an effort to close the trade imbalance and address concerns about market access and intellectual property. Indian professionals were also affected by immigration policies, such as more stringent H-1B visa requirements (Hussain, 2023). Notwithstanding these problems, both nations sought to preserve good economic ties by working together on defense and energy projects and participating in regional trade programs such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

In the war against terrorism, the US and India have established a strong alliance, working together on law enforcement, intelligence sharing, and capacity building. In 2005, security cooperation started to improve after years of tense ties. Simplifying defense sales and technology transfers was the goal of the 2012 Defense Trade and Technology Initiative. In order to improve India's force projection capabilities in the Indian Ocean, a major 2015 program concentrated on developing aircraft carrier technology. The two nations extended their collaboration beyond the sale of military hardware when they finalized the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement in August 2016 (Shahzad, 2023). The US and India strengthened their counterterrorism cooperation under the Trump administration (2017–2021), emphasizing intelligence exchange and capacity building. An important step towards enhancing intelligence cooperation was the signing of the Information Exchange Agreement (IEA) in 2019, which enables both countries to more effectively prevent and address terrorist threats. Additionally, through technical assistance and training initiatives, they collaborated to improve the capabilities of their security forces. In order to combat international terrorism, the US stressed the significance of coordinating efforts in international organizations such as the UN, G-20, and BRICS (Ganguly, 2022). Both nations also worked together to bring justice to those implicated in terrorism by targeting terrorist financial networks and safe havens. Overall, this time saw a major strengthening of the counterterrorism collaboration between the US and India.

National interests are always taken into consideration when a state formulates its foreign policy, and the increasing alignment of interests between the US and India, from the Clinton administration to the Trump administration, is a prime example of this. This strategic partnership

may cooperate on military and nuclear initiatives and promote democracy (Juanita, 2007). Both nations are dedicated to maintaining regional peace and stability while increasing the influence of nations such as China and Pakistan. India has helped stabilize Afghanistan by providing economic assistance and training Afghan security forces, while the US has emerged as a major supplier of defense equipment to India, enabling combined military exercises and training. Pakistan's situation in Afghanistan is made more difficult by the strategic relationship between the US and India, which promotes collaboration on security and counterterrorism. Both countries want a stable Afghanistan and are working together to combat extremism and terrorism in the region. India's changing foreign policy, which departs from Gandhi and Nehru's objectives, reflects its development into the world's largest democracy and a major South Asian force. With the backing of its partner, the US, India has deepened its relationships with Afghanistan in response to the country's geostrategic location, deteriorating relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and an increase in regional extremism (Hussain, 2023). India's position in global security and economic governance has been strengthened by this change, which has improved US-India cooperation on counterterrorism and security through expanded military cooperation and information sharing. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a major infrastructure project that links China's Xinjiang region with Pakistan's Baluchistan province's Gwadar port. To increase commerce and economic growth, it entails building roads, railroads, and energy pipelines. However, because the CPEC passes through Pakistan-administered Gilgit-Baltistan, which India claims as part of Jammu and Kashmir, both India and the US have expressed reservations over it. India worries the project would increase China's military and economic might in Pakistan and sees it as a breach of its sovereignty (Cooley & Carolijn, 2022).

These concerns are shared by the US, especially in light of CPEC's potential to destabilize the region and add to Pakistan's debt load. The US is concerned that the project may be used by China to gain economic and political clout, further destabilizing an already unstable region. Because both countries view China's expansion as a danger, the CPEC has impacted defense agreements between the US and India (Siddarth, 2020). The close ties between India and Afghanistan also present a problem for CPEC. India has voiced concerns about how the project would affect regional stability and has threatened to use its clout in Afghanistan to compel Pakistan and sabotage CPEC. Pakistan is more concerned about security because it fears that India may use Afghanistan as a springboard for assaults or meddling in its domestic issues. Because both India and the US priorities combating terrorism, WMDs, and Chinese influence, their strategic alignment shatters Pakistan-US collaboration and raises Pakistan's security threats. India is concerned about the China-Pakistan alliance because it thinks it might weaken its position in Afghanistan and the wider region (Shahzad, 2023). Because of the nuclear competition between India and Pakistan, which has a history of violence and distrust, South Asia is known to be a

hazardous region. Tensions with China and Pakistan have increased as a result of India's more aggressive regional stance brought forth by its expanding economic and military might. Additionally, Pakistan is worried about being surrounded as a result of India's growing connections with the US, which is escalating tensions in the region.

4.3.2. Pulwama Attacks and US Support of India's Right of Self-Defense

The largest incident targeting security forces since 1998 occurred on February 14, 2019, when a terrorist attack in Pulwama, Jammu and Kashmir killed 44 members of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). Indian media responded by blaming Pakistan, which resulted in Prime Minister Modi and Finance Minister Arun Jaitley calling for revenge and Pakistan losing its Most Favored Nation (MFN) status. The US-backed India's stance, calling on Pakistan to stop aiding terrorism, while protests in Delhi called for action against Pakistan. India rejected Pakistan's proposal for a joint probe and denied the accusations (Jamal, 2019). Prime Minister Modi's Hindutva-oriented ideology and self-centered attitude to maintain his political power in the domestic political context are evident in all of his significant foreign policy actions following the Pulwama event. His South Asian security strategy featured aggressive military tactics to threaten the region's peace. Furthermore, his commitment to the RSS's goal of purifying India and his domestic measures have brought attention to the non-Hindu people. On the battlefield of Kashmir (IIOK), his actions of condemning Jammu and Kashmir's position by nullifying Articles 370 and 35a of the Indian Constitution revealed his ambiguous gesture of endorsing India as a secular democracy. He discusses a few international policy choices made during the Pulwama tragedy and is assessed in detail (Khan, 2021).

India's Ministry of External Affairs and Ministry of Defense have been aggressively pursuing defense agreements and security cooperation with the US since 2014. The US and India signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in August 2016, which enables both countries to better monitor China's military operations and share military, aviation, and naval bases in case of emergencies (Khan, 2021). With the US Navy preparing to station 60% of its personnel in the Indo-Pacific to monitor commerce and communication networks concerning China and Pakistan, this pact sought to combat terrorism and increase regional dominance. Due to this pact and others in development, China and Pakistan will be under much pressure (Iqbal, 2016). During the 2+2 ministerial meeting in India on September 6, 2018, India and the US signed the Communication Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA). After the General Security of Military Deal (GSOMIA) and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), this deal is the third most important defense treaty since 2002. India can access US military communication technologies, namely CENTRIX (Combined Enterprise Regional Information Exchange), thanks to COMCASA. India's status as a Major Defense Partner, which enables it to get communication compatibility with the US military and buy specialized equipment

for encrypted communication, is a crucial aspect of the arrangement (Panda, 2018).

The long-awaited Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) between the US and India was finalized in the final week of October 2020. By using US military aid in geospatial information and improving its skills in automated missile and armed drone technologies, this arrangement enables India to lessen its reliance on Russia for military hardware. It makes it easier to share vital intelligence on Chinese military movements and secret satellite data. India's access to topographical and aeronautical data for targeting and navigation would be enhanced by BECA (Khan, 2021). In order to counterbalance Pakistan's missile capabilities and strengthen India's position in the region, the ruling Hindu nationalist party, the BJP, is in favor of this strategic alliance. Pakistan's foreign ministry denounced the strategic imbalance caused by the US, which might increase peace in South Asia, and voiced concerns about Modi's actions in Illegally Indian Occupied Kashmir (IIOK) and the tensions along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China (Reporter, 2021). According to JagannathPanday, the US sees India as a key component of its Asia strategy that is necessary to preserve long-term stability, especially in combating China's rise and terrorism. India's foreign policy was drastically changed by the Pulwama attacks, which highlighted terrorism as a crucial geostrategic element in its interactions with the US. The US alignment with India's right to self-defense strengthened defense cooperation between the two countries. In addition to strengthening India's military capabilities, the US-Indian initiatives show a common commitment to fighting terrorism and resolving regional security issues. Additionally, the administration of Prime Minister Modi has successfully used the self-defense narrative to strengthen its domestic political agenda and forge closer connections with the US (Khan, 2021). Hence, the Indo-US strategic partnership gave India much strength to take military action.

4.3.3. India Synchronizing Recognition of Terrorists with US Recognition: 2019 Designation of Masood Azhar as Global Terrorist

The most important Indo-US collaboration in the war against terrorism is India's recognizing and designating those terrorists and terrorist organizations as terrorists, which are designated by the US, which it regards as India's diplomatic victory. One of them is Masood Azhar. The core belief of Masood Azhar's jihadist philosophy is Qital fi Sabeel Allah, or "armed fighting for the sake of Allah," which defends the murder of unbelievers and hypocrites in the name of jihad. His opinions are quite similar to those of Ayman al-Zawahiri and other Al-Qaeda activists. Azhar compares jihad to other types of Islamic devotion in his 850-page work, *Fazail-e-Jihad* (Attributes of Jihad), highlighting its importance using several Hadith and Quranic texts (Azhar, 2000). He views jihad as an essential component of Islam, characterizing it as a holy deed that calls for bravery, tenacity, and a readiness to suffer in order to reap blessings both here on Earth and in the afterlife. In addition to expressing anti-Jewish views and characterizing jihad as the "First Line of Defense" for Islam, Azhar names Israel as a top target, pointing out its role in

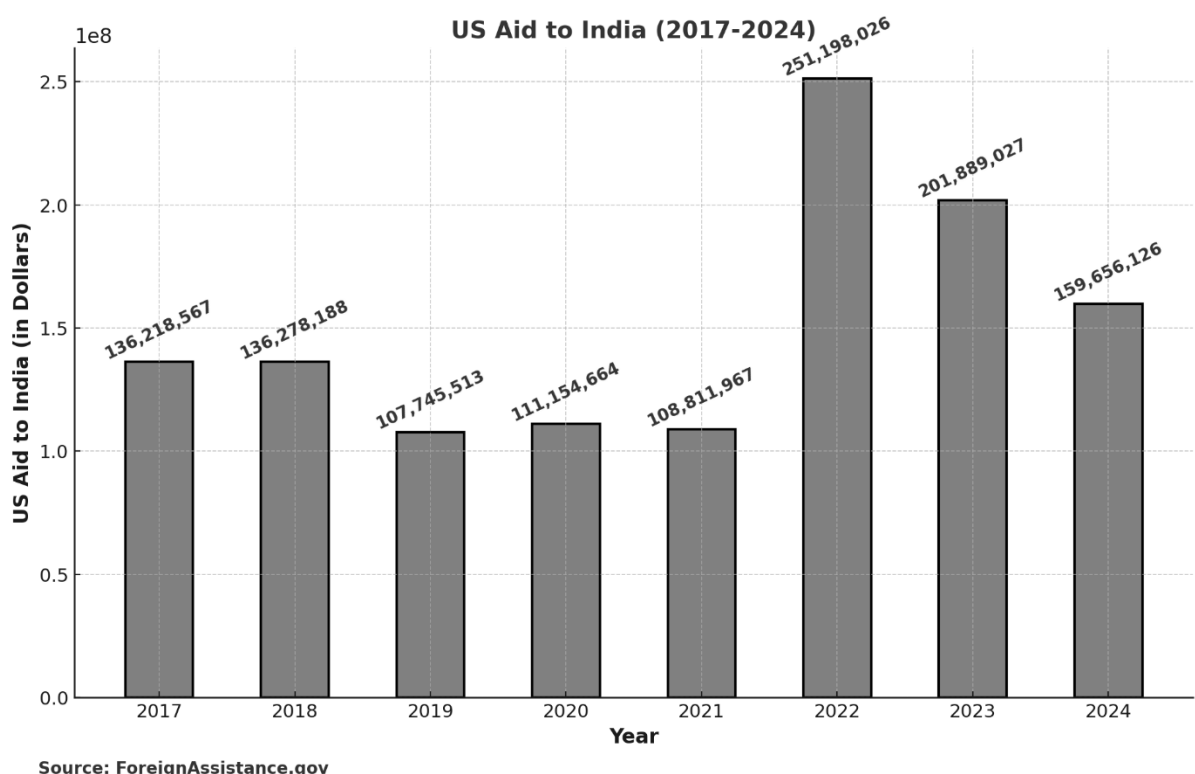
the destruction of the Babri Mosque in India (Zahid, 2019). India's Hindutva ideology particularly contradicts his school of thought, and apart from ideology, he is believed by India to have a dominant role in sponsoring terrorism in Indian-held Kashmir against India.

Mohammad Masood Azhar, who established Harkat-ul-Ansar (HuA) in 1993 to promote the "liberation of Kashmir," has had a major impact on the terrorism situation in Pakistan. Despite pressure worldwide, Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) managed to survive because of his leadership. JeM broke up after the US intervened in Afghanistan after 9/11, although they continued to carry out high-profile attacks, such as the 2001 Bahawalpur Church attack and the 2002 Islamabad Church attack (Dawn, 2002). JeM members were also implicated in assassination attempts against then-President Pervez Musharraf. Despite the 2002 crackdown on breakaway organizations by security authorities, Azhar kept JeM's attention on Kashmir. Pathankot's (2015) and Uri's (2016) Attacks marked the group's comeback. China has repeatedly undermined India's attempts to obtain Azhar's proscription under UN Security Council Resolution 1267, and JeM has changed its name several times despite being banned in Pakistan and classified as a Global Terrorist Organization by the US (Azhar, 2000).

Masood Azhar developed close ties with Al-Qaeda (AQ) while the Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001. With the help of Deobandi scholar Mufti Nizamud Din Shamzai, who had ties to both the Taliban and AQ, JeM was founded. After JeM was established in 2000, the Taliban let its militants get training in camps run by AQ. JeM's major attack on the Indian Parliament in December 2001 in retaliation for the war on terror escalated tensions between India and Pakistan and gave AQ commanders a tactical edge. Furthermore, JeM participated in several terrorist acts in coordination with other jihadi organizations, such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) (Reidel, 2016). Masood Azhar was hospitalized and unable to leave his house, according to Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi, in February 2019. His brother-in-law was in charge of Jaish-e-Mohammad's (JeM) operations. With an estimated 40,000 militants, the JeM is still strong despite continuous government crackdowns after the Pulwama attack, which resulted in the custody of many of its members. Operating mostly in southern Punjab, JeM has a cell-based organization and maintains both low-level relationships with several other militant groups and high-level partnerships with groups such as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). Despite international efforts to ban Azhar and JeM, his propaganda keeps recruiting new members and keeps the group operating (Zahid, 2019). US has always put pressure on Pakistan to dismantle terrorist safe heavens from Pakistan. India's efforts to designate Masood Azhar as a global terrorist and all its efforts in UNSC have been supported by the US which is a gross demonstration of India-US anti-terrorism cooperation. Hence, apart from terrorism in Afghanistan, terrorism roots in Kashmir have been an important geo-strategic factor influencing foreign policy of Pakistan and India towards the US.

4.3.4. Indo-US Counter Terrorism Defense Cooperation

Significant progress was achieved in Indo-US counterterrorism collaboration under the leadership of Modi and Trump, focusing on issues relevant to both countries. The US classified HizbulMujahideen (HM) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) after Modi's 2017 visit. This was remarkable since it was the first time an organization with a South Asian regional agenda—especially hostile towards India—had been given this title. It took a step towards harmonizing the regional and international counterterrorism strategies by supplementing previous FTO designations for Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM) in 2001 (India, 2017). By pointing out connections between local terrorist organizations and international objectives, India has attempted to coordinate its counterterrorism operations with the US. Important events include the 2008 attack on the Indian Embassy in Kabul by the Haqqani Network, the 2001 attack on Parliament by JeM and al-Qaeda to refocus Pakistan's military efforts, and the Taliban's involvement in LeT's 1999 hijacking of Air India flight IC 814, which resulted in the release of JeM founder Masood Azhar. These explanations highlight the interrelated dangers these organizations pose, strengthening the Indo-US alliance in tackling regional and international security issues (Parpiani, 2020). Moreover, US aid to India during the period 2018 to 2023 also showed increase particularly during 2022, though still lesser than US aid to Pakistan in the same period.



Following the 2019 JeM-led attack in Kashmir, the US and India recently worked together to place JeM leader Masood Azhar on the UN's 1267 Sanctions List, demonstrating their alignment in counterterrorism. The US played a crucial role by pressuring China to yield its hold

on the designation. In a similar aspect, the US and India worked together to put Pakistan on the FATF grey list due to its lack of action against terrorist organizations such as LeT and JeM (Chaudhury, 2019). Despite these commonalities, there are some policy differences: as US soldiers got ready to leave Afghanistan, the Trump administration considered re-establishing military links with Pakistan, even as it froze more than \$2 billion in aid to put pressure on Pakistan to take anti-terror measures. Despite earlier prohibitions, the US announced plans to rejoin Pakistan in the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program in late 2019 and authorized a \$125 million support package for Pakistan's F-16 fleet. US Assistant Secretary of State Alice Wells commended Pakistan's efforts to fight terrorism before the 2020 FATF assessment (Parpiani, 2020). Aiming for a US military withdrawal from Afghanistan as the 2020 election drew near, this action highlights the US's geopolitical balancing act in preserving military relations with Pakistan while supporting India on counterterrorism.

Without demanding political stability or particular results from Afghan peace negotiations, the US struck a peace agreement with the Taliban in February 2020, promising to cut the number of soldiers from 13,000 to 8,600 within 135 days and to completely depart within 14 months. Trump's election-year objective of military withdrawal was reflected in this deal, which was exclusively focused on the Taliban prohibiting the use of Afghan territory to attack the US (Report, 2020). However, it ignored the interests of US allies like India, which had made significant investments in civilian aid in Afghanistan, and it ignored the Taliban's activities against organizations with ties to Pakistan that were escalating tensions in the region. HizbulMujahideen (HM) was placed on the US Treasury's sanctions list and classified as a Foreign Terrorist Organization (FTO) by the Trump administration in 2017, blocking any US assets. However, because it mainly restricted assets within the US, this measure, like other designations like Azam Cheema in 2010, only had symbolic significance with minimal influence on the actions of terror groups operating in Pakistan (Parpiani, 2020).

By emphasizing "fair and reciprocal" commerce and promoting Indian cooperation with US antagonistic policies, the Trump administration brought transnationalism to the India-US relationship. Even though India was one of Iran's top oil importers until early 2019, the US wanted India to comply with the UN's classification of Masood Azhar as a terrorist by lowering Iranian oil imports. This would align India with the US's "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran. Due to transnationalism, frameworks for India-US counterterrorism collaboration have advanced more slowly (Parpiani, 2020). Other bilateral difficulties have impacted counterterrorism efforts, even as consultation mechanisms such as the India-US Counterterrorism Joint Working Group and Homeland Security Dialogue persist. For example, conflicts regarding data localization caused delays in planned modifications under the 2011 India-US Counterterrorism Cooperation Initiative and the 2016 data-sharing agreement between the FBI's Terrorist Screening Centre (TSC) and

India's Multi-Agency Centre (MAC). Similarly, India's demand for localization restrictions on digital services headquartered in the US caused the 2018 Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD-6) to stall (Smith, 2019).

Both India's complete integration into the US security framework in the region and the realization of India-US counterterrorism cooperation are hampered by US policymaking. Under the Indo-Pacific strategy, the US wants India to become a regional supplier of goods in the Indian Ocean; however, India's domestic security concerns about cross-border terrorism and support for radicalized insurgents in Kashmir from Pakistan-based groups undermine this goal. Effective counterterrorism coordination is hampered by structural and policy-level differences and environmental problems have already been noted (Parpiani, 2020). Establishing institutional ties must be a top priority for both countries to address and settle these disputes. India has taken action to create a new Indo-Pacific counterterrorism consensus. Notably, counterterrorism exercises centered on urban insurgent operations were included in the 2019 YudhAbhyas exercise between the Indian and US forces. The first Counter Terrorism Tabletop Exercise (CT-TTX) for Quad member nations was also held by India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) to confirm terrorist response protocols and promote the exchange of best practices. India should keep building on these initiatives going forward in order to strengthen collaboration with the US and other allies in tackling new terrorist threats in the Indo-Pacific region (Agency, 2019).

4.3.5. India's Indo-Pacific Strategy: Leverage Role in QUAD

With QUAD being one of the most important alliances boosting India's defense capabilities, India has forged over thirty strategic alliances with countries such as the US, UK, Japan, France, China, and the EU. India's cooperation with QUAD includes multilateral, quadrilateral, trilateral, and bilateral defense-strengthening initiatives. India was granted Strategic Trade Authorization (STA-1) status in 2018, which grants license-free access to specific defense technologies after the US classified it as a Major Defense Partner in 2016. Supported by the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI), which promotes cooperation in defense R&D, India, and the US participate in joint military drills, technology transfers, and defense commerce (Madutharanga, 2024). India acquired access to cutting-edge systems like the Sea Guardian UAS as the first non-treaty partner to be granted Category-1 status under the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR). In order to improve compatibility and shared security in the Indo-Pacific, the US also supports Boeing and Lockheed Martin aircraft for India's fleet. With US-India defense sales rising from about nil in 2008 to over \$20 billion in 2020, QUAD has greatly expanded defense trade. India's GEOINT capabilities are strengthened by the 2020 Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), which promotes integration among QUAD members (Stenek, 2022).

India and Japan have greatly increased their bilateral defense cooperation through joint military exercises, defense official visits, and maritime security cooperation. Strategic defense and

security interaction is promoted under the Japan-India Defense Consultative Framework (2+2) (Buchan & Rimland, 2020). The 2021 Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), the 2022 Memorandum of Cooperation in Cyber security, and the 2015 Defense Equipment and Technology Transfer Agreement are among the important agreements India and Japan have signed as part of QUAD. In order to promote infrastructure that would improve regional connectivity, the 2015 "Japan and India Vision 2025" placed a strong emphasis on a stable, rule-based Indo-Pacific (Kurita, 2023). Building on their "Strategic Partnership" that was formed in 2009, the two countries' bilateral relationship was elevated to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in 2020. High-level visits, prime ministerial meetings, the Framework Dialogue between Foreign Ministers, the Defense and Foreign Ministers' 2+2 Dialogue, defense policy and staff discussions, and Joint Working Groups (JWGs) are also part of this cooperation. Notable accords include the 2020 Memorandum of Understanding for Mutual Logistics Support and Cooperation in Defense Science and Technology, the 2015 AUSINDEX maritime exercise, and the 2015 Technical Agreement on White Shipping Information Exchange (High Commission of India Canberra).

QUAD states, including India, are united in their commitment to maritime security and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific, with India participating in joint naval exercises like Malabar to ensure open sea lanes and tackle common security challenges. The QUAD also facilitates information sharing and cooperation, enhancing India's situational awareness and cyber security capabilities against emerging cyber threats. Through QUAD, India collaborates on defense technology, benefiting from joint research, technology transfers, and defense co-production. Additionally, India is actively involved in QUAD-led humanitarian assistance and disaster response, demonstrating its commitment to regional stability. This cooperation extends to addressing regional security concerns, including non-state actors and geopolitical issues, furthering a stable Indo-Pacific (Madutharanga, 2024). In order to avoid diplomatic tension, the QUAD must reconcile conflicting strategic goals and deal with China's view of containment attempts. The US military imbalance raises questions about fair contributions. On the other hand, multilateral initiatives in fields like disaster response, economic cooperation, and shared democratic principles build confidence, improve defense cooperation, and improve regional stability. In order to better balance capacities and advance collective security, capacity-building and technology transfers are implemented. India's QUAD defense capacity-building initiatives improve intelligence, Intelligence gathering, and integration, increasing force projection and preventing China's two-ocean strategy. Joint training, such as the Malabar naval exercises, and standardized processes simplify operations and promote productive cooperation among QUAD members. These programs demonstrate improved integration through consistent collaboration by enhancing coordination, facilitating shared logistics, and increasing joint capabilities (Madutharanga, 2024).

Building defense capabilities across QUAD members improves intelligence collaboration and information exchange, especially in anti-submarine warfare and maritime domain awareness. Prompt intelligence exchanges enhance decision-making and situational awareness. Defense technology compatibility makes cooperative operations and resource integration easier. One example is the combined use of US P-8 surveillance aircraft. The Mutual Logistic Support Agreement (MLSA) between India and Australia and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Understanding (LEMOA) between India and the US are two examples of joint capability development projects that foster cooperative research, technology transfers, and shared military infrastructure, thereby strengthening collective defense capabilities in the Indo-Pacific region because the Indo-Pacific region is rich in natural resources and crucial for trade, stability depends on maritime security. India is dedicated to strengthening collaboration in maritime surveillance and combating non-traditional threats like drug smuggling, human trafficking, and piracy as a member of QUAD. In addition, India is a major player in disaster management, exchanging technology, resources, and experiences for post-disaster recovery and humanitarian aid, which promotes trust and regional cooperation among participating countries. Furthermore, India's participation in QUAD enhances collective defense, bolstering its "Make in India" defense agenda and having a favorable effect on regional security and stability (Madutharanga, 2024). Through cooperative initiatives and technology transfers, India's defense diplomacy within QUAD has greatly improved its military capabilities and increased its defense industrial self-reliance. Defense forces are now more integrated, allowing for smooth coordination in the face of regional security threats thanks to joint naval drills and research projects. In line with India's objective of a safe Indo-Pacific, QUAD's cooperative patrols and information-sharing agreements have strengthened maritime security and regional stability. India has been able to match its defense interests with those of like-minded countries through diplomatic interactions, increasing its international influence. Additionally, talks about counterterrorism and unconventional security issues demonstrate India's all-encompassing security strategy. India's economic resilience and defense manufacturing capabilities are enhanced by the defense industry partnership and economic cooperation that take place inside QUAD (Shahzad, 2022). India's being an important player in QUAD is due to its significant potential and role it can play in Indo-pacific region, its economic and military status, its close ties with the US and convergence of interests with that of the US, particularly in ensuring terrorism free Indo-Pacific region and combating China's rise.

4.3.6. US Withdrawal from Afghanistan: India's Foreign Policy

Kabul was taken over by the Taliban on August 15, 2021, bringing an end to the nearly two-decade-long US-led effort in Afghanistan on "state and nation-building." The lack of opposition from Afghan security forces confirmed long-held concerns among observers about their ability to fight the Taliban without outside help. President Biden facilitated the withdrawal timeline because

of Afghanistan's worsening security situation, even though he had originally scheduled it for September 11, 2021, to remember the 20th anniversary of 9/11. The war came to an end on August 30 with the last US army departure, and the Taliban took back power (Shear, 2021). India quickly restored diplomatic relations with the Afghan government after the Taliban were overthrown, making significant investments in rehabilitation and development. India was Afghanistan's biggest regional assistance provider by 2021, having donated nearly \$3 billion. India avoided military intervention and pursued a civilian-focused foreign policy, establishing close diplomatic ties with the Karzai and Ghani governments. Afghans saw India as a peaceful, dedicated partner in the state's growth and stability due to this strategy. However, India's foreign policy was once again exposed by the Taliban's comeback in 2021, which compelled it to reconsider its approach in the region (Ganaie, 2022).

However, India's soft power strategy turned out to be tactically naive. The weakness of the Afghan state became evident when the international community, led by the US, started to pull out. Despite past hostilities and the Taliban's attacks on Indian interests, India ignored the Taliban because of its sole emphasis on the Afghan government. India was eventually unprepared for the Taliban's swift comeback in 2021 as a result of this lack of diplomatic outreach, and when the Afghan state collapsed, its embassies and consulates were forced to close, reflecting the difficulties encountered during the Taliban's initial rise to power (Ganaie, 2022). Beyond working directly with the Taliban, India had to look into other options in order to regain a strategic position in Afghanistan. India has started taking actions that can open official lines of contact with the Taliban regime. Taliban spokesman Suhail Shaheen said peaceful collaboration is crucial and underlined the significance of acknowledging regional realities. His comments imply that, with the Taliban's present power, India would gain by adopting a similar approach and acknowledging the requirement for interaction with Afghanistan, even if doing so involves indirect acceptance of the Taliban government (Subramanian, 2021).

Given that India has always approached its involvement in Afghanistan through a zero-sum approach about Pakistan, the Taliban's comeback to power in Afghanistan represented a concerning change in the state's foreign policy. While Pakistan praised the regime change as a victory for Afghan sovereignty, Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the Taliban's rise represented a strategic setback for India (Hindu, 2021). High-level discussions between Taliban commanders and Pakistan's chief of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) served to emphasize this sense of victory further. India's perception of strategic loss was made worse by its inability to communicate with the Taliban at a time when peace negotiations with the West were gaining momentum. India realized that it needed to adjust its Afghan strategy to reclaim a strategic position in light of the shifting circumstances. India's actions while chairing the UN Security Council, when a resolution

recognizing the Taliban as a state actor was implemented, demonstrate how important it became to engage with the Taliban (Roy, 2021).

India quickly declared humanitarian help in the shape of 50,000 metric tons of wheat when foreign forces left, and Western backing declined, and it signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) to distribute the wheat. In keeping with India's continued commitment to a civilian-centric approach in Afghanistan, this aid, which the WFP called "landmark," sought to both ease food shortages and enable direct contact with the Taliban administration (Ganaie, 2022). The Taliban has promised India a safe atmosphere for its embassy as it attempts to establish its presence in Afghanistan under their rule. Given that greater foreign interaction raises the reputation of the Taliban's administration, this action is viewed as a step towards legitimizing it. India has continued to provide financial support for Afghanistan despite not having completely restored its diplomatic posts. India showed its continued commitment despite the Taliban's control by allocating Rs. 200 crores (about US\$ 27 million) for humanitarian relief, scholarships for Afghan students, and continuing projects in its fiscal budget for 2022–2023 (Hindu, 2021).

In order to preserve the goodwill that has been developed over the last 20 years, India will continue to provide food, medical supplies, and financial aid. However, in order to gain a strategic foothold, India needs to go beyond these humanitarian initiatives. India may have a chance as Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan worsen. The Taliban stressed their sovereignty and denounced Pakistan's airstrikes in April 2022 that killed several people (Aljazeera, 2022). The Taliban reaffirmed their intention to re-establish diplomatic ties when an Indian team met with senior Taliban leaders in June 2022 to discuss commerce and humanitarian help (Ganaie, 2022). India might strengthen its ties with the Taliban and take advantage of its resentment of Pakistan as Afghanistan struggles with severe shortages of basic necessities. In order to advance its strategic objectives in the region, India must have a working relationship with the Taliban because distance may not provide any real advantages. Thus, India, at first, has been reluctant of engaging with Afghanistan post US withdrawal, with concerns over regional stability, however, immediately later, realizing the fact that stable Afghanistan is inevitable for its long term regional and global goals, it extended its relationships with Afghanistan.

4.3.7. Kabul Under Taliban Regime: India's Cautious Re-Engagement

Due to strict international sanctions, an economic crisis worsened by a lack of foreign aid, and due to a decline in local businesses, the Afghan Taliban is gaining control over the country. The extended conflict between Russia and Ukraine has diverted Western attention from Afghanistan's humanitarian needs, and the US has left the country in a financially vulnerable position. China and Pakistan have provided aid for rehabilitation and reconstruction in this

situation, which has caused India to worry about its influence in the region (Farooq, 2022). India has always criticized the Taliban's human rights record and saw them as a Pakistani proxy. Pakistan has urged the international community to provide Afghanistan with economic assistance through diplomatic channels in order to stop the emergence of extremist threats. However, India argued against the Taliban's official recognition at the SCO meeting in September 2021, pointing to their inequitable governance and human rights issues. The US and Russia participated in a regional security forum on Afghanistan that India convened in November 2021. However, the Taliban were left out, and China and Pakistan declined to attend because they had doubts about India's motives (Wire, 2021).

In order to further India's regional goals and offset Pakistan's influence, Indian leaders have backed tactful interaction with the Afghan Taliban despite previous disagreements. In an effort to improve Afghan-Pakistani relations and maybe soften the Taliban's position towards India, India is currently concentrating on diplomatic and economic outreach to the Taliban. During a recent SCO-CSTO conference, Prime Minister Modi pledged to provide food and medical supplies and help with health, education, infrastructure, and capacity-building. India's increased efforts to re-establish its footprint in Afghanistan through strategic engagement and targeted support are signaled by this approach (TV, 2021). India acknowledges the Taliban as an important political force in Afghanistan and sees cooperation with them as crucial to limiting Pakistan's regional dominance. A total pullout, according to Indian strategists, would risk India's strategic interests. The Taliban are becoming more dependent on regional assistance as a result of Afghanistan's economic difficulties brought on by international sanctions. Despite being an important ally, Pakistan is unable to provide for all of Afghanistan's requirements on its own, which gives India the chance to intervene. India hopes to meet Afghan requirements and restore its regional influence by providing wheat and resuming economic initiatives (Farooq, 2022).

Given Afghanistan's strategic significance, Indian authorities have started interacting with the Taliban. India has demonstrated a practical change in strategy by pledging to transfer 50,000 metric tons of wheat via Pakistan's Wahga border in response to severe food shortages. In addition to providing food aid, India is strengthening diplomatic ties by reopening its embassy in Kabul to protect interests and keep an eye on investments. India is actively seeking Afghan stability to protect its regional influence and encourage bilateral interaction while keeping lines of communication open with the US, EU, and other partners (ANI, 2022). With 25 Afghan military cadets finishing their training in July 2022, India has maintained its long-standing commitment to this program. Additionally, India has provided Afghan soldiers with more training and language instruction. India has restarted commercial flights at the request of the Taliban leadership, enabling Afghan patients to receive medical treatment and students to study there. Additionally,

by opening Indian markets to Afghan agricultural exports, this involvement helps Afghanistan generate income and strengthens bilateral connections under the Taliban-led government (Farooq, 2022).

By establishing commercial channels through the Chabahar Port to Iran and deeper into Central Asia, India hopes to oppose China's Belt and Road Initiative, which includes the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). India is putting aside historical disagreements in order to increase its regional influence and assist these objectives by cultivating cordial ties with the Taliban-led government in Afghanistan. A new stage of India-Pakistan competition is beginning as a result of the Taliban's ascent to power in Afghanistan. India uses Afghanistan's humanitarian crises to forge diplomatic connections with the Taliban to offset Pakistan's influence. Indian strategists can try to undermine Pakistan's contribution to Afghan stability by taking advantage of regional issues, such as border conflicts and sharing water from the Kabul River. To undermine Pakistan's regional power and portray it as an untrustworthy partner for peace in Afghanistan, some speculate that India may back destabilize groups like the TTP within Pakistan (Ramachandran, 2022).

Reducing Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan is India's main policy goal. India intends to keep funding and assisting anti-Pakistan groups through its intelligence agencies, even if it might not be able to carry out training activities because of its better relations with the Taliban. To increase animosity between the two nations, India plans to start media campaigns that attribute terrorist acts in Afghanistan to Pakistan. India hopes to improve relations with the Taliban and facilitate their communication with the US and the rest of the world by reopening its embassy in Kabul. By doing this, India establishes itself as a possible regional mediator, increasing its power and enabling the Taliban to share intelligence for better security (Farooq, 2022). Hence, Afghanistan is an important factor in India's relations with the US and its strategic goals in the region and the world.

Chapter 5:

IRAN AS A GEOSTRATEGIC FACTOR IN PAKISTAN AND INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICIES TOWARDS THE US (2018-2023)

5.1. Introduction

Though Iran is far from India's northwestern border, it lies strategically between the Middle East and South Asia, providing Pakistan with an enormous geopolitical value for its proximity to the country, the resources that are plentiful there and its position along the Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz, an important maritime chokepoint for global oil supply (Ahmed & Bhatnagar, 2018). Not only, does Iran's location provide ample access to vast energy reserves, but it also permits easy access to regional trade routes which are critical for the region's growing economies. Iran is a land connection to the broader Middle East for Pakistan, and a gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia for India, often through Iran, avoiding Pakistan and forming an alternative corridor into energy and trade networks (Jahangir & Ahmed, 2023).

Iran is geographically situated in such a relevant position in South Asian geopolitics by being at the geometrical centre of South Asian geopolitics sharing the borders with Pakistan and influencing Indian strategic calculations. For centuries, Iran has helped and shaped Pakistan and India's foreign policy through its energy resources, trade, and regional alliances. Added to this have been the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and subsequent geopolitical shifts with both nations trying to navigate their connections to US and local powers (Awan, 2018). Iran has been an important focal point in the foreign policy considerations of both Pakistan and India, because of its role in shaping the regional stability and security in the region (Raza, 2020). The one common factor in Pakistan and India's foreign policies toward Iran has been the country's uneven relations with powerhouses of the world, notably the US. The relationship, both opportunities and challenges, was the conjuncture of alliances and regional interests of Pakistan and India in the context of the Iranian position on the international stage.

In the run-up to the Cold War, Iran was a strategic ally for the US under the Shah's regime, playing alongside Pakistan and other pro-Western allies in the region. It was highlighted more by Iran's role in the CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) alliance, which was designed to counter Soviet influence in the region. However, during Iran's time as a republic following the 1979 Iran Revolution, the country took on a more anti-Western stance despite tensions with the US, and it made a realignment of its regional strategy (Abbasi, 2019). The policy change reflected in Pakistan was that Iran became more ideologically parochial and less predictable as a partner in Pakistan's Western-oriented regional alliances (Vatanka, 2016).

On the other hand, Pakistan and Iran developed friction from the 1980s along sectarian and ideological cleavages, the Iran-Iraq War (1980 – 1988) and Iran's increasing support of the Shia factions across the region added to the determination of the bilateral relations. Despite these challenges, Pakistan and Iran ensured cooperative relations in trade and security collaboration measures between them. For most of Pakistan's history, the country has strived to maintain balance in relations with Iran, using its economic ties, including in the energy sphere, to counter any disadvantage brought about by the Iran-US polemics (Alam, 2004). Yet this balancing act has demanded skilful diplomacy because Pakistan's commitment to US interests in the region has been concurrent with its picking of sides in the Afghan-Soviet conflict of the 1980s and beyond.

Iran has traditionally supplied energy security to India and counterbalanced Pakistani influence in the region. India's relations with Iran, during the Cold War, were subject to the country's policy of non-alignment and its strategic affinity with the Soviet Union, employing which it placed itself in indirect proximity to Iranian concerns (Mubarik, 2019). However, the end of the Cold War and India's later liberalization in the 1990s radically changed its foreign policy to one of energy security and economic growth. The result was that Iran became more engaged through the exchange of energy imports and transportation corridors that would bypass Pakistan. In the 2000s, the completion of the Chabahar Port agreement signalled another strategic calculus for India: it opened a critical trade access route with Afghanistan and Central Asia, way free from Pakistan's territory.

The US diplomatic and economic sanctions on Iran during the presidencies of George W. Bush and Barack Obama posed especially troublesome barriers to Pakistan and India's diplomatic, and especially economic as well as people-to-people relations with Iran throughout the 2000s. Balancing its alliance with the US and its need for regional stability, Pakistan was careful: it cooperated economically with Iran but was non-panoptic in its political alignment (Jahangir & Ahmed, 2023). However, India took a more pragmatic position, calling for greater economic or friendly ties while defending a certain diplomatic distance to protect an expanding strategic partnership with the US. Since 2008, India's upgraded strategic ties with US necessitated a recalibration of its ties with Iran to avoid jeopardising it. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), otherwise known as the Iran Nuclear Deal, had temporarily lightened some of these pressures, allowing both Pakistan and India to move more freely about energy and infrastructure projects with Iran. But since the JCPOA was unilaterally scrapped by the Trump administration in 2018, it reopened the door to new constraints on Iran's regional relationships.

5.2. Iran as a Geo-strategic Factor in Pakistan's Foreign Policy towards the US (2018-2023)

5.2.1. Pakistan's Foreign Policy Stance Amidst US-Iran Nuclear Relations

In terms of US-Iran nuclear relations, Pakistan maintained a largely pragmatic balancing act between its strategic alignment with the US and the need to keep positive ties with Iran, from 2018–2023. This period reflected a high sense of what Pakistan's diplomatic positioning with this issue should be during an era of escalating US-Iran tensions as Pakistan shared a border with Iran and relied on the US for security and economic support (Shah & Ismail, 2023). Thus, Pakistan's foreign policy was influenced by the combination of its close alliance with Saudi Arabia, dependence on US aid, and the need for regional stability.

Pakistan's foreign policy between 2018 and 2023 is important in the context of US-Iran nuclear relations. In 2015, Iran agreed on a nuclear deal with global powers, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), that had been intended to curb Iran's nuclear ambitions in return for sanctions relief. In May 2018, the US President Trump withdrew from the JCPOA and its implementation of a maximum pressure campaign targeting the economy and politics of Iran (Shah, 2022). This shift intensified tensions in the Middle East, though. It presented problems for Pakistan, which has tilted between seeking a cordial relationship with the US and a close one with Iran.

After the US pulled out of JCPOA unilaterally, Pakistan, like all the European partners, found itself in the middle of a complicated geopolitical landscape. The reimposition of stringent sanctions on Iran shook the regional balance of power and caused Pakistan to reexamine its priorities in foreign policy. The renewed US sanctions targeting Iran put Pakistan's historical energy resource reliance on Iran, and its incumbent on developing the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project, on the verge of becoming increasingly precarious. These developments left Pakistan with a complex balancing act to undertake, trying at once to sustain its relationships with Iran and maintain ties with the US (Belal, 2019). During this period, the confrontations as well as the diplomatic engagements shaped the evolving nature of Pakistan-US relations. It was to affirm Pakistan as a US key ally in counterterrorism and regional stability. But the US hardline approach to Iran made it difficult for Pakistan to thread its own interests. Pakistan turned increasingly pragmatic in its foreign policy, playing a role, wherever possible, as a mediator in regional conflicts and at the same time working to secure its energy security requirements.

The US re-imposition of sanctions on Iran in 2018 put Pakistan back on the spot to limit its ties with Iran, more particularly in the energy space. However, sanctions made no contribution whatsoever to Pakistan's dream of constructing similar bilateral energy cooperation through Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project that had been under discussion since the 1990s. Though energy shortages and a desire for more energy sources exist, Pakistan's leaders preferred not to

fully commit to the project for fear of damaging relations with US(Salehi et al., 2019). Pakistan, meanwhile, took a cautious approach, saying it had stood behind peaceful resolutions to US-Iran tensions as well as Iran's right to peaceful nuclear energy under international supervision.

At the same time, Pakistan's approach also took root from its broader geopolitical and economic constraints. Given its dependence upon US and International Monetary Fund (IMF) financial aid, the country was overly sensitive to international scrutiny of its relations with sanctioned states such as Iran. It reminded Pakistan of a neutral stance and argued that diplomacy is the way out and that it should also seek out other regional partners to minimise the impact of the repercussions of the US-Iran hostilities. In Pakistan's foreign relations, the tensions between the US and Iran as well as increased insecurity in the region between 2020 and 2021 formed the most figured diplomatic issue. In January 2020, the killing of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani heightened tensions that the US and Iran were on the brink of an open war and heightened security concerns across the Middle East and South Asia(Khan& Sun, 2022). However, Pakistan, which like any other third world state is struggling with economic pressure from global agencies and internal security threats, did not want to be dragged into these tactics. In response, Imran Khan's administration was effectively doing the opposite — was almost not taking sides but was engaging actively in diplomacy to prevent a deepening of regional conflict (Karim, 2023).

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi paid a 'peace mission' to Iran and Saudi Arabia to help the two countries reduce tensions and foster a positive change in the peace process. This diplomatist entry was a support continued Pakistani endeavour in maintaining the region to being stable without harming its bilateral relations with US and Iran. Despite the cautious nature of this mediation effort, Pakistan expressed concern over articulating their perception of the US conduct in the region much less advocating a critique of US operations in the region, and instead concentrating on regional diplomacy and non-interventionism (Serenko, 2021). The resurfacing of the Taliban in Afghanistan and the subsequent withdrawal of US in 2021 made politics even harder. Because of the proximity to Iran and Pakistan, the emphasis of the strategy of Pakistan is shifting closer to the relations with Afghanistan. Pakistan was concerned with Afghanistan's security under the Taliban regime and regional power balance because of Iran and India (Masta, 2022). This meant that Pakistan's position on the part of foreign policy that dealt with US sensibilities had to adapt new dynamics that informed the emergence of a competitor state capable of providing the power vacuum.

At the same time, Pakistan's engagement with Iran was broader than energy cooperation. However, the two countries explored ways to work together in fighting terrorism and strengthening border security and trade. Despite external pressures, the commitment to the strengthening of their bilateral ties was underscored through high-level visits and diplomatic

dialogues(Zaidi & Ahmad, 2022). The shared concerns about groups of extremists operating along their borders were particularly appropriate given this cooperative approach. It intends to navigate these complexities in a way that serves its national interests while helping to maintain regional stability. With the geopolitical landscape always evolving, Pakistan's relationship with both the US and Iran will be an important element for determining the direction of its foreign policy.

5.2.2. 2018 – US Withdrawal from JCPOA and Maximum Pressure Campaign: Pakistan Foreign policy Response

Signed in 2015 by Iran and the P5+1 (US, UK, France, Russia, China, and Germany) the JCPOA was a landmark agreement that sought to curb Iran's nuclear activities in exchange for lifting economic sanctions. Inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) were mandated to be strict and allowed for limited nuclear activity by Iran while it was monitored. However, many states backed the deal, but the Trump administration thought it fell short, not addressing Iran's ballistic missile program or its activity in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen at the regional level(Overhaus, 2020). In May 2018, at his first United Nations General Assembly address following his election to the presidency, President Trump formally announced the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and resumed pre-existing sanctions against Iran as well as imposing new economic restrictions on the country according to a policy dubbed 'maximum pressure'. This was a sanctions campaign hurting Iran's economy through its oil exports, banking sector, and many other industries to stop it from continuing its certain regional activities (Fiedler, 2022). However, JCPOA signatories other than Iran rejected this decision and continued to back the deal. The US, however, went for the unilateral sanctions' way, with very consequences for Pakistan, and any border and trading relations that Pakistan had with Iran.

After the US pulled out of the JCPOA, Pakistan was confronted with complex diplomacy. Due to its proximity to the US and we already know the scenario, Pakistan had been one of the close allies of the US, gaining from various avenues of military aid, economic aid, and strategic partnership, in the context of its efforts in the war againstterrorism. Yet neighbouring Iran has a 909 km border with Pakistan, and acts as a regional partner in trade, border security and energy(Mirza et al., 2022). At first, Pakistan reacted with impartiality and caution to the US pullout. Statements made in Pakistan's foreign policy, with regard to diplomacy and dialogue, had continuously stressed that the JCPOA must be preserved to ensure regional stability. Pakistan did not openly criticize the US decision, mindful of the damage it could do to already marred relations between the US and Pakistan —relations unnerved by Trump's previous attack on Pakistan for failing to combat terrorism.

However, the US withdrawal and the following sanctions on Pakistan compelled it to reduce its contacts with Iran, mainly as regards the Iran–Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project. The

idea for this project, wherein Pakistan would have a stable source of natural gas and thus was supposed to help mitigate the country's chronic power supply problems, had been talked about for the past 10 years (Khan, 2024). Nevertheless, the re-imposition of sanctions made it almost impossible for Pakistan to push through the pipeline without risking a US counterretaliation against Pakistan while Pakistan had one foot stuck in one camp and the other in another. The economic repercussions for Pakistan of the maximum pressure campaign extended to trade and energy cooperation with Iran. Renewed sanctions had a devastating effect on Iran's economy; from this came a huge decrease in the trade between Pakistan and Iran. With restricted access to Iranian oil and gas, Pakistan's energy crisis was only exacerbated, and Pakistan began looking towards alternative suppliers or face the type of mounting pressure on its energy sector (Dar & Haq, 2023).

The economic implications were joined by increased security challenges along Pakistan's border with Iran. Iran's economy was strained, cross-border smuggling increased, and the tension over activity by militant groups also surged. Pakistan and Iran worry about the existence of extremist groups along the border, and a maximum pressure campaign could further destabilise regions along the border (Shad & Abbas, 2018). In response, Iran strengthened border security cooperation with Pakistan, hailing additional security forces deployed and interdicting illegal activities with Pakistan. Yet, these efforts were frequently constrained by the broader geopolitical backdrop, as such actions by Pakistan were perceptive to avoid alienating any further US scrutiny.

The maximum pressure campaign forced Pakistan to rethink its foreign policy vis a vis the US and Iran and, in the process, starkly dramatized the sheer difficulty of Pakistan's regional presence. However, the impact on the IP gas pipeline revealed how Pakistan's economy was exposed to the impact of external support since it was reliant on the continued feed of US military largesse and developments in this region that ranged from sanctions to political hostilities between countries (Tahir & Hussain, 2022). Pakistan's refusal to lash back at the US despite the withdrawal from the JCPOA parallels a more typical trajectory in Pakistan's foreign policy — one of circumspect engagement and pragmatic diplomacy, of stability rather than ideological affinity. But Pakistan's position hardly budged by 2023, which maintained its call for a diplomatic solution to the US-Iran standoff while defending its own economic and security interests. The maximum pressure campaign made a sizeable dent in Pakistan-Iran relations, essentially hindering anything close to economic cooperation, and in the long run — complicating border security mechanisms. The measured approach of Pakistan also showed that it would not shy away from a balanced foreign policy to satisfy shifting and complicated pressures in the region, but at the same prioritized its partnership with the US and was not inclined to upset its immediate neighbours (Khan, 2024).

5.2.3. Pak-US Relations Amidst Saudi-Iran Rivalry

Over the long history of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, this has played itself out in a potent and influential manner in the foreign policies of countries in the Middle East and South Asia, including Pakistan. This rivalry also hinders Pakistan as most of its relations with Saudi Arabia have always been close, and Pakistan shares a border and has historical, religious, and economic linkages with Iran. Pakistan adds another layer to this rivalry because its relationship with the US, a close ally of Saudi Arabia and a major power in this part of the world, is so close. This, then, has put Pakistan on a path of strategic balancing between Iran and Riyadh while trying to cushion any negative effects on US ties.

Pakistani policy has always been to position itself as neutral between the rivalries of Saudi Arabia and Iran, as there have been competing demands in doing so. Failing to do so jeopardizes Pakistan's equilibrium, with an important percentage of its population belonging to the Shias and the country not being able to afford sectarian tensions that occur due to too close links to Saudi Arabia's anti-Iran position (Ahmed & Akbarzadeh, 2020). Furthermore, it is in Iran's interest as a neighbour and as a valuable trading partner, and for Saudi Arabia as a major economic power in Pakistan, to adopt a balanced policy.

Pakistan's leadership has stressed regional stability and its opinions on the Saudi-Iran rivalry have remained low profile. This was the stance that Prime Minister Imran Khan took during his tenure, insisting that Pakistan's foreign policy should strongly prioritize Pakistan's own stability and not get into engagements in the cases of regional conflicts. Further evidence of this neutral stance has come in Pakistan's lack of participation in the Saudi-led coalition's military involvement in Yemen, and the frequent battleships between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Zweiri & James, 2021). In 2015, however, Pakistan's parliament voted in favour of its policy of not getting involved in regional conflicts fuelled by Saudi-Iran rivalry: it remains neutral in Yemen.

In Pakistan's balancing act in the Saudi-Iran rivalry, its reliance on the heavy Saudi economy is one of the main complicating factors. Over the years, Saudi Arabia has provided Pakistan with career and energy subsidies and investment (Mistry, 2020). In 2023, Saudi Arabia pledged \$6 billion in loans and deferred Pakistani payment for oil imports, following a severe balance-of-payments crisis. This financial support was a barometer of how dependent Pakistan was economically on Riyadh, which has an impact on Pakistan's own ability to continue an independent foreign policy in Saudi-Iran geopolitics. However, the economic support of Saudi Arabia to Pakistan for Pakistan's political and economic stability is also regarded as an advantage by the US because the state is facing economic problems. However Western dependence on Saudi financial backing may be an incentive to bring closer to Saudi interest in such regional disputes as this could risk relations with Iran. Pakistan's leaders, in turn, have vacillated between acceptance

of Saudi economic largesse and a refusal to become drawn into Saudi-led initiatives that Iran considers suspect, including the Saudi-led military alliance(Onderco& Knopf, 2023). This casual engagement allows Pakistan to kiss the Iranian ass without totally being an ass to them which is good for us because it keeps them balanced where they need to be with the US.

To navigate the implications of the Saudi-Iran rivalry on its relationship with the US, Pakistan has several strategic options available. Firstly, by taking part in the regional security initiatives where Pakistan's involvement encompasses both Saudi Arabia and Iran, it can create an atmosphere of dialogue and community. Take for instance – Pakistan could urge regional forums such as those comprising Gulf states, Iran, and other regional players to deliberate on regional security and related issues, countering terrorists as well as economic concertation(Ahmed et al., 2019). This is all in line with US interests for maintaining regional stability and lets Pakistan be a part of a diplomatic framework that thematically includes Saudi Arabia and Iran. For Pakistan, there is scope to engage on the implications of the Saudi-Iran rivalry in the region at multilateral forums. Participation in the platform of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can help Pakistan speak in favour of dialogue and cooperation among member states. It can also allow for the relief of sectarian tensions and contribute to a joint tackling of regional security problems.

Remaining diplomatically independent in the region is of paramount importance to Pakistan and means reducing its reliance on Saudi aid. Pakistan can not only be less dependent on any single actor but also build alternative economic partnerships at home as well as abroad. Building better relations with China, Turkey and ASEAN countries could ensure Pakistan's improved economic resilience. To begin with, expanding economic cooperation with Iran, especially in border trade as well as in energy, would give Pakistan more options and consequently more freedom regarding Saudi economic influence.Pakistan has a special space to leverage diplomatic flexibility in its dialogue with Saudi Arabia and Iran on account of its close relationship with the US. If Pakistan continues to work with the US on areas of common interest, particularly counterterrorism, counter-narcotics, and Afghan security, then it can increase the US's strategic calculation to balance its ties with Iran and Saudi Arabia (Abbasi R., 2023). For example, Pakistan could request US help with various development projects that could diminish its economic vulnerabilities allowing it to deal with Saudi Arabia and Iran on terms more commensurate with its interests.

Finally, the way Pakistan has been dealing with the Saudi-Iran rivalry is crucial for the country's relations with the US. Pakistan could maintain its interests while preserving a strategic relationship with the US by paying specific attention to a nuanced approach of neutrality, mediation, and economic diversification. It provides Pakistan with the benefit of being an

instrument of stability for the region while maintaining a foreign policy consistent with the interests of the US and regional actors who accord predominance to the pursuit of peace and cooperation.

5.2.4. Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan Trio: Implications for Pakistan's US Foreign Policy

Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan are all integral parts of the complex dynamics, and they have a significant impact on Pakistan's foreign policy toward the US. Isolated on the fringe of Eurasia by Iran in the West and Afghanistan to the northeast, it shares borders with both, Pakistan's geopolitical position puts it at the heart of what is important to the US such as counterterrorism, regional stability and managing Iranian influence. Economically, the relationship between Pakistan and Iran is conducted between the two states based on the uneasy sharing of borders and the necessity for resources; and social security, Energy strangled Pakistan looks curiously upon Iran's natural resources, particularly its energy reserves. One such example is the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project that is proposed to be a solution to Pakistan's perennial energy shortages (Shah & Ismail, 2023). The real issue, however, is that the US sanctions against Iran have pretty much blocked the progress of the IP pipeline from which Pakistan stands to benefit by virtue of the massive amounts of natural gas that would enter the country on your behalf, and on the development of which you would have a closer relationship with Iran.

While Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan has a long, complex history of security concerns and ethnic ties; managing tensions between Islamic ideology and Western secular values has been difficult. As the US withdrew from Afghanistan in 2021, it left a vacuum in the region, and it has further exacerbated already adverse implications for Pakistan (Mahmood et al., 2022). As Afghanistan's neighbour and one of just a few countries with long historical ties to the new Taliban government, Pakistan has played a critical role in restoring Afghanistan's status quo and stoking engagement with the country (Khalid, 2020). Despite that, the US has viewed Pakistan as a highly valuable player in the region's stability. For its part, Pakistan does not want Afghanistan to become a safe haven for extremist groups such as ISIS Khorasan and al-Qaeda, which are major threats to security. Yet, the US is sceptical of Taliban links to such groups, and it's here that Pakistan's diplomatic double play comes into full view.

While maintaining a position of direct involvement, Pakistan has strongly supported a peace process led by Afghanistan and has vowed not to interfere. Post 9/11, Pakistan has been a key player in Afghan security in line with the US goal to combat terrorism. During Afghan peace process, Pakistan played a role as a mediator between the US and Afghanistan's new government and carried over security risks required to deal with Iran. The task for Pakistan has been to balance its commitments with Iran and Afghanistan in the Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan trio with its alliance

with the US on its strategic focus. Given the US's interests in limiting Iranian influence in the region and keeping the region stable, Pakistan endeavoured to live up to a pragmatic and cautious approach to it, because of the inherent interdependent security, political and economic interests in this triangle. This centres on non-interference, selective engagement, and support for regional initiatives (Omidi & Noolkar-Oak, 2022).

Neither Iran nor Afghanistan is a focus for alignment with any side, but Pakistan has chosen selective engagement and noninterference with both countries keeping stability as their priority. It also helped in avoiding entanglement in regional conflicts, that could negatively affect ties with the US. For example, Pakistan has stood aside on questions of Afghanistan's internal affairs, demonstrating that it backed an inclusive political process(Noor, 2021). In its relationship with Iran, Pakistan has stayed away from US-sensitive issues with Iran as regards Syria and Yemen, helping to enhance its reported neutrality.Only after interest in Iran's energy resources took off, Pakistan wavered in its pursuit of alternative partnerships, especially in the face of US sanctions on Iran. These engagements with Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Central Asia have helped Pakistan diversify its energy sources and avert dependence on Iranian supplies. However, Pakistan has long been an advocate of regional economic integration, with integration being the basis for Pakistan's rationale for cooperation between Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. While constrained by sanctions, this signals a commitment to maintaining peace in South Asia, congruent with US objectives (Ahmed & Akbarzadeh, 2020).The promotion of Pakistan's regional security initiatives has been an active feature through multilateral forums which include the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). Through these fora, constructive engagement on issues such as counterterrorism and trade are fostered with both Iran and Afghanistan(Murad & Muhammad, 2023). It is consonant with US goals for removing regional conflicts and builds on Pakistan's role as a stabilizing force. Given that Pakistan has its own security concerns it would prefer to respond to them through multilateral engagement rather than on its own, and that it wishes to stay neutral in the Iran-US conflict.

5.2.5. Counterterrorism Collaboration

The US-Pakistan counterterrorism collaboration, especially as Afghanistan's landscape changes. This shared priority has allowed Pakistan to get US support for its border security programs with Iran. Pakistan strengthens the US's strategic interests by focusing on its counterterrorism commitments, even as it grapples with Iran and Afghanistan. Pakistan's alignment of its interests with the US counter-terrorism goals helps it negotiate with Iran while supporting shared regional security goals. Pakistan's diplomatic approach to the Iran-Pakistan-Afghanistan nexus balances its relationship with a US alliance and reinforces this with its own regional partnerships(Ahmed, 2020). It is a sign of Pakistan's commitment to stability which is, along with

the US' interests, welcomed by Iran and Afghanistan. Pakistan's diplomacy of neutrality, mediation and multilateralism has put the country on the sidelines as a responsible regional actor that the US values for promoting stability. Pakistan got away with a flexible foreign policy that gave it a strong relationship with the US by carefully parading economic and security engagements with Iran and solidifying Afghan Stability (Ibrahim et al., 2021). A commitment to balance in this approach not only supports Pakistan's regional role and credibility as a partner that can deliver together to shared US and regional priorities, but it also anchors Pakistan's continued prominence in South Asia.

5.2.6. India-Iran Relations and Pakistan's foreign policy

The relation between India and Iran based on their first strengthened partnership around the Chabahar port development is something that Pakistan bears strategic challenges, that undermine its regional influence and security interests. India – Iran partnership is of huge investments like India's 10-year pact to run Chabahar's Shahid Beheshti terminal. Under the agreement, India pledged to pour in \$120 million to help develop infrastructure and offer Iran a \$250 million credit line. India plans to use this port to get to Afghanistan and Central Asia without passing through Pakistan at all and counterbalance the near neighbour Gwadar Port also which China has developed in the name of Gwadar Port in Pakistan under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). With Chabahar, India may have a very interesting geopolitical and economic future for Pakistan. The US has largely been inconsistent in its attitude to Chabahar, seeing it sometimes as a counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) but some days warning India not to cross a line into business negotiations with Iran that might anger sanctions (Homami et al., 2024).

As a strategic port on the Gulf of Oman, the Chabahar port gives India an unprecedented foothold that bypasses Pakistan's transit routes to Afghanistan and Central Asia. The port, despite Iran's own economic sanctions, is to serve India's regional interests while proving a hurdle for Pakistan's own modernisation of its own Gwadar port project (Khalid & Khan, 2020). Having both Gwadar and Chabahar less than 100 miles apart, the competition between the two ports is not coincidental: they are responding to the broader regional power dynamics, between Pakistan's alignment with China and India's partnership with Iran. The investment in the Chabahar port by India is a multi-layered strategy to force the power of political and economic presence in the region (Gul et al., 2020). Reaching Afghanistan and Central Asian markets directly, bypassing Pakistan entirely and generating a plainer lane to the landlocked regions, turns out to be a gainer for India by developing this port. India's trade ambitions were boosted by this move and it is a counter to the China-Pakistan alliance, which is working together in the nearby Gwadar port whose port China has invested about \$62 billion. India, with just \$ 500 million for Chabahar, is strategically balancing China's growing footprint in the region (Biberman et al., 2023). The

strategic location of the port further facilitates India's ability to factor as a stabilizing power in Afghanistan by keeping essential trade routes that are not transit-dependent through Pakistani means that affect India's influence over Afghan economic stability and infrastructure. But, by interacting with Iran via Chabahar, India also keeps open a diplomatic channel to keep drilling with its regional allies while dealing with a harmonious amalgamation of pressure and financial sanctions (Ejaz & Abid, 2021). By providing this partnership with Iran, India is achieving its geographic goals within the region while simultaneously developing its numerous diplomatic ties at different ends of the spectrum.

The India-Iran partnership and the development of Chabahar pose both strategic challenges and opportunities to Pakistan. Therefore, given Pakistan's economic needs, its US partnership and its relationship with China, Pakistan must consider various factors while responding to India's involvement in Iran. The Chabahar project puts India closer to Pakistan's Western border while raising concerns about possible Indian influence in the near immediate neighbourhood of Pakistan (Nisar, 2019). The location of Gwadar, in Baluchistan, also puts Pakistan in proximity, making it vulnerable to Indian influence to support separatist movements that Pakistan sees as a major internal security threat and to support secessionist aspirations in the Baluchistan region itself. Pakistan is careful about any Indian presence near Pakistan's territory as it thinks this may afford ground for intelligence (or political) interference. To balance that Pakistan has strengthened its intelligence and security operations in its neighbourhood, around the Gwadar port and cooperated more closely with China. Pakistan's security and development support comes from this partnership with China as a counterweight to the India-Iran nexus. Pakistan has also elevated its diplomatic relations with Iran to convince Iran not to side squarely with India, and to maintain Iran's ear on Pakistan's security concerns.

Coming through Chabahar, India today has an independent trade route with Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan. This bypassing undermines Pakistan's ability to exert transit leverage over trade between India and Afghanistan as far as revenues for Pakistan's transit role are concerned. Loss of transit fees and shift of trading routes to a location outside of Pakistan may have unfavourable economic effects, as well, given Pakistan's efforts to assert itself in the region. In response, Pakistan has stepped up its support for China in the acceleration of CPEC projects, as a means of inviting investment into the Gwadar port with the aim of transforming Gwadar into the centre of regional trade (Leibin, 2020). The aim of Pakistan is to make Gwadar economically viable and interesting for Afghanistan and Central Asian states so that Gwadar becomes a key alternative to Chabahar. Pakistan's ambition is to keep itself relevant as a regional transit route by positioning Gwadar as a regional trading centre with lower tariffs, better facilities, and safer passageways.

5.2.7. Pakistan's Diplomatic Engagement with Iran

Pakistan has realized that Iran is the key factor in regional balance and took diplomatic action to build up relations with Iran. The idea here was to make sure Iran is not falling in line entirely with India's strategic ambitions. However, lately, Pakistan has engaged with Iran in all such areas including economic cooperation, joint border security efforts, and counter-terrorism efforts. Given the potential impacts of the India-Iran nexus on its foreign policy, Pakistan has several strategic options to consider, such as strengthening the China-Pakistan alliance is good for Pakistan's economic goals, but it also acts as a security framework to soften the risks associated with India's increasing frontier to the West. In order to reduce India's influence, Pakistan can engage Iran to deepen the economic relations of both (Ali et al., 2019). As a part of Pakistan's initiative to deescalate tensions in the Gulf region and mediate between other regional rivals such as; Iran and Saudi Arabia, Pakistan PM Imran Khan visited Iran and met Hassan Rouhani to hold talks on the issue in 2019. The Pak-Iran ties aimed to ensure that the economic interests of Iran are not wholly dependent on Indian investments through bilateral projects but on mutual cooperation of Pakistan and Iran in particular for neighbouring markets and energy trade agreements. However, this needs to be carefully weighed against US sanctions on Pakistan's engagement with Iran.

Moreover, by fostering connections with multilateral organizations such as the SCO and ECO, Pakistan can emphasize regional cooperation. National and transnational strategies emerge that seek to make Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asian countries develop joint economic projects that bring down the probability of exclusive partnerships and bring about a conducive regional environment (Boni, 2023). Pakistan could instead decide to opt out of this issue and endorse a foreign policy of non-alignment that works with all regional players to the extent feasible: Iran and India. It would call on Pakistan to show itself as a neutral force and a stabilizing civilization in South Asia. With Pakistan ensconced in the India-Iran nexus, a careful recalibration of its foreign policy is required to tackle this strategically complex situation. Such a challenge to Pakistan's economic and security interests from India's engagement with Iran forces Pakistan to look for multiple options to protect its regional influence. Pakistan's answer is an intuitive one, one rooted in strengthening ties with China, deepening their economic relations with Iran and the pursuit of multilateral initiatives, to balance out the region. But ultimately Pakistan will have to employ deft diplomacy to thread its way through a shifting geometric, with Indian, Iranian, and US interests. However, the India-Iran nexus is problematic; however, Pakistan's adaptability and commitment to regional stability position it well to positively manage these shifts for a timely Pakistan relevance as a key regional player.

5.2.8. Assassination of General Qasem Soleimani and Pakistan's Response

The case of the assassination by a US drone strike of General Qasem Soleimani, commander of Iran's Quds Force in Baghdad on January 3, 2020, had profound geopolitical influence, with far-reaching implications in neighbouring Pakistan. The death of Soleimani only intensified Iran-US hostilities and raised tensions throughout the Middle East, and Pakistan found itself in a precarious position being the close friend to both Iran and the US. It was also a problem for Pakistan's relations with Saudi Arabia, who were at odds with Iran over their influence in the region (Abrahms, 2023). Pakistan's response was carefully neutral, saying that it wants to opt for regional stability. The rise in tensions around the region also prompted Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi to express concerns and appeal to Iran and the US to refrain from further escalation. It also declined to explicitly back one side or the other and urged both sides to seek diplomatic solutions to keep the peace (Rubin, 2022). It was a stance Pakistan needed to take dependent on US financial and security aid to the region while bordering and having economic interests with Iran, particularly regarding cross-border trade and shared security concerns.

In addition to diplomatic statements, Pakistan also quietly took up the role of mediator between the US and Iran. Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan reaffirmed a commitment to de-escalation and said Pakistan was communicating openly with both the US and Iranian leadership, signalling a readiness to help broker dialogue (Knights et al., 2020). Pakistan's strategic interest in averting any conflict, which could destabilize its western border, threaten its internal security, or disrupt its relations with Saudi Arabia lit the fire for this approach. The assassination of Soleimani, however, highlighted the balancing act of regional powers and pointed to Pakistan as a potential mediator in the Middle East and the policy of neutrality pertaining to its regional affairs.

5.2.9. From IPI to TAPI: Recounting the Relevance of Iran-Afghanistan Factor in Pakistan's Relations with the US

Originally conceived in the 1990s, the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline was to transport natural gas from Iran's South Pars field to India through Pakistan. Yet the project was dogged by geopolitical tensions, security concerns and international sanctions against Iran, to such an extent that its viability was all but impossible. On the contrary, the eventual rise of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan India (TAPI) pipeline as an alternative project bypassed, to some extent, some of the geopolitical headaches of IPI that arose from changed dynamics in the region (Ali et al., 2022). The evolution of Pakistan-US relations, especially about energy security and regional stability, is described in the shift of IPI to TAPI (Khetran, 2020). In the aftermath of the US pivot to boosting ties with Central Asian nations and Afghanistan, TAPI offered the US something to crow about, serving to enhance stable relations with Afghanistan and reduce the US' dependence on Iranian energy sources. TAPI was seen by the US to diversify energy supply routes as the US

attempted to reduce Iran's influence in the region in line with its wider strategy of 'containment' of Iran.

Iran-Afghanistan is a salient factor in Pakistan's foreign policy vis a vis the US, particularly as regards the latter's dealings with Pakistan. Shared challenges such as counter-terrorism efforts, narcotics smuggling, and economic instability underscore the complex relationship between these three nations. Iran's influence in Afghanistan and possible ways it could destabilize the Middle East have often smothered the possibility of cooperation between Pakistan and Iran in projects such as IPI. The Afghan conflict has always seen the involvement of regional actors, with Iran backing some caste and Pakistan trying to dictate the Taliban (Galimov, 2024). While this is clearly a complicated rivalry, it complicates Pakistan's ability to align its energy security goals with the interests of the US.

Through years of encouragement, the US has always encouraged Pakistan to support TAPI to bolster regional energy security with economic development in Afghanistan (Gul et al., 2022). For the US TAPI is a project to develop both as an energy and an economic relationship between Central Asian nations, Afghanistan, and South Asia. This also follows the US line of approach in having Afghanistan as a stable and prosperous country as an energy and trade conduit. US is promoting TAPI to reduce Iran's role in the region and increase Pakistan's energy diversification. Even though several benefits can be associated with the TAPI, much more needs to be done to pursue the implementation of the project in Pakistan. Afghanistan security issues pose a threat getting piped in recently as the Taliban resurfaces for a year and violence prevails. However, Pakistan's energy policy is subject to its relationship with both Iran and the US. Pakistan realises a need for diversification and does not wish to harm good relations with Iran which plays a strategic role in the region's energy market.

The TAPI deal has yet another challenge in place in the form of Pakistan's economy and energy requirements. The requirement for necessary funding and support for TAPI is imperative with Pakistan struggling with energy crises, and the necessity to invest in infrastructure in Pakistan and thus it must tread a fine line in its relations with the outside world (Rashid et al., 2023). Such projects can also be constrained by the possibility of resource or regional competition which thus requires a proper balance of diplomacy. The substitution of IPI with TAPI enshrines the socio-political context of energy security in terms of geopolitics and regionally restricted Pakistan-US relations. As the future source of energy import, TAPI provides a good signal for increasing energy security and further regional cooperation; however, it is not an easy job to secure the project in the region; security risks, geopolitical interferences, and economic considerations are the challenges that make such projects in the region so sensitive and challenging.

5.2.10. Iran Factor Amidst Afghan Peace Process and Post-US Withdrawal from Afghanistan

The Afghanistan peace process, especially as it relates to the US' withdrawal from Afghanistan in August of 2021 appears to have drastically reshaped the regional geostrategic balance, placing Iran in the driving seat of it all. Afghan dynamic is evolving, and Pakistan also deals with the challenges and opportunities associated with its relationship with the US. The complexity arises from Iran's algorithmic role in this mixture of alliance and rivalry involving many partners (Maley & Jamal, 2022). The Afghan Peace process started in earnest with the signing of the Doha Agreement between the US and the Taliban in February 2020, which aimed to provide the framework for the end of decades-long conflict in Afghanistan. The Taliban took over Kabul in August 2021, just the latest in a nearly two-decade-long battlefield struggle through which the US set a deadline for drawing down troops from Afghan soil. The rapid change also led to a broad concern about such an extremist group's resurgence, a humanitarian crisis and regional instability (Bibi et al, 2023). In relation to these, Iran's interest in Afghanistan is aligned to geopolitical and security factors. Iran has a long border with Afghanistan and has in the past been wary of the Taliban, a Sunni extremist group whose ideology is at odds with Iran's Shia majority. Iran has though pieced together the fact that it also needs to engage with the Taliban to continue to protect its interests and influence, after the US withdrawal.

5.2.11. Iran's Strategic Engagement in Afghanistan: Implications for Pak-US relations

Immediately after the Taliban returned to power, Iran quickly reached out to create diplomatic ties with the new Afghan government and it has signalled its willingness to engage with them. Iran's ideas behind this were to use its influence to foster a stable Afghanistan that would not spill into Iran and let it exercise some control over its security. Humanitarian assistance, promoting dialogue within the Afghan factions, and backing initiatives for an economically stable environment in keeping with Iranian interests, constitute this engagement. Also, since Iran has established a presence across Afghanistan, it backs, for example, the Shia groups (such as the Hazara community) within the country, as part of their political strategy to preserve influence in the country. With involvement in Afghan affairs, Iran can act as a big player in the region, such as countervailing US influence after the US withdraws from the country (Dobbins, 2022).

Over history, Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan has been shaped as much by a desire for strategic depth vis-a-vis India and multiple Afghan factions, including the Taliban. Pakistan sees an opportunity to solidify its influence in Afghanistan, which has long been seen as a vital part of its national security strategy. But it also comes with too big a price, especially the risk of the re-emergence of extremist groups and lack of stability in the region of Pakistan and Afghanistan. The case of Iran & Pakistan complicates the calculus of Pakistan's strategic

engagement with Afghanistan (Taye & Ahmed, 2021). Both countries are interested in prioritizing stability but historical rivalries and different approaches to the Taliban pose potential points of friction. For example, Iran's backing of Shia groups increases the threat of sectarianism, which may spill over into Pakistan and undermine its own internal stability. Moreover, as Iran attempts to enhance its presence in Afghanistan, Pakistan will probably be in a position to compete regarding its activities with the Taliban and other Afghans.

From the US standpoint, however, the withdrawal from Afghanistan leads to a fresh emphasis on staying in the region maintaining regional stability and countering Iranian influence. In addition to the apprehension of US officials that Iran's talk to the Taliban could encourage rising instability in Afghanistan and impact regional security directly, the resurgence of extremist groups is possible (Muzaffar et al., 2021). The US therefore has been urging Pakistan to take its part in supporting Afghan stability on a positive basis and to join forces against mutual threats. However, in this situation, Pakistan finds itself in a tough position. Pakistan, like several Gulf states, has historically relied on the US for military and economic support but its strategic interests may not always be in step with those of the US regarding Iran (Verma, 2022). In contrast, the US has kept a relatively cool approach to its neighbour Iran, through sanctions and despite Iran's designation as a regional foe. Taking into consideration the above, Pakistan's attempts to engage with Iran and play the balance game for itself in its foreign policy might bring tensions with the US.

For Pakistan, the evolving dynamics of the Afghan peace process and post US withdrawal environment combine to create a complex environment in which Pakistan's relationship with the US is changing. With so many relationships at stake, Pakistan must balance its rows with the Taliban, Iran, and its own strategic partnerships with the US (Amin et al, 2020). The problem is to pursue all these interests and for the nation's security. In case Pakistan wants warm relations with the US they need to prove that they are supportive of fighting terrorism and trying to bring stability in Afghanistan. But that commitment must offset its legacy connections to Iran and the Taliban; the very issue that may lead the US to perceive Pakistan as an unreliable partner (Ali & Anwar, 2023). Additionally, as the US alters its strategy in Afghanistan, it will likely emphasize developing regional cooperation to meet common challenges, including counterterrorism and stability within the economy. On the other hand, Pakistan's role as a mediator between the US and Iran could be a space in which Pakistan could enhance its diplomatic status if it is able to effectively balance its relations with both countries.

The complexities of Pakistan-US relations in the post-US withdrawal and Afghan peace process scenario are aggravated by the Iranian factor. Given Iran's backtracking from a tentative détente with the US and its rapid consolidation in Afghanistan, Pakistan must seek to balance its

historic ties with Iran and the geopolitical changes underway in the region, reflecting the overall interests of the US. Pakistan's ability to pursue all these competing interests and be in support of regional stability and counter extremist threats while at the same time promoting its strategic partners will determine the future of Pak-US ties (Amin et al., 2020). The situation in Afghanistan is unfolding, and Pakistan's role in the context is affecting decisively its foreign policy and shaping regional security dynamics.

5.3. Iran as a Geo-strategic Factor in India's Foreign Policy towards the US (2018-2023)

2018 to 2023 has been a critical period in the evolution of India's foreign policy exploring its strategic engagement with Iran in the backdrop of developing a partnership with the US. The relationship between India and Iran came to prominence as a foreign policy component of India's foreign policy, but one that was rooted in regional dynamics, economic interests, and a shifting geopolitical landscape in India's case. Cultural and civilizational ties between India and Iran go a long way. The complexities in their relationship were, however, introduced after the Cold War, particularly as India strove to balance its ties with the US and with Iran. In the wake of that agreement—the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reached between Iran and world powers in 2015—when India cut off relations with Iran in the wake of that deal, India returned to interacting with Iran in areas of energy and infrastructure (Qadri & Nabi, 2019). This relationship was seriously challenged by the subsequent US withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018, and its re-imposition of sanctions on Iran, putting India in a tricky position as it plays its interests in dealing with its pertinacious neighbour.

5.3.1. India-Iran Strategic Engagement Amidst Indo-US Strategic Partnership

As the terrorism threat began to look after 9/11, a new focus on protecting security in the Indo-Pacific encouraged the Indo-US strategic partnership. We formalized this partnership through several agreements, like the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement, to broaden the partnership to include defence, trade, and technology transfer. Yet the strengthening of this relationship called for a rethinking of India's relationship with Iran — a most inconvenient consideration in the light of US sanctions and Iran's ambitions in the region (Hussain & Naqvi, 2024). However, due to US sanctions, India would continue to do economic trade with Iran, in particular seeking to improve its cooperation in the area of energy. Countries that are key for India's energy requirements – including in the face of rising domestic demand – are Iran, which has the world's largest reserves of natural gas and oil. This was characterized by this engagement on a project like the Chabahar port project, an infrastructure initiative to enhance connectivity between India, Iran, and Afghanistan. India inked a 10-year Chabahar port deal in May 2021, promised to spend \$120 million on infrastructure and provide Iran with a \$250 million credit line for nine years. This strategic move was intended to improve trade routes between the country and

Afghanistan and Central Asian countries and create a strong Indian stake in the region by circumventing Pakistan(Kupriyanov&Makarevich, 2024). It not only provides a gateway into Afghanistan but also serves to put India up against China's Gwadar port, placing even more importance on Iran in India's larger strategic calculus.India's operation, or handling of its relations with Iran during the days of the US-imposed sanctions could be described as a tight ship. Since the rise of the Trump administration, the US has sought to put maximum pressure on Iran, thus forcing countries to keep their distance from the Islamic Republic. It had placed the nation on a knife edge, all but guaranteeing that India needed to maintain the bonds with the US and Iran. Laden with these warnings from the US, India has persisted with its import of Iranian oil despite the decline by arguing about the place of energy security in its foreign policy(Khan, 2024).

Other factors like the increase in power of some regions, particularly China, made these complexities worse. India was worried about the broad engagement with Iran, a 25-year Cooperation Agreement signed by the two countries in 2021 equally, which could amplify the 'enhanced Sino-Iranian relations' contrary to India's strategic clout in the region (Khanmohammadi & Sun, 2022). Thus, India had to search for a new strategy – a relationship with Iran that would not be vexing for the US but where Indian interest in oil acquisition and ensuring its strategic supplies would be safe(Pande, 2025).

5.3.2. India's Balancing Act: Iran and the US Factor

This news brought a diplomatic challenge to India in its relationship with Iran and at the same time with the US Different, India's effort to cultivate stronger defence cooperation with the US and to join the multilateral forum like the Quad was inversely proportional to its known relation with Iran. Employing such a construct, India found it useful to have a relationship with Iran and extract diplomatic influence over US on almost all matters concerning regional stability and counterterrorism (Khalaf, 2024).

Furthermore, the growing security concerns of India over Afghanistan and the resurgence of the Taliban in June 2021 to power sharpened the need to work with Iran. Both countries have a strategic necessity to ensure that Afghanistan does not plunge into anarchy because anarchy precipitates its security crises. Indeed, this is why India wanted to discuss with Iran Afghan stability because Delhi knew that Iran could bring regional stability and the region was less susceptible to extremism. India's relationship or interaction with Iran was linked with domestic politics. The government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi of the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) intended to aggressively enhance India's global status. But the latter undermined the government on questions of national security and the strategic alliance with US concerning Iran(Anas, 2021). This of course was fitting for the idea of a dependent relationship with the US while also being a

foreign policy that was separate from previous colonial relationship ideas owing to the fact that diplomacy certainly does require finesse.

5.3.3. India's Look West Policy: Balancing Between Iran and the US

India's Look West policy, hatched in the early 2000s, seeks to cement economic, cultural, and diplomatic ties with Middle East states including and foremost Iran, while simultaneously managing its strategic relationship with the US. India's geopolitical importance in the Middle East, which is not just an energy resource, not just a commercial centre, not just an area of huge popping out, but also a security challenge, absolutely India does not want to miss this hemisphere (Anstey, 2023). Intending to raise the country's global profile, the interest of India in controlling Iran and the US had become a vital element of its foreign policy.

From India's need to diversify diplomatic and economic relations beyond its immediate neighbours came the Look West policy. India's cultural ties, the trade that ran between the two countries, and their shared strategic interests have long influenced India's relations with the West, with special reference to Iran. Historically there are deep Iran-India connections, going back centuries, stretching back centuries, and that connection offers a rich repository of ideas and possible models. However, since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran and the subsequent US sanctions, politics changed dramatically as the US imposed sanctions. Nevertheless, Iran was considered essential by India as a partner in providing interstate energy security and regional stability (Ikenberry, 2018). During other leaders, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee took the Look West policy forward in the early 2000s with the realisation that strong ties with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries and Iran are vital and it brought forward the Look West policy. The initiative was catalysed by India's market demand for increasing energy both as a prime purpose to salvage the energy crisis and as a decisive step to enhance India's regional security role (Rajagopalan, 2020; Pande, 2025).

Energy security stands among one of the principal drivers of India's 'Look west' policy. As the economy is booming and demand for energy continues to rise, India is turning to Iran, which is rich in oil, and has plenty of natural gas too. Despite US sanctions, India continued to import energy from Iran, because it considered it vital to India's economic growth (Elavarasan, et al., 2020). Looking West framework feature, the Chabahar port project appeared as a key initiative. Located in southeastern Iran, the port is vital to upgrading the connectivity for India, Iran, and Afghanistan, with the strategic trade route avoiding Pakistan. The Chabahar project is a symbol of Indian engagement with Iran to expand its activity and, in the process, open trade passage with landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asian countries. Still, India has invested in good infrastructure on the port, indicating its long-term vision in the region of creating a stronghold.

Yet, this has not been easy (Pant & Mehta, 2018). Changes in the geopolitical dynamics of the world and US sanctions against Iran have made India's existence complicated.

The withdrawal of the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 and the immediate re-imposition of sanctions has compelled India to review its fundamental strategic priorities vis-a-vis Iran. India has always maintained historical links with Iran and is aware that ignoring these links could affect its strategic interests with Iran in the US, which at the same time has become one of its closest allies in defence and counter-terrorism cooperation. India has wisely and carefully negotiated how they have dealt with both Iran and the US. India wants to further enhance its strategic ties with the US on one hand while participating in the defence agreements with the US and taking part in Quad, a strategic grouping including Japan, and Australia (Khalifi & Amine, 2020). On the same note, India understands that for it to effectively secure its long-term interests in the region it must engage Iran in a vigorous manner. Moreover, the significance of Iran made India's 'Look West' policy a shrewd move yet, there are certain challenges occurring which complicate the policy. India's commercial interaction with Iran is highly constrained by the US sanctions on Iran. India has always been advised by the US not to do business with Iran, which it does not recognize, but that does not make it any easier (Belal, 2019). India's decline in oil import from Iran following a re-imposition of sanctions has compelled India to seek alternative sources of oil energy – in other words, greater supply from the US and other countries.

5.3.4. 2018 - US Withdrawal from JCPOA and Sanctions: Impediments for India and Implications for Indo-US Relations

US withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018 significantly altered the geopolitical paradigm of the Middle East, in great ways for India's foreign policy in relation to Iran and its relation with the US. The re-imposition of economic sanctions against Iran meant that India was confronted with multiple obstacles in attempting to navigate a middle path between its key relationship with the US and its long history in relations with Iran. This section considers the entangled ramifications of the US exit from the JCPOA, and the sanctions imposed on India, as well as the solidity of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) for logistics, Iran's situation under the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), India's vote at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the Indian–Iranian relationship in the context of growing Chinese interest in the Iranians (Nephew, 2018)

5.3.5. Logistical Obstacles in the Planned International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC): India's Response

It is the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and is an important project to improve the connectivity between India, Iran and Russia and allow trade between the regions, as well as offer a competitive alternative to the present maritime routes controlled by China.

Despite all these advantages, the latest activities have been critical for INSTC's development – the US' reinstating sanctions against Iran and its withdrawal from the JCPOA (Pal, 2024). The more important logistical hindrance to interacting with the INSTC pertains to Iran which has been unable to mobilise financing and investments necessary for the INSTC due to the sanctions placed by the US on it. This is due to the financial restrictions that have demoralized potential investors both local and international investors who have been locked out of projects crucial to the corridor's development. This is a big challenge for India because, based on the INSTC concept, the further development of transport infrastructure in the member-states, including Iran, should envision the perspectives for infrastructure development within the framework of cooperation, which presupposes the creation of new railway lines and advancement of Iranian seaports (Azmi et al., 2024). In addition, Iran's late commissioning of essential railway lines, including the Chabahar Zahedan line and Rasht Astara line, is limiting the movement of cargo through Chabahar port to Central Asia. But these delays not only create bottlenecks for India's trade with Iran they also vitiate the viability of the INSTC as a trusted route for trade. In the meantime, Asia's incorrigible experiment continues with India potentially falling behind where it needs to be in achieving its strategic objectives – regional connectivity and further countering Chinese influence, through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Khan, 2024).

5.3.6. Iran Under FATF: India's response

Iran's being placed on a FATF watch list for money laundering and terrorist financing risks adds to the difficulty for India to continue with engagement with Iran. China, along with many other countries, has already suffered severely because of the FATF's listing, as it is almost impossible for Iran to engage with the world's economy without angering international financial regulations. India's reluctance to deepen its financial ties with Iran is largely a response to fears of bothering to incur secondary US sanctions. The pressure being put on Iran by the FATF mirrors the broader foreign policy implication of US sanctions, which complicates India's way out of its Iran relationship. Specifically, Indian companies are reluctant to go into a partnership with Iranian individuals given the legal risk they take and the expense of doing business under scrutiny (Farsiani et al., 2020). India's growing economic ambitions in the region are also impacted by the FATF's influence, which hampers INSTC's trade dynamics. Due to Iran's perception of being a high-risk partner, India's aspirations of increasing trade with Iran influence the viability of the corridor and India's economic outreach to the Central Asian markets.

5.3.7. India's Vote at the IAEA Against Iran Under US Pressure: Implications for Indo-Iran relations

India's vote against the Iranian proposal in September 2021 to add some security to the deal over the country's nuclear program is too a departure from its diplomatic position toward Iran and matters much to the way the country will do business with Iran. The deviation from India's

normally nuanced stance towards Iran was interpreted in Iran as an indication of India's untrustworthiness in being a partner (Rózsa, 2021). This new tone in India's stance underscores the growing role of the US in shaping decisions of Indian foreign policy, most notably where non-proliferation issues are concerned. Iran perceived thus the decision as a betrayal, creating tensions in the bilateral relationship. This vote conveyed the ambiguity of India, a country with goals of strategic autonomy, but a necessity to join US interests in a multipolar world. Beyond the bilateral dimension, this vote has far-reaching implications for India's larger profile in the Middle East. Picking sides on the Iranian nuclear issue, prying out of the role it has played as a neutral 'actor' in the Middle East, could alienate Iran and hurt India's standing there (Gallagher et al., 2022). These have far-reaching consequences for India's diplomatic outreach, in particular, as India tries to boost trade relations and secure energy imports from Iran.

5.3.8. India-Iran Trembling Ties: A Room for Chinese Involvement in Chabahar

The involvement of China in the Chabahar project has been increased by the evolving dynamics of India-Iran relations posing a strategic challenge for India. China and Iran signed a landmark 25-year, \$400 billion partnership agreement in March 2021 that has been a cause for concern in India for the prospect of a strengthened Sino-Iranian axis. However, India has invested heavily in Chabahar to gain a foothold in Central Asia that has been compromised by China's growing clout in Iran. Iran's dependence on India has been reduced to a great extent by its alternative sources of funds through China, particularly in the infrastructure and energy sectors (Hosseini & Asadikhomami, 2021). In addition, Gwadar and Chabahar ports are competing fiercely with each other, and this is a geopolitical contest between India and China in the region. India is trying to make Chabahar an important trade link to Afghanistan and Central Asia, but China's huge investments at Gwadar port are likely to surpass India's: potentially rendering Chabahar strategically less important (Aslan & Rashid, 2020). Yet, with India's relations with Iran still shaking as the US seeks to seal Iran's economy under antagonistic regulations, and with China hinting at a greater role in Iran's economic fabric, the question of how to navigate India's interests becomes more complex. India's engagement with Iran needs to be reconsidered because the region may become party to a powerful Chinese partnership that could well upset the balance of power.

5.3.9. From India's Approach to Maintain Strategic Autonomy in Face of US Sanctions to Its Balancing Act Between Iran and the US

India's response to the US withdrawal from the JCPOA and its imposition of sanctions since has been guided by a large degree by that broader shift in its foreign policy approach. It is a desirable measure of independence coupled with two essential tasks of handling small-scale global processes (Djuyandi et al., 2021). India, which has always declared itself to act under the policy of nonalignment in world politics, can act with other countries and partners without abandoning its

national interests. However, the geopolitical setting has shifted and in so doing the strategy has to adapt to this new environment. Since India has embraced a strategic partnership with the US let alone, mainly in defence cooperation and counter-terrorism efforts India has had no other option but to dance to US's policies. This alignment has added pressure on India to reduce its economic relations, particularly in the energy sector with Iran. Nevertheless, these pressures have been at work in India while the latter has made sure that it has not avoided its historical connections with Iran and the world has not seen India indifferent to the need for such relations for stability and energy supply in the region (Firoozabadian & Yadegarian, 2024). The quest for balance is this by looking for a way to engage Iran on issues that are laudable endeavours such as the Chabahar port project as well as the INSTC while at the same time dealing with working relations challenged by the US sanctions.

Finally, the withdrawal of the US from the JCPOA and re-application of sanctions also became hurdles which disturbed India's scope of influencing its economic and strategic domino effect in the region categories. Two of these – the interconnectivity of logistical realities, Iran's status at FATF, India's diplomatic decisions in the IAEA and the increasing Chinese hold in Iran have impacted the multifaceted scenario of Indian foreign policy (Mousavian, 2023). Moving forward, India will have to balance its strategic partnership with the US and the equally important heritage of historical ties with Iran, to in large part determine India's future role in the Middle East and beyond.

5.3.10. India-Afghanistan-Iran Tripartite Transit Accord to Develop Chabahar Port: Geo-strategic Implications for Pakistan

The India-Afghanistan-Iran tripartite transit accord for the development and operationalization of Chabahar port, although it is not new, is coming to be viewed as a major political initiative with bearing for many in the region, especially Pakistan, China, and the US. The strategic motivations for the accord, the benefits the deal could bring to the participating states, and the broader geostrategic consequences for nearby states are the subject matter for this section. In 2016, the trilateral accord was signed to make trade and transit routes between India and Afghanistan through Iran's Chabahar port possible, increasing access to Central Asia. Afghanistan is very important economically and politically this accord, a landlocked country that requires access to world markets through surrounding countries (Macalister-Smith & Schwietzke, 2021). The agreement allows Afghanistan to diversify its trade partners, ending its dependency on Pakistan through a direct maritime route via Chabahar. Chabahar port for India acts as a counter to the Chinese presence in the region with the Chinese investments in Gwadar port just 100 miles away from Chabahar. This corridor is of immense strategic importance, it seeks to make India a more central player in Central Asia and to improve and increase economic links between Iran and Afghanistan (Regmi, 2023).

For Pakistan, the India-Afghanistan-Iran transit accord acts as an implicit threat to its own strategic interests and regional domination. However, the accord undermines Pakistan's role as a principal corridor for trade to Afghanistan and Central Asia which it has played a major part in exploiting. Gwadar, heavily invested in by China, is designed as Pakistan's main port point of entry into the international market. But Chabahar has started to become a viable alternative to this narrative. A possible strengthened trade and transit through Chabahar brings potential to a shift in regional power dynamics with Afghanistan giving preference to India as the principal trade partner (Khan et al., 2023). As this development continues, Pakistan's ability to influence Afghan politics and trade is under decline as the Afghanistan tries to regain hold of its neighbour after the US withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan.

Because of the India-Afghanistan-Iran tripartite transit accord on the development of the Chabahar port, it has geo-strategic implications for Pakistan, China, and the US. The accord improves trade and connectivity options for India, Iran, and Afghanistan, but the accord also brings about challenges for China's Belt and Road Initiative ambitions and for Pakistan's regional influence. For the US, the accord offers a strategic opportunity to expand ties with India to counter China's growing influence in the region. But the dynamics of US-Iran relations are complicated (Citaristi, 2022). The Chabahar initiative continues to reflect itself in the strategic calculations of all stakeholders who have an involvement in it, because of a process of mutual sideshows among national interests, regional dynamics, and global power shifts.

5.3.11. Implications of US Withdrawal from Afghanistan and Taliban Regime on India-Iran Ties

India's aspirations of ending the foreign intervention in Afghanistan through power attacks has gradually given way to the reality of the new geopolitical scenario in South Asia, with consequences for the India-Iran bilateral relationship. In this section, we look into how India and Iran's interactions are shaped by the volatile terrain of Afghanistan, particularly during the new regime of the Taliban, and both opportunities and challenges that come to light in that relationship (Narayanan, 2023). India and Iran have had a historically strong relationship on many levels — cultural, economic, and political. The two have found common interests in trade and regional security to shape the partnership. For India to have progressed deeper strategically in Central Asia — a necessity it counts among its priorities — Iran has been a crucial partner, and, for its part, Iran relies on India for investment and trade, especially under US's sanctions (Singh, 2021). This relationship features Chabahar port, a key focal point in development which India can use as a gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia. India's port also has strategic significance and it's an important part of Iran's expansion of its economic connectivity. The US withdrawal and Taliban re-establishment of a government has, however, brought new complications to the partnership.

5.3.12. The Impact of Taliban's Return to Power for India and Iran

The return of the Taliban to power has rendered Afghanistan a precarious security environment. When the US pulled out, Afghanistan's government collapsed quickly, causing concerns that little would remain stable, and the country would revert to governing itself with extremist groups back on the rise. For India as well as Iran, the security considerations as well as foreign policy approaches to the Taliban regime, pose significant challenges. The Taliban's control of Afghanistan alarms India about renewed cross-border terrorism, especially from groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed that have previously targeted Indian soil, from Pakistani soil. However, India has been investing in Afghanistan by building infrastructure and forging ties with all factions to counter Pakistani influence. But with the Taliban in power, it must rethink its strategic investments in the region (Hafeez, 2019). But the faction it concerns the most is the Taliban, for the same reason that it disdained the group for mistreating the Hazara Shia community of Afghanistan. Fortunately for Iran, it has a subsequent stake in a stable Eastern border because Iran fears an unstable Afghanistan could worsen sectarian tensions and spill over into its territory. The Iran's security interest is complicated by its hard-line policies and its ties to groups like al-Qaeda and thus it adopts a cautious approach to engagement with the Taliban (Humza & Khan, 2022).

However, the changing dynamics in Afghanistan offer India and Iran which have been relying on each other for a long for greater engagement. Both sides are equally concerned about the upsurge of extremist groups and instability in Afghanistan. This commonality may give rise to greater convergence in joint efforts toward drafting policies to deal with the region's security concerns. India's engagement in Chabahar port could be a trading platform between Iran and India. New connectivity through Chabahar will enable India to trade not only with Afghanistan but also with Central Asia for further diversification of its economic partnerships. A stronger relationship of shared interests between India and Iran could result in a stronger India-Iran relationship to confront shared security challenges. On a more positive note, also, both India and Iran can use the exercise of their positions to shape the Taliban's governance practices and seek international recognition and legitimacy. India's historical ties with Afghan factions as well as Iran's connections with the Taliban may give outlets for diplomatic approaches on the part of the Taliban to soften their stance on governance as well as regional relations.

5.3.13. The Relevance of China and Russia in India-Iran relations

In Afghanistan's shifting geopolitical landscape, however, other regional players have also increasingly been stepping in, primarily China and Russia. Both countries have stated an interest in talking to the Taliban, changing the nature of regional cooperation. It complicates India-Iran partnership due to two reasons; India and Iran must deal with the powerful neighbours they do

business with, and a post-West world is emerging with these powerful neighbours, creating a new multipolarity. China in particular has made itself a player in the region and has already gone an ink significant partnership agreement with Iran (Weitz et al., 2022). Both India and Iran worry because of China's expanding Belt and Road Initiative which the country would like to increase its influence in Afghanistan. Once the dust settles, this could push for India and Iran to work together to counterbalance the growing presence of China.

Another complication is that Russia was involved in Afghanistan too. But the Kremlin has tried to secure its influence in the region with the Taliban and insisted that Afghanistan's stability is important. For India and Iran, the question is how to interact with Russia without giving up on their interests. Despite many prospects for closer cooperation between India and Iran, several obstacles stand in the way of deepening India–Iran ties, particularly concerning the Taliban regime(Sharma, 2023). The chief obstacle has always remained the Taliban's hardline policies and the fact they've been reluctant to integrate a more inclusive form of governance. Diplomatic engagement from both India and Iran could come undone for their stance on human rights, as well as their treatment of minority communities.

5.3.14. From IPI to TAPI: Recounting the Relevance of Iran-Afghanistan Factor in India's Relations with the US

This was South Asia where global dynamics of energy security, economic integration and regional liberalisation reciprocally formed the matrix of human civilization. This context marked the change of the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline project to Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India (TAPI) pipeline to show India, Iran-Afghanistan, and US relations. According to this factor, the Iran-Afghanistan factor has been crucial to establishing India's strategic standing vis-à-vis the US, particularly on energy security and geo-political dynamics(Ali et al., 2021).IPI is a planned pipeline project developed in the late 1990s to pipeline natural gas originating from the Iranian South Pars field through Pakistan into India. The project was a good chance to optimize the energy supply and decrease the dependency on oil imports from the Middle East for India. However, the IPI pipeline, too had challenges; geopolitical, starting with US sanctions on Iran for the former's transit, and Pakistan's experimenting with energy policies. The more India became committed to the IPI project the more nervous it got, fearing that a deterioration in relations between the US and Iran would be the reaction of US to the matter(Jain & Abdullah, 2019). However, the IPI pipeline is not an ordinary line and India's relationship with Iran has largely been complicated based on the security situation in Afghanistan. The security of energy infrastructure and the supply routes was at stake with the increase of the Taliban in Afghanistan and with unrest in the region. This left little initial enthusiasm for India's support for the IPI pipeline, paving the way for a reconsideration of India's approach to energy in the region.

In contrast, the TAPI pipeline, inaugurated in 2010, played an important strategic alternative to the IPI project, which was India's changing energy diplomacy. An advocacy of greater regional cooperation and stability, the TAPI pipeline plan to transport natural gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan to India served as a framework for a new transnational architect. The project was seen by India as a way to boost its energy security while reducing reliance on Iranian gas, fitting better within US interests in the region (Rajpoot & Naeem, 2020). The role that TAPI had proved to have been geopolitically important for the US was supporting the project to counterbalance Russia and Iran's influence in Central Asia and in South Asia. The US encouraged TAPI as a means of establishing an alternative energy corridor, bypassing Iranian territory which would also be consistent with India's strategic aims. It was a crucial turning point in India's relations with Iran and the US, which is why this was a moment of alignment of US interests with India's. India factors up the Afghanistan factor in shaping its strategic decisions related to both IPI and TAPI (Holton, 2021). With its historical links with Afghanistan, India has been looking to promote a stable, inclusive Afghan government, and see peace and stability in Afghanistan as being critical to regional security. These efforts however have become difficult due to the Taliban's resurgence in 2021, which forced India to recalibrate its engagement with both Afghanistan and Iran.

An Afghanistan able to keep the TAPI pipeline transit route is necessary to ensure India's support for the TAPI pipeline. However, the Taliban's governance brings into question whether the project can be sustained in the long term (Saira & Javed, 2022). Yet TAPI is also at risk not only of instability and a return of insurgent groups but also of India's broader strategic interests in the region. With India's relations with the US undergoing a flux as Afghanistan does, there's still India's role with Iran to be considered. With a series of setbacks in the IPI project, India has, nonetheless, maintained its Iranian contact, notably in connection with such projects as the Chabahar port development, aimed at opening India up to both Afghanistan and Central Asia. That engagement is part of India's larger strategy to stay in Iran while balancing its ties with the US.

Iran is also picking up where it leaves off with regional players, as US sanctions put pressure on the country's geopolitical calculations. Iran's pivot towards China, which includes a deal signed with China in 2021 for a 25-year partnership agreement, may complicate India's position. But what Iran does need is foreign investments and economic partnership, which is why India can use its historical ties as well as its economic interests (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2020). The transition of the IPI to the TAPI pipeline is encapsulated in the convoluted relationships India maintains with Iran, any Afghan state, and the IUSA. With Iran's evolving geopolitics affecting and being affected by India's foreign policy India must adopt a nuanced approach towards handling its relations with Afghanistan. The TAPI pipeline offers a strategic pathway to increase

energy security, but the politics of government in Afghanistan and the regional balance of power shape possibilities. In the end, how India manages to negotiate all these contours will determine to some extent its future dealings with Iran and the US in the context of a growingly multipolar world.

5.4. Conclusion

Pakistan and India have a strong and historically determined affinity with the Iran factor playing an important role in their foreign policies, which derive from their geopolitical ambitions and strategic calculations. This comparative analysis assesses each country's relationship with Iran and their respective policies to demonstrate how they have approached the issue and the subsequent outcomes for stability in the region and international relations. Iran has historically been Pakistan and India's partner and competitor. Iran is essential for Pakistan both ideologically — as proof of support for the 'national missions' of establishing and maintaining an Islamic society — and practically, facilitating countering Indian influence in Afghanistan and the broader region. Issues of trade, energy cooperation and security are key factors for the Iran-Pakistan border which runs almost 900 kilometres (Plagemann&Destradi, 2019). Unlike India, Iran and India's relationships have not been as simple and India's relation with Iran has been a string of complex interchanges—which can be periodical as in the strong partnership and interludes as in tension on Iran's nuclear ambitions and its connection with Pakistan.

This analyses the reasons behind the divergent trajectories of Pakistan and India's foreign policies for Iran and this can be understood in the historical context. But Pakistan has been eager to keep good relations with Iran to manage India's increasing regional dominance. Unlike India, the US want to strategically dominate Afghanistan and Central Asia, while balancing with its interest in India.

Foreign policies of both countries towards Iran are designed with economic considerations so much. With continuing energy shortages, energy security is vital to Pakistan. In the 1990s, the Iran-Pakistan India (IPI) gas pipeline was envisaged as a 'Peace Pipeline' to carry Iranian natural gas to Pakistan and subsequently to India. Geopolitical tensions, however, such as US sanctions on Iran, have stood in the way of its progress(Fakhar et al., 2023). It is therefore important to note that recently Pakistan has been looking to Iran as a potential energy supplier to help address its energy crisis.

In contrast to India, India has pursued a proactive approach to secure energy resources from Iran. India's commitment to trade connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asia was evident in the signing of a 10-year agreement recently between Indian Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, SarbanandaSonowal and Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development,

MehrdadBazrpash for the operation of Chabahar port. India's expenditure of \$120 million on the ShahidBeheshti terminal and Iran credit line for \$250 million shows that it aims to reduce its dependence on Pakistan as a shipping route (Naazer, 2022).

Among Iran's nuclear program, it has also acted as a major factor in Pakistan and India's foreign policies. Pakistan is worried about the possibility of Iran with nuclear weapons in its regional and South Asian balance of power security. Pakistan is careful about Iran's military strength and wants diplomatic engagement to avoid creating further security risks, amid continued strategic manoeuvring between the two countries and its ally, the US(Fawcett &Jagtiani, 2024). They also complicate matters further given that the country has strong historical links with Saudi Arabia but is trying to keep a strong strategic partnership with Riyadh while trying to develop ties with Iran.India has been more proactive in tackling Iran's nuclear ambitions. However, tensions were set in Indo-Iranian relations after the US disengagement from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in 2018, which placed pressure on India to adopt a foreign policy in synch with US interests. In 2020, India voted against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as a show of its willingness to work with the US on issues of nuclear non-proliferation. India's strategic calculations align with this, to balance its older relationship with Iran with a love affair with US(Dunn, 2019). Moreover, the regional dynamics have been affected as Iran's nuclear negotiations have been issued to fluctuate. Both Pakistan and India have found it difficult to engage with Iran owing to US sanctions on Iran's nuclear program(Tahir & Hussain, 2022). In contrast, Pakistan is cautious, yet India has been willing to walk this tightrope in addressing its strategic interests.

A complication to this is the Iran factor, in addition to the regional alliances and influences that shape both Pakistan's and India's foreign policies. For Pakistan, its close ties with Saudi Arabia and its decades-old partnership with the US make it an awkward ally to Iran. Pakistan tiptoes its way between the two rivals Saudi Arabia and Iran to balance off. Pakistan's active participation in the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen is reflective of Pakistan's alignment with Riyadh but it at the same time wants to maintain a dialogue with Iran. In contrast, India has a multi-aligned strategy that tries to balance the relationship with another regional power. India has been striving to deepen its friendship with Iran without upsetting the US and Israel. Chabahar port investment by India boosts its connectivity while providing an offset to the Chinese-sponsored Gwadar port in Pakistan(Raza, 2020). It is purely this strategic balancing act that epitomises India's ambition to reach out geographically as well as to have influence but at the same time to safeguard its special links with Iran.

Finally, the Iran factor functionally shapes the external policies between the two countries, Pakistan and India, and their various contexts of historical realism, constraints of geopolitical

mechanics and goals of politics. For Pakistan, security concerns related to energy supply have largely driven a cautious approach toward Iran while balancing ties with Saudi Arabia, and the US. On the contrary, India's proactive approach is to be economically and regionally connected, sending a clear message that through external pressures, India wishes to strengthen its relations with Iran (Alaverdov, 2022). The uncertainty of the relations between the two countries and Iran, and the impact on regional stability and international relations will keep on changing. US sanctions on Iran, the advances of regional and international players in Central Asia, and the geopolitical dynamics globally will drive Pakistan and India's future foreign policies. The Iran factor, however, stands out as the defining characteristic of a larger geopolitical context of South Asia and its security impact on the world.

Chapter 6

A Comparative Analysis of Key Geostrategic Factors in the Foreign Policies of Pakistan and India Towards the US (2018 to 2023)

6.1. Introduction

South Asia as a region has strategic significance that combines global and regional geopolitics, power balance and interest. It is known that this region contains two nuclear-armed countries – India and Pakistan, and thus presents a semi-stable environment. Both these countries, Pakistan, and Iran have been on the receiving end, of the US as a superpower in the international system, with policies fitting its dynamics of strategic interests in counterterrorism, economic relations, and order in the region. The foreign policy of India and Pakistan towards the US is conditioned by their history, political, economic and security imperatives, and global context. India, as has been referred to as a rising world power, looks forward to playing a strategic role as a partner of the US in containing China and fostering stability in the region (Dunn, 2019). Pakistan, on the other hand, lays stress on its centrality to counterterrorism and political stability in South Asia and plays a subtle balance to the perceived threat by elevating the strategic optimism with China as a counterfoil to perceived marginalization in the US (Zaidi & Ahmad, 2022). This chapter provides an analysis of the main geopolitical influences that guide the relations of India and Pakistan with the US. The discussion revolves around five critical dimensions:

1. The strategic cooperation between India and the US
2. The China factor
3. The Iran factor
4. The Afghanistan factor
5. The Russia factor

This chapter makes a comparative study of the two countries and determines where their foreign policy alignment and misalignment arise from and why. This analysis does not only elucidate the characteristics of geopolitics in the South Asia region but also leaves an appreciation of the effect of these geopolitics on stability in this region and the role of US as a global power.

6.2. The Indo-US Strategic Partnership: The India Factor in Foreign Policy of Pakistan and India towards the US

The Indian foreign policy vis-a-vis the US has changed over the last three decades from the non-aligned era to the present era of a strategic partnership. This change is indicative of the new global political order and the rising standing of India among the international community. The basis of this partnership as both the countries and their political-military leaders are committed to war against terrorism, regional security, economic development, defence cooperation, and the spread of democracy. Some of the major turning points in this transforming bilateral relationship

include the civil nuclear deal of 2008 which paved the way for India to get international nuclear suppliers' group membership and correlative defence agreements like the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) 2018 (Boni, 2023). These accords have played a major role in increasing the compatibility between the Indian and US defence forces, providing for secure means of communication, and boosting bilateral relations in terms of defence.

Other aspects strengthening the Indo-US cooperation include the substantial synergy of military objectives of the two states and their growing concentration on the Indo-Pacific region. China's emergence as the continental and global power Asia's large country that the US perceives as a rising power, the US considers India as a power of strategic depth against China (Fiedler, 2022). In return, India gained a technological edge in its military forces, sharing of intelligence and most importantly, financial support to become a world power. The relations between the two states evolved into a more profound level of trust and cooperation that would evidence how, despite the traditional antagonism of the interests of both countries, their goals, and objectives, together with the general perception of security, economic development, and stability in the region, have changed to correspond to the new balance of power in the contemporary world.

The India- US strategic partnership has quite a unique set of interests. On counter-terrorism cooperation, an important area of the relations, it has been noted that there has been increased cooperation after the September 11 event. Post September 11 and the US-led war on terror regime, India found an opportunity to promote its counter-terrorism objectives as part of the international war. Due to the increase in terrorism-related to the insurgency in Kashmir and other parts of Indian-controlled territory, it tried to portray itself as a victim of terrorism in the international system and tried to compare its security threats with international terrorism. As a result of this alignment, India started sharing intelligence with the US and joined the latter in counter-terrorism operations (Verma, 2022). Furthermore, various measures like the US-India Counterterrorism Joint Working Group acted as a foundation to bolster the relationship in this strategic domain.

Terrorism and defence cooperation between the two countries has shown a profound improvement and added intensity in recent decades. In 2016, India was given the status of "Major Defence Partner" of the US which entailed deeper strategic ties, more secure technology sharing and higher levels of defence exports. The worth of total US defence exports to India in 2022 was more than \$20 billion. This growing defence cooperation has been supported by military exercises like YudhAbhyas and Malabar which involve partners the US, India, and Japan amongst others (Citaristi, 2022). These exercises are aimed at enhancing cooperation and in the formation of upgraded military relations between India and the US in the Southeast Asian region in which both the countries have common interests in non-interference and providing safety and security to vital maritime communication lines (Murad & Muhammad, 2023).

Many of the factors that have revolutionized the ties between the two countries can be traced to the Indian political and policy vision of the Indo-Pacific as an open, free, and inclusive region. Both countries have attached huge importance to the safeguarding of the region's independence, especially from the coercion of China. The increasing aggression of China over the territories has made India and the US cooperate especially over the securities challenge in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean (Holton, 2021). This has been done through Multilateral structures such as the Quad which is a strategic dialogue between India, the US, and Japan, Australia that focuses on the security of the Indo-Pacific, and by extension the world's seas, to ensure that they remain open and therefore, rule-based. It has since emerged as a strategic forum for cooperation on everything from naval security to counterterrorism and economic integration, with India and the US at the heart of the equation.

One of the other major fields of cooperation between the two countries has to do with the support of democracy and economic development. India and the US also share democratic institutions, respect for the rule of law, speech freedom and market-oriented economies. Each of these has formed the basis for a furthering of the connection; India stands out from China and other authoritarian states (Rajpoot&Naeem, 2020). There have also been trade relations, The US on the same note has turned out to be one of India's biggest trading partners. This kind of economic relationship is backed by sound investment commitments on various fronts like IT, power, and other sectors. Also, both countries support open, liberal, and non-discriminatory trade in the wake of reforms of the global institutions including the WTO and the United Nations.

Some key issues stand out as being areas of great cooperation, which means that the relationship between India and the US is not without its problems or differences, as it might be seen due to the awkward position that India holds in world politics. India has always cherished its strategic independence and has not been willing to come under any formal US-led military alliance system. This is especially apparent in forex because India declined to be part of the NATO-like military coalitions it aims for autonomy about foreign policies. It is also evident from its position between two of the greater powers of the world namely the US and other relevant allies, especially the Russian Federation (Rajagopalan, 2020). Today India enhances the level of cooperation with the US, but at the same time has a significant defensive partnership with Russia, which remains one of the largest deliverers of the military products. This has sometimes caused tension with the U.S especially when India's defence imports from Russia including the Russian S-400 missile defence system have raised eyebrows in US over how willing India is to subordinate itself to the US This deal has raised concerns in the US which threatened India that it will consider it under the CAATSA if continues to engage with Russia, but India stood its ground by refusing to fully abandon Russia (Ikenberry, 2018).

Besides the defence partnership, the trade and economic relations between the US and India are sometimes coloured with certain differences related to tariffs, markets, intellectual property rights, labour, mobility etc. For example, India has accused the US of placing tariffs on their products importation particularly steel and aluminium while the same has taken issue with India over the issue of restrictions it places on inward investment and access to its markets (Verma, 2022). Also, voiced at an ongoing hotline communication between the two nations' foreign secretaries, this past week, the US policies towards H-1B visas for the populous IT industry of India have remained critical, though vitalizing Indian organizations becomes difficult due to restrictions on issuing these visas for skilled workers to the US IT segment. These conflicts can be seen as an illustration of other issues with the economic partnership, specific aspects that brought out divergence of interest between the two nations.

Currently, Pakistan has a different view on the ties between the two countries in comparison with the similarities of the Indo-US relation. Pakistan perceives the strengthening of defence and strategic cooperation between India and the US as a threat to its regional security and stability. The US 'alignment' with India's military strength is seen by Pakistan as an effort to surround Pakistan, especially when it comes to topics such as Kashmir, where the support for India by the US has stirred up considerable animosity between the Obama administration and Pakistan. Pakistan has often complained to the US, of the fact that it is destabilizing the region and choosing India as the preferred choice of an ally (Abbasi, 2019). This perception has produced tension in the bilateral relations between the US and Pakistan, mainly in the post-9/11 period as Pakistan always felt ignored and the US preferred its rival in the region.

Therefore, the Indo-relations have emerged as one of the most moot international relationships of the current century based on shared political values of democracy, security, and vision of economy. Nevertheless, the form of the international relationship is not devoid of contentious tendencies. The fact that India has always followed a policy of strategic independence, the development of defence cooperation with Russia, and economic disputes with US are the unlike matters. On the other hand, the enhanced friendship of Indo with the US has posed certain threats in Pakistan where Indo-US interaction is seen with Scrupulousness (Ali et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the general trend in the development of Indo-US relations is one of continuity with elements of convergence, or partnership, based on the concern for mutual benefit in a more complex world.

6.3. The China Factor

Being at the heart of influencing the two countries' foreign policies, China reveals opposite external affiliations that expose the bifurcated South Asian structure. China has become a very useful partner for Pakistan which has offered an array of economic, military, and political support,

which has changed the strategic status of Pakistan in the region (Onderco& Knopf, 2023). Therefore, for India, China is a primary strategic competitor as it has unresolved border issues, material, and geopolitical competition within the South Asian region and because of the strategic relationship between China and Pakistan. These differing views have affected the bilateral relations between India and Pakistan and the external policies of each towards the US and the world.

China is important for Pakistan because only with its backing is there a chance to put pressure on India and improve the position of Pakistan in the region. It is therefore astonishing that perhaps the strongest emblem of the China-Pakistan relationship today is the CPEC or the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor which is a part of China's Belt and Road Initiative. By investing more than \$ 60 billion, CPEC is focused on creating an economic corridor by building an overland route linking China's restive western Xinjiang province with the world's deepest seaport at Gwadar in Pakistan, effectively making China avoid the Malacca straits (Galimov, 2024). The CPEC not only holds the promise to infuse Pakistan's infrastructure and energy sectors, but the same brings about a strategic makeover to Pakistan as vital to China's geopolitical calculations in Central Asia, the Middle East and Africa. For Pakistan, CPEC is much more than a simple economic project; it is a strategic project to deepen cooperation between Chins and Pakistan and to curb the hegemonic influence of India in the region.

Besides economics and structures, Pakistan also sees China as a military ally. The dependence on Chinese military equipment such as Shaanxi fighter jets. Endurance submarines and missile defence equipment have enabled Pakistan to find a new strategic ally that could effectively help Pakistan diversify its dependence away from the US. Energy cooperation could next follow. This relationship also provides diplomatic support to Pakistan in the international community, especially when it is taking a stand against India over the Kashmir issue where China has backed Pakistan. Pakistan-China relations are, therefore, a strategic partnership that covers the economic, military, and political front, especially in terms of security and power projection (Rajpoot&Naeem, 2020).

While Pakistan considers China a strategic partner and ally, India views China as a strategic competitor and threat to its own strategic and territorial claims. Two countries possess a very long border, and the border remains blurred and uncertain, and this border issue greatly contributed to the hostility between the two coupled nations. This has been poor over the last two decades due to increased military tensions and new competition trends (Djuyandi et al., 2021). The June-July 2017 Doklam standoff when Chinese and Indian troops deployed on opposite sides of a disputed territory with shared borders of China, India and Bhutan exposed the delicate state of Sino-Indian relations. However, the situation escalated to this level in the year 2020 when at least 20 Indian

soldiers were killed in June at the Galwan Valley. As the event showed, the targets of the Chinese leader have long been in confrontation with the US and other Western powers, and the Galwan clashes highlighted the growing strategic confrontation. These confrontations, especially combined with the burgeoning Chinese influence in the region have made China a direct security threat according to Indian perception.

That is why the issues expressed by India regarding China are not only related to the border issue. Over the last decade or so the Chinese investments in South Asia especially in Sri Lanka, Nepal and Bangladesh have been viewed by India as a strategic encirclement. Over the years, China has deepened relations with these countries, providing infrastructure financing and development schemes, which India regards as bids to weaken its position in its' own backyard through projects like the BRI. Correctly perceiving China's growing influence, India has begun actively seeking ways to offset such an increase – including the strengthening of its defence relations with the US and potential regional partners such as Japan and Australia (Abbasi, 2023).

Indian officials have also involved the US as a strategic rival in containing China's influence across Asia. In this respect, India's tilt toward the US is motivated primarily by the. is playing a balancing role in China's hegemonic behaviours in the South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Himalayas. South Korea and Japan are worried about China's assertiveness in territorial sovereignty in the South China Sea and its growing naval power in the Indian Ocean region. It has asserted this shared strategic interest that has seen deeper military collaboration, one of the great examples being the Malabar exercise where the US India, Japan and Australia are involved. These exercises are mainly concerned with enhancing cooperation, enhancing naval forces, and increasing security in the Asia-Pacific region of which China is seen as a threat (Raza, 2020). Further enhancing India's relations with the US is India's joinery with the US, Japan and Australia in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or the Quad known as 'The Quad,' informally dubbed as 'Asian NATO' is supposed to work for a transparent, free and open Indo-Pacific, including navigation, peace, respect for sovereign decisions and, generally, the adherence to international legal standards that so much India and the US value but see in China's territorial claims a direct threat (Zweiri & James, 2021).

India having relatively strengthened its military ties with the US has received the benefits of military equipment, technologies, intelligence sharing systems and platforms that boast of India to counter Chinese threat. The knowledge of the Indo-US relationship As to India, the US relationship is a strategic partnership to counterbalance China in the Indian Pacific region. In turn, Pakistan has a problematic relationship with China and so has a difficult relationship with the US. Although Pakistan has always wanted to maintain good relations with US it now much prefers China's assurance in the economic and military spheres (Fiedler, 2022). As a result of increased

dependency of both realms in China concerning the provision of military equipment as well as investment in infrastructural development, this partnership has over the years shifted a little away from the US, and this has begun raising eyebrows among the US. The change in focus has therefore been tilted on this shift with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) seen by the US as an effort by China to increase its clout in South Asia to the detriment of the region's stability and interests of the US. The Dollars has an opinion that the CPEC is being used as a strategic pressure point by China to influence Pakistan's political affairs and sovereignty, and this is inconsequential to the interest of the US.

Another area of struggle in the bilateral relations between the US and Pakistan is due to the proximity between Pakistan and China. Pakistan has been an ally of the US during its War on Terror however over recent years strong relations with China and patronage of certain militant outfits have raised tensions between the two countries. The US has time and again called on Pakistan to cut its relations and lessen dependency on China for defence and other supports but the oppressed Pakistani strategy of leaning heavily on China is an essential part of its policy (Holton, 2021). Such a dynamic situation generates complexity in the US relations with both India and Pakistan since the US tries to enhance its relations with India while at the same time cooperating with Pakistan. South Asian geopolitics have become even more polarized because when India accepted the US offer for strategic partnership, Pakistan responded by mirroring its relations with China. This increased partnership is not only beneficial to India's strategic positioning but also makes for increased confrontation with China and Pakistan. It also creates the impression of a Pakistan and China axis much to the detriment of India's rising dominance, an aspect that hampers the operations of the US in the region which it wants to dominate (Raza, 2020). Thus, competition between India and Pakistan, which seek support from different powers in a bid as part of their overall strategy in South Asia.

China has played a significant role in the current relationship between the US and both India and Pakistan. Given this predisposition, China also serves as a focal point for India with the US to enhance cooperation in the areas of regional security and defence modernisation and counterterrorism measures (Ikenberry, 2018). Peculiarities of China's activity have stimulated the rapprochement of the Indian economy and the US and solidified India's stance in the formation of the strategies of the Indo-Pacific region. For Pakistan's benefit nevertheless, China's relations make it very difficult for Pakistan to co-operate with the strategic aims of the US, meaning that Pakistan's relations with US are conditioned by its ties to Chins (Weitz et al., 2022). This divergence shows the larger structural conflict in South Asia – the Indian Partnership with the US and Pakistan with China gives the larger structural competition to power-shifting geo-politics.

In sum, China's power plays a significant role in delivering influences in South Asia on the agents of both, India and Pakistan's foreign policies and their relationship in terms of the US. India's new strategic partnership with the US based on mutual concern over China's increasing influence is in marked contrast to Pakistan's increasing dependence on China for trade and military aid. This divergence in strategic orientations has implications not only for the trilateral relationship between India, Pakistan, and the US but also affects the geopolitical struggle in the Indo-Pacific region and the entire world. This will remain the case as China rises to further politico-economic dominance within the region and the triangular relationship between these three countries will go a long way in defining the future politics of South Asia.

6.4. The Iran Factor

Iran due to its location at the centre of the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia has always been in the strategic Crux of security, development, and global politics. Since this country plays both strategic and geopolitical significance to both India and Pakistan, they both try to involve Iran to fulfil their national security, economic, and strategic interests. But their policies towards Iran differ greatly, informed by their geopolitical interests, commitments and constraints engendered by the sanctions regime as well as the rivalries within the region (Zaidi & Ahmad, 2022). That said, both nations have attempted to navigate between their respective relations with Iran and the US, and while not identical, their quests are defined by vastly different sets of parameters.

Iran is viewed by India as the necessary access point to strengthen regional integration, energy security, and proxy power projection in Central Asia and beyond. For many years, the biggest single feature of India's engagement with Iran has been the construction of the Chabahar Port on the southern coast of Iran. The port is an important connecting point for India to Afghanistan and the Central Asian States, which can reduce their dependence on the Pakistan ports and provide a geo-strategic counterpoint to the Gwadar port of Pakistan where CPEC has invested billions of dollars. India views investments in Chabahar not only as an economic activity but also Geopolitical response to China's One Belt One Road initiatives through CPEC which India considers as surrounding it (Shah & Ismail, 2023). The Chabahar project represents the continuity of India's efforts to have strategic access to Iran regardless of the US sanctions regime. Indeed, the project has been let off by the US showing how strategically relevant Chabahar port is to India's transcontinental connectivity plan and the country's development of Afghanistan.

The Chabahar project has been announced, as I have mentioned, not simply as an infrastructure company; it is a long-term strategic plan of India to become a strategic partner of Iran and Afghanistan, while simultaneously denying Pakistan the strategic equation it enjoys with China. In 2016 Modi, Rouhani and Ghani agreed to take practical measures to link the Chabahar,

Sagae and Attah to the trilateral agreement for the strategic Chabahar port of Iran to operate to link India to Afghanistan (Pradhan & Pradhan, 2020). This fits into India's strategic goal of state building and peace and order in a country that for years has been a battleground for great power rivalry. The Chabahar port also directly rivals the Pakistan Gwadar Port which is a part of the CPEC which portrays the rivalry between the two neighbours India and Pakistan. Arising therefore from Delhi's strategic calculus for Chabahar, it shows that India is willing to continue to engage with Iran even amidst the condemnation from the US as it seeks to develop strategic assets in the region.

In general, the matter between Pakistan and Iran is multifaceted: containing elements of cooperation as well as considering the security situation in the South Asian region and beyond. Its neighbours are China to the south with a 909-kilometre border and India to the east; thus, there was and is a lot of emphasis on cooperation in the fields of border security, militancy, and smuggling. In the past few years, the two countries have cooperated in combating operating insurgent groups active in the Balochistan province of Pakistan and the Sistan-Baluchistan province of Iran which are connected with separatist movements and foreign militants. For instance, in 2019 the Jaish al-Adl which operates on the Iranian-Pakistan border, targeted the Iranian Revolutionary Guards (Rubin, 2022). Iran blamed Pakistan-based elements for the attack and relations escalated with fresh demand from Iran for Pakistan to act more forcefully against these groups. To this Pakistan enhanced border control measures as well as issued high-level diplomacy to contain worsening relations between the two countries. This case explains how carefully Pakistan has to tread in the Iran game given the security situation on the border.

Nevertheless, the economic cooperation between Pakistan and Iran has been limited by some conditions from outside, for example, sanctions by the US. The most important investment cooperation between the two countries-the Iran-Pakistan (IP) gas pipeline project has also suffered several setbacks mainly due to concerns over the anger of US. The proposed pipeline was aimed at facilitating the energy-starved Pakistan, but the project is stagnant even though Iran has constructed its segment of the pipeline. Pakistan has not settled its obligations partly because of financial problems and the fears of repercussions from the US (Belal, 2019). This example explains the dilemma in which Pakistan has to work more to meet its requirement of energy from Iran while it is fully dependent upon US financial and military aid. However, they have not given up this cooperation as both security and energy have always been at the forefront of their diplomatic relations.

This relationship is further clouded by Pakistan's friendship with Saudi Arabia, a regional nemesis to Iran and Iran's centrally located arch-rival. Currently, Pakistan is one of the biggest beneficiaries of Saudi financial assistance and a close security partner of the Kingdom; hence, it

cannot afford to offend Iran. A classic example worth citing this policy of keeping a balance was seen in 2015 when Pakistan avoided joining the Saudi-led military action in Yemen. Saudi Arabia had anticipated Pakistan to act in support of the military intervention; however, Pakistan's parliament naturally declined to support any intervention on this basis as Pakistan's government wanted to maintain good relations with both sides: Saudi Arabia and Iran (Homami et al., 2024). This decision pointed to the multi-faceted nature of Pakistan's regional policy. Since the country's foreign policy was tied with Saudi Arabia, its strategic partner, Pakistan had to ensure good relations with Iran for business purposes.

India, on the other hand, is not as diplomatically treading between the lines as Pakistan when it comes to Iran diplomacy. Although India has trimmed down its oil imports from Iran at the prompting of US especially after Trump suspended the exemption on countries importing Iran oil in 2019, it has not given up its stake in the deep-rooted strategic interest by abandoning investment in projects like Chabahar. Although energy trade has considerably reduced because of the US sanctions, India has invested \$ 85 million to address two berths related to Chabahar Port and has emphasised the working of the port despite these circumstances. Nevertheless, this increasing geographical gap in energy trade is likely to have put a damper on the relations between India and Iran as Iran has shown dissatisfaction with the steps being taken by India to observe the US sanctions (Ahmed & Akbarzadeh, 2020). In 2020, Iran started expressing willingness to construct a railway from Chabahar to Zahedan, an Iranian city near the Afghan border, which is irritated by India's caution. This change shows that there are increasingly constrained opportunities for India to attend to its energy needs through its strategic partnership with Iran or any Islamic nation for that matter amid tightening clampdown from the US on India's relation with Iran (Leibin, 2020).

The disparate reactions of India and Pakistan to sanctions imposed on Iran by the US have to do with the former's strategic orientation. India, which has pursued a policy of strategic independence, has negotiated with the diplomatic offices in US aiming to get necessary exemptions for crucial projects like Chabahar. On the other hand, the Pakistani government has been more conservative in using Iran as an economic partner due to the uncertainty which may end up in isolation from the West or get blocked from the US sanctions (Serenko, 2021). This difference in approach shows the underlying regional considerations better; for India Iran is a strategic partner for trans-regional connectivity and economic cooperation whereas for Pakistan Iran is a strategic ally for guaranteeing security in its restive western provinces.

The idea of Iran throws light on the interplay of the dynamics of regional geostrategic interests and alliances, which determine the external policies of not only India and Pakistan but also the entire South Asian region. Even though the two countries admit the necessity of some sort

of communication with Iran, their approaches kind of reflect their global strategies. For India, Iran is a strategic partner to improve its regional clout, to checkmate Pakistan, and to protect its vital sea-borne supply chain, no matter whether this causes problems with the US (Shad & Abbas, 2018). To Pakistan, Iran is a neighbour without which it cannot afford to have a dysfunctional relationship in matters of border control and the general stability of the region, but owing to Pakistan's strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia and the US it has its relations with Iran severely limited.

These dynamics make clear that, along with the South Asian – Middle Eastern connection, Iran as a pivotal state represents both integration and differentiation in the foreign policies of the two South Asian actors. As the relations between the US and Iran persist in defining the general conditions within the South Asian strategic space, Pakistan's, and India's actions towards the further development of their strategies will determine the consequences for their relations with the US (Citaristi, 2022).

6.5. The Afghanistan Factor

Pakistan and India are strategic neighbours, and both are beneficiary states in Afghanistan hence the South Asian region has been a key area of interest in the US foreign policy, especially in the post-September 11, 2001. Since the beginning of the 21st century Afghanistan's stability as a core of US strategic interests especially in counterterrorism, counter-insurgency measures, and regional security. Afghanistan is important for both India and Pakistan for different reasons, yet its role in the country's politics and security has been justified by different factors (Kupriyanov&Makarevich, 2024). India has been more concerned with developmental cooperation and soft power diplomacy while Pakistan has been involved largely in security cooperation often because of its rivalry with India and its support to the Taliban. These different roles explain the multi-dimensional nature of US relations with both countries since the two's policies towards Afghanistan affect their relations with US differently.

Both India and the US are in accord with a stable and un-interference Afghanistan without terrorism. Currently, both states perceive instability in Afghanistan as a threat both to regional stability and the struggle against terrorism. This has meant that the countries' working toward this goal has led to a vast cooperation between India and the US especially in the areas of development aid and terrorism. India's Development Assistance: Besides, India has been one of the most lavish donors in Afghanistan reconstruction donating over \$3 billion in aid since 2001. India's strategy is more involved in the use of soft power to build trust among Afghanistan people by spending on projects like education, health, and infrastructure projects, agriculture (Dar &Haq, 2023). The Afghan Parliament building is one of the largest ever Indian investments in Afghanistan and epitomizes India's commitment to a long-term relationship with Afghanistan. India has also

invested in constructing basic facilities with links to central Asia through roads and the facility of constructing a dam in Herat.

India, as a close neighbour to Afghanistan, shares major goals with the US of fostering and restoring economic stability in the state. Both have cooperated on diverse projects, similar to the Cambodia-US-Afghanistan-India Trilateral Dialogue, aimed at increasing India's participation in the reconstruction of Afghanistan (Ara, 2019). Currently, India provides direct support to Afghanistan's renewal independently from the military support offered by the US in combating terrorism. US and India's Shared Counter-Terrorism Goals: India has suffered major issues because of terrorism that has occurred in Afghanistan and the wider region, as has the US. India has been an unfortunate victim of cross-border terrorism especially originating from Pakistan groups with operating bases in Afghanistan. India considers Afghanistan as a counterbalance to Pakistan's control and both India and US have tried to partner to fight terrorism (Azmi et al., 2024). Thanks to India and the US cooperation in intelligence and the military field, combating terrorism has become stronger on the global level with both countries supporting measures alongside the Afghan administration aimed at destabilizing terrorists' networks located in Afghanistan. Although both states have adopted their strategies in Afghanistan differently; however, India and the US have collaborated on countering-terrorism campaigns in the region. For instance, both countries have fostered the Afghan government's struggle against Taliban and ISIS militants. India has also helped to train the Afghan security forces in operations to combat terrorism, bolstering their cooperation with the US-led training programs (Farsiani et al., 2020). This cooperation is of mutual interest between these two countries to ensure that Afghanistan remains safe from any terrorist influence.

Although both India and Pakistan are alarmed by the situation in Afghanistan, their attitudes differ greatly due to the differing interests and conflicts of interests, as well as different positions in their relations with the US. The greatest disparity is based on their stance concerning the Afghanistan war and the Taliban. India's Soft Power and Diplomatic Engagement: India has avoided traditional military interventionism in Afghanistan hence adopting what can be referred to as soft power diplomacy and strategy of foreign aid (Karim, 2023). However, India's leverage has been comparatively limited due to Pakistan's deep links to the Taliban although. As much as India has established a positive image in Afghanistan through its supply of human & funds for its development it has not directly initiated any military force in the country hence cannot dictate influentially for the country. India, which has invested heavily in reconstruction in Afghanistan, has also been left out of the so-called negotiated peace talks between US and the Taliban (Khetran, 2020).

Over the last few decades, Indian diplomacy which mainly aims at development and stability in Afghanistan has been a nightmare for Pakistan. At the same time, Pakistan has traditionally seen Afghanistan as within its orbit because of India's increasingly active engagement in its neighbour. Pakistan has remained very sensitive to India's presence in Kabul apprehending a strategic encirclement of Pakistan, more so in connection with the issue of Kashmir (Gallagher, 2022). Pakistan duly considers Afghanistan as a critical strategic depth, and its relationship with the Taliban has been more of an effort to keep a friendly government in power in Kabul. Pakistan's Support for the Taliban: On the other hand, the Pakistani security apparatus has not only patronized the Taliban but did so from its emergence as a proxy structure to influence Afghanistan, but also with the idea of neutralizing India's rising ascendancy in the region. Some of the main issues that have been a bone of contention between the West, especially US and Pakistan are its part in the emergence of the Taliban in the 1990s and support of the group even though it is against the US in the new world order strategy after the September 11 attacks. Pakistan has strayed from its position that it has little influence over the Taliban, but it has been supporting the group & through the ISI in particular (Qadri&Nabi, 2019). Pakistan regards the Taliban as a stabilizing force within Afghanistan that will help to ensure that Afghanistan does not turn into an India-friendly government (Rózsa, 2021). The US, however, has accused Pakistan of sponsoring the Taliban and other insurgents as a way of ensuring that it wields power in Afghanistan. This split has given way to strains in the relations between the two countries, especially now that Pakistan had to side with the US after the infamous 9/11 attacks and aid the US-led coalition in Afghanistan. While cooperating on the war on terror, the relationship has strained over the fact that Pakistan continues to harbour the Taliban and other groups.

This characteristic was heightened to its fullest in 2021 after US's exit from Afghanistan and the Taliban seizing control in Kabul (Fiedler, 2022). India, which has invested a lot of money in Afghanistan's reconstruction, had to think about its actions as the Taliban regained control of the country. Taliban capture of the Afghan capital of Kabul exposed the inability of the US and its allies to put in place an effective functioning nation in Afghanistan. India failed to dictate the developments, as its money could not tip the scale: this demonstrated the soft power strategy's weakness in a nation where security and militant factors have always played crucial roles (Dobbins, 2022). While Afghanistan mourned the collapse, its neighbour Pakistan rejoiced at the Taliban's regain of power, as it has always considered it a geopolitical win. Pakistan has since been dealing with the Taliban in favour of its interests which include trade and insecurity on the borders. Nevertheless, Pakistan's alliance is not without its problems as Pakistan has turned increasingly unstable due to the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) a militant group with a connection to the Afghan Taliban active on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border (Citaristi, 2022).

The US's withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Taliban's resurgence have put additional strain on US-Pakistan relations. While Pakistan played a pivotal role in facilitating the peace talks between the US and the Taliban, the fallout from the Taliban's takeover exposed the limitations of Pakistan's influence over the group. The US now faces the dilemma of how to deal with the Taliban regime, while Pakistan continues to advocate for a more constructive engagement with Kabul. This divergence in strategies underscores the deeper geopolitical tensions that shape US relations with both India and Pakistan (Khalaf, 2024). India's position on the Taliban remains cautious, as it seeks to balance its regional interests with its long-standing opposition to militant groups. India has expressed concerns about the Taliban's resurgence and the implications for its security, particularly in Kashmir, where Taliban sympathisers have supported separatist movements in the past (Plagemann&Destradi, 2019). However, India has also shown interest in engaging the Taliban diplomatically, especially in the context of humanitarian assistance and regional stability.

Afghanistan's geopolitical importance has been central to US foreign policy in South Asia, particularly since the US-led invasion in 2001. For both India and Pakistan, Afghanistan has been a key arena for their strategic interests, but their roles in the country have been shaped by contrasting geopolitical objectives, historical relationships, and alliances (Firoozabadian&Yadegarian, 2024). This section compares how India and Pakistan have engaged with the US in the context of the peace talks with the Taliban, highlighting their divergent roles, reactions, and strategies regarding the Afghan peace process.

India's role in Afghanistan has traditionally focused on development, soft power diplomacy, and strengthening the Afghan government. India has been a major contributor to Afghanistan's reconstruction, providing over \$3 billion in aid, primarily in the form of infrastructure development, healthcare, and education. India's approach to Afghanistan has been shaped by its desire to counter Pakistan's influence in the region, particularly as it views Afghanistan as a strategic buffer against Pakistan and a potential base for anti-India militancy (Gul et al., 2022). India's exclusion from the direct US-Taliban peace talks, which began in 2018 and culminated in the Doha Agreement of 2020, was a point of significant tension. While the US sought to negotiate directly with the Taliban to end its involvement in Afghanistan, India was left out of the discussions despite its substantial investment in Afghan reconstruction and its strategic interests in the region. India viewed this exclusion as a setback, given that it had long supported the Afghan government and had invested in projects that were seen as a way to bolster the Kabul administration against Taliban insurgents. The lack of a seat at the table highlighted the divergent approaches of India and Pakistan towards Afghanistan's future (Khan, 2024). While the US saw Pakistan as the key intermediary with the Taliban, India, which had built close ties with

Afghanistan's government, felt sidelined and concerned that the peace process would reward a group that had been historically hostile to India.

Following the announcement of the US-Taliban deal, India expressed significant concern about the potential consequences of a Taliban resurgence in Kabul. The Taliban's violent past, particularly its oppressive policies towards women, its harbouring of anti-India insurgents, and its close ties with Pakistan, made India highly wary of the group's return to power. Moreover, India feared that the Taliban's victory could embolden militant groups operating in Kashmir, given the Taliban's ideological alignment with anti-India Islamist groups (Naazer, 2022). Despite these concerns, India also recognized the necessity of engaging diplomatically with the US and Afghanistan's future leadership, and thus refrained from taking an overtly confrontational stance. India's engagement with the US in Afghanistan, therefore, remained primarily focused on humanitarian aid, political support for Afghan stability, and counter-terrorism cooperation, rather than direct involvement in the peace process itself. In an interview with M. Moheq, he says,

“India's strategy is indeed different. While Pakistan has historically viewed Afghanistan as a vital strategic asset, India's focus is on economic and technological growth. Afghanistan is not a priority for India, and its investments there have been limited. During the Republic era, India had better relations with the Afghan government, but with the Taliban's return, India has scaled back its engagement. India has maintained some ties with Afghan political factions, including the Taliban, to retain influence if needed. However, India's primary focus remains on its global economic and technological ambitions, as well as strengthening ties with Europe, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific region. Afghanistan is not central to India's long-term strategy” (Moheq, 2024).

Pakistan's engagement with the US in Afghanistan has been marked by a much more direct involvement in the peace talks, due to its long-standing support for the Taliban and its strategic interests in the region. Pakistan has long viewed Afghanistan as a vital buffer state in its rivalry with India (Ikenberry, 2018). For Pakistan, the Taliban has been a crucial proxy to maintain influence in Kabul, particularly after the Taliban took control of Afghanistan in the 1990s and continued to serve as an ideological and strategic ally. Pakistan's role in facilitating the US-Taliban peace talks was therefore integral, as it sought to ensure that the Taliban would have a significant role in Afghanistan's future.

Pakistan's involvement in the peace talks can be viewed as a strategic manoeuvre to shape the outcome of the peace process in a way that aligns with its interests. By acting as a mediator between the US and the Taliban, Pakistan sought to maintain its leverage in Afghanistan, ensuring that a Taliban-led government would act in Pakistan's interests. This included keeping India's

influence in Afghanistan limited and ensuring that Afghanistan did not serve as a base for anti-Pakistan militants. Pakistan's efforts to guide the Taliban into peace talks were not without challenges, as Pakistan faced increasing international criticism for allegedly harbouring Taliban leaders and other militant groups within its borders (Plagemann&Destradi, 2019). Despite these criticisms, Pakistan's support for the US-Taliban peace process was critical, as it hoped to secure the long-term stability of its western border and gain international recognition for its role in facilitating peace talks.

The February 2020 Doha Agreement, which stipulated the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan in exchange for the Taliban's commitment to prevent terrorist groups from operating within Afghanistan, was hailed by Pakistan as a diplomatic victory. Pakistan viewed the deal as a recognition of its influence over the Taliban and its central role in the Afghan peace process (Shah, 2022). While the agreement did not fully address Pakistan's desire for the Taliban to serve as a stabilizing force in Afghanistan, it offered Pakistan a chance to shape Afghanistan's future without direct US military involvement. This approach further diverged from India's, as Pakistan's priorities were centred on securing a Taliban-dominated government that would mitigate India's growing presence in Afghanistan and bolster Pakistan's security.

Perhaps the most significant difference in the two countries' foreign policies has to do with the US's role in mediating peace talks with the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan. The decision taken by the US to talk directly to the Taliban despite the banned terror group's history of violence and its links to al-Qaeda was based on the perception that dialogue with the Taliban would bring peace to Afghanistan once the US withdraws from the country. However, this decision aroused threatening factors for both the countries India and Pakistan but in different aspects. About India for example, the US's openness to interact with the Taliban was viewed as a disregard for the democratic government in Afghanistan that India had always been supporting for two decades. Realising that Pakistan had fully backed the Taliban, India, which had invested in Afghan infrastructure and given extensive humanitarian support there, grew concerns when a US-sponsored peace settlement would likely lead to the Taliban's formal recognition as Afghanistan's government. While India is one of the primary regional actors with which Afghanistan has had significant cooperation, it was not included in the talks. Indian PM Manmohan Singh said that due to its commitment to democracy and a steady state in Afghanistan, it was hard for India to support the US policy which in his opinion was focused too much on the exit rather than on peace (Raza, 2020).

For Pakistan though, the direct dealings with the Taliban, which the US had started was viewed as common sense in bringing about a cessation to the war and in carving the Pak's strategic stakes in Afghanistan. Pakistan had always insisted that the Taliban was a political actor

in Afghanistan and that by participating in the peace talks, Pakistan was securing a favourable strategic position (Maley & Jamal, 2022). However, the US and other Western countries accused Pakistan of a display double game, as it was supporting the Taliban also when it was an important partner in the war on terror. That said, while being an intermediary broker, Pakistan was guaranteed its influence in the Afghanistan processes, mainly because of the historical ties between Pakistan and the Taliban.

The Taliban taking control of Kabul after the US withdrawal, illustrated the different consequences of the peace talks for India and Pakistan. India's worst nightmare came through when the Taliban seized control of Afghanistan translating into the region's shift of power. India, which has invested billions in Afghanistan and has a strong relationship with the Afghan government, was without a strategy. The Taliban rule post withdrawal of the US put India in a new paradigm in the region. India was relatively reluctant to diplomatically approach the Taliban till recent years and has only embarked, on and donated humanitarian assistance, and is cautiously trying to interact with the new rulers of Afghanistan (Serenko, 2021). For India, counter-terrorism remains its top goal, and it wants to ensure Afghanistan does not turn into a launching pad for militant groups that could attack India, especially in the disputed territory of Kashmir.

However, Pakistan regarded the Taliban winners as its long-term policy of supporting the group and as a victory. Pakistan without any loss of time went on initiating a diplomatic relationship with the Taliban where the major concerns were over border control and economic relations but also to tighten its grip in Kabul. Nonetheless, there is doubt over the Taliban's capacity to govern the security situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan is under growing pressure to contain the aftermath of the Taliban's actions including TTP (Pant & Mehta, 2018). The divergent reactions over the fall of Kabul reveal the polarized roles that India and Pakistan had in the US-Taliban peace talks and their relations with the US. India's focus more on development and diplomacy has been largely reversed by the Taliban's resurgence while Pakistan's strategy of backing the Taliban makes it an actor in post-withdrawal Afghanistan with problems aplenty.

The endeavours to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table showed how India and Pakistan have a different approach to their foreign policy, especially the US relation to Afghanistan. The two states do have common fears regarding the stability of Afghanistan, still more, their plans differ radically owing to such factors as regional interests, security, and partnerships. India for its part remains an outsider to the envisaged peace talks as do its concerns of a Taliban-dominated Afghanistan in comparison to Pakistan's keen interest in the peace process to topple the favoured outcome to its strategic designs (Khan, 2024). These divergences have been brought out by the US entry and its negotiated settlement with the Taliban and exit from Afghanistan, thereby recasting the geo-strategic map of South Asia. The future evolution of India's and Pakistan's foreign

policies regarding Afghanistan, the US and each other will also be determined by this phenomenon in the years to come.

Therefore, the Afghanistan factor explains the dissimilarities of methods adopted by India and Pakistan in the South Asia strategy of the US. Whereas both these countries have interests in stability in their respective region, their approach to Afghanistan is MODs through their overall strategic interests and their divergent relations with the US. India has a developmental strategy while Pakistan has a security approach, especially concerning the Taliban in Kabul (Khan, 2024). They have become worse after the US left Afghanistan and the Taliban came back to power suggesting that these regional animosities are deeply rooted, and that outside intervention cannot alter Afghanistan's destiny.

6.6. The Russia Factor

This section argues that Russia's return as a dominant player on the world scene has posed interesting questions and challenges to the US mainly on bilateral relations with both India and Pakistan. India was a close friend of the USSR during the Cold War and Pakistan sided with the US seeking military and financial assistance to check India's domination in South Asia (Rashid et al., 2023). However, post the occurrence of the phenomenon of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India and Pakistan again repositioned their relations with Russia on strategic, economic and defence factors. The evolution of these two countries came with the emergence of Russia today as a player in the international system of relations contributing towards the foreign policy of each of them with different results on their relationship with the US.

India and Pakistan have tried to involve Russia in the strategic balancing in South Asia in different ways. Russia has continued to be on the list of strategic defence partners for India which procures a large quantity of its weaponry and equipment from Russia. India has stepped up its defence cooperation with the US, but Russia continues to supply it with hi-tech weaponries including the S-400 missile system that India committed to purchase despite CAATSA (Mubarik, 2019). This purchase has led to increasing relations tension between India and the US, but India has not reciprocated the desire to sort of completely end the defence cooperation with Russia its former Cold War ally. Indian sources believe that its dependence on Russia is one aspect of its policy of not linking itself to any one country's supply systems – including that of the US (Taye& Ahmed, 2021).

Pakistan, also, has tried to step up its military and collaboration with the Russian Federation in the economic sphere, but more prudently. Amid rising apprehensions about its future in Afghanistan and the US's unilateral withdrawal from there, Pakistan sought help from Russia, especially in the military-technical field. This activity has and continues to involve joint naval

exercises and other military drills with common membership in formations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, or SCO (Raza, 2020). This cooperation brings a new kind of change in the policy of Pakistan for involving different other countries for military collaboration except for the US and China. Also, the economic cooperation between Russia and Pakistan has expanded progressively; Russia is considering providing natural gas construction of pipelines via Pakistan. The shift in the China-Russian relationship is also partly because of the changing structure of the international system where both enjoy the common interest of a decrease in the US presence in the South Asia region. Pakistan has also required Russia to provide diplomatic support in the region to keep the rapidly growing relations with China as a counterweight to friendly but competitive relations with India (Jahangir & Ahmed, 2023). Russia's policy of standing aside in the conflict between India and Pakistan makes the country a perfect partner for Pakistan in confronting the US shift towards the Indian side.

Although both India and Pakistan have tried to woo Russia as part of a balancing strategy, their relationship with Russia differs substantially in the context of the unfolding of relations with the US. Establishing the military relations of India with the Russians, particularly in the recent announcement of India procuring the S-400 missile system poses a challenge to the emerging Indo-US cooperation. The US has time and again informed India that it might fall under the CAATSA list, that considers dealings with Russian defence and intelligence sectors (Saira&Javed, 2022). Nonetheless, India has gone ahead with the deal proving the fact that to some extent, it is not entirely willing to cut off its relationship with Russia. India needs to sustain its bi-fold defence procurement strategy for the future security demand because of the growing threat from China and the power shift in the Indian Ocean region. But this alignment with Russia became an issue of concern for the US-India relationship as the US wanted to impose pressure on them to refrain from going ahead with their defence deals with Russia which US considers a strategic rival on the international stage.

Similarly, the increasing relations between Pakistan and Russia are eyed with suspicion by the US for different reasons. After 9/11, the US aligned with Pakistan and since then US has become more worried about Pakistan's conduct particularly its links with militancy in Afghanistan and with the Taliban (Belal, 2019). Again, with the changing strategies of counterterrorism and stabilization in Afghanistan, Pakistan will look to seek alternatives and they have moved towards Russia to balance the bias that US has developed for India. However, the increasing defence and economic ties between Pakistan and Russia pose a problem to the US Strategy in the region (Abbasi, 2019). It is also noteworthy that the US has rather negative attitudes toward the closeness of relations between Pakistan and China and the increasing stock of defence cooperation between Pakistan and Russia, which may create problems for the US. To the great concern of the US, there

has been a melding of Russia and Pakistan relations lately that is likely to sour the US plans for stabilizing Afghanistan, where both Pakistan and Russia have stakes but were traditional rivals.

Also, the US raised concerns and concerns regarding the Pakistan-China closeness in which Pakistan has been seeking support through the CPEC. The recent instance of deepening ties between Russia and Pakistan may open a way for Pakistan not to rely solely on China. However, it is not wholly consistent with the US interests in South Asia, where the US has endeavoured to continue dominance over Pakistan as an aspect of its great power competition approach to China and South Asian security (Azmi et al., 2024).

In conclusion, while both India and Pakistan have wanted to use Russia as a counterpoint to their associations with the US, the character of relations with Russia differs for each country. The S-400 deal, and other continuing arms deals between India and Russia turned the situation around the US in the Asian region into complicated, while Pakistan won the trust of the US, and expanded the cooperation in defence and energy area with Russia. These dynamics show that the nature of political relations in South Asia is becoming more diverse, complicated with Russia's rising role as a superpower on the world stage for both, US-India and US-Pakistan relations.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

The current policies of both countries, India and Pakistan towards the US are more alike but have vast differences having similarities of interest having different approaches to these divergent foreign policies due to regional strategies South Asian strategies different allies, and different historical perspectives. Despite mechanisms of seeking US commitment for defense support, economic partnership, and counterterrorism, the two states' foreign policy relations differ regarding their positions toward major world powers, especially China, and regional interests. In this literature review, the main points of contact and separation of the foreign policies of both States will be identified, and then further explanation of these points will be provided.

The most converging factors seen in India and Pakistan's foreign policy vis-a-vis the US are economic relations, defence-related advantages, and counterterrorism. Both countries need economic and military assistance from the US towards their development and security. Terrorism has been one of the major focuses of cooperation between India, Pakistan as well as the US. Following the September 11 hijacking, the US broadened its counter-terrorism operations in southern Asia where India and Pakistan are located have previously suffered a considerable amount of terrorism. Having been targets of cross-border terrorism from Pakistan, India has stepped up intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism drills and cooperation in combating financial terrorism with the US. One such example is the US-India Counterterrorism Joint Working Group

which makes India and the US work together in the presence of terrorist threats. India has also received several Counter-Terrorism training programs sponsored by the US for its security forces which has strengthened India-US cooperation in the domain. Pakistan has been important for the US in the War on Terrorism, especially as a frontline state during the invasion of Afghanistan. Pakistan's support was more valuable in the first operations while militancy has been periodically strained through Pakistan's alleged sheltering of the militants mainly in FATA. However, the US has kept on supporting Pakistan with military equipment and funds, Pakistan has received billions of dollars in aid since the 9/11 incident if Pakistan would assist in counterterrorism.

India as well as Pakistan regard their ties with the US as crucial for their emergent economy. Impacts of trade: The US is one of the leading trade partners of India; India has a growing economy which indicates the trade relationship between the two countries was beneficial. Recently the bilateral commerce between India and the US reached over \$150 billion and it is evident that the IT, Pharmaceutical & Energy industries played a significant role. Notably, India's burgeoning technology industry which comprises Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Infosys among others, has acquired considerable market access and investment from the US firms. Moreover, the US-India Civil Nuclear Agreement signed in 2008 made nuclear cooperation possible as well as provided a way for India to gain civilian nuclear energy technology and ensure energy security. As for the present time, Pakistan also has certain economic problems, but at the same time, it would like to expand economic relations with the US. It also makes the US one of the biggest trading partners of Pakistan especially in the exports of textile products that makes up a greater percentage of Pakistan's export market. Also, in averting Pakistan's energy crises and infrastructural push, US economic aid has been fundamental. For example, only in the US there are financed initiatives directly connected with the construction of power stations and the extension of the electrical networks in Pakistan. Despite the economic downturn and sometimes political turbulence, these two countries have since sustained their economic friendly relations.

Though, both India and Pakistan rely on the US for defense and economic concerns; their foreign policies differ significantly in the context of their strategy affairs, especially in the Chinese factor, regional stability and perceiving the Indo-US relation. India's Alignment with the US in the Indo-Pacific: The two countries with the most variance of approaches are India and China, especially regarding the US as a strategic partner in the framework of the Indo-Pacific region. The QUAD in which India is a member along with the US, Japan and Australia is a testimony to the increasing consolidation of cooperation between India and US in emerging security architecture. India perceives the aggressive movement by China in the South China Sea, the Himalayan region, and the Indian Ocean as a threat to its sovereignty and dominance in the region. In this genotype, it has cooperated with the US in increasing key military cooperation and joint exercises in addition to improving defense relations. For instance, the Malabar Naval Exercise held with the US

alongside India, Japan and Australia was designed to enhance security and stability in the Indian Pacific region as a means of checking on the rising dominance of the Chinese naval power.

In addition, there has been a marked upswing in the arms imports by India from the US which include next-generation combat fighter aircraft, reconnaissance gear and ballistic missile defense systems. The Indian procurement of the S-400 missile defense system from Russia defied US sanctions under CAATSA, at the same time it demonstrates that India wants to maintain a bipolar military strategy between both Russia and the US, but it also establishes the dynamics of Indo-US defense ties. On the other hand, the destination choice of Pakistan seems to be influenced more by its strategic alliance with China. Pakistani's dependency on Chinese economic and military aid and diplomatic political status has led to a shift in Pakistani's relationship with US. Pakistan's active role in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a multi-billion-dollar infrastructure development plan is the major shift that again brings Pakistan in sync with China much against India's emerging strategic partnership with US. China also gives military aid to Pakistan consisting of computer sales of modern fighter aircraft, missile systems, as well as submarines, strengthening the China-Pakistan Strategic partnership. Largely, the US has been one of the most significant military and economic allies of Pakistan, but this increasing China-Pakistan cooperation is apprehensive for the US as it is inimical to its interest in South Asia and the broader Indian Ocean region.

There is also cooperation between India and the US which has led to tensions and increased amounts of hostility within the region, especially between India and Pakistan. These developments, particularly the ongoing rapprochement of India and the US across defense and security issues – LEMOA and COMCASA – are viewed in Pakistan as a direct threat to its national security, and a threat to its strategic standing in South Asia. Pakistan sees the expanding military relations with the US as a part of an Indian plan to surround Pakistan and diminish its strength as the Indian military is dominating as compared to Pakistan's military power. Furthermore, Pakistan holds resentment because the US supports India in the Kashmir issue. A perceived bias in the direction of India especially in the post-September 11 world has put pressure on the relationship between Pakistan and the US as Pakistan feels the US has turned a blind eye to India's aggression in Kashmir. It has made Pakistan move closer to China and Russia to look for other support as a counter to India's rising might.

The third important difference can be traced back to US engagement in Afghanistan. India and Pakistan in particular have their own and very often opposite interests in Afghanistan. India has extended a significant number of resources and political leverage to the reconstruction of Afghanistan and is seen as a part of South Asia as a development partner Afghanistan is perceived through the prism of Pakistan's security especially in the era of the resurgent Taliban. US's backing to India for elevating its development assistance to Afghanistan has been a bone of

contention between the two countries since Pakistan accuses India of a proxy war against Pakistan in Afghanistan. In future, India is likely to continue its interaction with Afghanistan in the same way. Dr. Moheq remarks,

“In future, India may maintain some level of engagement with Afghanistan, particularly with political factions like the Taliban, to keep a foothold in the region. However, I do not expect significant investments from India in Afghanistan. Even during the Republic era, India's financial contributions were modest compared to Western countries. Under the Taliban, India is unlikely to trust or invest heavily in Afghanistan. While India may provide humanitarian aid during crises, its focus will remain on its economic and technological growth. India's relationship with Afghanistan has never been military-centric, and I do not foresee that changing. India will likely avoid overextending itself in the region, prioritizing its global economic and strategic interests instead” (Moheq, 2024).

However, Pakistan has been aspiring to play a role in any peace and reconciliation process going on in Afghanistan, including the negotiation between the US and the Taliban. This action as a mediator has always formed the basis of Pakistan's diplomacy to the region as being a potent power over the Taliban has defined its diplomacy with the US. Although at one point US relied on Pakistani assistance in Afghanistan, 2021 witnessed the emergence of the Taliban which alerted US- Pakistan ties and their interaction. In analyzing India's and Pakistan's new foreign policies toward the US, we can speak about the convergence and divergence which, in turn, show structural characteristics of the interconnection between India and Pakistan with the US. On the one hand, Indonesia and Australia pursue economic partnership, defense cooperation, and counter-terrorism aid on the other hand, however, their strategic interests: regarding China, Afghanistan, and regional security, bear major differences. India seems to be progressively shifting in the US camp to counter China while enhancing defense links are opposed to Pakistan's strategic reliance on China. These contrasting policies have significant implications for the future of US interest in South Asia, as US coolly examines its ties to these two nuclear powers. Every strategic bilateral and multilateral relationship between India and Pakistan and between the US and India, and Pakistan are not only defined on a historical basis, but they are being influenced by the changing balance of power in the South Asian region.

The nature of the foreign policy of India and Pakistan vis-à-vis the US is uniquely configured by strategic dimension, history, and current relations. This paper examines the nature of India and Pakistan's relations with the US and how the trio strategically supports each other in matters of national security, economic growth, and power in South Asia. Nevertheless, strategies towards the US differ significantly mainly because of goals, interests, and perceptions of security environments both at regional and global levels as well as different alliance structures. India and

Pakistan understand the significance of cooperation with the US thus marking the defense cooperation, counterterrorism, and economic growth. However, all these relationships are built under different geo-political strategies from that of the US. To India, the US holds favorable, as it seeks to contain China's rise and augment its power in the region and international politics. Indian foreign policy has progressively become more coincident with US strategic interests especially in containing China's aggression, promoting trade, and expanding defense cooperation. The intensification of the bilateral relations between India and the US is based, inter alia, on the similar values of democracy, common fears of terrorism, and developing military cooperation. Nonetheless, India has had historical relations with Russia, has always favored strategic autonomy and has managed to maintain an equal distance from the two superpowers – the US and China – that adds a bit of complication to the overall equation of the relationship between India and the US. The acquisition of equipment like the S-400 and the continuation of the dependence on Russian weaponry is a big hurdle in the way of India's complete strategic convergence with the US.

On the contrary, Pakistan's foreign policy in the case of the US is influenced by its strategic alliance with China and its participation in the War against terror. Pakistan began a bilateral relationship with US more than 70 years ago with solid, and its current relationship with China has become vital for its strategic depth through CPEC and military cooperation with China. Pakistani dependence upon Chinese support in economics and the military has raised conflict with the US believing that increasing cooperation between Pakistan and China poses a threat to peace and US interests in the South Asian region. Pakistan's relations with Saudi Arabia and its attempts at maintaining a balance between relations with China and the US also put additional complexity into Pakistan's foreign policy. The country strives to maintain balance in its strategic interests from the pressures that are exerted by the competing super assistants.

The comparative analysis laid down in the study makes it clear that South Asia's geopolitical environment is complicated. The India-Pakistan composite dialogue includes main threats, particularly terrorism, regional stability, and the emerging superpower of China with varying hostile and mutual reassurance produce different hostile and mutual reassurance due to various alliances and different histories. India is shifting more and more on the side of the US concerning its major security concerns including China, the security of the Indo-Pacific region, and the protection of its place in the new global hierarchal order. On the other hand, it is a part of a close association with China and dependency on Chins for Growth and Development Aid and Military Assistance provides a diametrically opposite posture to it especially when it comes to its relations with the US while considering the rivalry with India

An important conflict pattern that could be identified in the context of the present study is the combination of cooperation and conflict in the foreign policies of India and Pakistan catering

to the US. Each nation acknowledges that the other's approach involves reaching out to US for a variety of security and economic goals, yet how each nation engages with the other's capital is striking in its dissimilarity. India – US relations and cooperation being twined are based on its commonalities of mutual concerns and priorities such as counterterrorism, stability in the South Asian region and containing China's growing dominance. However, due to India's strategic independence of foreign policy, it has certain disagreements between the ongoing partnership with Russia and its relations with the US. As for the counter-terrorism cooperation, this convergence is for Pakistan, especially in Afghanistan but the growing reliance on China undermines this relationship for US, especially given its current emphasis on substantiating against China.

Chinese involvement has especially been identified as playing a crucial part in the foreign policy of both India and Pakistan. The type of power transition, therefore, that poses a direct threat to India and its dominance over the region is China's rise, spearheaded by bilateral territorial disputes and China's increasingly close relations with Pakistan. The rising China's territorial imperialism and aggression towards its small neighbor ASEAN members have prompted India to enhance its strategic partnership with the US. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with the US, India, Japan, and Australia is an institutional mechanism through which India and the US are pursuing a coordinated strategy in the Indo-Pacific, of which freedom of navigation, respect for international law, and security in the face of Chinese assertiveness are important principles. Pakistan has offset India's military and economic prowess by becoming integral to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the crucial and strategic China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Yes, Pakistan has shouldered itself under China's wing which has helped its regional status but at the same time has put the Pakistan-US relationship into a quandary because US to an extent sees the Pakistan-China friendship as a protestant to its strategic interests in the region.

Iran also features clearly and prominently in the external political strategies of both India and Pakistan but in different respects. India has strategic interests in developing relations with Iran, especially due to its desire to respond to Pakistan's Gwadar Port through Chabahar, and the desire to build connectivity in Central Asia. Even though the US has imposed sanctions that stopped it from financing projects in Iran, this persevered, due to India's long-term aims in the region. For Pakistan, however, Iran is best characterized as a rival with whom it needs to cooperate to secure borders and maintain stability in the region, yet its alliance with the Saudis and dependence on US financial and military assistance put serious limits on Pakistan's interactions with Iran. The Iran factor therefore makes it possible to understand the realities of the geopolitical system of South Asia, examined by analyzing the interactions between the competing interests, allies and rivals' pressures which define the foreign policy of India and Pakistan and their relations with the US and other countries of the region and the world.

US is in the process of restructuring its approach to international relations in the context of the

emerging civilizations of the modern world, but this bipolar approach to the relations of the two countries with the US will remain an essential component of the strategies of both India and Pakistan and a significant focus in US global policy in South Asia. Presently as an emerging global power India shares the strategic vision and interest of the US in counterbalancing China and maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific region. The US' most pressing concern in South Asia today is Afghanistan whose stability continues to depend on Pakistan – a key strategic player whose nexus with China poses some challenges to US's interest. The two South Asian states' diverse ties with the US will persist to define their bilateral relations with the US and each other. The foreign policies of India and Pakistan towards the US are deeply rooted in their respective geostrategic contexts and national priorities. While both nations recognize the importance of engaging with the US to enhance security, economic development, and regional stability, their divergent alignments with global powers such as China and Russia create contrasting dynamics. This comparative analysis highlights the complexity of South Asia's geopolitical environment, where the interplay of converging and diverging interests shapes the region's future trajectory and its relationships with global powers. As the US navigates these competing dynamics, its engagement with India and Pakistan will remain a critical factor in shaping the region's stability and global security. The choices made by both states, in terms of their alliances and strategies, will have far-reaching implications not only for their futures but for the broader global order in an increasingly interconnected and multipolar world.

7.1. Recommendations

In the light of above discussion, Pakistan must prioritize political and economic stability through good governance, transparency, and reduced corruption. As AparnaPande (2025) highlights, effectively utilizing the youth bulge and human resources as national assets through economic inclusiveness is inevitable for growth. Sustainable growth, job creation, and tax reforms will reduce aid dependence and strengthen Pakistan's foreign relations, especially with the US. Moreover, Pakistan should tackle terrorism through enhanced cooperation and coordination among security institutions, adequate resources, and expert input to ensure stability. A balanced foreign policy should maintain strong ties with China and Russia while building trust and broader cooperation with the US. Improving relations with Afghanistan, especially through preferential trade, will also support regional stability. DrMoheq recommends,

“Pakistan should revise its foreign policy towards Afghanistan. Pakistan's focus on Pashtun Islamists created distrust among other ethnic groups, such as Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras, who felt marginalized and punished by Pakistan's policies. Pakistan had the opportunity to build balanced relationships with all Afghan ethnicities and ideologies. Instead, it prioritized Pashtun Islamists, which has damaged its reputation and influence in Afghanistan. To correct this, Pakistan

should engage with all ethnic and political groups in Afghanistan, not just Islamists. If Pakistan demonstrates a genuine shift in strategy, many Afghans are willing to reconsider their stance and rebuild a partnership” (Moheq,2024).

Pakistan should sustain strong and balanced bilateral ties with China and Russia while ensuring these relationships do not obstruct with Pak-US collaboration. It must clearly communicate that its partnerships with China and Russia are driven by their shared economic and security interests, not opposition to the US, and avoid perceptions of overdependence with China or Russia, particularly in projects such as CPEC. Mutual trust with the US can be strengthened by prioritizing economic cooperation in investment, trade, and technology transfer, and credible counterterrorism efforts. Moreover, Pakistan’s active involvement in counterterrorism initiatives and its openness in security cooperation can help address longstanding US concerns. Pakistan should pursue a balanced defense partnerships by maintaining military ties with China and Russia while engaging the US through joint training and non-threatening cooperation. Participation in international institutions and multilateral platforms such as the SCO can further help Pakistan present itself as a neutral and responsible state. Stability in Afghanistan requires close cooperation with the US on counterterrorism, intelligence sharing, and support for an inclusive government. Moreover, strengthening border management by preventing militant safe havens and promoting economic corridors with Afghanistan can ensure regional peace and stability.

In addition, reducing tensions with India through sustained bilateral dialogue, materializing confidence-building measures, and economic engagement is essential for regional stability. Focusing on trade and connectivity while addressing security concerns transparently can improve Pakistan’s diplomatic standing, particularly with the US. Pakistan should also deepen its ties with the EU and reduce its dependence on China. Strengthening ties with Iran, Central Asian Republics (CARs), and Muslim-majority countries- Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the UAE, can enhance regional connectivity, energy security, and counterterrorism cooperation. By promoting peace, stability and cooperation across these regions, Pakistan can position itself as a responsible regional actor aligned with broader US objectives.

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