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**Pakistan- US Relations since 2017: Strategic
Shifts in the Transforming World**

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Abstract

Pakistan-US relations have been cumbersome since the inception of Pakistan. And since 2017, bilateral relations have become more tense and underwent significant shifts, influenced by evolving geopolitical realities, regional security concerns, economic interests, and strategic alliances. This study examines the key developments in Pakistan-US relations post 2017 from divergent perspectives such as Sino-US rivalry and growing Pak-China relations, the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and Taliban 2.0, and more importantly, Indo-U.S. strategic convergence to counter China and the impact on Pakistan. The timeframe from 2017 is chosen because of administrative shift in US after Trump victory as 45th president of the United States and since then Pakistan-US cooperation revolved around the counterterrorism efforts and military collaboration, converted into increasing tensions over issues such as the Taliban's resurgence, Pakistan's strategic alignment with China through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and U.S. concerns over democratic governance and human rights. These divergent issues redefined the nature of engagement. Additionally, economic aid, trade policies, and diplomatic engagements continue to influence relations. This research explores the complexities of USA-Pakistan relations in a rapidly changing global order, assessing both challenges and opportunities for future cooperation.

Keywords: Pakistan-U.S. Relations, U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan Geopolitical Shifts, Strategic Alliances, Taliban 2.0, Sino-US Rivalry

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan-US relations have undergone significant shifts after 9/11, and during all these years till the culmination of the Afghan War, the bilateral relations went through lowest ebbs. The turning point in Pakistan-US relations was the capture of Osama Bin Laden, and the Salala incident. This relation took another turn after the U.S. presidential elections and Trump's entry into the Oval Office as the 45th president of the US. reflecting the evolving global geopolitical landscape and shifting strategic priorities. Once defined by counterterrorism cooperation and

military aid, the bilateral relationship has faced new challenges amid changing US foreign policy objectives, Pakistan's deepening ties with China, and regional security concerns in South Asia. The long-awaited Afghan War ended in 2021 after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Although it marked a turning point, altering the dynamics of engagement between Washington and Islamabad, but by and large, this withdrawal was full of repercussions. This withdrawal not only reshaped the global power structure, but disturbed the regional balance too. Therefore, compelling Pakistan and the US to identify new grounds and a common set of interests, including economic partnerships, regional stability, and Pakistan's growing engagement with emerging global players. But Pakistan's tilt towards China and focus towards the eastern border throughout the Afghan War compelled the United States to revisit its foreign policy towards South Asia and offer a broader role towards India.

Although the growing Indo-US alliance could have been seen during the Obama administration, but with Trump's entry, the US shifted its foreign policy towards South Asia with more inclination towards India. The key developments in bilateral relations since 2017, assessing their implications within the context of a changing global order. By analyzing diplomatic engagements, security collaborations, economic ties, and geopolitical realignments, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving dynamics between the two nations while keeping in mind the following key actors:

- India
- China
- Afghanistan

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF PAKISTAN-US RELATIONS

The relationship between the United States and Pakistan has long been characterized by cycles of engagement and estrangement, shaped by strategic interests, security concerns, and evolving political dynamics (Akhtar, 2021). The changing global order with the rise of China and the US counterbalancing strategy to boost India as a strategic partner to counter China became loud and clear. And henceforth the intensity of the relation became bitter and undergone significant shifts as both countries recalibrated their foreign policy objectives amid a rapidly changing global order. Historically, Pakistan-US partnership was built on security cooperation and the glaring example is Pakistan's inclination to sign South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). This alliance became stronger after the Soviet Union enters Afghanistan (1979) and Pakistan fought the proxy war and assisted the United States to meet its foreign policy objectives. History has shown that the US primary focus at that particular time was to contain communism and deter the USSR (Jabeen et al., 2020). But after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, America left the region in acute crisis and Pakistan faced the brunt of refugees and terrorism. In addition, internal dynamics of Pakistan played a key role in making Pakistan's internal and external sovereignty weaker. The repeated military interventions, constitutional crisis, and pursuit of nuclear policy left Pakistan in isolation and recognition issues. Before 9/11, Pakistan was ruled by Musharraf, and America was reluctant to recognize the Musharraf government, but post-9/11 altered the entire scenario and Pakistan-US relations got

restored. But this time, this cooperation was not to deter a communist country, and not to help Afghan Mujahidin. The US prime objective was to dismantle Al-Qaeda. And Pakistan was used as a means to end, but this time more open and resilient. Pakistan was designated the status of non-NATO ally, and its territory was used to eradicate terrorism in Afghanistan (Zaidi & Ahmad, 2022). On the contrary, Pakistan's Musharraf government received recognition. During the Obama Administration, the Af-Pak policy was recognized, but Pakistan endeavored to get the US to realize the unique status of two neighboring states and urged the US to recognize them through the separate lens.

Pakistan fought a war on its soil, and successfully dismantled the terrorist activities in its tribal belt, and this created anti-American sentiments and anti-Pakistan elements within Pakistan. However, despite all the counterterrorism efforts, Pakistan's role was least appreciated and in 2017, with the Donald Trump entry it became bitter. India was designated with a broader role and Pakistan was asked to do more". But this reorientation in relations is also the crux of broader geopolitical factors—such as the rise of China, the evolving Indo-US strategic partnership, and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and resultantly reshaped bilateral engagements (Kugelman, 2020).

During the Obama administration (2009–2017), Pakistan- US relations remained complex, balancing counterterrorism cooperation with increasing concerns over Pakistan's alleged support for militant groups (Fair, 2018). While security and economic aid continued, Washington expressed growing frustration over Pakistan's perceived reluctance to dismantle safe havens for the Haqqani Network and the Taliban (Schaffer & Schaffer, 2016). The Trump administration (2017–2021) took a more confrontational approach, suspending military aid and pressuring Pakistan to take stronger action against terrorist organizations (Haqqani, 2020). The decision to cut off \$1.3 billion in security assistance in 2018 marked a significant downturn in relations, reinforcing Washington's skepticism regarding Islamabad's counterterrorism commitments (Tellis, 2019).

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 marked a critical juncture in the bilateral relationship. With the Taliban's return to power, Pakistan's strategic importance once again became evident, leading to renewed, albeit cautious, diplomatic engagement between Washington and Islamabad (Rehman, 2022). The Biden administration has pursued a more pragmatic approach, focusing on regional security, climate change, trade, and humanitarian aid while keeping security cooperation limited (Markey, 2023). However, Pakistan's increasing alignment with China—particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project under Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative has complicated US-Pakistan relations, as Washington views CPEC as a challenge to its strategic interests in South Asia (Small, 2020)

The American-Pakistan relations have experienced significant fluctuations, shaped by evolving geopolitical priorities, security concerns, and economic engagements. The partnership, historically anchored in military cooperation and counterterrorism efforts, began to shift as the United States recalibrated its foreign policy focus, particularly with its pivot to the Indo-Pacific and withdrawal from Afghanistan (Kugelman, 2019). Meanwhile, Pakistan's deepening strategic

and economic ties with China, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), introduced new complexities into its relationship with Washington (Small, 2020). The Trump administration adopted a more transactional approach toward Pakistan, cutting military aid and pressuring Islamabad to take decisive action against militant groups operating within its borders (Fair, 2018). However, following the US exit from Afghanistan in 2021, diplomatic engagement between the two nations saw a renewed emphasis on regional stability and economic cooperation (Rehman, 2022). Under the Biden administration, the relationship remains pragmatic, focusing on climate change, trade, and counterterrorism while maintaining a cautious stance on security assistance (Haqqani, 2023). The US-Pakistan relationship is increasingly influenced by broader regional dynamics, including India's growing strategic partnership with the United States and the shifting balance of power in South Asia. This paper explores the evolution of US-Pakistan relations since 2015, analyzing key diplomatic, security, and economic developments and assessing their implications for both countries in an era of geopolitical realignment.

In the current global landscape, US-Pakistan relations remain fluid, shaped by broader regional and international developments. The rise of India as a key US ally, shifting power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific, and Pakistan's internal economic and political challenges further influence bilateral engagements. This paper explores the evolution of US-Pakistan relations since 2015, analyzing key diplomatic, security, and economic developments while assessing their implications for the future of this complex and often volatile partnership.

DYNAMICS IN A CHANGING GLOBAL ORDER

The global order has undergone significant transformations since 2017, with shifting power dynamics, strategic realignments, and the emergence of new geopolitical challenges influencing US-Pakistan relations. The rise of China as a global superpower, the deepening Indo-US strategic partnership, and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan have all played a crucial role in redefining the bilateral relationship. As Pakistan navigates its position within this evolving landscape, its engagements with both Washington and Beijing have shaped its foreign policy approach, while internal economic and political challenges continue to impact its global standing (Kugelman, 2020). The major dynamics involved in the strategic recalculations between the two countries are as follows:

- Sino-U.S. rivalry and Pakistan-China strategic convergence
- Indo-U.S. alliance and strategic dilemma for Pakistan
- Afghan Taliban and Tehrik-Taliban Pakistan
- Taliban 2.0 and Repercussions for Pakistan-US Relations
- CPEC vs IMEC

SINO-US RIVALRY AND PAKISTAN CHINA STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE

One of the most significant shifts in the global order has been the intensifying rivalry between the United States and China. As the US seeks to counterbalance China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific, Pakistan has found itself in a delicate position due to its deepening economic and strategic ties with Beijing. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a key component of

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has positioned Pakistan as a crucial partner in China's regional ambitions (Small, 2020). However, Washington has expressed concerns that CPEC could lead to Pakistan's economic dependence on China and undermine US interests in South Asia (Markey, 2023). The US has also sought to offer alternatives to Chinese investments, emphasizing economic cooperation through initiatives like the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) (Haqqani, 2023).

The rise of China as a major power in East Asia is another turning point of the 21st Century that is challenging the U.S. and its promotion of liberal values. In this context, one of China's key strategies is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which aims to expand China's influence by investing in infrastructure projects across various regions, including South Asia and the Indian Ocean. A critical part of this initiative is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which connects China to the Arabian Sea through Pakistan, reducing China's dependence on key shipping routes like the Malacca Strait. The rise of China is a threat to US interests in the region, therefore, to counter China's growing influence, the U.S. introduced measures like the Build Act (2018) and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). These initiatives aim to enhance U.S. influence in the Indian Ocean region and compete with China's BRI. The Indian Ocean is strategically important due to its role in global trade, particularly oil and natural resources, and its proximity to unstable regions like the Middle East (Zafar et al., 2025).

INDO-U.S. ALLIANCE AND SECURITY DILEMMA FOR PAKISTAN

The greater and strong India is in the strategic interest of the United States, but on the contrary, it creates a security dilemma in Pakistan. And resultantly, the growing Indo-US ties are compelling Pakistan to revisit its relations with the US because the strategic alliance is strengthening India's military capabilities and strategic position in the region. This partnership shifts the regional power balance, creating security concerns for Pakistan, which views India's growing influence and military strength as a direct challenge to its own security (Akhtar, 2024). Over the past decade, the US-India strategic partnership has expanded significantly, encompassing defense, technology, trade, and regional security. The 2016 designation of India as a "Major Defense Partner", along with key defense agreements such as the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) and the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), underscores Washington's commitment to bolstering New Delhi's military capabilities (Pant & Joshi, 2021). The two countries have deepened their defense, trade, and technology cooperation, particularly through agreements such as the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) (Pant & Joshi, 2021, Akhtar, 2024). This strategic realignment has further strained US-Pakistan relations, as Islamabad views Washington's support for New Delhi as a challenge to its security interests, particularly concerning the Kashmir dispute and regional stability (Tellis, 2019).

Pakistan's perspective, these developments pose strategic challenges, particularly concerning regional security and the balance of power in South Asia. Islamabad perceives Washington's growing defense cooperation with India as a shift away from its traditional security partnership with Pakistan. The revocation of Jammu and Kashmir's special status by

India in 2019 further strained US-Pakistan relations, as the Trump administration largely refrained from intervening, signaling a tilt toward India (Tellis, 2019).

PAKISTAN'S RESPONSE TO US-INDIA ALIGNMENT

Pakistan has sought to counterbalance US-India ties by strengthening its strategic partnerships with China, Turkey, and Russia. In recent years, Islamabad has deepened defense and economic cooperation with Moscow, including the purchase of military hardware and joint military exercises (Korybko, 2022). Additionally, Pakistan has worked to enhance its diplomatic engagements with Middle Eastern allies, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to maintain economic and strategic support (Malik, 2023).

As the global order continues to evolve, US-Pakistan relations remain fluid, shaped by broader geopolitical shifts and regional security dynamics. While Washington and Islamabad continue to engage on key issues such as counterterrorism, economic development, and regional stability, the rise of China, the strengthening US-India partnership, and the aftermath of the Afghanistan withdrawal have reshaped their strategic priorities. Moving forward, the extent of cooperation between the two nations will depend on their ability to navigate these complex geopolitical realities while balancing their respective national interests.

AFGHAN TALIBAN AND TEHRIK-TALIBAN PAKISTAN

The U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan, particularly targeting groups like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Al Qaeda, and the Haqqani network, became a major point of tension in Pakistan. The internal sovereignty of Pakistan was questioned. These strikes were effective in eliminating key threats, but they also caused a lot of anger among Pakistanis, especially those living in the areas affected. Many people in these regions suffered psychological trauma from the strikes, and there was widespread resentment over the violation of Pakistan's sovereignty (Shah, 2018). (Akram et al., 2024). The strikes were seen as an infringement on the country's territorial integrity, creating a lot of public hatred toward the U.S. While the drone strikes weakened the Taliban and other militant groups, they also complicated the peace process in Afghanistan and affected Pakistan-US relations. The killings of top Taliban leaders undermined efforts to negotiate peace in Afghanistan and deepened disagreements between the U.S. and Pakistan over how to deal with the Taliban. Pakistan tended to consider Afghanistan as strategic depth against India, but this unconditional support to the Afghan Taliban engulfed Pakistan into unending war in the tribal areas of Pakistan (Akhtar et al., 2021). The return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan, known as "Taliban 2.0," created a range of reactions in Pakistan. Akram et al., (2024) presented a realistic picture of Pakistan-US relations and considered it as a blend of victory and failure. On the one hand, it is a victory for Islam and Afghan sovereignty, while on the other hand it raises concerns about increasing extremism and terrorism in Pakistan.

TALIBAN 2.0 AND REPERCUSSIONS FOR PAKISTAN-US RELATIONS

The US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 marked a turning point in the geopolitical landscape, altering the dynamics of Pakistan-US relations with the revival of the Taliban. This time Pakistan and the United States had to face the modern version of Taliban known as Taliban 2.0. Washington has long viewed Pakistan as a key player in regional security, given its historical

ties with the Taliban and its role in facilitating peace negotiations (Rehman, 2022). However, the Taliban's return to power has led to new challenges, with the US expressing concerns over Pakistan's continued engagement with the group. While Islamabad has emphasized the need for stability in Afghanistan, Washington remains cautious about its future counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan (Kugelman, 2022).

Pakistan's economic crisis has also influenced its diplomatic engagements, prompting Islamabad to seek support from multiple global players, including the US, China, and international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Malik, 2023). While Washington has maintained economic assistance to Pakistan, it has shifted focus from military aid to development cooperation, particularly in areas like climate change, trade, and governance reforms (Haqqani, 2023). Security cooperation remains limited, with the US maintaining a cautious approach toward military assistance, prioritizing counterterrorism efforts while avoiding large-scale security aid packages (Markey, 2023).

CPEC vs IMEC

Pakistan's deepening relationship with China, primarily through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has emerged as a critical aspect of its foreign policy. CPEC, launched in 2015 as part of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), involves multi-billion-dollar infrastructure projects, including highways, ports, and energy facilities aimed at boosting Pakistan's economic growth (Small, 2020). However, the US has expressed strong reservations about CPEC, viewing it as an instrument of Chinese economic and political influence in South Asia (Markey, 2023).

In response to China's expanding footprint in South Asia, the US has attempted to counterbalance its influence by strengthening economic ties with regional players, particularly India. Washington has also encouraged alternative development initiatives, such as the Blue Dot Network (BDN) and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), to offer infrastructure financing and economic partnerships that rival China's BRI (Rehman, 2022). However, Pakistan remains hesitant to fully align with US-backed initiatives, given its long-term strategic and economic dependence on Beijing (Haqqani, 2023).

The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), launched at the 2023 G20 Summit, is a collaborative project between India, the U.S., the European Union, and key Gulf nations. It aims to create a trade route that competes with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), improving economic development, regional stability, and reducing logistical challenges in the Indian Ocean Region, the Middle East, and Europe (Monroe, 2023). This initiative highlights the ongoing rivalry between China and the U.S. for global influence, with countries like Pakistan and Gulf states balancing these competing powers. While the U.S. has lost some regional trust due to aggressive policies, China promotes multilateralism and regional cooperation for sustainable development (Zafar et al., 2025). Therefore, Washington has cautioned Islamabad against potential debt traps, fearing that excessive reliance on Chinese loans could weaken Pakistan's sovereignty (Malik, 2023). Pakistan needs to create a well-rounded foreign policy that doesn't favor any one country. This requires a practical and balanced approach, including reassessing its relationship with its eastern neighbor and ensuring regional stability through peaceful efforts.

PAKISTAN-US RELATIONS: A WAY FORWARD

Given the evolving geopolitical landscape, Pakistan-US relations must adapt to emerging global and regional challenges. While historical security ties remain important, the future of this relationship should focus on diversification, economic stability, and regional cooperation. The following suggestions outline potential pathways for a more constructive and sustainable partnership.

1. STRENGTHENING ECONOMIC AND TRADE RELATIONS

Under President Trump, the U.S. used pressure tactics on Pakistan, including adding it to the FATF grey list and blocking IMF aid. However, in 2018, the U.S. shifted its focus to reconciling with the Taliban for peace in Afghanistan, realizing Pakistan's influence over them. This led to a renewed rapprochement between Pakistan and the U.S. (Zaidi & Ahmad, 2022). But after U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan's economic crisis, marked by soaring inflation, currency depreciation, and a growing fiscal deficit, has necessitated repeated engagements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Given the US's significant influence over the IMF, Pakistan has had to balance its diplomatic ties carefully to secure financial bailouts (Malik, 2023). Washington has supported Pakistan's economic stabilization but has conditioned assistance on reforms in governance, fiscal management, and counterterrorism policies (Rehman, 2022). The US remains one of Pakistan's largest trading partners. Expanding bilateral trade and investment opportunities can help reduce Pakistan's dependence on external loans and foster economic resilience. Encouraging US private sector investments in Pakistan's technology, energy, and infrastructure sectors could provide economic alternatives to Chinese investments under CPEC. Establishing a preferential trade agreement (PTA) or reviving the US Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) for Pakistani exports would boost Pakistan's struggling economy.

2. EXPANDING COOPERATION IN CLIMATE CHANGE AND RENEWABLE ENERGY

In recent years, US aid to Pakistan has shifted from military assistance to economic development, focusing on climate resilience, education, and trade. The Green Alliance Initiative, launched under the Biden administration, aims to enhance US-Pakistan cooperation on climate change and sustainable development (Kugelman, 2022). However, security-related aid remains minimal, reflecting Washington's cautious approach in light of past policy failures (Haqqani, 2023). Climate change poses a major threat to Pakistan, as seen in the 2022 devastating floods. The Green Alliance Initiative, launched under the Biden administration, should be further expanded to address climate resilience, disaster management, and renewable energy investment. The US and Pakistan can collaborate on solar, wind, and hydropower projects, reducing Pakistan's reliance on fossil fuels and alleviating its energy crisis.

3. ENHANCING COUNTERTERRORISM AND SECURITY COOPERATION

Pakistan's unconditional support led to anti-Pakistan and anti-American sentiments which caused a wave of terrorism. This wave got intense after the U.S. withdrawal, overwhelmed with the pursuit of global dominance, which failed to realize the ground realities of Afghanistan, which exacerbated the regional security after 9/11 and post-U.S. withdrawal. The resurgence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) following the US withdrawal and the Taliban's takeover

has led to significant security challenges in Pakistan, including sectarian violence and cross-border terrorism. This situation is driven by both internal and external factors, such as the suspension of international aid, which exacerbated corruption and insecurity. The return of the Taliban also reignited threats from groups like al-Qaeda and ISIS, while the dominance of Pashtun culture has sparked ethnic tensions within Afghanistan (Bashir, 2023)

While large-scale military aid may not resume, targeted counterterrorism cooperation should continue, particularly against groups like ISIS-K and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) that threaten regional security. Intelligence-sharing mechanisms and joint counterterrorism training programs could help both countries tackle security threats without direct military involvement. Border security cooperation between Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the US could prevent the resurgence of extremist groups following the Taliban's return to power.

4. BALANCING GEOPOLITICAL ALIGNMENTS

Pakistan should maintain strategic autonomy by balancing its relations with both the US and China, ensuring it does not become overly dependent on a single global power. In turn, Washington should recognize Pakistan's security concerns regarding India and avoid policies that may be seen as overly favoring New Delhi. A regional dialogue mechanism involving the US, China, India, Pakistan, and other key stakeholders could be established to prevent conflicts and promote economic connectivity in South Asia.

The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) reported that India in 2023 ranked as the fourth-largest military spender, allocating \$83.6 billion, while Pakistan was ranked 30th, with defense spending of \$8.5 billion (SIPRI, 2024). India under Modi have seen rapid strategic modernization. Aatmanirbhar Bharat' was launched by Modi in May 2020, and the defense startups in India are the glaring epitomes of Modi's vision to make a greater role , However, in current regional and global dynamics India's increasing clout is to deter China and to build military capabilities that can effectively counter China, rather than focusing on Pakistan. However, any strategic advancements made by India are seen as significant security threats by Pakistan (Akhtar, 2024).

5. STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

The US can play a constructive role in supporting democratic institutions and governance reforms in Pakistan by promoting judicial independence, media freedom, and political stability. Encouraging anti-corruption initiatives and economic transparency measures could improve investor confidence and attract foreign direct investment (FDI). Increased educational exchanges and scholarships for Pakistani students in the US would foster long-term diplomatic goodwill and people-to-people ties. The future of Pakistan-US relations lies in a pragmatic, issue-based approach that moves beyond traditional military alliances. Both nations should focus on economic engagement, climate resilience, counterterrorism, and regional stability, while respecting each other's strategic priorities. By fostering a balanced, forward-looking partnership, Washington and Islamabad can navigate global uncertainties and build a mutually beneficial relationship in the years to come.

CONCLUSION

Since 2017, Pakistan-US relations have been shaped by shifting geopolitical, economic, and security dynamics within an evolving global order. While historically defined by security cooperation, particularly in counterterrorism, the bilateral relationship has undergone significant transformations due to factors such as the US-China strategic rivalry, the deepening US-India partnership, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, and Pakistan's internal economic challenges. These factors have not only redefined the nature of US-Pakistan engagement but have also positioned Islamabad at the crossroads of competing global interests. Pakistan's strategic alignment with China, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has emerged as a key point of divergence between Islamabad and Washington. While China remains Pakistan's largest economic and infrastructure partner, the US has expressed concerns over debt dependency, regional security implications, and Beijing's expanding influence in South Asia. Meanwhile, the growing US-India strategic partnership has further complicated Pakistan's diplomatic calculus, as Washington strengthens its military and economic ties with New Delhi while reducing its security commitments to Islamabad. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 marked a turning point in regional security dynamics, with Pakistan playing a pivotal role in the Taliban's return to power. While the US and Pakistan continue to share common concerns over counterterrorism and regional stability, Washington remains skeptical of Islamabad's long-standing ties with the Taliban and its role in the post-withdrawal security environment. Additionally, Pakistan's worsening economic crisis has made it increasingly dependent on global financial institutions such as the IMF, where the US holds considerable influence, further affecting the bilateral relationship. Despite these challenges, US-Pakistan relations have not completely deteriorated. Under the Biden administration, the focus has shifted from security cooperation to economic, climate, and development partnerships, reflecting a broader reorientation of US foreign policy in the region.

Initiatives like the Green Alliance for Climate Cooperation highlight new areas of engagement beyond traditional security concerns. However, Washington's limited appetite for military aid and Pakistan's increasing reliance on China suggest that the bilateral relationship will remain pragmatic, transactional, and issue-based rather than deeply strategic. Moving forward, the future of US-Pakistan relations will depend on Islamabad's ability to navigate its geopolitical challenges, balance its relationships with major global powers, and implement economic and governance reforms to ensure long-term stability. While tensions and divergences in strategic priorities are likely to persist, areas of mutual interest—such as counterterrorism, trade, climate change, and regional security—may provide opportunities for sustained engagement. In an increasingly multipolar world, Pakistan's foreign policy decisions will play a critical role in determining its position in global power structures and the nature of its relationship with the United States.

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