

AMERICA FIRST, SOUTH ASIA LATER? REASSESSING U.S. POLICY  
TOWARD INDIA AND PAKISTAN UNDER THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

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Abstract

The research method of this paper is qualitative and relies on the interpretivist approach and post-positivist philosophy to examine the impact of the America First approach by the Trump administration has had on the relationship of the United States with both India and Pakistan in ways that are complex. This two paradigm can assist us in perfectly realizing the way the chief political and diplomatic figures of the three nations perceive and interpret shifts in American strategic priorities. It also transcends mere viewing of facts but takes into account the subjective intricacies of international relations. The analysis of the changes in the U.S. foreign policy that have taken place during the Trump administration in the scope of the dip- lomatic activity, official language, and reaction of the other countries can be introduced as the qualitative case study design. It involved 20 semi-structured interviews with specially se- lected experts of different demographic and professional backgrounds. These interviews made it possible to explore participants' points of view and experiences in a flexible and thorough way. Along with primary data, a content analysis of secondary sources such policy documents, speeches, and news reports was done to systematically find patterns and themes that were relevant to the research questions. The Braun and Clarke thematic analysis ap-proach was used to find the main themes in the data research. These themes included strate- gic favouritism towards India, transactional diplomacy, security realignment, and how dif- ferent regions see the U.S. mediation obligations. This strategy made it possible to look at how Indian and Pakistani players reacted differently to changes in U.S. policy. The method's strictness and sensitivity to context gave us a full picture of how the complicated interactions between economic, security, and diplomatic factors affected South Asia's growing ties with the US under the Trump presidency.

**Keywords:** America First; South Asia; U.S.-India Relations; U.S.-Pakistan Relations; Trump Administration; Strategic Realignment

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## INTRODUCTION

When Donald Trump became the 45th President of the United States in January 2017, he put in place a foreign policy framework that was very different from the multilateral, alliance-based approach that the U.S. had used in international dealings since World War II. Owais,

M. (2019). The "America First" concept was a key part of this change. It was a way of talking about and planning for national sovereignty, economic nationalism, and transactional diplomacy above values-based global leadership. Instead of basing foreign cooperation on the need to preserve the supremacy of the U.S. via entities such as NATO, the UN, and multilateral trade agreements, as was the case with past regimes, the Trump administration largely viewed the subject through the perspective of costs and benefits. Holland, K. (2018). Individuals ceased viewing alliances as inherent strategic benefits and, instead, viewed them as matter of negotiation. People were required to contribute the burden and receive something in order to continue being engaged. Ahanger, G. A., Dwivedi, S., Dar, A. A., Malik, A. H., & Gupta, S. (2019)

The foreign policy conducted by Trump was strange both in its organization and implementation. It depended much on such factors as personal diplomacy (with Kim Jong-un and Modi, to name a few),

- Direct communication through social media sites, especially Twitter, and
- A violation of diplomatic norms, often going around institutional rules in favour of direct talks between leaders. Until June, B. (2024).

The foreign affairs aspect of the administration was generally ad hoc and transactional, looking at the short term gain such as military sales, trade agreements, or political optics at home rather than long term strategic constancy. Trump doubted the value of long-term relationships, withdrew the U.S.A. from significant international agreements such as the Paris Climate Accord and the Iran Nuclear Deal, and altered the understanding of U.S. leadership by concentrating on bilateralism rather than global responsibility. This philosophy represented a decisive shift towards India in South Asia due to economic opportunities and concerns over Chinese rising. Instead, the ties with Pakistan deteriorated, mostly due to the counterterrorism operations and the Afghan peace initiative. Chandio, K. H. (2018). The Trump administration has been a game-changer in the U.S. geopolitical priorities in the region, whose impact keeps on reverberating in the relations between India and Pakistan as well as the credibility of the

U.S. in South Asia. In this paper, the author examines the shift in the U.S. foreign policy towards India and Pakistan during the Trump administration (2017-2021) and the impacts that this shift would have on the future, until 2025. The article discusses the impacts of the America First concept on the Washington strategic thinking in South Asia, which has altered the conventional diplomatic equations. Bhatnagar,

S. (2023). The relationship between the U.S. and India under the presidency of Trump became very strong. This was observed through improved coordination on defence matters, deepening of business relations and more coordinated Indo-Pacific strategy. India was to grow increasingly significant as an ally in preventing Chinese designs on the region. Conversely, the relations between the U.S. and Pakistan deteriorated. The government imposed penalties, reduced military assistance, and demanded that Pakistan should do more to crack down on terrorist groups that used its territory, particularly regarding the withdrawal in Afghanistan. Malik, A. I., Mirza, M. N., & Qaisrani, I. H. (2020). In examining the impacts of these developments on the U.S. relations with both nations and

how the latter responded to each other, this article will be examining policy papers, official language, and reactions in the region until 2025. It also views the larger implications on security in the region, confidence in diplomacy, and the future of geopolitics in South Asia.

## REDEFINING U.S. PRIORITIES

The Trump administration altered the strategic priorities of the U.S. by elevating India as a major partner in contesting Chinese regional ambition and enhancing economic and defence collaboration. India has been regarded as a consistent democratic Indo-Pacific associate and this has attracted increased diplomacy and strategic interest. Pakistan, on the other hand, was subjected to greater criticism as it was perceived to be too eager to collaborate with the militant groups and not doing enough to achieve peace process in Afghanistan. Jahangir, A., & Khan, F. (2020). The government reduced military assistance and fined Pakistan, and this was unlike the U.S. to act as a neutral negotiator. This adjustment elevated the significance of transactional diplomacy and India became inclined to collaborate with the U.S. in achieving its objectives and compelling Pakistan to take decisive action against terrorism. This was a shift in the former dual-track approaches that placed the Indian ascendancy over that of Pakistan and sidelined Pakistan. This altered the security landscape in South Asia.

## AMERICA FIRST DIPLOMACY

The America First policy shifted the U.S. South Asian position significantly as the transactional diplomacy, American economic interests, and national security become the priorities over the conventional alliance-building and cooperation with other nations. Hanif, S., & Khan, M. (2018). The Trump administration prioritized bilateral deals and immediate gains over the regional schemes that included all players. This altered the U.S. engagement with India and Pakistan rather significantly. India was termed a strategic partner in order to counter the rising influence of China. Joshi, S. (2021). This implied that there would be stronger defence ties and trade relations. Pakistan, on the other hand, received more condemnation and sanctions, including this type of sanctions and funding reduction, which demonstrated that most people did not believe that Islamabad was doing enough to combat terrorism. That doctrine turned Washington into a less impartial mediator and a lot more into a backer of allies that were perceived to assist American interests and a punisher of those that were perceived to harm it. Ambreen, T., & Zaheer, M. A. (2024). The America First approach caused the U.S. to become more selective, erratic, and pragmatic in its engagement, which altered how diplomacy operated in the region.

### Shifting Diplomatic Attitudes

India mostly supported the Trump administration's "America First" strategy because it saw it as a chance to improve strategic and business ties with the US. Indian leaders praised Washington's strong stance against China and its increased cooperation on defence, which fit with India's goals in the area. Soami, R. (2023). During this time, there were more diplomatic encounters, military transactions, and support for India's position in the Indo-Pacific area. India, on the other hand, was still worried about how reliable the U.S. promise would be in the long run because the policy was based on transactions. Pakistan, on the other hand, saw the change as a setback and a diplomatic slap on the wrist. The U.S. cutting back on military aid and adding further sanctions were seen as punishments that showed the U.S. was unhappy with Pakistan's efforts to fight terrorism and its complicated role in Afghanistan. Islamabad responded by strengthening its ties with China and Russia as potential strategic partners and reaffirming its right to make its

own foreign policy decisions. Pakistan's belief that U.S. assistance was waning made people more doubtful about Washington's goals and made it harder for the two countries to work together on regional security issues. Shahbaz, M., & Phil, M. (2024). The different reactions and impressions showed how U.S.–India and U.S.–Pakistan relations were becoming more uneven during the Trump administration, changing regional alliances and strategic thinking.

## **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The Trump administration's foreign policy, which was based on the idea of "America First," was a big change from how the U.S. had dealt with South Asia in the past. This change led to a lot of questions about whether the United States has pushed aside a fair and nuanced approach to both India and Pakistan in favour of transactional and selective relationships. As India became more and more of a strategic partner, Pakistan faced more and more sanctions and diplomatic isolation, which might threaten long-term regional stability and U.S. power. This study's goal is to find out if Trump's U.S. strategy put short-term gains ahead of balanced involvement, and what this means for South Asia's geopolitical future.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

To carefully look at how the Trump administration's "America First" policy affects the U.S.'s diplomatic and strategic ties with India and Pakistan, and to what extent this policy changes the balance of power in the region and the U.S.'s standing in South Asia.

## **SIGNIFICANCE**

Wanting to predict the future behavior of the U.S. in South Asia and the greater Indo-Pacific region, in general, one should obtain a better idea of how the administration of Trump modified the U.S. foreign policy towards both India and Pakistan. This paper examines the effects of the transactional and selective involvement of the so-called America First doctrine. It also provides us the indication of how the alteration in the US policy can impact the security of the region, alliances, and relationships in the future. This is one thing that policymakers, scholars, and other people in the region interested in managing the intricate transformation in the power relations and developing good policies in an Asia that is increasingly multipolar need to know.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **TRUMP'S FOREIGN POLICY DOCTRINE**

This was a rather opposing foreign policy of the Trump administration to the former United States plans which aimed at alliances and collaborations with other countries. Three rather important notions to this break were unilateralism, economic nationalism, and transactional diplomacy.

### **UNILATERALISM**

The Trump plans did not give much attention to the multilateral institutions and agreements that had been of concern to the U.S. foreign policy. Nisar, R. D., & Rahim, T. (2025). The administration has pulled out the US obligations in important international treaties, including the Paris Climate Agreement and the Iran Nuclear Deal (JCPOA). This showed that they did not trust global governance systems that they perceived to be not good to American interests. This position was a unilateral position which meant that the country was unilaterally making decisions without even consulting or getting the approval of its friends. This indicated that the country was pulling back on its shared responsibilities on the international affairs.



## **ECONOMIC NATIONALISM**

The program of Trump was largely concerned with safeguarding American businesses and jobs with the help of protectionism. Kaura, V., & Era, T. (2017). This economic nationalism manifested itself through the wild renegotiation of trade agreements, such as the substitution of NAFTA with the USMCA, and through tariffs on friends and foes alike. The administration believed that trade involved a zero sum game and attempted to rectify what they perceived to be imbalances as well as shelter industries domestically which were generally contrary to any classical notions of free trade.

## **TRANSACTIONAL DIPLOMACY**

Trump's foreign policy was mostly based on deals, which was its most important trait. People thought of diplomacy as a series of agreements between two countries, and working together depended on short-term, real benefits for the United States. This plan changed alliances and partnerships into business deals, which meant that there had to be more "burden-sharing" and real rewards on investment. Ahmed, A., Rehman, M. M. U., & Umer, M. A. (2024). Trump always pushed NATO members to spend more on defence and thought that countries would have to pay for U.S. help before they could get it. All of these things together made a foreign policy that was unpredictable, focused on individuals, and tended to put short-term gains ahead of long-term strategic goals. In South Asia, this idea showed up as a selective engagement that improved ties with India based on common economic and geopolitical goals, while at the same time taking a harsher and more conditional approach to Pakistan.

## **HISTORICAL U.S.-INDIA-PAKISTAN RELATIONS**

The triangle of relationships between the U.S., India, and Pakistan is a delicate and shifting part of U.S. foreign policy that has been affected by changes in the world since the Cold War and after 9/11.

## **ALLIANCES DURING THE COLD WAR**

During the Cold War, the main thing that affected U.S. policy in South Asia was competition with the Soviet Union. Pakistan became a key ally since it was close to the USSR and was part of U.S.-led military alliances like CENTO and SEATO. This alignment gave Pakistan a lot of military and economic help. Gurjar, S. (2024). India, on the other hand, stayed neutral and often turned to the Soviet Union for help, especially after the 1971 war between India and Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh. During a lot of the Cold War, the U.S. and India had contentious relations because of this.

## **Change after the Cold War**

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the Cold war presented new opportunities as well as challenges. The US had an interest in better relations with India because Indian economy has opened up in the 1990s and India was increasingly becoming strategically important in the changing world. Sarker, M. M. (2018). Nevertheless, the rivalry between Pakistan and India complicated the way the U.S. intervened. Things were worsened by Pakistan offering sanctuary to militant groups and concerns that Pakistan was looking to spread nuclear weapons, this was further exacerbated when India and Pakistan conducted nuclear weapon tests in 1998.

## **THE WAR ON TERROR AND WHAT HAPPENED AFTER 9/11**

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks altered a lot of how the U.S. operated in South Asia. Pakistan was elevated to the status of a major ally in the U.S. led War on Terror and a front-line state in the struggle against the Taliban and al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Ur Rehman, A. (2021). This alliance provided mutual military assistance and cooperated with one another

although there existed high level of mistrust between them particularly due to the alleged support of Pakistan to some extremist groups. Bashir, F., Naseer, N., & Majeed, T. (2025). Meanwhile, the role of India increased due to the democratic government, powerful economy, and influence in the region. Bell, M. S., Kertzer, J. D., Jerdén, B., Shah, H., & Stirling, E. B. S. (2018). The U.S. established strategic relationships resulting in agreements such as U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement (2008). This is a big indication of change towards positive relations between the two nations. Post 9/11 U.S. has attempted to maintain stability in the region, yet it has been walking a fine line regarding its strategic interests in both Pakistan, its controversial partner, and India, its newfound partner.

## RESEARCH GAPS

Even though there have been a lot of studies on U.S. foreign policy in South Asia, there hasn't been much research on how the U.S. is involved with both India and Pakistan at the same time. Most studies look at these relationships on their own, without taking into account how they are connected by the competition between India and Pakistan. This disconnected approach doesn't take into account how U.S. policies towards one country affect others and the region as a whole. Many studies put security and counterterrorism first, often ignoring economic and diplomatic factors. The Trump administration's clear favoritism towards India and harsh treatment of Pakistan make it clear that a comparison is needed. There is also not much qualitative study that includes points of view from both countries. There isn't a lot of study that looks at how the U.S. talks about India and Pakistan to find strategic biases. To fully appreciate U.S. policies in this troubled area, these problems must be fixed.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How did the Trump administration redefine U.S. strategic priorities between India and Pakistan?
- In what ways did the "America First" policy shape U.S. engagement in South Asia?
- How did both countries perceive and respond to this shift?

## METHODOLOGY

This study is qualitative. The researcher has used both an interpretivist approach and a post-positivist philosophy in this work. The interpretivist method helps us understand how key players in India, Pakistan, and the U.S. view and interpret the effects of the "America First" agenda. It recognises that international relations are more complicated and subjective than just facts in a post-positivist way. This method shows complicated meanings of policy changes and diplomatic language, which is important for looking at how different South Asian countries reacted. It makes the analysis better by combining real-world research with contextual interpretation. It makes sure that the results are relevant to the situation and based on reliable methods. This research uses a qualitative case study design. A qualitative case study design is best for looking at the complicated and context-dependent aspects of Trump's foreign policy towards India and Pakistan. It makes it easier to look at all the diplomatic actions, formal language, and regional points of view. This strategy makes it clear how the "America First" idea has complicated implications in South Asia. It makes it easier to compare based on real political situations.

## DATA COLLECTION METHOD

The semi-structured interview method has been used for in-depth interviews with specialists in the same subject. This method allows for the study of personal opinions and experiences while also allowing for the investigation of new issues. The investigator used content analysis for secondary data and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke's methodology)

for primary data. Content analysis is important for carefully looking at textual material from interviews and documents to find patterns that are relevant to the topic at hand. Thematic analysis of primary data makes clear important themes and interpretations that come from the specified expertise in the field.

SAMPLING

Purposive sampling was used to get people of different ages, genders, and levels of education to reply. The sample size was 20 participants, or it went on until the issue was fully covered. The people who answered the questions have asked open-ended questions in English in places they like, such as their homes and offices.

DATA ANALYSIS Q-NO-1

How Would You Describe The Impact Of The Trump Administration’s “America First” Policy On U.S. Relations With India And Pakistan, Respectively?

Theme	Description	Example Codes	Country Focus
Strategic Favouritism	Perception that the U.S. visibly favoured India over Pakistan.	“India as a natural ally,” “Tilt toward New Delhi”	India (Positive), Pakistan (Negative)
Transactional Diplomacy	Emphasis on short-term, benefit-based engagement rather than long-term strategy.	“Quid pro quo,” “No free rides,” “Aid conditionality”	Both
Security Realignment	Shift in military and intelligence cooperation, especially cutting aid to Pakistan.	“Cuts in CSF,” “Defense deals with India”	Pakistan (Negative), India (Positive)
Perceived Abandonment	Feeling in Pakistan of being side-lined or punished.	“Isolation,” “Ignored,” “Lack of trust”	Pakistan
Strengthened Bilateralism	Deepening of India-U.S. ties in trade, defense, and diplomacy.	“2+2 dialogue,” “Arms sales,” “Shared democratic values”	India
Reduced Mediation Role	U.S. less involved as a neutral party in Indo-Pak disputes.	“No Kashmir mediation,” “India-focused diplomacy”	Both (Ne)

DESCRIPTION

The Trump administration's "America First" policy led to a unique strategic alignment with India, which improved relations between the two countries in defence, trade, and regional co- operation. On the other hand, relations between the U.S. and Pakistan got worse, with less aid and more pressure on counterterrorism measures. This change upset the usual balance of power and changed the way South Asia's diplomats work.



Q-No-2

In Your View, What Specific Actions Or Rhetoric During The Trump Era Signaled A Shift In U.S. Strategic Priorities In South Asia?

Theme	Description	Example Codes	Country Focus
Aid Suspension to Pakistan	Reduction or suspension of military and financial assistance to pressure Pakistan on terrorism.	“Aid cuts,” “Coalition Support Fund halt,” “Do more”	Pakistan (Negative)
India as Strategic Partner	Emphasis on India’s role in U.S. Indo-Pacific and defense strategy.	“Major defense partner,” “Shared values,” “Democratic ally”	India (Positive)
Hard-line Rhetoric Toward Pakistan	Critical statements blaming Pakistan for harbouring terrorists.	“Safe havens,” “Double game,” “Lies and deceit”	Pakistan (Negative)
Bilateral Embrace of India	Strengthening U.S.-India ties via diplomatic visits, defense agreements, and economic dialogue.	“Modi-Trump summits,” “Trade talks”	India (Positive)
Indo-Pacific Strategy Inclusion	Inclusion of India in the U.S. strategic Indo-Pacific vision to counter China.	“Free and open Indo-Pacific,” “Quad cooperation”	India (Positive), Regional
Absence of Mediation Role	U.S. refraining from intervening in Indo-Pak disputes, notably on Kashmir.	“No mediation,” “India’s internal matter”	Pakistan (Negative), India (Neutral to Positive)

DESCRIPTION

During Trump's time in office, the U.S. geopolitical goals in South Asia changed a lot. The approach was based on transactions and security. The 2017 South Asia Strategy stressed the need to keep putting pressure on the Taliban and told Pakistan to get rid of terrorist safe ha- vens in its own country. Trump's loud condemnation of Pakistan and cutting off aid to the country were big changes from how the US had acted diplomatically in the past. At the same time, the U.S. enhanced its strategic and defence ties with India, making it a counterweight to China. The change in rhetoric and policy made it clear that the U.S. was moving towards In- dia as a long-term ally and away from Pakistan as a key player in its regional strategy.

Q-NO-3

How Did Indian And Pakistani Political Or Diplomatic Circles Respond To This Shift In U.S. Foreign Policy Focus?

Theme	Description	Example Codes	Country Focus
Indian Optimism	India viewed the shift as validation of its regional and global significance.	“Natural ally,” “Defense and cooperation,” “U.S.-India synergy”	India (Positive)





Pakistani Diplomatic Discontent	Pakistan perceived bias and reacted critically to aid cuts and public criticism.	“Blame game,” “Unfair treatment,” “Strained trust”	Pakistan (Negative)
Increased Indian Engagement	Indian policymakers intensified diplomatic and defense dialogues with the U.S.	“High-level visits,” “Defense pacts,” “Strategic dialogues”	India (Proactive)
Pakistani Realignment Efforts	Pakistan sought closer ties with China, Russia, and other regional powers.	“Pivot to China,” “CPEC emphasis”	NewPakistan (Strategic Shift)
Security Reactions	India leveraged U.S. support for defense upgrades; Pakistan re-evaluated its security policy.	“S-400 purchase,” “CT defense upgrades; Pakistan re-cooperation,” “Reduced intel sharing”	Both
Narrative Management	Both governments used media and official channels to frame the U.S. shift domestically.	“Narrative building,” “Media diplomacy,” “Public rhetoric”	Both

DESCRIPTION

India and Pakistan reacted very differently to the change in U.S. foreign policy during the Trump administration, which shows how their strategic goals are different. Indian politicians and diplomats mostly welcomed the change, seeing it as a sign of India's growing importance in the world and its role in fighting China and terrorism. New Delhi said that defence ties had improved and that Washington had given more rhetorical support. Pakistani officials, on the other hand, were worried and angry, especially about cuts in aid and claims that the country was a safe haven for terrorists. Islamabad called the U.S. position unfair and worked to deep- en its diplomatic and economic ties with China and Russia over time.

Q-NO-4

Do You Think The Trump Administration’s Approach Promoted Regional Stability Or Increased Geopolitical Tensions In South Asia? Why?

Theme	Description	Example Codes	Implication
Heightened Indo-Pak Tensions	Trump’s perceived favouritism toward India worsened Pakistan’s security concerns.	“Strategic imbalance,” “Loss of trust,” “Increased hostility”	Increased Geopolitical Tension
Strengthened India-U.S. Axis	Closer U.S.-India ties were seen as stabilizing by India but alarming to Pakistan.	“Defense pacts,” “Shared interests,” “Regional leadership”	Mixed (Stability for India)
Erosion of U.S. Mediator Role	U.S. disengagement from traditional mediation led to fewer conflict resolution avenues.	“No Kashmir mediation,” “One-sided diplomacy”	Increased Tension
Pressure on Pakistan	U.S. punitive measures pushed Pakistan toward alternative alliances.	“Aid suspension,” “CPEC reliance,” “Strategic realignment”	Increased Regional Fragmentation



Strategic Clarity	Some viewed the shift as offering clearer alignment and policy predictability.	“Transparent policy,” “Clear signals,” “Defined expectations”	Moderate Stability (for India)
Short-Term Instability	Participants noted that transactional diplomacy caused volatility in relations.	“Unpredictable tweets,” “Policy swings,” “Lack of consistency”	Regional Volatility

DESCRIPTION

The Trump administration's plan may have made geopolitical tensions in South Asia worse instead of making the region more stable. The U.S. made things worse between the two nuclear-armed neighbours by publicly siding with India and being unfriendly towards Pakistan. The end of public aid and harsh words made Pakistan feel more like China and less like the U.S., which weakened U.S. influence in Islamabad. Pakistan saw the strengthening of U.S.- India ties as a threat, even though it was good for the U.S. and India, because it may lead to an arms race and diplomatic hostility. The change in approach focused on short-term strategic gains at the cost of long-term regional stability and peace.

Q-NO-5

To What Extent Did Economic Or Security Interests Shape Trump’s Engagement With India Versus Pakistan?

Theme	Description	Example Codes	Country Focus
Transactional Security Approach	U.S. tied security cooperation with Pakistan to performance on counterterrorism.	“Do more,” “Aid-for-action,” “CSF cuts”	Pakistan (Negative)
Defense Partnership with India	Emphasis on arms deals, joint military exercises, and strategic cooperation.	“COMCASA,” “BECA,” “Military exercises”	India (Positive)
Trade and Economic Friction	Trump criticized trade imbalances with both countries, but especially targeted India.	“Tariffs,” “Trade deficit,” “India removed from GSP”	India (Negative on trade)
Selective Investment Diplomacy	U.S. promoted private investment in India but reduced economic engagement with Pakistan.	“Energy deals,” “Tech investment,” “CPEC criticism”	India (Positive), Pakistan (Reduced)
Counterterrorism Conditionality	Pakistan’s security relationship was conditioned on anti-terror cooperation.	“Terror safe havens,” “Frozen military aid”	Pakistan (Negative)



Strategic Regional Calculations	U.S. used India to balance China, limiting broader engagement with Pakistan.	“Indo-Pacific pivot,” “Quad alliance,” “India as counterweight”	India (Strategic Partner), Pakistan (Marginalized)
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DESCRIPTION

The Trump administration's interactions with India and Pakistan were clearly affected by both economic and security goals, but not in the same way. Trump saw India as a big market for American goods and services. He put a lot of emphasis on economic interests and trade differences. Still, security issues, especially those related to stopping China's rise and strengthening Indo-Pacific alliances, played a big role in improving relations. On the other hand, the main reason for engaging with Pakistan was security, especially its role in the Af-ghan peace process and efforts to fight terrorism. Money issues weren't a big deal, and the relationship became increasingly transactional, with U.S. help depending on certain security outcomes. In short, India's strategic alignment and long-term economic potential made it a better partner than Pakistan.

Q-NO-6

Looking Ahead, How Do You Think These Policy Changes Have Influenced South Asia's Expectations Of Future U.S. Administrations?

Theme	Description	Implications for South Asia	Strategic Recalibrations by South Asia
Unpredictability of U.S. Policy	South Asia perceives increased volatility and inconsistency in U.S. foreign policy direction.	Heightened uncertainty about long-term U.S. commitments, especially regarding security and economic cooperation.	Diversification of alliances; hedging strategies to reduce dependency on U.S. support.
Transactional Approach	U.S. policies under "America First" focus more on transactional deals rather than multilateralism.	Expectation of a more self-interested and pragmatic U.S. approach toward South Asia.	Emphasis on bilateral negotiations; cautious engagement in multilateral forums.
Strategic Prioritization	U.S. signals fluctuating priorities, sometimes side-lining South Asia in favour of other regions.	Concerns about reduced attention and aid, especially vis-à-vis India-Pakistan dynamics and Afghanistan stability.	South Asian countries seek alternative partnerships (China, Russia, Middle East).
Security Cooperation	Changes in U.S. defense and counterterrorism policies impacting regional security architecture.	Expectation of conditional security cooperation linked to U.S. global strategy shifts.	Strengthening regional defense ties; increasing indigenous security capabilities.



<b>Economic Engagement</b>	Shifts in trade and aid policies impacting development and investment.	Doubts about sustained U.S. economic support and openness to South Asian markets.	Pursuit of economic diversification; increased regional economic integration efforts.
<b>Democratic Values and Human Rights</b>	Perceived inconsistencies in U.S. emphasis on democracy and human rights.	Skepticism about the reliability of U.S. promotion of democratic norms.	Pragmatic engagement, prioritizing national interests over ideological alignment.

DESCRIPTION

The Trump administration's changes to policy have changed South Asia's expectations for future U.S. administrations in many important ways. India looks forward to the continued improvement of its strategic, economic, and defence ties with the U.S. It hopes that future U.S. presidents would continue to treat India as a higher partner, especially when it comes to fighting China. On the other hand, Pakistan would expect the U.S. to be more cautious and conditional, based on doubts and hopes for accountability in counterterrorism efforts. The area may think that the U.S. policy is becoming more self-serving and less based on traditional allies or diplomatic aid. This has led India and Pakistan to make their foreign relations more diverse. India has done this with Western and Indo-Pacific countries, while Pakistan has done this with China, Russia, and the Gulf states. Because of this, South Asia today sees U.S. involvement as important, but not the only or most likely thing to happen.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

The "America First" policy of the Trump administration marked a major change in how the U. S. interacted with South Asia, notably with India and Pakistan. The government developed a transactional and interest-driven foreign policy, putting American economic and security goals ahead of traditional diplomatic ties. India and Pakistan were affected in different ways by this change. The Trump administration wanted to work more closely with India on security and strategy, mostly because they were both worried about China's rise in the Indo-Pacific area. There was a clear shift towards New Delhi when important steps were taken, such as supporting key defence accords (such COMCASA and BECA) and praising India's democratic values and economic prospects in public. Trump's trip to India in 2020 and his friendly relationship with Prime Minister Modi made this even more clear. On the other hand, relations with Pakistan got worse over time. The administration's harsh words, cuts to aid, and public claims that Islamabad was hiding terrorists showed how angry they were with Pakistan's role in the Afghan war. The end of military funding and Pakistan's placement on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list are two more examples of how the U.S. has gone from being tolerant to being more accountable. Indian politicians and diplomats supported the strategic alliance because they saw it as a sign of India's importance on the world stage and a shared vision for the Indo-Pacific region. India saw what the Trump administration said and did as proof that it could lead the region. On the other hand, Pakistani officials were not happy with the U.S. response, saying they were unhappy with what they saw as U.S. bias towards India and a lack of concern for Pakistan's security concerns. Pakistan's answer was to expand its foreign policy by improving ties with China, Russia, and the Gulf states. These different reactions showed how each country changed its diplomatic position in response to changing U.S.

priorities. Some others say that the Trump administration's approach made tensions in the region worse instead than better. The perceived bias against Pakistan and the pro-India stance made it less likely that there would be fair mediation in South Asia, especially when it came to the Kashmir crisis. The U.S. made the geopolitical conflict between India and Pakistan worse by overtly siding with India and ignoring Pakistan. The United States' inconsistent commitment to long-term peacebuilding in Afghanistan, together with its quick pullout plan, has also led to further instability in the area. The government was able to force Pakistan to support the U.S.-Taliban peace plan, but it didn't do anything about the larger instability in the region. The Trump administration's approach towards South Asia was shaped by different economic and security goals. India was a good partner since its economy was growing, it had a lot of potential customers, and its strategic interests were in line with those of the U.S. Trump often criticised economic imbalances with India, but he also promised to increase trade and investment between the two countries. Still, working together on security issues, notably to fight China and promote a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," became very important. On the other hand, people mostly saw Pakistan through the lens of security, especially when it came to its role in Afghanistan. The U.S. strategy was more constrained and utilitarian since economic engagement was limited and mostly conditional. The Trump administration's actions have changed how many in the region expect the U.S. to get involved. India expects to keep working closely with Washington on defence, technology, and Indo-Pacific cooperation. Pakistan, on the other hand, wants a more sceptical and businesslike relationship, so it needs to show that it can be trusted in the fight against terrorism and for regional security. India has strengthened ties with Western allies and regional partners, while Pakistan has become more dependent on China and other non-Western powers. In South Asia, the main point is that U.S. foreign policy is becoming more affected by changing strategic goals than by long-term ties. As a result, future U.S. administrations may find a region that is more cautious, has other allies, and doesn't depend on American leadership as much. This change in strategy shows how Trump's "America First" ideology still affects South Asian geopolitics.

## DISCUSSION

The "America First" policy of the Trump administration changed the way the U.S. interacts with South Asia in a big way, putting India and Pakistan on different pathways. Trump's foreign policy, which was based on deals, changed what people thought diplomatic relations should be like. It put strategic and economic rewards ahead of loyalty to allies. India has gained a lot from this change. The U.S. government has improved defence cooperation with India and recognised India's leadership in the area, notably as a counterbalance to China. New Delhi's view of a stronger partnership grew stronger after agreements like COMCASA and BECA and Trump's visit to India in 2020. Pakistan, on the other hand, faced more scrutiny and less diplomatic goodwill. The suspension of aid and harsh public criticism of its role in Afghanistan showed that it was moving towards a policy of conditional engagement. The different dynamics led to different reactions: India strengthened its ties with the U.S., while Pakistan changed its approach by building stronger ties with China, Russia, and Gulf states. This difference in policy made tensions in the region worse because Washington's obvious bias towards India made it harder for the U.S. to be an impartial mediator in South Asian conflicts, especially those over Kashmir. The U.S. pulled out of Afghanistan without a long-term plan for stabilising the country, leaving a power vacuum that made the region even less stable. India was a better partner since it had a lot of market potential and was in line with U.S. Indo-Pacific goals. Pakistan's



role was mostly limited to security cooperation and counterterrorism activities. Both countries are changing how they think about their relationships with the US. India wants to keep its strategic alignment with the US, while Pakistan wants a more cautious and conditional engagement. These changes are part of a larger trend in South Asia to adapt to a U.S. foreign policy that is more unpredictable and based on interests. This shows how the Trump administration's strategy will have a long-lasting effect on the region's geopolitical view.

## CONCLUSION

There was a clear strategic convergence between the Trump administration and India. This was because both countries were worried about China's aggressive behaviour and their economic and defence interests were becoming more aligned. The shift was made more important by big accords like COMCASA and BECA, which made it easier for the U.S. and Indian armed forces to work together. The Trump administration always praised India's democratic values and strategic importance, making it a key partner in the push for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific." Economic alignment played a big role because efforts to improve trade between the two countries continued even while there were disagreements about tariffs. This changing cooperation showed that the U.S. was reevaluating its goals in South Asia, making India a key part of Washington's strategy in the region. People only saw Pakistan as a security threat during the Trump administration, which made things worse and put more pressure on the two countries' diplomatic trust. The government's focus on Pakistan's role in Afghanistan and counterterrorism overshadowed broader cooperation between the two countries, limiting the relationship to a small set of security needs. The tensions got worse when funding was cut, military support stopped, and people publicly accused the country of harbouring terrorists. This policy didn't encourage cooperation; instead, it pushed Islamabad away from its friends and towards new ones like China and Russia. The U.S. had less power in Pakistan and made things worse in the region because it didn't have a good plan for getting involved. The "America First" approach used by the Trump administration had some short-term tactical benefits, including as putting pressure on Pakistan to fight terrorism and improving ties with India as a strategic counterweight to China. But this policy hurt long-term stability in the region and made the U.S. less credible in South Asia. The clear transactional attitude and inconsistent participation caused confusion among regional partners, hurting Washington's reputation as a reliable and fair operator. The U.S. put short-term national interests ahead of long-term diplomatic connections, which made it harder for the U.S. to solve problems or build lasting peace. This made South Asia more divided and fearful.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- The US should have a fair, principle-based policy in South Asia that carefully looks at the complicated relationship between India and Pakistan. This method would focus on long-term regional stability, respect for sovereignty, and encouraging conversation instead of transactional techniques. The U.S. can rebuild trust, encourage peaceful conflict resolution, and improve multilateral cooperation by treating both countries fairly and consistently. By using a principle-based approach, the US would be seen as a more trustworthy partner. This would allow the US to help with security issues while also improving economic and diplomatic ties throughout the area.
- To keep the discourse going and ease tensions in the area, it is important for institutions to work more closely with India and Pakistan. The U.S. could help the two

countries communicate and work together more consistently by improving diplomatic channels, increasing cultural and educational exchanges, and supporting multilateral forums. This involvement would build trust between the two sides, help them deal with shared security problems like terrorism and extremism, and make it easier for them to work together to end conflicts, especially in Kashmir. Setting up regular meetings and working together on projects can help the U.S. work with other countries in South Asia on issues other than bilateral tensions. This will make the U.S. more powerful and committed to peace and stability in the region.

- For lasting peace in South Asia, it is important to avoid too much militarisation and put diplomatic normalisation first. The large military buildup and antagonistic attitudes could make things worse and start arms races between India and Pakistan. The U.S. should put more emphasis on encouraging conversation and taking steps to create trust that will lead to a diplomatic solution to the problems between the two sides. Promoting peace talks, supporting steps that create trust, and helping third parties mediate can help clear up misunderstandings and make the region more stable. The U.S. can help make South Asia a safer and more cooperative place by putting diplomacy before of military action.

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