



INSIDE PAKISTAN: DOMESTIC CHALLENGES AND EXTERNAL IMPERATIVES



Editors

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Inside Pakistan: Domestic Challenges and External Imperatives

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Edited by Imran Ahmed, Claudia Chia, Kunthavi Kalachelvam and John Vater

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Introduction

Imran Ahmed

Home to recurring ethnic as well as sectarian nationalisms and disputed borders with neighbouring nations, an encompassing, stable and inclusive sense of Islamic nationhood has been difficult to define in Pakistan.

The study of Pakistani politics is not only captivating in its sheer dynamism but also imposing in the task of decoding its manifold complexities, hidden forces and intricate nuances. Scholars and commentators grappling with domestic political developments in Pakistan are often required to contend with the blinding pace of political change, the fluid shifting nature of political alliances and the kaleidoscopic blur of new and evolving configurations of political actors. Moreover, Pakistan is situated in a sensitive regional context, marked often by instability, suspicion and competition rather than cooperation, collaboration and trust. The country's internal make-up consists of a mosaic of cultures, languages, religions and religious sects, and a layered, often hierarchical, social strata. This tense regional setting and complex internal sociology is embroiled in the makings of and contestation over local and national identities, as well as political struggles over issues of recognition, resource allocation and representation. Home to recurring ethnic as well as sectarian nationalisms and disputed borders with neighbouring nations, an encompassing, stable and inclusive sense of Islamic nationhood has been difficult to define in Pakistan. The religious 'other' occupies a contested space in the Pakistani national imagination. What it means to be Pakistani has been an ongoing source of intense social, political, and often violent conflict since the founding of the state in August 1947. This tension bears heavily over the design of laws, socio-cultural policies and the constitutional set-up within Pakistan, and foreign engagement and international activism abroad.

That Pakistan sits at the intersection of major global trade routes renders the country crucial to the imperial ambitions of global superpowers. Unsurprisingly, Pakistan has often been wound up in global political and ideological struggles. Whether it is the Afghan jihad of the 1980s, the 'War on Terror' following the tragic events of September 11 or the Belt and Road Initiative in recent years, Pakistan is often central to the imperial designs of world powers. Its involvement in these grand military, ideological or economic projects continues

to shape and transform its domestic politics and inner economic workings to the present day. History, in other words, both recent and past, is indispensable to the observer and analyst in coming to terms with the broader trajectories of Pakistan's internal flux and its place in the world. Pakistan's declining economic fortune adds new layers of instability as it struggles to grapple, negotiate, and manoeuvre between the whims and limits imposed between donors and lenders. There is also the factor and influence of the establishment, a euphemism for Pakistan's powerful and seemingly omnipresent armed forces and intelligence agencies. The influence of these institutions on political developments is often difficult to underestimate and harder still to determine, making the puzzle of Pakistani politics all the more perplexing. Unravelling the hidden machinations of inimical foreign powers and the influence of powerful internal forces remains a fixture of Pakistan's public and political discourse, fuelling conspiracies and raising questions over the loyalties of Pakistan's political class and the legitimacy of its formal democratic, electoral, and constitutional processes.

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This issue of the South Asia Discussion Papers series aspires to place recent developments in Pakistan in a broader perspective and identify the key tensions driving political contestations in the country. It presents short, accessible but comprehensive and provocative papers which take stock of the complex interactions between the historical and the contemporary state and society, between the local, the regional and the global, and between the structural or institutional, with the evolving social and political. It asks the following questions: what are the foremost domestic political and economic issues facing Pakistan? What are their origins, causes and impacts? How have the various recent political dispensations in Pakistan sought to mitigate, navigate and respond to these challenges? How have these challenges evolved in response to ongoing political developments in the country? And how have they reshaped domestic civil-military, centre-periphery, and majority-minority relations within and Pakistan's relations with its neighbours, other Muslim majority states and the global powers?

This volume opens with an evaluation of Imran Khan's prime ministerial term. Khan promised much but his achievements and legacies remain contested by commentators and analysts. Zahid Ahmed offers an incisive assessment of his performance, analysing his leadership style, the development of Khan's cult of personality, the substance of his Islamic vision and the profound political and economic challenges faced by his administration. Khan led a fragile coalition government but commanded formidable street power. However, it was his close ties to the armed forces which ultimately determined the course of his political fortunes, including his initial electoral success and, ultimately, his fall from high office. Ayesha Siddiqa details the inner intricacies of Khan's relationship with the military within the broader historical backdrop of civil-military relations in the country and the pressures which Pakistan's reliance on international powers places on this relationship. The guiding focus of her paper is an assessment of Khan's role in defining the overall foreign policy of Pakistan and the challenges he has left behind for the current Shehbaz Sharif administration.

The struggle for power and contestation over the meaning of Pakistan are often intimately intertwined.

While state and political institutions grapple for power and influence in Pakistan, they do so in ongoing engagement with the question of the purpose of the state itself. The struggle for power and contestation over the meaning of Pakistan are often intimately intertwined. The armed forces, for instance, have long justified their preeminence as defenders of Pakistan's territorial and ideological integrity. General Zia ul Haq, for instance, had (in)famously declared himself as a "soldier of Islam" and argued that "Pakistan, which was created in the name of Islam, will continue to survive only if it sticks to Islam. That is why I consider the introduction of [an] Islamic system as an essential prerequisite for the country."¹ Islam, however, is both a source of national identity and a lightning rod of division. The conflicting and contradictory visions of an Islamic Pakistan continue to raise difficult questions concerning how Pakistan should become 'Islamic'. Differences in opinion, as I show in my paper, has resulted in disturbing politics of exclusion and extremism. And in the contemporary period, governments, including

1 S Akbar Zaidi, "Despotic Islamisation", Special Report: Darkness Descends 1977-1988, *Dawn*, 17 October 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1364410>.

that of Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, remain wedged between calling upon Islam for political legitimacy, appeasing powerful far-right groups and battling militant Islamist resistance against the state.

As Pakistan stammers in economic crises of seismic proportions, Asma Hyder provides the context and perspective on the country's financial woes in her paper, arguing that the issues of Pakistan's economy are deep-rooted. She maintains that although previous governments have sought to address the issue, they have struggled to achieve the desired economic growth and macroeconomic stability that Pakistan has long needed. Hyder further notes that while the pandemic has posed profound challenges for all economies, the issues are notably complex and manifold in Pakistan. Debt is a major problem for Pakistan's shrinking economy. In her paper, Katharine Adeney points out that Pakistan's bilateral debt to China tripled from US\$5,210 million (S\$7,474 million) in 2015 to US\$14,180 million (S\$20,000 million) in 2021. She examines the politics and problems of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) peddled either as the solution to the country's economic woes or as a debt snare to entrap the country to Chinese control. Adeney suggests that though the problems with the CPEC are many and longstanding, there are also opportunities for Pakistan to make the most of these investments.

Debt is a major problem for Pakistan's shrinking economy.

Raja Mohan outlines how the Kashmir question has come to increasingly shape bilateral relations between India and Pakistan. He traces the strategies of the two countries in a game of one-upmanship, arguing that while Pakistan's dispute with India over Kashmir harks back to the founding days of the two states, in recent years, the issue has acquired greater political significance, with India currently possessing the upper hand over Pakistan. While normalising diplomatic relations with India possesses extensive hurdles, Chulanee Attanayake and Mohammad Masudur Rahman offer a compelling case for strengthening Pakistan's ties with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, suggesting improving relations, particularly through increasing economic partnerships and growing cultural bonds, present potential developmental opportunities for all three countries. Zahid Hussain unpacks the security implications for Pakistan with the return of

Taliban rule in Afghanistan. He suggests restoring of the Islamic Emirate is a blow to pluralism, gender equality, inclusive government and democracy within Afghanistan. He also maintains that transforming an insurgent group with various ideological and factional differences into a unified governing apparatus will be no easy task. Hussain explains that emboldened militant groups are a corollary of the Taliban rule, which poses new dangers to both Pakistan and the stability and security of the broader South Asian region.

Turkey and Pakistan share a long history of good relations and remain bound through many areas of mutual interest.

Turkey and Pakistan share a long history of good relations and remain bound through many areas of mutual interest. While ties between the two nations have grown in recent years, notably through pacts to support military exchanges, defence contracts and economic collaboration, Ihsan Yilmaz shows that the two countries have struggled to turn their good relations into substantive forms of lasting cooperation. His paper looks at the various stumbling blocks which impede Turkey-Pakistan cooperation and the implications of Turkey's success in projecting its soft power in Pakistan. While Turkey and Pakistan are both Muslim middle powers and share cultural and ideological affinities, Masood Khalid looks at the curious case of Pakistan's long-standing good relations with China, a country with whom it shares little socio-political features in common. Khalid's paper offers a historical survey of watershed moments which have contributed to building mutual trust between the two nations.

While China and Pakistan have sought to provide mutual support in times of both hardship and ease, Touqir Hussain, in his paper, maintains that Pakistan's relationship with the United States (US) lacks consensus and longevity and requires frequent reset. He argues that Pakistan does not have permanent importance or any lasting place in US foreign policy. To him, Islamabad's importance has differed based on the US' fluctuating interests in the region. US-Pakistan relations, in other words, stand in glaring contrast to China and Pakistan's "all-weather" partnership. On the other hand, Pakistan-Russia relations are an illustrative example of extraneous geopolitical and geostrategic conditions bringing erstwhile rivals closer together. Syed Muhammad Saad Zaidi's study of Pakistan-Russia relations emphasises the need

to look beyond security to establish long-term, cordial bilateral ties and suggests that good relations and multifaceted cooperation are mutually beneficial to both states.

Matthew Nelson's paper details Pakistan's complex relationship with the Middle East, a region where countries are deeply divided on the issue of supporting Islamist movements. This division places Pakistan, historically of pro-Islamist orientation, in a difficult situation where it must balance the conflicting dynamics of maintaining its long-standing anti-Islamist ally Saudi Arabia, draw on the support of pro-Islamist countries in the Middle East like Iran, respond to pressing domestic exigencies, juggle its geostrategic interests, and hold fast to its pro-Islamism values. Nelson argues that maintaining neutrality will be a profound challenge for Pakistan. Finally, the volume closes with Iqbal Singh Sevea's reflections on the political future of Pakistan as the country effectively operates in "election mode". Sevea believes that the judiciary and the military, both non-elected institutions, will determine the country's future political process.

What happens in Pakistan is of profound global significance. Domestic developments have extra-regional repercussions, rendering the need to understand Pakistan and its ongoing imperative within and beyond the country. Moreover, Pakistan's nuclear capabilities, its geography as *nexus* between South and Central Asia, and South Asia and the Middle East, its emergence as a Muslim middle power on the world stage, its close relationships with the major world players, its potential to spread Islamist radicalism or its capacity to compound regional instability, are factors often cited as reasons for taking Pakistan seriously. But recognition of Pakistan's global geopolitical significance poses particular challenges for scholarly inquiry. The urge to box Pakistan into taxonomic political science categorisations such as 'failed state' or 'terrorism ground zero' is an inviting, easy but misguided temptation. A burgeoning genre of analytical and policy writing has emerged, especially in the aftermath of September 11, which frames Pakistan as a geopolitical problem requiring bold and calculated solutions. However, this literature is often reductive and fails to recognise Pakistan's unique historical, sociological and

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economic circumstances and its almost unwavering resilience in enduring frequent cycles of crisis, political deadlocks and social conflict. It is also often remiss of the fact that Pakistan itself is often the nearest and most affected casualty of the instability it experiences. This publication spotlights the importance of viewing and analysing Pakistan on its own terms.

Score Card: Imran Khan's *Naya* Pakistan and the Madina Dream

Zahid Shahab Ahmed

Summary

After his party's rather surprising win in the 2018 elections, Imran Khan became the 22nd prime minister of Pakistan. Leading up to the elections and after becoming the prime minister, Khan tried to realise his vision of an Islamic welfare state based on the model of the first Muslim state, Riyasat-e-Madina. Faced with numerous challenges, such as an economy in distress and income inflation, Khan's government implemented some pro-poor initiatives and other programmes in line with his vision. In April 2022, his government faced a no-confidence vote resulting in Khan not completing his full five-year term. As his government was around for over three years, it is still timely to look back at the scorecard of Khan's dream of Naya Pakistan.

Introduction

Soon after commencing his cricketering career in the 1970s for Pakistan – a cricket-crazy nation – Khan became a celebrity. The climax of his career was when he led Pakistan's cricket team to victory in the World Cup in 1992. Simultaneously, he carried out charitable work and established the 'Shaukat Khanum Cancer Hospital' in Lahore. He entered politics after founding the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in 1996. He won a National Assembly seat from his hometown, Mianwali, in 2002. After boycotting the 2008 elections, PTI emerged as the second-largest party in terms of votes in the 2013 elections and formed a coalition government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. To the surprise of many political analysts, PTI won enough seats to elect Khan as the country's 22nd prime minister in August 2018. After nearly 22 years in politics, this was a priceless victory in which his promises to his voters played an important factor.

After nearly 22 years in politics, this was a priceless victory in which his promises to his voters played an important factor.

Leading up to the 2018 general elections, Khan made bold promises to create a *Naya* Pakistan (New Pakistan) and a state based on the ideals of the first Muslim state (Riyasat-e-Madina). So, how was Pakistan going to be ‘new’ as per Khan’s vision? While comparing himself with erstwhile leaders of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Khan vowed that he would live a simple life without any luxuries.¹ As is clear from his party’s manifesto, Khan promised that he would achieve the target of *Naya* Pakistan through a range of measures, including punishing corrupt leaders, fixing the crisis-ridden economy and promoting the rule of law and an Islamic welfare state.²

An Appraisal

The first was PTI’s inclusion of several key members who were previously in other parties that Khan labelled as corrupt.

Before presenting a scorecard on Khan’s government, it is important to highlight some issues that created a legitimacy crisis for the PTI government. The first was PTI’s inclusion of several key members who were previously in other parties that Khan labelled as corrupt. These included prominent names like Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry, both of whom were part of the PPP. The second was the issue of the military’s influence in the 2018 general elections favouring Khan. While Khan repeatedly denied any such favours, it is no secret that his party has close connections to some generals in the Pakistani army. There is a long history of the Pakistan army influencing domestic politics, and this was also reflected recently when the PTI and opposition parties jointly endorsed an amendment in the 1952 Army Act that ultimately allowed the controversial three-year extension in the tenure of General Qamar Javed Bajwa, Chief of Army Staff, in 2020.

- 1 Adam Withnall, “Imran Khan sheds hundreds of servants and says Pakistan’s elite must pay tax as his first cabinet is sworn in”, *Independent*, 20 August 2018. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/imran-khan-pakistan-tax-rich-prime-minister-servants-cabinet-swearing-in-a8499591.html>.
- 2 “The Road to Naya Pakistan: PTI Manifesto 2018”, pp. 6-7, <https://pmo.gov.pk/documents/manifesto-pti.pdf>.

Before discussing the austerity measures, it is important to explain certain concepts central to the PTI. As mentioned earlier, these included the creation of an Islamic welfare state based on the model of Riyasat-e-Madina. But what were those ideals in Khan's view?³ He described what he meant by an Islamic welfare state, "The Holy Prophet (PBUH [Peace Be Upon Him]) and Khulafa-e-Rashideen practically materialised this thought [welfare state] in the first Hijri century."⁴ On 11 November 2019, he also sent the following message via Twitter, "The Holy Prophet (PBUH) founded the State of Madinah on modern principles of Rule of Law, Human Rights, Compassion, Meritocracy & the Pursuit of Knowledge as a sacred duty. If a state follows these principles, it will rise."⁵

Linked to the concept of the first Muslim state is Khan's claim of simplicity similar to that of the first four caliphs. Soon after coming to power, he initiated several austerity measures, including refusing to live in the luxurious Prime Minister's House, auctioning luxury cars bought by previous governments and selling milk cows. The auction was held at the prime minister's residence in Islamabad, and eight cows were sold for roughly US\$19,000 (S\$25,818).⁶ A key focus of this austerity drive was on the prime minister's personal expenses, paid for by public funds, which the Khan government claims reduced significantly from PKR218 million (S\$1.62 million) to PKR46 million (S\$342,500).⁷ Khan remained consistent with his humble dressing as he continued to wear simple local attire (shalwar and kameez) even during his overseas trips.⁸ However, his simplicity claims were not

Khan remained consistent with his humble dressing as he continued to wear simple local attire (shalwar and kameez) even during his overseas trips.

3 "Imran should stop politics on Riyasat-e-Madina", *Pakistan Observer*, November 2019, <https://pakobserver.net/imran-should-stop-politics-on-riyasat-e-madina-marriyum/>.

4 "PM Imran reaffirms resolve to make Pakistan an Islamic welfare state", *The Express Tribune*, 10 November 2019, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2097041/1-eid-miladun-nabi-president-alvi-pm-imran-reiterate-efforts-establish-welfare-state>.

5 Imran Khan (@ImranKhanPTI), "Our Prophet PBUH founded the State of Madinah on modern principles of Rule of Law...", Twitter, 10 November 2019, 10:46 PM, <https://twitter.com/imrankhanpti/status/1193540328382517251>.

6 "PM Imran Khan sells Sharif's cows at a premium", *Khaleej Times*, 27 September 2018, <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/article/pm-imran-sells-sharifs-cows-at-a-premium>.

7 "PM house, PMO expenses reduced to Rs46m in PTI govt's austerity drive", *The Express Tribune*, 8 March 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2288090/pm-house-pmo-expenses-reduced-to-rs46m-in-pti-govts-austerity-drive>.

8 "Here are five style highlights from PM Imran from his 69th birthday", *Dawn*, 12 March 2022, <https://images.dawn.com/news/1188527>.

free from criticism as the opposition questioned him about using a helicopter between his home and office and chartered flights during international travels.⁹ As soon as Khan was removed from office, the new government reported that Khan's helicopter rides from the Prime Minister's House to his residence in Islamabad cost taxpayers PKR980 million (S\$7.2 million) during the PTI government's tenure.¹⁰

While the target of phase one was not achieved, langars were opened in major metropolitans like Islamabad, where a langar fed around 600 to 800 people daily.

The key elements of an Islamic welfare state include pro-poor policies and actions. Building on his charitable work and credibility, Khan continued with some important initiatives. These included shelter homes for the homeless, *langars* (communal free kitchens) and health cards for the marginalised segments. In 2019, Khan launched the *Ehsaas-Saylani Langar* scheme under the Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Division to provide free food to the poor twice a day. This programme was a collaboration between the government and the Saylani Trust; and the plan was to open 112 soup kitchens (*langars*) in the first phase within the first year. While the target of phase one was not achieved, *langars* were opened in major metropolitans like Islamabad, where a *langar* fed around 600 to 800 people daily.¹¹ Government officials and PTI leaders were often seen visiting these *langars* and eating alongside the poor. This programme was important because the *2021 Global Hunger Index* ranked Pakistan at 92 out of 116 countries.¹² In addition, there was the health card scheme, *Sehat Sahulat Program*¹³ for the needy, through which the government provided a maximum of PKR1 million (S\$7,600) per family annually, for all kinds of medical procedures, including cancer treatment and open-heart surgery.¹⁴ Further, the government opened 17 shelter homes

9 Tahir Imran and Patrick Evans, "Imran Khan mocked for helicopter home-to-work commute", *BBC*, 30 August 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-trending-45356096>.

10 Sanaullah Khan, "Govt claims Rs980m spent on Imran Khan's back-and-forth air travel from PM House to Bani Gala", *Dawn*, 21 April 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1686115>.

11 "Ehsaas Langar," *Government of Pakistan*, [https://www.pass.gov.pk/userfiles1/files/1_%20Brief_English-Ehsaas%20Langars_April%2015\(1\).pdf](https://www.pass.gov.pk/userfiles1/files/1_%20Brief_English-Ehsaas%20Langars_April%2015(1).pdf)

12 "Pakistan," *Global Hunger Index*, <https://www.globalhungerindex.org/pakistan.html>.

13 Sehat Sahulat Program, Government of Pakistan, <https://www.pmhealthprogram.gov.pk/>.

14 "Number of hospitals to be increased to 1000 under 'sehat sahulat program' by March: CEO", *Daily Times*, 16 January 2022, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/869670/number-of-hospitals-to-be-increased-to-1000-under-sehat-sahulat-program-by-march-ceo/>.

and planned to double that number to provide accommodation for the homeless.¹⁵

While these are important initiatives, feeding Pakistan's poor is a momentous task, considering the sheer scale of the need. During the PTI government's tenure, income inflation constantly increased, making it challenging to address the needs of the marginalised in the country.¹⁶ This fact was demonstrated through the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data showing an increase in the number of moderately to severely food-insecure households from 15.9 per 100 households in 2018-2019 to 16.4 in 2019-2020. As more people were pushed below the poverty line,¹⁷ the government needed to spread the web of its social services.¹⁸

Riyasat-e-Madina was established because of the constitution of Madina. It was believed to be written during 622-624 CE, when non-Muslims were guaranteed the same political and cultural rights as Muslims. On this front, Khan focused on promoting interfaith harmony in Pakistan. He appointed Maulana Tahir Ashrafi as the Special Representative of the Prime Minister on Interfaith Harmony. Ashrafi regularly met with religious leaders of other faiths and sectarian groups and was even spotted praying inside a church in Pakistan.¹⁹ The PTI government was also lauded for its commitment to initiatives like the Kartarpur Corridor – an important religious site for Sikhs – which opened in 2019.²⁰ While such gestures were important, much remained to be done to provide safety and security and equal rights to religious minorities who became extra vulnerable

The PTI government was also lauded for its commitment to initiatives like the Kartarpur Corridor – an important religious site for Sikhs – which opened in 2019.

15 Shabbir Hussain, "'Ehsaas' to open 17 new shelter homes", *The Express Tribune*, 19 July 2021, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2311345/ehsaas-to-open-17-new-shelter-homes>.

16 "Inflation, pandemic pushing people into poverty in Pakistan", *WION*, 10 August 2021, <https://www.wionews.com/world/inflation-pandemic-pushing-people-into-poverty-in-pakistan-404665>.

17 "Poverty in Pakistan up from 4.4% to 5.4%: World Bank", *WION*, 22 June 2021, <https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/poverty-in-pakistan-up-from-44-to-54-world-bank-393089>.

18 Shabbir Hussain, "'Ehsaas' to open 17 new shelter homes", op. cit.

19 Ahtesham Khan, "WATCH: Muslims pray inside Peshawar church in show of solidarity", *The Express Tribune*, 31 January 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2341291/watch-muslims-pray-inside-peshawar-church-in-show-of-solidarity>.

20 Zahid Shahab Ahmed, "Reopening the Kartarpur Corridor: Tangible benefits for Indo-Pak ties", ISAS Brief No. 882, Institute of South Asian Studies, 29 November 2021, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/reopening-the-kartarpur-corridor-tangible-benefits-for-indo-pak-ties>.

During Khan's term, violent religious extremism remained a major challenge and was witnessed through the murders of a Pakistani Christian and a Sri Lankan worker due to blasphemy accusations.

after the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan in August 2021. During Khan's term, violent religious extremism remained a major challenge and was witnessed through the murders of a Pakistani Christian and a Sri Lankan worker due to blasphemy accusations.²¹ In this regard, the National Action Plan (NAP) on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and terrorism is an important policy document that needed further amendments to counter extremist narratives against sectarian and religious minorities. While the government produced the new 2021 NAP with emphasis on uniform CVE laws, regulating places of worship and countering extremism through madrassas and public and private schools,²² there was no mention of how extremist narratives would be countered.

A troublesome aspect of the PTI government was the way it tackled corruption. There were several corruption cases against opposition leaders, including Nawaz Sharif of the PML-N and Asif Zardari of the PPP. Khan made his intentions clear during the election campaign of 2018 when he said, "The self-proclaimed kings go abroad and buy palaces and expensive properties. They siphon funds from here and their kids sit abroad on billions in businesses."²³ He promised that he would bring back that looted money.²⁴ Despite being convicted, Sharif was allowed to travel to London for medical treatment and since then has not returned.²⁵ However, there is yet no sign of the looted money having come back to Pakistan. Overall, the PTI government was unable to handle this massive corruption challenge. Despite its

21 "Enraged mob kills man accused of burning Koran in remote Pakistani village", *ABC News*, 14 February 2022, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-02-14/man-accused-of-blasphemy-killed-by-mob-in-pakistan/100827244> and; Shah Meer Baloch and Hannah Ellis-Petersen, "Man tortured and killed in Pakistan over 'blasphemy'", *The Guardian*, 22 December 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/03/pakistan-sri-lankan-man-priyantha-diyawadana-tortured-killed-alleged-blasphemy-sialkot>.

22 Asif Chaudhry, "New anti-extremism policy to keep tabs on law enforcement ranks", *Dawn*, 22 January 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1670809>.

23 "PPP, PMLN broke all records of corruption: Imran Khan", *The News*, 16 July 2018, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/342409-imran-says-he-educates-people-about-problems-inflicted-by-pml-n-ppp>.

24 Kashif Zafar and Owais Karni, "PPP, PML-N looted country by turns: Imran Khan", *The Express Tribune*, 12 July 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1755687/1-ppp-pml-n-looted-country-turns-imran-khan>.

25 Ayaz Gul, "Pakistan's convicted ex-PM flown to London for medical treatment", *Voice of America*, 16 November 2019, https://www.voanews.com/a/south-central-asia_pakistans-convicted-ex-pm-flown-london-medical-treatment/6179666.html.

claims that there was zero corruption under the PTI's administration,²⁶ a Transparency International report found Pakistan sliding from 16 spots to 140 out of 180 countries in its corruption perception survey.²⁷ Khan failed to fulfil his promise of ending corruption within 19 days of his government.²⁸

Conclusion

In the lead-up to the 2018 general elections, Khan also promised to address various challenges, including poverty and corruption. While his government implemented various pro-poor initiatives, the task became more difficult with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and income inflation. As the country's economy continued to deteriorate, Khan had no choice but to ask for loans from other states and the International Monetary Fund. The poor economic situation and continuous income inflation pushed millions more below the poverty line, thereby increasing the demand for government's schemes, such as *langars*, shelter homes and health cards. With limited funds, it was highly unlikely that such services would reach out to all those who needed them. Nonetheless, such initiatives were central to Khan's vision of an Islamic welfare state and his government's plan was to expand these initiatives. These were done, albeit at a slow pace. However, these were not permanent solutions as millions needed equal opportunities to be able to earn a respectable living. That could only happen through the creation of a conducive environment where industries thrive, and foreign investment grew – ultimately creating more job opportunities. With regards to violent extremism, the government revised the NAP but this plan needed regular appraisals to ensure that extremist narratives and hate crimes were constantly tackled.

While his government implemented various pro-poor initiatives, the task became more difficult with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and income inflation.

26 "No corruption case surfaced during PTI Govt: Farrukh", *Associate Press of Pakistan*, 25 January 2022, <https://www.app.com.pk/national/no-corruption-case-surfaced-during-pti-govt-farrukh/>.

27 Zulqernain Tahir, Syed Irfan Raza and Amin Ahmed, "Pakistan's transparency ranking worse off under PTI", *Dawn*, 26 January 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1671455/pakistans-transparency-ranking-worse-off-under-pti>.

28 "PTI will end corruption in 19 days, terrorism in 90 days: Imran Khan", *The Express Tribune*, 26 February 2012, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/342104/pti-will-end-corruption-in-19-days-terrorism-in-90-days-imran-khan>.

In conclusion, Khan initiated several programmes to actualise his vision of Riyasat-e-Madina. However, these initiatives faced serious challenges. His pro-poor programmes needed more resources, given that there was great need, particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. The dilapidated state of the economy made it difficult for the PTI government to allocate necessary and much-needed resources towards such welfare schemes. Similarly, Khan needed to do more for interfaith harmony and the protection of religious minorities, which were central to Riyasat-e-Madina. Overall, Khan was nowhere near to achieving his *Naya* Pakistan by the time he left office in April 2022.

Power Balancing Power with an Internal Imbalance: Islamabad vs Rawalpindi – Managing a Changing World Order?

Ayesha Siddiqa

Summary

Pakistan has faced significant internal political developments over the past few months. The passing of a no-confidence vote to remove Prime Minister Imran Khan became tumultuous. The Supreme Court intervened with its suo moto ruling to enact the final decision' leading to the vote being passed. Now, Khan is no longer incumbent as Shehbaz Sharif takes office until the next elections are held in August 2023. At this crucial juncture, it is important to revisit Khan's time as prime minister and the plans he had set for his government. This assessment will aid in setting the scene as to what Shehbaz is inheriting from his predecessor. This paper hopes to examine how Khan's role played a part in defining the overall foreign policy of Pakistan and his government's previous aspirations for the state.

Introduction

The end of the War on Terror era seemed to gradually dovetail into the return of global geopolitics in which competition between states, according to the United States (US) and then-Soviet Union Cold War years, had become the hallmark. While threat by non-state actors and terrorism is now in the background, it is the China-US rivalry and a growing US-Russia hostility that are driving global politics and increasing challenges for states around the world that for the last three decades, had lost the piquancy of great power competition. Countries like Pakistan that traditionally benefitted from alignment with the US during the Cold War do not want to be aligned with any of the powers. This is despite its close relations with Beijing and a less warm but working relationship with Washington. However, the question is if Islamabad has the capacity to pull its plan through? Does it have a workable plan to be part of the China-Pakistan Economic

Countries like Pakistan that traditionally benefitted from alignment with the US during the Cold War do not want to be aligned with any of the powers.

Corridor (CPEC), yet be able to convince the US of its neutrality? How did negotiation with significant global powers take place at a time when relations between the politically powerful Army general headquarters (GHQ) and the Khan government appeared tense?

The CPEC Goes Weak

Khan's focus on eradicating corruption and targetting the political opposition meant lesser interest in foreign policy issues.

During Khan's trip to China to watch the Beijing Olympics in February 2022, he seemed to have come full circle regarding his views on the CPEC. With his comments regarding the "transformational impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor",¹ he had departed from his earlier views of the project as being rife with corruption and giving unfavourable concessions to China.² The project came to a standstill after Khan came into power in 2018. This meant that only approximately US\$25 billion (S\$34.8 billion) out of a total of US\$53 billion (S\$73.7 billion) that was promised to the previous Nawaz Sharif government was received and that too mainly during the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government.³ The cricketer-turned-politician had willingly given control of the project to the military by appointing Lieutenant General (Retired) Asim Bajwa as Chairman of the CPEC Authority.⁴ The general was later replaced by a civilian due to Chinese pressure.⁵ Khan's focus on eradicating corruption and targetting the political opposition meant lesser interest in foreign policy issues. His interest in Chinese investment was driven by the same logic as the PML-N government – using Beijing's investment to keep his political boat afloat. Rising inflation (12.3 per cent), increasing

1 "PM Imran, Li vow to work for regional stability", *Dawn*, 6 February 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1673581>.

2 "Is new Pakistani PM Khan backtracking on China's economic corridor?", *DW News*, 18 September 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/is-new-pakistani-pm-khan-backtracking-on-chinas-economic-corridor/a-45539991>.

3 Amna Saqib, "The Direction Of China-Pakistan Cooperation To Come", *The Friday Times*, 18 February 2022, <https://www.thefridaytimes.com/the-direction-of-china-pakistan-cooperation-to-come/>.

4 Press Trust of India, "Pakistan retired General appointed as CPEC Authority chairperson", *The Hindu*, 27 November 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/pakistans-retired-general-appointed-as-cpec-authority-chairperson/article30099357.ece>

5 Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, "China's concerns cause a change of guard at CPEC", *The Economic Times*, 14 August 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/world-news/chinas-concerns-cause-a-change-of-guard-at-cpec/articleshow/85319348.cms?from=mdr>.

food insecurity⁶ and pressure from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to meet the fiscal deficit target have forced the government to reduce subsidies and increase taxes. Due to this, his government became unpopular fast.

Challenges of Indo-Pacific Strategy

Khan was also keen to market himself as a leader eager to further the cultural interests of the Muslim world, taking up cudgels against Islamophobia and presenting himself domestically as a man in charge. Interestingly, while the world was absorbed with the crisis in Ukraine, one of Khan's goals during his visit to Russia right in the middle of the European/American crisis in early March 2022 was to discuss the menace of Islamophobia with President Vladimir Putin.⁷ Khan did not remain popular for his handling of foreign-policy issues. Since taking charge in 2018 till 2022, his years in office were marked by mishandling of relations with several countries, including Saudi Arabia, India and the US. His visit to Moscow drew criticism at home and made observers apprehensive of possible American and other Western powers reactions to an ill-timed visit.⁸

Khan did not remain popular for his handling of foreign-policy issues.

However, it would be unfair to accuse Khan of running his own foreign policy, which is instead reflective of the military establishment's own view of setting the geopolitical agenda to a new taste popularly reputed as the 'Bajwa Doctrine'.⁹ Its architect, the current Army Chief, General Qamar Javed Bajwa, desires the world to recognise Pakistan's power ambitions and adjust their policies, at least marginally, to accommodate Islamabad's taste. He also wants recognition of Pakistan's status as a stable country whose services to the war on

6 "Pakistan annual inflation rose to 12.3% in December", *Reuters*, 1 January 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/markets/asia/pakistan-annual-inflation-rose-123-december-2022-01-01/>.

7 "PM Imran Khan, Russian President Putin discuss bilateral relations and Islamophobia", *IN News*, 25 February 2022, <https://irshadgul.com/pm-imran-khan-russian-president-putin-discuss-bilateral-relations-and-islamophobia/>.

8 Amer Nazir, (@amerlondon), "Channel 4 UK, shots of IK with Put-in, twice mention of likes of China, Pak supporting him...", Twitter, 25 February 2022, 3:48 AM, https://twitter.com/amerlondon/status/1496935102949036041?s=20&t=hJPFDSdH_xgpsit5j1sDMA.

9 Suhail Warraich, "The Bajwa Doctrine: from chauvinism to realism", *The News*, 18 March 2018, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/293885-the-bajwa-doctrine-from-chauvinism-to-realism>.

terror should be recognised instead of it getting pushed around as a rogue state. Though the temporary friction with Saudi Arabia was blamed on Khan, Pakistan's drift towards Turkey, China or Russia is much more institutional. Despite the projection that the army chief and prime minister follow a diverse policy – it was claimed that while Khan was going to Russia, Bajwa would travel to the US¹⁰ – the political government and the Army GHQ are largely on the same page. There is an understanding that the country ought to maintain a strategic balance between global powers to navigate safely and carefully through the challenges of the Indo-Pacific strategy in which Pakistan does not figure as a frontline state.

It is also a fact that Beijing is the only country that remains inclined in building Pakistan's military-strategic capacity.

The call for balance and not opting for either an American or Chinese camp is Pakistan's dire need. It does not want to get pushed towards either group or be considered as part of one specific camp mainly because of its military and economic needs. It is both dependent upon the US for seeking help with multilateral aid agencies like the IMF and the World Bank, but also to ride safely through the probing examination of the Financial Action Task Force that relegated Pakistan to a grey list in 2011-12. This is weighted against its need to get financial help, investment for infrastructure development and military modernisation. This makes China highly crucial for Pakistan. It is also a fact that Beijing is the only country that remains inclined in building Pakistan's military-strategic capacity. In the last five to six years, Beijing has provided Pakistan with fighter aircrafts, frigates and submarines. This comes at a time when no Western country is inclined to help Pakistan modernise its armed forces.

It is also a fact that Pakistan remains reluctant to commit itself entirely to the Chinese camp. Despite Beijing's interest and investment in developing a deep fishing port in Gwadar, Baluchistan, a region that is now an alternative naval base for Pakistan, Islamabad has been cautious in giving concessions to China in the area. Pakistan's recently published National Security Policy, which denotes its grand national

¹⁰ "Imran Khan Will Visit Moscow and Qamar Bajwa is Going to Visit US", *Haqeeqat TV*, 12 February 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9y1lj-G7jTI>.

strategy, the emphasis is on turning the country into a geo-economic hub for all camps rather than a front-line state for a single alignment.¹¹

A New Strategy by a Weak Government

The problem with carving a strategy and a new direction is that it is fraught with challenges, the foremost being the tension between the government and the opposition. There was not only an absence of dialogue between the government and the opposition, but also a lack of faith. The Khan government targetted its political opponents using the National Accountability Bureau and other state institutions. It had clamped down on the media that added greater fuel to the opposition's fire.¹² Earlier this year, it introduced changes to the cybercrime law to stifle voices on social media.¹³ Understandably, the space that social media gives to citizens was disliked both by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) authoritarian government and the military. Such laws, hence, are meant to not only push back the opponents but also bridge the gap between the military and the government. The Army GHQ were Khan's source of strength and means to bring him to power in 2018. There were signs of growing disenchantment between the prime minister and the army chief, leading to a weakened relationship between the two, arriving at a less than ideal outcome.

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The perception amongst many in Pakistan was that Bajwa and Khan were no longer on the same page towards the end of his term, the formula that was intrinsic to the health of the hybrid civil-military regime that both agreed to in 2018. The issue pertained to Khan's push to manipulate and manage the army's leadership to ensure a safe end of his term and return to power again in the next elections. Khan aimed to arrange the army chief's succession to bring former Inter-Services Intelligence's chief, currently serving as Corps Commander

11 "National Security Policy of Pakistan", 2022, <https://static.theprint.in/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/NSP.pdf>.

12 "Imran Khan clamps down on Pakistan media, 2 journalists detained", *WION*, 7 August 2021, <https://www.wionews.com/south-asia/imran-khan-clamps-down-on-pakistan-media-2-journalists-detained-403813>.

13 "Pakistan: New cybercrime law threatens to stifle social media dissent", *DW News*, 24 February 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/pakistan-new-cybercrime-law-threatens-to-to-stifle-social-media-dissent/a-60899561>.

According to the grapevine in Islamabad, Khan had also discussed with his confidantes the possibility of retiring Bajwa in March 2022 and replacing him with the officer of his choice.

Peshawar, Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed, to power in the Army GHQ. Though Bajwa is due to retire in November 2022 after the end of his second tenure granted to him in 2020, this succession did not actualise. There were rumours that the army chief aimed at another extension or, at least, one that would have allowed the prime minister from making his own choice in case Khan was tempted to negotiate with the opposition parties the same way he did in 2020. Back then, the PML-N had initially given unconditional support to the extension bill that it then asked to be discussed in parliament after it drew criticism from within its own circles.¹⁴ According to the grapevine in Islamabad, Khan had also discussed with his confidantes the possibility of retiring Bajwa in March 2022 and replacing him with the officer of his choice.

All of this was rather dramatic and made Khan appear weak and less stable. Like previous governments of the Pakistan Peoples Party (2008-2013) and PML-N (2013-2018), the PTI government has become lame in its last year and a half before its fall. It was a classic case of heads of governments trying to beat the Army at the game of power politics and losing their own balance in the process.

The more important point to note was not the survival of Khan's government but its utter instability that would have made it a highly ineffective tool in governing the state and maintaining a semblance of control over foreign and security policies. Khan's government did not have feet to stand on as far as governance was concerned. In its last four years, it willingly gave greater control of the running of the state to the military. The military's institutional intervention in state affairs expanded horizontally. From economic policy planning to media and culture, the army chief's footprints were everywhere. The foreign policy and re-orientation of geopolitical goals were certainly not Khan's forte. However, the military used Khan's weakness as a cover to create greater room to adjust in its overall policy. As mentioned earlier, the GHQ Rawalpindi tried to manage the negative cost of Khan's Moscow visit as an independent gesture. This way, it tried to minimise the cost of missteps.

¹⁴ Zahid Hussain, "Backroom deal ensures second term to General Bajwa", *Arab News*, 8 January 2020, <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1610051>.

However, it is important to note that navigating a new direction through a weak government is a difficult undertaking. The risks may outweigh the gains. Now with Shehbaz in power, it will be vital to see how he navigates the intricacies of this hybrid civil-military regime whilst managing the state of the country's economy. He will also have to map out Pakistan's foreign policy imperatives and future trajectory. Khan's government has left many challenges for Shehbaz to overcome. And, given that Shehbaz and his party's immediate priority would be to focus on the campaign for the upcoming elections in 2023, the domestic and international challenges are likely to set Pakistan for prolonged instability, at least in the near future.

Religion and Minorities: Is Rising Islamisation a Real Threat?

Imran Ahmed

Summary

This paper examines the challenges and threats Islamisation poses for religious minorities. First, the creation of Pakistan raised difficult questions about how the state created in the name of Islam should become 'Islamic'. Differences in opinion in this matter, together with the struggle to settle on a constitutional agreement, began a process of politicising religious minorities as a threat to Islamisation and the realisation of an Islamic Pakistan. Second, as Pakistan cycled through constitutions and authoritarian rule, it became clear that Islamisation had a sectarian edge, and that such laws were the product of political exigencies and consequently, had major design flaws. Although Islamisation has been a slow-moving process, it continues to be both contested and a driver of disturbing politics of exclusion and extremism. In the contemporary period, governments are wedged between calling upon Islam for political legitimacy, appeasing powerful far-right groups and battling militant Islamist resistance against the state.

While the movement for Pakistan demanded a separate state for the Muslims of India, it left this future state's ideological underpinnings ambiguous.

Religious minorities in Pakistan face complex challenges. A fundamental source of tension and contestation in the state is the struggle to settle on its Islamic orientation, and this impacts the status and place of religious minorities in drastic and profound ways. Pakistan was the historical outcome of the two-nation theory, which asserted that (colonial) India was home to two distinct nations: one Muslim and one Hindu. While the movement for Pakistan demanded a separate state for the Muslims of India, it left this future state's ideological underpinnings ambiguous. The immediate post-Independence constitution-making struggled to make sense of the contradictions of the movement and its conflicting ideologies. It was not enough to state that Pakistan was Islamic since to be 'Islamic' required some consensus on what 'being Islamic' meant. The debates were most concerning for religious minorities. An overt Islamic orientation of the state risked denigrating non-Muslims to second class citizens and threatened undue state intervention into their lives.

The *Objectives Resolution*, a document stating the intent and purpose of the future constitution, which was passed in 1949, seemed to confirm these fears since it rendered Islam central to the state's identity, sovereignty and goals. While the document promised that the principles of democracy, freedom, equality, tolerance and social justice shall be observed, as enunciated by Islam, it was unclear what those freedoms were. The statement remained silent on whether the substance of such principles was open to political negotiations or fixed by religious mandate. The document posited that the Pakistani state acquired its sovereign authority from God and was required to exercise this authority within limits prescribed by Him. This raised the question of whether non-Muslims could, in fact, act for or on divine authority. It was also not particularly reassuring that the *Objectives Resolution* made vague promises that adequate provisions would be made for the minorities to freely profess and practise their religions and develop their cultures. But just how this was possible in a state committed to Islam was difficult to square. The document's authors lauded it as a watershed moment in Pakistan's independent history. Nevertheless, Liaqat Ali Khan, Pakistan's Prime Minister, considered the passing of the *Objectives Resolution* "to be a most important occasion in the life of this country, next in importance only to the achievement of independence".¹ The document, however, set in motion new tensions and contradictions.

It was also not particularly reassuring that the Objectives Resolution made vague promises that adequate provisions would be made for the minorities to freely profess and practise their religions and develop their cultures.

The constitution-making process in the late 1940s and the early 1950s revealed that a host of competing, if not diverging, ideas speculated on how Pakistan should approach the issue of Islam and its relationship with the state. These divisions contributed to prolonging the constitution-making process, raising both the political stakes of the deliberation and the unrest that came with the extended deadlock. The *Objectives Resolution* confirmed the central place of Islam in the state's identity and its preeminent role in shaping the governance, political norms, social and public policy. But it left a great deal of ambiguity. If Islam enunciated democracy, should Pakistan be a parliamentary democracy, presidential or something in-between

1 Golam Wahed Choudhury, *Documents and Speeches on the Constitution of Pakistan* (Dacca: Green Book House, 1967), p. 24.

or altogether unique? These questions were difficult to answer and harder still to acquire any consensus. The constitutional impasse frustrated Islamists, and the stand-off between the government and Islamic groups vying for an Islamic Pakistan produced circumstances that rendered religious minorities vulnerable to persecution as political targets.

The anti-Ahmadi riots instrumentalised this fear over the dangers the political leadership and religious minorities posed toward realising an 'Islamic' Pakistan.

Indeed, Islamist groups provoked the fear of non-Muslims stalling or threatening the Islamisation process; the tensions culminated in the anti-Ahmadi agitations of 1953, where riots and violence rocked Punjab over calls for the removal of prominent Ahmadi politicians and civil servants. A judicial investigation into the disturbances noted that the ulema differed on foundational questions on Islam, such as defining the Muslim and mapping the boundaries of theological toleration between faith, orthodoxy and heresy. Nevertheless, what the ulema and the Islamists often shared in common was a mutual distrust of the political elite and their commitment to the Islamic cause as well as non-Muslims. That Islam was in danger drove the Pakistan cause at the twilight of the *Raj* (Rule). Further, prominent ulema ushered a call to 'true' Muslims to join the movement and ensure its success and capacity to hold its leadership accountable and committed to Islam. The anti-Ahmadi riots instrumentalised this fear over the dangers the political leadership and religious minorities posed toward realising an 'Islamic' Pakistan.

The 1956 constitution, though short-lived, set several precedents. Pakistan was declared an Islamic republic. The new constitution also enshrined the *Objectives Resolution* of 1949 as its preamble and went on to include several Islamic provisions as directive principles of state policy which were unenforceable in the final print by the courts. The idea behind this design was that Islamic principles ought to direct government policy towards facilitating Muslims to live collectively and individually in conformity with the mandates set by the Quran and the Sunnah. Perhaps the most striking inclusion was Article 198, which stated that no law shall be enacted which is repugnant to the Injunctions of Islam and that existing law shall be brought into conformity with such Injunctions. Article 198 (4) sought to assure

non-Muslims that the repugnancy clause was not a cause of concern, stipulating that nothing in the Article shall affect the personal laws of non-Muslim citizens or their status as citizens or any provision of the constitution. The 1962 constitution offered similar prescriptions and a softer version of Article 198 of the 1956 constitution. In its initial iteration, the document declared Pakistan just as a republic – a measure that garnered Islamist opposition. The first amendment returned Pakistan to an Islamic republic, and though this was little more than a cosmetic change, it revealed that Islamic symbolism and signposting matter. This constitution too was short-lived.

Both the 1956 and 1962 constitutions were drawn up under authoritarian conditions and in a period in which Pakistan's rulers had little tolerance for Islamist opposition – let alone Islamisation. While there is no shortage of references to Islam in both constitutions, the telling feature in the design of these Islamic provisions is that Islamising the state was not a priority and that Islamisation was to be incremental and at the hands of the legislature. It was, to some extent, engineered to stall or placate rather than advance or accelerate Islamisation. The repugnancy clauses of both constitutions provided the cover or window dressing of signalling the intent to Islamise law without the substantive powers or drive to do so. Nevertheless, neither authoritarian suppression nor constitutional manoeuvres to arrest or slow Islamisation dampened calls for an Islamic order. If anything, many of Pakistan's failings, including the loss of its eastern wing in the 1971 civil war, suggested that Pakistan was not Islamic enough. And this had to be addressed.

The repugnancy clauses of both constitutions provided the cover or window dressing of signalling the intent to Islamise law without the substantive powers or drive to do so.

As Pakistan cycled through to its third and current 1973 constitution, which had Islamic prescriptions and provisions resembling its two earlier constitutional predecessors, Pakistan's ruling government had to offer more. Article 2 rendered Islam the state religion of Pakistan. But this was also insufficient. A constitutional amendment in 1974 rendered Ahmadis as non-Muslims. While this is a defining, watershed constitutional moment, it is unusual and predictable. It is well documented that the amendment effectively rendered Ahmadis second-class citizens; what makes it unusual is that Pakistan's Islamic

identity took on a sectarian character. This is unsurprising as the drive for Islamisation contained a sectarian edge, something which the anti-Ahmadi riots of the 1950s blatantly displayed. Earlier constitutional efforts to include sects in the interpretation of Islamic injunctions did little to appease this hostility towards minority Islamic sects.

Many of these laws had severe design flaws, which meant that they were open to abuse and manipulation to self-serving ends and personal gain.

As the movement for an Islamic government gained momentum, it combined with other unrests in the country and growing disillusionment with the government. The tumult culminated in martial law and the dictatorship of General Zia ul Haq. Zia promised to transform Pakistan into an Islamic state appropriating the Islamic cause. His Islamisation programme in the late 1970s and 1980s introduced law and constitutional reform, including several controversial new criminal and blasphemy laws. He politicised Islam in a context – sensitive to sectarian differences following the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. His campaign of Islamisation sought to impose a Sunni interpretation of Islamic law and criminalised the beliefs of the Shia and the Ahmadis. These laws impose harsh and, at times, capital punishment for violations, signalling a tacit state sanction for violence and vigilantism against religious minorities and vulnerable groups such as women and the poor. This is perhaps one of the most detrimental impacts of Islamisation under Zia. Many of these laws had severe design flaws, which meant that they were open to abuse and manipulation to self-serving ends and personal gain. The blasphemy laws, for example, were imposed to prevent insult to Sunni religious sensitivities, theology and religious figures. However, these laws did not require proof of intent for registering violations and often punished the poor and illiterate sections of minority communities.

While Islamisation garnered considerable opposition and Zia did back down on some reforms on a few occasions, much of his Islamisation programme remains intact in one form or another. These laws have acquired a symbolic capital as representative of Pakistan's Islamic promise. Indeed, to oppose them garners the scorn of hardline Islamists. The continual politicisation of Islam has entwined piety and politics together. Moreover, the defence of these laws have

inspired vigilantism against those who seek to reform or repeal such laws. Perhaps the most telling example of this development is the assassination of Salman Taseer, the late governor of Punjab. He labelled Section 295-C of the Pakistan Penal Code, one of the country's most notorious blasphemy laws, as a 'black' law. His murderer was hailed as a martyr, exemplifying the continuing blurring of boundaries between the religious and the political. The sanctification of politics has had perverse consequences, including the proliferation of acts of terrorism against the state, where state personnel, facilities and infrastructure is now commonplace. However, the most disturbing development since the Zia era has been the ongoing acts of terror targetting religious minorities and their places of worship. While Taseer's murder was a high-profile case, the attacks and intimidation of ordinary people from minority communities in Pakistan often go unnoticed. It is difficult for religious minorities to mount substantive or lasting social or political resistance as the threat of violence and persecution looms large. The social and political context is geared towards their individual and collective silencing.

It is difficult for religious minorities to mount substantive or lasting social or political resistance as the threat of violence and persecution looms large.

Different regimes in Pakistan have struggled to manoeuvre between the need to praise Islamic systems of government, profess their commitment to Islam, appease the political juggernaut of the increasingly influential far-right political party, the Tehreek-e-Labbaik, and counter radical groups seeking to overthrow the existing state structure for a truly Islamic one. Caught in the middle of this deadly tug of war are religious minorities who continue to face government paralysis, the pressure to toe the line and the looming threat of persecution and lynching. Moreover, the brute force of radical Islamist movements has targetted minorities' places of worship to send a public message that Pakistan is first the land of Muslims, and the government can do little to protect the minority communities.

State of Pakistan's Economy: Reviving Growth

Asma Hyder

Summary

Essential reform, the need for well-designed policies, structural changes and the evasion of ad-hoc approaches toward development are emphasised.

The issues of Pakistan's economy are deep-rooted and long-lasting. The present government and several previous ones have struggled to achieve desirable economic growth and macroeconomic stability. However, there have hardly been any steps taken toward reforms and structural transformation of the economy. This paper discusses a few pressing problems within the economy and suggestions to improve the present grim situation. Essential reform, the need for well-designed policies, structural changes and the evasion of ad-hoc approaches toward development are emphasised. The COVID-19 crisis poses a multifaceted challenge for all economies, and Pakistan is no exception. Nevertheless, thoughtful policy steps may address a few of these crucial issues. This paper also emphasises lessening the government's size, reducing the supply-side constraints to control inflation, increasing competitiveness and productivity to compete in the international market and managing transmission, distribution and electricity generation.

Over the years, Pakistan has struggled to achieve macroeconomic stability and sustained economic growth. Its highly volatile growth experience¹ resulted in increased uncertainty and lack of confidence both at the ends of the investor and consumer. Low investment,² as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP), growth in total factor productivity, stagnant exports and soaring external debt are all long-standing and persistent issues underlying the Pakistani economy.

1 As reported in "Statistical Supplement", *Pakistan Economic Survey 2020-21*, Finance Division, Government of Pakistan, it was 6.8 per cent in 1960s, 3.5 per cent in 2000s, 0.4 per cent in 2008-09, 3.7 per cent in 2012-13, 4.6 per cent in 2015-16, 5.5 in 2017-18, 2.1 per cent in 2018-19, -0.5 per cent in 2019-20 and 3.9 per cent in 2020-21.

2 The gross fixed capital formation (as a percentage of the GDP) in Pakistan in 2020 was 15 per cent; in Bangladesh, it was 30 per cent; in India, it was 27 per cent; and the average of South Asia was 26 per cent. Similarly, Pakistan's average investment share of nominal GDP in the last 60 years was 17.5 per cent.

Recently, there has been a rebasing exercise to measure the GDP of the country.³ This exercise provides a true assessment of the economy because over time, many new sectors have emerged, and a few sectors have been redefined. The present exercise reveals that the share of agriculture changed from 23 per cent to 24 per cent, the share of industry from 20.9 per cent to 19.5 per cent and the change in the share of the service sector in Pakistan's overall GDP from 56 per cent to 56.6 per cent. These trivial changes in the percentage of GDP show that the economy's structural formation has remained unchanged during the last 10 to 15 years.

Recently, with the shift of political regime change from Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz to Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf and now a newly formed government, Pakistan has had to face the challenges of the pandemic with limited fiscal space. This global health emergency further reflected the government's weak capability to handle such an enormous health crisis accompanied by an economic crisis. This paper further sheds light and suggests a way forward for selected pressing issues, including available fiscal and monetary policy, and the external sector and provides a few comments on social sector initiatives of the present government.

Stagnant and recently shrinking fiscal space is one of the country's biggest concerns. Low fiscal space affects all sectors and restrains the government's initiatives and expenditures. During the last three years, revenues have remained almost unchanged. However, the overall budget deficit has increased by almost 22 per cent in 2020-21 as compared to 2016-17. A more upsetting indicator is the proportional trends in current and development expenditures. In the same years, 2020 and 2021, the current expenditure increased by almost 17 per cent as compared to expenditure levels in 2016-17, but development expenditure was cut by 50 per cent as compared to the expenditure in 2016-17.⁴ The decrease in development expenditure and increase

Stagnant and recently shrinking fiscal space is one of the country's biggest concerns.

3 *Pakistan Economic Survey 2020-21*, Finance Division, Government of Pakistan, https://www.finance.gov.pk/survey_2021.html.

4 In a recent rebasing exercise, the base year changed from 2005-06 to 2015-16 for the measurement of the GDP.

in current expenditure will have a rather compounding negative effect on the economy as well as on the budget in the coming years.

An increase in poverty and vulnerability is an apparent outcome of this bleak economic situation, along with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the other hand, the long-lasting issue of circular debt in the energy sector grew chronic this time. The trade deficit increased by almost 106 per cent during the current year, mainly due to considerable increases in imports against stagnant exports. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the consumer price index rose by 12.3 per cent at the end of 2021 as compared to the previous year. The continuous price increase, especially food inflation, has eroded the purchasing power of the middle and lower-income groups. An increase in poverty and vulnerability is an apparent outcome of this bleak economic situation, along with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵ The growth of the private sector, despite a lower interest rate, shows a lack of entrepreneurial interest and a stagnant economy. Finally, Pakistan's performance in the external sector in the region is very low, compared to other peer countries like India, Bangladesh and Vietnam.

The solutions for economic revival are deep-rooted and probably not limited to the political regime under the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf or the present coalition government. The nature of the political system and continuous long-term disruptions after independence did not allow Pakistan to build a robust structure with strong thought leadership, which requires continuity in the democratic system. The temporary authoritarian regimes led to high rent-seeking, discouraged positive changes or reforms and instead provided an incentive to maintain the status quo. One of the most pressing issues for the present government is the continuously shrinking fiscal space. Thus, to reduce the current expenditure, many departments and ministries like the board of investment, the ministry of technical training and professional education, the health services and coordination ministry, including the Planning Commission, are almost irrelevant in the post-devolution scenario. These government offices should be abolished

⁵ "The poverty rate declined by 40 per cent over the last two decades to 24.3 per cent in 2015, but the IMF projects a sharp reversal, with up to 40 per cent of Pakistan living below the poverty line during the pandemic" from "Pakistan, pandemic could push millions more into poverty", Press Release, United Nations Development Programme, 18 June 2020, <https://www.undp.org/press-releases/pakistan-pandemic-could-push-millions-more-poverty>.

and have their responsibilities transferred to provincial governments. The growing size of the governmental bodies increases current expenditure and compounds procedural inefficiencies. Besides these structural changes in the administrative system, there are many other simultaneous measures, like making thoughtful decisions on the allocation of resources for subsidies, ambitious tax reforms and improvement in the structure of the financial sector for better transactions – especially for remittances and foreign investments for improving the fiscal space available to the government.

The current subsidies by the government are disproportionately skewed toward the Water & Power Development Authority and K-Electric. Its attempts to manage the circular debt in the form of Independent Power Plants and Power Holding Private Limited seem to have failed in fixing the problem. No other solution exists for the energy sector except structural reforms to streamline the procedures. Several initiatives like the privatisation of distribution companies, improvements in metering, billing and the collection system, reduction in line losses and increased capacity through innovation and higher reliance on renewable energy can help to improve the performance of the energy sector. According to the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority report in 2020,⁶ investment is needed in transmission and distribution networks compared to the installed capacity to generate electricity. Distribution companies should have financial and operational independence and follow sustainable business models. A significant reduction in the circular debt is inevitable to expand the fiscal space for the government.

A significant reduction in the circular debt is inevitable to expand the fiscal space for the government.

Managing inflation and the affordability of commodities of daily use for lower or even the middle-income group is also a challenge for almost every government. A few studies analysed that inflation in Pakistan is explained by supply-side constraints and market friction.⁷

6 National Electric Power Regulatory Authority, State of Industry Report, Government of Pakistan, 2020.

7 Muhammad Nasir and Wasim Shahid Malik, "The Contemporaneous Correlation of Structural Shocks and Inflation-Output Variability in Pakistan", *The Pakistan Development Review* 50, no. 2 (2011): 145–62; Rehman, F U, and Malik, W S, *A structural VAR(SVAR) approach to the cost channel of monetary policy*, University Library Munich, Germany; and F.U.Rehman, and M.Nasir, *The need for accommodating monetary policy in The State of Pakistan's Economy: During the Pandemic and Beyond: 2021-22*, Edited by L S Farooq, and M Asif, IBA Press, Karachi.

The demand-side shocks explain less than 30 per cent variability in inflation. Besides the increase in international oil and electricity prices impacting the country, the devaluation of the Pakistani currency also contributed to inflation. Devaluation increased the prices of currency and the cost of production due to an increase in imported inputs.

From the investors' point of view, private investment is discouraged due to the increased cost of production, market uncertainty resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the high cost of doing business owing to market frictions. In this scenario, the monetary policy becomes redundant, and lowering the interest rate is not an effective policy option. However, the low-interest rate proved to be a cushion for the investors in maintaining their working capital. Thus, the sustainability of old ventures was somehow successfully maintained. In the near future, the central bank should be ready to confront the after-effects of the pandemic, uncertain economic prospects, rising inflation and citizens' expectations of the exchange rate.

The external side of the economy, coupled with the above investment climate, is under threat due to a steep rise in the trade deficit. In recent years, the imports of machinery, vehicles and vaccines kept the import bill very high. Nevertheless, sales tax and customs duties contributed positively to the Federal Board of Revenue's collection with a high increase in imports.

One reason for the growing trade deficit, among many other factors, is the lower level of competitiveness.

The government's expectations from remittances, Roshan Digital Accounts and expected growth in exports seem challenging to improve the external-facing side of the economy. To handle this situation, drastic measures are required. In fact, the share of exports in the GDP has been consistently decreasing over the last two decades. Most of the peer countries in the region report a relatively higher percentage of export share in the GDP. One reason for the growing trade deficit, among many other factors, is the lower level of competitiveness. For instance, despite subsidies and concessions for the textile sector (which is the largest contributor to Pakistani exports), it still lacks diversification and sophistication. The number of product varieties has significantly reduced during the past decade, and Pakistan fell in the

world ranking of product varieties exported from the 38th percentile to the 45th percentile (Pakistan Development Update 2021). Similarly, regional and international market integration has proven to be a successful strategy for many Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam and Singapore.⁸ Pakistan should consider importing raw materials and producing finished goods for exports.

Increasing productivity at the firm level is a significant challenge for local producers. The data shows that the productivity of Pakistani firms does not increase with their age like many other countries.⁹ Besides these significant challenges, many other constraints like certification and labelling of products, marketing, branding, registration, lack of preferential trade agreements and licensing discourage many exporters. In this aspect, the government can play a role in helping these small but potential manufacturers. To fix the challenges of the external sector, reforms of integrated nature are essential. To design such reforms, there is a need for dialogue among the private firms, government and relevant departments like training institutions, national tariff commissions, the industry of commerce and the federal board of revenue. All stakeholders should work together to figure out how to enhance competitiveness, productivity and the capabilities of local businesses.

All stakeholders should work together to figure out how to enhance competitiveness, productivity and the capabilities of local businesses.

The present government upscaled social protection during the COVID-19 outbreak through the *Ehsaas* program. Almost PKR179.8 billion (S\$1.34 billion) was distributed as a one-time emergency cash assistance to 14.8 million beneficiaries at the risk of falling into extreme poverty. According to a World Bank report, Pakistan is ranked fourth in terms of coverage of cash transfers through its social protection programmes.¹⁰ Another flagship initiative is the *Sehat Saholat* health card, which increases the population's purchasing power from the lowest social strata. However, increasing the purchasing power will

8 A Nakhuda, "Need for export-oriented strategies," *Daily Tribune*, January 2022.

9 N U Rehman, "Network alliances and firms' performance: a panel data analysis of Pakistani SMEs," *Eurasian Bus Rev* 6, 37–52 (2016).

10 "Social Protection and Job Responses to COVID-19: A Real-time review of the Country Measures", *Pakistan Development Update: Reviving Exports*, World Bank Report, May 2021.

Investments should be diverted towards improving public health facilities; there is a need to analyse doctor/paramedic staffing and region-wise population to doctor ratio.

only work if there is enough supply of adequate health services, including access to doctors, nurses and beds. According to the World Bank statistics, there are 1.1 physicians available for 1,000 people, 0.4 nurses or midwives for every 1,000 people, and one hospital bed for every 1,600 people. Without addressing these supply-side constraints, any such initiatives from the demand-side would barely work. Thus, like other sectors, there is a need to introduce reforms in the health sector. Investments should be diverted towards improving public health facilities; there is a need to analyse doctor/paramedic staffing and region-wise population to doctor ratio. Finally, a framework for the production, distribution and pricing mechanisms of pharmaceutical products is required for better healthcare in the country.

With more than 67 per cent of the population under 30 years of age, and approximately two million people expected to enter the labour market annually, Pakistan needs serious planning. An ambitious reform agenda is required for long-term persistent economic growth and sustainable development. As discussed above, the previous and current governments' repeated ad hoc approaches to address crucial issues of Pakistan's economy are stacking up into matters of grave concern.

Highway to Success: Is the CPEC a Winner?

Katharine Adeney

Summary

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been widely touted as a “game changer” for Pakistan. Part of China’s wider Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was to include enormous amounts of Chinese investments to improve Pakistan’s infrastructure and energy as well as expand the port (and airport) of Gwadar. Officially launched in 2015, it has been variously described either as the solution to all of Pakistan’s problems, increasing Pakistan’s exports and improving its gross domestic product (GDP), or as a Chinese trap to saddle Pakistan with debts so large that Pakistan would have to cede control of vital parts of its territory and infrastructure to China in lieu of repayment. Partly building on research co-authored with Filippo Boni,¹ this paper assesses how the CPEC progressed under the premiership of Imran Khan, whether there is any evidence of the CPEC delivering on its promises, and where we should look in the future, following the return of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawab (PML-N) to power.

Brief Introduction to the CPEC

The CPEC is one of the investment corridors for China’s infrastructure financing through the BRI. Defined by Chinese Prime Minister Li Keqiang as the “flagship project” of China’s ambitious BRI, it has resulted in at least US\$25 billion (S\$35 billion) in investment. While this is significantly less than the US\$62 billion (S\$86 billion) that was talked about in 2017, many projects have been funded, including energy infrastructure, roads, a port and airport and fibre optic cables. Nawaz Sharif, the prime minister under whom the programme was formally inaugurated in 2015, described the CPEC as a “game changer”. Many of the projects defined as CPEC projects were retrospectively added to the CPEC, but others were new. Under Nawaz’s premiership,

The CPEC is one of the investment corridors for China’s infrastructure financing through the BRI.

1 Filippo Boni and Katharine Adeney, “The Impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on Pakistan’s Federal System: The Politics of the CPEC”, *Asian Survey*, 60 (3), 2020, pp. 441-65.

energy projects were prioritised, in addition to those located within Punjab, the political base of Nawaz's party, the PML-N.²

After his election, Khan was more positive regarding the CPEC, signalling that he would seek to change its focus to align it with the priorities of the PTI.

Khan came to power in 2018. His (and his political party, the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's [PTI]) previous opposition to the CPEC was well known. Their criticisms focused on the way in which the PML-N administration had prioritised projects in the eastern wing of the country (where its political heartland was located) and in charge of corruption in the development of these projects.³ After his election, Khan was more positive regarding the CPEC, signalling that he would seek to change its focus to align it with the priorities of the PTI.⁴ However, two months later, his adviser for commerce and investment, Abdul Razak Dawood, questioned the financial terms accorded to Chinese companies and argued that Pakistan "should put everything on hold for a year so we can get our act together".⁵

Dawood's intervention was quickly quashed by the Pakistani army pressuring Khan to publicly retract Dawood's comments. A week later, the army chief re-affirmed Pakistan's commitment to the CPEC during his visit to Beijing. Following this, the PTI made more conscious efforts to refocus the CPEC to chime with Khan's populist rhetoric, especially with regards to socio-economic development and job creation. However, many Pakistani politicians were unconvinced and charged that the CPEC's projects had stalled under Khan's tenure, for example, former prime minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi's allegation in February 2022 that "no [CPEC] project was completed...during the current [Khan] government's tenure".⁶ This was despite the creation

² Ibid.

³ "Eastern route for CPEC may foster enmity between provinces, warns Imran", *The Express Tribune*, 30 September 2015, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/965041/eastern-route-for-cpec-may-foster-enmity-between-provinces-warns-imran>.

⁴ Andrew Small, "Returning to the Shadows: China, Pakistan, and the Fate of CPEC", The German Marshall Fund of the United States and the Centre for Asian Law, 2020, <https://www.gmfus.org/news/returning-shadows-china-pakistan-and-fate-cpec>.

⁵ Anderlini, Jamil, Henny Sender, and Farhan Bokhari, "Pakistan rethinks its role in Xi's Belt and Road", *The Financial Times*, 10 September 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/d4a3e7f8-b282-11e8-99ca-68cf89602132>.

⁶ Mohammad Hussain Khan, "CPEC stalled under PTI govt, says Shahid Khaqan Abbasi", *Dawn*, 7 February 2022, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1673733/cpec-stalled-under-pti-govt-says-shahid-khaqan-abbasi>.

in 2019 of the CPEC Authority (headed by a retired military general) to “ensure timely completion of the CPEC projects...[and] help ensure coordination among the departments concerned”.⁷ The rest of this paper will assess the accuracy of the charges of a slow down under Khan’s government.

Special Economic Zones

Although the PTI ostensibly sought to use the CPEC to create jobs and promote socio-economic development, rhetoric did not always match reality. In the 2018-19 Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP), the PTI removed many of the CPEC projects that had featured in the previous PSDP (including those in the poorest province of Pakistan, Balochistan) to the tune of US\$125 million (S\$173 million).⁸ The initial mantra behind the CPEC (from both China and Pakistan) was that it would serve to develop the economically marginalised areas of both countries.⁹ Balochistan province is one of the poorest areas in Pakistan. Although the port of Gwadar, situated within the province, was targetted as a high priority project, many of the projects surrounding Gwadar port and airport remain uncompleted. There has been little investment outside Gwadar, which has become securitised. This has led to protests, with locals arguing that they are being displaced from their fishing grounds and that they are not receiving any benefit from the CPEC.¹⁰ Although an impressive number of ‘Social and Economic Development under CPEC’ projects were listed on the CPEC website from mid-2021 onwards (in many different parts of Pakistan), little detail on these projects is included.

The initial mantra behind the CPEC (from both China and Pakistan) was that it would serve to develop the economically marginalised areas of both countries.

7 Amir Yasin, “Asim Bajwa Made Chairman of Newly Created CPEC Authority”, *Dawn*, 27 November 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1519047>.

8 Filippo Boni and Katharine Adeney, “The Impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on Pakistan’s Federal System: The Politics of the CPEC”, 2020, op. cit.

9 Christine R. Guluzian, “Making Inroads: China’s New Silk Road Initiative”, 2017, *Cato Journal*, 37 (1), pp. 135-47, <https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/serials/files/cato-journal/2017/2/cj-v37n1-10.pdf>.

10 Katharine Adeney and Filippo Boni, “How China and Pakistan Negotiate”, 2021, In *China Local/Global*, edited by Evan A Feigenbaum, pp. 1-34, Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; and Bokhari, Farhan, and Benjamin Parkin, “Pakistan seeks to calm protesters at Chinese Belt and Road port project”, *Financial Times*, 18 December 2021, <https://www.ft.com/content/0bd3988d-96d6-47a2-8006-1810cd90c151>.

After his election, Khan sought to turn the creation of the SEZ to his advantage, arguing that they would provide local job and training opportunities.

Other projects, such as the creation of special economic zones (SEZ), have progressed extremely slowly. The development of the SEZ was always envisaged to be part of the CPEC as listed in the Long-Term Plan¹¹ published under the PML-N's government. After his election, Khan sought to turn the creation of the SEZ to his advantage, arguing that they would provide local job and training opportunities.¹² However, progress has been slow, and often more aspirational than real. The location of the SEZ has been politicised. Decisions over location have been made for political rather than economic reasons, for example, the prioritisation of Rashakai as the SEZ for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa over Hattar, despite the existing economic zone at Rashakai being described as a failure by analysts¹³ and ranked lower in feasibility studies than other locations. Rashakai is located in the constituency of the former chief minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the government of which was led by Khan's party, the PTI.¹⁴

As Rashakai SEZ was inaugurated in May 2021, reports in January 2022 indicated that steel production would start within three months.¹⁵ However, in February 2022, reports emerged that Chinese investors were asking for further incentives before investing.¹⁶ Demands for preferential incentives for Chinese companies have been longstanding.¹⁷ In an interview in 2020, a western diplomat questioned why Chinese companies would invest in the SEZ, given that "all companies, not just the Chinese, are [being] offered preferential rates."

11 "Long Term Plan for China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (2017-2030)", Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform, 2017, <https://www.pc.gov.pk/uploads/cpec/LTP.pdf>.

12 Ibid.

13 Ejaz Hussain and Muhammad Furqan Rao, "China-Pakistan Economic Cooperation: The Case of Special Economic Zones (SEZs)", 2020, *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 13 (4), pp. 453-72, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40647-020-00292-5>.

14 Katharine Adeney and Filippo Boni, "How China and Pakistan Negotiate", op. cit., pp. 1-34.

15 "Eastern route for CPEC may foster enmity between provinces, warns Imran", op. cit.

16 Business Recorder, "Chinese investors want more incentives in Rashakai SEZ project", *Aaj News*, February 2022, <https://www.aaj.tv/news/30278339>.

17 Filippo Boni and Katharine Adeney, "The Impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor on Pakistan's Federal System: The Politics of the CPEC, 2020", op. cit., pp. 441-65.

On paper, progress is being made in Allama Iqbal SEZ in Punjab, which was inaugurated in January 2021, as approval was granted for 15 applications by named companies in March 2021.¹⁸ This was followed by news in December 2021 that a United Arab Emirates energy firm was also investing US\$15 million (S\$20.5 million).¹⁹ However, little information is available about the pace of construction or whether utilities have been connected. We must, therefore, be skeptical about the rates of progress. Without such connectivity, the development of the SEZ will stall. A prime example is the Bostan SEZ in Balochistan, where work has started slowly because of the lack of utilities provided.²⁰ The SEZ in Sindh, Dhabeji, is still embroiled in legal disputes and work has not yet commenced.²¹

As a recent Asian Development Bank report on the CPEC noted, “[s]tarting with an ambitious plan with multiple SEZs simultaneously often results in failure and waste of resources”.²² There are capacity problems in Pakistan, such as multiple bureaucratic hurdles for international investors. Back in 2020, an industrialist reported that “there should be one place where people can go and submit documents...the current system is not built to create ease”.²³ Despite reports of centralisation to provide a “one window operation”, little has changed in practice.²⁴

There are capacity problems in Pakistan, such as multiple bureaucratic hurdles for international investors.

18 “Establishment of industrial city in Faisalabad begins”, *Dawn*, 6 March 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1610952>.

19 Associated Press News, “UAE firm to invest \$15mln”, *The News*, 17 December 2021, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/917426-uae-firm-to-invest-15mln>.

20 “First Cluster of Bostan Special Economic Zone opened: Daud Bazai”, *Balochistan Express*, 28 August 2021, <https://bexpress.com.pk/2021/08/first-cluster-of-bostan-special-economic-zone-opened-daud-bazai/>.

21 Irfan Syed Raza, “Dhabeji Industrial Zone project hits snags”, *Dawn*, 29 November 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1660813/dhabeji-industrial-zone-project-hits-snags>.

22 “Economic Corridor Development in Pakistan: Concept, Framework, and Case Studies”, Asian Development Bank, February 2022, <https://www.adb.org/publications/economic-corridor-development-pakistan>.

23 Saira Abdul Waheed, and Muhammad Naeem Khan, “Drivers and Barriers for Successful Special Economic Zones (SEZs): Case of SEZs under China Pakistan Economic Corridor” 2020, *Sustainability* 12 (11): 4675, p. <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/11/4675>.

24 Syed Ali Zia Jaffery, “Special Economic Zones and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Opportunities and Challenges for Pakistan”, University of Lahore: Centre for Security, Strategy and Policy Research, 30 August 2021, <https://csspr.uol.edu.pk/sezs/>.

Technical and vocational education in Pakistan is not aligned with industry needs.

The Framework on Industrial Cooperation, signed during Khan's visit to Beijing in February 2022, has high aspirations but little detail on how the mechanics of the "business-to-business matchmaking mechanism of Pakistani and Chinese enterprises" will operate.²⁵ Technical and vocational education in Pakistan is not aligned with industry needs.²⁶ This is an issue that has not received sufficient attention despite the belated construction of the Technical and Vocational Training Institute in Gwadar. As journalist, Hasaan Khawar, told me in December 2020 that the "Chinese say they can't find high-tech or specialised labour in Pakistan. So, wherever they can't find local labour, they bring in Chinese [workers]." Although the CPEC website has started publishing job figures for the CPEC projects, including a tally of local jobs created, independent verification (and details of the nature of these jobs) is still required.²⁷

Energy and Infrastructure

Contrary to the claims of many Pakistani politicians regarding the lack of progress under the PTI, an analysis of the CPEC's website reveals that five energy projects were completed under Khan's government. These include three projects in Thar, Sindh, the Coal Fired Power Plant Hub in Balochistan and the Matiari to Lahore line transmission project. The first four were well on their way to completion by the time Khan became prime minister, but the last one was not.²⁸ Table 1 reveals that the location of the energy projects remains concentrated in Sindh because of the number of projects on the Thar coal fields located in that province.

25 Business Recorder, "Chinese investors want more incentives in Rashakai SEZ project", *Aaj TV*, 11 February 2022, <https://www.aaj.tv/news/30278339>.

26 "Economic Corridor Development in Pakistan: Concept, Framework, and Case Studies", op. cit.

27 The data is suspect in other ways, for example, <http://cpec.gov.pk/project-details/36> lists the total number of jobs created at 120, with the number of local jobs created as 240 (with thanks to Dr Eram Ashraf for bringing this to my attention).

28 Khalid Hasnain, "Major work on 886km Matiari-Lahore transmission line completed", *Dawn*, 30 October 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1587725>.

Table 1: Completion status of CPEC energy projects in 2018 and 2022

Energy Projects	2018		2022		Total projects
	Completed	Partially completed	Completed	Partially completed	
Punjab	2	3	4	1	5
Sindh	7	4	11	1	12
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	0	1	0	1	1
Balochistan	0	2	1	1	1
Gilgit-Baltistan	0	0	0	0	0
Azad Jammu and Kashmir	0	1	0	1	1

Note: The 2018 data was taken on 23 October 2018 and the 2022 data taken on 10 February 2022. The 2018-22 Sindh data are not directly comparable as two new projects were added in Thar and one completed project was removed from the CPEC's website.

Source: cpec.gov.pk

Apart from energy projects, infrastructure projects – particularly roads – were a major feature of the CPEC. Under Khan's leadership, there was more progress in this area (although many of these projects were started under the PML-N government). As Table 2 demonstrates, additional infrastructure projects were added to the CPEC portfolio by the PTI, particularly in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. As noted above, neither the PML-N nor the PTI governments have been shy of using the CPEC to bolster their political base, and the lack of projects in these two provinces had previously been criticised by the PTI. However, it remains to be seen whether the funds to deliver on these 'in the pipeline' projects will transpire, especially since the removal of the PTI government from power in 2022.

Apart from energy projects, infrastructure projects – particularly roads – were a major feature of the CPEC.

Table 2: Completion status of CPEC infrastructure projects in 2018 and 2022

Infrastructure Projects	2018		2022		In Pipeline	Total projects
	Completed	Partially completed	Completed	Partially completed		
Punjab	1	2	4	0	1	5
Sindh	0	1	1	0	1	3
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	1	2	3	1	7	11
Balochistan	0	1	0	4	2	6
Gilgit-Baltistan	1	0	1	0	2	3
Azad Jammu and Kashmir	0	0	0	0	0	0

Notes: The 2018 data was taken on 18 October 2018 and the 2022 data was taken on 3 February 2022. The figures for Punjab are not directly comparable, as the Orange Line Metro was added after 2018. Three road projects were also added to the portfolio for Balochistan after 2018.

Source: cpec.gov.pk

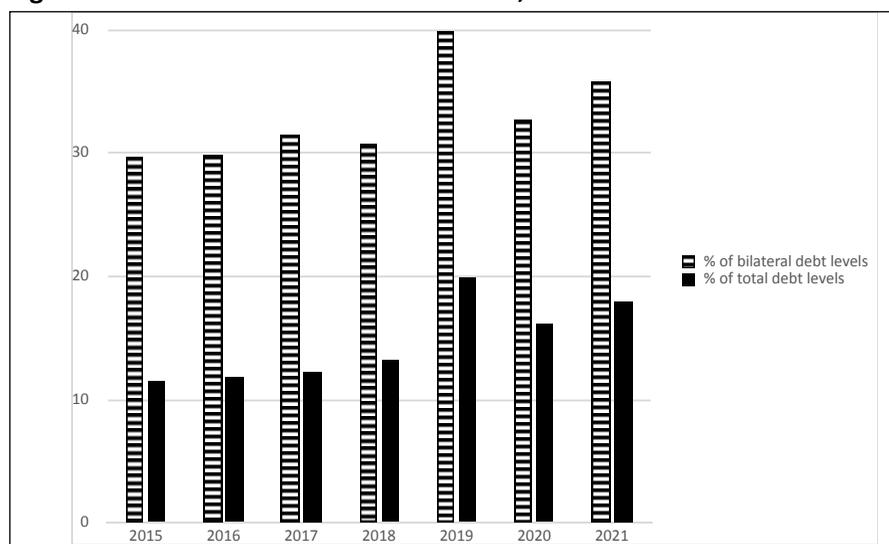
One of the major international concerns surrounding the CPEC was the levels of debt Pakistan would incur. Very few of the projects have been funded through grants – most have been funded through the independent power producer (IPP) financial mode (discussed below) and the Chinese government loans “at or near commercial rates”.²⁹

Bilateral debt to China currently stands at almost 18 per cent of Pakistani’s total debt (and 36 per cent of bilateral debt levels).

It was under Khan’s government that the scale of Pakistan’s bilateral debt to China became evident, as shown in Figure 1. Bilateral debt levels to China almost tripled from US\$5,210 million (S\$7,222 million) in 2015 to US\$14,180 million (S\$19,650 million) in 2021. Bilateral debt to China currently stands at almost 18 per cent of Pakistani’s total debt (and 36 per cent of bilateral debt levels). This does not include loans from Chinese banks. In February 2022, the International Monetary Fund included the “US\$4 billion [S\$11 billion] given by China to stabilise the foreign exchange reserves part of the external public debt”, bringing the levels of external public debt to US\$18.4 billion (S\$25.5 billion).³⁰

29 Kazim Alam, “Most loans under CPEC at commercial rates: report”, *Dawn*, 30 September 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1649227>.

30 Shahbaz Rana, “Foreign public debt to ‘jump to \$103b’ by end of next fiscal”, *The Express Tribune*, 6 February 2022, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2342247/foreign-debt-to-jump-to-103b-by-end-of-next-fiscal>.

Figure 1: Pakistan's bilateral debt to China, 2015-2021

Source: Finance Division 2015-2021

In addition to the bilateral loans, large repayments are due to the IPPs, a feature of the early part of the CPEC project. Chinese IPPs were able to demand higher rates of return for their investments, which were guaranteed by the Pakistan government. This was to ensure that the energy projects that characterised the early stages of the CPEC were delivered in a timely manner. Drawn by domestic priorities, notably the promise to fix the energy crisis (a mainstay of Nawaz's electoral platform in 2013), "the tariff payments paid by the Pakistani government to the power generation companies included a high return on equity".³¹ "Chinese policy banks [also] required developers to purchase political risk insurance"³² – which had to be reimbursed by the Pakistan government to developers.

Chinese IPPs were able to demand higher rates of return for their investments, which were guaranteed by the Pakistan government.

Khan sought to restructure the terms and length of time of the IPP repayments during his period as prime minister.³³ In May 2021, the debt load exceeded the US\$19 billion (S\$ 26.3 billion) in total

31 Rishikesh Ram Bhandary and Kelly Sims Gallagher, "What drives Pakistan's coal-fired power plant construction boom? Understanding the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor's energy portfolio", *World Development Perspectives*, Volume 25, March 2022.

32 Ibid, p. 4.

33 Khaleeq Kiani, "Pakistan urges China to soften terms for power deals", *Dawn*, 15 April 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1549299>.

invested in the plants despite the fact that “many of the plants are not actually producing power due to overcapacity and the failure of Pakistani power authorities to develop the national grid and related delivery systems to fully meet grassroots demand.”³⁴ At the 10th Joint Cooperation Committee in 2021, Beijing refused again to renegotiate the terms of the power sector contracts.³⁵

Although the CPEC is too big to fail, the way forward is unclear.

Although the CPEC is too big to fail, the way forward is unclear. In the early stages of the CPEC, when concerns were raised over the number and amount of loans, it was argued that Pakistan’s GDP would increase once the energy shortages were fixed, thus increasing Pakistan’s ability to repay its debt.³⁶ However, Figure 2 clearly demonstrates this has not happened. Even before the onset of COVID-19, and with the increased energy generation, the GDP per capita was *reducing* in Pakistan. Energy generation is no magic bullet.

Figure 2: GDP per capita (Constant 2015 US\$) 2014-2020



Source: World Bank (2022)

³⁴ Khaleeq Kiani, “Pakistan, China agree not to alter tariff on power deals”, op. cit.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ishrat Husain, “Financing Burden of CPEC”, *Dawn*, 21 June 2017, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1313992>.

Conclusion

Many of the problems facing the CPEC are longstanding and a legacy of the previous PML-N regime although it was under the PTI that the dangers of the “debt trap” surfaced. Despite his previous (and current) commitment to the CPEC, current Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif faces an uphill struggle. The shrinkage of Pakistan’s economy, in evidence even before the pandemic hit, has exacerbated “the serious issue of overcapacity and unsustainable capacity payments to power generators”.³⁷ A few weeks before the dismissal of Khan, China had to agree to roll over US\$4.2 billion (S\$5.8 billion) of debt.³⁸

To make the most of the investments under the CPEC and to increase the GDP and its capacity to repay the investments, Pakistan needs to focus on what it wants to achieve from the SEZ. Till date, “there have been no special incentives for specific industries that would benefit Pakistan”.³⁹ The Asian Development Bank has argued that Pakistan needs to focus on producing “higher value added goods”⁴⁰ and that, with the exception of rice, Pakistan’s exports are in sectors of low value.⁴¹ As the CPEC moves towards agricultural cooperation, Pakistan needs to ensure that the technology transfers from China are affordable by focusing on high value goods that can be exported to China, for example, mangoes. Pakistan also needs to ensure that new agricultural projects do not add to Pakistan’s water scarcity and further undermine its water security.

Finally, Pakistan needs to push for more educational and training opportunities. Despite Khan’s rhetoric, there is little evidence of new skilled Pakistani jobs being created.⁴² Pakistan should also look further to develop incentives for Chinese companies to invest, particularly those that are “tied to local employment quotas or training provisions”.⁴³

Pakistan also needs to ensure that new agricultural projects do not add to Pakistan’s water scarcity and further undermine its water security.

37 Nicholas Simon, “Shelving of huge BRI coal plant highlights overcapacity risk in Pakistan and Bangladesh”, *China Dialogue*, 1 May 2020, <https://chinadialogue.net/en/energy/11988-shelving-of-huge-bri-coal-plant-highlights-overcapacity-risk-in-pakistan-and-bangladesh/>.

38 Shahbaz Rana, 2022, “Govt gets financial relief as China rolls over \$4.2b debt”, op. cit.

39 Katharine Adeney and Filippo Boni, “How China and Pakistan Negotiate”, op. cit., pp. 1-34.

40 “Economic Corridor Development in Pakistan: Concept, Framework, and Case Studies”, op. cit.

41 Ibid, p. 42.

42 Ibid, p. 43.

43 Ibid, p. 23.

Kashmir Cause and Ties with India: Geo-economics over Geopolitics

C Raja Mohan

Summary

For more than three decades, the Kashmir question has been at the very top of Pakistan's foreign policy agenda. The origins of Pakistan's dispute with India dates back to the independence and partition of the subcontinent in 1947 and have led to a series of conflicts. But the issue has acquired a much sharper political edge and a higher diplomatic salience since the late 1980s and has been the most important factor driving the bilateral relationship with India. Since then, the political initiative on the Kashmir question was with Pakistan, and Islamabad had successfully put India on the defensive. A series of weak coalition governments in New Delhi struggled to deal with the Pakistani offensive on the Kashmir question. Narendra Modi's tenure as India's prime minister since 2014, however, has seen a major effort to challenge Pakistan's Kashmir strategy.

Although it is too early to state that Modi has turned the tables on the Kashmir question, Pakistan's ability to dominate the discourse has been constrained.

Modi, the first leader since Rajiv Gandhi in 1984 to win a majority in the Lower House, and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), with its strong nationalist orientation and an ideological approach to the Kashmir question, has taken the offensive on the question. Although it is too early to state that Modi has turned the tables on the Kashmir question, Pakistan's ability to dominate the discourse has been constrained.

This paper analyses Pakistan's shifting fortunes on the Kashmir question. It examines Pakistan's unprecedented leverage over India on Kashmir at the dawn of the 1990s and India's attempt to neutralise it under Modi. Underlying this outcome is the steady shift in the regional balance of power favouring India. Pakistan's diplomacy on Kashmir and its correlation with the balance of power with India can be understood by looking at three important dates. The first was in 1971, which marked Pakistan's division; the second was the acquisition of a nuclear deterrent by Pakistan in the late 1980s that restored the balance of power; and the third was in 2014 when Modi

departed from traditional Indian policies on Kashmir – on both the internal and external dimensions of the Kashmir question. Modi's efforts to change the terms of engagement with Pakistan on the Kashmir question culminated in the August 2019 decision to change the constitutional status of Kashmir in the Indian Union.

Modi's moves have begun to test Pakistan's Kashmir strategy. Equally challenging are the changed international conditions. If the global environment seemed to favour Pakistan's Kashmir offensive in the 1990s, the new international context has begun to favour India. Yet, the dramatic elevation of the Kashmir question in Pakistan's domestic politics and the intensity of emotional energy that is now attached to it makes it hard for Islamabad to refashion the strategy. On the one hand, it is quite clear that Pakistan's ability to force the issue on India has declined. On the other hand, any weakening of the position on Kashmir will inevitably draw objections from sections of the deep state and the political class. This, in turn, will significantly constrain any political attempt at crafting creative compromises in the unsustainable Kashmir strategy.

If the global environment seemed to favour Pakistan's Kashmir offensive in the 1990s, the new international context has begun to favour India.

India's decisive victory in the 1971 war made the Kashmir question dormant. India's successful vivisection of Pakistan and the liberation of Bangladesh altered the territorial map of the Subcontinent defined by partition. It also altered the balance of power between India and Pakistan. The July 1972 Simla Accord outlined a framework to resolve the Kashmir question that met India's basic preferences – a settlement on territorial status quo in Jammu and Kashmir. But the issue went on the back burner as Pakistan focused on recovering from the loss of its eastern wing. However, a number of factors helped push the Kashmir question back on the front burner by the late 1980s.

For one, the Pakistan army, which was humiliated by the 1971 defeat and the division of the nation, saw the 1972 agreement as a victor's pact imposed by India. Reopening the Kashmir question was quite central to the Pakistan army's thinking. That, in turn, demanded reversing the balance of power produced by the 1971 war.

Through the 1970s, Pakistan made a determined effort to develop nuclear weapon capabilities.

That brings us to the second factor – Pakistan’s acquisition of nuclear weapons that restored the balance of power by neutralising the conventional superiority of India. That China and the United States (US) could not prevent India from breaking up Pakistan underlined the importance of nuclear weapons as the ultimate deterrent for Pakistan. Through the 1970s, Pakistan made a determined effort to develop nuclear weapon capabilities. The US, which initially cracked down on Pakistan’s nuclear quest, had acquiesced at the turn of the 1980s as Washington focused on reversing the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan with the help of the Pakistani army. By the late 1980s, Pakistan had acquired the basic nuclear deterrent. Many thought that nuclear weapons might help stabilise Pakistan’s relations with India by giving it assured security. Instead, Pakistan saw the nuclear deterrent as offering it the strategic impunity to force a re-opening of the Kashmir question.

That leads us to the third factor – Islamabad’s support for an insurgency in Kashmir was based on the successful use of jihad to drive the Soviet troops out of Afghanistan at the end of the 1980s. And as luck would have it, the post-1971 internal stability in Kashmir broke down in 1989. As massive protests mounted against New Delhi in Kashmir, Pakistan had a political opportunity to extend support for dissident groups and unite them under the banner of the Hurriyat. At the same time, Pakistan launched terror organisations devoted to the pursuit of jihad in Kashmir.

A fourth factor also strengthened Pakistan’s upper hand on Kashmir – pressures on India from the Bill Clinton administration in the 1990s to engage Pakistan to resolve the dispute. The US’ concerns on Kashmir also fused with the new emphasis on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in South Asia. As the military tensions rose between India and Pakistan in the late 1980s, the idea of Kashmir as the “world’s most dangerous nuclear flashpoint” took root in the US policy discourse on South Asia.

Finally, a fifth factor reinforced Pakistan's Kashmir diplomacy. The post-Cold War international focus on human rights opened up enormous possibilities for Pakistan to mount a relentless campaign against India on the Kashmir question. It successfully mobilised liberal opinion in the West and the Islamic world against New Delhi's Kashmir policies. Together, these five factors reversed all of India's post-1971 gains on Kashmir.

It successfully mobilised liberal opinion in the West and the Islamic world against New Delhi's Kashmir policies.

As Pakistan rejected the Simla Agreement and demanded the reopening of the Kashmir question, a weakened New Delhi had no choice but to engage Pakistan to explore a new set of terms. Inder Kumar Gujral, who was the foreign minister and prime minister in the coalition government that ruled India between 1996 and 1998, put Kashmir back on the negotiating table. Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, took the next step of opening parallel negotiations with the Hurriyat within Kashmir and with Pakistan on the dispute itself.

Vajpayee's initial outreach was marked by a visit to Pakistan in February 1999 that produced the Lahore Declaration that provided a new basis to engage Pakistan and was more in tune with the new circumstances in South Asia, including the acquisition of nuclear weapons by India and Pakistan. But the outreach broke down within a few days as the Pakistan army's aggression in Kargil came to light.

If the Army Chief General, Pervez Musharraf, actively undermined the peace process initiated by Vajpayee and Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, he became a champion of productive dialogue on Kashmir once he took charge of Pakistan in a military coup at the end of 1999.

An attempted high stakes negotiation on Kashmir forced by Musharraf on Vajpayee sputtered at a summit in Agra in 2001. But the two sides found a framework in January 2004 to advance the peace process. It involved a commitment from India to negotiate seriously on Kashmir, Pakistan's promise to create a violence-free environment, and joint pursuit of confidence-building measures (CBMs) in a broad range of areas.

In India, Singh was not bold enough to persuade a reluctant Congress leadership to take political risks on the issue.

Although Vajpayee lost power in the general elections that followed, the peace process gained momentum in Manmohan Singh's first term as prime minister. The two sides expanded a range of CBMs, came close to solving some difficult issues like the dispute over the Siachen glacier and negotiated a broad understanding of Kashmir. The two sides had negotiated a draft agreement on Kashmir during the period 2004 to 2007 through a backchannel¹ that involved four broad elements: greater autonomy for the two regions of Kashmir under the control of India and Pakistan; no change in the territorial disposition of Kashmir between India and Pakistan; cross border cooperation between the two administrations of Kashmir; and demilitarisation, along with reduction of violence. However, the breakthrough in the negotiations were never formalised by the two sides. And the support for the settlement along those lines seemed to evaporate. In Pakistan, Musharraf's power began to ebb by late 2007. His successor as the Army Chief, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, did not seem too interested in taking the Kashmir framework forward. In India, Singh was not bold enough to persuade a reluctant Congress leadership to take political risks on the issue.

The Kashmir policy of Modi, who took charge in May 2014, would turn out to be very different from that of his predecessors. Five changes stand out.

First, Modi broke the persistent cycle of terror-talks that trapped Indian diplomacy towards Pakistan since the early 1990s. India would suspend talks every time there was a major terror attack but resume the talks after a brief interval. Modi took a firmer line that there would be no talks until cross-border terror came to an end.

Second, Modi discarded the pretence that the Hurriyat in Kashmir had a role in the talks with Pakistan; Modi's predecessors were willing to let visiting Pakistani leaders meet, as a matter of routine, with the Hurriyat leaders in New Delhi. The Modi government put an end to this practice as well. New Delhi could not ignore the reality that

¹ See Happymon Jacob, *The Kashmir Back Channel: India Pakistan Negotiations on Kashmir from 2004-2007* (Washington DC: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Georgetown University, 2001).

Pakistan had a political handle in Kashmir, but the Modi government was unwilling to legitimise it.

Third, Modi challenged Pakistan's nuclear impunity. His predecessors were restrained in their military response to terror attacks, fearing the potential escalation to the nuclear level. Modi, in contrast, was ready to test the potential for escalation. Modi called Pakistan's nuclear bluff by raising the intensity of cross-border shelling to stop infiltration, undertaking cross-border raids by the Indian army on terror launch pads and ordering the Indian air force to bomb an alleged terror camp in Pakistan as a response to a major terror attack at Pulwama in February 2019.

Modi, in contrast, was ready to test the potential for escalation.

Fourth, Modi also mobilised international pressure on Pakistan to rein in its terrorism. India had a major success in getting the Financial Action Task Force, the global watchdog on money laundering and terror financing, to put Pakistan on the grey list since 2018. This probably has been the single biggest international pressure point on Pakistan to reconsider its support for terror.

Fifth, in a major move after he returned to power in 2019, Modi got the parliament to approve fundamental changes in the constitutional status of Kashmir. Modi separated the Ladakh region from Jammu and Kashmir and designated them as union territories; he abrogated Article 370 which gave the region considerable autonomy from New Delhi; and he lifted the restrictions on the non-residents from owning property in the regions. Surprised by New Delhi's sudden move, Pakistan embarked on a major international diplomatic offensive, including an effort to raise the issue in global forums, which included the United Nations (UN) Security Council. However, barring China and Turkey, no other country was willing to bat for Pakistan in the UN.

A number of factors explain the difficulties that Pakistan face in compelling India to make concessions on Kashmir.

The first is the dramatic reversal of the economic fortunes of Pakistan and India. Until the early 1990s, when New Delhi launched its

reforms, Pakistan's economy grew at a much faster pace than that of India. By 2020, the Indian economy at US\$2.6 trillion (S\$3.56 trillion) was nearly 10 times larger than Pakistan's at US\$260 billion (S\$359.9 billion). Once the poorer cousin of Pakistan, Bangladesh has become the second-largest economy in South Asia at US\$320 billion (S\$443 billion).

The second is the weakening of Pakistan's strategic bonds with many of its traditional partners. The US and the West that followed a 'Pakistan First' policy in the region during the Cold War now attach higher importance to relations with India for both economic and strategic reasons.

The third is India's growing ties with key Islamic states, especially the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia. The UAE, for example, described India's constitutional changes as internal to India and is now considering investments in Kashmir.²

The idea of parity with India has long driven Pakistan's global ambitions; that has become difficult to sustain in the current situation.

Fourth, on the nuclear question, the US and the international community have accepted India's nuclear weapons as a political reality and have agreed to accommodate its interests; they have not extended it to Pakistan. The idea of parity with India has long driven Pakistan's global ambitions; that has become difficult to sustain in the current situation.

Finally, the concern for human rights and preventive diplomacy that dominated the 1990s no longer drive international relations amidst the return of geopolitics. Kashmir has largely fallen off the international agenda, and it will remain harder for Pakistan to make it a central element of its global engagement.

As a new government, led by Shehbaz Sharif, takes charge in Pakistan, Islamabad will have to come to terms with the changed international conditions on Kashmir and its declining leverage over India. The big

² Navdeep Suri, "Shipping, shopping, and saffron: India-UAE strategic partnership on display in J&K", *ORF Online*, 24 January 2022, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/india-uae-strategic-partnership-on-display-in-jk/>.

policy question is about the tight linkage between Kashmir and the normalisation of bilateral relations. The Imran Khan government had ruled out even minimal engagement with India until New Delhi reversed the constitutional changes in Kashmir. The tightness of this linkage varied over time during the last three decades.

Pakistan's civilian leaders, especially Nawaz and Asif Ali Zardari, sought to loosen that linkage and put greater emphasis on economic cooperation and people-to-people contact when they were in power. However, the army vetoed such proposals. In a major departure, General Qamar Jawed Bajwa called for a reorientation of Pakistan's policies away from geopolitics to geo-economics and seeking peace with its neighbours. He took the lead in negotiating a ceasefire agreement with India in February 2021. He also signalled flexibility on Pakistan's Kashmir terms for a renewed peace process, but the internal reaction has not been enthusiastic.³³ As he comes to the end of his term in November 2022, it is not clear if he can work with the new government to reorient policy toward India. With Khan mounting a campaign against Bajwa and accusing the new government as an "import" from the US, it will be quite hard for the new government to take political risks with India.

Could India make it easier for Pakistan to take a more creative approach to Kashmir and the normalisation of bilateral relations? On the face of it, the Modi government and the BJP do not believe they must make compromises on Kashmir for a good relationship with Pakistan. However, it remains a fact that Modi has agreed to talk about Kashmir if Pakistan addresses India's concerns on cross-border terrorism. This was implicit in the statement on the ceasefire issued by senior military officials on 25 February 2021 that said the two sides "agreed to address each other's core issues and concerns".⁴⁴ "Core issues" have long been the code for Pakistan's emphasis on Kashmir and India's on cross-border terrorism.

On the face of it, the Modi government and the BJP do not believe they must make compromises on Kashmir for a good relationship with Pakistan.

3 Fahd Husain, "Indian offer led to 'quiet' talks on all issues", *Dawn*, 25 April 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1620230>; and Fahd Husain, "Engaging the enemy", *Dawn*, 8 May 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1622675>.

4 Ministry of Defence, "Joint Statement on Ceasefire", *Press Information Bureau*, New Delhi, February 2021. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1700682>.

While optimism must be kept firmly in check when it comes to Kashmir and Pakistan's relations with India, there might be a bit of room for renewing a formula that will allow simultaneous movement on the two core issues – Kashmir and terror – that will facilitate incremental steps towards the normalisation of relations. Pakistan does need flexibility on Kashmir as it focuses on getting its economy and foreign policy in order. The shift in the regional balance of power in favour of India is real but may not be enough for New Delhi to impose a Kashmir solution on Pakistan. Even a limited pause in the Kashmir conflict would be a welcome relief for India amidst its deepening military tensions with China and the post-Ukraine churn in regional and global geopolitics.

Friendly Overtures: Pakistan Reaching out to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh

Chulanee Attanayake and Mohammad Masudur Rahman

Summary

Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are two neighbours of Pakistan with whom it shares common regional ties in terms of proximity and development journey. They have unleashed potential in economic, trade relations and people-to-people partnerships. Strengthening ties will be a template for the small South Asian countries to engage diplomatically with one another without being overshadowed by India. This paper explores the economic and people-to-people ties Pakistan can develop with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Introduction

Pakistan's relational journey with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh is distinctive. While its ties with Colombo have always remained cordial and friendly, its relations with Bangladesh began with hostility and remained thorny. However, Pakistan shares a strong cultural bond with both countries. Its relations with Sri Lanka date back to the pre-Islamic era. Buddhism flourished in areas that later became Pakistan. A historical narrative notes that Mohammad bin Qasim, the Arab military commander of the Umayyad Caliphate, who led the Muslim conquest of Sindh and Multan, came to Sindh in the 8th century to rescue widows of Arab settlers in Serendib (ancient Sri Lanka), making the advent of Islam in this region.¹ During Pakistan's struggle for a separate homeland during the colonial period, Sri Lankan Muslims supported it.² Since then, traditions of goodwill between the two countries continued.

While its ties with Colombo have always remained cordial and friendly, its relations with Bangladesh began with hostility and remained thorny.

1 Sabiha Hasan, "Pakistan-Sri Lanka Relations", *Pakistan Horizon* 38, no. 2 (1985), p. 104-128.

2 Ibid.

During Sri Lanka's independence in 1948, Quaid-e-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah, the founding father of Pakistan, sent his warmest goodwill to the country and noted in confidence that the two countries would remain good friends.³ Post-independent bilateral relations between Sri Lanka and Pakistan were marked by mutual understanding, including the forging of close diplomatic ties. Their mutual concern and fear vis-à-vis their big neighbour, India, have laid the foundation for a strong relationship.⁴ Despite not subscribing to a common border, a common culture or a common religion, Colombo and Islamabad are experiencing a growing and problem-free mutual relationship that does not necessitate frequent meetings between their heads of governments.⁵

Pakistan's parliament condemned and adopted a resolution against this war criminal trial which upset Bangladesh severely and dragged bilateral relations through the mud.

Relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan have been frosty since the liberation war in 1971. Pakistan never acknowledged or apologised for the horrific war crimes against about three million Bangladeshis. This was despite then Pakistani Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto setting up the commission to examine the factors that led to Pakistan's surrender in Dhaka on 16 December 1971. The report stayed classified for more than 30 years and Pakistan reluctantly acknowledged that crimes were committed by "some" of the soldiers. In July 2002, when Prime Minister Parvez Musharraf visited Bangladesh, there was hope that the tensed relations between the two countries may be repaired. However, when Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed concern⁶ in a statement following the execution of a war criminal in 2013, Bangladeshi sentiments were deeply hurt. Consequently, Islamabad was forced to withdraw its High Commissioner and it expelled Bangladeshi diplomats from Pakistan in return. Pakistan's parliament condemned and adopted a resolution against this war criminal trial which upset Bangladesh severely and dragged bilateral relations through the mud.

3 Ibid.

4 Hasan (1985), p. 106; M Mayilvaganan, "Sri Lanka-Pakistan relations: Search for strategic relationship", *FPRC Journal* 2 (2014), p. 121.

5 Jiffrey Hashim, Ceylon News Letter, *Dawn* (Karachi), "Pakistan-Sri Lanka Relations.", *Pakistan Horizon* 38, no. 2 (1985), p. 104-128.

6 Staff Correspondent, "Pakistan again sides with war criminals", *The Daily Star*, 12 May 2016, <https://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/pakistan-again-sides-war-criminals-1222429>.

When Imran Khan came to power as Pakistan's prime minister in 2018, a change was expected. In 2020, he attempted to normalise the relationship with Bangladesh. Khan made a phone call and sent an email to Bangladesh's Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. In 2021, Khan wrote a letter to Hasina, congratulating her on the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's Independence and the birth centenary of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman (the Father of the Nation). Hasina positively replied to Khan and tried to improve the bilateral relationship between the two countries. This friendly overture by the two leaders showed a significant positive step toward improving bilateral relationships. However, Bangladesh has, over the years, been demanding an unconditional apology for the war crimes and misdeeds of Pakistani armed forces following the complete repatriation of stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh. However, Pakistan always remained adamant on its stand. This is a stumbling block in their relationship.

This friendly overture by the two leaders showed a significant positive step toward improving bilateral relationships.

Sri Lanka, on the other hand, viewed Khan coming into power as an opportunity to strengthen their relationship further. When Khan visited Sri Lanka in 2021, he was given a grand ceremonial welcome and fanfare. Sri Lankan Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa held Pakistan in high esteem for its unwavering support to Sri Lanka during its fight against terrorism.⁷

Opportunities for the Future

After coming to power, Khan looked for opportunities to realise Pakistan's economic potential as a trade, investment and tourism destination. For this purpose, it was important for Islamabad to look closely at its neighbourhood.

⁷ "Khan tells Mahinda Pakistan values its ties with Sri Lanka", *Colombo Gazette*, 23 February 2021, <https://colombogazette.com/2021/02/23/khan-tells-mahinda-pakistan-values-its-ties-with-sri-lanka/>.

Economic Partnership

Sri Lanka and Pakistan have shared flourishing economic ties since the renewal of a long-term trade agreement signed in 1984 to diversify and strengthen bilateral trade. Sri Lanka became the first country to sign a free trade agreement (FTA) with Pakistan in 2005. The FTA provides 100 per cent duty concession on 206 commodities from Sri Lanka into Pakistan while Sri Lanka has waived duties on 102 items from Pakistan. With that, bilateral trade has increased by 27 per cent, making Pakistan Sri Lanka's second-largest trade partner in South Asia. Bilateral trade, which was US\$169 million (S\$225.2 million) in 2005 rose to US\$345 million (S\$486.3 million) in 2021.⁸ According to the Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Colombo's imports from Pakistan in 2019 amounted to US\$370 million (S\$492.95 million) and its exports were US\$82 million (S\$109.2 million). Although the financial value of bilateral trade appears to be minimal, the diplomatic significance of their economic ties indicates a continued desire and potential to further strengthen economic relations.

Both Pakistan and Sri Lanka are engulfed in a deep economic crisis resulting from long-term unsustainable economic practices and immediate exogenous shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Sri Lanka and Pakistan see an opportunity to use the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to enhance their trade relationship. Especially for Sri Lanka, it is an opportunity to connect with the Central Asian region. However, given how the economic crisis is unfolding in both Sri Lanka and Pakistan, it is uncertain how the CPEC opportunity can be realised by the two countries. Both Pakistan and Sri Lanka are engulfed in a deep economic crisis resulting from long-term unsustainable economic practices and immediate exogenous shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The rising debt, galloping inflation and devaluing of the local currency have led both Colombo and Islamabad to seek support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to address the crisis. Pakistan managed to secure an extended term of US\$3 billion (S\$4.2 billion) loans from Saudi Arabia when new Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif made his maiden overseas visit to Riyadh in late April 2022. On the other hand, Sri Lanka is still struggling to secure a loan from the IMF amidst the devastating political turmoil in the country.

⁸ Mayilvaganan, op. cit., p. 124.

Similarly, Pakistan is eager to improve the bilateral economic relationship with Bangladesh and is keen to sign an FTA with it, although Dhaka is reluctant to do so. Bangladesh's GDP has already crossed the US\$400 billion (S\$542.5 billion) mark while Pakistan's GDP is still less than US\$300 billion (S\$407 billion). Bangladesh's GDP per capita and most of its social indicators are much higher compared to Pakistan. Bilateral trade between Bangladesh and Pakistan was about US\$1.3 billion (S\$1.7 billion) in 2011, which declined to US\$661 million (S\$896 million) in 2020. Bangladesh's imports from Pakistan were US\$947 million (S\$1.2 billion) in 2011, which dropped to US\$583 million (S\$790 million) in 2020, a major concern for Pakistan. Bangladesh's exports are much lower compared to its imports from Pakistan at only US\$62 million (S\$84 million), accounting for 0.08 per cent of Bangladesh's total export in 2020. This indicates that Bangladesh is a very important export destination for Pakistan. On the other hand, although Bangladesh imports mainly textiles and cotton, amounting to about US\$500 million (S\$678 million), from Pakistan, they are natural trading partners as they export similar products globally.

Pakistan needs to regain its position as an export market to Bangladesh as Islamabad is suffering from hyperinflation and perpetual negative overall trade balance. Friendly ties with its South Asian partner will help Pakistan make progress in its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and normalise its bilateral diplomatic relationship with Dhaka. A report by Pakistan Business Council⁹ indicates that Pakistan's export potential to Bangladesh is about US\$2.95 billion (S\$4 billion). Bangladesh will benefit from importing its garment's raw materials at a lower price in the pandemic as ready-made garments are the main export items of Bangladesh.

While the smaller South Asian states are struggling to balance their geopolitical ties with the two giant neighbours, China and India, Bangladesh has successfully balanced its ties with them and emerged

Friendly ties with its South Asian partner will help Pakistan make progress in its recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and normalise its bilateral diplomatic relationship with Dhaka.

9 "Trade and Investment Opportunities in a Pakistan – Bangladesh FTA", *The Pakistan Business Council*, September 2021, <https://www.pbc.org.pk/research/trade-and-investment-opportunities-in-a-pakistan-bangladesh-fta/>.

A formal apology by the Pakistani side for war crimes can only forge deeper bilateral engagement and cooperation between the two states.

as a regional economic power. Bangladesh has started extending loans to its neighbours to address their financial crises, investing overseas and progressively signing preferential trade agreements to enhance bilateral trade and investment cooperation, indicating an emerging power in South Asia. Bangladesh possesses substantial foreign exchange reserves and has developed the capacity to provide economic support to other smaller countries in the region. With loans extended to Sri Lanka¹⁰ and the Maldives, Bangladesh has quickly transformed from an external financial support seeker to a loan provider. Pakistan, on the other hand, has been struggling with its negative balance of payment and is compelled to borrow conditional loans from the IMF and China. Bangladeshi companies are investing overseas to ensure market access as the country will graduate¹¹ from the United Nation's List of Least Developed Countries in 2026. Therefore, a deeper bilateral trade and investment engagement with the business communities on both sides could be a stepping stone to improve bilateral diplomatic relations and trust, which is critical for the betterment of the people of both countries. A formal apology by the Pakistani side for war crimes can only forge deeper bilateral engagement and cooperation between the two states. The dealings of bilateral diplomatic relations require utmost maturity and pragmatism, keeping in mind the regional aspirations of both countries, which will help achieve their mutual national objectives.

Cultivating People-to-People Ties

Pakistan has the potential to revive cultural ties with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. With Sri Lanka, in particular, Pakistan has been promoting historical Buddhist heritage. Taxila, a significant archaeological site in Punjab, is a reminder of Pakistan's Buddhist history. Gandhara, the centre of historic Buddhist art, was situated in present-day Peshawar in northwest Pakistan. It is believed that Pali, the language in which

10 Sanjay Kathuria, "As Bangladesh Rises, Sri Lanka Finds India is Not the Only Neighbour With Deep Pockets", *The Wire*, 10 June 2021, <https://thewire.in/south-asia/bangladesh-sri-lanka-south-asia-india-deep-pockets>.

11 Md Mustafizur Rahman, "Bangladesh's Graduation: Challenges and Imperatives to Continued International Support Measures", *ISAS Working Paper 347*, Institute of South Asian Studies, 26 July 2021, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/bangladeshs-graduation-challenges-and-imperatives-to-continued-international-support-measures/>.

the canons of Theravada Buddhism have been preserved in Sri Lanka, was spoken in some areas of what constitutes Pakistan today. According to some scholars, after the partition of British India in 1947, the pre-Islamic history of Buddhist sculptures and other artefacts were used as instruments of nation-building and forged a unifying historical narrative for East and West Pakistan.¹² However, being an Islamic nation, Pakistan rarely recalls its Buddhist heritage. Rather, the Buddhist connection was recalled and revisited during the visit to Sri Lanka. Recalling cultural ties with the Buddhist community in Sri Lanka serves two purposes for Pakistan. During his term, Khan had emphasised on unleashing his country's tourism potential.¹³ Pakistan also agreed to open pilgrimage corridors for Sri Lankans to visit ancient Buddhist heritage sites in the country.¹⁴ During Khan's visit to Sri Lanka, he openly offered to facilitate Buddhist pilgrimage to Sri Lankans. Pakistan also assisted in its public diplomacy and invoked better foreign relations with countries like Sri Lanka and Nepal. Following India's bid to invoke Buddhism in its outreach to some of its neighbours, Pakistan has been seen using its Buddhist heritage in its ties with Sri Lanka and Nepal in recent years. In 2019, it sent sacred relics of Gautama Buddha to Sri Lanka for the Vesak Festival in the island nation.¹⁵

In terms of Pakistan-Bangladesh ties, when Musharraf visited Dhaka in July 2002, it was hailed as a huge success because the Pakistan president, who also happened to be the Chief of Army Staff, expressed regret for the events of 1971. Musharraf visited the National Memorial at Savar shortly after arriving in Dhaka to pay tribute to the national heroes of Bangladesh who died during the 1971 war. Musharraf's statement was warmly received in Bangladesh. Prime Minister

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12 Andrew Amstutz, "A Pakistani homeland for Buddhism: Displaying a national history for Pakistan beyond Islam, 1950-1969", *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 42, no. 2 (2019), p. 237-255.

13 Ashfaq Ahmed, "Pakistan declared world's third highest potential adventure destination for 2020", *World Asia*, 29 December 2019, <https://gulfnews.com/world/asia/pakistan/pakistan-declared-worlds-third-highest-potential-adventure-destination-for-2020-1.68714974>.

14 "Khan tells Mahinda Pakistan values its ties with Sri Lanka", *Colombo Gazette*, 23 February 2021, <https://colombogazette.com/2021/02/23/khan-tells-mahinda-pakistan-values-its-ties-with-sri-lanka/>.

15 "Buddha Diplomacy: Pakistan uses its inter-religious past to build modern ties", *Global Village Space*, 2 May 2018, <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/buddha-diplomacy-pakistan-uses-its-inter-religious-past-to-build-modern-ties/>.

Khaleda Zia expressed gratitude to Musharraf for his candour and hoped that it would help heal past wounds. It was not a formal apology but surely a significant step forward because Musharraf was not only Pakistan's head of the government but also the head of an institution that was responsible for all of Pakistan's crimes and excesses against Bangladeshis.

The SAARC has been inactive for a long time due to tensions between India and Pakistan, and the South Asia Free Trade Area has been largely ineffective.

Following this were many problems involving the trials of war criminals in 2013, which only strained the relationship further. Although the two countries are both founding members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and members of the Developing 8 Countries, the Organisation of Islamic Countries and the Commonwealth of Nations, bilateral relations still exist in deep trouble. The SAARC has been inactive for a long time due to tensions between India and Pakistan, and the South Asia Free Trade Area has been largely ineffective.

Conclusion

Pakistan reaching out to Sri Lanka and Bangladesh will bring immense economic and developmental opportunities for the three countries. It will not only strengthen bilateral trade and economic ties but will also enhance people-to-people partnerships. Most importantly, it will provide an alternative framework for regional diplomacy. Given the India-Pakistan rivalry, the SAARC remains inactive and dormant. Most summits are overshadowed by the clash between the two South Asian rivals. Strengthening relations with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka will show that the smaller South Asian countries could independently improve trade and diplomatic ties with Pakistan in low political domains without making it a zero-sum game for India.

Fall of Kabul: The Future of Pakistan-Afghanistan Relations

Zahid Hussain

Summary

Almost two decades after its government was ousted, in what could be described as an ironic twist of fate, the Taliban are back in power. In fact, their return was foretold after the United States (US) signed an exit agreement with the insurgents in Doha in February 2020. The Doha agreement paved the way for the pulling out of foreign forces, thus ending America's longest war.

There was always a doubt over how long Afghan government forces would be able to hold out without on-ground US support. Yet, no one expected the fall would come so swiftly. The Afghan forces, which were raised and trained by the Americans, just melted away in the face of the lightning insurgent onslaught. Kabul was taken without much resistance.

It all happened as the last American soldiers were packed and ready to leave Afghanistan, ending the so-called "Forever War". It has been a chaotic endgame that even left the Taliban stunned and unprepared.

The radical Islamist movement had ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, imposing a harsh, regressive and authoritarian order. Its return has inevitably evoked the memories of that repressive era, which had pushed Afghanistan into the darkest period of its recent history. It remains to be seen whether the Taliban 2.0 is any different from the past radical Islamist regime led by the late Mullah Omar, the supreme leader and founder of the movement.

The radical Islamist movement had ruled Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, imposing a harsh, regressive and authoritarian order.

Although the Taliban's top leadership has publicly promised to form an inclusive government with representation from all sections of Afghan society, there is no indication that it will honour its pledges once it consolidates its hold on power. Moreover, the announcement of the restoration of the 'Islamic Emirate' contradicts the very concept

of pluralism. The Taliban leaders have publicly rejected the concept of electoral democracy.

The Taliban leaders have also promised to take a moderate position on social issues, allowing women to work and have access to education. But they have also conditioned women rights under the parameters of 'Islamic Sharia'. Their interpretation of Islamic Sharia appears to have differed from the past. While the current Taliban's political leadership appears more moderate and flexible in its views, there is no evidence that the commanders leading the fight would also be amenable to change.

Governing a bitterly divided land ravaged by decades of conflict is perhaps more difficult than winning a war.

The transformation from an insurgent group to one in power is never easy. Governing a bitterly divided land ravaged by decades of conflict is perhaps more difficult than winning a war. Perhaps the most serious challenge for the Taliban is maintaining unity within its ranks. Many of the ideological and factional differences swept aside during the war have resurfaced with the group now in power. With no absolute authority, a power struggle is bound to ensue.

The struggle between the moderates who want to take a break from some of the harshest legacies of the previous dispensation and the hard-liners who are unwilling to reform could sharpen. While the Taliban may have appeared as a monolith during the war, differences in military tactics and other policy matters kept surfacing. Yet, the disagreement did not affect the resistance. The end of the war has widened the fault lines.

Many of the commanders in the field are believed to have more hard-liner views. Among them are those who joined the resistance as teenagers after the fall of the Taliban government in December 2001. This new generation of Taliban commanders have replaced the old guards who have either died or been sidelined.

The political leadership that negotiated the peace deal with the Americans mostly comprised veterans who were not in the field. Many of them spent time in detention and lived abroad after being

released. They have had greater exposure to the outside world and a relatively better understanding of the new reality, that is, the need to balance between extremist views and changing views to achieve international recognition. Unsurprisingly, they appear more moderate in their views, at least in their statements.

However, one must not expect a complete transformation of the conservative movement that has fought to restore the old order under the Islamic Emirate banner. The issue is how far would the Taliban leadership go in accepting pluralism and changing its regressive views on women's rights for the international community to recognise the new dispensation.

There is no organised resistance to the so-called Islamic Emirate. However, the calm could be deceptive. The Taliban cannot rule the country through brute force. Afghanistan is no longer vulnerable as in the 1990s when the Taliban could enforce their harsh social order. The promise of change and the pledge to establish a pluralistic political order may not satisfy the new generation of Afghans which is better educated and more aware of its situation. The fear of a reversal drives the exodus of educated Afghans in such large numbers to the old order. The assurance given by the Taliban does not have a calming effect. The unease is tangible.

The fear of a reversal drives the exodus of educated Afghans in such large numbers to the old order.

Demonstrations by women's groups are a manifestation of the brewing resistance to the attempt to curb their rights. The number of women participating in these protests may not have been large, but nevertheless, they show that people are prepared to fight back. Any crackdown on the protests could fuel more discontent.

The conservative orientation could be disastrous for a country facing multiple economic, social and political challenges. It cannot deal with problems isolated from the international community. One of the poorest countries in the world, Afghanistan, is on the brink of a human catastrophe with the large-scale internal displacement of a population fleeing the conflict and worsening economic conditions.

According to a recent United Nations refugee agency report, “...more than a quarter-million people have been forced to leave their homes since the beginning of this year. And over 90 per cent of Afghans are believed to be living below the poverty level. Further instability in the country could push more people into starvation.”¹

Many more Afghans are ready to leave the country to escape retribution and search for a better future for themselves and their children elsewhere.

These are some of the more serious problems the Taliban administration needs to focus on. The economy cannot revive under regressive rule. To run an effective administration, the Taliban need educated, trained and skilled workforce. The exodus of professionals has already left a big gap. Many more Afghans are ready to leave the country to escape retribution and search for a better future for themselves and their children elsewhere. The uncertainty regarding the Taliban-led administration and the prevailing ambiguity surrounding human rights issues, particularly the right of the women to work and their access to education, are not encouraging. Afghanistan is, once again, at a crossroads.

The effects of the seismic change in Afghanistan go beyond its borders. And, indeed, the resurgence of the Taliban after their ouster from Afghanistan in 2001, also took place beyond the country’s borders. Inevitably, the return of the Taliban and the restoration of the so-called ‘Islamic Emirate’ in Afghanistan have a huge impact on regional geopolitics.

It is tough for Pakistan to escape the fallout from the re-emergence of a hardline Islamist regime across the border. There is a tangible sense of jubilation among right-wing Pakistani Islamist groups which see the return of the Taliban as a victory for jihad, and even among those in the corridors of power in Islamabad.

Notwithstanding the euphoria, the Taliban’s military success across the border is ominous for Pakistan’s national security. The Taliban’s control across the Durand Line has given an immense boost to the Islamist militancy movement in Pakistan. The two decades of war

1 Zahid Hussain, “The Taliban challenge”, *Dawn*, 8 September 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1645170>.

in Afghanistan have had devastating effects on Pakistan, turning the country into a new battleground for Al Qaeda-linked militants. Insurgent safe havens along Pakistan's western borders have provided the Afghan Taliban strategic depth in the country, giving an impetus to Islamist militancy in Pakistan's hitherto tribal regions.

Predictably, the return of Taliban rule in Afghanistan has emboldened Pakistani militant groups. More disturbing for Pakistan are the reports of splinter Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) groups – based across the border in Afghanistan – being reunited, backed by some transnational militant groups such as Daesh. This development has led to an increase in cross-border attacks in the tribal districts, particularly in North Waziristan, where Pakistan's control remains tenuous. There may be some differences between their objectives, but the worldview of the Afghan Taliban and TTP is, in fact, the same.

This development has led to an increase in cross-border attacks in the tribal districts, particularly in North Waziristan, where Pakistan's control remains tenuous.

The recent border incidents are indicative of the souring of relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan's Taliban-led administration. The Taliban forces have removed border fences at several places, stating that Pakistan has no authority to build barriers along the Durand Line. A video posted on social media showed a truck bulldozing the fences along the Pakistani border in the eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar. Similar incidents have been reported in other areas. There have also been reports of the exchange of mortar fires on both sides.

Pakistan has been erecting fences along the 2,400-kilometre-long border to formalise it with Afghanistan and stop illegal crossings. Pakistani authorities said more than 92 per cent of the border has already been fenced. Historically, the border between the two countries has remained fluid with the free cross-border movements of tribes before Pakistan decided to erect fences.

The Durand Line, drawn under British colonialist rule in 1893, has been the main source of tension between the two countries for the past seven decades. Afghanistan does not recognise the Durand Line because it was created by the British "to divide ethnic Pashtuns". Islamabad, however, insists that the Durand Line is a permanent

border between the two neighbours. Tribe members on both sides of the divide consider it to be a “soft border”. The Taliban seek to have an open border for Pashtun tribe members inhabiting the region. The Taliban’s disruption of Pakistan’s border fencing happened as the Taliban had just completed 100 days in power.

Previous Afghan governments had also objected to the border fencing, yet there had not been any incident of the use of force to stop it. Pakistani authorities have played down the incident, saying it was a localised action, but a military spokesperson said the work on fencing would continue despite provocation. The Afghan Taliban administration does not seem to be backing down on the fencing issue.

Any more action by the Taliban to prevent border fencing could intensify regional tensions.

An Afghan defence ministry spokesperson said Taliban forces would not allow Pakistani military to construct what he called an “illegal” border fence.² Pakistani authorities are hopeful that the row will be resolved through negotiations. However, they also indicated that they would not allow the Taliban to disrupt the work. Any more action by the Taliban to prevent border fencing could intensify regional tensions.

Pakistan has been actively campaigning for international humanitarian support for Afghanistan. It has also been calling for the lifting of sanctions against the Taliban administration. Such actions by the Taliban may affect Pakistan’s efforts to mobilise international support for the conservative regime.

It is not just the border standoff but also the militant sanctuaries in Afghanistan that have caused strains in the relations between Islamabad and the Taliban regime. Some 5,000 militants took refuge in Afghanistan after they were driven out of the tribal regions by military operations by Pakistan.³ Most of them are settled in the eastern Afghan provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar with the support

2 “Taliban stop Pakistani troops from fencing border”, *Dawn*, 23 December 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1665245>.

3 “5,000 TTP militants present in Afghanistan: Pakistan”, *The Boarding News*, 29 June 2021, <https://news.boringnews.co/story/2021-06-29-fd-5000-ttp-militants-present-in-afghanistan-pakistan>.

from the Afghan Taliban. Last year, the TTP factions reunited and stepped up their cross-border attacks in North and South Waziristan. The two regions, which have now integrated into the mainland, have remained unsettled. Scores of Pakistani soldiers have been killed in the attacks over the past year. The TTP's chief, Noor Wali Mehsud, claimed the group was a branch of the Taliban Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Although a Taliban spokesperson has rejected the claim, the close association between the two is obvious. Afghan Taliban leaders have pressed the Pakistan government to consider the TTP's demands seriously.

Many of the TTP leaders and fighters who were freed from jails after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August last year have now been actively involved in planning terrorist attacks in Pakistan. The Afghan Taliban have repeatedly assured Pakistan and the international community that they will not allow its country's soil to be used for terrorist activities against any state. Yet, there is no indication that the Taliban would be willing to act against the TTP's sanctuaries in Afghanistan. A Taliban spokesperson has reportedly advised the Pakistan government to make peace with the militants. Undoubtedly this is not very assuring for Pakistan. Apparently, TTP fighters were involved in breaking the border fences along with the Afghan Taliban. The nexus between the Afghan Taliban and the TTP is a cause of great concern to the Pakistani security establishment.

Meanwhile, Pakistani security agencies have launched covert operations to eliminate the TTP leaders based in Afghanistan. In early January 2022, a senior TTP leader and the group's former spokesperson, Khalid Balti, was killed in the eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar. Although no one has claimed responsibility for his death, the news was broken by Pakistani security agencies, giving credence to suspicions about a covert operation. Earlier, two senior TTP leaders were killed in a predator strike on a militant sanctuary in Kunar province. The region has been used as a base to launch cross border terrorist attacks. There has not been any public response from the Afghan Taliban regime on the two incidents but such actions could further strain Pakistan's relations with the Taliban regime.

The Afghan Taliban have repeatedly assured Pakistan and the international community that they will not allow its country's soil to be used for terrorist activities against any state.

Looking beyond Pakistan, the return of the Taliban has had a huge impact on regional geopolitics. The return of the Taliban in Afghanistan could lead to further instability in South Asia. It is important and necessary to prevent Afghanistan from becoming the theatre of a new proxy war between India and Pakistan.

Historically, Afghanistan's strategic location has made it vulnerable to the involvement of outside powers and proxy battles. Continued instability could also lead to regional countries backing different factions and getting deeply involved in the conflict. The spill-over effects of instability and conflict in Afghanistan could be disastrous.

Muslim Brotherhood: Ertuğrul Ghazi Gallops to Lahore

Ihsan Yilmaz

Summary

Ties between Turkey and Pakistan were initially cemented during the Cold War period. A new scale of warming relations between Turkey and Pakistan has emerged in the last decade. Their relations are multifaceted. On the diplomatic front, the heads of states have exchanged visits. Turkey has openly shown support for Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. These ties have translated into several pacts to support military exchanges, defence contracts and economic collaboration. With a special focus on Pakistan, this paper will briefly discuss how Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's quest for a New Turkey, the leader of the Muslim World, has led his country to use not only conventional hard power but also soft power to wield influence across the Muslim world.

Introduction

Turkey and Pakistan have a longstanding history of a healthy bilateral relationship. Their ties were cemented in their Cold War military alignment with American security architecture. In 1955, the two countries became members of a regional defence pact called the Central Treaty Organisation. Their relationship developed gradually with the formation of the Regional Cooperation and Development in 1964 with a bid to jointly enhance the region's economic development. Since 1965, the two countries have reached a strategic consensus on the issues of Kashmir and Cyprus. While Iran and Pakistan's relations have been adrift, despite sharing a common border and cultural similarities, a new era of cordial relations between Turkey and Pakistan has emerged in the last decade.

Since 1965, the two countries have reached a strategic consensus on the issues of Kashmir and Cyprus.

In 2003, during Erdoğan's visit to Pakistan, both states signed a High-Level Military Dialogue for defence cooperation. The two countries organised multiple Pakistan-Afghanistan-Turkey Trilateral Summits

and, in 2016, signed a strategic partnership agreement.¹ Today, the two countries, with troubled relations with the United States (US), are Muslim middle powers with a growing entente in a multipolar Eurasia.²²

Similarly, Pakistan's geopolitics and size as the second largest Muslim country after Indonesia, makes it an important ally for Turkey.

Post-2010, the relations between the two countries began to intensify. Pakistan has consistently sought opportunities to re-present its post-September 11 image as a peace-loving nation versus a hub of terrorism. It is always in need of allies that would lend support in times of Indo-Pak conflict – Turkey under Erdoğan fits the bill as a brother.³ Similarly, Pakistan's geopolitics and size as the second largest Muslim country after Indonesia, makes it an important ally for Turkey.

The ties between Islamabad and Ankara have translated into a number of pacts to support military exchanges and economic collaboration.⁴ By 2020, they had signed around 13 memorandums of understanding, with five relating to the defence industry.⁵ The two countries aim to enhance bilateral trade to US\$5 billion (S\$6.9 billion) by 2023 from the current US\$800 million (S\$1.1 billion) under their strategic economic partnership.⁶

Turkey-Pakistan Relations Complicated by Third Countries

During the post-Cold War era, Pakistan lost much relevance for the Western security architecture. After September 11, the West's Mujahideen allies became the primary enemy, and Pakistan found

- 1 Rahat Shah, "Explaining Pakistan-Turkish Relations: Islamism and Naya Pakistan", *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 2022, p. 5, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/25765949.2022.2057718>.
- 2 Arif Rafiq, "The Turkey-Pakistan entente: Muslim middle powers align in Eurasia", Middle East Institute, January 2021, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/turkey-pakistan-entente-muslim-middle-powers-align-eurasia>.
- 3 Tanzeela Khalil, "India-Pakistan Relationship: A Case of Perpetual Instability", *NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability* 3, (2020), pp. 79-93.
- 4 "Turkey-Pakistan defence industry deals peak in last two years", The Middle East Monitor, February 2020, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20200226-turkey-pakistan-defence-industry-deals-peak-in-last-two-years/>.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Pakistan, Turkey to transform ties into economic partnership", *Dawn*, February 2020, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1534568>.

itself divided between the West and the Mujahideen.⁷ On one hand, the regional rivalries and problems among China, India, Pakistan, Japan, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), South China Sea littoral countries, Bangladesh and Myanmar have complicated Turkey's relations with Asia. However, on the other hand, Pakistan's dependency on China, strained ties with the US, conflict with India and its poor economy have restricted the scope of Turkey-Pakistan relations.⁸

Pakistan has been trying to compensate for its strained relations with the West by leaning on China for economic and military support. However, this has deepened Pakistan's dependence on China and weakened its autonomy.⁹ Even though Pakistan has significantly moved closer to China, it has not completely disrupted its relations with the US due to economic and geopolitical considerations.¹⁰ In fact, it is important for Pakistan to maintain cordial ties with the US and the West – this could help Islamabad from being removed from the Financial Action Task Force's grey list in terms of terror financing.¹¹

Even though Pakistan has significantly moved closer to China, it has not completely disrupted its relations with the US due to economic and geopolitical considerations.

Turkey supports Pakistan's official position on Kashmir. In 2019, at a roundtable conference on the margin of the 74th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Erdoğan called the Jammu and Kashmir region an open-air prison.¹² However, the growing role of India in the global order has become an important consideration in Turkey's South Asia policy. Thus, while maintaining strong military ties with Pakistan, Turkey has sought similar economic and political relations with India.¹³ However, New Delhi has questioned Turkey's stand on

7 Omair Anas, A Post-Cold War Era Context of Turkey's Asia Relations., 57-84. O. Anas (ed.), Turkey's Asia Relations, 2022, p. 73.

8 Ibid, pp. 64 and 81.

9 Ibid, p. 74.

10 Zahid Shahab Ahmed and Abdul Basit, Turkey's Relationship with Afghanistan and the Pakistan Factor: An Examination of Historical and Geopolitical Factors, pp. 113-130. O. Anas (ed.), Turkey's Asia Relations, 2022.

11 Ahmed and Basit, Turkey's Relationship, op. cit., p. 124.

12 Muhammed Huseyin Mercan and Güliz Dinç, Turkey's Policy Towards Crisis Regions in Asia After 2002, pp. 163-184; and O. Anas (ed.), Turkey's Asia Relations., 2022, pp. 169-170.

13 Anas, A Post-Cold War Era Context, op. cit., pp. 62-72.

Kashmir and the strengthening of its defence relations with Pakistan and has called Ankara not to interfere in its internal affairs.¹⁴

Several Arab countries, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, which were previously Pakistan's close defence partners, have gradually moved closer to India to expand their defence partnerships beyond the West. Consequently, Turkey has emerged as an important Muslim partner for Pakistan in the face of its growing isolation in the Muslim world.¹⁵ However, as far as Turkey's competition with Saudi Arabia over the leadership of the Sunni Muslim world is concerned, Pakistan is not likely to take a clear stand, given its economic dependence on and historic relations with Saudi Arabia.¹⁶

Strategic Partnership, Defence and Economic Relations

As Turkey's domestic arms industry has grown substantially in recent years, its defence deals with Pakistan have also increased.

China is Pakistan's main source of defence hardware. However, Turkey has been increasingly presenting itself as an alternative to inaccessible American and French equipment and has been easing Islamabad's near-total dependence on Beijing.¹⁷ As Turkey's domestic arms industry has grown substantially in recent years, its defence deals with Pakistan have also increased. Pakistan has been shifting from upgrading Pakistani hardware originally procured from other North Atlantic Treaty Organization countries to the arms made in Turkey. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute reported that Turkey was Pakistan's fourth-largest source of arms, surpassing the US, and that Pakistan was Turkey's third-largest arms importer during the period 2016 to 2019.¹⁸ Pakistan has plans to buy Turkey's T129 attack helicopters valued at US\$1.5 billion (S\$2.07 billion). It is also planning to acquire four corvettes from Turkey. Additionally, Pakistan has several modernisation projects with Turkey over its fast-attack

14 Merve Seren, Turkish-Asian Cooperation in Diversified Strategic Environment, pp. 131-162; and O Anas (ed.), *Turkey's Asia Relations*, 2022, p. 137.

15 Anas, *A Post-Cold War Era Context*, op. cit., p. 71.

16 Ahmed and Basit, *Turkey's Relationship*, op. cit., p. 124.

17 Rafiq, *The Turkey-Pakistan entente*, op. cit.

18 Ibid.

submarines.¹⁹ The arm trade figures are set to grow as Turkey fulfills recent orders from Pakistan exceeding US\$3 billion (S\$4.14 billion).

In addition to defence relations, Turkish economic investment in Pakistan has grown in the past decade. However, Turkey's shrinking economy has restricted its investments abroad. Similarly, bilateral trade between the two countries has remained stagnant over the past decade, peaking at around US\$1.1 billion (S\$1.52 billion) in 2011, partly due to Ankara's protectionism. Free trade agreement negotiations have not progressed either.²⁰ The absence of predictable and sustainable stability in Pakistan restricts Turkey-Pakistan's economic relations.²¹

While there has been growing literature on the two nations' strengthening economic, diplomatic and military ties, the influence of soft power used by Turkey in Pakistan has received rare attention.²² Turkey's cultural contributions to Pakistan are more important than military contributions.²³ Its soft power and public diplomacy activities include Turkish language promotion programmes, cultural centres, and charity and social welfare activities through agencies such as the Yunus Emre Institution, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency and recently introduced educational foundations such as the Turkish Maarif Foundation.

Turkey's cultural contributions to Pakistan are more important than military contributions.

Following September 11, while the Middle Eastern states faced soft-power challenges, Turkey was able to skilfully position itself as a potential leader of the Muslim world, challenging Saudi Arabia's claims to leadership, and advocating a moderate form of Sunni-Hanafi Islam enshrined in the Sufi mystic tradition.²⁴ However, as Turkey's

19 Seren, *Turkish-Asian Cooperation*, op. cit., p. 145.

20 Rafiq, *The Turkey-Pakistan entente*, op. cit.

21 Anas, *A Post-Cold War Era Context*, op. cit., p. 76.

22 See for one of the few exceptions, Ihsan Yilmaz and Kainat Shakil, *Transnational Islamist Populism between Pakistan and Turkey: The Case of Dirilis – Ertuğrul*, European Center for Populism Studies, <https://www.populismstudies.org/transnational-islamist-populism-between-pakistan-and-turkey-the-case-of-dirilis-ertugrul/>.

23 Ahmed and Basit, *Turkey's Relationship*, op. cit., p. 119.

24 Ibid, p. 121.

hopes of entering the European Union declined and Erdoğan took an authoritarian turn, Turkey's pan-Islamic rhetoric intensified to enhance Turkey's political stance in the Muslim world. To appeal to the extranational Muslims, Erdoğan has relied on a network of Muslim Brotherhood sympathisers across the Muslim world under the guise of Islamic solidarity.²⁵

Turkish Soft Power

Both leaders joined forces in their jihad against Islamophobia in the West.

In this context, Erdoğan and then Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan have emerged as two Muslim leaders who have advanced a foreign policy driven by Muslim nationalist emotions.²⁶ Both leaders joined forces in their jihad against Islamophobia in the West. At times, this has presented itself as mere anti-Western populist rhetoric.²⁷ Also, unlike other political leaders in Pakistan, Khan seemed to be the only leader keen in explaining Islam to the West, making him an ally of Erdoğan. The two nations agreed to set up a joint television channel to deal with Islamophobia and create an Islamic bloc to solve Muslim problems.²⁸ Thus, Turkey's rich history and highly industrialised film industry strengthened Turkish soft power in Pakistan and helped Khan implement his Islamist populist vision.²⁹

Turkish entertainment productions, especially soap operas, have been exported to more than 50 countries worldwide, resulting in high export revenue annually. Some of these are Hollywoodesque' political-action films and television drama series such as *Diriliş Ertuğrul* (Resurrection

25 Al-Sarhan, S (2019). *Erdogan and the last quest for the greenmantle*, <https://icsr.info/2019/05/23/erdogan-and-the-last-quest-for-the-greenmantle/>.

26 Anas, A *Post-Cold War Era Context*, op. cit., p. 63. For Imran Khan's Islamist populism, see in detail, Ihsan Yilmaz and Raja M. Ali Saleem. "A Quest for Identity: The Case of Religious Populism in Pakistan," *Populism & Politics*, <https://www.populismstudies.org/a-quest-for-identity-the-case-of-religious-populism-in-pakistan/>; Ihsan Yilmaz and Kainat Shakil. "Imran Khan: From Cricket Batsman to Populist Captain Tabdeli of Pakistan, European Center for Populism Studies," <https://populismstudies.org/imran-khan-from-cricket-batsman-to-populist-captain-tabdeli-of-pakistan/>; and Ihsan Yilmaz and Kainat Shakil. "Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf: Pakistan's Iconic Populist Movement," <https://populismstudies.org/pakistan-tehreek-e-insaf-pakistans-iconic-populist-movement/>.

27 Ihsan Yilmaz, "Hagia Sophia and Turkish Anxiety to Lead the Muslim World", *Berkley Forum*, 27 July 2020, <https://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/responses/hagia-sophia-and-turkish-anxiety-to-lead-the-muslim-world>.

28 Rahat Shah, "Explaining Pakistan-Turkish Relations: Islamism and Naya Pakistan", *Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies*, 2022, DOI: 10.1080/25765949.2022.2057718, p. 1-2.

29 Ibid, p. 2.

Ertuğrul), *Bir Zamanlar Osmanlı* (Once Upon a Time: The Ottoman Empire), *Osmanlı Tokadı* (The Ottoman Smack), *Osmanlı'da Derin Devlet* (Deep State in the Ottoman Empire), and *Payitaht: Abdulhamid* (The Last Emperor).³⁰ Even though they are historical productions, they recreate past glories and project current socio-political affairs into historical events and formalise new geopolitical imaginations. All of them re-write history and reframe geopolitical issues from an Islamist populist perspective of Erdoğanism.³¹ For example, *Payitaht: Abdulhamid* re-narrates the time of the Ottoman Sultan Abdülhamid and his struggles for the survival of the Ottoman Empire in the face of imperialist and sinister anti-Muslim conspiracies of the West, aiming to create a *deja vu* effect for the audience.

Even though they are historical productions, they recreate past glories and project current socio-political affairs into historical events and formalise new geopolitical imaginations.

All these productions overlapped with Khan's Islamist populism rhetoric. Thus, unsurprisingly, he told the nation to watch Ertuğrul Ghazi (*Diriliş Ertuğrul*), a Turkish drama dubbed in Urdu. It is a historical narrative and adventure story about Ertuğrul, son of Suleiman Shah, father of the founder of the Ottoman Empire, Osman.³² Ertuğrul Ghazi in Pakistan was aired in April 2020 on the national media platform Pakistan Television Cooperation (PTV). Khan remarked:

“Turkey has made this film or drama series which they call Resurrection, they made this film. And for this first time, they depict how the Turks progressed and how they conquered half of Europe as one of the greatest forces of time... the Western culture and civilization has hijacked us to such a great degree that we are unaware of our own past.”³³

Khan felt that the medium of films should be used to educate the “aloof” and “West-inspired” younger generations about the Muslim

30 Senem Çevik, “Turkish historical television series: public broadcasting of neo-Ottoman illusions”, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 19, no. 2, (2019), pp. 227-242.

31 Ihsan Yilmaz. *Creating the Desired Citizens: State, Islam and Ideology in Turkey*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021; Ihsan Yilmaz and Galib Bashirov. The AKP after 15 Years: Emergence of Erdoğanism in Turkey. *Third World Quarterly*, 2018, 39:9, pp. 1,812-1,830.

32 Shah, Explaining Pakistan-Turkish Relations, 2.

33 PM Imran Khan talks about “Diriliş Ertuğrul”, October 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ybeJ67nQj40>.

world's "glorious past", "triumphs" and "heroic figures" so that the "western civilisational hegemony" is "broken" with series' such as *Ertuğrul*. As a counter to "third-hand culture", *Ertuğrul Ghazi* has gone beyond pop culture to seep into deep fissures of Pakistani society's imagination and conception of Turkey.³⁴

Retail brands are not just limiting themselves to the cast of Ertuğrul Ghazi; rather, they are using slogans of 'uniting cultures' and 'Muslim heritage' to sell their merchandise.

The show's official Urdu YouTube channel, called the *TRT Ertuğrul*, by PTV, has around 18 million subscribers. By April 2022, views of its first episode on YouTube alone exceeded 125 million, and the show's Turkish cast members are now celebrities in Pakistan. Now, markets in Pakistan are full of fan merchandise. Retail brands are not just limiting themselves to the cast of *Ertuğrul Ghazi*; rather, they are using slogans of 'uniting cultures' and 'Muslim heritage' to sell their merchandise.³⁵

In a country already sympathetic to Turkey, the large audience for the show makes it a highly useful transmission device for religious populism in a transnational sense for Erdoğan. The instrumental value of the soft power of the show is such that the Justice and Development Party (AKP) has been highly successful in transmitting its narrative of glorification of the Turkic ethnicity as the guardians of the Sunni Muslim world.

The civilisational discourse of the show has allowed its Pakistani viewers feel part of the Muslim *ummah* that has been a victim of the whims and control of the "Western world" – throughout the show, *Ertuğrul* is busy unmasking the plans of the Crusaders, pagans and internal traitors.³⁶

Conclusion

Despite the rhetoric and the ongoing positive trajectory of Turkey-Pakistan relations, the two countries have not been able to substantially deepen economic, security and regional cooperation due to several constraints, including complicated relations with third

34 Yilmaz and Shakil, *Transnational Islamist Populism*, op. cit.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid.

countries, distance and weak economies on both sides. Pakistan's regional and international isolation is also a challenge in the pursuit of its relations with Turkey. Having said that, Turkey has been easing Pakistan's overdependence on Chinese arm procurements.

However, Turkey has been successful in its soft power projection in Pakistan. Its soft power instruments have been implemented in full force in the country. Erdoğan and his ruling AKP have been very active in Pakistan, using cultural centres, facilities, schools, aid, Islamist populist movies and television drama series to transmit anti-Western sentiments and propagating Turkey as one of the key countries that has countered the West in the past and is capable of resisting Western hegemony today. This Islamist populist narrative has resonated with many people in Pakistan.

Can Pakistan Really be China's 'Iron Brother'?

Masood Khalid

Summary

Pakistan-China relations offer a unique case study for academics and researchers on South Asia. It is an interesting topic of research since it involves demystifying a relationship which has stood its ground for the last seven decades, despite vicissitudes, and given that it has been maintained in the absence of any compatibility between their socio-political systems. What are the factors that propel this relationship and have cast an imprint on the regional and global security matrix? In my view, the centrality of this relationship vests in the mutual trust gained over the years, exemplified by mutual support in good and troubled times. A brief recount of the seminal events in Pakistan-China ties would substantiate this premise.

Historical Recount

They were new to each other and in a discovery mode as far as the contours of their relationship were concerned.

In ancient times, the fables of the Old Silk Route attest to trade and some cultural links between the people of Hunza and Gilgit-Baltistan in Pakistan's north and China's Xinjiang as well as the travels of Buddhist monks from China to Swat Valley and Taxila, the epicentre of the Gandhara civilisation. However, the mighty Karakoram range always came in the way of formalising any organised interaction between Pakistan and China. When both nations emerged as independent states, there was a knowledge gap between them. They were new to each other and in a discovery mode as far as the contours of their relationship were concerned. In 1966, the decision to link their countries through the Karakoram Highway (KKH), a precursor to the present-day China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), was to overcome the physical barriers separating the two peoples.

Pakistan was born amidst turmoil in 1947: the culmination of a long national struggle against Western imperialism and a struggle between two communities – the Hindus and the Muslims. China went through

similar experiences of anti-imperialism before 1949. Both nations thus found themselves unified in a common cause, retaining a measure of empathy. They did not allow their different ideological moorings to colour their perception of each other.

In 1947, Pakistan had to develop its economy, industry and governing structures from scratch. And it had to do so in one of the world's most volatile regions and in the shadow of a much larger neighbour. The quest for security was, therefore, a key driver of Pakistan's foreign policy, resulting in its membership in Western-led military alliances such as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation and the Central Treaty Organization in the 1950s. Pakistan's Western leanings, however, did not impede its decision to recognise the People's Republic of China in 1950, the first Muslim country to do so – a propitious start indeed.

This first step alone, followed by Pakistan's refusal to participate militarily in the Korean War and its disappointment over China's absence in the 1951 San Francisco Conference, earned it such goodwill in China that Chairman Mao Tse Tung instructed his foreign ministry in 1951 to develop ties with Pakistan.

The First Rendezvous

Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Pakistani's Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra met for the first time at the Bandung Conference in 1955, followed by their first mutual high-level visits to the other's country in 1956. Within two months of each other, Zhou's refusal of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharla Nehru's invitation to visit Srinagar during his visit to India in 1959, owing to Pakistan's sensitivities over the Kashmir issue, gave early indications of the course which this relationship would take in the future. Further interactions in Bandung and the two-way visits put to rest any misgivings or apprehensions that might have existed about each other's intentions and helped in developing mutual confidence in the new relationship. It is noteworthy that China trusted Pakistan despite its alignment with the West. Moreover, it was becoming clear that China wished to develop its relations with Pakistan, independent of its ties with India, which incidentally enjoyed great warmth in that period.

It is noteworthy that China trusted Pakistan despite its alignment with the West.

Tilt towards China

As China was isolated due to the Sino-US and Sino-Indian split, with cracks also appearing in its relations with the then Soviet Union, the border treaty was a major confidence-building measure and a turning point in Pakistan-China relations.

While China and Pakistan were engaged in laying the foundation of their relationship, China's relations with India soured when the Dalai Lama fled to India in 1959 and China failed in its attempt to settle its border with India, ultimately leading to their first border clash in 1962. The event of the United States (US) cosying up to India in the wake of the 1962 war caused huge dismay in Pakistan, a treaty ally vis-à-vis a non-aligned claimant when the US' assistance to India increased while Pakistan faced restrictions. This prompted Pakistan to have a fresh look at its US policy, the outcome of which was its tilt towards China. In 1963, both countries signed a border treaty. As China was isolated due to the Sino-US and Sino-Indian split, with cracks also appearing in its relations with the then Soviet Union, the border treaty was a major confidence-building measure and a turning point in Pakistan-China relations. Then, in 1964, Pakistan became the first non-communist country to land its airline in China. Another significant decision was Pakistan's denunciation of the 'Two-China' policy of the US in 1965.

Later, the war between India and Pakistan in 1965 proved to be a litmus test for Pakistan-China ties, when China, reciprocating to Pakistan's successive gestures, came to its rescue by supplying emergency military equipment which the US had suspended. Since Pakistan's armed forces had American inventory, the US ban affected its warfighting capability. Chinese assistance at the height of the crisis left an indelible mark on the Pakistani psyche and China began to be regarded as a trusted friend in need.

After an uncertain start in the 1950s, both countries had thus added depth to their ties. Pakistan's firm support of China's UN candidature, its facilitation of the Sino-US rapprochement in 1971, China's support to Pakistan in the 1971 East Pakistan crisis, its grant of a credit of US\$300 million (S\$414.3 million at current rates) to Pakistan [despite cultural revolution-related convulsions in China and a poor economy], its economic and technical assistance to build Pakistan's heavy industrial capacity, its waiver of a US\$100 million (S\$138.1 million at current rates) loan for Pakistan after the 1971 crisis and its first veto in

the United Nations (UN) Security Council in Pakistan's favour in 1972 to deny UN membership to Bangladesh collectively fast-forwarded this relationship. With the KKH nearing completion in 1978, Pakistan and China had laid the architecture for their long-term strategic partnership.

Core Principles

This relationship, often described as a model relationship, has been nurtured by successive Chinese and Pakistani leadership. Both countries avoid interfering in the other's internal affairs and demonstrate reciprocity in their dealings. Their mutual support on issues of each other's "core interest" has augmented this trust. Both have complemented efforts to break each other's isolation in regional and global affairs. China appreciates Pakistan's support when it was under sanctions and completely isolated. Similarly, China's support to Pakistan helped improve its security environment vitiated by the Indo-Pakistan rivalry.

Both countries avoid interfering in the other's internal affairs and demonstrate reciprocity in their dealings.

Pakistan and China celebrated the 70th anniversary of their diplomatic relations in 2021. Throughout these seven decades, the relationship has forged ahead and is now multi-dimensional. The perception of China as a close and trusted friend is deeply etched in the minds of the Pakistani people. Likewise, China considers Pakistan to be its close friend. It stresses that its relationship with Pakistan is a priority.

The CPEC: A Win-Win Blueprint

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is the biggest global economic enterprise of the century and has opened new avenues for the economic development of countries like Pakistan. Pakistan believes that the CPEC provides a win-win blueprint for regional connectivity and is coordinated with its narrative of geo-economics as a pivot of its foreign policy. The CPEC would not only help overcome Pakistan's development deficit but also serve as a conduit for trade and energy routes from China to South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe. China has come forward to help Pakistan achieve socio-

economic stability, which is a vote of confidence by China in Pakistan's economic potential. Today, China is Pakistan's largest trading partner and biggest investor. It is of no surprise then that seeing its long-term benefits to Pakistan and China, the CPEC is facing opposition from their adversaries.

Security Conundrum

In South Asia, the US has decided to promote India as a counterweight to China. Their increasing collaboration in strategic and military domains is creating instability and an arms race in South Asia. Pakistan is caught in a tripartite conflictual situation between the US and China, China and India, and India and Pakistan. This conflict-prone syndrome is ominous for the region.

Important convergences on regional issues and a futuristic vision underpinning this relationship have ensured its survival amidst multiple headwinds.

Critics of Pakistan-China relations often cite Pakistan's vulnerabilities as an impediment to realising their full potential. Its issues of governance and economy, political instability, the threat of terrorism, conflict with India and problems with Afghanistan are raised as a question mark on the long-term prospects of Pakistan-China relations. There is no doubt that these issues confronting Pakistan warrant utmost attention and are being handled by the Pakistan government within its capacity, but a counterargument is that despite these issues having persisted in varying degrees, Pakistan-China relations have not only sustained but, in fact, gained substance. Important convergences on regional issues and a futuristic vision underpinning this relationship have ensured its survival amidst multiple headwinds.

Strategic Synergy

There is also strategic convergence between the two sides. The following are several examples:

- Neither Pakistan nor China believes in a zero-sum Cold War mindset. The current upheaval in US-China relations is viewed as a great setback for global peace and security, economic growth and a deflection from the more urgent universal challenges faced by our planet. Developing countries like Pakistan do not wish to

compromise on their economic progress offered by initiatives like the BRI. Pakistan's experience in dealing with major powers other than China has been different. For instance, Pakistan has had a longstanding relationship with the US but with a chequered history. On the other hand, Pakistan-China relations have maintained their unique trajectory and resilience. This has been a relationship which is self-sustaining and without any conditionalities. Both value its worth.

- Pakistan and China feel secure in their relationship due to a reliability factor. Pakistan supports China's policy of a "peaceful neighbourhood" and all efforts towards resolution of regional disputes. India's action in August 2019 of revoking the special status of Jammu and Kashmir has introduced a new paradigm of conflict, straining India's relations with both Pakistan and China and alienating the Kashmiri people. India's refusal to join the BRI has generated more tensions. Pakistan believes that peace and harmony between China, India and Pakistan could change the fate of the region. Compulsions of geography and regional realities necessitate cooperation and normalcy which would offer great economic opportunities for South Asia and the wider region.
- Pakistan and China agree on strengthening regional mechanisms like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation and the Economic Cooperation Organization. Pakistan strongly resists any external pressure to dissociate it from the CPEC. Trilateral discussions are underway to expand the scope of the CPEC to Afghanistan. China will be a major player in Afghanistan's reconstruction effort and Pakistan's role as a trade route for landlocked Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics and a logistic base for China's transportation of men and machinery for Afghanistan will be crucial. Given the fragility of the situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan and China are engaged bilaterally and multilaterally to stabilise Afghanistan. Both Pakistan and China expect that Afghanistan's territory will not be used against them. The two countries agree that peace in Afghanistan is crucial for the BRI and the CPEC.

Pakistan believes that peace and harmony between China, India and Pakistan could change the fate of the region.

As the security of the region faces multiple challenges, Pakistan and China will ensure that their relationship remains a strong deterrent against forces that seek to undermine their friendship.

- Being a large market of 220 million, a nuclear weapon state and a prominent member of the Islamic community, Pakistan's role in South Asian strategic calculus is irreplaceable. Mutual dependability and enhanced strategic coordination between China and Pakistan will continue to be shaped by the dynamics of their respective relationship with India, Indo-US and US-China relations. As the security of the region faces multiple challenges, Pakistan and China will ensure that their relationship remains a strong deterrent against forces that seek to undermine their friendship. China is concerned over the growing strategic imbalance in South Asia and recognises Pakistan's legitimate apprehensions in this regard. China's defence cooperation with Pakistan is meant to rectify this strategic imbalance. There is unanimity in their views that partnerships like AUKUS (a trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom and the US) and Quad (the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between Australia, India, Japan and the US) will destabilise the Indo-Pacific region. Pakistan is also concerned about the nuclearisation of the Indian Ocean. While the policymakers in Pakistan recognise that there cannot be equality in the US relationship with India and Pakistan due to divergent geostrategic interests, they still expect a rational balancing instead of pushing the region to the point of the precipice.
- China's investment in the CPEC has made China and Pakistan major and equal stakeholders in its success. China hopes Pakistan will continue to take steps toward political and social stability, ensuring security for Chinese assets and personnel and overcome bottlenecks in the CPEC's implementation. During a visit to China in February 2022, Prime Minister Imran Khan reaffirmed his commitment to the CPEC and took a number of steps to ameliorate the security and business environment for Chinese investors. With a corresponding commitment from the Chinese side, the CPEC is expected to gain speed in its second phase.

- Being an important member of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, Pakistan can play a positive role in bridge building between China and the Muslim world through an objective evaluation of China's policies, motivations and actions in Xinjiang. China's concerns on terrorism, extremism and separatism are genuine and need to be fully explained and appreciated. Pakistan has a vital interest in the peace and stability of Xinjiang due to its proximity to its northern region, which is the gateway to the CPEC.
- The port of Gwadar is the centerpiece of the CPEC. The recent terrorist incidents in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan are said to be motivated by an external hand. The development of Gwadar and its potential as a regional transshipment and export hub cannot be undermined. Enhancing bilateral cooperation on Gwadar's security is a common objective and a priority for Pakistan and China.
- Multilateral cooperation forms a critical component of the Pakistan-China relations which has benefitted both sides in protecting their core interests. This cooperation may see greater synergy. The Pakistan-China-Russia trilateral cooperation also has the potential to contribute to regional peace and security and economic integration. Their potential to positively impact the stabilising of the situation in Afghanistan should not be overlooked.

China's concerns on terrorism, extremism and separatism are genuine and need to be fully explained and appreciated.

Conclusion

In recent years, China has helped Pakistan, through the CPEC, with balance of payment facility and greater market access for its products. China hopes Pakistan will be able to overcome its structural impediments through a sustained reform process and move towards self-reliance and economic stability. To this end, China is helping Pakistan in its capacity building. Pakistan-China relations will be further reinforced as new regional alignments and realignments emerge, posing challenges to their common interests. It is relevant to note that in October 2021, President Xi Jinping quoted:

“History has proved that the two countries have always been each other’s trustworthy iron brother no matter what changes the international landscape has undergone. Given that the world is seeing more sources of instability and risk, the two countries should stand together more firmly, promote their all-weather strategic cooperative partnership and build a closer China-Pakistan community of shared future in the new era.”¹

Nothing else can explain this relationship better than the bond of mutually reinforcing ‘iron brotherhood’, which Xi highlighted.

1 “Xi Jinping Speaks with Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan on the Phone”, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China”, 26 October 2021, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx_662805/202110/t20211026_10087508.html.

On the Edge: Resetting US-Pakistan Relations

Touqir Hussain

Summary

The relationship between the United States (US) and Pakistan has served some of the critical interests of the two countries for over six decades but has lacked strategic consensus, organising principle and continuity. Now and then, the ties have to be reset. This is one of those moments, but the challenge is different: how to bring some stability to the relationship in a world that has changed so much since they last reengaged in an international arena dominated by the September 11 events. They both face tougher new challenges and are charting fresh pathways in their national and foreign policies that will influence how they relate to each other in the future.

Introduction

The US-Pakistan relations are at crossroads. Policy planners on both sides have no clear vision of future ties, which they are struggling to define. On the US' front, the challenge has been President Joe Biden's ongoing search for a foreign policy that strikes a balance between President Barack Obama's policy of vacillating engagement and isolation and President Donald Trump's naked pursuit of 'America First' as well as finding ways to connect US foreign policy with Biden's own ambitious domestic agenda. Where Pakistan figures in all this is vague.

Policy planners on both sides have no clear vision of future ties, which they are struggling to define.

In Pakistan, there are growing sentiments that the country's mounting economic difficulties, rising challenges to its internal stability and continuing threats to its external security require good relations with Washington. But there is uncertainty about the American response.

The present phase of the on-again, off-again US-Pakistan relationship began after the 2011 killing of Osama Bin Laden by American forces. This episode marked the end of Washington's resolve to fight the Afghanistan war and the beginning of the end of the meaningful

US-Pakistan partnership in a war that largely defined their restored ties after September 11. The years that followed were full of mutual recrimination.

American trust in Pakistan worsened due to the unfounded public suspicion of the Pakistani authorities being complicit in sheltering Bin Laden. This included the military and intelligence agencies' unhappiness with the activities of the Haqqani Network, which was believed to be operating out of Pakistan. The blame game was aggravated by the US' extraordinary relationship with India and its emerging China containment policy, given the clearest expression in the Trump administration's National Security Strategy issued in December 2017.

The US and India's policies towards China converged, as did their security concerns about continued instability in Afghanistan and shared threat perceptions linked to the extremist and militant organisations in the region. All this culminated in a common focus on their opposition to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and both coordinated strategies to coerce or isolate Pakistan.

Pakistan's successful efforts to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table had also become irrelevant.

Washington's failure in Afghanistan had made Pakistan's legitimate assistance in the American war effort, from which it grievously suffered, pointless. Pakistan's successful efforts to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table had also become irrelevant. The deal Islamabad achieved brought the Taliban to power, leading to a chaotic and humiliating US exit from Kabul. Washington vented its anger on Islamabad by resuscitating the blame on alleged Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan for the failure of the Afghanistan war.¹ Then, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's jubilation over the Taliban victory,² and his criticism of US policies on American media network,³ added insult to injury.

- 1 Max Zahn with Andy Serwer, "Retired Gen. Stanley McChrystal: Afghanistan War was a 'failure'", 13 October 2021, *Yahoo Finance News*. https://sg.finance.yahoo.com/news/retired-us-general-afghanistan-war-was-a-failure-144647839.html?soc_src=social-sh&soc_trk=tw&tsrc=twtr.
- 2 Maroosha Muzaffar, "Taliban have broken 'the shackles of slavery,' says Pakistan PM Imran Khan," *Independent*, 17 August 2021. <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/south-asia/taliban-pakistan-imran-khan-afghanistan-b1903821.html>.
- 3 PBS interview with Judy Woodruff. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/interview/judy-woodruff/>.

On 13 September 2021, at a House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee hearing on the US' withdrawal from Afghanistan, Secretary of State Anthony Blinken was forced to sit through remarks from Congressmen over what they thought to be the negative role of Pakistan in the war.⁴ Blinken was advised that the US' relationship with Pakistan needed to be reevaluated.

While moving with the flow of Congressional grievances and agreeing that the relationship with Pakistan needed to be reassessed, Blinken left open the possibility that this reset did not necessarily have to be negative. He said that reassessment is “one of the things we’re going to be looking at in the days, and weeks ahead – the role that Pakistan has played over the last 20 years but also the role we would want to see it play in the coming years and what it will take for it to do that.”⁵ His response reflects that the US did not want to burn its bridges with Pakistan. Furthermore, Pakistan is also keen to revive the relationship. After deciding to skip Biden’s Summit for Democracy, Islamabad followed up with the offer to be a bridge between the US and China, signalling its desire to be in both camps and maintain cordial relations with both powers.⁶

The fact is that Pakistan has no permanent importance for Washington, nor does it have any lasting place in US foreign policy. Its significance has varied according to fluctuating US interests in the region, positioning it sometimes alongside Washington and sometimes against it. It is essentially a need-based relationship, and as its previous highs and lows demonstrate, you never know when that need will arise again. That is why both sides have been walking back from the brink and looking for ways to reset the relationship at a sustainable and low expectation levels.

After deciding to skip Biden’s Summit for Democracy, Islamabad followed up with the offer to be a bridge between the US and China, signalling its desire to be in both camps and maintain cordial relations with both powers.

4 Patricia Zengerle and Humeyra Pamuk, “Blinken says U.S. will assess Pakistan ties over Afghanistan’s future”, *Reuters*, 2021. [khttps://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/blinken-says-us-will-assess-pakistan-ties-over-afghanistans-future-2021-09-13/](https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/blinken-says-us-will-assess-pakistan-ties-over-afghanistans-future-2021-09-13/).

5 Ibid.

6 Naveed Siddiqui, “Pakistan to engage with US on democracy at ‘opportune time in future’”, *Dawn*, 8 December 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1662654>.

With the US' withdrawal, Pakistan and the US are searching for a new meaning to animate bilateral relations.

Where do we go from here?

For the past two decades, the relationship derived its strengths and weaknesses primarily from the Afghanistan war. With the US' withdrawal, Pakistan and the US are searching for a new meaning to animate bilateral relations. Divergent influences will shape and impact the trajectory of the bilateral relationship: unfavourably by US-India ties; positively by Pakistan's potential involvement in Afghanistan; unpredictably by US-China tensions; and unexpectedly by domestic political compulsions in America.

As to the broader elements of the emerging American foreign policy that provides the overall backdrop of the relationship, several factors might be worth mentioning. Biden's presumptive foreign policy, which he terms as being for "the middle class", would mean that the US is focused on protecting American jobs and factories by restoring balance in international trade and investment relations, strengthening manufacturing, developing supply chains and safeguarding American technological superiority. The policy also includes looking out for new business opportunities abroad for American companies.

This would be Biden's version of 'America First'. But, unlike Trump, Biden will pursue a traditionalist and elitist foreign policy that seeks the reassertion of global leadership and the strengthening of Washington's traditional alliances. Though the commitment will remain rhetorical and selective, there will also be an emphasis on values like human rights and democracy. All three foreign policy strands have become entwined with American domestic politics and come to find a strong focus on counterbalancing China and Russia.

The US Interests in South Asia

The US has two principal concerns in South Asia – China, on the one hand, and Afghanistan and the related issue of terrorism's threat to Washington and global security, on the other. For the China problem, the US primarily needs help from India, and for the other concerns,

it largely requires assistance from Pakistan. The US also has a stake in the stability of the region, and cooperation from both India and Pakistan is critical to this goal.

As for Afghanistan and terrorism, Washington has grown tired of carrying the weight alone. It is likely to outsource the task to Pakistan. Notably, the US' haphazard withdrawal from Afghanistan has had a big backlash for Biden domestically, and Pakistan's role in the war became contentious. He is thus determined to shift the conversation away from Afghanistan by avoiding public discussion of the conflict and steering clear of anything that could stoke memory of the war, like US-Pakistan cooperation. That is probably why he did not call Khan when the latter was in power.

As for Afghanistan and terrorism, Washington has grown tired of carrying the weight alone.

Biden would be pleased if Pakistan and European allies could cooperate and take the lead in mitigating the current humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, with Washington leading from behind. He would also like Islamabad to exert pressure on the Taliban on women's rights and inclusivity as well as by helping with the remaining evacuation of foreigners. The US also needs Pakistan's help in getting the Taliban to fight and weaken, if not eliminate, Al Qaeda and the Islamic State of Khorasan Province and other affiliated terrorist organisations, for which Pakistan's military and intelligence assistance will be essential.

General Frank McKenzie, Head of the US Central Command, alluded to the need for one particular area of cooperation by Pakistan in his congressional testimony, "Over the last 20 years, we've been able to use what we call the air boulevard to go in over western Pakistan and that's become something that's vital to us as well as certain landlines of communication."⁷ Separately, both the Central Intelligence Agency head and the Federal Bureau of Investigation director have also been saying that with the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US has lost the ability to "collect and act on terrorist threats", suggesting the need for Pakistan's help.

⁷ US Senate testimony on withdrawal from Afghanistan, September 2021.

Washington might also like to see if offering Pakistan an American alternative could contain Pakistan-China relations.

Pakistan is also geopolitically significant to the US. Besides, Washington has some economic interest in Pakistan, not so much on the account of potential connectivity amongst the Central-South Asian economies but rather to avail opportunities for US business and investment to enter Pakistan. The American private sector is gradually opening up to relations with Pakistan, partly to avoid leaving the field clear only to China and perhaps partly to test the limits and potential of working alongside the CPEC. Washington might also like to see if offering Pakistan an American alternative could contain Pakistan-China relations.

Pakistan's Interests

What does Pakistan seek from the US? Pakistan knows that the days of a high-profile aid relationship are over. It now desires investment, trade and assistance with international financial institutions, particularly the International Monetary Fund. The US is Pakistan's largest trading partner and its largest export destination. Pakistan also has financial vulnerabilities, such as being on the Financial Action Task Force's grey list, where America holds a whip hand. Additionally, Islamabad-Washington ties are also looked upon as a moderating influence on India's Pakistan policy.

The fact remains that China cannot, and perhaps does not, want to fulfill all of Pakistan's needs, given its multiple challenges. Pakistan will face uncertain headwinds over Afghanistan's future, continued pressures from an assertive and dominant India and internal and cross-border dangers from terrorism and extremism. Efforts to stabilise the economy, which is in a dire state, will present their own set of difficulties Islamabad will have to build amenable relations with the major powers, to successfully navigate these challenges.

Pakistan has recently been trying to chart a new course in its foreign policy and the long-existing governance paradigm. It began with the February 2020 cease-fire agreement with India along the Line of Control in Kashmir and conducting backchannel conversations with India. On 18 March 2021, at Pakistan's first-ever public 'Security

Dialogue’, Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa stated that it is “our desire to change the narrative of geo-political contestation into geo-economic integration.” He also extended an olive branch to India. More recently in January 2022, Pakistan has announced its National Security Policy, which places economic interest as the most critical dimension of its national interest.⁸

Conclusion

Washington cannot afford to ignore Islamabad. The latter has an important role in advancing or complicating US interests in the future. Its relevance to Washington stems from its strategic location at the crossroads of Afghanistan, Russia, China, India and Iran. Further, Pakistan’s close connections with China have a direct impact on the US Indo-Pacific strategy, and India-Pakistan tensions continue to undermine New Delhi’s capability to balance Beijing.

Bipolarity and nuclear weapons act as guardrails against conflict, as does economic interdependence.⁹ Washington can thus live with Islamabad’s good relations with Beijing since it recognises that isolating Pakistan would only lead to tightening its embrace of China. Moreover, targetting China-Pakistan relations would not serve American interests. It will have little effect on China, but it will destabilise Pakistan. And an unstable Pakistan, the US fears, would foster militancy, endanger its nuclear assets and raise the likelihood of confrontation with India, jeopardising America’s security and strategic interests.¹⁰ Overall, a Pakistan that is economically and politically stable may be instrumental to the US better realising its goals in the region.¹¹

Overall, a Pakistan that is economically and politically stable may be instrumental to the US better realising its goals in the region.

8 Farrukh Saleem, “National economic interest”, *The News*, January 2022, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/929195-national-economic-interest>.

9 Cliff Kupchan, “Bipolarity is Back: Why It Matters”, *Washington Quarterly*, February 2022.

10 Anwar Iqbal, “US generals express concern over Pakistan’s nuclear arsenal in wake of Taliban takeover of Afghanistan”, *Dawn* September 2021, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1649127>.

11 Marvin G. Weinbaum & Syed Mohammed Ali, “Seizing the Moment for Change: Pathways to a Sustainable US-Pakistan Relationship”, Middle East Institute Policy Brief on US Pakistan Relations, March 2020.

Pakistan wants a broad-based relationship but the US is not keen. During her visit to India in October 2021, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman said that Washington was looking for a relationship with Islamabad that served only a “narrow and specific” purpose.¹² However, a lot has transpired since then. There appears to be some progress in meeting each other’s expectations.

Pakistan may have played its cards well by skipping the Summit for Democracy and then offering to be a bridge between the US and China. It signalled Pakistan’s desire to maintain good relations with the US while simultaneously highlighting the strategic nature of Pakistan-China relations, the richness of whose substance was reaffirmed during Khan’s visit to China in early February 2022.

It is no coincidence that right during the visit, the US State Department spokesman Ned Price remarked, “Pakistan is a strategic partner of the United States. We have an important relationship with the government in Islamabad, and it’s a relationship that we value across a number of fronts.”¹³ These words have been rare indeed in recent decades. He added that Washington is not asking countries to choose between the US and China.

Both factors could be driving the State Department’s change of heart towards Pakistan.

Could the US’ relationship with Pakistan be that missing piece of the US’ Indo-Pacific strategy and China policy, by which it could exert influence over Pakistan to ensure that the country’s actions in the region do not undermine American interests? If so, this would apply not just to China but also to Pakistan’s growing relations with Russia. Both factors could be driving the State Department’s change of heart towards Pakistan.

However, engagement between Washington and Islamabad will not come without conditionalities and pressures, including some which Pakistan will have to accommodate for its own sake and the sake of its relations with the US, without compromising its vital interests, including its strategic ties with China.

¹² Washington’s Divergent Diplomacy in South Asia Foreign Policy Michael Kugelman, October 2021.

¹³ Anwar Iqbal, “Pakistan still a strategic partner”, *Dawn*, February 2022 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1673142>.

Russia Warms Up to Pakistan: Looking Beyond Security

Syed Muhammad Saad Zaidi

Summary

In contemporary times, while formulating relations, states prioritise geo-economic gains over geopolitical benefits. Hence, cooperation amongst former adversaries is far more likely. Pakistan-Russia relations are a prime example of former adversaries warming up to each other. In the last decade, rapid rapprochement has been witnessed between the two states. Regional geopolitical realignment, changed geostrategic orientations and altered perceived identities have acted as catalysts to strengthen the bilateral ties.

Introduction

In the realm of geopolitics, there are no perpetual enemies or friends. The national interest of a state drives the nature of its relations vis-à-vis other states. Thus, the nature of relations between states changes with time; old allies may turn into enemies or vice versa. This is evident when analysing the relations between Pakistan and then Soviet Union (USSR) and now Russia. Throughout the infamous Cold War, Pakistan and the USSR were stern adversaries, as the former was a vibrant member of the United States (US)-led capitalist bloc created to contain the latter. However, after the USSR disintegrated, the Russian Federation emerged, both sides no longer perceived the other as an adversary.

The national interest of a state drives the nature of its relations vis-à-vis other states.

The geostrategic paradigmatic shift in the policy orientation towards Russia was the pivotal factor that induced warming up relations between both states. Instead of a geo-military approach to increase its influence in the Indian Ocean region, particularly South Asia and Pakistan,¹ Russia pursued a geo-economics strategy; forging strong

1 Feroze Hassan Khan, "Russia-Pakistan Strategic Relations: An Emerging Entente Cordiale", *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 4, no. 1-Special Issue (15 January 2021): 43-65.

economic ties, which, in turn, gave it the much-needed political capital – a win for all involved parties.² As a result, decades-old animosities between Pakistan and Russia were forgotten and both states began to strive for socio-economic cooperation.

While Russia lost its trusted partner in South Asia, India, mending ties with Pakistan was its way to remain influential in the most geopolitically vibrant region of the world.

Furthermore, the regional political paradigm shift – India prioritising the United States (US) over Russia and the US shifting its focus from Pakistan to India – contributed greatly to the accelerated Pakistan-Russia rapprochement.³ Pakistan lost its decades-old key ally, the US; thus, ameliorating its relations with Russia, a resurging great power, was the best possible alternative. While Russia lost its trusted partner in South Asia, India, mending ties with Pakistan was its way to remain influential in the most geopolitically vibrant region of the world. Hence, the relations between the two states strengthened, especially in the economic domain.

This paper sheds light on the evolution of Pakistan-Russia relations. It highlights the key events that helped warm the ties between the two states. Most importantly, it explains how geo-economics collaboration trumps military or security matters in the two states' bilateral relations.

Pakistan-Russia Rapprochement: Geo-economics as the Main Driver?

After Russia, the primary descendant state of the USSR was established, the geopolitical baggage of the past did not characterise its relations with Pakistan. Instead, the ties between the two states hit the reset button. Soon after, high-level officials from both states were witnessed making frequent trips to the other state to lay the groundwork for improved and amicable ties. At the United Nations General Assembly session, both heads of state, Boris Yeltsin, President of Russia, and Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan, met and

² Ibid.

³ Syed Muhammad Saad Zaidi and Adam Saud, "From 'Geo-Strategic Rivals' to 'Probable Allies'? A Constructivist Analysis of the Pakistan–Russia Relations", *Herald of the Russian Academy of Sciences* 91, no. 2 (1 March 2021): 153–62, doi:10.1134/S1019331621020106.

agreed to strengthen bilateral ties.⁴ Shortly after, in 1996, Russia agreed to help Pakistan launch its second satellite, 'Badr-B'.

In April 1999, Nawaz Sharif, Prime Minister of Pakistan, visited Moscow; it was the first official visit by a Pakistani premier to Russia. Pakistan tried to develop a much-needed political capital with Russia, which later translated into Russia assisting in the culmination of the Kargil War in 1999. In 2001, Russia sold 16 MI-17 military cargo helicopters to Pakistan, highlighting deepening ties between the two states.⁵ Later, in 2003, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf visited Moscow and concluded several agreements to strengthen diplomatic ties – especially in resolving visa issues. Most importantly, Musharraf was able to win over Russia's support for Pakistan's bid as an observer member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).⁶

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In 2007, Mikhail Fradkov, Russian Prime Minister, visited Pakistan – the first visit of the Russian head of state to Islamabad. Bilateral relations further consolidated, and an agreement was inked on the joint exploration of oil in Pakistan. However, 2009 proved to be the watershed moment in the Pakistan-Russia relations; the Indo-US strategic partnership materialised which brought Russia and Pakistan even closer, as both had voids to fill – Pakistan was in dire need of cultivating a trustworthy veto ally while Russia had to maintain its influence in South Asia.⁷

The relations between the two states progressed rapidly. Interactions between Asif Ali Zardari, Pakistan's President, and Dmitri Medvedev, President of Russia, increased significantly. Consequently, multiple avenues of cooperation between the two states opened up. At the 2010 Sochi summit, both leaders agreed to establish Russia-Pakistan

4 Rouben Azizian and Peter Vasilieff, "Russia and Pakistan: The Difficult Path to Rapprochement", *Asian Affairs* 30, no. 1 (2003): 36-55.

5 Muhammad Owais, "Pakistan-Russia Relations: Economic and Political Dimensions", *Pakistan Horizon* 60, no. 2 (2007): 130.

6 Muhammad Hanif, "Pakistan-Russia Relations: Progress, Prospects and Constraints", *IPRI Journal* 13, no. 2 (2013): 63-86.

7 Zaidi and Saud, "From 'Geo-Strategic Rivals' to 'Probable Allies'? A Constructivist Analysis of the Pakistan-Russia Relations", op. cit., p. 159.

Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation. Furthermore, in 2011, while visiting Russia, Zardari expressed to his counterpart, “[We] are very close neighbours, we are in the same region. Our borders don’t touch, but our hearts do.”⁸

After the attack by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Pakistan – the Salala incident – Russia not only publicly condemned the US’ actions but also praised Pakistan’s contribution to the war on terrorism.

In 2011, Prime Minister of Pakistan, Syed Yusuf Raza Gilani, and Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister of Russia, met on the sidelines of the 10th SCO Heads of Government Meeting in St. Petersburg. The meeting proved to be a game-changer in the relations between the two states. After the meeting, not only did Putin openly support Pakistan’s bid to become a full SCO member but also proffered to assist in the expansion of the Karachi Steel Mills, provide technical assistance in the Muzaffargarh and Guddu power plants, and assist in the development of the Thar Coal Project.⁹ Putin also stated that “Pakistan is our major trade and economic partner and an important partner in South Asia and the Muslim world”,¹⁰ highlighting Pakistan’s geopolitical significance in the eyes of Russia. After the attack by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in Pakistan – the Salala incident – Russia not only publicly condemned the US’ actions but also praised Pakistan’s contribution to the war on terrorism.¹¹

In 2012, Putin had to cancel his visit to Pakistan, though he sent Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov who concluded several agreements in metallurgy, railway and power. In nearly a decade (2000-2012), the trade volume between Pakistan-Russia grew six times, highlighting the rapid progress in the bilateral ties between the two states.¹² More importantly, in 2013, the first Russia-Pakistan Strategic Dialogue was

8 “Meeting with President of Pakistan Asif Ali Zardari”, *President of Russia*, 12 May 2011, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/11224>.

9 Almas Haider Naqvi and Yasir Masood, “Rejuvenating Pakistan-Russia Relations: Discernable Trends and Future”, *Strategic Studies* 37, no. 4 (2017): pp. 18-38.

10 “Prime Minister Vladimir Putin Meets With Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan”, Official Website of the Government of the Russian Federation, 7 November 2011, <http://archive.government.ru/eng/docs/16991/>.

11 Khurram Abbas, “Russia’s Revival: Opportunities and Limitations for Pakistan”, *IPRI*, 4 February 2016, <https://ipripak.org/russias-revival-opportunities-and-limitations-for-pakistan/>.

12 Claudia Chia and Zheng Haiqi, “Russia-Pakistan Economic Relations: Energy Partnership and the China Factor”, *ISAS Working Papers: Long-Term Studies on Trends and Issues in South Asia*, 6 October 2021, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/papers/russia-pakistan-economic-relations-energy-partnership-and-the-china-factor/>.

held, which paved the way for the establishment of military ties. Soon after, in 2014, the decades-old arms embargo imposed on Pakistan was finally lifted.¹³ In 2016, in Gilgit-Baltistan, ‘Druzhbha-2016’, a Pak-Russia joint-military exercise was conducted.¹⁴

In 2015, a landmark agreement of US\$2 billion (S\$2.77 billion) was concluded between Russia and Pakistan on the construction of a 1,100-kilometre long liquified natural gas pipeline – the North-South Gas Pipeline – connecting Karachi, Pakistan’s major port city, with large industrial hubs located in the province of Punjab.¹⁵ Unfortunately, this project suffered from many delays due to issues ranging from US sanctions to disagreements over the project’s operational and financial details. However, in May 2021, an amended Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA) was signed between the two states. It renamed the pipeline, Pakistan Stream Gas Pipeline, and change the equity; Pakistan became the major stakeholder with a share of 74 per cent, while Russia owns 26 per cent.¹⁶ The signing of an amended IGA highlights how both states are striving to forge long-term cordial ties by exploring areas and using tools of ‘low politics’, contrary to past practices.

The signing of an amended IGA highlights how both states are striving to forge long-term cordial ties by exploring areas and using tools of ‘low politics’, contrary to past practices.

After more than two decades, in February 2022, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan was invited to visit Moscow. This visit was of great strategic significance as it clearly showcased Pakistan’s rising geopolitical status in the eyes of Russia, a clear Russian tilt towards developing cordial ties with Pakistan and an emerging Pakistan-China-Russia triad, especially in the geostrategic context. Most importantly, even though a full-scale war erupted between Russia and Ukraine a day before the meeting between the two heads of state, the meeting went on as scheduled, highlighting the geostrategic and geopolitical significance Pakistan holds for Russia.

13 Zachary Keck, ‘Russia Ends Arms Embargo Against Pakistan,’ *The Diplomat*, 4 June 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/russia-ends-arms-embargo-against-pakistan/>.

14 ‘Joint Exercise with Russia Progressing Well: ISPR’, *Dawn*, 28 September 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1286616>.

15 Abbas, ‘Russia’s Revival’, op. cit., p. 201.

16 ‘North South Gas Pipeline Project: Pakistan, Russia Sign Amended IGA’, *The News*, 29 May 2021, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/841561-north-south-gas-pipeline-project-pakistan-russia-sign-amended-iga>.

Since Russia's approach changed from geo-military to geo-economics vis-à-vis Pakistan, there has been rapid rapprochement between the two states.

Since Russia's approach changed from geo-military to geo-economics vis-à-vis Pakistan, there has been rapid rapprochement between the two states. Economic cooperation between the two countries increased manifold, evident from the massive growth in bilateral trade volume from a negligible US\$92 million (S\$127.4 million) in 2003 to over US\$800 million (S\$1.11 billion) in 2018.¹⁷

Hurdles and Obstacles in Pakistan-Russia Rapprochement

While there has been tremendous geopolitical convergence between Pakistan and Russia in the last decade, there are obstacles which could impact the establishment of long-term cordial ties. These include the following:

- The troubling past of the two states, which, in turn, could lead to a possible trust deficit between them in the future.
- Russia does not want to provoke Pakistan's archrival, India, one of its largest trading partners.
- Pakistan cannot afford to totally sever its longstanding ties with the US, Russia's geostrategic competitor.
- Security concerns and political instability in Pakistan are of great concern to Russian companies. As a result, they are reluctant to invest in Pakistan.
- The Arab world, in general, and Saudi Arabia, in particular, have never been comfortable with Russia. Pakistan would not want to harm its relations with the Arab world. It could, therefore, remain cautious in its dealings with Russia.

¹⁷ Zaidi and Saud, "From 'Geo-Strategic Rivals' to 'Probable Allies'?", *A Constructivist Analysis of the Pakistan-Russia Relations*, op. cit., p. 161.

Policy Recommendations to Improve Bilateral Ties

Undoubtedly, contemporary geopolitical transformations have brought Pakistan and Russia closer. It is in their national interest to forge mutually beneficial relations with each other. The following are some policy recommendations that could help the two sides to strengthen their bilateral ties:

It is in their national interest to forge mutually beneficial relations with each other.

- Promote Pakistan-Russia comprehensive dialogue – high-level officials from both states should continue make frequent bilateral visits. This will help overcome mistrust and help develop positive perceptions, which, in turn, will lay the groundwork for enhanced relations.
- Geo-economics should be the cornerstone of their bilateral relations. This will lead to greater economic interdependence and will lead to a win-win situation for both sides.
- People-to-people contacts need to be increased between the two states. This will help build trust and goodwill. For this purpose, programmes such as student and cultural exchanges should be promoted by both states.
- Both states share common security concerns (for example, terrorism and extremism) especially vis-à-vis Afghanistan. Thus, both states should devise common strategies to safeguard their interests.
- A triad comprising Pakistan, Russia and China should be formed in view of the international and regional geopolitical realignments.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Pakistan-Russia relations have often been underrated due to misperceived notions and a mindset based on historical legacy. Now, both states have the geopolitical and geostrategic compulsions to improve their relations. The way forward for both countries is to enhance mutual cooperation through a multi-faceted approach to maintain robust and durable relations. In many respects, geo-economics cooperation is the cornerstone of the perceived future alliance between the two sides.

Pakistan, the Middle East and Islamism

Matthew J Nelson

Summary

The Muslim world is divided between states that accept or support a substantial role for Islamist movements and those that oppose such a role, particularly Egypt's election of a Muslim brotherhood affiliated president followed by his removal in a military coup. Pakistan's key ally in the Middle East – Saudi Arabia – has emerged as an anti-Islamism leader; but with reference to Kashmir, Afghanistan and elsewhere, Pakistan has developed closer ties with the pro-Islamism camp. This paper examines the relationship between Pakistan, the Middle East and Islamism in the wake of the Arab Spring.

A decade after the Arab Spring in 2011, the Muslim world is divided. On one side, we see states that accept or support a substantial role for Islamist movements with a socially transformative ideological agenda – states like post-revolutionary Iran or Turkey under President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and his Adalet ve Kalkımna Partisi (Justice and Development Party [AKP]). On the other side, we see vociferously anti-Islamist regimes – in Saudi Arabia, under Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, for instance, or Egypt, under General Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

This divide between pro- and anti-Islamist camps has left Pakistan in an awkward position. Pakistan's domestic politics – from political parties like the modern, university-based Jama'at-e-Islami (JI) to the Deobandi, madrasa-based Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) – leave a wide berth for Islamist ideologies and political movements. Further, some of the most important pro-Pakistan groups fighting in Kashmir – from Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (affiliated with JI) to Jaish-e-Mohammad (affiliated with Deobandi madrasas) – share a broadly Islamist orientation. However, Pakistan's most important ally in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia, has turned *against* Islamism. Increasingly, Pakistan is torn between its own pro-Islamist values and its longstanding ties to the Middle East's most important anti-Islamist power.

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Islamism and Its Opponents

To grasp the overarching shape of this pro and anti-Islamism divide – and its implications for Pakistan – it is helpful to re-examine recent trends both within and beyond the Middle East.

Pulling away from any special focus on ‘Shi’i-majority’ Iran or ‘Sunni-majority’ Saudi Arabia in favour of an appreciation for *pro-Islamist* Iran and *anti-Islamist* Saudi Arabia, it is helpful to recall the 2011 election of Egypt’s first pro-Islamist Muslim Brotherhood leader President Muhammad Morsi and then, in 2013, Morsi’s removal in an anti-Islamist military coup led by General el-Sisi. Morsi exchanged visits with leading figures from Pakistan’s pro-Islamist Jama’at-e-Islami. But his removal by el-Sisi was supported by Pakistan’s vociferously anti-Islamist ally, Saudi Arabia.

The July 2021 removal of Tunisia’s pro-Islamist parliamentary speaker, Rachid Ghannouchi, by the nation’s anti-Islamist President, Kais Saied, was similar. For decades, Pakistan had cultivated close ties with Turkey’s pro-Islamist Erdogan; but even as Erdogan condemned Ghannouchi’s removal, Pakistan’s key ally, Saudi Arabia, supported it.

Pro-Islamism	Anti-Islamism
Iran	Saudi Arabia
Qatar	United Arab Emirates
Turkey	Egypt
Tunisia (Rachid Ghannouchi)	Tunisia (Kais Saied)

Pakistan has struggled to balance its ties with both sides of this crucial Islamism divide in South Asia.

Pakistan has struggled to balance its ties with both sides of this crucial Islamism divide in South Asia. While Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan and the opposition JUI chief Fazlur Rahman have nurtured close relations with the most striking pro-Islamist regime in South Asia, namely, the Afghan Taliban, they have also developed closer ties with the energetically anti-Islamist leader of Bangladesh, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Whilst the Taliban work to construct an exclusionary Islamic Emirate, Hasina has moved aggressively to deny any space

for domestic religious opponents from the Jama'at-e-Islami and a Deobandi madrasa-based protest movement known as *Hefazat-e-Islam* (Protection of Islam).

Pakistan is not the architect of this pro-Islamist or anti-Islamist divide. The drivers of that divide lie in Iran and, more importantly, for Pakistan, in Saudi Arabia. Pakistan has sought to project a position of neutrality but, increasingly, hints of its pro-Islamist orientation have emerged.

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Islamism

Since the Arab Spring in 2011, the basic parameters of the Muslim world's pro-Islamist or anti-Islamist divide have emerged from the shifting religious sands of Saudi Arabia under Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman, commonly known as 'MBS'. He has sought to articulate and export his own understanding of what he calls 'moderate' Islam: new forms of public entertainment, interaction of unmarried men and women, women drivers and more. Saudi Arabia's anti-Islamist ally, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), has taken this trend one step further, decriminalising the cohabitation of unmarried couples as well as the sale of alcohol.

MBS does not envision a liberalisation of Muslim (or Sunni) religious discourse. Instead, he envisions a consolidation of his own authoritarian interpretive power. In particular, he seeks to reinforce a clear hierarchy between the crown and Muslim clerics, or between the monarch and the Muslim Brotherhood, bringing the latter sharply to heel. In general, MBS' style moderation involves an explicit rejection of (a) anti-monarchical revolutionary regimes like that of Iran; (b) the university-based modernist or fundamentalist approach associated with lay Muslim ideologues from the Muslim Brotherhood (or the Jama'at-e-Islami); (c) the influential evangelism of global Sunni missionary movements like South Asia's Deobandi Tablighi Jama'at; and (d) the historically embedded social and political autonomy of madrasa-based clerics representing various Sunni *madhhabs* (schools of Islamic juris-prudence). In Saudi Arabia, Wahhabi clerics continue to play an important role within the kingdom's religious establishment.

In Saudi Arabia, Wahhabi clerics continue to play an important role within the kingdom's religious establishment.

However, MBS has restricted their space for political manoeuvre, in particular, with respect to their role in the kingdom's notorious vice-and-virtue police called the Mutaween.

In the case of Muslim leaders battling the Muslim Brotherhood, the Jama'at-e-Islami and various Salafi or Deobandi challengers (such as el-Sisi [Egypt], Saied [Tunisia] and Hasina [Bangladesh]), Saudi Arabia's appeal to Muslim moderation, combined with authoritarian political power, is familiar. However, in Pakistan, this combination has also made for an increasingly difficult fit.

Pakistan's military establishment is broadly sympathetic to forms of religious nationalism framed by authoritarian power.

Pakistan's military establishment is broadly sympathetic to forms of religious nationalism framed by authoritarian power. However, as noted above, the Pakistani state also retains close ties with many other politically active Islamists. Even when Khan, Pakistan's pro-establishment prime minister, faced considerable resistance from destabilising clerical movements – an anti-blasphemy movement known as the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (Movement of “Prophetic Presence” in Pakistan) and, simultaneously, a violent Taliban offshoot known as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (Movement of Pakistan Taliban) – the state did not seek to eliminate them. Instead, Islamabad initiated talks to acknowledge and partially accommodate their demands.

There is no denying about Pakistan's close relationship with Saudi Arabia. However, in recent years, it is equally clear that Pakistan has had no interest in joining the kingdom's push for a global anti-Islamist coalition. On the contrary – and, from a sectarian perspective, counter-intuitively – military and civilian leaders in Sunni-majority Pakistan have recalibrated and enhanced their engagement with the pro-Islamist government in Iran.

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Iran

In 2015, Pakistan surprised Saudi Arabia with a unanimous parliamentary vote refusing to join the kingdom's military intervention against Iran-backed Houthi rebels fighting to wrest control from Yemen's exiled President Abd-Rabu Mansour Hadi.¹

More recently, Pakistan and Iran have sought new ways to capitalise on transit and trade opportunities associated with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In particular, Pakistan and Iran are exploring ambitious new forms of regional connectivity along their common coastline on the Gulf of Oman.

Pakistan's Gwadar port – a linchpin of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) linking the BRI's overland Asian 'belt' to its global maritime 'road' – was poised to compete with a nearby port in the Iranian town of Chabahar. The port in Chabahar, scarcely 100 miles west of Gwadar, was initially co-funded by Iran, alongside Pakistan's key rival, India (owing to a special exemption from United States [US] sanctions targeting the regime in Tehran). Bypassing Pakistan and China, India sought a new route through Iran and Afghanistan to Central Asia and, from there, to Russia: the so-called North-South Corridor. But, for India, this route was dependent on a friendly regime in Kabul. That option disappeared when Pakistani support helped the Afghan Taliban seize power in Kabul in 2021. At that point, Indian financing for the port in Chabahar was lagging. However, increasingly, financing from China has emerged to fill the gap, transforming a North-South Corridor project initially meant to bypass the CPEC and the BRI into a project more closely tied to the BRI itself. In effect, a pro-Islamist regime in Iran has cooperated with Pakistan to advance one of the most important trade-and-infrastructure corridors in the world.

In effect, a pro-Islamist regime in Iran has cooperated with Pakistan to advance one of the most important trade-and-infrastructure corridors in the world.

The implications of this new link have not been lost on Saudi Arabia. In fact, even apart from China's BRI, Pakistan and Iran have sought

¹ Hadi is currently based in Saudi Arabia. The Houthis have targetted both Saudi Arabia and the UAE with several missile attacks.

Once again, Pakistan's ties with Iran have cut against Saudi interests in the region.

new ways to secure the Pakistani province of Balochistan and the Iranian province of Sistan and Balochistan against external and/or cross-border attacks. Specifically, Iran has sought Pakistani support against Sunni insurgents allegedly aided by Saudi Arabia targetting the interests of Tehran (for example, Jaish-e-Adl or Jundullah) even as Pakistan has sought Iranian support against ethnic Baloch insurgents allegedly aided by India who have demanded independence from Pakistan (for example, the Baloch Liberation Army, the Baloch Republican Army and, more recently, a new formation known as the Baloch Nationalist Freedom Movement). Once again, Pakistan's ties with Iran have cut against Saudi interests in the region.

Pakistan, Saudi Arab and Afghanistan

Similar frictions have emerged in Afghanistan, where Pakistan's support for the Taliban's restoration of a pro-Islamist emirate in Kabul only further widened Islamabad's distance from Riyadh.

During the Afghan jihad against the Soviet intervention, Afghan mujahideen were supported by Saudi Arabia via Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Directorate, with the Saudi leader of al-Qaeda, Osama bin Laden, helping to coordinate anti-Soviet Arab jihadis. After the Soviets withdrew (1989) and particularly after the Taliban seized power in Kabul (1996), the Taliban established a new Islamic 'emirate' that received formal diplomatic recognition from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and the Emirates. However, the Taliban *maintained* their relationship with al-Qaeda and Pakistan even *after* al-Qaeda attacked the US (2001) and then turned their guns on Saudi Arabia (2003).

For nearly 20 years, the Taliban battled American troops to restore their emirate in Kabul (2001-2021). However, throughout this period, key Taliban leaders remained in the Pakistani city of Quetta – the so-called Quetta Shura. Riyadh offered to host a series of talks between the US-backed Afghan government and key members of the Pakistan-backed Quetta Shura in 2019 but the Taliban refused. Insisting that they would not negotiate with what they saw as America's Afghan

‘puppet’ regime under Afghan President Ashraf Ghani, they accepted an offer from the pro-Islamist regime in Doha to negotiate with Washington instead. In effect, the Pakistan-based, Pakistan-backed pro-Islamist and al-Qaeda-affiliated Taliban turned away from the anti-Islamist regime of MBS toward a pro-Islamist regime in Qatar.

In fact, the Pakistan-backed Taliban turned away from Saudi Arabia to Qatar even as Saudi Arabia and the UAE imposed an economic blockade on Qatar for its pro-Islamist ties to Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood and al-Qaeda. During this blockade, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif sought to project a position of neutrality even as Turkey extended active diplomatic and military support to Qatar. However, Nawaz Sharif was later removed from office by a Pakistan Supreme Court judgment that relied heavily on a disclosure of financial interests tied to a document provided by the anti-Islamist regime in Abu Dhabi.

Since the Pakistan-backed Afghan Taliban returned to power in Kabul, the role of Pakistan’s erstwhile partners in Riyadh and Abu Dhabi has been minimal. Today, diplomatic access in Kabul passes through the pro-Islamist regime in Doha. From Islamabad to Kabul, as well as Doha and Istanbul, the common link is not merely pragmatic or logistical. With respect to Islamism, at least, the link is also partly ideological.

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and India

However, the most glaring illustration of the post-Arab Spring divide between pro- and anti-Islamist camps is not strictly confined to Saudi Arabia. From Pakistan’s perspective, the most glaring illustration also concerns the shifting relationship between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan’s chief rival, India. In the past, Saudi Arabia and the UAE enjoyed close ties with Pakistan. However, following MBS, both Saudi Arabia and the Emirates have tilted sharply in the direction of (anti-Islamist) India.

Seeking to choke off a popular Muslim resistance movement in Indian-administered Kashmir that is also supported by Jama’at-e-Islami and Deobandi militant movements (for example, Hizb-ul-

During this blockade, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif sought to project a position of neutrality even as Turkey extended active diplomatic and military support to Qatar.

Mujahideen and Jaish-e-Mohammad), India abrogated the special constitutional autonomy associated with the state of Jammu and Kashmir in early August 2019. Pakistan assumed that Saudi Arabia and the UAE would reinforce its diplomatic objections but they refused. Instead, both states praised India's Hindu-nationalist Prime Minister Narendra Modi for boosting India's ties with the Gulf. Indeed, under MBS, Saudi Arabia's economic investments in India have grown to five times the size of Saudi investments in Pakistan. And, already in 2016, Saudi Arabia awarded Modi its highest civilian honour, the Order of Abdulaziz Al-Saud (Special Class). Further, in late August 2019, the Emirates added its own highest honour, the Order of Zayed, despite Modi's controversial actions in Kashmir just three weeks earlier and his widely documented reputation for failing to deter deadly vigilante violence targeting Muslims in India.

The Gulf's anti-Islamist monarchies were not invited, and, in due course, Saudi Arabia threatened Pakistan with sanctions.

Seeking support for its objections to Modi's actions in Kashmir, Pakistan turned away from Saudi Arabia to Turkey and Malaysia. However, Saudi Arabia retaliated. Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad had previously invited Pakistan, Iran, Qatar and Turkey as well as Indonesia to an event in Kuala Lumpur in December 2019 that some described as a pro-Islamist alternative to the Saudi-led Organisation of Islamic Cooperation. The Gulf's anti-Islamist monarchies were not invited, and, in due course, Saudi Arabia threatened Pakistan with sanctions. Pakistan did not attend the meeting in Kuala Lumpur but when Pakistan asked Malaysia to support its objections regarding Kashmir, Saudi Arabia called in Pakistan's final payment on a US\$3 billion loan (S\$2.2 billion) and halted a deferred-payment scheme on Saudi oil shipments. Even when Pakistan's top general, Qamar Javed Bajwa, was dispatched to Riyadh, MBS refused to see him, forcing him to meet the Saudis' chief military officer instead.

Apparently, MBS did not view this possibility of a global pro-Islamist Muslim bloc kindly. To reinforce his point, he simply used India's controversial actions in Kashmir – in many ways, the most important foreign policy issue in Pakistan.

Conclusion

Changes led by MBS in Saudi Arabia figure powerfully in Pakistan's relationship with the Middle East and, beyond this, the wider Muslim world. These changes have heightened a longstanding cleavage between the supporters and opponents of several different shades of Islamism – from the anti-monarchical revolutionary regime in Iran to university-based modernist or fundamentalist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood or the Jama'at-e-Islami and traditional Deobandi groups like the Tablighi Jama'at or the Taliban. While MBS has turned against these groups, Pakistan has not. Pakistan's ties to all these different groups have increasingly pushed it away from its historically embedded ties to Saudi Arabia in favour of Saudi rivals like Qatar, Turkey and Iran.

For Pakistan, there is geostrategic value on both sides of this critical Islamism divide. It is, therefore, unlikely that Islamabad will begin to downplay its relationship with Riyadh even as numerous contexts from Balochistan and Afghanistan to Kashmir push it to engage with Tehran. However, the challenge will lie in maintaining some semblance of neutrality. Pakistan's geostrategic interests are sharply divided. However, among both its military and incumbent civilian elites, its Islamist values are not.

Pakistan's ties to all these different groups have increasingly pushed it away from its historically embedded ties to Saudi Arabia in favour of Saudi rivals like Qatar, Turkey and Iran.

Postscript: The Political Future of Pakistan

Iqbal Singh Sevea

In the coming months, Pakistan will witness intense political, constitutional, and ideological contestations that will shape its political future.

Imran Khan's innings as Pakistan's prime minister came to an end when his government lost a no-confidence motion on 9 April 2022. Shehbaz Sharif was swiftly elected to replace Khan with the support of a coalition that included the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) [JUI-F]. Given that there is little that binds these parties together apart from their opposition to Khan, Pakistan is effectively in election mode. Even before the vote of no-confidence, Khan and his party, the Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), had begun mobilising their supporters through mass *jalsas* (rallies), press conferences, and the use of social media. In the coming months, Pakistan will witness intense political, constitutional, and ideological contestations that will shape its political future. For instance, parties like the JUI-F and the PPP are calling for electoral reforms that will overturn bills passed by the PTI, which allowed overseas Pakistanis – amongst whom Khan has substantial support – to vote. This reflects the fact that both Khan and the PTI should by no means be written off. Indeed, just as it was becoming clear that the PTI would lose power at the centre, the party emerged as the big winner in local body elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Khan's message of fighting corruption and political dynasts, together with his appeal to religious symbolism, have won him a loyal base among the middle class, youth, and the diaspora. In his public addresses since being deposed, Khan has reiterated these issues and asserted that he is fighting for *haqiqi azaadi* (true freedom) against foreign powers and their local conspirators. The popularity of Khan's political rhetoric is linked to the emergence of a new politically significant middle class. More broadly, developments that led to the PTI government being deposed point to reconfigurations in the role of the military and the judiciary in the political sphere. The call for *haqiqi azaadi* has been welcomed by some observers for seemingly challenging the hold of the military and established political elites.

However, Khan's political rhetoric coupled with his government's attempts to prevent the no-confidence motion from taking place does not bolster Pakistan's nascent democratic structures. There are two aspects of his political discourse which are particularly salient in this regard. First, all the economic problems of Pakistan are linked to corruption. In line with this, politicians are presented as *chors* (thieves) and the cause of all of Pakistan's ills. Here, Khan is echoing military leaders like Ayub Khan who justified military coups as the only recourse to save the country from self-serving politicians. Second, he presents himself as the only leader who can save the country and chart an independent foreign policy. This was reflected in his style of governance, which some had likened to a presidential rather than a parliamentary system.

Khan has also made a conscious effort to appeal to religiously and socially conservative sections of society. Such an interlacing of populism, religion and power has found support amongst sections of the middle class. In fact, it signals the emergence of a middle class that is aspirational, conservative, politically important and happy to support the rise of a strong man. It is also worth noting that Khan's unsuccessful attempt to dissolve parliament to avoid the vote of no confidence questions the legitimacy of parliamentary processes. The PTI government invoked Article Five of the constitution to dissolve the parliament. This paper iterates that loyalty to the state is the duty of every citizen. The use of this clause to dismiss the parliament essentially implied that the opposition members who had supported the no-confidence motion were disloyal and conspiring against the state. These are serious allegations that question the legitimacy of parliamentary processes. Since 1958, the unilateral dissolution of parliaments by various presidents had stunted the development of the democratic process in Pakistan. Thus, the 18th Amendment of 2010, which removed this presidential power, has been hailed as strengthening democracy. The use of Article Five to call for fresh elections, which was ruled to be unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, warned of a return to pre-2010 politics. The PTI had come to power in 2018, promising to build a *Naya* Pakistan (New Pakistan). However, its inability to deal with rising debt and soaring inflation led to disillusionment.

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Significantly, Khan also lost the support of the military. The military is widely believed to have played a role in ensuring that Khan and the PTI came to power in 2018. There were serious allegations levelled against it of censoring the media and facilitating alliances during the electoral hustings. Subsequently, the military's influence over official decisions resulted in Khan's government being described as a hybrid regime. While the military has long played an important role in Pakistani politics, Khan's lauding of his close working relationship with it provided a new type of discursive legitimisation of the hybrid regime model. The military was now publicly associated with specific policies. Thus, sections within the security establishment were concerned that the PTI's inability to deal with the economic situation could potentially impact the military's legitimacy.

Looking ahead, it may also be a signal that the military is keen to return to a scenario where it is not publicly associated with a specific government and party.

The growing rifts between the government and military were publicly seen in the disagreement over the appointment of the chief of the Inter-Services Intelligence spy agency in 2021. The military was also concerned by Khan's rejection of, in his words, Pakistan's "humiliating relations" with the United States (US) and over-reliance on China. It has long been keen on balancing Pakistan's relations with China and the US. The military's decision to remain 'neutral' was key to the fall of the PTI government. Looking ahead, it may also be a signal that the military is keen to return to a scenario where it is not publicly associated with a specific government and party.

Given the economic distress that Pakistan is facing and the fact that subsequent governments will need to make difficult choices such as cutting subsidies and expanding the tax base, the military is likely to be concerned about being linked too closely with the government. Moreover, the hybrid regime experiment is largely associated with the current Chief of the Army Staff, General Qamar Bajwa, and has had its critiques within the military itself. The fact that Khan had repeatedly stressed that the military and his government were on the 'same page' resulted in sections within the military being concerned about being linked with the PTI government's inability to deal with the economic situation and its poor governance record. While it remains to be seen who will replace General Bajwa when he retires in November 2022,

the military will likely revert to a policy of publicly keeping a distance from the government. This does not, of course, mean that it will not exert political influence. On the contrary, recent statements by General Bajwa on the importance of relations with the US and the importance of its military supplies indicate its preferred direction for Pakistan's foreign policy and strategic relations. Thus, the military will likely allow the various parties to jostle it out in the political arena and not be actively involved in 'match fixing'.

After all, the military does not have any easy ally this time around. The PML-N, PPP and PTI have complicated relations with the military. While they have received patronage from the military, they also blame the army for destabilising their governments. In contrast, there are signals that the judiciary is willing to play an active role in the political sphere. Khan became the first prime minister to lose a no-confidence motion because the Supreme Court ruled that his attempt to dissolve the parliament was unconstitutional. Notably, Chief Justice Umar Bandial had taken *suo moto* notice of the political developments that were unfolding. Since the vote, the Supreme Court has ruled that parliamentarians who defect will not be allowed to participate in no-confidence motions. This ruling will have a major impact on the tussle between the PTI and PML-N for the chief ministership of the politically important province of Punjab. Chief Justice Bandial has also taken *suo moto* notice of the "perceived interference" by the current government in ongoing investigations against them. To be sure, the judiciary has intervened in the political space before. This includes ruling General Pervez Musharraf's actions as president to be unconstitutional and removing Nawaz Sharif as prime minister. In the past, it has also not been averse to being a part of civil military operations like the Karachi Operation of 2013 that dramatically impacted the political landscape of Karachi by fragmenting political parties.

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The question to look out for in the coming months is to what extent the Supreme Court uses its authority to take *suo moto* notice over parliamentary affairs and the impact such interventions could have on the development of democratic structures. When Khan came to power in 2018, it was only the second time in Pakistan's history that

an elected government had handed the reins of power to an elected body. While he has energised a section of the middle class, it remains to be seen if his rhetoric and political actions have strengthened the credibility of the political process. It is, however, clear that the political, ideological, and constitutional debates which will play out in the coming months and the role of non-elected entities like the military and the judiciary will determine the future of the political process in Pakistan.

Appendix 1

About the Authors

Dr Imran Ahmed is a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies in the National University of Singapore. He writes on religion, law and politics in late-colonial India and contemporary Pakistan. His current research projects focus on religion and politics, constitution-making and blasphemy laws in South Asia.

Dr Ahmed received his PhD from the University of New England. He has published in leading journals in history, politics and law, including *South Asia*, *the Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *Third World Quarterly*, *The Round Table*, *Griffith Law Review* and *Journal of Law, Religion and State*. He is also a co-editor of the volume, *Religion, Extremism and Violence* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

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Dr Ahmed has been associated with several think tanks in Pakistan, including the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad and Islamabad Policy Research Institute. During the period 2017-2019, he was a non-resident research fellow with the University of Southern California's Center on Public Diplomacy. He is a board member of the International Peace Research Association Foundation and the secretary of the South Asian Studies Association of Australia.

Dr Ahmed has Master's degrees in Sociology and Peace Education and a PhD in International Relations. Among his publications is *Regionalism and Regional Security in South Asia: The Role of SAARC* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013). He writes regularly for several news outlets, including *The National Interest*, *The Diplomat* and *Al Jazeera*.

Dr Ayesha Siddiqa has a PhD in War Studies from King's College London. She is the author of two books, including internationally acclaimed *Military Inc* – expertise in military decision-making, defence economics, civil-military relations and militancy and extremism in South Asia and the Middle East. She has also authored 12 book chapters and published over 300 articles in academic journals and opinion pieces in leading national and international outlets, including

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She was a regular contributor to the Australian Strategic Policy Institute Counter-Terrorism yearbook for the years 2018 & 2019. She is the only woman and civilian to work with the Pakistan Navy as Director of Naval Research. She has worked as an Advisor to the Chairman of National Accountability Bureau – Pakistan's Anti-Corruption Watchdog. She has been associated with the Department of the Auditor General of Pakistan for over 10 years as part of Pakistan's prestigious civil service.

Dr Asma Hyder is dean and professor at the Institute of Business Administration, Karachi. She is also a former member at the Planning Commission, Ministry of Planning Development and Reform, Islamabad. She is a recipient of the Fulbright J. William Award for International Understanding and completed her Post Doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania, United States. She has been a visiting research fellow at University of Sussex, London School of Economics and Political Science, United Kingdom, and Carleton University, Canada.

Her research interest focuses broadly on development issues and specifically different labour market issues, wage differentials, schooling, gender, health and social well-being. Besides working on Pakistan's social issues, she is also studying the household behaviour and preferences toward child schooling during and after economic and climatic shocks in extremely vulnerable and poorest societies of the world. Her regional interest includes Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa.

Professor Katharine Adeney is a Professor of Comparative Politics at the University of Nottingham. She is co-editor of the new Palgrave Series on the Politics of South Asia. Her principal research interests include elections and democracy in South Asia; the politics of majoritarianism in South Asia; the historical and contemporary evolution of federal systems in South Asia; and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

Among Professor Adeney's publications are *Federalism and Ethnic Conflict Regulation in India and Pakistan* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and *Contemporary India* (with Andrew Wyatt) (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) as well as numerous journal articles in leading journals such as *Democratization, Publius, Asian Survey, Nations and Nationalism* and *India Review*. Her Twitter handle is @katadeney.

Professor C Raja Mohan is a Visiting Research Professor at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) in the National University of Singapore, and a Senior Fellow at the Asia Society Policy Institute in New Delhi, India. He was the Director of ISAS from May 2018 to December 2021. He was a Professor of South Asian Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.

Professor Raja Mohan is one of India's leading commentators on India's foreign policy. He has been associated with a number of think tanks in New Delhi, including the Institute of Defence Studies and Analyses, the Centre for Policy Research and the Observer Research Foundation. He was also the founding director of Carnegie India, New Delhi – the sixth international centre of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington DC. He was the Henry Alfred Kissinger Chair in International Affairs at the United States Library of Congress, Washington DC, from 2009 to 2010. He served on India's National Security Advisory Board. He led the Indian Chapter of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs from 1999 to 2006.

He writes a regular column for *The Indian Express* and was earlier the Strategic Affairs Editor for *The Hindu* newspaper, Chennai. He is on the editorial boards of a number of Indian and international journals on world politics.

Professor Raja Mohan has a Master's degree in nuclear physics and a PhD in international relations. Among his recent books is *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific* (2013) and *Modi's World: Expanding India's Sphere of Influence* (2015).

Dr Chulanee Attanayake is a Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) in the National University of Singapore. Her research focuses on China and its policies in South Asia. She is one of the few Sri Lankans who focuses on this research area. Dr Attanayake's book *China in Sri Lanka*, a comprehensive analysis of Sino-Sri Lankan bilateral relations was published in 2013.

Prior to joining ISAS, Dr Attanayake served as the Director (Research) of the Institute of National Security Studies Sri Lanka – the national security think tank under Sri Lanka's Ministry of Defense. She was a visiting lecturer at the Bandaranaike Centre for International Studies on Politics in South Asia and Politics in the Indian Ocean, and at the Royal Institute of Colombo. She worked as a research associate at the Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute for International Relations and Strategic Studies – a think-tank under the Ministry of External Affairs. She has also served as an international expert on an international study group on Green Belt and Road, a project by the United Nations Environment Programme and the Ministry of Environmental Protection in China.

Dr Attanayake obtained her PhD from the Central China Normal University in Wuhan. She has a Bachelor in Arts from University of Peradeniya and a Master's degree in regional development and planning from University of Colombo.

Dr Mohammad Masudur Rahman is an international trade economist by training, with over 17 years of work experience in New Zealand, China, Japan, Vietnam, Korea, Switzerland and Bangladesh. Prior to joining the Institute of South Asian Studies in the National University of Singapore as a Visiting Research Fellow, Dr Rahman worked as a consultant with the institute.

Dr Rahman has held research and faculty positions at several leading institutions, including the United Nations University, Japan, University of Waikato, New Zealand, Zhejiang Agricultural and Forestry University, China, Microcredit Regulatory Authority and Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh and World Trade Organization. He was a Visiting Fellow at Asia Growth Research Institute and Aoyama Gakuin University, Japan and Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, Korea. He has been a consultant for a number of projects for the International Finance Corporation, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, Asian Development Bank, and Korea University of Foreign Studies.

Recently, Dr Rahman has developed two trade portals – Vietnam Trade and Information Portal and Bangladesh Trade Portal, with support from the World Bank.

Dr Rahman has published extensively in several academic journals, including *Singapore Economic Review*, *Sustainability*, *South Asia Economic Journal*, *Journal of Economic Structures* and *Journal of International Trade Law and Policy*. He is an editorial board member of *Journal of Indian and Asian Studies*, published by World Scientific.

Mr Zahid Hussain is an award-winning journalist and author. He is a former correspondent for *The Times of London* and *The Wall Street Journal*. He has also covered Pakistan and Afghanistan for several other international publications. He is a regular columnist for *Dawn*. Dr Hussain was a Pakistan scholar at Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars, Washington DC. His latest book is titled *No Win War – The Paradox of US-Pakistan Relations under Afghanistan's Shadow*.

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He has conducted research on nation-building; citizenship; authoritarianism; populism; transnationalism; ethnic-religious-political identities and their securitisation (Middle East, Pakistan, Indonesia); minority-majority relations (Australia, Turkey, the United Kingdom [UK] and the United States [US]); socio-legal affairs, identities, belonging and political participation of Muslim minorities in the West (the UK, Australia, and the US); Islam-state-society relations in majority and minority contexts; global Islamic movements; political Islam in a comparative perspective; Turkish politics; Turkish diasporas (the UK, Australia, the US); transnationalism; intergroup contact (Australia); and politics of victimhood (Australia, Turkey).

Dr Yilmaz was Professor of Political Science at Istanbul Fatih University (2008-2016), casual lecturer in law, social sciences and politics at SOAS, University of London (2001-2008) where he taught Islamic Law and Society, Legal Systems of Asia and Africa and Turkish Politics at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Before SOAS, he was a fellow at Center for Islamic Studies, University of Oxford (1999-2001) where he worked on Muslim political participation in the UK and unofficial Muslim laws of young Muslims in the West.

Ambassador Masood Khalid is a career diplomat, who joined the Foreign Service of Pakistan in 1979. He was appointed Pakistan's Ambassador to China in January 2013 following ambassadorial assignments in South Korea and Malaysia. As Ambassador to China, Mr Khalid made invaluable contributions to the strengthening of Pakistan-China relations. He has also served in Pakistan's missions in London and Tashkent. During his tenure, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor was conceived, launched and consolidated. He also served as the Deputy Permanent Representative for the Pakistan Permanent Mission to the United Nations, New York, United States from 2001 to 2005.

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Professor Hussain has been pursuing an academic career in the United States since 2003. He is presently a Visiting Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of South Asian Studies in the National University of Singapore. He is also an Adjunct Faculty at Georgetown University and

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He has served as an elected board member for the American Institute of Pakistan Studies, the Association for Asian Studies (South Asia Council), and the American Political Science Association (Religion and Politics), and he has completed consultancies for a number of organisations in the United States, the United Kingdom and Asia: The Asia Foundation, the Asian Development Bank, the National Bureau of Asian Research, Brookings Institution, the United States Institute of Peace, the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and others.

Associate Professor Iqbal Singh Sevea is the Director of the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) in the National University of Singapore (NUS). He is the fifth director of the research

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Before joining ISAS, he was an Associate Professor with the Department of History at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill where he was a faculty member from 2012 to 2021. From 2018 to 2021, he was also a Visiting Research Associate Professor at ISAS. Prior to this, he was an Assistant Professor and the Coordinator of the Contemporary Islam Programme at the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS) at the Nanyang Technological University. He is the current Vice-President of the American Institute of Pakistan Studies and has also served on the committee of the American Institute of Indian Studies.

Associate Professor Sevea is the author of the books, *The Political Philosophy of Muhammad Iqbal: Islam and Nationalism in Late Colonial India* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012) and *Islamic Political Thought in Modern South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming, 2022). His other publications include articles and chapters on ethnonationalism in South Asia, the Partition and its aftermath, culture and state ideology in Pakistan, the spread of transnational Islamic movements across the Indian Ocean, conceptions of bodily piety in South Asia, and Muslim education in South Asia.

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