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Pakistan's Strategic Balancing Between China and the United States: Navigating Great Power Competition in an Emerging Multipolar Order

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ABSTRACT

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The rising geopolitical contest between the United States and China has changed the geopolitical landscape of South Asia, and Pakistan needs to adjust its foreign policy to protect its national interests. Instead of wanting to align one-sidedly with either of the powers, Pakistan has overtime developed to adapt a move of balancing strategically with an effort to maintain security, economic growth and diplomatic options. This paper discusses the dynamics of balancing strategy of Pakistan in the context of Neoclassical Realism in its case that external pressures involving Sino-U.S. rivalry are moderated by domestic political, economic, as well as security factors. With an official policy document, government reports, and academic literature of that time as the main sources, the research utilizes the qualitative research design involving tracing of the process and content analysis. It concludes that Pakistan still deepens its multi-faceted strategic relationship with China by means of trade and defense collaboration but at the same time remain pragmatic in its relationship with the United States in the area of trade, regional security, counterterrorism, climate cooperation, and investment. This

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multidimensional orientation is an indication of the Pakistani attempt to exploit as much as possible the strategic benefits and minimize the expenditures related to great-power competition. The article concludes that sustainability in the strategic balancing of Pakistan will rely on the domestic political stability, economic stability, institutional capacity, and its capability to respond well to change in the dynamic international order. This research study will be relevant to the overall literature base on strategic balancing by offering a modern evaluation of the foreign policy actions by Pakistan within the ever-growing multipolar world.

Keywords: Pakistan; Strategic Balancing; China; United States; Sino-U.S Competition; Neoclassical Realism; Foreign Policy; CPEC; Indo-Pacific; Multipolarity.

Introduction

The international system is experiencing a deeper change marked by a steady dispersion of power in a more unipolar order to a more challenged and multipolar strategic environment. At the pivot of this shift, is the rising competition between the United States and China that has transpired beyond the economic competition to include obligates of military modernization, technology advancement, regional security and differing visions of international regulation. This geopolitical game has brought the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific and South Asia to undergo a major transformation that has forced the regional states to reevaluate their foreign policy priorities based on the changing power structure. When nations lie at the crossroads of incompatible strategic interests, diplomatic agility and protecting national interests have proven to be a more complicated endeavor ([Gawi & Abdullahi, 2024](#)). Pakistan stands in a unique situation to these changing geopolitics. The country has some geostrategic importance as it is located at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Indian Ocean. Over the decades, Pakistan has been having a strong strategic relationship with China based on their mutual security interests, political trust, defense, and increased economic involvement ([Abbas, Ali, Khan, Farooq, & Ismail, 2024](#)). China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) being the pioneer project under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has only enhanced the bilateral cooperation between the countries by implementing infrastructural development, energy investment, industrial relations, and connectivity across regions. These changes have made Pakistan both more significant in the overall regional policy of China and at the same time more visible in terms of the foreign policy decisions of Islamabad to the rest of the world.

Although it has developed a very strong relationship with China, Pakistan has not discarded its relationship with the United States. Despite the ups and downs of bilateral relations related to the withdrawal of the U.S. troops in Afghanistan and the controversies regarding the regional security, both nations remain united in terms of trade, counterterrorism, climate resilience, education, community health, and economic growth. The United States is still among the largest export partners of Pakistan with international financial institutions that Washington enjoys a significant influence still a key factor in the economic stabilization process of Pakistan ([Abbas et al., 2024](#)). Therefore, Pakistan cannot risk practicing an exclusive foreign policy with only one of

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the great powers.

The development of a strategic competition between the Washington and Beijing has thus presented a tricky policy quandary to the Pakistan team. A warmer relationship with China enhances the long-term security and infrastructure development of Pakistan but can enhance strategic tension with United States and regional allies. On the other hand, increasing the involvement with the United States can provide both economic and diplomatic prospects but can also cause troubles in Beijing over the question of strategic trustworthiness on the part of Pakistan. Instead of attempting to see these relationships as mutually exclusive, Pakistani policymakers have more progressively tried to pursue a pragmatic policy of trying to maintain positive relations to both powers without getting involved in the direct confrontation between the great powers ([A. Khan & Bibi, 2025](#)). This strategy represents an attempt to gain maximum economic possibilities, retain national security and strategic independence in times of the increased geopolitical insecurities.

The current literature has paid significant attention to strategic relations between Pakistan and China and how the relations between the United States and Pakistan have been changed throughout history. A lot of research is conducted on defense cooperation, economic interdependence, regional security, and alliance politics. Yet, to a great extent the literature still perceives the foreign policy of Pakistan in terms of traditional views of alliance creation or strategic reliance whereby Pakistan is seen to be making a decisive move toward one external actor at the cost of the other. These interpretations fail in explaining the recent diplomatic behavior of Pakistan which is selectivity in cooperating with China and the United States in issue areas ([Malik, Rehman, Ansari, Shah, & Ali, 2026](#)). The expanding complexities of regional politics thus requires a new method of analysis that can describe Pakistan attempting to juggle between antagonistic strategic associations into an expanding multipolar global condition.

The article will fill that gap because it will focus on how Pakistan has been strategic in balancing between China and the United States using the theoretical approach of Neoclassical Realism. The paper contends that, it is not only possible to study the foreign policy of Pakistan through the lens of systemic pressures created by the presence of the great-power rivalry. Instead, the external strategic incentives are sifted by internal politics, economic factors, institutional factors, and national security interests, which jointly influence the policy decisions of Islamabad. The article combines both the international variables and the domestic factors, which are incorporated to give a more detailed account of the contemporary foreign policy behaviors in Pakistan ([Hussain, Mahmood, & Javed, 2026](#)). This study uses qualitative analysis of official policy literature, government publications, current scholarly research and global strategic analysis to assess the manner in which Pakistan is attempting to stay strategically flexible in the context of growing Sino-U.S. rivalry. It argues that the current foreign policy of Pakistan is more of strategic balancing as opposed to being either power oriented. This changing orientation is critical in determining how regional security, great-power rivalry in South Asia, and the role of Pakistan in the new multipolar international system will be in the future.

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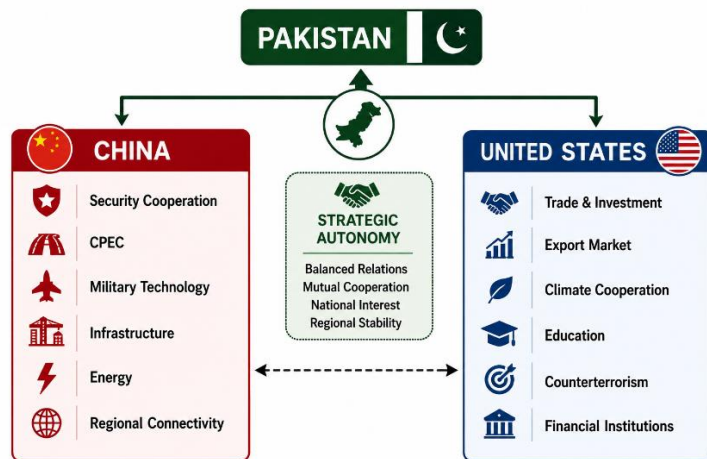


Figure 1: Strategic Autonomy

Literature Review

Increasing strategic rivalry between the United States and China has spawned a lot of scholarly discussion of the foreign policy options of middle and regional powers. Pakistan is strategically located in this debate due to its strategic alliance with China and the long-term, despite its ups and downs, historic relationship with the United States (A. Ahmad, Noor, & Asim, 2025). The state of the art has explored the topic of external relations of Pakistan through different conceptual lenses such as realism, alliance politics, strategic hedging as well as economic interdependence. These works offer useful ideas on bilateral relations of Pakistan with both the super powers yet as far as they remain mostly consistent in the manner Pakistan deals with competing strategic interests in an increasingly multipolar international system. This review explores the main lines of the literature and determines the theoretical and empirical gap the current research essential addresses.

Strategic Balancing in International Relations

Strategic balancing is a notion based on realist theories of international relations. Waltz (1979) contends that the balance between concentrations of power by the states is maintained to maintain their security in a condition of anarchic international system. Walt (1987) even goes further to elaborate on this argument by suggesting that states balance against perceived threats and not necessarily on material capabilities. Later researchers, such as Schweller (1998) propose that balancing is never necessarily the appropriate frame to predict state behavior, since home-based political choices, economic incentives, or personal preferences of a ruler tend to influence foreign policy making.

The recent school has added a slight twist to the debate by bringing in notions like hedging and strategic autonomy. According to Kuik (2008), hedging is a policy whereby the states neither relate solely to the rival great powers but rather seek economic and security collaboration with them. Similar is Evelyn Goh, who actually maintains that numerous Asian states are implementing diversified strategies in

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diplomacy that reduce the risks of strategies but do not denounce current partnerships (Goh, 2005). These views are especially applicable in explaining the actions of states faced with the growing great-power competition when alliance loyalty makes foreign policy less flexible.

Pakistan-China Strategic Partnership

Literature has always seen China as the most dependable strategic player of Pakistan. Bilateral cooperation started off as political coordination since the creation of the diplomatic relations in the year 1951, but this has since then graduated to the stage of full-scale strategic partnership taking the form of the defense, nuclear cooperation, development of infrastructure and regional diplomacy. According to Small (2015), a convergence of strategic interests, especially in the common goal of equalizing the influence of India regionally, perpetuates the relationship. Garver (2016) also warns that shared security interests and geopolitical variables have helped build a sustainable relationship that is not confined to immediate political situations. The introduction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) greatly increased scholarly attention to bilateral relations. Experts like Wolf (2020) argue that CPEC is not only a kind of infrastructure project but a more general approach to regional economic integration, industrialization, and connectivity within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative. Other authors highlight the strategic relevant of Gwadar Port, energy investments, transportation networks and defense-industrial cooperation stating that these initiatives cement the place of Pakistan in the Chinese regional policy.

However, there are a few studies, which have cast doubts about the sustainability of the debts, challenge in implementation, ability to govern and local security concerns of CPEC. The opponents believe that the economic reliance on the Chinese financing will impair strategic flexibility of Pakistan (Aman & Yaseen, 2025). On the other hand, there are other scholars who argue that these issues are habitually exaggerated besides not taking into account the wider developmental and geopolitical advantages of Chinese investment. The literature thus gives conflicting accounts on the possibilities as well as limitations of the deepening of the relationship of Pakistan with China.

Pakistan-United States Relations

The US role in relationship with Pakistan has historically been one of cooperation, strategic drift and intermittent realignment. Early literature concentrates mainly on the Cold war alliances whereas the more current literature looks at the post-9/11 alliance, counterterrorism cooperation, and events after the U.S. withdrawal of Afghanistan. Fair (2014) states that bilateral relations have often been based on the acquisition of short-term strategic goals, instead of the long-term collaboration of institutions. This trend has been a reason behind the existence of cycles of mistrust each side even though cooperation in security has been done extensively. The recent literature has indicated that the relations between Pakistan and the U.S. have changed slowly shifting to a security-oriented partnership to the one that extends to the economic and diplomatic areas. Despite the decrease in the level of defense cooperation with other countries over the recent decades, researchers point out that there are increased cooperation opportunities in terms of trade, climate resistance, higher education, communicable

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health, and regional equilibrium. One of the key export markets of Pakistan is still the United States and the multilateral financial institutions have been still playing an important part in macroeconomic rebalancing of Pakistan ([I. Khan & Shah, 2024](#)). These trends imply that the bilateral relationship has significant strategic relevance even in terms of evolving geopolitical conditions.

Pakistan's Foreign Policy Between Competing Powers

A growing literature holds that the modern foreign policy of Pakistan cannot be only viewed through old-fashioned politics of alliances. A number of researchers indicate that Islamabad gradually adapts a pragmatic approach that seeks to generate the maximum number of economic opportunities without relying on a particular outside actor. This view can be seen more notably in the literature focusing on Pakistan being involved in Chinese infrastructural projects and still being active in the Western financial institutions and global organizations. Strategic hedging and middle-power diplomacy has also been examined, and it is a valuable analytical instrument with which to understand the behavior of Pakistan. These studies will not take the relations with China and the United States as mutually exclusive and selective cooperation in various fields of policy. Pakistan enhances military and Infrastructural relations with China and continues to have positive economic, diplomatic, and institutional ties with the United States and other western allies ([Abbasi, 2023](#)). This kind of behavior can be viewed as an attempt to keep up policy autonomy in the face of increasing great-power competition.



Figure 2: Major Developments (2015-2026)

Research Gap

In spite of the current body of scholarship providing a lot of valuable information regarding the bilateral relations between Pakistan and China as well as United States, there are a number of limitations. To begin with many of the available sources explore

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these relationships or examine the issue separately instead of looking at the relationship as a networked part of the overall foreign policy strategy of Pakistan. Second, a lot of studies still apply to alliance politics as the main explanatory factor and pay less attention to the interplay of systemic pressures and domestic political, economic and institutional variables. Third, these new geopolitical trends such as increased Sino-U.S. rivalry, domestic economic struggles in Pakistan, the post-Afghanistan regional setting, and the creation of an even more multipolar international system have changed the strategic environment in a manner not fully reflected by the previous versions.

To cover such gaps, this research focuses on the use of a theoretical approach of Neoclassical Realism to the issue of strategic balancing of Pakistan between China and the United States. It contends that the foreign policy of Pakistan is neither exclusive nor strategic indifference. Rather, it is an evolving balancing policy that is formed through the interaction of external force rivalry and internal restrictions. This research aims at offering a deeper explanation of the changing foreign policy of Pakistan in the twenty first century by relating it to the recent trends in geopolitics in alignment with literature of the day.

Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical framework in this study is Neoclassical Realism (NCR) to study strategic balancing of Pakistan between China and United States. Neoclassical Realism gives a superb account of foreign policy as it combines the pressures typical of the systems with the variables at the domestic level. Taking a contrasting approach to Classical Realism, which lays stress on human nature, or Structural Realism, which explains state behavior mainly by the allocation of power in the international system, Neoclassical Realism contends that the outer space variables can only affect foreign policy through the influence of domestic political institutions, leadership perceptions, state capacity and strategic priorities ([Larik, Mangi, & Bukhari, 2023](#)). As a result, different states that operate under the same circumstances of international pressure can employ distinct strategies of foreign policy based on their political and educational environment inside the state.

A distinct intellectual basis of Neoclassical Realism was posited by Gideon Rose (1998), who held that systemic incentives are themselves insufficient in explaining fluctuations in state behavior. Rather, foreign policy makers perceive external threats and opportunities via domestic political procedures after which they transform them into foreign policy choices. The structure was later refined by other scholars like Randall Schweller, Steven Lobell, William Wohlforth and Fareed Zakaria among others, who established that the state capacity, economic conditions, the preference of the elite and domestic institutions hold a significant weight on the outcome of foreign policy. This theoretical approach is especially applicable to the analysis of middle powers the foreign policy of which is both conditioned by external rivalry and internal limitations.

It is becoming a more complicated foreign policy issue that Pakistan has to bear in the present strategic environment. The increasing strategic tension between the United States and China has shifted the balance of power in the region, especially in the south Asian and Indo-Pacific region. Being a strategically located state that has had extensive

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strategic ties with both the two giant powers, Pakistan is under constant external demands due to military tension, economic conflict, technological tension and regional security issues ([Z. Khan, 2022](#)). Structural realist explanations would result in an outcome of Pakistan taking a firm stance with one great power. Pakistan foreign policy, however, has shown a more complex trend of discriminative engagement and malleability, making it clear that systemic pressures cannot solely be considered a sufficient factor to account the external behavior.

Neoclassical Realism provides a proper analytical style since it covers the manner in which Pakistan deciphers these external pressures on the basis of domestic political and economic realities. The foreign policy is comprised of persistent fiscal limitations, the reliance on foreign funding, the transformations in the civil-military relations, the internal political instabilities, the security considerations, the developmental concerns, all the factors that have an impact on the manner in which foreign policy is made ([Alunaza & Sherin, 2022](#)). Strategic opportunities externally originating and domestic political feasibility thus require reconciliation by decision-makers. As such, Pakistan has attempted to remain engaged in an overall strategic relationship with China, yet has attempted to retain a positive relationship with the United States in respects such as trade, investment, climate cooperation, counterterrorism and regional diplomacy. In this study, the independent variable is the accelerating of strategic competition between China and the United States. Intervening variables are domestic political stability, economic vulnerability, and civil-military decision-making, leadership perceptions, institutional capacity and national security priorities. These are some variables that mediate the influence of systemic pressures when it comes to foreign policy decision-making. The dependent variable is the Pakistani manipulation of strategic balancing, which can be seen through its prospective simultaneous development of close relations with China, and pragmatic relations with the United States without committing to any significant alignment with either of the two powers.

This paper highlights that the foreign policy of Pakistan should not be regarded as a pure balancing or band wagoning through the use of Neoclassical Realism. Instead, it is an expediency approach meant to maintain strategic flexibility, with the maximum of security, economic prospects, and diplomatic flexibility given the circumstances of growing great-power competition. The framework thus offers a consistent pattern to rationalize the continuity and adaptability of the Pakistan foreign policy to the changing multipolar world order.

Methodology

The research design used in this study is qualitative to analyze the aspects of strategic balancing between China and the United States in Pakistan in the backdrop of the growing great-power rivalry. A qualitative study is suitable since the study seeks to explain the motivations, processes, and policy decisions behind the foreign policy of Pakistan and not set causal relationships using statistical analysis. The researcher uses single-case study design, which will enable a more detailed analysis of the strategic behavior of Pakistan in reaction to the shifting regional and global trends.

The theoretical framework on which the analysis will be conducted is known as Neoclassical Realism that focuses on how systemic pressures and domestic political

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factors interact to achieve the final outcome of foreign policy. Process tracing and qualitative content analysis are used to capture this interaction in the study. It uses process tracing to analyze how significant geopolitical events such as the growth of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the changing Sino-U.S. strategic rivalry, American withdrawal in Afghanistan, and economic dilemma in Pakistan have contributed to foreign policy decision-making over the years. Official statements, policy documents, strategic reports, and academic literature are evaluated using content analysis to determine consistent themes in connection to Pakistan balancing strategy. The given research is based on secondary sources with the supplement of official documents. These consist of publications of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan, the Government of Pakistan, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the U.S. Department of State, Pakistani Economic Survey, the State Bank of Pakistan, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the Stockholm international Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the International Institute for strategic Studies (IISS), and peer-reviewed journal articles released in 2015-16. The current policy reports of major research institutions are also referred to so as to include the recent developments and policy discussions.

In order to increase analytical validity, evidence is triangulated among varied academic and institutional sources. By comparing official reports, research work, and international datasets, there is a low probability of bias connected with any one report on the issue, and it enhances the credibility of the outcomes. The chosen timeframe encompasses important geopolitical changes that have transformed the external environment of Pakistan such as the adoption of CPEC, shifting U. S. regional strategy, growing presence of China in the international system, and the rise of an increasingly multipolar international order.

The results are discussed in the analytical framework of Neoclassical Realism perspective that identifies the impact of external strategic rivalry in the framework of domestic political and economic factors in the evolving strategy of Pakistan to achieve strategic balancing between China and the United States.

Pakistan-China Relations

The Pakistani and Chinese relationship has been among the longest-lived strategic alliances in the modern international relations. The evolution of bilateral cooperation Since the creation of the diplomatic relations in 1951, the bilateral cooperation has progressed, starting with the minimal diagnostic engagement to an all-encompassing cooperation in the areas of defense, economic development, political coordination, technological cooperation, and regional security. The relationship has been often defined as an all-weather strategic cooperative partnership that managed to persist even during periods of political diversification in the region, as well as international balances of power. The relations between Pakistan and China, unlike numerous bilateral relations that are conceived by the geopolitical interests of the time, have been nurtured by the convergence of strategic interests, trust and institutional cooperation in the long term. The bilateral relations strategic base was set in the early years of the cold war, especially after the Sino-Indian border war in 1962. Similarities with regard to regional influence of India helped to mend closer political and security ties between Islamabad and Beijing

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([Memon & Kousar, 2024](#)). In the following decades, the two nations increased collaborations in military weapon production, intelligence gathering, infrastructural growth, and diplomacy in multilateral organizations. This enabled China to be constantly on the side of Pakistan whenever it came to matters concerning sovereignty and territorial integrity, and Pakistan emerged as a very reliable friend of China in South Asia and the entire Islamic world. The convergence of strategic interests transformed the bilateral relations into a stable relationship which can endure the crisis and evolutions in regional affairs and shifts in world politics.

The foundation of the relations between Pakistan and China is the defense cooperation. China has emerged as the biggest defense equipment supplier and a critical defense modernization companion to Pakistan. Pakistan has been able to boost its conventional defense with the help of joint production program, technology transfers and military training. The bilateral relationship in defense-industrial relations can be seen through the successful project of developing a new fighter aircraft, the JF-17 Thunder characterized as the joint project between the two countries intended to enhance the local defense production. Another area that has been broadened in cooperation is the increase in the area of naval modernization, air defense systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, missile technology, cybersecurity, and space-associated capabilities ([K. Khan, Uddin, & Maghfoor Ullah, 2024](#)). The interoperability and institutional collaboration between the two-armed forces is further enhanced by regular joint military drills, and strategic conversations.

The role of economic cooperation has never been as high as it is now due to the introduction of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2015. CPEC being the flagship project in the Belt and Road Integrative (BRI) of China aims to enhance and connectivity in the region by investing in its transport infrastructures, energy production, industrialization, digital communication, and port modernization. The route will connect the Xinjiang region of China and the Gwadar Port of the Arabian Sea in Pakistan, which will give China increased access to the global sea routes in maritime trade and will be necessary to enhance the infrastructure development plans of Pakistan. The project has changed the bilateral relations in that the economic aspect has become significant in an already existing strong strategic partnership. The development of infrastructure under CPEC has also enhanced tremendous growth in the transportation network in Pakistan. Highways, motorways, and road projects have enhanced the linkage amid various parts of the country and they have made domestic trade as well as the trade across regions. At the same time, electricity production has helped solve the incessant energy shortages, which have in the past limited the output in the industries and the growth of the economy ([McCartney, 2022](#)). The increase in electricity production capacity comes with new hydropower-based, coal-fueled, solar, and wind power plants, which have caused some worry about environmental sustainability, as well as long-term funding sources, leading to scholarly discussion.

Gwadar Port is at the heart of the wider CPEC scheme. The port is strategically located close to the entrance of the Persian Gulf and has a significant geopolitical and commercial importance. The Chinese investment has also helped in the growth of the port facilities, free economic zones, transport and development of the urban areas that will see Gwadar become a logistics and commercial center in the region. As far as China

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is concerned, Gwadar allows it to have an alternative trade and energy importation path that will complement the current maritime transport systems. To Pakistan, the port is a chance to improve the connectivity of the region, an introductory to the economic development of Balochistan as well as to a position as a portal to link South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East and western China.

Over the recent years, bilateral cooperation is improving its second stage with focus on industrialization, agriculture, digital connectivity, science, technology, and business-to-business investment. CPEC Phase II aims to step beyond the infrastructural building by furthering Special Economic Zones (SEZs), industrial relocation, modernization of agriculture, vocational training and technological cooperation ([T. Ali, Huang, & Xie, 2022](#)). Such programs seek to create job opportunities, build capacity in manufacturing, boost exports and enhance the economic sustainability of Pakistan on long-term basis. Both governments are still reiterating their desire to develop economic cooperation in the revised framework, although the implementation has been slower than originally projected.

In addition to having a bilateral cooperation, Pakistan and China have close diplomatic coordination on regional and international matters. The two countries often take sides on matters before the United Nations or other multilateral bodies and focus on the need to promote the principle of sovereignty, non-intervention and peaceful resolution of disputes. Pakistan has continuously signed the One China Policy and China has been vocal in supporting Pakistan in security issues and economic growth. Mechanisms of bilateral consultation have become more institutionalized with constant high level political consultations, foreign ministerial consultations, and further consultation on regional issues such as Afghanistan, counterterrorism, and the overall Asian security issues. The bilateral cooperation in counterterrorism has also grown to be a significant part of bilateral relations. Both governments consider stability in Pakistan as a requisite towards the successful implementation of CPEC and the safety of the Chinese personnel developing projects in Pakistan ([T. Ali et al., 2022](#)). As a result, information exchange on areas of intelligence, law enforcement and security has diversified significantly. The effort to ensure safety of Chinese nationals and the strategic infrastructure has led to creation of special security settings by Pakistan to protect the bilateral economic cooperation in the wake of changing security threats.

Even though the collaboration has had significant success, the Pakistan-China relations are still confronted with a number of issues. Attacks on the Chinese staff, delays in implementation, bureaucratic wastages, issues on sustainability of debts and tensions in the geopolitics in the region have sometimes been found to be a hindrance on implementation of the projects. The transparency of some of the investment agreements and unequal distribution of the developmental benefits to various parts of Pakistan have also come under scrutiny by the critics. Even then, both governments have always been ready to respond to these issues by institutional discourse and policy realignment instead of letting them harm the larger strategic relationship. The evolving strategic environment has further strengthened the importance of Pakistan-China cooperation. The growing competition between China and the United States, the expansion of the Indo-Pacific security arrangements, and the changes in the regional alignments have strengthened the interests of China in having a stable and reliable relationship with

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Pakistan ([Jasmin, Hosen, & Biswas, 2025](#)). Meanwhile, Pakistan sees its connection with China as a key national security resource, economic modernization, and technological progress as well as a foreign policy. Instead of signaling a transient interlacing of interests, bilateral cooperation has rather taken root as a part of the long-term strategic calculations of the two nations.

On the whole, Pakistan-China relations have grown into a multidimensional cooperation that goes far beyond the field of classical military cooperation. Cooperation in defense, economic integration, and construction of infrastructural interconnectedness, diplomatic co-ordination, technological co-operation and connectivity to the region is all examples of the high level of bilateral interaction. The partnership is still considered a fundamental part of the foreign policy of Pakistan and although the relationship is still influenced by the challenges in implementation and evolving geopolitical conditions, it still holds an important place in Pakistan. Their development is therefore a critical component when explaining the wider approach of strategic balancing by the Pakistani side towards the escalating great-power rivalry between China and the United States.

Pakistan–United States Relations

The US/Pakistan has been the most important and complicated bilateral relationship in the politics of South Asia. After the independence of Pakistan in 1947, there has been a series of periods of positive strategic partnership, political conflict, and diplomatic refocusing between the two nations. In comparison to the comparatively stable relationship which Pakistan enjoys with China, the relationship it maintains with the United States has largely been transformed based on changing priorities of security within the region and globally. Nevertheless, their relationship has been strained with recurrent tensions, both nations still appreciate the strategic nature of bilateral engagement in terms of regional stability, fight against terrorism, trade, economic development, climate resilience, and multi-lateral diplomacy. As a result, the Pakistan-U.S. relations are still a valuable asset of Pakistan in terms of its foreign policy even with the increasing role of its relations with China. Their bilateral cooperation began in the early years of cold war as Pakistan became members of the U.S.-alliance security organizations, such as the southeast Asia treaty organization (SEATO) and central treaty organization (CENTO). All these arrangements were an intersection of strategic interests that sought a containment of Soviet influence in the Asian region ([Shamil, 2024](#)). Pakistan saw the cooperation with Washington as a chance to empower her defense system and to obtain economic support whereas the United States thought Pakistan as another key player in the region in its global strategy of containment. They are the relationships that, despite the improvement of military cooperation, failed to remove disparities in the fields of the security of regions, especially in terms of the rivalry between Pakistan and India.

The relations took a new dimension after the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan in 1979. Pakistan had also emerged as a primary host nation helping the U.S. to supply support to Afghan opposition forces which led to a great deal of military, financial and intelligence collaboration. The alliance further grown in 1980s when both the governments had common strategic interests. Nevertheless, the transactional character

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of bilateral relations was also revealed during this period. With the Soviet departure of Afghanistan, American strategic considerations changed and this resulted in lesser interaction with Pakistan and sanctions were imposed on the country under the Pressler Amendment because of the fears of the nuclear program of Pakistan. This sudden change in policy created a feeling in Pakistan that bilateral cooperation was frequently informed by evolving American strategic interests as opposed to long-term institutional affiliation. Through the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the Pakistan-U.S. relations changed once again. The United States-led Global War on Terror took a central position as Pakistan would supply logistical backing, intelligence cooperation, and military assistance to carry out operations in Afghanistan ([Popalzay, 2024](#)). At the same time, Pakistan had been receiving a generous security support and economic aid and at the same time facing an increasing domestic security challenge in the form of militant violence. Despite continued widespread cooperation, disagreements on how to counterterrorism, drones use and also border control and also in how to approach militant groups that are active in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border started emerging. Such differences in policies helped to escalate mistrust amidst sustained strategic interactions.

The step of the United States to withdraw its troops in Afghanistan in 2021 has fundamentally changed the nature of bilateral relations. Security cooperation had been shifted into the back seat as the longest American involvement in military intervention came to an end. Rather, the two countries started delving into new aspects of cooperation focused on trade, economic cooperation, climate change, and public health, including education, energy security and economic development in the region. Such a shift indicates an increasing acknowledgment among many that bilateral relations in the long term have to be based on a more diversified base than just military cooperation ([Farhan, Rana, Abbas, & Ikram, 2024](#)). The economic relations have become a major aspect of Pakistan-U.S engagement increasing in significance. The US is still among the major export partners of Pakistan especially in the export of textiles, apparel, surgical equipment, leather products and agricultural products. Bilateral trade is also an important source of export earnings and foreign exchange reserves of Pakistan. In the United States, companies also have investments in various industries such information technology, pharmaceuticals, consumer goods, financial services and energy. Although the total sum of foreign direct investment is not as high as it could be, the opportunities to enter into new commercial relations via investment, digital innovation, renewable energy, and technology associations are found by the private sector.

Bilateral relations also have an essential place in financial cooperation. To overcome macroeconomic shocks and foreign currency financing requirements, Pakistan has occasionally been relying on the support of international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Though these agencies are autonomous, the US enjoys significant influence in the governance of these agencies. Therefore, the positive relationship with Washington continues to play a significant role in the overall economic diplomacy of Pakistan and especially at the time of fiscal austerity and structural adjustment. Past Pakistani governments have thus tried to retain frequent economic conversations with American policymakers as they endeavor to implement internal reforms to enhance investor delegate, as well as economic stability.

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The military intervention in Afghanistan stops the large-scale American military operations but does not stop counterterrorism cooperation. The interests in the two countries are to ensure that transnational terrorist groups that can pose a threat to the security of the region and international security are not brought back. In areas of intelligence exchange, collaboration with law-enforcers, money laundering with extremist networks and capacity-building projects continue to be engaged. Despite such a decrease in the range of military cooperation than it was during this post-9/11 era, both governments still know the significance of communication in this area on the developments regarding security in the region especially in respect to Afghanistan and the emerging security threats. The other component that is getting more and more attention is collaboration in climate change and sustainable development. Pakistan is one of the most vulnerable countries to climatic related disasters such as floods, droughts and extreme weather. The drastic 2022 floods marked the significance of the improved collaboration in disaster management, climate adaptation, and humanitarian aid on the global level. Humanitarian aid, climate resilience programmes, public health and technical assistance have built with the aim of enhancing the institutional capacity in Pakistan, supported by the United States ([Popalzay, 2024](#)). The development of renewable energy, water management, food security, and environmental governance has gained significance as a new aspect of the emerging bilateral relationship.

Educational, scientific, and people-to-people interactions make the relations between Pakistan and the U.S. resilient as well. Every year, thousands of Pakistani students study higher education in American universities and enhance academic collaboration and contacts. Institutional linkages that are long term beyond the government-to-government links have been established through research partnerships, scholarship programmes, public health initiatives and cultural exchanges. Such contacts lead to understanding each other better and give a chance to collaborate in the field of science, technology, innovation, and the development of human capital. However, there are still critical issues that lead to bilateral relationships. Human rights issues, interest of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, Afghanistan differences, concerns of democratic governance, and regional security occasionally cause diplomatic friction. The increasing strategic alliance between the United States and India has turned out to be another significant factor affecting Pakistan perception towards the American regional policy. Washington is starting to see India as a key ally in its Indo-Pacific policy, especially in regulating the growing influence of China in the region ([Shahid, 2024](#)). In its turn, Pakistan tends to perceive such development as a shift in the regional balance of powers that could have an impact on its long-term security interests. These divergent views on strategies are still crippling the extent of bilateral collaboration even after repeated deliberations in diplomacy.

The developing strategic relationship that Pakistan maintains with China has also led to new complexities in Pakistan-United States relationship. One of the most common assessments made by American policymakers regarding the situation in the region is the perspective through the more universal lens of Sino-U.S. strategic rivalry, and one of the most recurring statements made in response by the Pakistani officials is that Pakistani cooperation with China does not target any third party. Islamabad has constantly contended that friendly relations with Beijing need not come at the cost of

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friendly relations with Washington. The stance represents the larger foreign policy goal of Pakistan to maintain strategic independence because of not incurring singular affiliation to one of the opposing powers. The trend with bilateral diplomacy over the past few years has been towards pragmatic interaction and not ideological convergence. Elite political consultations, economic consultations and inter-parliamentary consultations and collaboration in multilateral institutions attest to the fact that the two nations still realize the virtue of the long-term engagement. Pakistan is interested in increased trade and investment, technological collaboration, and educational collaboration, whereas the United States is willing to advance regional stability, economic growth, and counterterrorism collaboration ([M. Ali, 2025](#)). Despite the presence of strategic differences, the two governments have been shown to have an interest in ensuring a functional and stable relationship based on mutual interests and not temporary security imperatives.

In general, the United States and Pakistan relations have been developing as an alliance-driven security collaboration that has become more multifaceted and diversified involving economic, diplomatic, environmental, educational and regional aspects. It is marked with cooperation and at the same time disagreement, which show varying priorities of international system. To the United States, their involvement with Pakistan is merely a part of a larger enterprise that seeks to diversify its outside relationships, fascinate investment, enhance economic stability and remain flexible in diplomacy. The dynamic characteristics of this relationship are thus highly important in explaining the modern-day approach used by Pakistan of balancing strategies between China and the United States ([G. Khan, Shah, & Ullah, 2026](#)).

Strategic Balancing Analysis

The escalation of the strategic rivalry between China and United States has brought a fundamental change in the external environment of Pakistan which compels the policy makers to adopt a foreign policy that positively addresses the national interest without overly identifying itself with one of the two dominant forces. Instead of pursuing a conventional alliance policy, over recent years, Pakistan has become more of strategic balancing, balancing deep strategic cooperation with China and continued engagement with the United States in a handpicked set of areas of interest. The strategy indicates pragmatic evaluation of security needs, economic interests and diplomatic ambitions of Pakistan in a multipolar international system that is becoming multipolar ([G. Khan et al., 2026](#)). Since the Neoclassical Perspective views balancing as a process in which systemic forces occasioned by great-power rivalry and local political, economic and institutional imperatives interact, the balancing strategy of Pakistan can be interpreted as a response to systemic pressures both within national borders and locally as it is at present.

Security Balancing

The security issues are still the major factor in defining foreign policy of Pakistan. China remains the most critical strategic and defense ally of Pakistan, as they are currently supplying them with high-technology military weaponry, technology, cooperation in intelligence, and collaborative production of defense. Joint initiatives

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have enabled the enhancement of the conventional deterrence of Pakistan such as the JF-17 Thunder fighter airplane, modernization of the navy, air defense, and missile technology. Taking the form of regular military drills, elevated military discussions, and the widening of cooperation in the domain of cyber security and space technologies enhance bilateral relations on the strategic level even more ([K. Ahmad, 2026](#)). In the outlook of Pakistan, defense partnership with China helps in ensuring stability in the region and minimizing the conventional military asymmetry against India.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has held back on breaking security consultations with the United States. Even though the military collaboration is at its lowest since the American troops pulled out of Afghanistan, there is still intelligence sharing, coordination of counterterrorism, and professional military interaction at the areas where minds meet. The two nations are also worried about the operation of the transnational terror groups and the unsteadiness that may arise due to Afghanistan ([Akhtar, 2022](#)). Pakistan thus has minimal yet positive security relationship with Washington without compromising on its strategic relationship with Beijing. This two-faceted strategy demonstrates that Pakistan is differentiating between long-term policy co-operation with China and issue-oriented co-operation with the United States in terms of security matters. Security balancing is also a manifestation of the intention of Pakistan not to be directly engaged in strategic conflict between the two giant powers. This stance allows Pakistan to maintain sufficient strategic flexibility, at the lowest level of risk of polarization in the region.

Economic Balancing

Another key pillar of the strategic balancing strategy of Pakistan is economic considerations. The continuous financial demands, external debts, dwindling foreign exchange reserves and developmental issues have made Pakistan inclined towards diversified sources of foreign investment and financial aid. This means that Pakistan cannot count solely on either China or the United States to help realize its long-term economic goals. China has become the biggest investor in the infrastructure in Pakistan with China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The transportation, energy, digital infrastructure, industrial zones, and port-building investments have helped to cope with the significant infrastructure shortages limiting economic growth over decades. The latter stage of CPEC also focuses more on industrialization, modernization of agriculture, technological collaboration, export-based manufacturing ([Ismail, 2025](#)). The initiatives will enhance productivity, job creation, and connectivity within the region, as well as bolster the role of Pakistan in the regional supply chains.

However, Pakistan is at the same time inclined towards maintaining good economic ties with United States and other western economies. The US continues to be among the largest export markets of Pakistan especially in the textiles, clothing, leather goods and surgical equipment. Pakistan: the availability of American markets will create income in terms of valuable foreign exchange earnings and millions of employment opportunities in the export-oriented business sectors in Pakistan. Pakistan also has American involvement in the form of American private investment, technological cooperation and educational collaboration to contribute towards the larger development goals ([Zaidi & Ahmad, 2022](#)).

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Moreover, the involvement of Pakistan in international financial institutions like the international monetary fund and the World Bank is another aspect of economic balancing. Pakistan has been depending on financial support and structural reform program through these institutions during times of macroeconomic unstable conditions. It is noteworthy that there should be good diplomatic relations with the western governments to secure further access to international assistance on finance and investor confidence. Instead of perceiving Chinese investment and western financial involvement as being opposing, Pakistan has tried to incorporate both in a wider economic diversification strategy.

Diplomatic Balancing

Diplomatic policy of Pakistan also shows such a trend of partial involvement with the rival major powers. The governments of the past and present have continuously highlighted independent foreign policy based on strategic independence, sovereign equality and positive interaction of all key players. Such a foreign policy allows Pakistan to work with various partners without committing to actions that would restrict foreign policy inappropriately. In the multilateral institutions, Pakistan has been working in close collaboration with China in promotions on matters concerning sovereignty, non-interference, finance of development and security in the region. Bilateral consultation is becoming more institutionalized with the frequent high-level meetings, strategic discussions, and organization collaboration through institutions like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) ([Ullah, Yasir, Khan, & Ullah, 2024](#)). China also has been offering Pakistan some diplomatic support in a number of issues regarding the security of the region and does this to strengthen both governments in terms of trust.

At the same time, Pakistan has been actively engaged in dialogue with the United States on a bilateral strategic dialogue and economic consultations, parliament and collaboration in international organizations. Washington continues to be a key player in the international governance bodies, international financial institutions and climate programs. Pakistan thus remains enjoying positive interactions with the United States in all other fields such as in the field of public health, education, food security, renewable energy, climate resilience and in humanitarian collaboration ([M. Ali, 2025](#)). Diplomatic balancing on the part of Pakistan is not limited to the bilateral ties it has with China and the United States. Islamabad has also enhanced its ties with the Gulf countries, Turkey, the Central Asian republics, the European Union, and international organizations and has broadened its economic diplomacy in various regions. Diversifying the foreign alliances will minimize reliance on one power and maximize the capacity of Pakistan to adopt independent foreign policy within a highly divided international system.

Regional Strategic Balancing

The balancing strategy of Pakistan is greatly influenced by regional geopolitics. The rising strategic relations between India and the United States, the development of the defense relations within the framework of the Indo-Pacific process, and South Asia involvement into the regional security system have changed the strategic environment

of South Asia. Developments in this regard are felt to shape the regional equilibrium of power by Pakistan and thus the country highly values its strategic relationship with China. Meanwhile, Pakistan realizes that regional stability over the long term cannot be achieved without positive involvement with other countries of the region and key international players. Since the U.S troops pulled out of Afghanistan, Pakistan has aided diplomacy efforts to achieve political stability, humanitarian aid and economic connectivity in the region ([Ch, Ali, Uddin, & Hussain, 2025](#)). Islamabad also aims at having an increase in economic integration with Central Asia, in terms of transportation and energy corridors that connect South Asia to Eurasia. Such initiatives show that the regional policy of Pakistan is not confined simply to issues of traditional security but it is more inclusive in other issues of trade, connectivity and economic development.

The foreign policy of Pakistan is multidirectional relationships with Gulf countries also depict the same. Investment and energy cooperation, remittances, and financial help make Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar significant economic and strategic allies. The continued positive relations with these states can serve as an addition to what Pakistan has already achieved with China and the United States and support the overall economy.

Domestic Drivers of Strategic Balancing

Neoclassical Realism further underlines the point that the course of foreign policy is determined not only by foreign forces and pressures, but by the domestic factors. Balancing strategy has internal political, economic and institutional rationalities, which can be applied in policy decisions made in Pakistan. Ongoing economic difficulties need to be met with a variety of options in the form of foreign investment, export markets, and support. The pace and direction of the foreign policy implementation process is also determined by political transitions, civil-military orchestration and bureaucratic abilities with assistance of the public opinion. The military community still views China as the major long run strategic ally of Pakistan especially in defense modernization and deterrence in the region. Civilian governments, in their turn, emphasize more on trade development, foreign investment, macroeconomic stability, as well as on enhancing diplomatic contacts with various international partners ([Tasleem, 2022](#)). These priorities are more or less focused on different things, but both the civilian and military sectors largely allow the implementation of a foreign policy that is not based solely on the actions of a single external actor.

Assessment of Pakistan's Balancing Strategy

The modern foreign policy practiced by Pakistan proves that strategic balancing is becoming a purposeful and responsive measure to the growing great-power rivalry. Instead of having to choose one over the other between China and the United States, Islamabad has tried to keep its foreign affairs apart as a country by denoting collaboration to both sides in spheres where their interests coincide. China has still been main strategic, defense and infrastructure partner of Pakistan whereas the United States still continues to have a significant role in the area of trade, investment, higher education, counterterrorism, climate co-operation and global financial governance. This contrasted strategy will ensure that Pakistan exploits the maximum economic

opportunities, enhances national security and maintains diplomatic flexibility. However, it will be even harder to maintain this plan later when the strategic rivalry between Beijing and Washington grows. When two forces anticipate regional individuals to have more policy harbors, it narrows the policy area of diplomatic leveling. The capacity of Pakistan to be able to balance will thus rely on the state of political stability in the country, economic reforms, institutional capacity, shrewd diplomacy as well as effective diversification of its international relationships (Ch et al., 2025). When effectively handled, strategic balancing becomes the most plausible construct that can provide Pakistan with the most practical model of safeguarding its national interest coupled with accustoming to the changing paradigm of an increasingly multipolar international system.



Figure 3: Pakistan's Strategic Balancing

Challenges

The policy of Pakistan to balance between China and the United States provides it with the wide range of diplomatic flexibility, but the policy burden cannot be sustained due to a number of domestic and external threats. The first difficulty would be the growing approach of strategic conflict between Beijing and Washington. With competition in military issues expanding to technology, trade, investment, and control over the region, both hegemonies are expected to demand more strategic commitment on the part of their allies. This changing geopolitical environment limits the policy space that Pakistan has and the struggle to ensure that it continues to enjoy positive relationships with all three countries at once. Another significant limitation is economic vulnerability. Pakistan still experiences a series of balance-of-payments crises, increasing foreign debt, inflationary pressure, and poor fiscal resources. The result is these structural vulnerabilities, which heighten reliance on external financial support, foreign direct investment and foreign lending bodies. The presence of Chinese investment following the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has helped in the development of infrastructure, with the international monetary fund and other multilateral organizations playing a pivotal role in providing macroeconomic stability (I. Ali, Arshad, & Anthony Rogers, 2024). Over dependence on one external source however, can decrease the

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bargaining power and decrease the strategic freedom of Pakistan. Foreign policy autonomy in Pakistan is thus critical to re-energize sustainable economic growth and internal structural changes.

Political instability within the countries also complicates strategy balancing. Unstable political dynamics, polarization of institutions, issues governing the country and discontinuity in policies commonly jeopardize the continuity of implementation in foreign policies. Although the key political entities in Pakistan generally believe in preserving good relations with both China and the United States, variations in the priorities of the policies and the evolving situation within Pakistan might influence the speed and efficiency of diplomatic interaction. An integrated foreign policy is an outcome of consistent political institutions to support long-term strategic goals beyond elections. Other issues that are majorly challenging are the regional security dynamics. US-India strategic partnership has witnessed significant growth in terms of defense cooperation, the exchange of technology and Indo-Pacific initiatives. Pakistan sees such developments as a change of the balance of power in the region, which strengthens its strategic reliance on China. At the same time, the lack of stability in Afghanistan, cross-border terrorism, and the absence of resolution of regional conflicts remain to derail diplomatic and security resources ([Bukhari & Gaho, 2025](#)). All these complicate the process through which Pakistan has tried to diversify its foreign association at the same time maintaining stability in the region.

The other crucial issue touches upon implementing key economic initiatives. Despite the fact that CPEC has created a massive infrastructure spending, most of the projects have been slowed down due to security reasons, bureaucracy, lack of finances as well as bureaucracy and administrative bottlenecks. The incidents of assaults on Chinese workers have heightened issue of security of the project and trust among investors. To solve these problems, it is important to increase institutional coordination, better governance, and more security mechanisms that will guarantee the bilateral economic cooperation in the long-term perspective. Lastly, the international political economy is changing in masse, posing new strategic challenges. Rivalry in the emergent technologies, digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence as well as semiconductor manufacturing and critical supply chains can roundly shape geopolitical configurations ([Ismail, Mehdi, Ali, Gilani, & Ahmad, 2025](#)). To survive in this dynamic world, Pakistan should build and enhance technological capabilities and human capital as well as diversify economic partnerships. The inability to evolve may decrease its strategic relevance and narrow policy options in the future in a constantly more complicated international system.

Future Prospects

Any future foreign policy of Pakistan will heavily be connected to how adeptly it will adjust to the emerging balance of power without compromising its strategic autonomy. With more multipolarity in the international system, this might create possibilities whereby interests of middle powers may be more diversified in terms of their diplomatic and economic alliances without undivided allegiance. Pakistan has a good opportunity to take advantage of such transformation as the country has perfect geographical location, growing regional connectivity, and already developed

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relationships with both China and United States. The strategic alliance with China could continue to be the backbone to the security and infrastructural development of Pakistan. The productive capacity of the country and the better economic resilience of Pakistan in the long term might be possible with the successful presence of CPEC Phase II, industrial cooperation, technological cooperation, and modernization of agriculture ([K. Khan et al., 2024](#)). Sustained defense cooperation and diplomatic coordination are likely to augment bilateral strategic trust as well.

Meanwhile, Pakistan will be more likely to be more active in engaging with the United States in areas where there are common interests. Enhancement of trade, influx of foreign investment, intensification of collaboration in the education sector, adaptation to climate challenges, renewable energy, digital transformation, and civic well-being can offer great economic and technological advantages ([I. Khan & Shah, 2024](#)). This kind of cooperation would not mean that the Pakistan strategic partnership with China should be discarded but is just an indication of diversified expenditure in terms of foreign policies. It is the domestic reforms that will ultimately determine the success of the balancing strategy of Pakistan in the long-term. Pakistan will have a better bargaining power and less reliance on outside players because political stability, good economic management, institutional effectiveness and enhanced governance will help it. As long as it blends internal strength with pragmatism in foreign policy, Pakistan will be able to sustain a good relationship with the competing major powers and at the same time uphold its national interests ([Malik et al., 2026](#)). It is probable therefore that strategic balancing will always be the most viable and viable foreign policy option as long as the great-power competition will dominate the politics of the region and the world at large.

Conclusion

Pakistan is currently caught in a very delicate balance between long term strategic alliances on both sides and new diplomatic prospects due to the increasing strategic competition between China and the United States that has significantly affected the foreign policy environment of Pakistan. This paper illustrates that the external behavior of Pakistan can hardly be explained by such terms as exclusive alignment between the two powers, but rather it is the result of a series of pragmatic policy of strategic balancing to achieve maximum national security, economic growth and diplomatic options. The analysis shows that Pakistan has been able to preserve a strong strategic alliance with China at the same time accommodating positive relationship with the United States in spheres of their common interest namely, trade, counterterrorism, climate cooperation, education as well as economic development.

The application of the Neoclassical Realism as the analytical framework has revealed that the systemic pressures do inter-relate with domestic political, economic and institutional forces in shaping the foreign policy of Pakistan. Competition between Beijing and Washington on external fronts opens up strategic opportunities and constraints, whereas internal fractures, such as economic vulnerability, political stability, governance ability, and security interests, moderate policy reaction. Due to this interaction, Pakistan has opted to employ a flexible balancing strategy as opposed to the traditional alliance politics or hardline neutrality.

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Another important point made in the study is that strategic balancing lacks risks. The growing great-power competition, the security issues in the region, poverty, as well as the lack of national stability in domestic politics keep the diplomatic malleability of Pakistan to the test. To maintain such strategy, it will be essential to undergo recurrent economic reforms, stronger institutions, better governance, and consistent long-term foreign policy that has the capacity to react to the evolving geopolitical dynamics. The further diversification of the economic relationships, an increase of the level of the technological cooperation and strengthening of the regional connections will contribute to the further improvement of the strategic independence of Pakistan.

To sum up, the experience of Pakistan demonstrates that a perfectly located middle power has the opportunities to browse the ever more competitive international environment without having to rely on one major power. As the international system increasingly moves toward the more multipolar form, the concept of balancing at the strategic level will probably still be the most successful tool in promoting Pakistan national interest. Further studies can build on this analysis by exploring how the emerging technologies, regional economic integration and the evolving trends in global governance can influence the future the foreign policy options of Pakistan over the decades.

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