

Pakistan's Recent Diplomatic Efforts and Implications for Relations with the US

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Key Points

- Pakistan has recently been actively engaged in comprehensive diplomacy (until the recent overthrow of Prime Minister Khan).
- Pakistan is seeking to expand its diplomatic capabilities through religious and intergovernmental diplomatic activities.
- Although the US has maintained a cold relationship with Pakistan since its withdrawal from Afghanistan, it should maintain its influence by discovering a new agenda and strengthening cooperative relations.
- Pakistan is very active in calling on the international community to recognize Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and to strengthen humanitarian assistance to prevent starvation.
- US relations with Pakistan will be strongly affected by the outcome of the upcoming general election under the new Pakistani government.

Introduction

In 1947, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, founder of the state of Pakistan, clearly described the principles and objectives of Pakistan's foreign policy in a broadcast message: "The foundation of our foreign policy is friendship with all nations across the globe."¹ In accordance with this, the Islamic Republic of Pakistan has maintained a large diplomatic network across the world. Pakistan is the second largest Muslim majority country in terms of population (after Indonesia) and the only Muslim majority nation with nuclear weapons. Pakistan enjoys a strategic geopolitical location: it is situated at the corridor of major maritime and land-based transit routes, ranging from energy-rich Central Asia and the Middle East to the population centers of South and East Asia, and has geostrategic hotspots such as Afghanistan, China, India and Iran as immediate neighbors. Pakistan maintains a tense relationship with the Republic of India due to the Kashmir conflict, close ties with the People's Republic of China, Turkey, Russia and the Gulf Arab states, and fluctuating relations with the United States of America due to overlapping interests during the Cold War and War on Terror (WOT). Pakistan is a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

¹ "Ministry of Foreign Affairs Homepage". MoFA.gov.pk. Government of Pakistan. 2013.

The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in August last year caused a sudden change in the region, and Pakistan, which is most affected by the situation in Afghanistan, is making various diplomatic efforts to respond to the expected change. Particular attention is paid to ensuring the direction of national policy, including foreign policy, is determined by a new general election and a new cabinet to be elected as a result of the recent political chaos related to the overthrow of Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Pakistan's Recent Active All-Round Diplomatic Activities

A. With China

A general quotation referring to China-Pakistan Friendship is: "A Friendship Higher than Himalayas, deeper than ocean, sweeter than honey, and stronger than steel."² China has played a significant role in the development, economy, and security of Pakistan, with their relationship beginning in 1950, when Pakistan was among the first countries to enter into official diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (on Taiwan Island) and recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) on Mainland China as the sole representative of China. Since then, both countries have placed great importance on maintaining an extremely close and supportive special relationship, and both countries have made regular high-level visits which have resulted in a large number of agreements. The PRC has provided Pakistan with economic, military, and technical assistance, and each country considers the other as a close strategic ally. Since the beginning of the 21st century, Pakistan and China have strengthened their relations through bilateral trade, military agreements and supporting each other on key issues. Particularly for Pakistan, which is in a desperate economic situation, China's support for national projects to develop key infrastructure such as roads, ports and railroad networks is absolutely essential. Since the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which secures overland transportation routes through Pakistani territory as an alternative to crossing the Strait of Malacca, is important enough to be regarded as BRI's flagship project, the interests of both countries are shared.

China has invested a significant amount in Afghanistan under the pro-American government of Ashraf Ghani,³ so it is hoped that these projects will be carried out in a stable manner. The anti-American government on the border with Afghanistan was displeased, but once the US withdrew its troops, the security threat became a reality. Over the past 20 years, China has demonstrated a contradictory attitude toward the US presence in Afghanistan. On the one hand, China has seen America's war, presence, and the "manipulation" or "distortion" of Afghan policy as the cause of instability. In Beijing's view, the war has long deviated from its original goal of fighting terrorism and has morphed into a plan to control the heart of Eurasia and China's backyard. Therefore, across the board, the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan has been portrayed in a highly negative light and as a source of regional instability and concern. Ironically, China is equally, if not more, critical of the withdrawal of US troop. Just as it did with the Foreign Ministry's statement after the bombing on May 8 in 2021, China attributes the deterioration in Afghanistan security causally to the US announced withdrawal plan and blames Washington for its "irresponsible" behavior.⁴

Currently, China's main interest in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan appears to be two issues. China views the attack by IS-K or East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in relation to its suppression of Muslims rooted in the Xinjiang-Uyghur region as a major security threat and wants to ensure that the Afghan Taliban prevent radical groups from attacking China's western border within Afghanistan. China is worried that Afghanistan could become a haven for an extremist Uyghur group. The Chinese authorities might try to protect their country from terrorist attacks by building relations

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/04/21/what-china-and-pakistans-special-friendship-means/> (10:25, April 6, 2022)

³ Beijing has invested in Afghanistan, \$3.4 billion since 2005, according to the American Enterprise Institute. One of the largest Chinese projects in the country -- the Mes Anyak copper mine in Logar province -- has been deadlocked for years since the contract was awarded in 2008.

⁴ Yun Sun, "How China views the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan", War on The Rocks, May 13, 2021.

<https://warontherocks.com/2021/05/how-china-views-the-u-s-withdrawal-from-afghanistan/> (April 6, 2022)

with the Taliban. On the other hand, China is also interested in expanding the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and securing flexibility of it in Afghanistan once it has regained stability. China expressed the hope of extending its multi-billion-dollar BRI to Afghanistan, saying that the “Taliban believes” that the initiative is beneficial to the development and prosperity of the war-ravaged country and the broader region.⁵ Even though the plan has not made much headway due to political differences between the previous Ashraf Ghaniled government in Kabul and Pakistan over Islamabad’s support to the Taliban militants, China has demonstrated at every opportunity its ambitions to make a major contribution to the stability and development of Afghanistan under the Taliban. A surprise visit and meeting of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi with the Taliban leadership in March 2022, followed by the third Foreign Ministers Meeting of Afghanistan’s Neighbors, hosted by China in Tongxi in east China’s Anhui Province in late March, clearly illustrate China's intentions.⁶

The leverages Pakistan can have with China include the continued promotion of CPEC as the flagship BRI project, the opportunity to play a key role in balancing China’s relations with the US and India, and its influence on the Afghan Taliban. Of course, China wants to negotiate directly with the Taliban, but Pakistan must use its influence on the Afghan Taliban to continually appeal to China to be an important strategic partner. Since China is currently providing and will continue to provide the greatest help to Pakistan, it will continue to strengthen relations not only through bilateral relations, but also through activities in consultative bodies and international organizations dealing with major issues in the region, such as the Extended Troika⁷. In the context of military competition with India, a large number of new Chinese weapons are being introduced, which is also expected to contribute to strengthening of bilateral relations with China to some extent.

B. With Afghanistan

Afghanistan and Pakistan have a long history of tense relations defined by numerous recurring drivers: sovereignty concerns, security interests, geopolitical dynamics, cross-border connectivity and trade. Together, these dynamics will shape the future prospects for stability in Afghanistan and the region as a whole.

The day after the Taliban took control of Kabul and took over the presidential palace, then-Prime Minister Khan said that the Taliban are “breaking the chains of slavery”⁸, which can be recognized as the Pakistani government giving support for the Afghan Taliban. However, things do not appear to be going the way Pakistan had hoped. Contrary to expectations that its influence on the Afghan Taliban can be used as leverage in diplomatic relations, the US remains indifferent to Pakistan, and China is also strengthening its direct relations with the Afghan Taliban. Contrary to expectations, the Pakistan Taliban (TTP) seems to be emboldened to commit terrorist attacks in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan. According to the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), 207 terrorist attacks took place in Pakistan in 2021 — an increase of 42% relative to 2020. 335 lives were lost in these attacks. PIPS notes that the TTP alone was responsible for 87 attacks, an increase of 84% compared to 2020. The TTP itself claimed 282 attacks in 2021 and claimed to have killed more than 500 law enforcement personnel; it claimed an additional 42 attacks in January 2022.⁹ Despite all these difficulties, the second-best thing for Pakistan is to recognize the Taliban

⁵ <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/china-eyes-bri-extension-to-afghanistan-as-it-awaits-taliban-to-form-govt-11630678935241.html> (April 6, 2022)

⁶ Bobby Naderi, “Tunxi meeting takeaways: Putting Afghanistan on the path of recovery”, CGTN, April 1, 2022. <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2022-04-01/Tunxi-meeting-takeaways-Putting-Afghanistan-on-the-path-of-recovery-18St8JkoHsl/index.html> (April 7, 2022)

⁷ China Chairs the Extended Troika Meeting on Afghan Issue (fmprc.gov.cn) (April 25, 2022)

⁸ <https://www.independent.co.uk/asia/south-asia/taliban-pakistan-imran-khan-afghanistan-b1903821.html> (April 6, 2022)

⁹ Madiha Afzal, “Pakistan’s ambivalent approach toward a resurgent Tehrike-e-Taliban Pakistan”, Brookings, February 11, 2022. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/02/11/pakistans-ambivalent-approach-toward-a-resurgent-tehrik-e-taliban-pakistan/#:~:text=An%20uptick%20in%20terrorist%20attacks&text=PIPS%20notes%20that%20the%20TTP,42%20attacks%20in%20January%202022.> (April 7, 2022)

as the legitimate power of Afghanistan and to rule Afghanistan with stability. Only then can terrorist groups such as the TTP be properly controlled, and a situation in which large numbers of refugees flow into Pakistan and burden the still difficult economy can be prevented in advance.

Pakistan's National Security Advisor (NSA), Moeed Yusuf, held discussions with Taliban leaders of Afghanistan on trade and other issues during his visit to Kabul on 29 and 30 January. The Taliban leaders assured him that the soil of Afghanistan could not be used against its neighbors, including Pakistan. "The purpose of the visit was to discuss with the Afghan leadership the country's humanitarian needs and Pakistan's proposals to deepen economic engagement to address the current challenges facing Afghanistan," a statement by the NSA office said.¹⁰ Although not explicitly mentioned in the statement, it is assumed that both sides also exchanged views on fencing at the border between the two countries as well as the future expansion of the CPEC.

In the recent 48th Session of OIC CFM, 'the developments in Afghanistan and their humanitarian consequences for the Afghan people' was selected as one of the main topics. As host country, Pakistan announced the establishment of a Humanitarian Trust Fund for Afghanistan, managed by the Islamic Development Bank and financed by donations from OIC member states, Islamic financial institutions, donors and international partners. The money will be used for humanitarian aid in Afghanistan, where, according to the United Nations, 95 percent of the population have insufficient food to eat and poverty is increasing rapidly.¹¹ As such, Pakistan is more active than any other country and calls on the international community to recognize Taliban-controlled Afghanistan as a normal country as soon as possible and to strengthen humanitarian assistance to prevent starvation.

Furthermore, major infrastructure projects linking Pakistan via Afghanistan from Central Asia, such as TAPI, CASA-1000 and PAKAFUZ railway, which are currently suspended due to the domestic situation in Afghanistan, will continue to be on the agenda of both countries in the future.

C. With Iran

Despite the fact that Iran was one of the first countries to recognize Pakistan's sovereignty after Pakistan independence in August 1947, it is not difficult to imagine that relations between Shi'a-majority Iran and Sunni-majority Pakistan are not very friendly.

Although both countries continue to cooperate economically where possible and form alliances in a number of areas of mutual interest, such as fighting drug trafficking on their border and combating the insurgency in the Baluchistan region, instability and violence on the border remain a key factor hindering the normalization of bilateral ties. The Iranian leadership believes that these militants are operating from Pakistan and has demanded that Pakistan take action against their camps. The Pakistani side of Baluchistan has also experienced multiple attacks by Baluch separatists against security forces, civilians and even Chinese citizens involved in CPEC projects. To make things worse, the intensity of attacks in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan has increased significantly since the Taliban took over Afghanistan in 2021, resulting in casualties among security personnel. These attacks have displayed a new degree of sophistication on the part of the militant Baluchistan Liberation Army. Unlike the terrorists active in the northwest of Pakistan, the Baluch groups have never held any territory in Pakistan and therefore cross the border back into Iran after every attack.¹²

¹⁰ <https://hindustannewshub.com/world-news/pakistans-nsa-moeed-yusuf-visited-afghanistan-taliban-gave-this-assurance/> (April 6, 2022)

¹¹ <https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/wang-yi-attends-oic-meeting-as-special-guest/> (April 5, 2022)

¹² Umer Karim, "Uneasy Relations: Geopolitical Challenges for Iran on its Eastern Border", The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington, Mar 4, 2022. AGSIW | Uneasy Relations: Geopolitical Challenges for Iran on its Northern and Eastern Borders (April 5, 2022)

This is not the only issue that makes relations between the two countries difficult. The Pakistani security establishment has been further irked by the involvement of multiple Iranian intelligence agents in Pakistan in money laundering activities, including a senior civil servant in the Pakistani government.¹³ This could lead to additional complications for Pakistan, a country already on the gray list of the financial watchdog Financial Action Task Force (FATF), owing to deficiencies in countering terrorism financing and money laundering to satisfy FATF auditors. Furthermore, the IRGC involvement in the recruitment of Pakistanis for its proxy in Syria has raised concerns among Pakistani security officials, who worry these militants' return and involvement in sectarian violence could increase domestic instability.¹⁴ For the time being, Pakistani leadership continues its strategy of working with the Iranian security infrastructure, specifically the IRGC (through a joint task force of its interior ministries), in addressing violence along the border zone and are erecting a fence. However, owing to the dependence of the local economy on crossborder smuggling, instability and violence are likely to persist, further complicating the relationship.¹⁵

In the military domain, there was a high-profile breakthrough when Iran's highest-ranking military official, Major General Mohammad Bagheri, Iranian Forces Chief of Staff, along with a defense delegation, visited Islamabad on October 2021, where he met his Pakistani counterpart General Qamar Javed Bajwa, naval commander Amjad Khan Niazi and head of state Prime Minister Imran Khan. The two sides discussed ways of expanding their military-technical ties, including the signing of an agreement on collaboration in the construction of warships and submarines.¹⁶

Iran and Pakistan have a history of practical cooperation, even when they have been at odds. Today, they're establishing more common ground in the absence of US troops stationed between them. Diplomatic relations between the two states have recently improved under the policy of Prime Minister Imran Khan, who sought to strengthen Pakistan's relations with Iran. Along with other domains, economic cooperation is likely to become more active as Iran has expressed interest in joining the China– Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as part of the larger Chinese BRI.¹⁷

D. With Russia

The Soviet Union and Pakistan established diplomatic and bilateral relations on 1 May 1948. For most of the Cold War, the Soviet Union's relations with Pakistan have seen ups and downs during the different periods of Pakistan's history, which was not determined by Pakistan's own will, but rather by the relations of its neighbors - Russia and India, Russia and Afghanistan, but mostly the US-Russia relations dealing with Afghanistan. In recent years, relations between Russia and Pakistan have been warming up as a countermeasure to the warming of relations between India and the United States. The two countries conducted joint military exercises for the first time in 2016, after signing a military cooperation agreement in 2014.¹⁸ In 2015, Russia and Pakistan agreed in principle to build a 1,100 km (683 mile)-long pipeline to deliver imported Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) from Karachi on the Arabian Sea coast to power plants in the northeastern province of Punjab.¹⁹ Pakistan has also granted Russia access to its port of Gwadar, a warm water port in the Arabian sea.²⁰

¹³ https://afghanistan.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_st/features/2022/02/18/feature-02 (April 6, 2022)

¹⁴ Talha Ahmad, "Iran's proxy war and Pakistan", Global Village Space, March 9, 2020. <https://www.globalvillagespace.com/irans-proxy-war-and-pakistan/#:~:text=According%20to%20some%20reports%2C%20the,Punjab%2C%20Karachi%2C%20and%20Quetta.> (April 6, 2022)

¹⁵ <https://agsiw.org/uneasy-relations-geopolitical-challenges-for-iran-on-its-eastern-border/> (March 31, 2022)

¹⁶ <https://www.newsweek.com/us-odds-islamic-republics-iran-pakistan-forge-new-ties-1648021> (April 7, 2022)

¹⁷ <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1910782/iran-expresses-desire-join-cpec> (April 6, 2022)

¹⁸ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1285633> (April 8, 2022)

¹⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/pakistan-russia-collaboration-gas-pipeline-project-2022-02-23/> (April 8, 2022)

²⁰ <https://www.livemint.com/Politics/78Er6cZkeSvj2iEj1NeBIP/Pakistan-approves-Russias-request-to-use-Gwadar-Port.html> (April 8, 2022)

On February 24, when Russia's invasion of Ukraine was imminent, Prime Minister Khan was the only head of state to visit Russia to meet Putin. The delegations argued that the talks between the two leaders would focus on regional developments, Afghanistan, Islamophobia, and a major gas pipeline deal that Pakistan would like to finalize with Russia.²¹ The delegation, in light of prior discussions, agreed that the visit was essential. However, this ultimately contributed to a negative perception of Pakistan in the international community and possibly provided an excuse of poor foreign policy for the later vote of no confidence in the Pakistani Parliament for Prime Minister Imran Khan.²² If the reason for the inappropriate visit was the smooth promotion of the PAK-Stream, as it is known, this proves that the PAK-Stream project and relations with Russia are very important issues for Pakistan. When the UN

General Assembly (UNGA), on March 24, overwhelmingly adopted a resolution that "demands" Russia "immediately" withdraw from Ukraine, in a powerful rebuke of Moscow's invasion by a vast majority of the world's nations, Pakistan was one of 38 countries that abstained from voting on the UNGA resolution.²³ This can be seen as an indirect expression of their willingness to engage in future diplomatic activities with Russia. In addition to Russia's attractiveness for natural resources, considering that the 'Russia card' can be used very effectively in the chronic conflict with India, Russia is clearly a target for diplomatic efforts that Pakistan cannot neglect. Greater efforts are expected to be made in various domains to develop relations between the two countries.

E. With CAS

The emerging regional security threats following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan have led to active engagement between Pakistan and Central Asian States (CAS). Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have a direct border with Afghanistan and are therefore vulnerable to spill over from Afghanistan. Pakistan shares similar concerns. Pakistan's trade with CAS amounts to less than one billion USD. After the US withdrawal, Pakistan hopes for a stable Afghanistan and an increase in trade and economic cooperation with Afghanistan and Central Asia. CAS are rich in energy resources. Therefore, the region is crucial for power-hungry Pakistan to obtain cheap electricity. In return, CAS would get access to Pakistani markets for their high-quality cotton and agricultural products.

Two energy projects are planned between Pakistan and Central Asia. The CASA-1000 project (Central Asia-South Asia Power Project), launched in 2016, aims to export surplus hydroelectricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Afghanistan and Pakistan. This project is expected to be operational by 2024. However, the progress has been slow, and the viability of this project depends on the situation in Afghanistan. The other project, TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan and India gas pipeline), is also facing trouble due to the uncertain situation in the region.

In the meanwhile, Uzbekistan desires to extend the Hairatan-Mazar-i-Sharif rail line²⁴ to Kabul and further to Peshawar in Pakistan. To construct this railroad, Uzbekistan and Pakistan have approached multiple financial institutions, including China-sponsored Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB). The Asian Development Bank (ADB) has also expressed an interest in partial financial support for the project. The new railway is expected to reduce the movement of commodities from Central Asia to Pakistan from 30 and 15 days and reduce transport costs by 30 percent and 35 percent respectively.²⁵ Another important factor is the reduction of transport costs. The costs of transporting a container from Tashkent to the port of Karachi is estimated to be around 1,400-1,600 USD, which is about half the cost of transportation from Tashkent to the Iranian port – Bandar Abbas.²⁶ Uzbekistan and Pakistan

²¹ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/25/pakistan-imran-putin-russia-ukraine-invasion> (April 11, 2022)

²² Imran Khan claims US threatened him and wants him ousted as Pakistan PM | Pakistan | The Guardian (April 11, 2022)

²³ <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1114632> (April 11, 2022)

²⁴ This railway line was built with financial support (165 million USD) from Asian Development Bank (ADB) and became operational in 2011.

²⁵ Djoomart Otorbaev, "Central Asia's Afghan Route to Prosperity", Project Syndicate, April 13, 2021. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/central-asia-afghanistan-transport-energy-opportunity-by-djoomart-otorbaev-2021-04>

²⁶ Akromjon Nematov, "Uzbekistan's Strategy for Building Greater Trans-regional Connectivity", Diplomat Magazine, June 30, 2021. <https://diplomatmagazine.eu/2021/06/30/uzbekistans-strategy-for-building-greater-trans-regional-connectivity/> (April 10, 2022)

signed a Transit Trade Agreement (TTA) during Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit in July 2021, which allowed the free flow of goods from both sides. Additionally in 2022, a Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA) was signed during Uzbekistan President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's visit to Islamabad.

Although the scale is not large, Islamabad is trying to sell weapons to Tajikistan as part of its plan to expand its influence in Central Asia. Tajik President Emomali Rahmon paid a two-day visit to Pakistan on 2-3 June 2021, where he signed a defense agreement with Islamabad.²⁷ Under the agreement, Pakistan would sell domestically manufactured weapons to Dushanbe.²⁸

Also, from the perspective of the Central Asian countries, a close relationship with Pakistan would be strategically useful to accomplish their own regional agendas, especially for the landlocked countries. As a result, the interests of CAS can be broadly shared with Pakistan, but most projects were designed to ensure stability in Afghanistan first.

F. With GCC

Pakistan and countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) are linked by geographical proximity, spiritual and cultural ties, labor and trade exchanges, and common security interests. The GCC represents the collective will of Member States for co-operation, leading to economic integration and the defense against external threats. It is a block that is vital for international energy needs. This is the region where a large Pakistani workforce is employed, and thousands of Pakistanis travel to for the Hajj to be spiritually redeemed. Peace and security in this important region are crucial to international prosperity, and Pakistan's geographical location assumes weight in this regard.

GCC Secretary General Dr. Nayef Al Hajjraf paid two visits to Pakistan. His first visit took place during the meeting of Foreign Ministers of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) held in Islamabad in December 2021 to discuss the looming humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan. The second visit took place on 5 January in order to broaden the scope of PAK-GCC cooperation and to provide it with an institutional framework. A wide range of sectors have been identified as possible segments of strategic dialogue that should be conducted in an institutionalized framework. These include policy, security, trade and investment, agriculture and food security, transport, energy, environment, health, education and culture. A Joint Action Plan for Strategic Dialogue has been finalized. The China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) appears to have given a new inspiration to this cooperation by opening up new opportunities for energy and goods transport between China and GCC Member States via Pakistan.²⁹

For Pakistan, security, stability and secure flow of energy resources are high priorities. Hundreds of oil- and gas-laden vessels cross the Strait of Hormuz every day and sail quite close to Pakistani territorial waters. The bulk of Pakistan's energy, be it oil or gas, comes from GCC countries. Vessels heading west are facing threats like piracy near the Horn of Africa. Pakistan was an active member of the Combined Task Force (CTF) 150 and CTF 151 based in Bahrain, both international maritime contingents to promote the safety of navigation and to counter threats on the high seas. It has also extended technical training facilities to the navies of the GCC Member States under bilateral arrangements.³⁰

Another reason that makes this relationship special is that the rich countries of the Middle East can be of great help to Pakistan, which is struggling particularly with its economy. After talks with Prime Minister Imran Khan during his visit to Riyadh in October 2021, Saudi Arabia pledged to provide USD 4.2 billion to Pakistan, of this, USD 3 billion was

²⁷ "Tajik president to pay a two-day visit to Pakistan", Asia Plus, June 2, 2021.

<https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/politics/20210602/tajik-president-to-pay-a-two-day-visit-to-pakistan>

²⁸ Baqir Sajjad Syed, "Tajikistan to buy weapons from Pakistan", The Dawn, June 3, 2021. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1627157> (April 10, 2022)

²⁹ Javed Hafeez, "Pakistan's role in China-GCC developments", Arab New, November 30, 2021. <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1978411> (April 10, 2022)

³⁰ Javed Hafeez, "CGG-Pakistan relations: An upward trajectory", Arab News, January 10, 2022. <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/2001681> (April 2, 2022)

deposited with the Central Bank of Pakistan and USD 1.2 billion was also used to finance refinery products during the year.³¹ Islamabad also received USD 3 billion in economic aid from the UAE in December 2018,³² and the UAE has extended the terms of interest-free loans as the Pakistani economy continues to struggle with sluggish growth amid the coronavirus pandemic.³³

G. With International Organizations

Pakistan officially joined the United Nations (UN) on 30 September 1947, just over a month after its founding. Today it is a member of the Charter and participates in all the specialized agencies and organizations. In particular, the Pakistani military has played a main role in the UN peacekeeping program in different parts of the world. Pakistani troops have served in 23 countries so far, in a total of 41 UN peacekeeping missions since its first mission in Congo in 1960.

On 15 March 2022, United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) approved a resolution setting March 15 as the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, which was introduced by Pakistan on behalf of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).³⁴ The resolution calls on all countries, UN bodies, international and regional organizations, civil society, the private sector and faith-based organizations to “organize and support various high-visibility events aimed at effectively increasing awareness of all levels about curbing Islamophobia” and to observe the new International Day for Combating Islamophobia.³⁵ There is no doubt that Pakistan's contribution to the whole process has led to an improvement in its status in the Islamic world.

In addition to the UN, Pakistan continues to enjoy a privileged status in the OIC. Pakistan is the second largest member of OIC in terms of population, the only Muslim country to detonate nuclear weapons, and has a large labor workforce working in various Muslim countries. On 22 and 23 March 2022, Pakistan hosted the 48th session of the Council of Foreign Minister (CFM) of the OIC. Pakistan has tried to publicize the Kashmir issue, its paramount security and diplomatic issue, and to use it as an opportunity. The CFM reviewed the “critical human rights and humanitarian situation” in Indian-administered Kashmir as one of the main agenda.³⁶

Strategic Implications for Relations with the US

Throughout the War on Terror (WOT), the United States and Pakistan have come to argue over strategies while accusing each other of various things. Islamabad's turbulent relationship with Washington suffered setbacks under Prime Minister Imran Khan. During his nearly four years in office, Khan relentlessly criticized Washington for what he said was a “flawed war” in neighboring Afghanistan.³⁷ While these differences wore down the trust between the two nations, the two would continue to share a healthy relationship. Although the two countries do not view each other favorably in polls, the US-Pakistan relations continue to promote trade and regional economic cooperation. This type of relationship is beneficial for both countries and gives incentive for continuing friendly relations. In particular, as the recent concerns about the revival of terrorist groups such as IS-K in Afghanistan escalate, it is worthwhile to cautiously cooperate for a policy change in the establishment of US military's Access-Basing-Overflight

³¹ <https://www.tribuneindia.com/news/world/pakistan-receives-usd-3-billion-from-saudi-arabia-to-help-stabilise-countrys-economy-346273> (April 10, 2022)

³² <https://www.arabnews.pk/node/1509801/pakistan> (April 10, 2022)

³³ https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/uae-extends-term-of-2-billion-interest-free-loan-to-pakistan-made-in-2019-121042100140_1.html (April 10, 2022)

³⁴ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2022/ga12408.doc.htm> (April 2, 2022)

³⁵ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/16/pakistan-pm-lauds-un-for-international-day-to-combat-islamophobia> (April 2, 2022)

³⁶ <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2022/03/29/oic-and-kashmir/> (April 2, 2022)

³⁷ <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-to-seek-deepening-of-important-ties-with-us-/6526760.html> (April 13, 2022)

(ABO), which PM Khan strongly opposed to carry out WOT effectively and efficiently, given the limitation of Over The Horizon (OTH) operations.

Considering the fact that the Khan regime has had a blatantly uncomfortable relationship with India throughout, it can be expected that the Shebaz government could take a step forward to improve relations to some extent. Shehbaz's older brother, former prime minister Nawaz Sharif, had good relations with Modi and hosted him at his residence in Lahore in December 2015, when the Indian head of state undertook a surprise trip to Pakistan.³⁸ Analysts are skeptical about a major change in bilateral relations, citing the limited stint of the new Pakistani government and with no letup in tensions over Kashmir, but are saying that efforts to reduce tensions are possible.³⁹

On 11 March 2022, celebrating the election of Pakistan's new prime minister, White House press secretary Psaki said, "We value our long-standing cooperation with Pakistan, have always viewed a prosperous and democratic Pakistan as critical to US interests",⁴⁰ and Sharif's office replied to the following day, "We welcome US reaffirmation of long-standing ties with Pakistan." And the Pakistani declaration states, "We look forward to deepening this important relationship on the principles of equality, mutual interest and mutual benefit."⁴¹

However, challenges still exist. Analysts say re-establishing relations with the US would be a key priority for Sharif, but domestic and economic issues will keep him busy because Khan will not allow this political system and new policies to settle down smoothly. Blaming the US and the 'foreign conspiracy' could work well for Khan. In parts of Pakistan, such as the border area with Afghanistan, anti-Americanism is being sold to the public. In this regard, it is very likely that Khan would emerge as a strong opposition leader for this new government and its new diplomatic policies.

Recommendation for the US/USCENTCOM

- The US should use the inauguration of the new Pakistani government as an opportunity to improve relations between the two countries but be careful not to create misunderstandings that could be misused for Pakistan's domestic politics.
- Prior to any large-scale efforts to improve relations, Pakistan's urgent economic difficulties, such as the IMF loan program, should be addressed.
- The US and USCENTCOM should strengthen their cooperation in the military domain and, in particular, consult on the establishment of a US base in Pakistan for the implementation of the WOT in the CASA region.
- The US should make good use of Pakistan's strategic value based on its connectivity, and in particular, USCENTCOM should consider inviting an Indian Senior National Representative in the context of its effort to improve Pakistan-India relations, which could have a major impact on Pakistan's stability.

³⁸ <https://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/pm-modi-lands-in-lahore-on-a-surprise-visit-meets-pak-pm-nawaz-sharif/> (April 13, 2022)

³⁹ <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-to-look-for-deepening-of-important-ties-with-us-/6526760.html> (April 13, 2022)

⁴⁰ US values its long standing cooperation with Pakistan: White House | Business Standard News (business-standard.com) (April 25, 2025)

⁴¹ Pakistan expresses desire to engage with US to promote goals of peace, security (radio.gov.pk) (April 25, 2022)