

# EVOLVING DYNAMICS OF PAKISTAN-US RELATIONS

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The relationship between Pakistan and the United States is perhaps one of the most consequential ones that has traditionally impacted Pakistan's strategic posture and the strategic dimensions of the South Asian region. For Pakistan, the US remains a critical partner and both the military and the civilian leadership have consistently made efforts towards achieving favourable dynamics in the relationship. Looking into the history of the relationship, it is interesting to observe that though the two nations never trusted each other's intentions, they maintained a strong alliance (in three critical phases: 1950s-1960s, 1980s, and post 2001).

The bilateral relationship has gone through high and low phases, and the last decade has seen a strained phase in the relationship. Former US President Donald Trump took a firm position against Pakistan by cutting down on the sale of US military equipment and military aid, which has been an essential and perhaps the most desirable component (for Islamabad) of the US-Pak dynamics. Under President Biden, the relationship suffered a further blow with Pakistan's former Prime Minister (PM) Imran Khan's accusatory position wherein he held the USA responsible for Pakistan's economic and security woes

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and, finally, for his scandalous exit from the PM's office. After the exit of Imran Khan, Pakistan's civilian and military leadership have been making concerted efforts to enhance the bilateral cooperation with Washington.

In September 2023, US Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome's visit to the strategically located Gwadar port in Balochistan province (Pakistan) led to sundry speculations regarding potential shifts in US-Pakistan ties. In December 2023, the visit of Pakistan's Army Chief Asim Munir to Washington generated ample debate and speculations. General Munir reportedly had high level meetings including with Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin, Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun, UN Secretary-General António Guterres and, very importantly, with the Pakistani diaspora. In his interaction with the Pakistani Americans, Munir requested them to invest in Pakistan through the newly created Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC).<sup>1</sup>

Pakistan's economic crisis has been alarming and the nation has been in dire need of external assistance. Although, after rigorous deliberations the economic strains have been managed by the bailouts, debt rollovers and assistance from various channels, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), China, Saudi Arabia and UAE, Pakistan is far from economic stability. The foreign reserves stand at approximately \$8 billion which is barely sufficient to cover eight weeks of imports. Inflation stands at around 30 per cent and the value of the Pakistani rupee against the US dollar dropped to a record low in 2023.

Though the US has consistently projected its keenness for Pakistan's stability, it has (till now) refrained from offering any direct economic assistance and has insisted that Pakistan conduct structural reforms according to the guidelines of the IMF. The focus of the previous phases of the US-Pakistan partnership has been, by and large, security. There seem to be a shift in the dynamics of bilateral ties, and the current phase of the relationship seems to

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1. Anwar Iqbal, "Army Chief Embarks on Charm Offensive to Woo Diaspora", *Dawn*, December 18, 2023, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1798767>. Accessed on December 25, 2023.

focus more on cooperation in the arena of non-traditional security threats.

### **US-PAKISTAN RELATIONS: SEESAW OF HIGHS AND LOWS**

Pakistan's foreign policy has been primarily driven by its strategic objectives, its desire to modernise its military and acquire high technology equipment. Soon after partition, Pakistan had started convincing (the US) about Pakistan's crucial role in the US' strategic dynamics of the Cold War. Jinnah told Bourke-White, while talking about his views on relations with Washington, "America needs Pakistan more than Pakistan needs America... Pakistan is the pivot of the world, as we are placed...the frontier on which the future of the world revolves...Russia is not so very far away".<sup>2</sup> This is the sentiment Pakistan conceived with its birth and maintained in its narrative of the country being extremely relevant for the US due to its strategic geographic location. Bourke-White wrote that the Pakistani officials would tell her, "Surely America will build our army... Surely America will give loans to keep Russia from walking in".<sup>3</sup> In 1947, Jinnah conveyed to Raymond A. Hare of the Division of Middle Eastern and Indian Affairs and Thomas E. Weil, Second Secretary of the Embassy at New Delhi that "establishment of Pakistan is essential to prevent 'Hindu imperialism' spreading into the Middle East; the Muslim countries would stand together against possible Russian aggression and would look to the US for assistance."<sup>4</sup>

Pakistan was keen on an economic and military relationship with the US to counter its threat perceptions vis-à-vis India. On the other hand, America's interest in providing military aid to Pakistan was driven mainly by two factors.

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2. Margaret Bourke-White, *Halfway to Freedom: A Report on the New India in the Words and Photographs of Margaret Bourke-White* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1949), as cited in Hussain Haqqani, *Magnificent Delusions: Pakistan, The United States, and an Epic History of Misunderstanding* (New Delhi: Thomson Press India Ltd, 2012), pp. 8-9.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 9.

4. Office of the Historian, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1947, The British Commonwealth; Europe*, vol. III, 845.00/5-247: Telegram, New Delhi, May 2, 1947, 10 a.m. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1947v03/d96>. Accessed on 18, May 2023.

First, the geographical location of Pakistan abutting the oil-rich Persian Gulf region (where the USA and UK had extensive commercial interests) and the strategic location of the Straits of Hormuz which offered Washington easy access to energy resources as well as a monitoring point for the southern Soviet Union and western China. Pakistan's strategically important location, in fact, turned it into a convenient launching pad for the Cold War strategies.<sup>5</sup> And, second, the fear of Soviet expansion into the Middle East.

A mutual defence assistance agreement signed on May 19, 1954, between the USA and Pakistan was the first formal bilateral security commitment between the two countries and provided the legal basis to the US military assistance.<sup>6</sup> Pakistan entered the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) in 1955 and the Baghdad Pact, renamed the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO), after Iraq left the pact in 1956, ostensibly joining the chain erected by the US around the former Soviet Union and its then military-ideological ally, China, to check the spread of communism.<sup>7</sup> This resulted in a robust inflow of military and economic aid for Pakistan. Being a member of these two security alliances provided Pakistan with a stronger claim on US resources, and the US also benefited from the regular interaction between the Pakistani civilian and military officials and their counterparts from the other member-countries. In this process, the US acquired a larger stake in its relationship with Pakistan.<sup>8</sup>

By the year 1957, Pakistan was receiving a massive amount of sophisticated military equipment, training, and economic aid. The inflow from Washington included sophisticated Patton main battle tanks, modern artillery, howitzers, F-86 jet fighter squadrons, F-104 Starfighter supersonic interceptors, and air-to-air missiles. A further, qualitative boost came from the military training by the US military

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5. Pran Chopra, "Pakistan Squanders a Strategic Advantage," in Ajay Darshan Behera and Mathew Joseph, eds., *Pakistan in a Changing Strategic Context* (New Delhi: Knowledge World, 2004), p. 90.

6. Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 67.

7. Shahid Javed Burki, *Historical Dictionary of Pakistan* (New Delhi: Vision Books, 2003), p. 337.

8. Kux, n. 6, p. 74.

teams and also in the US military schools for the Pakistan Army.<sup>9</sup> Pakistan not only acquired high-technology weapons from the USA but also benefited by the interaction with the American armed forces which influenced Pakistan military's thinking and strategy. The massive US arms aid to Pakistan in the late 1950s provided it with the incentive to initiate the 1965 War. While Pakistan failed to win in this war, its military nevertheless projected it as a victory, especially in the air, and the thirst for high-technology systems intensified.

The US military assistance was suspended after the India-Pakistan War in 1965 when Pakistan used the US equipment in the war. Pakistan's desperation and its quest for alternative sources of military equipment drove it towards China. For Beijing, Pakistan was (and has been) a low-cost option to balance India and counter the US' expansion the region. Needless to say, China's energy requirements have been a critical factor in its alliance with Pakistan.

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in 1979 offered a strategic opportunity for Pakistan and brought in a renewed US-Pakistan engagement. Pakistan became the frontline state in the US' war against the Soviets. General Zia-ul-Haq was well aware of the criticality of Pakistan's support for the USA and he managed to negotiate for substantive aid and the latest military equipment. Some issues were unanimously agreed between the military leadership and Washington: firstly, Pakistan would not compromise on its nuclear programme; secondly, US interference in Pakistan's internal matters was not acceptable and it was Pakistan's prerogative to solve its internal affairs.<sup>10</sup> Zia negotiated an elaborate military and security-related aid package of \$3.2 billion. The US military assistance programme included the sale of 40 F-16 Falcon multi-role combat aircraft, attack helicopters, and second-hand destroyers. The second US package, worth, \$4.02 billion, commenced in 1987 but was suspended due to the US arms embargo in 1990 as Pakistan crossed the 'red lines' to acquire nuclear weapons capability.

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9. Ibid., pp. 86-87.

10. General Khalid Mahmud Arif, *Working with Zia: Pakistan's Power Politics 1977-1988* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 340-341.

This phase of the US-Pakistan engagement contributed towards a significant transformation in the Pakistan Army's posture and position and, very importantly, the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) emerged as a potent institution commanding not only the military's strategic moves but also playing a decisive role in Pakistan's politics.

### **9/11, GLOBAL WAR ON TERROR AND US MILITARY AID TO PAKISTAN**

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the USA led to a major strategic shift for Pakistan, and Islamabad became a frontline state for Washington and an ally in the global war on terror. The new US-Pakistan relationship helped Pakistan move out of the economic crisis that had built up in the late 1990s. Pakistan's military modernisation received a major boost as it received substantive military assistance from the USA and its Western allies. Pakistan offered its complete military support to the USA, including the use of its air space as well as the use of its air bases at Jacobabad, Pasni, and Dalbandin by the American forces for 'search and rescue' missions. The US presence on the Pakistani bases led to substantial US investments for renovating the bases, and, in addition, Pakistan was paid for providing security for the bases. The Shahbaz air base at Jacobabad, for example, went through extensive construction work to renovate the base, including, the installation of radar equipment. Pakistan was able to obtain US equipment and other support systems, including intelligence, which has been actively operating in the war against terrorism. In September 2003 alone, in order to enhance surveillance capability, the supply of US air traffic control radars as well as associated equipment and services worth \$110 million was authorised to Pakistan.<sup>11</sup>

In February 2002, Pakistan and the USA signed a defence cooperation agreement, and Pakistan agreed to American forces using its military equipment for training and other military exercises. Pakistan also agreed to provide other facilities like food, water, medical services, and transportation, against payment, to the US forces operating in Afghanistan. Taking a step towards institutionalising the military relationship with Pakistan, the

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11. US Defence Security Cooperation Agency, <http://www.dsca.mil>

USA, in an important strategic move, designated Pakistan as a 'Major Non-NATO ally' (MNNA) in March 2004. With the MNNA status, modern US inventories and also spare parts for the US equipment that was being used in Pakistan were made available to Pakistan. One of the most important advantages of this designation was that Islamabad was able to obtain what is called 'Excess Defence Equipment (EDA)'. These are weapons and equipment that the USA may not need anymore, and which may be transferred at nominal rates to its allies. Some of the significant equipment which Pakistan received post 2001 included F-16s, Bell-205/UH-1 Huey-2, P-CUP Orion, AN TPS-77 air surveillance radar and AIM-120C Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM).

Pakistan's defence modernisation flourished post 9/11 with US assistance and consistent Chinese imports. Even with the lavish US assistance flowing in (see Table 1) on the pretext of Pakistan's counter-terror operations, President Musharraf aided the resurgence of the Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan while the USA was distracted in Iraq in 2003-04, and support for the Haqqani network remained active, not allowing the war on terror to show the desired outcome. However, a significant shift in US trust and support was apparent after the killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad (Operation Neptune Spear), on May 2, 2011, in a US Navy SEALs raid on his compound. While the USA realised that it had limited options in terms of replacing its strategic reliance on Pakistan due to its heavy military presence in Afghanistan, American military support for Pakistan did see a shift after 2011.<sup>12</sup> In his first tweet of January 2018, President Donald Trump said, "The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than \$ 33 billion in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies and deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!"<sup>13</sup>

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12. See Susan B. Epstein and K. Alan Kronstadt, "Pakistan: U.S. Foreign Assistance", July 1, 2013, CRS Report, R41856, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R41856.pdf>. Accessed on August 10, 2022.

13. President Trump's first tweet of 2018.

**Table 1: Direct Overt US Aid Appropriations for and Military Reimbursements to Pakistan FY2002-FY2024**  
(rounded to the nearest millions of dollars)

Note: Final obligation and disbursement totals may be lower than program account appropriations

Program or Account	FY 2002- FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019	FY 2020	FY 2021	FY 2022	Program or Account Total	FY 2023 (req.)	FY 2024 (req.)
CN	341	-	-	-	-	-	341	-	-
FMF	4,073	-	-	-	-	-	4,073	-	-
IMET	52	-	-	-	4	3	59	4	4
INCLE	949	21	40	21	25	25	1,081	17	17
NADR	182	2	2	1	1	-	188	1	1
PCF/PCCF	2,352	-	-	-	-	-	2,352	-	-
Total Security-Related	7,939 <sup>b</sup>	23	42	22	30	28	8,406 <sup>b</sup>	22	22
Climate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	9	37
CSH/GHCS/GHP	295	-	-	3	7	31	336	30	32
ESF/ESDF	8,696 <sup>c</sup>	48	62	53 <sup>d</sup>	45	50 <sup>e</sup>	8,954	54	82
Food Aid <sup>f</sup>	643	-	-	-	-	-	643	-	-
IDA	1,065	36	-	6	3	47	1,157	a	a
MRA	371	4	28	32	2	62	499	a	a
Total Economic-Related	11,356 <sup>g</sup>	88	90	94	57	190	11,875 <sup>g</sup>	93	151
CSF Reimbursements <sup>g</sup>	14,573 <sup>h</sup>	<sup>h</sup>	<sup>h</sup>	-	-	-	14,573	-	-
Grand Total	34,190	111	132	116	87	218	34,854	115	173

US Departments of State, Defense, and Agriculture; US Agency for International Development.

Source: Table from K. Alan Kronstadt, *Pakistan and Pakistan-U.S. Relations*, May 22, 2023, CRS Report, R47565, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R47565/6>. Accessed on June 1, 2023.

CN: Counternarcotics Funds (Pentagon budget)

CSF: Coalition Support Funds (Pentagon budget)



GHP:	Child Survival and Health; Global Health and Child Survival (GHCS) from FY2010; Global Health Programs (GHP) from FY2013
ESF:	Economic Support Funds; Economic Support and Development Funds (ESDF) from FY2018
FMF:	Foreign Military Financing
IDA:	International Disaster Assistance (Pakistani earthquake, flood, and internally displaced persons relief )
IMET:	International Military Education and Training
INCLE:	International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement (includes border security)
MRA:	Migration and Refugee Assistance (also includes Emergency Refugee and Migration Assistance or ERMA; shows obligations)
NADR:	Nonproliferation, Anti-Terrorism, Demining, and Related (the great majority allocated for Pakistan is anti-terrorism assistance)
PCF/PCCF:	Pakistan Counterinsurgency Fund/Counterinsurgency Capability Fund (PCF overseen by the Pentagon, PCCF overseen by State)

- a. This funding is “requirements-based”; there are no pre-allocation data.
- b. Includes \$312 “global train and equip” funds from FY2006 FY2009 authorized by Section 1206 of the National million Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for FY2006, within which \$100 million in FY2008 and FY2009 funds was for Pakistan’s paramilitary Frontier Corps.
- c. Congress authorized Pakistan to use the FY2003 and FY2004 ESF allocations to cancel a total of \$1.5 billion in debt to the US government. Also includes \$17 million in Human Rights and Democracy Funds from FY2002-FY2007.
- d. Includes \$7 million in FY2020 COVID supplemental funds.
- e. Includes \$10 million in supplemental FY2022 ESF under the Additional Ukraine Supplemental Appropriations Act, 2022 (P.L. 117-128).
- f. P.L.480 Title I (loans), P.L. 117-328P.L.480 Title II (grants), and Section 416(b) of the Agricultural Act of 1949, as amended (surplus agricultural commodity donations). Food aid totals do not include freight costs.
- g. Includes \$286 million in Development Assistance appropriated from FY2002-FY2008.
- h. CSF was Defense Department funding to reimburse foreign forces for logistical and operational support of U.S-led military operations; it is technically not foreign assistance. Beginning in FY2015, successive NDAA’s subjected one-third to one-half of annual CSF to Pakistan to Haqqani Network-related certification requirements

that could not be waived by the Administration. The Administration did not issue certifications for FY2015-FY2018. The NDAA for FY2019 revamped the CSF program, authorizing \$350 million to support security enhancement activities along Pakistan's western border, subject to certification requirements that have not been met to date. The NDAA for FY2020 disallowed the use of FY2020 funds to reimburse Pakistan.

### **EVOLVING DYNAMICS OF BILATERAL ENGAGEMENT**

Even though, following Operation Neptune Spear and President Trump's tough position on Pakistan, US assistance to Pakistan decreased considerably, Pakistan remained a critical factor for the US in Afghanistan. The US relied on Pakistan for peace negotiations with the Taliban in Doha. Pakistan took the credit for bringing the Taliban to the negotiating table with the US and finally getting the Taliban into power, which Islamabad perceived and celebrated as a strategic victory.

In the past four decades, Afghanistan has been the most important factor determining Islamabad's relationship with Washington. After the US' exit from Afghanistan in August 2021, the dynamics seem to be altered. There has been a new phase of resetting US-Pakistan ties. The following factors have been crucial in this regard:<sup>14</sup>

- The US interest in Afghanistan has decreased significantly since its exit from the region, and its reliance on Pakistan has shrunk.
- The US' increasing tensions with China, Pakistan's closest ally.
- The US' increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific strategy to counter China, where Pakistan does not occupy any space. The Biden administration's February 2022 Indo-Pacific Strategy, and October 2022 National Security Strategy and National Defence Strategy do not mention Pakistan. The US has been fully engaged with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or QUAD, along with India, Japan, and Australia).
- Pakistan's increasing reliance on China. Pakistan and the USA have completely divergent opinions on China.

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14. K. Alan Kronstadt, *Pakistan-US Relations*, May 22, 2023, CRS Report, R47565, p. 1, [https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2023-05-22\\_R47565\\_1e5ed81ca95d3f73b68866297150b79772ef83b2.pdf](https://www.everycrsreport.com/files/2023-05-22_R47565_1e5ed81ca95d3f73b68866297150b79772ef83b2.pdf). Accessed on June 1, 2023.

India's strategic and economic rise on the world stage, the expansion of India's diplomatic profile, and its expanding partnership with the US are also critical factors contributing to Washington's posture in the region. After the US' withdrawal from Afghanistan, there have been serious concerns in Washington regarding regional security and its impact on Pakistan.

In the first public hearing in Congress about Afghanistan after the US' withdrawal, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, "Pakistan has a multiplicity of interests, some that are in conflict with ours...It is one that is involved in hedging its bets constantly about the future of Afghanistan, it's one that's involved in harbouring members of the Taliban...It is one that's also involved in different points of cooperation with us on counter-terrorism...this is one of the things we're going to be looking at in the days and weeks ahead – the role that Pakistan has played over the last 20 years and also the role we would want to see it play in the coming years and what it will take for it to do that."<sup>15</sup>

The US has an interest in stabilising Afghanistan, focussing on human rights (specifically women's rights) and would not want Kabul to become a hub of terrorist activities. Engagement in counter-terrorism and regional security has been maintained cautiously by the Pentagon.<sup>16</sup> This includes high level military-to-military engagements and a session of the US-Pakistan Counter-terrorism Dialogue in March 2023.<sup>17</sup>

In 2020, the US imported approximately \$3.8 billion worth of goods from Pakistan and Pakistan imported about \$3 billion worth of US goods. In 2022, the trade figures saw a rise: US imports stood at \$6 billion and Pakistan imports stood at approximately \$3.2 billion.

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15. Patricia Zengerle and Humeyra Pamuk, "Blinken Says U.S. Will Assess Pakistan Ties Over Afghanistan's Future," *Reuters*, September 14, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/blinken-says-us-will-assess-pakistan-ties-over-afghanistans-future-2021-09-13/>. Accessed on June 1, 2023.

16. CRS Report, n. 14, p. 2.

17. US Embassy and Consulates in Pakistan, "Two-day US-Pakistan Counterterrorism Dialogue Concludes in Pakistan," <https://pk.usembassy.gov/two-day-u-s-pakistan-counterterrorism-dialogue-concludes-in-islamabad/> March 7, 2023, cited in CRS Report, n. 14, p. 2.

Exports from Pakistan mainly comprise textiles and clothing and exports from the US mainly consist of cotton, fruit, oilseed, etc.<sup>18</sup>

The USA has also remained the leading investor in Pakistan in the last 20 years. According to a US Department of State report, US investment in Pakistan in the recent fiscal year has increased by 50 per cent.<sup>19</sup> Major US investments are focussed on “consumer goods, chemicals, energy, agriculture, business process out-sourcing, transportation, and communications.”<sup>20</sup> The US has indicated its keenness to enhance economic cooperation with Pakistan.<sup>21</sup> In February 2023, both countries concluded the ninth meeting under the US–Pakistan Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) after a gap of seven years.<sup>22</sup>

Other areas of cooperation highlighted by the USA and Pakistan include extensive people-to-people contacts between the two countries.<sup>23</sup> Pakistan’s strong diaspora in the US, estimated at one million, plays a crucial role in channeling US investments, to Pakistan.<sup>24</sup> Remittances to, and investments for, Pakistan from the US based diaspora alone stood at \$3 billion in the last fiscal year.<sup>25</sup> Climate change has been discussed as an area of potential cooperation as Pakistan encounters serious environmental challenges, and the summer 2022 floods affected one-third of the country and around 33 million people.

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18. CRS Report, n. 14; United States Census Bureau, *Trade in Goods with Pakistan*, <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5350.html>. Accessed on March 1, 2024.

19. U.S. Department of State, “U.S. Relations with Pakistan,” August 15, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-pakistan/>. Accessed on August 20, 2022.

20. *Ibid.*

21. See Elizabeth Horst, “The Future of US-Pakistan Relations,” The Wilson Centre, You Tube Video, April 27, 2023, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/future-us-pakistan-relations>. Accessed on May 12, 2023.

22. Office of the United States Trade Representative, “Joint Statement from the 9th US-Pakistan TIFA Council Ministerial,” February 23, 2023, <https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2023/february/joint-statement-9th-us-pakistan-tifa-council-ministerial>. Accessed on June 10, 2023.

23. Horst, n. 21.

24. Centre for Strategic and International Studies, “The Future of Pakistan and US-Pakistan Relations”, February 20, 2024, Discussion available online, <https://www.csis.org/events/future-pakistan-and-us-pakistan-relations>. Accessed on March 1, 2024.

25. *Ibid.*

In the recent statements from Pakistan, four critical areas for cooperation have been highlighted: technology, energy, agriculture and minerals (lithium, copper, gold, cobalt and rare earth).<sup>26</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

A different dimension of the US-Pakistan relations is evolving. The ties are relatively at a neutral level, where the relationship has not fallen to the lows of the 1990s when Pakistan struggled with US sanctions, but US policy-makers have conveyed a firm message to Pakistan that the US administration is no longer willing to provide the easy military assistance it received in the 1980s and 2000s. For decades, Pakistan has sold the narrative to the West and its traditional donors that it is a state that is too dangerous to fail. A geostrategically located nuclear weapon state, with the fastest-growing nuclear arsenal and a raging insurgency on its tribal borders, Pakistan cannot be allowed to fail. This has been the argument driven by Pakistan. However, Pakistan's decreasing relevance on the global stage and its inability to control its security situation within, the continuing political instability, and consistent economic crisis, which requires a constant flow of external assistance, seem to have altered the dynamics for Pakistan.

The US' exit from Afghanistan has reduced Washington's direct interests in Afghanistan, but the USA still desires a stable Afghanistan that does not facilitate a global *jihadi* terror network. Washington certainly seeks Pakistan's support on this front. The killing of Al-Qaeda leader Ayman al-Zawahri in Kabul by US drone strikes in 2022 indicates cooperation on counter-terrorism between Pakistan and the USA. Even though Pakistan has denied its involvement in the operation, the fact remains that the feasibility of an operation of this nature remains questionable without the Pakistan military's cooperation.

Pakistan's nuclear arsenal has been expanding at a rapid pace; it reportedly possesses over 170 warheads and its past record of nuclear proliferation raises questions about the integrity of its nuclear programme. The US has been concerned about the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, specifically with the deteriorating security situation in the country. The Tehreek-e-Taliban

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26. Ibid.

Pakistan (TTP) has been emboldened after the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. The number of TTP terror attacks targeting the security establishment has gone up significantly in Pakistan. In March 2024, Pakistan's Ambassador to the UN, Munir Akram, highlighted the gravity of the TTP problem and the support it receives from the Afghan Taliban.<sup>27</sup> In 2023, 306 terrorist attacks took place in Pakistan, which killed 693 people including 330 security personnel.<sup>28</sup>

The USA cannot overlook the challenges of a nuclear Pakistan, with rising terror attacks. President Biden expressed concern when he said Pakistan is "one of the most dangerous nations in the world" as it has "nuclear weapons without any cohesion".<sup>29</sup>

There are alterations in the dimensions of the US-Pakistan relationship from a strong military and security-based relationship to a more comprehensive relationship that focusses on the economy, trade, climate change, human rights and counter-terrorism. It appears that the relationship is likely to stay neutral unless a major strategic development elevates Pakistan's strategic relevance once again. The US will continue to engage with Pakistan on non-traditional security issues. On the other hand, while Pakistan welcomes Washington's cooperation on non-security issues, it is keen to revive the security dimension in the relationship. Even though, Pakistan's military modernisation has been very significant with Chinese assistance in the last two decades, Islamabad has always welcomed US equipment.

Given the evolving situation of the US-Pakistan relationship and the strained India-Pakistan relationship, the critical question for New Delhi is whether the USA can persuade Pakistan to evaluate its strategic calculus.

Pakistan, despite its deep economic crisis and political upheaval, has continued its covert operations, such as arms-dropping and

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27. "Amb Munir Akram Speaks at the UNSC on Situation in Afghanistan", March 6, 2024, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1-Js3ElwS5E>. Accessed on March 10, 2024.

28. "Pakistan Security Report 2023", *Conflict and Peace Studies*, vol 16, January 2024, Number 1, Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, [https://www.pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Pakistan\\_Security\\_Report\\_2023.pdf](https://www.pakpips.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/Pakistan_Security_Report_2023.pdf). Accessed on March 2, 2024.

29 "Nukes Without any Cohesion, US President Biden Terms Pakistan 'One of the Most Dangerous Nations'," *The Indian Express*, October 16, 2022, <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/pakistan-nuclear-weapons-most-dangerous-nations-in-the-world-joe-biden-8210160/>. Accessed on June 22, 2023.

drug-dropping through drones in Punjab (in India). Can the US' changing approach towards Pakistan compel it to rethink its strategy of using terrorism against India (and Afghanistan)? Decades of covert war being prioritised over its national development has not helped Pakistan. Can this phase of the US-Pakistan relationship influence Pakistan to alter its strategies?

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