

The Post 9/11 Alliance: Unfolding Implications for Pak-US Relations

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Abstract

The relationship of the US and Pakistan took a turning point with the attacks of September 11, 2001 after cold ties during 1990s. The alliance made between them was the mixture of cooperation, dependence, strategic divergences and mistrust. This research aims to critically analyze how the security, economy and foreign policy of Pakistan affected after its involvement in the Global War on Terror (GWOT). This research demonstrates that although Pakistan gained considerable economic assistance from the US and Pakistan's international reputation improved but it also faced security threats, economic instability, and widespread internal displacement. The economic assistance could not boost sustainable economic growth of Pakistan and dependency increased as terrorism disrupted investment and trade badly. Pakistan also suffered huge number of military and civil casualties and collateral damage due to military operations and drone strikes, undermining public trust and raising national sovereignty concerns. Diplomatically, the strategic partnership of both countries shifted to transactional engagement, further complicated by Pakistan closer ties with China and Washington's alignment with India. The study adopts qualitative research methodology by using secondary data sources like books, research articles, newspapers and related websites. It looks into specific research question what are the major implications of Pakistan's post 9/11 alliance with the United States by analyzing the economic, security and foreign policy implications for Pakistan as a result of its participation in the GWOT and argues that Pakistan faced extensive challenges while fulfilling international commitments towards counterterrorism within emerging multipolar global order.

Keywords: Pakistan, China, US, implications, security, alliance, India

Introduction

After the world-shaking 9/11 incident, US foreign policy focused on eradicating terrorism by announcing a war against it which proved to have long-term implications for US engagement in the world. Containment of terrorism became a crucial element of the US foreign policy for which the US built a worldwide coalition against terrorism and involved Pakistan as the frontline state, the role similar to Cold War era (Hussain, 2021). Pakistan's significant geopolitical position gives it an exceptional role and making it a vital player in contemporary world. The role given to Pakistan after 9/11 attacks influenced US-Pakistan mutual relationship. An alliance of two old

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cold war allies was formed against terrorism but nevertheless disagreements and confusion strained their relations having far-reaching implications for Pakistan. According to Khan (2025) the alliance built during that phase resulted in weakening the security of Pakistan through drone strikes and TTP emergence. With the US attacks on Afghanistan, Taliban and Al-Qaeda leaders shifted from Afghanistan to the border areas of Pakistan which soon turned into a nucleus for terrorists (Khan, 2014). US compelled Pakistan to take strict actions to control terrorists and hunt Al-Qaeda (Yousaf & Adkin, 2001). Under US pressure Pakistani forces conducted major military operations in tribal region. These operations created tussle and mistrust between population and Pakistani forces.

Although the post 9/11 developments brought for Pakistan some significant gains but it also had to choose dangerous and risky options. Pakistan after lining up with US in the war against terror, faced the challenge of terrorism and militancy in its own territory. The biggest security threat to Pakistan posed by India since independence was replaced by militancy and violence within state. The two-front situation on its eastern and western borders became difficult for Pakistan to handle when the terrorism shifted from western borders to its land, making security concerns the most important for Pakistan. Terrorism reached the highest level from 2004-2016 and huge number of attacks and death recorded in the urban areas like Peshawar, Lahore, Karachi, Quetta and Khyber Agencies (Imran et al., 2023). Besides terrorist attacks, unrest in Balochistan in the form of separatist movement and target killing has been witnessed after 9/11 incident. RAW played a key role in unifying Baloch militant groups with TTP and provided them financial support and training in Afghanistan for causing sectarian violence in Karachi and Balochistan (Iqbal, 2024).

Being a victim of terrorism Pakistan lost more than 80,000 human lives, suffered economic loss of \$102.5 billion along with huge damage to its cultural and religious norms (Express Tribune, 2015). However, Pakistan's PM in an interview in the US mentioned that besides casualties Pakistan has financially lost \$150 billion while the aid received from the United States compensated \$20 billion only (Iqbal, 2024). Most significantly public became victim of extremism and radicalization. The post 9/11 developments and grievances between US and Pakistan created a negative impression of Pakistan globally and presented it as a producer of religious extremism, violence and militancy (Begum & Umer, 2024). This negative impression restricted its policy options, presenting Pakistan as insincere, duplicitous in international community.

After catastrophic event of 9/11, Pakistan became a significant partner of the US and supported in its fight against terrorism. Pakistan was under constant pressure of the US to counter Afghan Taliban, who settled themselves in the tribal areas of Pakistan, posing direct threat

to Pakistan. The Pakistan Army launched many operations in tribal areas but US showed dissatisfaction. Although US provided aid to fight against terrorism but the loss of Pakistan was huge along the challenge of militancy and insecurity. They blame one another in case of any failure due to lack of trust. Both countries have diverse national interests which they want to achieve through each other. The US after gaining its short-term objectives ignores Pakistan and its concerns and even calls it an unsuitable partner. Another factor is that US remains inclined towards India which causes strategic imbalance in the South Asia region. The study is important to assess the evolving dynamics after a major change in Pak-US relations in the post 9/11 period which resulted in making their alliance to fight the war against terrorism but brought many challenges which Pakistan is still facing on its territory. The study provides an in-depth integrated analysis by combining the security, economic and foreign policy implications and gives an overview how these two asymmetrical states can collaborate in the changing international power structure.

Theoretical Framework

The Realism theory given by John J. Mearsheimer can be applied to this study to analyze the complexities of post 9/11 US-Pakistan relations. The features of power center and self-interest of this theory effectively explain the dynamics and implications of this relationship. The engagement between both states is operated through mutual security concerns as well as their divergent priorities indicate realist elements. The focus of theory on power dynamics and security helps to assess the wider regional implications of their relationship. To explore the intricacies of this bilateral relationship Mearsheimer's realism is useful to comprehend the motives and behaviours of states in a complex global environment. According to this theory states operates in an anarchic international structure, giving priority to their own survival, national interests and power (Mearsheimer, 2001). In the post 9/11 phase, both US and Pakistan pursued their national interests through strategic partnership. US tried to gain regional hegemony and counterterrorism aims, while Pakistan sought financial aid and international legitimacy.

Offensive realism mainly stands for power maximization of states in international system. States are eager to acquire maximum power share to become a global or regional hegemon and for this purpose often apply coercive means. This framework emphasizes the competitive, mistrustful, and transactional alliance between US and Pakistan, where both countries prioritized short-term benefits over long-term strategic alignment. Pakistan's extreme dependence on the US while the use of military and economic leverage by the United States shows power dynamics and asymmetry illustrated by offensive realism.

In the evolving landscape of global dynamics, the relationship between the United States and Pakistan has been a complex collaboration of strategic interests, regional dynamics and shifting alliances. Mearsheimer's theory of offensive realism provides insights into the behavior of states in the international system particularly in the pursuit of power and security. This theory emphasizes the competitive nature of states relations where they seek to maximize their relative power to ensure their survival. According to offensive realism states are driven by the desire to achieve hegemony to become the dominant power on the global stage. Mearsheimer applied offensive realism for the US engagement with other states and regions. The US which is a regional hegemon, seeks global hegemony for which it uses its maximum global power shares and captures maximum world regions to exercise its power there. It is an unending power thirst and to quench this thirst the US invades and intervene in different states.

In the context of South Asia, the US has historically aimed to exert influence and maintain a significant presence. This can be seen in the US support for India as a regional counterbalance to China's rise. Offensive realism implies that great powers will attempt to prevent the rise of potential peer competitors. This aspect becomes significant when considering the US approach towards China's growing influence in the region. The US-India partnership which aims to bolster India's capabilities as a regional power can potentially marginalize Pakistan and create security concerns. As the US strengthens its ties with India, Pakistan may perceive a tilt in the strategic balance against its interests, pushing it to seek support from other powerful actors like China. For power balancing Pakistan and China may engage in forming alliances, military buildups, to counter potential threats. In this way Pak-China mutual cooperation in terms of economic investments, military cooperation, and diplomatic backing empowers Pakistan to counterbalance the perceived US-India nexus.

Methodology

It is qualitative research which is suitable for this study to deeply understand such sensitive topic. It is not measuring any statistical data but analyzing the implications in US-Pak relations post 9/11. Data is collected through secondary sources like books, research articles, newspapers, and websites related to this topic. Data collected through these sources is analyzed in depth while research design is descriptive. This research mainly covers the post-9/11 US-Pak alliance and the resulting implications for Pakistan till the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and a short overview of US-Pakistan relationship in the evolving international power structure. However, it does not focus on the changing ties between them during the second term of president Donald Trump.

Major Research Question

What are the major implications of Pakistan's post 9/11 alliance with the United States?

Major Implications*Security Implications*

The Alliance formed between Pakistan and the US to fight against terrorism was actually an alliance between a dependent and independent state. The friendship of both states has never been exemplary but this time the alliance threatened the security of Pakistan. Pakistan became the victim of ethnic and sectarian terrorism since post 9/11 challenges. Fighting an unseen enemy needed a long-term economic engagement than just providing military hardware. More than 70,000 people including politicians and other civilians beside 4000 security employees lost their life till 2015 as a result of war waged by the United States (Khan & Ali, 2019). The brutal killing of Benazir Bhutto, ANP Minister Bashir Bilor, Interior Minister of Punjab Shuja Khanzada and many other leaders, security personnel and civilians are the instances of this inhuman act to target Pakistan and its people. The internal security of Pakistan was particularly crumbled with drone strikes of the United States in the territories of Pakistan which raised serious questions about Pakistan sovereignty.

Soon after Taliban attacks on US-led NATO forces in Afghanistan, Pakistan was pressurized by the US to stop growing cross border terrorism and conduct full-fledged operations against terrorists (Yousef & Adkin, 2001). After failed negotiations with Taliban and their takeover of Pakistan tribal regions followed by implementing its judicial system (Nizam-e-Adal), Pakistan was compelled to take action against Taliban. After the 9/11 event, the military campaign by the US administration against Al-Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan through air bases in Pakistan increased violence and unrest in Pakistan besides TTP started a turbulent wave of terror attacks (Khan & Wei, 2016). Taliban started attacking public as well as army-based places including GHQ.

The incident of Lal Masjid, assassination of former PM Benazir Bhutto, suicidal attacks, target killing of Hazara community in Balochistan, and the terrorist attack on Army Public School (APS) Peshawar shook the whole country. Pakistan army carried out five major and many minor operations against terrorism and insurgency that brought even more challenges for state security. These operations resulted in high number of casualties together with excessive collateral damage but operations were unavoidable in order to prevent future terrorist attacks. The major operations included Operation Enduring Freedom (2001–2002), Operation Al Mizan (2002–2006),

Operation Zalzal (2008), Operations Sher Dil, Rah-e-Haq, and Rah-e-Rast (2007–2009), and Operation Rah-e-Nijat (2009–2010).

These terrorist attacks damaged mental health and tortured Pakistani citizens psychologically and physically. Not only elders but children suffered a lot. The military operations resulted in long lasting social, economic, Psychological and political implications. These operations caused public resentment against army and government. The people of tribal regions considered these operations as threat to their culture and identification while the leaders of tribal areas view them as threat to their powers. About 3 million people displaced internally due to operations which further increased crisis in Pakistan. Educational institutions were attacked by insurgents, depriving children from their right of education. There were massive loss of human lives and their properties. Operations greatly impacted the security, and law and order situation in the country. On other side India utilized this scenario to blame Pakistan in 2008 Mumbai attacks and convinced US to pressurize Pakistan. Pakistan showed its serious concerns about unilateral activities of the US inside country which in return questioned the veracity of Pakistan to obstruct the way of growing Talibanization in the country. All this situation also badly impacted the prestige of Pakistan army within country and on international level. The US drone strikes and the death of Osama bin Laden inside Pakistan raised questions on Pakistan's sovereignty, its security and its commitment towards the GWOT, increasing misperception between both allies (Perlez, 2011).

The engagement of US Pakistan post 9/11 revived their relationship. US provided military aid to Pakistan to fight against terrorism effectively but in return, it badly hit Pakistan. The US war against terrorism which started in Afghanistan against Taliban and Al-Qaeda was not circumscribed and spread to the tribal areas of Pakistan, giving birth to new militant groups. It shifted the Pakistan's security paradigm from a focus of external threat of India to internal threats of militancy and terrorism. These extremists and non-states actors threatened the security and sovereignty of Pakistan causing militancy and insurgency. US drone strikes and military operations added to the instability and led to massive human loss. Pakistan sacrificed the country's more significant interests for some perceived and apparent objectives. All this situation earned Pakistan nothing beneficial but a title of a rogue and terrorist-sponsored state internationally. Pakistan became the worst war-affected country and left isolated in the international arena.

Economic Implications

The post 9/11 partnership of Pak-US brought for Pakistan diplomatic support, political security, international legitimacy and massive aid yet Pakistan shows disappointment over some issues. The

commitment of Pakistan to eradicate terrorists from its soil attracted the special attention of America. Sanctions were waived and aid from US initiated, covering wide range of sectors and purposes like education, health, democracy, eradication of child labor and narcotics, security, trade, and implementation of laws. Besides aid, new grants and loans were also approved. Pakistan was provided three kinds of military aid, Coalition Support Fund, Pakistan's Counterinsurgency Capability Funds and Foreign Military Financing. Additionally, Pakistan received civilian aid which was 80% in the form of Economic Support Fund.

The flow of aid to Pakistan started just after a month of joining the US war on terror. United States assisted Pakistan in order to make it enabled to fight and eradicate safe havens of the terrorists from its land and take part in the war against terrorism effectively. Pakistan received a lion's share of about \$6 billion under coalition support fund, which is more than 50% of US total assistance to Pakistan after 9/11 (Oversight of U.S. coalition support funds to Pakistan, 2008). The main areas of focus of US support were economic and military. A report of the US indicated that Pakistan has received 25.91 billion dollars till now in the name of its economy and military uplift since September 2001. \$17220 million as military and 8680 million dollars as economic aid was huge assistance between two allies. Along with other funds Pakistan received 1012 million dollars for equipment and global training and 265 million dollars to oppose and counter narcotics. It also got 27 million financial help to cope with disasters and \$ 115 million as anti-terror support (Ali, 2016).

Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act, 2009 or Kerry Lugar Bill was passed in 2009 to enlarge \$1.5 billion from 2010-2014 each year. In 2009 in the name of 'Friends of Democratic Pakistan' \$5.28 billion were approved for next five years (Sassi, 2011). Pakistan received huge aid of 1.3 billion dollars in 2010 due to floods. It also received International Disaster Assistance and Migration and Refugees Assistance in the disaster of 2005, 2010 and expanded to the people who became homeless due to war on terror. The United States also helped to strengthen Pakistan's security by extending fund to buy military equipment from United States. For this purpose, the US gave 5.4 billion dollars from 2002 to 2010 to buy mainly F16, air crafts and other modern equipment. Pakistan was also the 62nd largest trading partner of United States amounting \$5.3 billion (Ali, 2016).

The aid remained high at the time of convergences and strategic interests but declined in times of divergences, following the old pattern of history. The continuation of aid to Pakistan has always remained conditional to the extent of Pakistan's efforts in the US war in Afghanistan. Economic assistance through Kerry Lugar Bill was extended to various sectors of Pakistan but apparently the bill was more of a to-do-list, demanding stringent actions from Pakistan to

wipe out terrorism by dismantling terrorists' stations and control the power of some organizations like Jaish-e-Muhammad and Lashkar-e-Taiba. It was believed by some experts that through this way US is interfering in Pakistan strategic affairs and trying to indicate Pakistan as the center of terrorism, showing trust deficit between Pakistan government and its army and increasing tension between them (Najam, 2020). This affected the productivity of aid and the level of their relationship. During the later part of Obama Administration, the civil and military aid to Pakistan started contracting which almost cut down completely during Trumps' period. Trump made India a part of its Afghan strategy while his castigating attitude towards Pakistan made even a transactional relationship hard to continue. On one hand where Trump saw the US-Pak relationship from Afghan prism just like other presidents of the United States and used pressure tactics for getting unquestionable compliance, on other hand the Pak-China growing strategic and economic engagement was opposed by the United States.

The deteriorated security situation in Pakistan post 9/11, reduced the overall domestic activity which caused decrease in foreign direct investment, tax collection, industrial output and its exports. Due to huge financial loss Pakistan was unable to pay its loans received from international organizations specially IMF hence multiplying the credit risk. Terrorism produced unemployment specially in KP and FATA region. Due to operations, drone strikes agriculture sector and tourism was negatively affected due to which thousands of people lost their jobs and shut down their businesses.

Another heavy cost and the serious consequence of the war against terrorism was the displacement of people from war plunged areas to other districts due to increased insurgency and military operations. The National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) registered 337,772 people from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and FATA who were displaced from their homes due to deteriorated security conditions (Jamshed, 2021). The Amnesty International recorded the number of IDPs more than 500,000 while Pakistan Institute of Peace Studies has revealed that from 2.7 million to 3.5 million people left their homes in the wake of security threats and military operations. IDPs had to close their businesses, left their properties and became unemployed which increased burden on Pakistan's economy. The already economically weak country could not provide full assistance to its IDPs (Khalid, 2020). Besides IDPs the influx of Afghan refugees after 9/11 event, negatively impacted the economy, trade, business and exports of Pakistan as well as terrorism increased. Increase in terrorist attacks delayed the execution of development schemes also raised the cost of the projects. During 2007-08 United States was supporting Pakistan with \$1.9 billion while Pakistan was bearing the cost of war as \$6 billion (Pasha, 2008). According to the economic survey of Pakistan 2009-10, the cost of war increased gradually from 67.9 billion

in 2004-05 and reaching 262 billion in 2009-10. While in the same period the indirect cost increased from 192 billion to 707 billion (Khan, 2013).

The economy of Pakistan remained fluctuating due to fallout of Afghanistan war. The unstable domestic condition lowered the growth of economy within state and internationally. Market confidence was lost with inadequate flow of investment. Foreign Direct Investment was adversely affected specifically in KP and FATA due to terrorist activities. The agriculture sector and tourism in KP met heavy loss. Due to bomb blasts, shelling, explosion of bridges, law and order situation, curfews and army operations only Swat suffered the loss of 35 billion rupees and 55 to 70 % fruit was devastated (Irshad, 2011). People attached to tourism industry lost their jobs. Besides handling these problems Pakistan was facing Indian insurgency in the province of Balochistan through Afghanistan. India was taking advantage of worsen security situation and was providing financial support to insurgents to bring instability in Pakistan (Jamshed, 2021).

After 9/11, the status of Pakistan was upgraded by the US to facilitate its mission and use it against the Taliban and the doers of the 9/11 incident but in fact, Pakistan suffered a lot in the war against terror. Although, Pakistan received larger aid from the United States to fight against militancy and to dismantle Taliban, but the collateral damage was much more than that. Due to huge economic loss Pakistan's dependency increased and sustainable growth could not be achieved.

Challenges for Pakistan Foreign Policy

Foreign policy is the set of practices of political influence to interact with other states. In international system foreign policy is the most significant element as this is the way through which a state appears and engages itself with the world. Foreign policy is the combination of principles, interests, aims and objectives a state opts for deciding and regulating its relation with other countries. The post 9/11 period proved challenging for Pakistan's foreign policy for taking tough decisions. The foreign policy which Pakistan adopted after 9/11 caused the breach of its sovereignty, drone strikes, military operations, controversial death of Osama bin Laden, Salala incident, problem of Internally Displaced Persons, disaster in agriculture and infrastructure, social and economic distress and impediment to the Kashmir cause when India tried to link the struggle for self-determination with terrorism and United States could not differentiate between them (Akhtar, 2010).

The post 9/11 developments have several implications for US-Pakistan mutual relation. United States not only preferred India against Pakistan but also appreciated Afghanistan to extend its relations with

India to pressurize and threaten Pakistan from numerous fronts like hostile neighbors and using media war to accuse Pakistan for harboring terrorists particularly Haqqani network. When the collective efforts of the United States with its NATO allies and India and Afghan government, remained ineffective to bring peace in Afghanistan, United States started blaming Pakistan for its failure through media and other diplomatic tactics. The allied forces blamed Pakistan for backing Taliban and making the Afghanistan conflict more complicated (Khaver, Umar & Ahmad, 2019). However, Pakistan achieved its task of eradicating hiding places of the terrorists in Pakistan through various major and minor operations but on the other side of the border allied troops could not fulfill their target which further increased the frustration of the United States. Actually, the United States could neither concentrate on development and betterment of the people nor could play role in growth of political and administrative system in Afghanistan hence it failed to win the hearts of the people and faced resistance. Pakistan being a victim of terrorism and blamed for despite its sacrifices decided to install fence on the border to stop the entrance from Afghanistan but this was too not appreciated by the United States. Instead admitting its failures and weaknesses US started 'do more' slogan. A team of the US delegations visited Pakistan with the demand of do more and for fixing deadline for the attainment of these demands (Khaver, Umar & Ahmad, 2019).

Sattar (2018) is of the view that the current tense relations between US and Pakistan is indicating shift in their strategic plans as Pakistan is concentrating its bond with China whereas United States is consolidating its relations with India as infliction for Pakistan. Normally in diplomacy there is mutual trust and states get benefits of bilateral agreements and concessions and their mutual interests are served whereas US used coercive diplomacy against Pakistan in form of do more, drone strikes, threats, use of force, giving tough conditions to Pakistan and applying sanctions unilaterally, multilaterally or through international organizations. US has always applied carrot stick policy for Pakistan. The cordial relations of US and Pakistan are only observed during convergences. When the interests of the United States diverge, it changes its course of action and compel Pakistan to act accordingly. Pakistan's foreign policy aims to have good and friendly relations with other countries specially its neighboring countries. But the structural imperatives emerging from international system has affected its foreign policy at different times. Pakistan could not escape itself from the Afghanistan issue on its western border while it kept intact with China even being a dedicated ally of United States. As the China's capabilities are growing and it is appearing as a global competitor and rival to United States, now it is a troubling matter for Pakistan to lean towards one side without considering dissatisfaction and concerns of the other. The foreign policy of Pakistan has remained

inclined towards United States regardless of its neighboring states but the main hurdle is the formation and implementation of an independent foreign policy. With respect of foreign policy of Pakistan, the role of army is unavoidable due to Indian factor also called as Indian fear, tense relations with United States and absence of effective political leadership while another obstacle is the economic dependence on other states or organizations for aid and loans. Through economic dependence super powers impose their agenda and achieve their goals.

In terms of foreign policy, the post 9/11 US-Pak alliance pressurized Pakistan to make hard decisions and compromises. Allowing United States to conduct military operations on its land undermined its autonomy and increased public resentment. The close relations between China and Pakistan were perceived by the US to strengthen China's hold in South Asia and challenge American strategic influence in the region. However, the US response to Pak-China strategic alliance will unfold in the changing world order.

The US-Pakistan Relationship in the Changing International Power Structure

The relationship between the United States and Pakistan continues to evolve in the face of changing global dynamics, regional challenges, and shifting priorities of both nations. The changing world scenario, characterized by the rise of China as a global power and its growing influence in South Asia particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has added a new dimension to the US-Pakistan relationship. While the US has concerns about China's expanding presence and its implications for regional power dynamics, Pakistan views its partnership with China as crucial for economic development and security. The strategic and economic alignment of Pakistan with China and expanding engagement with Turkey and Russia, mark shifts in Pakistan's foreign policy priorities, impacting its interactions with the US (Chaudry et al., 2025).

For the past four decades, Afghanistan has served as a point of common concern and convergence between Pakistan and the United States. Both cooperated each other on the issue of counterterrorism. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 altered the strategic environment, marked the end of a shared counterterrorism agenda while intensifying Pakistan's security concerns. The evolving situation in Afghanistan, and resurgence of the Taliban created uncertainties about the future role of both the US and Pakistan in the post-conflict landscape. The revitalization of TTP operating from Afghan sanctuaries directly threatening Pakistan's security (Bakhsh et al., 2024).

The US withdrawal while creating power vacuum also raised questions about the extent to which Pakistan would be involved in shaping Afghanistan's future and how it would balance its own security

interests with broader regional stability. With broader geopolitical shifts the US has been re-evaluating its foreign policy priorities and global partnerships. As the US focuses on great power competition with countries like China and Russia and making warm relations with India to use it as a balancing power against these countries, its attention on Pakistan might shift in relative terms. The US inclination towards India and particularly their defense partnership creating feeling in Pakistan of being sidelined or overlooked, hence impacting its perception of the US-Pakistan relationship. These feelings force Pakistan to recalibrate its foreign policy options.

Pakistan is at a geopolitical crossroads where it has to balance between competing powers. The world shifting towards multipolar order creating both opportunities and limitations. Pakistan can either leverage great power competition to enhance its strategic autonomy and economic interests or it can face the risk of becoming marginalized if it cannot balance constructive ties with major powers. Currently the US-Pakistan relationship is based on selective and transactional engagement rather than strategic partnership. They are cooperating in specific areas such as counterterrorism intelligence sharing, economic linkages and climate change but lack the comprehensive strategic framework evidenced in early periods. The US focuses on Pakistan's counterterrorism role while Pakistan desires a broader strategic and economic partnership that United States is hesitant to offer. However, some structural elements that obstruct their level of engagement include Pakistan's inability to become a reliable security partner as it itself facing internal security issue. Secondly the element of trust deficit between both countries, and thirdly, Pakistan's increasing dependence of on China along with the US tilt towards India, testing the loyalties of both sides towards each other.

The future of US-Pakistan ties will most probably depend on these three factors; First, how both countries engage with each other in managing the Taliban-controlled Afghanistan and to address the emerging threat of terrorism. Second, the response of the United States to Pak-China relations, whether the US can accommodate their closer ties without considering it as a zero-sum competition (Chaudry et al., 2025) and finally whether Pakistan can efficiently address the US concerns regarding terrorism while maintaining its strategic relationships with regional powers. Rather than returning to the patron-client model that characterized the Cold War, US-Pakistan relations are now more transactional, issue-specific partnership and aligned with the dynamics of the multipolar world. This evolution reflects a wider global pattern in which rigid alliances are giving way to adaptive, interest-based engagements shaped by shifting geopolitical contexts.

Conclusion

The event of 9/11 proved to be a turning point in the bilateral relationship of the United States and Pakistan. The alliance formed was thought to be advantageous for both states but it had great implications for Pakistan significantly implications related national security, economy and its foreign policy. The new alliance which was made to fight against the terrorism brought short-term financial support and diplomatic legitimacy but the long-term repercussions were mostly negative. Pakistan bore the brunt of war through human loss, economic decline, disintegrated social cohesion, and deteriorated security situation. The asymmetrical nature of Pak-US partnership became prominent when despite sacrifices Pakistan was portrayed as untrustworthy. Pakistan gave many sacrifices in the form of humans, financial, military and security related in the war against terror but it failed to win the trust of its ally, United States and right place globally. The economic aid could not contribute to boost Pakistan's economy as the cost of war was more than that. Furthermore, Pakistan faced pressure from US in navigating foreign policy options, specifically Pakistan's cordial relations with China. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan and its growing ties with India have further alienated Pakistan in the emerging landscape of South Asia. The future relations of these two nations rest on the shift from coercive and transactional engagement towards mutual respect, cooperation and long-term involvement.

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