



## The Growing Nexus Between Pakistan and The USA After the USA's Successful Mediation in the Indo-Pak War and Its Implications for Pak-China Partnership in South Asia

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the evolving dynamics of Pakistan-U.S. relations following the U.S.'s successful mediation in the Indo-Pak war and its implications for the long-standing Pak-China strategic partnership. Through a qualitative analysis of historical, political, and strategic dimensions, this research reveals that Pakistan's dual alignment strategy with the U.S. and China is driven by pragmatic calculations to maximize economic, military, and diplomatic benefits. However, this approach also poses risks, particularly in the context of great power competition, where the U.S. and China have divergent interests in South Asia. The findings suggest that Pakistan's relationships with both the U.S. and China are increasingly interlinked, requiring nuanced diplomatic balancing to preserve strategic autonomy and maximize benefits. This study contributes to the academic discourse on South Asian geopolitics, offering insights for policymakers, strategists, and scholars seeking to understand the complexities of Pakistan's foreign policy in a rapidly evolving regional landscape.

**Keywords:** *Economic Pragmatism; Strategic Nexus; Geo-Economic; South Asian Political Dynamics*

### **Introduction**

Critical turning points have punctuated the shifting dynamics of South Asian geopolitics, but few have been as strategically transformative as the period following the United States' successful mediation

in the Indo-Pak war. This intervention not only de-escalated one of the most volatile episodes between the two nuclear-capable neighbors but also opened a new chapter in Pakistan-U.S. relations. Emerging from the shadows of direct conflict with India, Pakistan perceived in the U.S. mediation a valuable opportunity to reposition itself on the global stage. For Washington, the settlement presented an opportunity to enhance its influence in South Asia, particularly in an era characterized by intense Cold War rivalries.

However, for Islamabad, the recalibration of relations with the U.S. carried significant implications, not least for its time-tested strategic partnership with China. Balancing the benefits of closer cooperation with Washington against the imperatives of its enduring alliance with Beijing became a delicate and complex diplomatic undertaking. This triangular interplay would come to define much of Pakistan's strategic maneuvering in the decades that followed, shaping the security and economic architecture of South Asia. (Haqqani, 2025).

The improvement in Pakistan-U.S. relations after the mediation was the outcome of converging political, security, and economic calculations. For the U.S., Pakistan's geographic position was of immense strategic value not only as a counterweight to Indian alignment with the Soviet Union but also as a frontline state in containing Soviet influence in Asia (Tellis, 2014). This translated into sustained military assistance, economic aid, and diplomatic support in international forums. For Pakistan, the benefits were equally compelling: access to advanced military technology, opportunities for economic development, and a strengthened international profile (Wyne, 2022). The relationship was marked by a mutual recognition of utility. Washington needed Pakistan to maintain a regional balance of power, and Islamabad needed U.S. backing to address both its defense requirements and development ambitions (Haqqani, 2025). Yet, the warming of ties with the United States inevitably cast a shadow over Pakistan's strategic relationship with China. Beijing had long been Pakistan's most reliable partner offering unwavering support in defense cooperation, infrastructure development, and strategic counterbalancing against India (Small, 2014). The deep military collaboration, political backing in international institutions, and joint infrastructure projects had cemented the notion of an "all-weather friendship." The U.S. entry into Pakistan's strategic orbit introduced a new variable into this equation. While Islamabad sought to reassure Beijing of the continuity of their alliance, China's strategic planners could not ignore the possibility that American influence might, over time, dilute Pakistan's commitment to the Sino-Pak partnership (Siddiq, 2017).

Counter to the optimistic narrative of a seamless dual alignment, critics argued that Pakistan's growing closeness with the U.S. risked creating mistrust in Beijing, especially at moments when Washington's regional policies clashed with Chinese strategic interests (Tellis, 2014). From China's perspective, greater U.S. involvement in South Asia was not simply about conflict resolution but often part of a broader agenda of strategic containment. This perception created the potential for friction as Pakistan's simultaneous engagement with both powers occasionally forced it into policy contradictions (Small, 2014). Proponents of Islamabad's dual alignment strategy, however, contended that maintaining robust ties with both the U.S. and China was a pragmatic choice, one that allowed Pakistan to maximize benefits from two competing superpowers (Wyne, 2022). By leveraging their rivalry, Pakistan could extract economic aid, military support, and diplomatic backing from both sides, even if this approach required delicate balancing and constant diplomatic management (Haqqani, 2025).

## ***Problem Statement***

Pakistan's foreign policy has long been characterized by its strategic reliance on China as a steadfast partner while intermittently recalibrating its relationship with the United States during periods of geopolitical necessity. The U.S.'s successful mediation in the Indo-Pak war marked one such moment of realignment, opening new avenues for military, economic, and diplomatic cooperation with Washington.

While existing literature extensively documents the historical depth of the Pak–China alliance and the episodic surges in Pakistan–U.S. relations, it often fails to critically address the complex interplay between these two relationships when pursued in parallel. This oversight is significant as closer ties with the U.S., particularly those born out of crisis mediation, carry potential strategic costs including shifts in China’s threat perceptions, recalibration of its defense and investment commitments, and subtle reconfigurations in regional security alignments. Moreover, scholarship tends to underexplore whether Pakistan’s dual alignment enhances its strategic autonomy or, conversely, entrenches its dependency on competing global powers with divergent interests in South Asia. The absence of detailed empirical analysis on how U.S.-Pakistan rapprochement affects the depth and scope of the Sino-Pak partnership leaves a critical gap in understanding the broader consequences for regional stability, economic integration projects like the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and Pakistan’s long-term diplomatic leverage. This study seeks to address these gaps by examining the post-mediation evolution of Pakistan-U.S. relations, its implications for the Pak–China strategic axis, and the resulting challenges and opportunities for Pakistan’s role in shaping the geopolitical order of South Asia.

### ***Significance of the Study***

This study is significant for multiple reasons. First, it contributes to the academic discourse on South Asian geopolitics by critically examining the evolving nexus between Pakistan and the United States following U.S. mediation in the Indo-Pak war and its subsequent implications for the long-standing Pak–China strategic partnership. It provides a nuanced analysis of how this triangular relationship intersects with Pakistan’s broader foreign policy realities, including its security imperatives, economic dependencies, and regional balancing strategies. Secondly, the findings have practical value for policymakers in Pakistan by offering insights into how Islamabad can navigate the competing interests of two global powers without undermining its strategic autonomy or jeopardizing key initiatives such as the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). By identifying the opportunities and risks embedded in this dual alignment, the research underscores the importance of crafting a foreign policy that maximizes strategic gains while mitigating vulnerabilities. Finally, this study enriches the understanding of great power competition in South Asia by highlighting how U.S.-Pakistan rapprochement can influence Chinese strategic calculations and regional stability. Through this integrated analysis, the research aims to inform both academic scholarship and practical diplomacy, offering guidance for policymakers, strategists, and scholars seeking to understand and manage Pakistan’s role in a rapidly evolving geopolitical order.

### ***Methodology***

To provide a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the evolving nexus between Pakistan and the United States after U.S. mediation in the Indo-Pak war and its implications for the Pak–China partnership in South Asia, this study employs a qualitative research methodology. This approach is particularly suited to the topic as it allows for a nuanced exploration of the historical, political, and strategic dimensions that shape Pakistan’s foreign policy decisions and regional alignments. By drawing on a wide range of primary and secondary sources, including historical records, policy documents, official statements, and scholarly analyses, the research examines how various stakeholders, such as government policymakers, diplomatic actors, and strategic analysts, influence and respond to the shifting balance between U.S. engagement and China’s long-standing strategic partnership with Pakistan. The study uses thematic analysis as its primary analytical framework, enabling the identification of recurring patterns, strategic priorities, and policy dilemmas that emerge from this triangular relationship. This method facilitates the synthesis of theoretical perspectives from international relations, such as balance of power theory, dependency theory, and strategic alignment models with grounded empirical realities, including

security imperatives, economic cooperation mechanisms, and geopolitical constraints. By tracing themes across different historical phases and critical diplomatic junctures, the study aims to generate a layered understanding of how Pakistan navigates great power competition in South Asia, offering insights that can inform both academic scholarship and practical foreign policy formulation.

### ***Theoretical Model***

#### **Realism Theory**

This study is anchored in the Realism theory of international relations, which emerged as a dominant analytical framework in the mid-20th century through the foundational works of Hans Morgenthau (Morgenthau, 1985) and Kenneth Waltz (Waltz, 1990). Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations* articulated the core realist principles that international politics is governed by objective laws rooted in human nature, where the primary goal of states is the pursuit and preservation of power. Waltz later refined this into structural realism, emphasizing the anarchic nature of the international system and the distribution of capabilities among states as the key determinants of state behavior. Realism contends that states act rationally to maximize their security and survival, often prioritizing power politics over moral or ideological considerations. This framework is particularly relevant to the evolving nexus between Pakistan and the United States after the latter's successful mediation in the Indo-Pak war, as well as the implications for Pakistan's long-standing strategic partnership with China. The triangular dynamic between these three states reflects the realist emphasis on balance of power politics, where Pakistan seeks to leverage its relationships with both Washington and Beijing to safeguard its security, enhance its military and economic capabilities, and counterbalance regional threats, most notably from India. Scholars such as Waltz (Waltz, 1993) have expanded on this logic with the balance of threat theory, explaining how states align not merely against power but against perceived threats, a concept directly applicable to Pakistan's foreign policy calculus in South Asia. The post-mediation U.S.-Pakistan rapprochement can thus be interpreted as a strategic maneuver within a realist paradigm, enabling Islamabad to diversify its security partnerships while managing the risks of overdependence on any single great power. In turn, China's continued investment in the Pakistan-China Economic Corridor (CPEC) despite closer U.S.-Pakistan engagement underscores how great powers also operate within realist calculations, seeking to maintain influence in strategically vital regions. By applying the realist lens, this study critically examines how Pakistan navigates great power competition, security imperatives, and alliance politics in an anarchic international system where survival and strategic advantage remain paramount.

#### **Crust and Troughs in Pak–U.S. Relations: A Historical Overview**

##### **Formation and Early Alignment (1947–1958):**

Pakistan-U.S. relations began shortly after Pakistan's independence in August 1947, marked by a cautious but increasingly strategic engagement. Initially, Washington's interest in Pakistan was minimal compared to its ties with India; however, the Cold War context soon elevated Pakistan's value as a potential ally against Soviet influence in Asia (Kux, 2001). By the early 1950s, Pakistan had joined U.S.-led security alliances such as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954 and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1955 in exchange for substantial economic and military aid. These alliances reflected Pakistan's strategic decision to align with the Western bloc for security guarantees against India, while for Washington, Islamabad offered a geographically advantageous partner in containing communism (McMahon, 1996). This period marked the first crust in bilateral relations, characterized by mutual strategic utility, though Pakistan's expectation of unconditional support in its disputes with India was already a source of latent tension.

**Strains and Disappointments (1959–1971):**

Despite the early alignment, fissures emerged when U.S. policy appeared to favor India, particularly in the wake of the Sino Indian War of 1962, when Washington provided military assistance to New Delhi (Haqqani, 2025). The turning point came during the 1965 Indo-Pak war, when the U.S. imposed an arms embargo on both India and Pakistan, disproportionately affecting Pakistan due to its heavier reliance on American weapons. The embargo exposed the fragility of the alliance, undermining Pakistani confidence in U.S. commitments. The 1971 Bangladesh crisis and subsequent Indo-Pak war further strained ties as Washington's support was limited to diplomatic channels despite Pakistan's role in facilitating the secret U.S.-China rapprochement through Henry Kissinger's 1971 visit to Beijing (Francis, 2020). While Pakistan had played a pivotal role in reshaping global geopolitics, the U.S. response to the crisis fell short of Islamabad's expectations, marking a deep trough in the relationship.

**From Strategic Convergence to Post-Cold War Estrangement: U.S.–Pak Relations, 1979–2000:**

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 transformed Pakistan into a frontline state in the U.S.-led containment strategy against Moscow. Under General Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan became the primary conduit for American financial aid, weapons, and intelligence to the Afghan mujahideen (Coll, 2005). The Reagan administration dramatically increased military and economic assistance, reinstating Pakistan as a key strategic partner. This crust was arguably the most pronounced in the bilateral history, underpinned by shared objectives in Afghanistan. However, U.S. concerns over Pakistan's nuclear program were temporarily muted for strategic convenience, laying the groundwork for future confrontations once the Soviet withdrawal was complete. With the end of the Cold War and the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the U.S. strategic calculus shifted. Pakistan's utility diminished, and the Pressler Amendment sanctions of 1990, triggered by U.S. concerns over Islamabad's nuclear program, resulted in the suspension of most military and economic aid (Haqqani, 2025). The 1990s were marked by deep mistrust exacerbated by allegations of Pakistan's support for militant groups in Kashmir and the Taliban in Afghanistan (Rashid, 2010). The 1998 nuclear tests by Pakistan in response to India's tests prompted further sanctions under the Glenn Amendment. This decade represented one of the most prolonged troughs in bilateral ties, with engagement limited largely to counter narcotics and occasional diplomatic dialogue.

**Post 9/11 Alliance and War on Terror (2001–2011):**

The September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks radically transformed U.S.-Pakistan relations. Under General Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan emerged as a critical non-NATO ally in the U.S.-led "War on Terror," receiving billions of dollars in aid in exchange for logistical, intelligence, and military cooperation in operations against al Qaeda and the Taliban (Fair, 2014). This marked another crust, yet one fraught with contradictions, while the U.S. sought decisive action against militant Pakistan, which was accused of maintaining selective support for groups aligned with its strategic interests in Afghanistan (Tellis, 2008). The 2011 U.S. raid in Abbottabad that killed Osama bin Laden without prior notification to Pakistan epitomized the erosion of trust, signaling a sharp downturn.

**Strategic Divergence and Managed Engagement (2012–Present):**

In the decade following the Abbottabad raid, relations oscillated between transactional cooperation and open hostility. U.S. drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas, differences over Afghan reconciliation, and Washington's growing strategic partnership with India under the "Indo-Pacific" framework deepened Pakistani skepticism (Markey, 2013). While there were moments of cooperation, such as joint counterterrorism operations and Pakistan's facilitation of U.S. Taliban talks in Doha, the broader trajectory reflected diminishing strategic convergence. The Trump administration's suspension of security

assistance in 2018 and accusations of “lies and deceit” further strained ties (Kugelman, 2025). However, Pakistan’s assistance in the 2020 U.S. Taliban agreement demonstrated its enduring, if limited, relevance to Washington’s regional agenda. The withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan in 2021 has shifted the relationship toward a more limited, issue-specific engagement, focused on counterterrorism, regional stability and economic cooperation, marking the latest phase in the long pattern of crusts and troughs.

### **Growing U.S. Interest in Pakistan and Major Variables**

The historical crusts and troughs in Pakistan-U.S. relations demonstrate that American interest in Pakistan has rarely been constant, instead peaking during moments when Islamabad’s strategic geography and capabilities aligned with Washington’s broader geopolitical objectives. From the Cold War containment of the Soviet Union to the post-9/11 war on terror, Pakistan has periodically reemerged as a critical partner in U.S. strategic calculations (Kux, 2001). In the current era, U.S. interest in Pakistan is again evolving not toward an expansive alliance reminiscent of the 1980s or early 2000s, but toward a pragmatic, issue-specific engagement shaped by regional instability, the India-China rivalry, and U.S. security objectives in South and Central Asia. This recalibrated interest is influenced by several major variables, including Pakistan’s geographic position, its role in Afghan stability, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), nuclear security concerns, and the broader U.S. strategy of balancing China while deepening ties with India.

### **Strategic Depth in Pakistan and Global Powers' Interest:**

Pakistan’s position at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East continues to be the most enduring driver of U.S. interest. Historically, Washington leveraged this geography to contain Soviet expansion, support Afghan resistance in the 1980s, and facilitate counterterrorism logistics post-2001 (Coll, 2005). Today, while U.S. ground operations in Afghanistan have ended, Pakistan retains value as a regional connectivity hub and potential bridge in crisis diplomacy, especially in Afghan peace negotiations and humanitarian corridors (Markey, 2013). CPEC, a flagship project of China’s Belt and Road Initiative, has become a focal point in U.S. strategic thinking about Pakistan. While Washington publicly frames its concerns in terms of debt sustainability and transparency, CPEC is seen through the prism of great-power competition, given its potential to enhance China’s strategic reach in the Indian Ocean and deepen Sino-Pak defense integration (Small, 2014). U.S. engagement with Pakistan in this context often seeks to provide economic and development alternatives, partly to counterbalance China’s influence. This mirrors earlier Cold War patterns where American aid was strategically deployed to limit Soviet leverage, another instance of historical continuity in the variables driving U.S. interest. Nuclear security remains a core U.S. concern. Since Pakistan’s nuclear tests in 1998, Washington has maintained a dual-track approach to engagement to ensure the safety of nuclear assets and pressure to prevent the proliferation of nuclear technology (Cronin, 2005). In parallel, Pakistan’s role in counterterrorism remains relevant, particularly in containing transnational terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan and its border regions (Tellis, 2008). While these issues often generate friction, they also serve as entry points for security cooperation.

### **Evolving Ups and Downs in the USA's Interest in Pakistan:**

The most consequential shift in recent years is the deepening India-U.S. strategic partnership, formalized through defense agreements, technology transfers, and shared commitments under the Indo-Pacific strategy (Pant, H. V., & Joshi, Y., 2017). This alignment, framed by Washington as a counterbalance to China, has significant implications for Pakistan. From Islamabad’s perspective, U.S. defense cooperation with India, particularly in intelligence sharing, missile defense, and advanced weapons systems, tilts the regional balance of power, potentially emboldening New Delhi’s stance on contentious issues such as Kashmir (Fair, 2014). The abrogation of Article 370 by India in August 2019,

and Washington's muted response, reinforced perceptions in Pakistan that U.S. strategic priorities increasingly favor India. However, this also creates a diplomatic opening for Islamabad to position itself as a stabilizing actor, offering Washington cooperation on Afghan stability, counterterrorism, and regional crisis management as a counterweight to excessive Indian leverage. Linking back to the historical "crusts and troughs," the present phase reflects a nuanced form of engagement, neither the deep estrangement of the 1990s nor the expansive alignment of the early War on Terror years. Instead, U.S. interest is shaped by selective convergence: intelligence cooperation, regional stability, and non-proliferation, alongside competition for influence in Pakistan's economic future vis-à-vis China. This mirrors past periods where American engagement was instrumental and conditional, driven by specific strategic goals rather than a commitment to long-term alliance building (Haqqani, 2025). The challenge for Pakistan lies in leveraging this renewed but limited U.S. interest to its advantage, managing the risks posed by India's U.S. closeness while safeguarding its partnership with China.

**Indian's De-hyphenated Foreign Policy and Option for USA inside the Region:** India's long-standing policy of de-hyphenation, severing its international identity from being reflexively paired with Pakistan, reached a turning point under Prime Minister Modi's administration. Since mid-2014, New Delhi has actively promoted its global credentials, casting off the constricting Indo-Pak dyad and emphasizing its standalone strategic weight, particularly in the Indo-Pacific and Quad frameworks (Mukhopadhyay, 2024). This shift has been empirically validated through media analysis. Google Trends data shows a statistically significant decline of over 55% in public and online references that hyphenate India with Pakistan after mid-2014 (Mukhopadhyay, 2024). Strategically, India's reorientation toward China as its primary geopolitical counterpoint underscores its ascent as a regional power distinct from Pakistan (Shekhar, 2025). Nonetheless, recent developments suggest a partial re-hyphenation in political discourse, where Pakistan once again features prominently in domestic narratives, especially in electoral messaging, complicating India's strategic focus by reactivating the very linkage it sought to dismantle (Gupta, 2025).

Parallel to India's trajectory, the United States has pursued counter-interest building in Pakistan, not only by encouraging Pakistan's regional relevance but also by balancing its deepening ties with India. On August 14, 2025, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced new initiatives to strengthen economic engagement with Islamabad, including investment prospects in Pakistan's critical minerals and hydrocarbons sectors, specifically in Balochistan's Reko Diq gold and copper mines (Reuters, 2025). This follows a recent trade agreement and resumed counterterrorism dialogue, signaling Washington's pragmatic outreach to Pakistan even amid tensions with India. U.S. State Department spokesperson reaffirmed that America's commitments to both India and Pakistan remain intact, reinforcing its de-hyphenated posture and its ability to engage diplomatically across South Asia's geopolitical spectrum (Times of India, 2025). These moves illustrate the U.S. strategic calculus: balancing its India-U.S. strategic partnership by sustaining lines of cooperation with Pakistan on critical security and economic fronts.

### **Pakistan's Security Role in Arresting an ISIS Commander:**

Pakistan's counterterrorism apparatus played a pivotal role in the March 2025 capture of Mohammad Sharifullah, an alleged senior planner for Islamic State Khorasan (ISIS-K) behind the August 26, 2021, Abbey Gate suicide bombing at Kabul airport that killed 13 U.S. service members and 170 Afghans. U.S. authorities announced that Sharifullah was taken into custody and subsequently transferred to the United States for prosecution. Islamabad publicly underscored that the arrest followed Pakistani cooperation and a military operation along the Afghanistan-Pakistan border (Al Jazeera, 2025). The U.S. Department of Justice stated that Sharifullah faces charges for his role in planning the attack, situating the case within a broader law enforcement push against ISIS-K networks operating across the region (U.S. Department of Justice, 2025). Beyond the headline arrest, the episode reflects the transnational reach and evolving lethality of ISIS-K, assessed by U.S. homeland security and independent terrorism scholars as a

branch capable of projecting violence well beyond its core sanctuary areas in Afghanistan and the Afghanistan-Pakistan borderlands (Jadoon, 2024). In this context, Pakistan's ability to generate actionable intelligence and execute cross-border adjacent operations remains a material factor in constraining ISIS-K operatives who exploit porous frontiers and fragmented local ecosystems for recruitment, logistics, and safe havens (Jadoon, 2024).

Operationally and diplomatically, the Sharifullah capture marked a renewed issue-specific convergence in Pak-U.S. relations after years of volatility. Washington publicly praised Islamabad's assistance while Pakistani officials framed the action as proof of credible cooperation on shared security priorities (The Washington Post, 2025). This cooperation dovetails with U.S. post-withdrawal objectives, namely, the over-the-horizon disruption of ISIS-K planners and facilitators while allowing Pakistan to demonstrate utility at a moment when U.S. grand strategy in South Asia is otherwise shaped by deepening ties with India and competitive balancing vis-à-vis China (Department of Homeland Security, 2024). The episode thus both tempers and tests the familiar pattern of crusts and troughs it creates tangible goodwill and operational channels, intelligence liaison, extradition support, and financial disruption, yet does not erase persistent frictions over Afghanistan militant safe havens or broader regional alignments. Strategically, Pakistan's role in delivering a high value ISIS-K planner offers leverage in dialogues on counterterrorism assistance and economic engagement with Washington, while for the United States it validates a pragmatic, transactional model of cooperation focused on discrete, high impact counterterrorism outcomes rather than an expansive alliance an approach consistent with recent U.S. assessments of the enduring ISIS-K threat and the need for flexible partnerships in the region (Department of Homeland Security, 2024 (Department of Homeland Security, 2024) and (The Washington Post, 2025).

### **Pakistan's Endorsement of the USA Mediation in the War:**

Pakistan's endorsement of U.S. mediation in the most recent conflict with India reflects a multi-layered strategic calculation that intertwines immediate conflict management with long-term diplomatic positioning. In the aftermath of the April 22 terrorist attack and subsequent escalation along the Line of Control, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif publicly appealed to Washington to facilitate comprehensive dialogue between New Delhi and Islamabad, praising former U.S. President Donald Trump's role in brokering a ceasefire (times of India, 2025 a). This position signals Islamabad's readiness to leverage American diplomatic capital both to de-escalate tensions and to project itself internationally as a constructive, peace-oriented actor. It also provides Pakistan an avenue to relieve international pressure while ensuring that the United States remains directly engaged in South Asian security dynamics, an approach consistent with Islamabad's historic use of great-power mediation during high-stakes crises (Financial times, 2025).

The significance of this stance becomes clearer when contrasted with India's unequivocal rejection of third-party intervention and reaffirmation of its strategic autonomy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi reiterated that the ceasefire resulted solely from direct military channels, denying any formal U.S. mediation (Al Jazeera, 2025). This divergence highlights a core asymmetry, whereas New Delhi views external involvement as an infringement on its sovereignty, Islamabad sees it as an opportunity to reshape regional narratives, balance India's growing strategic partnership with Washington, and reinforce its own regional relevance. In the context of deepening U.S.-India defense cooperation, Pakistan's openness to American mediation also serves to subtly counterbalance New Delhi's influence, reminding Washington of Islamabad's continued utility in managing regional crises. This approach not only sustains Pakistan's dialogue with the U.S. but also allows Islamabad to maneuver diplomatically between Washington and Beijing in an era of intensifying great power competition (Times of India, 2025 b).

## Significance of Pakistan's security regimes

Pakistan's security regimes, comprising its military establishment, intelligence agencies, and strategic policy frameworks, play a foundational and multifaceted role in shaping the country's internal stability, regional posture, and international alignments. Historically, the military has not only managed existential threats, such as during the 1965 and 1971 wars with India, but also molded foreign policy, aligning closely with partners like the United States during periods like the U.S.-Soviet Cold War and the post 9/11 War on Terror (Haqqani, 2025). The powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has served both as Pakistan's main security architect and as a sensitive node in transnational counterterrorism operations, balancing pressure from the U.S., accountability to civilian leadership, and its own strategic calculus (Coll, 2005). Importantly, the security regime underpins Pakistan's credibility as a partner in regional counter-extremism, enabling high-impact actions like the 2025 arrest of an ISIS-K planner, which in turn facilitates issue-specific cooperation with Washington (Reuters, 2025). In the contemporary context of rising Indo-U.S. strategic alignment, Pakistan's regime-driven security apparatus enables it to sustain strategic autonomy and maneuver diplomatically between great powers, while safeguarding critical projects like CPEC and managing nuclear deterrence dynamics (Small, 2014). Thus, Pakistan's security regimes remain central to its pursuit of sovereignty, regional influence, and survival amid shifting geostrategic pressures.

## Mineral's dilemma

Pakistan's geographic location and geological composition have endowed it with vast natural resources that are of increasing global strategic importance. Stretching from the mineral-rich mountains of Balochistan to the salt ranges of Punjab and the gemstone belts of Gilgit Baltistan, the country possesses significant deposits of copper, gold, chromite, barite, marble, rare earth elements, and hydrocarbons (U.S. Geological Survey, 2025). Among these, the Reko Diq deposit in Baluchistan is considered one of the largest undeveloped copper-gold reserves in the world, with an estimated annual production capacity of 90 million tonnes and a projected operational life of nearly four decades (Mining.com, 2025). Yet, despite this abundance, the mining sector's contribution to Pakistan's GDP remains under 1%, constrained by regulatory inefficiencies, underdeveloped infrastructure, limited technological capacity, and chronic security challenges in resource-bearing regions. This resource paradox has historically made Pakistan both a potential economic powerhouse and a target for foreign strategic interest, as global powers seek to secure supply chains of critical minerals vital for defense technologies, renewable energy infrastructure, and high-tech manufacturing (Small, 2014). With the rise of great-power competition, particularly between the U.S. and China, Pakistan's resources, especially those embedded within the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) geography, have acquired new geopolitical weight, making mineral access a critical variable in foreign policy alignments (Tellis, 2008).

In July 2025, the U.S. and Pakistan signed the Energy and Critical Minerals Partnership, marking a new phase in bilateral engagement. Announced by U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, the agreement outlines American investment and joint ventures in Pakistan's mineral and hydrocarbon sectors, with a clear focus on projects in Balochistan and the Indus Makran Basin (AInvest, 2025). The partnership includes provisions for U.S. companies to secure concessions in copper, gold, and rare earth extraction, alongside financing from the U.S. Export-Import Bank and the Development Finance Corporation for large-scale operations such as Reko Diq (Financial Times, 2025). For Washington, the deal serves a dual purpose: diversifying supply chains away from China and reinforcing its economic footprint in a strategically contested region (AInvest, 2025). For Islamabad, it promises foreign investment, technology transfer, and potential export diversification, but also raises concerns over sovereignty, resource dependency, and equitable profit-sharing issues that have historically plagued resource contracts in Pakistan (Haqqani, 2025). Notably, this mineral cooperation intersected with U.S. diplomatic mediation in the recent India-Pakistan conflict, with American envoys leveraging the promise of economic

cooperation and investment as part of the broader peace facilitation effort (Times of India, 2025). In this way, the minerals dilemma underscores the central theme of this research: Pakistan's strategic resources are not merely economic assets but also diplomatic instruments capable of attracting external mediation, influencing regional conflict resolution, and shaping the trajectory of Pakistan, U.S.-China relations in the evolving South Asian security architecture.

### **Implications for Pak-China partnership**

The evolving dynamics of Pakistan-U.S. relations, shaped by episodes such as the U.S.'s successful mediation in recent Indo-Pak tensions, strategic counterterrorism cooperation, and the 2025 Energy and Critical Minerals Partnership, carry direct and complex implications for the long-standing Pak-China partnership. While Islamabad's engagement with Washington offers economic incentives, security collaboration, and diplomatic leverage, it also intersects uneasily with Beijing's deep strategic investments, particularly under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). U.S. entry into sectors such as critical minerals, especially in Balochistan, a province central to several CPEC projects, introduces overlapping spheres of influence that could generate both cooperation and competition between the two major powers in Pakistan's economic landscape. For China, which views Pakistan as a strategic anchor in its Belt and Road Initiative and a counterbalance to India's regional ambitions, an increased U.S. economic and diplomatic footprint poses potential risks to the exclusivity and strategic depth of its partnership. For Pakistan, managing these overlapping interests demands careful diplomatic balancing to ensure that U.S. involvement does not dilute Chinese confidence or investment commitments, while also preventing overdependence on either power. This delicate equilibrium underscores the broader reality that Pakistan's partnerships with Washington and Beijing are no longer insulated spheres but are increasingly interlinked, requiring nuanced policy strategies to preserve strategic autonomy while maximizing the benefits of both relationships (Small, 2014).

### **China's investment in Pakistan**

China's investment in Pakistan has evolved into one of the most strategically significant bilateral economic engagements in South Asia, deeply rooted in shared geopolitical interests and mutual economic dependencies. Central to this relationship is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), launched in 2015 as the flagship of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, aimed at transforming Pakistan's infrastructure, energy, and industrial sectors while providing China with a shorter, more secure trade route to the Arabian Sea. Beyond mere economic cooperation, these investments serve broader strategic purposes, enhancing China's access to critical maritime routes through Gwadar Port, strengthening Pakistan's role as a regional partner in counterbalancing India, and securing Beijing's influence in the Indian Ocean region. This partnership has expanded into diverse sectors, including transport, energy generation, telecommunications, and mineral exploration, reflecting China's long-term commitment to embedding Pakistan within its regional economic and security architecture. However, the increasing U.S. interest in Pakistan's critical minerals and infrastructure since 2025 introduces new competitive dynamics, potentially complicating Beijing's economic predominance and compelling Islamabad to navigate a delicate balance between its two most powerful external partners (Small, 2014).

### **Economic Sector:**

Economically, China's investment in Pakistan is anchored in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which Islamabad reports has completed 50+ projects worth about US\$25 billion to date within a broader pledge now exceeding US\$65 billion for energy, transport, and industrial infrastructure (Reuters, 2023). On the supply side of Pakistan's economy, Chinese-backed generation has materially lifted installed electricity capacity. Pakistan's total installed capacity reached 42,131 MW by March 2024, with new coal, hydro, and nuclear assets disproportionately associated with CPEC's first phase (Finance

Division Government of Pakistan , 2024). Flagship examples include the Karachi K-2/K-3 Hualong One nuclear units, where final acceptance milestones were signed in 2024–2025, consolidating long-horizon baseload gains and deepening Sino-Pak technology linkages (World Nuclear Newz, 2024). Beyond energy, the current policy thrust is to move from roads and power to industrial upgrading and logistics. Beijing and Islamabad agreed in February 2025 to accelerate railway modernization (ML-1), expand activity at Gwadar, and invite Chinese capital into mining and offshore hydrocarbons, tying real economy investment to export logistics and special economic zones (Reuters, 2025). These flows are visible in the balance of payments. The State Bank of Pakistan data show China as a leading source of net FDI in FY-2024/25, with gross inflows of about US\$1.71 billion and net inflows of roughly US\$1.22 billion over the period captured in the most recent tables (State Bank of Pakistan , 2025). Taken together, CPEC’s sunk assets in generation and transport, the fresh pipeline in rail, ports, and mining, and continuing Chinese FDI establish Beijing as Pakistan’s pivotal economic partner while also exposing Islamabad to execution, debt service, and security of investment risks that must be managed as the initiative shifts into an industry and export-oriented second phase (Reuters, 2025).

### Security Sector:

From a security perspective, Chinese investment in Pakistan, particularly under the CPEC framework, has necessitated a robust expansion of Pakistan’s protective apparatus to safeguard both infrastructure and personnel. The Pakistan Army established the Special Security Division (SSD), comprising over 15,000 troops, supplemented by paramilitary and police units, tasked exclusively with securing CPEC projects and Chinese nationals (Dawn, 2024). This is in direct response to escalating militant threats, especially from Baloch insurgent groups and transnational actors such as ISIS-K, which have targeted Chinese engineers, energy sites, and logistics corridors. Following the April 2022 Karachi University suicide attack, joint counterterrorism coordination between Pakistan’s military and China’s Ministry of State Security was intensified, with Beijing demanding stringent security guarantees as a precondition for continued high-value investment (Al Jazeera, 2022). In 2024–2025, Pakistan further enhanced maritime security at Gwadar and Ormara through expanded naval patrols and the operational deployment of newly acquired Chinese-built Type 054A/P frigates, ensuring that the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) linked to the Belt and Road remain insulated from piracy or sabotage (The Express Tribune , 2024). This militarization of project protection not only strengthens bilateral defense ties but also embeds China more deeply into Pakistan’s internal security calculus, aligning Islamabad’s counterterrorism priorities with Beijing’s strategic interest in keeping its economic corridors free from instability.

### Options for China:

The China-Pakistan relationship, often described as an all-weather strategic cooperative partnership, has been one of the most enduring bilateral alliances in modern Asian geopolitics, grounded in shared strategic interests, mutual trust, and consistent diplomatic support since the early 1960s. From Beijing’s assistance in developing Pakistan’s infrastructure and defense capabilities after the 1965 Indo-Pak war to Islamabad serving as a bridge for China’s rapprochement with the United States in the 1970s, both countries have navigated shifting global power balances with a remarkable degree of policy alignment (Small, 2014). This partnership has withstood regional turbulence from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, through the post 9/11 U.S. led war on terror, to the launch of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in 2015 as the flagship of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Today, the relationship is not only framed in terms of strategic solidarity but also as a vehicle for economic integration, regional stability, and security cooperation. However, current geopolitical dynamics present new challenges: China has reiterated its support for Pakistan’s core concerns amid renewed tensions with India, particularly over Kashmir, while calling for restraint and dialogue (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People Republic of China , 2024). Simultaneously, Washington’s recent warming toward Islamabad, especially following U.S.

mediation efforts in Indo-Pak disputes, has added a layer of complexity to Beijing's strategic calculus, compelling China to assess the durability of its privileged position in Pakistan's foreign policy orbit (The Washington Post, 2025).

Against this backdrop, Beijing's current stance blends continuity with recalibration. On the one hand, Chinese officials have reaffirmed their commitment to safeguarding CPEC and deepening economic cooperation, particularly in energy, industrial zones, and connectivity projects that have already attracted nearly US\$26 billion in direct investment and created thousands of jobs in Pakistan (FMPRC, 2024). On the other hand, the U.S.'s growing role in Pakistan, most recently in critical minerals cooperation, presents both competitive and cooperative possibilities. While Washington's mineral diplomacy aims to integrate Pakistan into U.S.-led supply chains, Beijing's strategic option is to differentiate by emphasizing industrial upgrading, green energy, and integrated logistics, where it maintains a comparative advantage. The implications for the main research focus, U.S. mediation in the Indo-Pak conflict and its impact on the Pak-China partnership, are profound. Successful U.S. diplomacy could reduce immediate Indo-Pak hostilities, indirectly benefiting CPEC's operational environment, but it may also dilute China's role as Pakistan's sole strategic guarantor. Thus, the central question becomes how Beijing can preserve the all-weather depth of the relationship while adapting to a more multipolar competitive setting, ensuring that its economic, security, and geopolitical stakes in Pakistan remain secure and strategically relevant (The Washington Post, 2024).

### **Mineral Interest of China in Pakistan and the Ongoing Projects:**

China's mineral sector interests in Pakistan have steadily risen into a strategic frontier, driven both by Beijing's domestic need for critical raw materials and Islamabad's quest for investment beyond traditional infrastructure and energy sectors. Central to this is the Reko Diq copper-gold deposit in Balochistan, reputed as one of the largest of its kind globally, and symbolic of the untapped potential in Pakistan's geological endowment (U.S. Geological Survey, 2025). Chinese firms have pursued feasibility studies and joint venture negotiations with Pakistani authorities to penetrate this sector, signaling a deliberate expansion of Chinese economic horizons beyond roads and power stations (Small, 2014). This shift aligns with China's broader resource diversification strategy, reducing reliance on volatile maritime supply chains and enhancing resilience for industries like electronics, clean energy, and defense manufacturing. For Pakistan, deeper Chinese involvement in its mineral sector offers alternative revenue streams, the potential for industrial clustering, e.g., downstream metal processing hubs near Gwadar, and greater leverage in managing the balance between Chinese, American, and other foreign investment, a dynamic that reflects the central research concern over how such integrations shape regional alignments.

Currently, operationalizing mineral wealth remains a work in progress, though momentum is clearly building. In mid-2025, Islamabad announced bilateral understandings with Chinese state-owned enterprises to conduct structured geological surveys in chromite and copper-rich areas of Balochistan, supported by infrastructure upgrades such as roads, power, and rail access, co-financed via CPEC's industrial corridor envelope (Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives, Pakistan, 2025). At the same time, discussions are underway to integrate mineral export lanes into Gwadar's logistics chain, linking mine sites to port facilities under Chinese management. While these projects are in early stages, they underscore China's extended investment strategy in Pakistan, mirroring its upstream expansion in resource procurement and downstream integration through infrastructure-led corridors. This deepening of Chinese economic engagement in minerals intersects with your main research theme the more entrenched China becomes in Pakistan's economic fabric, the more nuanced the challenge becomes for Beijing to preserve its all-weather partnership even as the U.S. pursues alternative footholds through its 2025 minerals pact highlighting the study's broader inquiry into how economic instruments mediate great power influence and alignment in South Asia.

**Key Findings:**

- The relationship between Pakistan and the United States has been complex and multifaceted, marked by periods of strategic convergence and divergence. The U.S.'s successful mediation in the Indo-Pak war opened a new chapter in Pakistan-U.S. relations, driven by converging political, security, and economic calculations. For the U.S., Pakistan's geographic position was of immense strategic value, not only as a counterweight to Indian alignment with the Soviet Union but also as a frontline state in containing Soviet influence in Asia.
- Pakistan, in turn, benefited from access to advanced military technology, opportunities for economic development, and a strengthened international profile. However, this warming of ties with the U.S. inevitably cast a shadow over Pakistan's strategic relationship with China, a long-standing partner that offered unwavering support in defense cooperation, infrastructure development, and strategic counterbalancing against India.
- The deep military collaboration, political backing in international institutions, and joint infrastructure projects had cemented the notion of an "all-weather friendship" between Pakistan and China. The U.S. entry into Pakistan's strategic orbit introduced a new variable into this equation, potentially creating mistrust in Beijing, especially at moments when Washington's regional policies clashed with Chinese strategic interests.
- Proponents of Islamabad's dual alignment strategy contend that maintaining robust ties with both the U.S. and China is a pragmatic choice, allowing Pakistan to maximize benefits from two competing superpowers. By leveraging their rivalry, Pakistan can extract economic aid, military support, and diplomatic backing from both sides, even if this approach requires delicate balancing and constant diplomatic management.
- However, critics argue that Pakistan's growing closeness with the U.S. risks creating mistrust in Beijing, particularly when Washington's regional policies conflict with Chinese strategic interests. The U.S.-Pakistan rapprochement can be interpreted as a strategic maneuver within a realist paradigm, enabling Islamabad to diversify its security partnerships while managing the risks of overdependence on any single great power.
- The implications of this dual alignment strategy for the Pak-China partnership are significant. While Islamabad's engagement with Washington offers economic incentives, security collaboration, and diplomatic leverage, it also intersects uneasily with Beijing's deep strategic investments, particularly under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). U.S. entry into sectors such as critical minerals, especially in Balochistan, introduces overlapping spheres of influence that could generate both cooperation and competition between the two major powers in Pakistan's economic landscape.
- For China, which views Pakistan as a strategic anchor in its Belt and Road Initiative and a counterbalance to India's regional ambitions, an increased U.S. economic and diplomatic footprint poses potential risks to the exclusivity and strategic depth of its partnership. For Pakistan, managing these overlapping interests demands careful diplomatic balancing to ensure that U.S. involvement does not dilute Chinese confidence or investment commitments while preventing overdependence on either power.
- The current dynamics reflect a nuanced form of engagement, neither the deep estrangement of the 1990s nor the expansive alignment of the early War on Terror years. Instead, U.S. interest is shaped by selective convergence: intelligence cooperation, regional stability, and non-proliferation, alongside competition for influence in Pakistan's economic future vis-à-vis China.
- To sum up, the evolving dynamics of Pakistan-U.S. relations, marked by strategic cooperation and competition with China, underscore the complexities of Pakistan's foreign policy. Islamabad's ability to navigate these relationships will depend on its diplomatic acumen, strategic calculations, and ability to balance competing interests while preserving its strategic autonomy and maximizing benefits from both partnerships.

### Conclusion:

Conclusively, the evolving dynamics of Pakistan's relationships with the United States and China reflect the complexities of navigating great power competition in South Asia. The U.S.'s successful mediation in the Indo-Pak war and subsequent engagement with Pakistan, driven by strategic interests and security concerns, has opened new avenues for cooperation. However, this rapprochement also poses challenges for Pakistan's long-standing partnership with China, particularly in the context of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Beijing's broader Belt and Road Initiative. Pakistan's dual alignment strategy, leveraging its relationships with both Washington and Beijing, requires delicate diplomatic balancing to maximize benefits while mitigating risks. The U.S.'s growing interest in Pakistan's critical minerals and infrastructure, alongside China's deepening investments in the country, introduces new dynamics of cooperation and competition that will shape the future of Pakistan's foreign policy and regional alignments.

Ultimately, Pakistan's ability to navigate these complex relationships will depend on its strategic acumen, diplomatic flexibility, and capacity to manage competing interests while preserving its sovereignty and regional influence. As the geopolitical landscape of South Asia continues to evolve, Pakistan's relationships with the U.S. and China will remain a critical factor in shaping the region's stability, security, and economic development.

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