



## Comparative Analysis of Trump-Biden Administration Foreign Policy towards Pakistan: Contemporary and Future Prospects

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### Abstract

*The relations between the US and Pakistan have always been dynamic and played crucial role in South Asia's regional stability. To determine the continuation of the historical engagements, this study assesses the crucial US-Pakistan ties and what challenges both nations have faced during first term of Presidents Donald Trump and subsequent President Joe Biden administration. It also evaluates the contemporary Pak-US relations during Trump 2.0 and the future associated aspects. The imperative Pak-US partnership has been studied using a qualitative study methodology. In a bid to evaluate political participation, cross-cultural interactions, and security cooperation, the study also examined personality influence of Trump and Biden. States take action to further their interests and persuade other nations to act in facilitation of those goals. Since the 9/11 attacks, Pakistan has drawn attention from US policy circles, which includes both areas of shared and divergent interest. First, the South Asian security mechanism depends on Pakistan's paramount role in promoting regional stability, economic cooperation, and friendly relations with major powers. Second, there is a need for a clear position on counterterrorism initiatives, the Indo-US strategic cooperation to counter China. The findings reveal that the stability of South Asia depends on balanced relations between Islamabad and Washington and issues pertaining to asymmetric regional security.*

### Keywords

Pakistan-US Relations, Comparative Analysis of President Trump-Biden Policy, Strategic Partnership, Neorealism and Constructivism, South Asia Regional Stability

### Introduction

Under the presidency of Trump and Biden, Pakistan has faced the US's conflicted foreign policy, which presents both opportunities and challenges to achieve national objectives (Akhtar et al., 2023). Comparative analysis of the US-Pakistan relationship can analyze how the transition of power in White House transformed economic interactions, security collaboration, and diplomatic contacts. In what ways do President Trump and Biden impact relations between the US and Pakistan? How have Islamabad-Washington bonding impacted former's relations with other powers?

Pakistan's internal dynamics, relations with major powers, and geographic location all influence its strategic policy. As the lone hegemon in recent decades, the US has presented both opportunities and challenges for Pakistan. The Kashmir dispute, cross-border terrorism, climate change, and Afghan stability all influence Pakistan's strategic decisions. Washington has traditionally employed carrot-and-stick strategy granting Pakistan economic, military, and diplomatic support

while in parallel imposing sanctions and intervention in internal affairs. In the words of Najam Shafique “Pakistan is the US most allied ally during war on terror” (Rafique 2011).

When President Trump took office in 2017, US foreign policy underwent significant alteration. Transactional Trump led the transactional relationship between the US and Pakistan. President Trump initially took a strong stand against Pakistan for allegedly harboring extremists, tweeting “lies and deceit” to sway Pakistan's political circles (@realDonaldTrump, 2018). President Biden, on the other hand, took a cautious approach and engaged Pakistan more diplomatically. Trump employed the “America First” strategy and engaged foreign nations, including Pakistan, while keeping hardcore American interest in focus (Bilal et al., 2025).

During President Trump's first term in office, Pakistan encountered several challenges, while the US solely displayed indifference to issues concerning Afghanistan. President Trump reaffirmed that Pakistan must contribute more to counterterrorism efforts and Afghan security. Islamabad was subjected to sanctions under the Defense Authorization Act of 2019 that included the Financial Action Task Forces (FATF) and the suspension of military and economic assistance. In addition, military support to Pakistan under coalition support fund was also put on hold (Hassan et al., 2020).

When Biden administration came to power, it exercised a cautious diplomatic approach with Islamabad. For Biden, withdrawal from Afghanistan in February 2020 was an important step in which Pakistan played an important role. However, post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan, no credible warmth in Pak-US relations was observed. The strategic relationship between the US and Pakistan throughout the War on Terror have been complicated, influenced by both regional and international factors. It is worth noting that since US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Pakistan has suffered an estimated 70,000 casualties and \$130 billion in economic losses due to terrorism (Sadia, 2023) Finding a middle ground to strengthen Pak-US strategic cooperation on issues pertaining to Afghanistan and regional security has always been a complex undertaking (Iqbal, 2026).

This article discusses the political, economic, and security aspects of US-Pakistan relations during presidency of Trump and Biden through the lens of neorealism and constructivism. The study also looks at the leadership and foreign policy strategies used by both US administrations regarding Pakistan. A qualitative and descriptive method of research is used to evaluate the US-Pakistan relations during presidency of Trump and Biden as well as the Trump 2.0. The study relies on the secondary sources of information including, research articles, books, websites, journal, reports, political leader’s statements, and digital media. Existing literature is analyzed to learn about crucial events and political engagements influencing the US-Pakistan relations particularly during Trump and Biden era.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Through the prism of constructivism and neo-realism, which combine the concepts of popular narratives and power maximization, the bilateral ties between the US and Pakistan can be evaluated. Constructivism and neorealism provide important perspectives on how cognitive narratives and systematic power dynamics influence foreign policy. Being the only hegemon following the end of the Cold War, the US developed a strategy for using both soft and physical power to influence developing nations like Pakistan (Khan 2019). American strategy was also motivated by national security and power maximization to influence events that had ramifications for global and regional security such as the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

Structural realism, articulated by Kenneth Waltz in his famous work “Theory of International Politics,” endorses the idea that power, security, and national interest guide state behavior towards others (Waltz 1979). The US strategy with Pakistan during the Trump administration can be described as being more focused on achieving strategic objectives than forging ideological bonds. A blame game and verbal spat were sparked by President Trump's initial transactional diplomacy strategy. In an attempt to sway Pakistani authorities into their comfort zone, the US employed punitive measures. Given the internal and external issues, including terrorism, economic instability, the political system, democracy, and its connections with China, Pakistan also responded in a measured response.

Owing to its geographical dynamics, threat perceptions, and financial constraints, Pakistan has pursued a calibrated strategy of alignment with both China and the US, reflecting a realist perspective of security maximization rather than ideological commitment. From a structural realist perspective, Pakistan’s behavior illustrates the conduct of a secondary state operating within an

anarchic international system, seeking to avoid overdependence on any single major power while preserving strategic autonomy.

During the administration of Donald Trump, the US employed coercive instruments—including the suspension of military and economic assistance—to compel behavioral change, consistent with power-based bargaining dynamics. However, Washington’s overarching interest remained the ending of decades-long Afghanistan conflict, which had imposed immense human and economic costs to Washington. This convergence of interests created space for mutual cooperation, leading to the 2020 Doha agreement between the US and the Afghan Taliban. From a constructivist standpoint, the shift from accusatory rhetoric to conditional engagement also reflected a recalibration of narratives surrounding Pakistan’s role in the peace process. Thus, both material interests and evolving perceptions interacted to shape the US–Pakistan engagement during this period.

Constructivism emerged in the 1970s with a focus on how identities, perceptions, and narratives shape and influence the foreign policy of a state. President Trump's use of *twitter diplomacy* to acknowledge and value Pakistan's participation in Afghanistan, moving from “lies and deceit to do more,” is an example of how shifting narratives influence policies (Khan, 2010). Pakistan, on the other hand, welcomed this transition and reaffirmed its commitment to deepen Pak-US relations based on mutual interests during Prime Minister Imran Khan’s meeting with President Trump in July 2019.

A combination of opportunities and obstacles for strategic relationships between the US and Pakistan is highlighted by the simulation of both constructivism and structural realism. Even during a crisis, minimal engagement is guaranteed by the structural support of cooperation in counterterrorism and regional stability issues. Finding common ground for strategic collaboration between the US and Pakistan is further constrained by competing geopolitical priorities, indicating that their relationship will likely remain transactional and interest-driven rather than transformational in character

### **Historical Perspective**

The US-Pakistan relationship, established in beginning of the Cold War, has always been dynamic and shaped by shifting geopolitical realities. Pakistan has traditionally sought to overcome its threat perceptions viz-a-viz India by developing strategic relations with global powers. Pakistan aligned with the US through security pacts such as CENTO (1954) and SEATO (1955) to augment its military capabilities for counterbalancing India, while Washington viewed Islamabad as a key partner in containing communism in South Asia (Ali et al., 2023). However, Pakistan-US relations soured when Islamabad received no credible assistance from Washington during 1965 and 1971 wars.

Although cooperation deepened significantly during the Soviet-Afghan War leading to US supported military modernization of Pakistan armed forces, but it fractured again following Soviet retreat from Afghanistan and growing trust deficit over development of Pakistan’s nuclear deterrent. This led to imposition of sanctions on Pakistan by US under the Pressler Amendment in the 1990s (Javaid et al., 2014). However, this sanctioned era was brief and ended after 9/11 when US approached Pakistan once again, albeit in a coercive manner this time, for supporting US led War-on-Terror in Afghanistan (Khan et al., 2024). Following 9/11, Pakistan once again became central to US strategy as a frontline state in the War-on-Terror, providing logistical and intelligence support in exchange for economic and military assistance. However, persistent US demands to “do more,” expanding drone strikes, and incidents such as the Abbottabad raid and Salala episode strained bilateral trust. Under President Obama, relations continued but became increasingly transactional, with US-India strategic convergence and ongoing counterterrorism concerns limiting deeper alignment.

First Trump administration adopted an assertive stance towards Pakistan, suspended security packages, and openly criticized Islamabad policies. Still, pragmatic collaboration resumed as Washington sought Pakistan’s assistance for negotiation with Afghan Taliban materializing in the form of Doha Agreement in 2020. Warmth developed in final phase of Trump administration, particularly after meeting with PM Imran Khan, faded quickly once again. When President Biden came to White House, he adopted a policy of strategic de-prioritization towards Pakistan post US withdrawal from Afghanistan. He focused more towards great-power competition with China – thus enhancing India’s strategic importance and wearing out Russia in Ukraine war. Engagement with Pakistan became increasingly limited to selective cooperation. Trump 2.0 presidency, once again resumed the momentum of Pak-US relations, specifically post Indo-Pak May 2025 conflict – which

resulted in repeated interaction between Trump and Pakistan political and military leadership. Nevertheless, the past trends suggest that Pak-US relations will remain interest-driven, relying on economic and security leverage while operating within a transformed regional environment marked by US-India alignment and deepening China-Pakistan cooperation. A breakdown of Pak-US bilateral relations is tabled below:

<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Key Events</b>	<b>Pakistan position</b>	<b>US stance</b>	<b>Nature of Relationships</b>
1954-1955	Mutual Defense Assistance; Entry into SEATO & CENTO	PM Muhammad Ali Bogra emphasized alignment with the West for security against India and communism	Sec. of State John Foster Dulles framed Pakistan as a “frontline state” in Cold War containment	Strategic Cold War Alliance
1965	Indo-Pak War & US Arms Embargo	President Ayub Khan expressed disappointment at US neutrality and arms suspension.	President Lyndon B. Johnson imposed arms embargo on both India and Pakistan	Strategic Frustration
1971	Bangladesh Crisis	President Yahya Khan facilitated US–China rapprochement.	President Richard Nixon tilted diplomatically toward Pakistan despite internal concerns.	Tactical Convergence
1979–1988	Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan	President Zia-ul-Haq declared Pakistan a “frontline state” against Soviet expansion.	President Ronald Reagan praised Pakistan as a key ally in defeating Soviet aggression.	High Strategic Alignment
1990	Pressler Amendment Sanctions	PM Benazir Bhutto termed sanctions unjust and discriminatory.	President George H. W. Bush halted military aid over nuclear concerns.	Strategic Disengagement
2001–2008	Post-9/11 War on Terror Alliance	President Pervez Musharraf, stating Pakistan would act in its “supreme national interest.”	President George W. Bush designated Pakistan a “major non-NATO ally.”	Renewed Strategic Alliance
2011	Bin Laden Raid & Trust Deficit	PM Yousaf Raza Gillani called the Abbottabad raid a violation of sovereignty	President Barack Obama defended unilateral action as necessary for US security	Severe Trust Crisis
2018	Aid Suspension	PM Imran Khan argued Pakistan had “fought America’s war.”	President Donald Trump accused Pakistan of “lies and deceit” and suspended security aid.	Strategic Estrangement
2022–Present	Recalibrated Engagement	PM Shehbaz Sharif advocated “geo-economics” and diversified diplomacy	President Joe Biden acknowledged Pakistan’s role in counterterrorism while prioritizing Indo-Pacific strategy	Limited Functional Cooperation

*Table 1: Breakdown of Pak-US bilateral relations*

**Outset of the US South Asia Strategy post Obama Administration**

Since beginning of War-on-Terror, collaboration in counter-terrorism efforts has been the defining aspect of Pak-US relations. Pakistan, being the frontline ally, played a crucial role in providing intelligence and logistics to NATO forces deployed in Afghanistan and conducted numerous intelligence-based operations (IBOs) in its own territory. However, Washington repeatedly pressed Islamabad for not doing enough against militant networks, and kept pushing the so-called “Do More” demand from Islamabad during Obama administration. Similarly, frequent US drone attacks on Pakistan mainland against terror outfits succeeded in neutralizing higher leadership of terror-networks but also caused significant collateral losses which contributed to increasing tensions between Washington and Islamabad.

US-Pakistan ties saw a dramatic change in 2017 with the arrival of President Trump in White House. Unlike past governments which relied significantly on Pakistan for logistical and intelligence support for counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan, Trump openly blamed Pakistan for playing a

double game, i.e., providing “safe havens” to Afghan militant groups on one side while receiving billions and billions of dollars in aid on other side. United States Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) in 2019 suspended further military assistance to Pakistan, including blockade of high-end military hardware like AH-1Z attack helicopters and additional F-16s which Pakistan needed for CT operations (Express Tribune, 2019). The persistent exchange of harsh rhetoric – particularly tweets by President Trump – pushed Pak-US relations into a strained phase once again.

For Pakistan, denial of its contribution and sacrifices in War-on-Terror – including human cost of over 70,000 casualties and billions of dollars of worth economic losses and repeated allegation of harboring militant organizations were utterly unacceptable. In an effort to curb terrorism, Pakistan launched multiple CT operations including Rah-e-Rast (2009), Rah-e-Nijat (2009), Zarb-e-Azb (2014), and Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017) and even launched the National Action Plan. All these measures were tangible evidence of seriousness displayed by Islamabad against terrorism (National Action Plan, 2014). But US skepticism still persisted, particularly regarding cross-border militant networks.

The 2017 US National Security Strategy institutionalized geopolitical reorientation (White House, 2017). It introduced a condition-based approach in Afghanistan instead of time-bound withdrawal. In addition, the strategy recognized India as a key strategic partner in South Asia and supported New Delhi’s growing influence in Afghanistan. India-US signed multiple defense agreements and high-end military hardware was sold to India by US. From US perspective, these moves were meant to counter China’s expanding geopolitical and geo-economic influence (State Department, 2017).

But for Pakistan, this approach was subject of major concern as it deviated from traditional US policy of maintaining balance between Pakistan and India. But the Trump administration ignored this historical and contemporary reality and viewed both nations from different perspectives altogether: Pakistan for stabilizing Afghanistan, and India for containing China. While US diversified defense collaboration with New Delhi to augment India’s traditional military capabilities; it primarily provided military assistance to Pakistan for anti-terror operations. This disturbed the conventional balance of power between both rivals. In parallel, Trump, just like Biden, viewed Pakistan-China deepening relations – particularly functionality of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) – with much concern (Fair & Bharat 2017). During his 2017 visit to Pakistan, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson pressed Pakistan’s leadership for swift military action and insisted that Pakistan’s participation in the peace process in Afghanistan is to be considered a requirement for cooperation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, 2019). Amid decreasing Washington support and growing asymmetry between New Delhi and Islamabad, Pakistan started working to strengthen its relations with China and began exploring new options, like Russia, to expand its foreign policy options.

Despite turbulent relations between Washington and Islamabad in early phase of Trump administration, Pakistan still played an important role in facilitating the conduct of US-Afghan Taliban negotiations. Utilizing diplomatic coordination with US Special Representative Zalmay Khalilzad and traditional channels of communication with Afghan Taliban leadership, Pakistan managed to undertake numerous confidence-building measures (CBMs) like prisoner exchange and reduction in violence. Islamabad pivotal contribution in advancing negotiation was also recognized by high-ranking US officials, particularly Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (Gul, 2018). These negotiations eventually resulted in the Doha Agreement (2020), and subsequently the end of US longest war. This success once again proved that Pak-US foreign relations are structured in such a pattern that even amid multiple political disagreements, shared interests repeatedly compel Washington and Islamabad to re-establish pragmatic cooperation.

#### **US-Pakistan Uncertain Strategic Partnership**

President Trump strengthened India’s position to counter China. Trump used a buck-passing tactic to increase pressure on India in South Asia during Modi’s June 2017 visit to Washington (Fair, 2017). Previously, the US-Indian Civil Nuclear Deal (2008), the 2014 Mutual Defense Partnership, technology transfer, and the “Made in India” campaign contributed to the country’s economic expansion. Regional security remained vulnerable due to relative isolation of Pakistan as a result of President Trump’s assertive stance and his lenient position towards India. Despite its sacrifices, the US did not provide Pakistan the same power that India exercises.

Prior to former Prime Minister Imran Khan's 2019 visit to the White House, the US implemented a plan to keep Pakistan involved in the withdrawal from Afghanistan during the Trump administration (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, 2019). Trump displayed his need for Pakistan to negotiate a peace agreement in Afghanistan by taking a combative approach that put pressure on Pakistan within the international community. Pakistan saw great success during this time, and the US requested its help. Pakistan's relationship with the Afghan Taliban who seized control of Afghanistan later in February 2020 caused it to backfire sooner rather than later. Recognizing the stakes, President Biden approached Pakistan with caution and requested assistance in stabilizing Afghanistan.

The Indo-US nuclear accord, the defense cooperation framework, and the international community's support for India are the main drivers of Pakistan's security concerns. Major countries like the US are drawn to South Asia because of its fragile security environment, long-standing rivalry over Kashmir, and deterrence policy. In his book "Geographical Pivot," Robert Kaplan stated that the US' inclination toward India would dictate the geopolitics of the twenty-first century in the context of US-China confrontation (Kaplan, 2010).

**Personality Influence of President Trump and President Biden on US-Pakistan Relations**

US policy in South Asia has evolved over decades, shaped both by enduring strategic interests and by the distinct priorities of successive administrations. Presidents such as Donald Trump and Joe Biden have approached the region through differing lenses, imprinting their own strategic preferences and diplomatic styles on policy execution. Notwithstanding these variations, core US concerns have remained relatively consistent—most notably engagement in Afghanistan, regional stability, and counterterrorism cooperation (Shamim, 2025). While these structural interests provide continuity, the tone, emphasis, and instruments of policy under Trump and Biden have diverged markedly, reflecting contrasting assessments of risk, alliance management, and the broader geopolitical environment.

To sway international leaders, President Trump used a confrontational and crude tone. The already fragile relationships were exacerbated by his determined actions. President Biden, on the other hand, adopted a more sophisticated strategy for handling Afghanistan, avoiding a verbal spat, engaging in multilateral engagement, and utilizing a variety of forums to allow US-Pakistan relations to flourish.

The current geopolitical environment influenced the policies of both President Trump and Biden administrations on issues pertaining to peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan was then commended for its pivotal involvement in the peace process during the Trump administration. One pivotal point was Donald Trump's shift from blaming Pakistan for supporting terrorism to viewing Pakistan as a responsible and important South Asian nation. Pakistan saw the efforts and decided not to engage in blame-game tactics. A key step in stabilizing Afghanistan was the Afghan peace settlement and peacemaking efforts for long term stability.

The US' predisposition and buck-passing towards India heighten more concerns about US-Pakistan relations and jeopardize Pakistan's interests. Amid geopolitical worries, Presidents Trump and Biden both embraced pro-Indian policies, opposing China and bringing allies to the Indian Ocean shore. Pakistan was offended by the Indo-US nuclear deal, the US backing India's UNSC bid, India's NSG membership, and Trump and Modi's speeches at joint rallies (Clary, 2025). India is considered a strategic partner, although Pakistan has not received a comparable acknowledgment in spite of all the sacrifices it made for the US war in Afghanistan. In an effort to keep up harmony between India and Pakistan, President Biden avoided openly highlighting India's involvement.

Another point of disagreement is that Trump, a Republican, has little interest in human rights, democracy, developing nations, or the fight against climate change. Floods have impacted many areas of Pakistan, causing millions of people to migrate to other areas and experience numerous difficulties. Extremism undermined the economic growth and internal stability. President Trump was more focused on American interests and more realistic in foreign policy. President Biden lambasted Pakistan for being devoid of a fair democratic process, freedom of speech, and human rights record. Biden's emphasis on liberal order is one example of how both presidents' approaches to other nations mirror their larger foreign policy philosophies.

<b>Category</b>	<b>Trump Administration (2017–2021)</b>	<b>Biden Administration (2021–24)</b>	<b>President Trump 2.0 (2024–Present)</b>
Foundational Policy Document	<b>2017 US NSS:</b> Accused Pakistan of providing safe havens to terrorists while	<b>2022 National Security Strategy (NSS):</b> Mentions Pakistan mainly in nuclear	"America First" revival with sharper emphasis on burden-sharing and

	receiving US aid.	security and counterterrorism context; India central to Indo-Pacific strategy	transactional diplomacy. Pakistan likely framed through counterterrorism and China-competition lens rather than partnership narrative
Opening Strategic Signal	January 1, 2018 tweets: “The US has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid... they have given us nothing but lies & deceit.”	No confrontational opening statement; administration avoided public antagonism and maintained low-profile engagement	Based on prior rhetoric, likely public emphasis on Pakistan’s accountability in counterterrorism and financial transparency. Tone may return to conditional engagement rather than quiet diplomacy.
Major Policy Action	Suspension of approximately \$1.3 billion in security assistance (2018).	Limited restoration of military training (IMET) and continued diplomatic engagement; no full aid restoration.	Security aid likely conditional; restoration only if linked to measurable counterterrorism outcomes. Preference for leverage-based diplomacy rather than unconditional assistance.
Afghanistan Policy Linkage	Publicly pressured Pakistan to “do more” against Taliban; relied on Islamabad to facilitate Taliban-US talks (Doha Agreement 2020).	Relied on Pakistan for logistical and intelligence coordination during 2021 withdrawal; adopted “over-the-horizon” counterterrorism strategy.	If instability resurges in Afghanistan, Pakistan may again become operationally relevant. Otherwise, limited sustained focus.
Public Framing of Pakistan	Frequently framed Pakistan as unreliable partner.	Framed Pakistan as important for regional stability and counterterrorism, but not a strategic ally.	Framed Pakistan as a responsible regional actor, competitor to India, and strong military revival of partnership
India Factor (Leader Position)	Strengthened US–India strategic partnership; praised India’s regional role repeatedly.	Institutionalized India as key Indo-Pacific partner; limited balancing language regarding Pakistan.	Continued strengthening of US-India ties under Indo-Pacific balancing strategy. Pakistan unlikely to regain parity in strategic importance relevant to India
Nuclear Security Statements	Expressed concern over nuclear weapons security but no major initiative launched.	2022 Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee speech referred to Pakistan as one of the “most dangerous nations” due to nuclear weapons without cohesion—later clarified diplomatically.	Possible renewed rhetoric expressing concern over nuclear stability and internal cohesion. Nuclear security may be cited as justification for engagement or pressure.
Engagement with Pakistani Leadership	Meeting with PM Imran Khan (2019): Trump offered mediation on Kashmir (later diplomatically softened).	Limited high-level engagement; no early phone call after taking office; engagement increased after 2022 floods and CT cooperation.	Frequently exchange of meetings on official level, Pakistan’s Army Chief appreciated by Trump
Tone of Diplomacy	Public pressure, aid conditionality, transactional bargaining.	Quiet diplomacy, bureaucratic engagement, issue-specific cooperation.	Direct, leader-driven, appreciation of Pakistan success in Pahalgam crisis
Strategic Outcome	Relationship moved from coercion to tactical cooperation (Taliban deal facilitation).	Relationship recalibrated to functional but low-priority engagement.	Relationship remains transactional, crisis-dependent, and influenced heavily by US–China competition dynamics

*Table 2: Comparison of President Donald Trump-President Biden policies*

**Trump 2.0 and Pakistan: Future Prospects**

The second term of President Donald Trump reflects a continuation of his first term’s structural recalibration in US foreign policy. Instead of adopting post WW-II “rules-based international order,” rhetoric, Trump has continued a more explicit interest-driven approach centered on “America First” doctrine (Franco, 2026). Instead of continuing liberal order underpinned by alliances, multilateral institutions, and trade regimes, Trump seeks to minimize strategic overextension, particularly in the Europe and the Middle East, while focusing his efforts and resources on containing China. This has redefined the interaction with traditional allies. NATO members are now compelled by Washington to spend more on defense and play a primary role in resolving Europe-centric issues. While some analysts criticize this as an isolationist and disruptive approach, rest consider it a necessary adaptation to a rapidly transforming world marked by the rise of China as a competing power to the US (Irfan et al., 2022).

In parallel, for Trump, the Western Hemisphere has reemerged as a central strategic focus reminiscent of the Monroe Doctrine – an approach now labelled the Monroe Doctrine (Popli 2026). From arresting Venezuela President Nicolás Maduro using military means, to repeatedly signaling ambition to acquire Greenland, Trump 2.0 is specifically focused on strengthening its control over Western Hemisphere while ironing out Chinese, Russian, and even Iranian influence from North and South American continents (Popli, 2026). This broader global recalibration is creating new modes of diplomatic engagements. In a system where historical relations are being overshadowed by tangible interests, middle powers capable of achieving shared interests with the US have regained relevance. It is within this context that Pakistan has experienced a significant repositioning in strategic calculus of the Trump administration.

Under Trump’s second term, Pakistan has moved from diplomatic marginalization to renewed strategic engagement. This transition became more apparent after the Indo-Pak May 2025 conflict which saw air-to-air combat leading to downing of multiple Indian Air Force (IAF) combat aircrafts by Pakistan Air Force (PAF) and exchange of drone attacks and missile strikes by both militaries across the border (Clary, 2025). The conflict, despite initial escalation, came to a halt rather quickly. President Trump’s repeated claim of mediating the conflict to avoid nuclear escalation between both nuclear rivals, was diplomatically endorsed by Pakistan. Islamabad nominated Trump for Nobel Peace Prize, however, no credible appreciation for Trump were observed from the Indian side (Matza, 2025).

More importantly, Pakistan leveraged strategic, diplomatic, and economic incentives to reconfigure and diversify Pak-US relations. For example, Islamabad welcomed US investment in rare earth minerals and critical resource extraction from Pakistan—areas crucial for Washington to minimize its dependency on Chinese rare earth minerals supply chains. In addition, Pakistan enhanced counterterrorism cooperation with US particularly by providing intelligence support in neutralizing key terrorist figures linked to attacks on US personnel in Afghanistan.

These measures have delivered positive outcomes for Pakistan. The US approved financial support and modernization packages for PAF F-16 fleet, signaling renewed defense engagement. Tariff structures were recalibrated more favorably relative to regional competitors, representing leverage in bilateral economic engagement. Very recently, Trump even dubbed Pakistan as a responsible nuclear power – a statement of significant symbolic importance highlighting a complete deviation from narrative that India has always attempted to push regarding Pakistan’s nuclear deterrent.

These renewed engagements do not represent abandonment of US-India relations. However, friction has been observed between Washington and New Delhi. Although the US has renewed 10-year strategic agreement with India and still views India as potential option for countering China, yet India’s persistent relations with Russia – including continuous purchase of Russian oil and India’s attempts to exercise “strategic autonomy” in international politics have been viewed with great concern by Trump administration. This is evident in Trump’s tariff warfare where he has specifically targeted India by imposing 50% tariffs on Indian exports (Iqbal, 2026).

For Pakistan, every step which distances India and the US provides it an opportunity to capitalize on its own interests. Pakistan’s geostrategic location, connecting Central Asia, Middle East, and South Asia, and its proximity to the Strait of Hormuz, makes it a crucial player that the US simply cannot afford to abandon. For Islamabad, developments since return of Trump presidency allowed it

to consolidate its relations with US without compromising its long-standing relationship with China. Rather than replacing Beijing with Washington, Pakistan appears to be diversifying its external alignments to maximize economic and security benefits.

Ultimately, Trump 2.0's approach highlights a broader transition in US foreign policy—from value-driven multilateralism toward interest-driven bilateralism. Within this transforming framework, Pakistan has exhibited agility in adapting to the new rules of engagement. Whether this recalibrated collaboration will augment into sustained strategic cooperation will depend on ability of both nations to carefully materialize shared interests without reviving the trust deficit that has historically undermined bilateral relations.

### **Conclusion**

When observed from the lens of structural realism, the evolution of US policy toward Pakistan across President Trump's first term, President Biden's administration, and now President Trump's second term, has been undertaken primarily by systematic pressure generated by intensifying power politics rather than personality driven phenomenon. President Trump first term saw degradation of Pak-US bilateral relations only to be revived later in few years. While President Joe Biden focused on selective engagement with Pakistan, Trump in his second term has once again adopted transactional pragmatism that prioritizes strategic utility over normative alignment. For Pakistan, this transition allowed it to realign itself as a credible geopolitical player by taking leverage of its geostrategic location, military prowess, and above all political willingness to achieve shared interests with the US. In the structural realist terms, both states have recalibrated their interaction in accordance with relative gains, threat perceptions, and the imperatives of positional advantage within an increasingly multipolar order. From the constructivist viewpoint, Pakistan's repositioning as a credible geopolitical player—leveraging its geostrategic location, military capabilities, and demonstrated political willingness to cooperate—reflects not merely structural opportunity, but an active reshaping of identity and role conception in relation to the US. Similarly, Washington's diversified engagement in South Asia signals an evolving understanding of partnership that privileges functional alignment over normative convergence. The future trajectory of Pak-US relationships will not be determined by idealistic expectation, but in the effective pursuit of interest-driven cooperation that pragmatically aligns regional stability, deepens economic interdependence, and secures reciprocal strategic interests within an increasingly multipolar international order.

### **Recommendations**

**Sustained Strategic Dialogue Mechanism:** At this crucial point in the changing regional landscape, Pakistan and the US must adjust to and institutionalize yearly strategic conversation on security-related issues. To improve bilateral relations, both nations must participate in regular diplomatic exchanges, high-level political involvement, and military diplomacy.

**Institutionalize Counterterrorism Framework:** Pakistan and the US need to work together on cross-border terrorism challenges, much as they did throughout the war on terror. The hundreds of lives, billions of dollars in economic losses, and infrastructure damage inflicted by foreign militancy which only affects Pakistan should be made right.

**Diplomatic Engagement:** Both nations would need to keep discussing strategic forums and work together on issues of shared interest and worldwide difficulties. In order to resolve Kashmir peacefully through UN resolutions, diplomatic action must also be taken on a global scale.

**Economic Partnerships:** Through platforms like the US-Pakistan Investment and Trade Framework Agreement (TIFA) and Critical Minerals Forums (CMF), Pakistan and the US must increase mutual understanding in order to boost investment and trade.

**Cooperation in Mines and Minerals Development:** Pakistan's unexplored mineral resources, which include rare earth elements, copper, and lithium, offer a chance for strategic economic cooperation. Investment criteria, sustainable extraction methods, and open mining governance can all be supported by the US. In pursuit of enhancing Pakistan's economic resilience, such collaboration would diversify US supply chains.

**Strategic Relevance after Pahalgam Conflict:** Since the United States withdrew from Afghanistan, Pakistan has faced challenges on both the Eastern and Western fronts. The US and Pakistan need to have a same strategic objective since regional security and Pakistan's stability are closely intertwined.

**Education, Cultural and People-to-People ties:** Immigration is another major priority of the US's new National Security Strategy, which tightens regulations to restrict people's freedom of movement.

Pakistan should demand that the US keep funding education, make it easier to obtain visas, and encourage travel.

**Democratic Governance and Institutional Capacity building:** In the future, through non-intrusive institutional collaboration, the US should assist judicial training initiatives, parliamentary exchanges, and governance improvements. Long-term bilateral trust and Pakistan's internal stability will both be improved by bolstering democratic institutions.

**Strengthening Strategic Stability and Crisis Management Mechanism:** Pakistan and the US should discuss nuclear risk reduction, conventional deterrence, and escalation control to collaborate constructively on strategic stability. Early-warning communication channels, reassurance efforts, and support for regional arms-control talks can all help avoid miscalculations in South Asia and reinforce global security.

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