**Choosing between China and America**

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In an apparent attempt to look judicious, Washington has put all at ease particularly smaller countries like Pakistan by consoling that ‘it is not a requirement for any country around the world to choose between the United States and China.’ The unbelievable part came next when the State Department Spokesperson Ned Price last week surprised all those who are closely observing the ice-cold Pak-US relations particularly under the new Biden administration. ‘Pakistan is a strategic partner of the United States. We have an important relationship with the government in Islamabad, and it’s a relationship that we value across a number of fronts. ’In recent times, the only strategic angle in Pak-US relationship has been in the realm of counter-terrorism.

Recent gestures expressed to China in the garb of solidarity indicate that perhaps Islamabad has already decided on which side the balance would tilt as and when the two giants needed moral support of smaller states.

[Weekly inflation goes down by 0.08pc](https://nation.com.pk/11-Feb-2022/weekly-inflation-goes-down-by-0-08pc)

In early December last year, the world witnessed Pakistan abstaining from the first Summit for Democracy hosted by President Biden to strengthen and renew the most sought after way of running a government. This was perhaps the very first time in the checkered history of Pakistan that an invitation from the US President was turned down. Not that anyone participating in the Summit missed Pakistan’s presence, the fact remains that Islamabad was able to convey a couple of strong messages to its ‘strategic partner’. China came first and Pakistan was still disconcerted with the way it was being treated by the US. It was at a time when after waiting for quite some time to receive a telephonic call from Washington, Islamabad had already said ‘absolutely not’ to a request from Washington that would have been acceptable as routine in the hay days of Pak-US relations.

Was PM Imran Khan’s arrival in China on the eve of the Beijing Winter Olympics’ opening ceremony a coincidence or were the visit dates carefully anticipated to avail of yet another opportunity to show solidarity with China? It goes without saying that the slow-paced CPEC and removal of obvious ‘misgivings’ attached to the $62 billion project was at the top of the agenda. Perhaps the IMF-imposed stringent conditions on Pakistan had necessitated a face-to-face meeting with President Xi Jinping hoping for some additional adjustments in debt servicing. Nonetheless, the visit timings are being seen in the context of yet another obvious tilt towards China vis-à-vis the United States. We are aware that following the US announcement of a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics, a number of countries followed suit including Canada, Australia and India.

[WB briefs on current 54 projects worth US$ 12.4bn of Pakistan](https://nation.com.pk/11-Feb-2022/wb-briefs-on-current-54-projects-worth-us-dollar-12-4bn-of-pakistan)

The nation had been told that Pakistan would not desire to be a part of any political bloc but instead wanted to play its role in bridging gaps between China and the US. However, the recent signaling from Islamabad clearly indicates an obvious tilt towards China. Or, is one looking too deep into it unnecessarily? The ‘bridging the gap’ part is also missing from the scene.

The recently released National Security Policy (NSP), inter alia, aims at seeking ‘areas of convergence with the United States in trade, investment, connectivity, counterterrorism, security, and intelligence cooperation.’ By tilting the foreign policy balance in favour of China, a time-tested friend, isn’t Pakistan inadvertently seeking an area of divergence insofar as its bilateral relationship with the US is concerned? Another obvious paradox could be found in the beginning of the chapter on Foreign Policy. Explaining the ‘External Context’, the NSP reveals that ‘Pakistan also maintains mutually beneficial relationship with all major powers and will further these based on commonality of interest.’ Fortunately, the NSP is subject to an annual revision. Hopefully, someone will remove the obvious anomalies contained in this important policy document.

[Rise to the Challenge with the All-New Redmi Note 11 Series](https://nation.com.pk/11-Feb-2022/rise-to-the-challenge-with-the-all-new-redmi-note-11-series)

Does China need Pakistan’s support to safeguard its interests in a global Summit or against the US in any move geared towards the imminent Cold War between the two giants? Would attending the inaugural session of Beijing Winter Olympics help in mending ways with the US in any possible manner? The age-old saying ‘a friend’s enemy is an enemy’ still holds water if one’s vital interests are not attached to the friend’s enemy. Is it inevitable to please China at the cost of Pakistan’s relations with the US? The answer to all these questions is no.

There is no denying the fact that Pakistan and China are joined together in a broad-based, long term ‘All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership’. It is a fact that China is Pakistan’s closest friend, staunch partner and iron brother. Certainly, Pakistan values Chinese support in not only upholding its territorial integrity and national development but also in matters of its national vital interests.

[Whole world praised govt's policies to curb Covid-19: PM Imran](https://nation.com.pk/11-Feb-2022/pdm-decides-to-bring-no-trust-motion-against-pti-govt)

However, the nature of the bilateral equation needs to be understood in its true perspective. To begin with, it is not on equal footings. Being a world power, China might be able to confine India’s nefarious designs against Pakistan at various multi-lateral forums including the United Nations but its trade and economic relations with India keep on flourishing. On the other hand, Pakistan can perhaps ill-afford to take any pro-China stance particularly against the US. Agreed, the gestures such as not attending the Summit for Democracy are but essential to keep the Sino-Pak trajectory on the right path. Nevertheless, the costs involved must also be kept in mind. One has not seen any report on China restricting Pakistan from creating goodwill towards the US. It would be highly antithetical for China.

There is a need to find a way in which China remains a steadfast friend but in the process the US is not annoyed. As today’s friends could be tomorrow’s enemies and vice versa, Pakistan must take every step with great caution. Pending a decision on choosing between China and America, Pakistan may grab the opportunity of still being a ‘strategic partner’ of the US and try achieving a ‘broad-based’ bilateral trajectory rather than staying in the narrow street of counterterrorism.