**Challenges of Pakistan Foreign Policy**

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September 26, 2022

Referring to geopolitical and geostrategic compulsions means you are talking about a country’s history, geography, foreign policy and national interest. Analyze the interests and core objectives of world big powers and important regional actors and you can easily determine your path to sustain and flourish as a country. Pakistan’s geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economics compulsions are as clear as daylight. Without putting your own house in order first, you may not even think of having a balanced foreign policy.

The question is: Have the policy-makers been focused on having a balanced foreign policy for Pakistan? Or, does it all depend on the government of the day and its priorities? Unfortunately, as in the case of dealing with internal politico-economic challenges, the approach to foreign policy has also been of ‘crisis management’ by making stop-gap arrangements. A cursory look at various important eras since independence may help in understanding the absence of a sustained foreign policy.

[Far-right leader Giorgia Meloni claims victory in Italy’s general elections](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Sep-2022/far-right-leader-giorgia-meloni-claims-victory-in-italy-s-general-elections)

Starting with the exploratory phase during 1947-53, Pakistan tried to have friendly relations with all countries of the world. Then the country saw the West alignment era of CENTO & SEATO during 1953-62 and after having wars with India from 1965-71, it experienced bilateralism and non-alignment from 1972-79. The Russian invasion of Afghanistan marred the years from 1979-89 thereby seriously impacting the socio-economic conditions of Pakistan. Certain ill-conceived ideas during that period are still haunting Islamabad. From 1990-2001, Pakistan had to face the effects of the post-Cold-War era and sanctions.

Pakistan went nuclear in 1998 creating the much-desired balance of power in South Asia. After 9/11, Pakistan saw itself as the frontline State in America’s War-on-Terror. Again, foreign policy was sacrificed at the altar of personal gains. August 2019 witnessed India annexing the disputed territory of Jammu & Kashmir. There goes Islamabad’s Kashmir policy. In August 2021, the Taliban took control of Afghanistan. The fact that no country including Pakistan has officially recognized the government in Kabul speaks volumes about the yawning gap between ‘planning’ and ‘results’. For a number of reasons, dealing with India, Afghanistan and the US have been the main focus of Pakistan’s foreign policy.

[Pakistan’s floods boost calls for compensation to poor nations](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Sep-2022/pakistan-s-floods-boost-calls-for-compensation-to-poor-nations)

Looking at the present geo-strategic and geo-political regional situation, four factors need to be realized if ever Pakistan needs to tread the path of reality. First, that dealing with India, Afghanistan, China and the US is not an emotional matter. It is purely an objective exercise that needs to be undertaken through rational thinking. The driving force would invariably be the national interests of countries and not the so-called mantra of ‘brotherly’ relations. After losing the ‘brotherly’ Iran, KSA and UAE, now the ‘Honey & Himalaya’ relations with China are posing some disturbing questions. Clearly, political uncertainty in Pakistan is not the only reason for not having a balanced foreign policy. There is more to it than meets the eye.

Secondly, Pakistan must realize that it cannot maintain relations with the US on an equal footing. Dealing with a superpower demands extra care, vision and wisdom. The dreadful expression of America’s Af-Pak policy needs to be understood in its true perspective. Islamabad is mistakenly looking at the US as an equal partner. Washington views Pakistan as a South Asian small country that needs to be regularly reminded of its ‘responsibilities’ and ‘commitments’ while equating it with Afghanistan. Hence, the mantra of ‘do more’. Sustained, serious, honest, meaningful and reality-based dialogue seems to be the best possible way for moving ahead.

[PTI protests against PM Shehbaz Sharif’s London visit](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Sep-2022/pti-protests-against-pm-shehbaz-sharif-s-london-visit)

Thirdly, the time has come that Islamabad took Afghanistan as an independent and sovereign country. Let them deal with their internal and external issues themselves. If a twenty-year stay of Western powers could not see even a semblance of the desired ‘peace’ in Afghanistan, let us try to understand Kabul’s own definition of ‘peace’ for its forty-million Afghans. From the Taliban’s diplomacy to cricket grounds, they desire the world to realize that Afghanistan must be left to its own devices. Dealing with extremism and terrorism in the context of Pakistan’s own peace and stability should take precedence over any other consideration. True, that stability in Afghanistan is important for peace in Pakistan. However, it is not the only prerequisite. The devil is in the detail.

Fourthly, the normalization of relations with India could not be achieved for a considerable period of time. History has proved it time and again. There is no need to underestimate or overestimate India. Correct estimation is required to understand the requirements of co-existing with an enemy. You cannot change your geography. Nor are the PMs after Modi expected to roll back on New Delhi’s policy towards Kashmir. Emotionalism must give way to realism. Gone are the days of ‘Crush India’ and Madam Noor Jahan’s milli songs. Let us accept that due to its political stability, bigger consumer market and better diplomatic maneuvering, India remains an important player in the region. The fact remains that the West, led by the US, is using India against China and desires it to keep playing the region’s policeman role.

[Imran khan to spend a busy day in Lahore today](https://www.nation.com.pk/26-Sep-2022/imran-khan-to-spend-a-busy-day-in-lahore-today)

The question is: If France and Germany can form and run the European Union and that too after having a history of perpetual animosity, why can’t the two South Asian nuclear powers follow suit? Agreed, Pakistan and India could not manage even a harmless forum such as SAARC. However, at least give the idea of normalizing relations a serious try. In doing so, both New Delhi and Islamabad may examine if there is a possibility of having peaceful coexistence without mulling over ‘terrorism’ and ‘Kashmir’. Out of the box thinking?

Finally, it must be reiterated that a politically and economically weak country cannot have a balanced let alone a viable foreign policy. It goes without saying that political stability is necessary for economic constancy. No more political experimentations. It’s time to go back to the drawing board, refresh our memory, clear our misconceptions and strategize for the future. Remember, the world never listens to what it doesn’t want to listen to. Hence, complaining would not help. Practical measures need to be envisioned and initiated.