**Challenges of Pakistan Foreign Policy**

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Remember, you need external support even to put your own house in order. Hence, mending ways with the US and normalizing relations is the biggest challenge for Pakistan’s foreign policy right now. Add into it the US desire to restrict relations only to counterterrorism, border security and intelligence sharing while completely ignoring normal economic and trade relations, and Islamabad is facing a huge challenge. The mantra of ‘do more’ still reverberates. Pakistan is expected to take ‘sustained action’ against all terrorist groups. Multiply this ‘sustained’ pressure with the menace of TTP, evasive Taliban, unstable Kabul, imminent threat of extremism, ISIS, Al-Qaida and the West’s apprehensions and things seem to be getting out of hand. While the presence of over 4.2 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan is a challenge that must be looked into immediately.

A word of caution for those optimists who are actively pursuing the normalization of relations with the US. Be very careful in mending ways with the US. Your kitchen must start running but the attached costs in geopolitical and geostrategic terms must be ascertained first before accepting any offer. Let us not repeat our mistakes. The US is an intriguingly interesting country. In the words of Henry Kissinger, ‘We cannot always assure the future of our friends; we have a better chance of assuring our future if we remember who our friends are.’ Therefore, Washington has a propensity to easily forget which side it was on or who its ‘friend’ is soon after achieving its own objectives.

[PM Shehbaz reaches New York to attend UNGA session](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Sep-2022/pm-shehbaz-reaches-new-york-to-attend-unga-session)

The West’s punishment mode and arm twisting through IMF and FATF continues. Depleting economic indicators, rising inflation and the ever-menacing debt burden are causing grave concerns. How to deal with India’s emerging relevance in the China-containment policy is yet another challenge. How to respond to India’s recent provocative actions, beginning with Articles 35-A and 370 to Abhi Nandan to the violation of Pakistan’s territorial waters to Brahmos accidental firing? Starting trade with India is no longer in Pakistan’s hands. Embarrassing India through EU disinfo lab or presenting dossiers have not worked. Former PM wished India to provide a roll-back map on 5th August steps. No response from India. If war is not an option, how to manage Pak-India relations with regard to Kashmir is certainly a huge challenge.

Creating a diplomatic balance between China and the US particularly in view of the emerging cold war, the Ukraine war and Russia-US rivalry is posing an entirely different set of challenges. After Afghanistan, the Ukraine crisis and prevailing tensions in the South China sea, the latest adventure in and around Taiwan does not augur well for the prospects of peace and stability in the region.

[Magnitude 7.7 earthquake strikes Mexico's west coast](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Sep-2022/magnitude-7-7-earthquake-strikes-mexico-s-west-coast)

Palestine issue, Israel’s unwillingness to concede, Iran-Israel, Iran-KSA, Iran’s nuclear programme, Syrian problem—all would have to be factored in to see Pakistan’s geopolitical and geostrategic compulsions. GCC countries particularly KSA and UAE are searching for new security partners after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. On the other hand, we are witnessing sea changes in the foreign policies of GCC countries particularly Saudi Arabia and UAE. The active presence of Russia, China and India in the Middle East and the re-entry of the United States with Biden’s recent visit have once again raised familiar questions. Against this backdrop, PM Sharif’s recent statement is telling if not appalling. He regretted that friendly countries had started looking at Pakistan as a country that was always asking for money. ‘Today, when we go to any friendly country or make a phone call, they think that we have come to beg for money’. How to bring back friends like KSA, Iran and UAE back to the fold? Should Pakistan recognize Israel without awaiting KSA’s position on the subject? Like UAE, if tomorrow KSA offers official recognition to Israel, what would Pakistan’s concerns be? Clearly, the Middle East is Pakistan’s next critical challenge.

[Japan evacuates millions as typhoon batters southern regions](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Sep-2022/japan-evacuates-millions-as-typhoon-batters-southern-regions)

As Beijing has refused to be taken for granted, keeping China on its side has become a challenge for Pakistan. China is gradually moving from ‘pro-Pakistan neutrality’ towards ‘absolute neutrality’. Its recent tilt towards India must worry Pakistan. On the other hand, the newly emerging Quads and other alliances have left almost no diplomatic space for Pakistan to deal with the emerging world dynamics. Pakistan has a negligible role to play at the SCO. No developments worth mentioning are taking place at the Pakistan desk in the United Nations either. With ECO, OIC, D-8 and SAARC becoming almost ineffective, one can imagine the level of Pakistan’s marginalization at multi-lateral forums. To top it all, those who are supposed to face these challenges on the diplomatic front, are being discouraged. The role of ‘the first line of defence’ has been reduced to only issuing press releases, corrigenda and rebuttals.

From a purely security point of view, safeguarding its strategic assets is Pakistan’s foremost priority. On certain technical and political grounds, the powerful Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) has not accepted Pakistan or India as its members. However, the ‘powerful’ knows the capabilities of the two South Asian nuclear powers with a past history of wars. Perhaps, they also have ‘assurances’ that even in extreme circumstances, both sides would refrain from pushing the button. Or, perhaps they would not allow such an eventuality. Whatever the case might be, Pakistan is justified to possess the nuclear know-how even if the West have certain reservations thereon. Understanding the true nature of having such an effective deterrent has been a challenge for Pakistan’s diplomats ever since May 1998. On the other hand, some inner circles do not realize that Islamabad’s nuclear prowess is only for deterring the enemy. It does not reduce your fiscal deficits or increase your GDP growth. Making a distinction between the two diametrically opposite concepts is likely to remain a challenge for Pakistan’s foreign policy in the foreseeable future.

[Senate committee discusses Afghan refugees' issues](https://www.nation.com.pk/20-Sep-2022/senate-committee-discusses-afghan-refugees-issues)

To be concluded.