**Complex Challenges**

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Pakistan is consistently navigating through the intricate web of political wisdom and strategic imperatives while striving to reconcile international and regional pressures with domestic compulsions. The geographic location of Pakistan, wedged between South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East, and bordered by India, Afghanistan, Iran, and China, places it at the intersection of diversified interests and conflicts.

The historical animosity with India primarily shapes the foreign and defence policy choices, while the turmoil in Afghanistan poses significant hurdles to the internal security strategy. The strategic considerations are intricately linked to its interactions with major countries like the USA, China, and Saudi Arabia on both regional and global fronts, requiring smart manoeuvring and diplomatic finesse to safeguard its national interests. Besides, the task of reconciling the conflicting viewpoints of diverse ethnic, linguistic, and sectarian factions presents a formidable obstacle for the leadership in their quest for unity and economic stability.

The intricate history of terrorism in Pakistan can be traced back several decades, with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 playing a pivotal role in the emergence of militant groups and the proliferation of extremist ideologies that received backing from numerous countries, including the USA. In the aftermath of the tragic events of 9/11, Pakistan emerged as a crucial ally in the USA-led war against terrorism, receiving substantial military and economic aid to combat extremist organizations; conversely, witnessed occasional strains in the relationship, particularly concerning clandestine backing of militant groups operating in Afghanistan.

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Consequently, Pakistan is grappling with major hurdles caused by widespread terrorism and extremist factions leading to adverse effects on its economy, security infrastructure, and diplomatic connections with nearby nations under the sway of countries such as the USA and China. The Durand Line has evolved into a hub for extremists and an increasing number of displaced individuals seeking safety within these covert locations, resulting in the emergence of terrorism in many forms, from suicide attacks to factional conflicts and separatist uprisings in Balochistan.

The TTP launched a minimum of 150 terrorist attacks inside Pakistan during the last year, heightening tensions and vulnerability, and evading capture by slipping away to sanctuary in Afghanistan. The lack of assistance by the Afghan government in handling the TTP is a cause for strained relations between the two countries, especially concerning the shared borders between the two nations; the primary focus now is on actively targeting TTP elements, albeit hindered by their movement across into Afghanistan.

Political unrest, coups détat, and incompetent civilian rule have repeatedly disrupted governance, preventing effective solutions to the core issues. Even during periods of civilian rule, the military has often exerted significant influence over the government through various means, including behind-the-scenes interventions, support for certain political parties or leaders, and direct involvement in decision-making on key issues such as national security and foreign policy.

One of the key challenges in the political landscape has been the balancing of power between civilian institutions and the military. The prolonged participation of the Pak Army in counterinsurgency operations raises political concerns, sparking discussions on its role in governance and impact on civilian establishment, especially connected to the issues of financial corruption and declining public confidence in governmental bodies.

The economy is teetering on the edge, burdened by crippling inflation and plagued by perpetual crises, marked by a lack of domestic production and excessive spending, heavily dependent on external borrowing. The economic downturn is exacerbated by domestic political turmoil, as well as escalating worldwide costs of food and fuel.

Even with assistance from the IMF and supportive nations lending funds, averting default might not solve the fundamental issues plaguing the economy. None of the political parties of Pakistan demonstrate the required political resolve or skill to bring about such changes, needing to give back $73 billion by 2025 via debt restructuring.

The waning influence of the post-Cold War American unipolar order has led to heightened competition among key players such as the US, China, and Russia, exacerbated by the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and discord between the US and Global South regarding human rights violations.

The stability of regions like Central Asia, the Middle East, North Africa, the Horn of Africa, and the Sahel is threatened by the decreasing ability of the US to focus on terrorist organizations. The ongoing conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, and Sudan are worsening the situation, while Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan are creating fertile grounds for terrorist groups to thrive. Pakistan indeed faces a complex array of challenges, from balancing relations with major world powers to addressing internal security threats, adapting to emerging technologies, and coping with environmental and climate change challenges. Navigating these strategic dilemmas to ensure effective national security requires a nuanced and multifaceted approach, involving diplomatic efforts, economic reforms, counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency strategies, investments in emerging technologies, and balanced resource allocation to support military modernization.

“The life of a nation is secure only while the nation is honest, truthful and virtuous”. – Fredrick Douglass

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