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**Abstract:** *This research examines the pattern of U.S.-Pakistan ties under President Biden (2021–2024) and pays attention to shifts in the U.S. foreign policy toward Pakistan in this timeframe. After cooperation at times and strife at others, the relationship has reacted to new geopolitical developments, particularly the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. The Biden administration is not focusing primarily on security, but on stability in the region, terrorism, climate change, economic growth and promoting democracy. Critical assessment in this research looks at changes such as Pakistan’s fading role in U.S. strategy, Washington connecting more with India to resist China and Pakistan strengthening its alliances with China and Russia. In addition, the paper outlines the problems caused by lower military and financial aid, less high-level diplomatic contact and U.S. worries over Pakistan’s human rights, free press and deteriorating democracy. It also reviews Pakistan’s handling of these changes such as modifying its foreign policy goals and greater attention to multilateral and regional activities. The analysis is based on official words, papers and research by experts who reveal how the Biden administration is now choosing particular cooperative topics instead of a general strategic alliance with Pakistan. It finds that the relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan, although not destroyed, is now based on fewer trusts and more on acts of utility, watchfulness and terms shaped by worldwide shifts in power. The research takes part in the wider debate about U.S. foreign policy and the geopolitics of South Asia by analyzing how international priorities affect the relationship between the United States and South Asian countries in a world with more than two major powers.*

**Introduction**

The US-Pakistan relationship has been a story of strategic interests, geopolitical calculations and changing global power equations and historic events. During the Cold War, relations have veered through cycles of cooperation, confrontation and repositioning. These tides rose more acutely in the post-9/11 era, as Pakistan emerged as a crucial partner for the United States in its counterterrorism efforts. But U.S.–Pakistan relations are entering a new phase under the Biden administration and this will be shaped largely by the U.S. withdrawal pattern from Afghanistan, as well as a redefinition of regional strategic interest (Hussain, 2022). Previous U.S. administrations, including those of George W. Bush and Barack Obama, retained security cooperation with Pakistan for years despite other strains in

relations — mainly because of Pakistan's logistical and intelligence support in the War on Terror. The Biden administration has chosen another path, roll backing military cooperation for diplomatic engagement and regional reorientation. This transition is reflected particularly in the administration's more robust links with India in pursuance of its Indo-Pacific orientation targeting China's ascendant role (Lodhi, 2025). The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 was a pivotal moment in the relationship. Pakistan, already a diplomatic conduit between the United States and the Taliban, became an epicentre of Washington's recalibrated South Asia policy. Instead of treating Pakistan as a frontline partner in counterterrorism, the US has instead preferred a policy of selective information-sharing and multilateral involvement with others in the region (Chaudry, 2024). There is, however, on-going apprehension that terrorist groups such as Tehrek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and ISIS - Khorasan (ISIS-K) may regroup but that is now being factored in under a broader regional approach.

Human rights, democracy and governance have also become new priorities under the Biden administration. U.S. officials are concerned with Pakistan's domestic policies, including limits on press freedom, the independence of the judiciary and the treatment of opposition forces. While these criticisms have cast a pall over the ties, they also signal the revival of US interest in democratic norms in foreign policy, alongside pragmatic concerns (Hussain, 2022). While its role in military combat has declined, Pakistan is still active in the region. The Biden administration's stance is a balancing one, ceding that Pakistan is strategically situated and might have a role in stabilizing the region but pointing toward partnerships with a number of other countries. It also speaks to larger trends in U.S. foreign policy, in which U.S. security interest, economic considerations and power recalibration in a multipolar world are reframing old alliances. The U.S. policy reorientation by the Biden administration — from a security-heavy alliance to a pragmatic, diplomatically diversified relationship — raises important questions. Questions loom about the future of bilateral relations as Pakistan is gradually fading in the U.S. strategic calculus due to changing regional alignments and its abysmal human rights record. This article analyses these changing dynamics and their impact on regional security, counterterrorism collaboration, and the larger trajectory of U.S.–Pakistan ties.

### Literature Review

The dynamics of U.S.–Pakistan relations have been historically shaped by Pakistan's geopolitical location and its strategic imperatives. Pakistan's foreign policy and its security concerns Pakistan's foreign policy, right from its birth, has been very much the other name of Pakistan defence policy. Picture Box Size Mode: Aladdin Khan Pakistan's formulation of foreign relations and treaties with US for its defence or security is very much the Legacy of American foreign and security policy. This alignment was further solidified during the Cold War; in return for economic and military aid, Pakistan signed-up to a number of Western-led security pacts such as SEATO and CENTO. But the heady days started to cloud in the late 1970s when America became aware of Pakistan's nuclear ambitions. The former incident — which helped erode trust and halt aid — was an early moment of tumult in the relationship. The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 re-awakened U.S. interest in Pakistan, which had become the front-line state in the fight against Soviet occupation. These years were also marked by another round of heavy inflow of military and civilian aid from Washington, which further solidified Pakistan's strategic prominence (Wright 2011). But with the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, this partnership rapidly eroded. U.S. aid was cut off in the 1990s, when the Pressler Amendment came into force, enhancing the sense of American unreliability in Pakistan. The situation deteriorated with Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998 which were the reason that the Glenn Amendment was invoked leading to more U.S. sanctions.

However, in spite of those setbacks, the attacks of September 11, 2001 provided a fresh strategic rationale for collaboration. Pakistan was also declared a major non-NATO ally, and was invited to fight the War on Terror. According to Jabeen et al. (2010), who noted that in this period, Pakistan was openly supporting U.S. military efforts in Afghanistan and engaging in intelligence sharing with the U.S. But even in the midst of this ostensible harmony, there were major tensions. American fears about militant sanctuaries in Pakistan, and Pakistani accusations of American overreach -- especially in the use of drones -- helped create a trust deficit which impeded a longer-term strategic alignment.

A game-changer was the U.S. pull-out from Afghanistan in 2021 that changed the regional security calculus fundamentally. Critics contend that the withdrawal of the U.S. was premature / obligatory and was not accompanied with a comprehensive plan to rehabilitate post conflict Afghanistan and that the empty space so created was filled by Taliban (Akbar, 2015). Pakistan's widely held image of secretly propping up the Taliban had only intensified the bad blood. This sentiment has stood out especially sharply during the administration of President Joe Biden, when mistrust between the two countries has soared, undermining the years of diplomatic goodwill cultivated through decades of security collaboration. The failure of US-Pakistan relations in the post-Afghanistan world has to be viewed through the prism of several intertwining geopolitical transitions. Ahmar (2021) lists three fundamental causes for this decline: the altered regional situation after America's withdrawal, the worsening of Pakistan-India relations and the escalating competition between the United States and China in the region. Pakistan's deepening economic and political integration with China – as emblematised by the CPEC – could hardly be further at odds with the US Indo-Pacific strategy, which is aimed at countering Beijing's growing ascendancy. This has led to a structural divergence between Pakistan's foreign policy trajectory and America's emerging strategic stakes in the Asian heartland.

The U.S. remained more guarded and transactional towards Pakistan under the Biden Administration. As Kazmi and Shabbir (2024) argue, this two-track policy placed a premium on minimal-type of counterterrorism cooperation, and at best insulated itself from deeper political engagement. As Afzal (2023) claims, the Biden Administration absence of strategic clarity towards Islamabad while pivoting towards India and East Asia pushed Pakistan into isolation. This absence of clarity created a void in bilateral diplomacy, in which neither side could delineate a clear vision for future cooperation. Ali (2021) substantiates this argument and remarks that U.S. policy makers were facing a difficulty in placing Pakistan against the backdrop of their global agenda, as they had started to tilt towards East Asia and the containment of China. The post-withdrawal diplomatic engagement focused even more narrowly on concrete tactical matters, such as intelligence sharing and management of Afghan refugees, rather than producing much progress in terms of broader political coordination. As observed by Chaudhry (2023), multi-dimensional relationship was turned into short term functionalism, and that long term strategic trust was eroded. Malik (2024) argues that this withdrawal was affected by internal political machinations within Pakistan that had eroded American trust in Islamabad's governing foundations. The military-civilian imbalance, the gutting of democratic institutions and the deepening economic crisis all factored into Washington's risk calculations. As Hussain (2021) argues, the Biden administration's disengagement was not just a tactical change; it was part of a broader strategic reorientation that favoured alliances whose relationship rested on shared democratic values, environmental collaboration and economic resilience.

With no prospect of engagement at a higher level, Pakistan started to readjust its foreign policy more firmly towards other options, such as China, Turkey and Russia. Although military-to-military contact with the U.S. never ceased, the level of political dialogue withered, as Khan (2023) has noted. Most symbolically, there was no formal tête-à-tête between President Biden and the then-Prime Minister Imran Khan—a point that Burki (2021) as well as Yousaf (2021) have used to show the deteriorating calculus of Pakistan in U.S. foreign policy. According to Zuberi (2024), Pakistan's growing strategic closeness to China has sequestered Islamabad outside realms of U.S. interest, and absent meaningful domestic reform, Pakistan faces marginalization in the emerging world order. NO WANING Even so, some channels of bilateral cooperation have endured the overall retreat. Some new areas of engagement have been emerging, as Blome (2025) argues: climate resilience, public health, educational exchanges, and renewable energy. (Abdul Hameed 2023)It is also important for Pakistan to use this opportunity in order to "broaden" its relationship with the U.S, to overcome "security dependency" and instead focus on democratic governance, economic restructuring and technological modernization. (Lodhi 2024) Hussain (2023) and Afzal advise the on-going American disengagement will lead to a growing risk of Pakistan slipping in to China's sphere of influence, diminishing US influence in South Asia. They suggest incorporating Pakistan into regional institutions dealing with climate change, counterterrorism and economic development.

Economic relations represent one of the few constants of the relationship. As Burki and Kamran (2021) note, the United States remains Pakistan's biggest export partner, despite diplomatic differences. This in turn emphasizes the stabilizing role that economic partnership may play in the relations. Without internal stability in Pakistan however, such cooperation is still limited (Stone 2022). Other factors like judicial activism, polarization, and flimsy institutions have undermined Pakistan's value as a trusted ally. As quoted by Kazimi (2025), Blome argues that people-to-people links—such as scholarships and academic exchanges—are still strong, though these do not get much attention in high policy debates.

The American image has also been impacted by the inconsistent quality of Pakistan's domestic governance. Abbasi (2022) argues that chronic political instability made U.S. decision-makers develop a preference for dealing with military interlocutors instead of civilian governments and weakened the democratic structures of Pakistan. Ahmad (2020, 2021) stresses that this imbalance distorts economic cooperation as well. Although the U.S. has been generous with aid, trade is underdeveloped, adding to the sense of frustration in Pakistan where economic demands are mounting. Ahmad points to room for cooperation, in energy and infrastructure, at a time when Pakistan's strategic utility is changing from a military to an economic relationship."

The security risks stemming from the U.S. departure from Afghanistan are as yet worrying. Taliban resurgence and cross-border instability makes Pakistan more vulnerable in this regard, since it allows extremist groups such as TTP and ISIS-K to grow in influence (Akbar, 2015). Hussain (2022) harks back to the Cold War to demonstrate how on-again, off-again bouts of trust and mistrust have undermined the durability of U.S.–Pakistan relations. In the best of times, sheer mutual suspicion — stoked by charges of militant ties, U.S. drone strikes and India's favoured state — has kept long-term cooperation from gaining much purchase. Rizvi (2022) and Junaid (2025) claim that the significance of Pakistan in U.S. foreign policy has waned from a primary to a secondary actor with the ascendance of U.S.–India strategic relations and the rise of China. They are of the view that Pakistan needs to re-define itself, and invest in a different strategic identity than just its historic role as a security partner. Otherwise, it could find itself marginalized in global politics. A recurring theme in the literature is that the relationship remains mired in a pattern of dependency, distrust, and reactive engagement that prevents it from becoming more balanced and future-oriented. This pattern was also reaffirmed in the fallout of Afghanistan in Pakistan's marginal position, at best, in determining the post-Afghanistan regional order. Javaid and Khan underline that with the impending shift in global power centres, Islamabad is in the process of adjusting its foreign policy accordingly. There is more to Pakistan-US relations than just security. Emphasis must be put on economic cooperation, democratic growth and multilateral cooperation. Lastly, unless the JWT is fixed, both countries will find it difficult to leverage these areas of convergence (Hussain 2022). Ultimately, a look through the literature concludes that if Pakistan and the U.S. want to see something come of their relationship in the emerging international system, they ought to move beyond pcr to a relationship characterized by: strategic visibility, mutual esteem, and institutional renewal.

### Objectives

- To analyse the key policy shifts in US-Pakistan relations under the Biden administration.
- To examine the impact of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan on Pakistan's strategic position

### Methodology

This paper utilizes qualitative research design to analyse the changing contours of the US–Pakistan relations under the Biden presidency (2021–2025). Methodology choice is dictated by the nature of the inquiry (which is above all interested in the diplomatic, strategic, and political shifts and not a quantifiable trend). As non-positivist, descriptive methods, qualitative research can facilitate the examination of international relations as complex bounder. (ii) es on and around the basis of narrative, context and meaning. The research is based on secondary data as its main source of information, including academic articles, op eds, think tank reports, policy briefs, and global media coverage. These texts are essential readings to understand the political context, ideological forces, and strategic adjustments behind the development of bilateral relations. The data are analyzed through text analysis to understand how responses post-Afghan withdrawal the U.S. has rearticulated it's on Pakistan.

Analysis focuses on how counterterrorism, regional security, democracy, and economic engagement narratives are discussed in academic and public policy debates.

The research design is interpretivist in nature and underpinned by the soft power theory presented by Joseph Nye. This school focuses on the application of attraction—rather than compulsion—as a technique of influence in international relations. The U.S., under Biden, the study contends, has sought a soft power recalibration involving diplomacy, aid, people-to-people exchanges and trade, in moving away from a militarised cooperation model with Pakistan. Drawing on that paradigm, the study follows the evolution of U.S. attempts to advance democracy, encourage regional stability, and counter terrorism through soft strategy of engagement and how these efforts have shaped bilateral perceptions and results. Drawing on a variety of expert analyses, policy writings and credible journalism, the article thereby builds up a composite picture of how foreign policy choices are being influenced by domestic trajectory in Pakistan as well the broader geopolitics. Yet the approach also enables a more subtle interpretation of the language of diplomacy, strategic posturing, and political behaviour when quantitative data is not available, yielding a richer and contextually contingent interpretation of the evolving landscape of U.S.–Pakistan relations.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The study's conclusions suggest that the policy of the Biden administration toward Pakistan represents a clear departure from the U.S. foreign policy trends of previous years, especially from the security- and military-centric interactions during the War on Terror. The study shows that, even though strategic cooperation continues (such as in counterterrorism and intelligence sharing), the overall nature of the bilateral relationship is now constrained, issue-based, and transactional. The Biden administration, unlike the Bush and Obama administration, which used the Pakistani military infrastructure for operational supports in Afghanistan's battlefields, did not attach the same level of importance to Pakistan's geostrategic relevance anymore. Instead it has shifted U.S. priorities towards the Indo-Pacific, and India as a key strategic partner. This pivot is part of a more general realignment of U.S. foreign policy that relegates Pakistan to the background compared to alliances that work within a countering-China framework.

High-level political participation is certainly one of the most striking results. The lack of direct engagement with Pakistan's senior leadership by President Biden — including the absence of a formal meeting with then-Prime Minister Imran Khan — has been read in diplomatic quarters as a signal of insouciance. Although military to military channels still worked, political and economic discussion was limited. Political inactivity by Washington dovetails with U.S. fears about a democratic backsliding, political chaos and growing links between Pakistan and China. The Biden-style soft power approach discouraged consideration of Pakistan as a value-engagement partner, significantly because of its own governance problems, as well as its ambivalence regarding things like press freedom and civil rights.

But the study also finds that U.S.-Pakistan cooperation has not been completely hollowed out. But soft power channels, such as they were, have assumed greater significance. Institutions offering education exchanges, renewable energy cooperation and climate cooperation programs have created new opportunities for interaction. They have not been as visible as the now-endangered military cooperation, but they represent a quiet shift in the bilateral relationship. Diplomatic communications on development, health, and climate adaptation show that the U.S. wishes to exert pressure on Pakistan through normative instruments and not through force or inducement. This lends credence to Nye's (2004) contention of the power of attraction rather than military domination.

A recurring theme in the report is the on-going lack of trust that prevents effective cooperation. Although they have made attempts at reconciliation, neither side trusts the other. From the U.S. side, Pakistan's inscrutable relationship with the likes of the Afghan Taliban and Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) has raised questions about its reliability as a counterterrorism partner. From Pakistan's perspective, American partiality for India—particularly in the areas of defence and nuclear collaboration—plays into the sense of strategic abandonment. The results discuss as such that this trust is based not only on differential policies but also on contrary security visions to the region. The United States, meanwhile, seems more and happier with playing a smaller role in the region, while



Pakistan sees itself as a mediator in an Afghanistan at peace. Economically, the results indicate asymmetry between trade and aid. Despite the U.S. being Pakistan's greatest market for exports, the economic connections have not led to other levels of engagement. The analysis points to neglected potential benefits in employing trade diplomacy as a stabilizing tool. Reports by think tanks and academic sources reviewed in this study stress repeatedly that persistent economic engagement — especially on such areas as green technology and digital infrastructure — could contribute to less turbulence in the bilateral relationship. But these regions are still under developed due to bureaucratic sluggishness, political distrust and Pakistan's weak economic management.

The findings underscore the continued fallout from Pakistan's deepening dependence on China. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) offers enormous infrastructure and energy investments, but has also helped drive a strategic parting of ways from Western (notably U.S.) partners. This relationship has attracted disapproval from U.S. authorities who see CPEC as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative, a project that is seen as undermining the liberal international order. As a result, Pakistan's further integration with China curtails scope for meaningful U.S. involvement on long-term development plans, governance reform, and the kind of regional diplomacy that is vital for the promotion of a stable Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the results also show that there is still a constituency in both Washington and Islamabad that supports a revival of cooperation. American ambassadors and envoys continue to emphasize the value of people-to-people, educational exchanges, and cultural diplomacy. On the other hand, Pakistani analysts and former diplomats contend that soft power bond rooted in economic and educational exchanges is a more promising way of the future. These voices are pressing for a reset in the relationship — one not just beyond the security calculus but toward a more comprehensive development engagement.

Also, the report suggests, domestic instability in Pakistan has greatly diminished Islamabad's ability to present itself as a reliable long-term partner. The research supports the conclusion that political polarization, the decline of democratic norms and military-civilian tensions together explain U.S. reluctance. As Abbasi (2022) and Stone (2022) both argue (convincingly in my view), U.S. foreign policy under Biden has emphasized the importance of democracies to be resilient, and the domestic scene in Pakistan does not instil confidence in this particular regard. The upshot has been a tactical, ad hoc and overwhelmingly transactional relationship, where maintaining strategic congruence has become ever more challenging.

Finally, the study's conclusion will argue that U.S.–Pakistan relations under Biden have structurally shifted. The partnership has since graduated from a militarized interdependence to a softer soother-based engagement. This transition is a function of not only evolving American strategic interests, but also Pakistan's recalibration in a multipolar world. Although openings for cooperation remain — especially in trade, education and climate diplomacy — seizing them will require more trust in one another, reform of institutions and more agreement on common values. If the two sides can't transcend their legacy of suspicion and reliance, then the relationship could keep sliding into strategic obsolescence.

### Conclusion

President Joe Biden's term from 2021 to 2025 heralded a shift in the trajectory of U.S.–Pakistan relations. Departing from the highly enmeshed defence and strategic cooperation of the past decades, especially during the Cold War and War on Terror, the Biden administration adopted a more cautious, practical, and issue-based approach to dealing with Pakistan. It followed a recalibration driven by several global shifts, including the United States' exit from Afghanistan, the strategic pivot to the Indo-Pacific and the sharpening competition with China. Pakistan, formerly a key cog in U.S. security strategy in South Asia, suffered a relative diplomatic demotion. The move did not break, but it definitely downgraded, bilateral relations in favour of U.S. efforts to elevate the U.S.-India relationship. Its own regional political fragility, the military's disproportionate influence over civilian matters, and a growing alignment with China— particularly through CPEC—made Pakistan's relations with Washington more complicated. However, the research shows that the partnership isn't too rotten to save. On-going areas of collaboration (on counterterrorism, climate resilience, health diplomacy, and educational exchange)

are testament to a legacy partnership. These arenas signify a discernible, yet significant movement from hard power to soft power instruments, consistent with broader patterns of U.S. global engagement. The staying power of such engagements, though, will be tied to how long both countries can adjust to the evolving geopolitical context and how they perform in terms of redefining their strategic importance to each other in areas other than security.

In the end, the direction of US–Pakistan relations belongs in transcending legacy distrust and transnationalism, and moving towards a longer-term relationship based on shared common interests, development goals, and safeguarding shared regional stability.

### Recommendations

1. **Revitalize High-Level Strategic Dialogue:** Establish regular, high-level diplomatic engagement to address critical areas such as regional security, economic cooperation, and governance.
2. **Shift from Aid-Dependency to Trade-Centric Ties:** Prioritize bilateral trade and investment by facilitating private sector partnerships and reducing trade barriers.
3. **Deepen Counterterrorism Coordination:** Expand cooperation through intelligence sharing, joint training, and support for de radicalization and policing reforms.
4. **Support Democratic Governance:** Back democratic resilience through non-intrusive support to institutions like the judiciary, civil society, and media freedoms.
5. **Offer Competitive Alternatives to CPEC:** Provide viable infrastructure and technology investment packages that respect Pakistan's sovereignty while ensuring transparent governance.
6. **Facilitate India–Pakistan Dialogue:** Use neutral channels to promote cross-border cooperation on trade, climate, and security as a pathway to regional peace.
7. **Support Economic Reform in Pakistan:** Collaborate on economic modernization by offering technical expertise, digital innovation, and anti-corruption capacity-building.
8. **Develop a Strategic Vision for Long-Term Engagement:** Craft a joint framework for U.S.–Pakistan relations up to 2030 based on stability, development, and global cooperation.

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