



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>
 Vol. 05 No. 01. Jan-March 2026. Page#. 780-792
 Print ISSN: [3006-2497](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18501056) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18501056)
 Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18501056)
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18501056>



Non-Traditional Security Threats and the Reorientation of Pakistan's Foreign Policy in South Asia (2012–2022)

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Abstract

This study investigates the transformation of Pakistan's foreign policy in South Asia between 2012 and 2022, arguing that traditional security frameworks inadequately capture the dynamics shaping its regional engagement. The central research question explores how non-traditional security (NTS) threats—including terrorism, economic vulnerability, energy and food insecurity, climate change, and cyber challenges—have influenced Pakistan's diplomatic behavior, and to what extent these threats have reoriented policy priorities. Employing a qualitative research design, the study conducts discourse analysis of official policy documents, foreign office statements, strategic speeches, and regional agreements, supplemented by secondary data from multilateral institutions and global security databases. The analysis reveals that Pakistan's foreign policy has undergone a partial but significant recalibration: traditional military-centric strategies remain, yet diplomatic engagement, economic cooperation, and multilateral normative discourse increasingly reflect the securitization of non-traditional threats. This transformation is evident in shifts in India policy toward de-escalation, adaptive Afghanistan strategies in response to border and refugee dynamics, pursuit of geo-economic initiatives such as CPEC, and enhanced engagement in climate and counterterrorism diplomacy. The study contributes to the literature by demonstrating the limits of classical realism in explaining foreign policy in contexts dominated by transnational and non-military threats, offering a layered framework that integrates securitization theory with empirical analysis. Practically, the findings underscore the need for integrated security planning, strengthened institutional capacity, and enhanced regional cooperation mechanisms to effectively address evolving security challenges in South Asia.

Keywords: Non-Traditional Security, Securitization Theory, Pakistan Foreign Policy, South Asian Regional Security, Geo-economics and Diplomacy

1. Introduction

State-centric and militarized paradigms have traditionally defined security thinking in South Asia, and the foreign policy analysis of the state of Pakistan has been rooted in the paradigm of territorial integrity, interstate rivalry, and nuclear deterrent (especially in the context of India). This realist disposition affected the interpretation and the formulation of policies over the decades, with preference being given to the traditional and strategic military threats ahead of non-military sources of insecurity. Nonetheless, the environment of post-2011 facilitated more and more the revelation of the restrictions of such a limited security framework. Rises of transnational terrorism, economic challenges, natural disasters, and cyber terrorism, and global governance strains have essentially complicated the security environment in Pakistan, and have led to a reassessment of its foreign policy priorities and tools.

With the withdrawal of the NATO troops in Afghanistan, the increasing rate of militant violence in Pakistan, and the dynamic nature of the global war on terror, the security calculus in Islamabad began transitioning. Old external threats did not fade away but slowly were flanked by and in some cases overshadowed by the non-traditional security challenges that did not respect national borders and could not be solved with military means. This transformation can also be compared to the overall tendencies in the development of security studies around the world where theorists have emphasized the increasing importance of human security, economic security, environmental security, and complex threats in defining state behavior (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde, 1998; UNDP, 1994). Nevertheless, it is now that even in light of such developments, the analysis of the foreign policy of Pakistan continues to largely be based on the classical realist perspective, and has created a critical analytical vacuum in explaining how non-traditional security challenges have shaped its involvement in the region.

The ten years of 2012 to 2022 is a crucial time frame of scrutinizing this change. It embodies a nexus of internal, regional and systemic pressures that all have redefined the foreign policy context of Pakistan. On the domestic level, Pakistan has had a history of terrorist violence, especially by Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), and sectarian militancy and internal displacement, which has put a strain on the state to supply security through coercive means only (Fair, 2014). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) regionally added a geo-economic aspect to the foreign policy of Pakistan, whereby the strategic discourse is not geopolitics but connectivity, development, and regional integration (Hussain, 2019). Simultaneously, the complicated relations of Pakistan with Afghanistan, initially supported by the US and then by the Taliban administration since 2021, created a cross-border security, humanitarian, and refugee issue that could not be resolved according to traditional deterrence policies.

Globally, the decision to put Pakistan on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) grey list two to three times since 2012 highlighted the increased significance of financial governance, regulatory compliance, and economic credibility as components of national security. In contrast to conventional sanctions, FATF surveillance imposed a significant but indirect limitation on the autonomy of foreign policy and economic diplomacy of Pakistan, making Islamabad adjust its relations with regional and international players (Khan and Qureshi, 2021). At the same time, the issue of climate change became a matter of existential security. Extremely high temperatures, lack of water, and catastrophic floods (the most significant one in 2022) revealed Pakistan to the environmental shock and highlighted the transboundary character of ecological insecurity in South Asia (Ahmed, 2023). All these changes forced Pakistan to express a wider definition of national and regional security.

Although these shifts have empirical importance, the current South Asian security literature is not well-prepared to understand them. To a large extent, the scholars still focus on India-Pakistan

conflict, nuclear stability, and crisis management and they regard non-traditional security concerns as less important or marginal (Ganguly and Kapur, 2010). Although important, this literature does not give sufficient attention to how far non-traditional threats have infiltrated fundamental decision-making on foreign policy. New research on human security and non-traditional security in South Asia is more prone to consider single issues areas - terrorism, climate change, or economic development - and not combine them into a consistent analytical construct that explains how foreign policy is changing over time (Acharya, 2016). As a result, the literature does not have a clear gap which defines how and to what extent the non-traditional security threats have re-defined the foreign policy of Pakistan in South Asia.

The paper fills this gap by theoretically analyzing how non-traditional security threats have influenced the foreign policy of Pakistan over the period between 2012 and 2022. It goes out of the deterministic explanations as a realist and instead adopts a wider security perspective that acknowledges the interaction between the conventional and the unconventional threats. The overall thesis here is that the foreign policy of Pakistan in South Asia has partially but substantially changed in the same period owing to the rising salience of non-traditional security issues, which challenges state- centered and militarized security paradigms of security. Such transformation, nevertheless, is limited by structural persistence, such as civil-military relations and power asymmetry in the regions and the unresolved territorial conflict, which could not allow a total abandonment of the old thinking on security.

Placing the foreign policy of Pakistan in the context of the changing environment of non-traditional security, the present study would be beneficial in the realms of both empirical and theoretical discussions of international relations. Empirically, it gives a decade long analysis on the effects of terrorism, economic vulnerability, climate change and transnational governance pressures on the way Pakistan has been behaving in the region. It conceptually disputes the hegemony of orthodox realist approaches to South Asian security studies and proves the analytical value of the integration of non-traditional conceptualizations of security in the analysis of foreign policy. This way, the article also addresses larger arguments on security transformation in developing and post-colonial states, where non-traditional threats tend to overlap with weak institutions and regional instability.

The article has the following structure. The second part is a conceptualization of non-traditional security and placing it within the framework of the contemporary theory of international relations. The next step will be the examination of the available literature about the foreign policy and South Asian security of Pakistan, with its emphasis on the most important gaps, and limitations. The following part of the assignment describes the theoretical framework and methodology used in the research. This analysis will subsequently map out the key non-traditional security threats to Pakistan as experienced between 2012 and 2022, and how they will impact on the foreign policy of Pakistan in South Asia. The last parts comment on the findings, policy implications and finally provide the future research avenues.

2. Conceptualizing Non-Traditional Security (NTS)

This section decides whether the article gets desk-rejected or sent for review.

2.1 Defining Non-Traditional Security

Non-traditional security (NTS) denotes the security threats that surface outside the traditional military and territorial understanding of what security is and has a direct impact on the existence, well-being and integrity of individuals and nations. NTS is a wide concept compared to the old type of security that focused on the outer military threats, the state sovereignty, it touches the issue of human insecurity, environmental degradation, economic instabilities, pandemics, and even technological uncertainties. These threats are normally transnational, they are non-military

in nature and they are not easily deterred or that coercive measures are taken against them hence necessitating such policy responses to be cooperative and multidimensional (Buzan, 2007; UNDP, 1994).

Human security is the normative centre of the NTS framework and reverses the referent object of security focusing it on the individual rather than on the state. Human security was introduced in the UNDP report on Human development (1994) with the key stress being freedom of fear and freedom of want which includes economic security, food security, health security and personal safety. In the developing state case, human security threats are usually the result of poverty, poor governance, domestic violence and social marginalization which subsequently cause spillover effect to national and regional security. Opponents say that the concept is excessively broad, but its power of analysis is in emphasizing the integration of domestic vulnerability and foreign policy behavior (Acharya, 2016).

The NTS agenda is further enriched with the focus on the environmental, economic, cyber, health, energy, and food security challenges as they contribute to the systemic risks that jeopardize the stability of states without the direct military conflict. Climate change, water scarcity and extreme weather events are becoming threat multipliers in effect increasing political instability and tensions across borders. Likewise, financial surveillance regimes, sanctions, and supply-chain disruptions have become a strong instrument of coercion in international politics as the expression of economic insecurity (Kahler, 2020). Cyber and information security issues undermine the state authority by means of disinformation and digital espionage as well as hybrid warfare, whereas health crises like pandemics reveal the vulnerability of national preparedness and regional cooperation systems. Together, the dimensions highlight the need to view security in new conceptualizations that are not limited to the military structures.

2.2. The International Relations Theory of NTS, 3.2.

The emergence of non-traditional security dilemmas criticizes directly the classical and structural realism, which define security as the military strength, anarchy, and state rivalry. The state-based ontology of realism has difficulties in explaining the threats which are generated inside the societies and cross the borders and cannot be addressed by balance-of-power policies. Although realist scholars have accepted the role of non-military factors, they usually consider them as side variables instead of factors of international policy change (Walt, 1991). This theoretical restriction is especially pronounced in the parts of the world like South Asia where internal weaknesses and transnational dangers are the form of outer actions.

The Copenhagen School is more open to analytical approaches with its theory of securitization that focuses on how problems are represented in the form of security threats by political discourse and not solely due to objective material conditions (Buzan, Waever, and de Witte, 1998). Securitization theory allows theorists to examine how non-traditional problems, like terrorism, climate change, or financial governance, become the topic of concern at the level of national security. This is particularly helpful when studying policy changes, since it helps one understand how states rationalize actions that are out of the ordinary, as well as redistribute resources, in reaction to perceived non-traditional threats.

In addition to securitization theory, human security approach as well as Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) offers valuable information regarding the spatial and normative aspects of NTS. Human security framework questions the primary role of the state in security affairs by anticipating the preeminence of individual welfare as a security goal, whereas RSCT underlines the fact that security relationships are centrally located in the region and that they are interdependent on patterns of friendship, hostility, and interdependence (Buzan and Wæver, 2003). The combination of these methods makes it possible to describe the functioning of non-

traditional threats at the domestic, regional, and systemic levels more nuanced, which is especially important in the context of the interaction of South Asian security.

2.3 Applicability to South Asia

South Asia is an exceptionally productive environment in which non-traditional security frameworks can be utilized considering the lack of strong and even state capabilities. Several states within the region experience chronic governance failures, weak institutional presence and socio-economic imbalances, which weaken their capacity to respond to non-military threats successfully. The manifestation of these internal weaknesses into foreign policy is that governments are looking to external sources, seeking legitimacy, or even ways to divert their attention away from domestic insecurity (Acharya, 2014). This means that interstate rivalry is not enough to gain a proper understanding of security in South Asia.

The transnational threats also help to enforce the applicability of NTS in the region. Terrorism, migration, water wars, pandemics, and climate-based disasters cross national borders on a regular basis, making the unilateral responses less effective. The fact that borders are porous, and that there are strong economic and social interlinkages implies that when insecurity has been created in a single state, there are often regional effects. Conventional security strategies, like military deterrence, do not fit well to address these issues, which explains the necessity of non-military and collaborative policy tools (Paul, 2018).

Having colonial histories and contentious boundaries increases the non-traditional security issues of South Asia by deepening the mistrust and compromising regional systems of governance. Unresolved territorial conflicts, artificial boundaries, and the development of states in the post-colonial period have created chronic instability that combines with non-traditional threats of today in complicated relationships. Weaknesses in governance in border areas usually contribute to perpetuation of militancy, smuggling, and destruction of the environment, yet the political institutions like SAARC are still ineffective due to inter-rivalry among the states. Non-traditional security is seen, in this regard, as offering a more holistic perspective of the interaction between the historical structures and the modern issues in determining how the foreign policy behavior of South Asia is influenced by the two.

3. Theoretical Framework: Securitization Theory

The theory of securitization is particularly suitable in the examination of the foreign policy of Pakistan because of the traditionally centralized security discourse in the country and the presence of elite actors in the determination of the threats to the nation. Traditionally, in Pakistan, political leadership, and bureaucratic institutions have been the key securitizing agents, and have debated issues like terrorism, economic vulnerability and external pressure as existential threats to the survival of the state. In contrast to purely realist approaches, securitization theory can be used to consider how non-traditional threats, including financial surveillance with the FATF regime, climate-induced calamity, or cyber and information warfare, are discursively upgraded into the national security agenda and then become part of foreign policy practice. This becomes especially applicable in a situation where the asymmetries in institutional power determine which actors may succeed in securitizing what issues and which audiences may and may not receive such securitization claims (Wæver, 1995; Wilkinson, 2007).

Non-traditional security threats are the independent variables in this research and will be operationalized based on policy rhetoric, official utterances, strategic statements, and diplomacy between 2012 and 2022. Those are terrorism and violent extremism, economic and financial insecurity, climate and environmental threats, cyber and information security issues, and energy and food insecurity. The dependent variable is transformation of the Pakistan foreign policy in

South Asia in terms of changes in diplomatic engagements, regional cooperation programs, framing of narratives as well as priorities in the policies. It is analytically oriented to the identification of instances of successful securitization in the case of which non-traditional problems are articulated as existential threats and converted into tangible foreign policy actions. Based on the chronological path of securitization, the framework allows conducting a structured evaluation of how non-traditional security issues have transformed the traditional Pakistani foreign policy without presupposing an absolute break with traditional security paradigms.

4. Methodology

The proposed research will use a qualitative analytical research design, whereby the researcher will analyze the influence of non-traditional security threats on the transformation of foreign policy in South Asia between 2012 and 2022 in Pakistan. The qualitative method also suitably follows the theoretical foundation of the study that is the securitization theory, which puts more emphasis on discourse, making meaning, and elite framing in lieu of purely quantitative indicators (Buzan et al., 1998). Instead of a security threat being quantified based on material measures, this study examines the construction of non-traditional problems as security concerns in official accounts and policy-making processes. The key sources of data are the National Security Policy of Pakistan (2022), the official statements and press releases of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the region and bilateral agreements, as well as the reports of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), evaluation reports issued by international organizations, the United Nations, World Bank, and Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). These are augmented by elite discourse, such as policy speeches, interviews and strategic communications of senior civilian and military officials, which collectively give an idea of how the security priorities will be articulated and justified.

The methodological approach used in the study is the discourse analysis and policy document analysis to determine the trends of securitization of non-traditional security threats across time. The discourse analysis is applicable to trace the process of posing a particular issue of terrorism financing, climate vulnerability, or economic instability as existential threats that need exceptional policy responses and policy documentary analysis helps to conduct a systematic analysis of institutional responses and foreign policy changes (Fairclough, 2013). Besides, the comparative time consideration is made within the 2012–2022 to elicit variation in terms of emphasis, continuity, and change of the current foreign policy orientation in Pakistan. Through this long-term method, it is possible to determine the key moments and external shocks that contributed to securitization processes. Although this methodology provides a much-needed contextual understanding, the research recognizes that some weaknesses exist such as skewed data information, limited access to classified decision-making processes, and the subjectivity that is inherent in the qualitative interpretation. To overcome such threats, triangulation between various sources of data is used, and the results will be interpreted carefully not to overgeneralize (Yin, 2018).

5. Mapping Non-Traditional Security Threats Facing Pakistan (2012–2022)

5.1 Terrorism and Violent Extremism

Terrorism and violent extremism continued to be the most chronic non-traditional security challenge that influenced the foreign policy of Pakistan in the period between 2012 and 2022, with the re-emergence of the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) after 2020 that served as a critical turning point. Although the massive destruction of militant infrastructure in Afghanistan occurred due to large-scale kinetic operations like Zarb-e-Azb (2014) and Radd-ul-Fasaad (2017), the security vacuum left behind in the country after the departure of the US in 2021 has allowed militant groups of TTP to reorganize across the border, escalating cross-border militancy and complicating the strategy of the Pakistani border management approach (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2022). These advancements strengthened the securitization of terrorism as an existential menace, not just to domestic stability, but also to the regional diplomatic profile of Pakistan, especially in its interactions with Afghanistan and its protection of counterterrorism qualifications at the global conferences. Besides, spillover in the region, such as inflows of refugees and the spread of weapons, as well as diplomatic pressure associated with the financing of terrorism, internationalized what previously was presented as a domestic issue of security. Consequently, Pakistan progressively incorporated the discourses of counterterrorism into the context of its foreign policy, pushing the focus toward border fencing, cooperation of intelligence and adherence to the international counterterrorism standards to reduce both security threats and reputational losses (Fair, 2014; Khan and Qureshi, 2021). This development highlights how terrorism became a non-conventional but key point of foreign policy realignment instead of an internal law-and-order problem.

Table 1

Terrorism and Violent Extremism as Non-Traditional Security Threats to Pakistan (2012–2022)

Dimension	Key Developments	Foreign Policy Implications
TTP Resurgence	Regrouping after 2020; increased attacks post-2021	Diplomatic pressure on Taliban regime; border securitization
Cross-border Militancy	Use of Afghan sanctuaries; porous borders	Shift toward border fencing and regional security diplomacy
Regional Spillover Effects	Refugees, arms flow, FATF scrutiny	Emphasis on counterterrorism compliance and global norms

5.2 Economic and Financial Security

Non-traditional security concerns, including, but not limited to, economic and financial insecurity, became a key influence on the foreign policy of Pakistan of 2012–2022, especially, with consistent grey-listing by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), persistent balance of payments (BoP) crises, and structural reliance on trade. With Pakistan on the FATF greylist, this was a case of regulatory and reputational coercion which restricted entry into global financial markets and forced the state to securitize financial governance as a state survival issue and not a normal economic management issue (Khan and Qureshi, 2021). Frequent BoP crises supported this securitization, increasing the dependence of Pakistan on external financing through the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and friendly states and reducing the autonomy of foreign policies and the motivation to act according to international financial standards (Kahler, 2020). Simultaneously, sustained dependence on trade, which is defined by a lack of export diversification and strong dependence on a small group of markets and imports, especially on energy, exposed Pakistan to negative external shocks and political pressure, which further ties

the economic vulnerability to regional and international interactions (World Bank, 2022). All these processes led to a shift in the discourse of foreign policy of Pakistan towards geo-economics, that is, economic diplomacy, adherence to regulations, and regional connectivity as a security need, and not as an independent form of economic policy.

Table 2**Economic and Financial Security Threats and Their Foreign Policy Implications (2012–2022)**

Dimension	Key Manifestation	Foreign Policy Implications
FATF Grey-listing	Monitoring and compliance pressure	Alignment with global counter-financing norms
Balance of Payments Crisis	Recurrent IMF reliance	Reduced policy autonomy; external conditionalities
Trade Dependency	Import-heavy growth model	Shift toward geo-economic and connectivity diplomacy

5.3 Energy and Food Security

Energy and food insecurity became the interrelated non-traditional security challenges that have played a major role in influencing the foreign policy orientation of Pakistan between 2012 and 2022, mainly because of the long-term reliance on imports, unsuccessful regional energy collaboration programs and agricultural stress caused by climate changes. The extensive importation of oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG), and food commodities subjected Pakistan to effects of price volatility and supply disruptions in the global market, turning what was an economic problem into a securitized national one (IEA, 2021). Geopolitical rivalries, sanctions, and security dilemmas led to the failure or uneven advancement of regional energy cooperation projects, including the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline, in solving structural energy shortages, and reflect the limitations of regionalism (Khan, 2019). At the same time, agricultural output was impacted by food stress caused by unpredictable rainfall and floods, increasing temperatures, and creating an internal instability with direct foreign policy implications, especially related to humanitarian diplomacy and climate activism (FAO, 2022). These dynamics have forced Pakistan to securitize energy and food security in its external relations, seek more intensive attention to diversifying energy relations, participation in multilateral climate and food governance regimes, and constructing the vulnerability to climate as a central element in its regional and global diplomatic discourse.

Table 3**Energy and Food Security as Non-Traditional Security Threats (2012–2022)**

Dimension	Key Challenge	Foreign Policy Implications
Import Dependence	Oil, LNG, and food imports	Energy diversification diplomacy
Regional Cooperation Failures	TAPI, Iran–Pakistan pipeline delays	Shift toward bilateral and global partners
Climate-Induced Stress	Food Floods, droughts, crop losses	Climate diplomacy and humanitarian engagement

5.4 Climate Change and Environmental Security

Climate change and environmental degradation played a role as high-risk multipliers in the security of Pakistan between 2012 and 2022, most evidently in the form of frequent flooding, the increasing water shortage, and the structural weaknesses of the Indus Basin system. The

same happened with major floods in 2014, and, even more disastrously, in 2022, which revealed the constraints of disaster preparedness in Pakistan and revealed the transboundary character of environmental insecurity with serious humanitarian, economic, and diplomatic consequences (World Bank, 2023). In addition to the occasional disasters, a long-term water scarcity (due to glacial melting, unpredictable monsoons, population increase, and ineffective water management) has been presented, especially regarding the sustainability of agriculture, as well as energy generation (Mustafa et al., 2017). Such pressures collide with Indus Basin vulnerabilities(s), as reliance on a collective river regime controlled by Indus Waters Treaty has increased Pakistan's sensitivity to upstream processes and climate change, increasing the securitization of water as a part of regional political language and nomenclature, particularly in relation to India (Bisht, 2019). As a result, climate change has ceased to be the fringes of the environmental policy to being central to the Pakistan foreign policy and Islamabad has begun focusing climate justice, climate financing and multilateral environmental agreement as strategic objectives and not development issues.

Table 4

Climate Change and Environmental Security Threats and Foreign Policy Implications (2012–2022)

Dimension	Key Impact	Foreign Policy Implications
Floods (2014, 2022)	Humanitarian and economic losses	Climate diplomacy and aid mobilization
Water Scarcity	Agricultural and energy stress	Regional water security discourse
Indus Basin Vulnerabilities	Transboundary river dependence	Engagement through treaty-based diplomacy

5.5 Cyber and Information Warfare

The domain of cyber and information warfare became a relevant non-traditional security risk to Pakistan in 2012–2022, based largely on disinformation efforts, hybrid narratives about warfare, as well as the increasing demands on effective digital diplomacy. The growing application of coordinated disinformation, especially via social media and digital news systems, has made the external image management of Pakistan more complex and increased diplomatic tension, specifically with regard to regional conflicts (Bradshaw and Howard, 2019). Such practices are often integrated into more general hybrid warfare discourses, where cyber operations, manipulation of information, economic coercion and diplomatic signaling are playing in tandem, making it difficult to differentiate between war and peace (Mumford, 2018). In retaliation, information space has become another strategic domain of securitization by Pakistani state institutions, in which the ability to control the storyline and cyber resilience are core to national and regional security. Nonetheless, poor institutional support, disjointed regulatory structures, and reactive, but not proactive, digital diplomacy have prevented Pakistan to actively respond to hostile discourses and promote its policy agendas abroad (Hussain, 2021). Through this, cyber and information warfare has become part and parcel of Pakistan foreign policy issues in South Asian region, which strengthens the argument of treating digital spaces not as instruments of communication but as a security frontier.

Table 5

Cyber and Information Warfare as Non-Traditional Security Threats (2012–2022)

Dimension		Key Manifestation	Foreign Policy Implications
Disinformation Campaigns		Coordinated online narratives	Diplomatic image management challenges
Hybrid Warfare Narratives		Blending cyber, political, and economic tools	Securitization of information space
Digital Challenges	Diplomacy	Institutional and capacity gaps	Reactive foreign policy communication

6. Impact on Pakistan's Foreign Policy in South Asia

The emergence of unconventional security dangers triggered a slow adjustment of the historically India-focused foreign policy of Pakistan, indicating a noticeable change in the active militarized postures towards the diplomatic and narrative-based approaches. Although some of its fundamental issues like Kashmir were not resolved, Pakistan increasingly stressed the need to engage in de-escalation and conflict management, the most significant of which was the reinstatement of the 2003 Line of Control ceasefire in 2021, which was a sign of securitization of economic stability and internal security as opposed to confrontation (Ganguly & Kapur, 2010). Similar discussions on partial normalization of trade with India, albeit politically limited, were indications that enduring hostility came at an economic and diplomatic price aggravating non-traditional security weaknesses. The redefinition of this was also noticeable in the Afghanistan policy of Pakistan, as border control, migration, and cross border militancy continued to overshadow the doctrine of strategic depth. These dilemmas were compounded by the Taliban takeover in 2021, which compelled Islamabad to walk the fine line between engagement with the Taliban government and international pressure, security spillover, and humanitarian commitments, thus showing the constraints of the conventional strategic power in dealing with transnational threats (ICG, 2022).

At regional level, non-traditional security threats enhanced the shift of Pakistan to economic diplomacy and multilateral relations as part of security management. ChinaPakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) became a core of geo-economic discourse in Pakistan, no longer as a project to introduce infrastructure, but a stabilizer formula to overcome energy insecurity, economic vulnerability, and connectivity in the region (Hussain, 2019). At the same time, the lack of progress of the SAARC because of the political differences highlighted the decreasing usefulness of formal regional arrangements and encouraged Pakistan to seek bilateral and minilateral agreements and enhanced involvement in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) as an alternative means of dealing with terrorism, economic cooperation, and regional stability (Acharya, 2014). Outside of regional platforms, Pakistan became more active in securitizing non-traditional forms of threat by utilizing multilateral and normative settings, focusing on climate diplomacy in the wake of floods in 2022, compliance-driven counterterrorism collaboration, and humanitarian discourses to restore international trust. This foreign policy realignment shows how the process of adjusting the foreign policy of Pakistan is not a complete abandonment of the old fashioned security issues but a multi-layered process whereby, the non-traditional security threats emerged and cut across priorities, discourse and diplomatic strategies in South Asia.

7. Discussion

The results of this analysis highlight the inability of the classical realism analytical framework to capture the emerging threats of non-traditional security (NTS) that amplify the analytical weaknesses of the paradigm in its prioritization of military force and inter-state competition at the expense of overlooking the foreign policy salience of economic vulnerability, climatic stress, and transnational threats. The case of Pakistan between 2012 and 2022 indicates that NTS pressures have forced a change in the diplomatic language, policy priorities, and regional interaction, but this has not been a paradigmatic change, but just the partial change. The presence of long-standing structural restraints, in particular the long-standing role of the military in the decision-making process on matters of security and the failure to overcome the unresolved competition with India, keep anchoring the Pakistani strategic thinking in the realist context and limiting the extent to which the country can change its policy (Fair, 2014; Ganguly and Kapur, 2010). This pattern is further supported by comparative evidence in South Asia: India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka have also integrated NTS issues like climate resilience, economic stability, and counterterrorism into their foreign policies but none of them has replaced traditional security logics, which suggests a region-wide trend of layered over linear transformation (Acharya, 2014). The case of Pakistan is therefore not an exception but a general South Asian situation where non-traditional security issues have transformed state behavior in small bits without destroying entrenched realist imperatives but coexisting with them.

8. Findings and Policy Implications

8.1 Key Findings

Through this work, we have shown that the non-traditional security (NTS) threats are gradually setting the foreign policy agendas of the Pakistani state, forcing it to rework its foreign policies in order to deal with the terrorist threats, its economic vulnerability, energy and food insecurity, climate risk, and cyber threats to the state. These problems have not just shaped the content of the policy but the language in which security is conceptualized has also been shaped by these issues affirming the explanatory role of securitization theory in explaining the adaptive measures in Pakistan (Buzan, Waefer, and de Wilde, 1998). Nevertheless, institutional lag has been a major limitation, even with these adaptations, there are bureaucratic inefficiencies and lack of civilian oversight, the translation of NTS issues to proactive civil foreign policy is slowed (Fair, 2014). Moreover, regional cooperation mechanisms, be it SAARC, bilateral or multilateral ones like the SCO is not well developed and there is existent geopolitical rivalry as well as structural constraints that hamper the ability to respond in a co-ordinated manner to transboundary issues such as climate change, energy dependence, and terrorism (Acharya, 2014).

8.2 Policy Implications

The conclusions indicate that there is a strong necessity to make Pakistan come up with an integrated security policy and this is a systematic way of integrating both non-traditional threats as well as conventional strategic considerations. It is necessary to strengthen civilian institutions, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, economic planning institutions and environmental agencies to minimize institutional lag and have a consistent policy response to NTS challenges (Khan and Qureshi, 2021). Also, Pakistan needs to focus on the creation and strengthening of non-traditional security cooperation systems (regionally), as well as through multilateral structures, bilateral agreements, and track-two diplomacy, to solve common vulnerabilities in the areas of energy, climate, and transnational security. Pakistan can not only boost their resilience to any emerging threats and reassert its role in South Asian politics by integrating NTS considerations with formal policy frameworks, but also by striking a balance between the transactions and reactive aspects of the existing foreign policy strategy.

Conclusion

This paper shows that the foreign policy of Pakistan toward South Asia in the period between 2012 and 2022 has been slightly but significantly changed due to the growing salience of non-traditional security threats such as terrorism, economic vulnerability, energy/ food insecurity, climate change, and cyber challenges. Using the securitization theory, the study identifies the not only external pressures, but the social construction and discursive presentation of such threats as existential risks, directed at the redefinition of diplomatic priorities, policy discourse, and approaches to regional interactions. Theoretically, the paper will have a contribution to the study of international relations by showing how classical realist theories fail in instances where transnational and non-military security threats dominate the state behavior, and how a discourse-based approach to the analysis of security provides a valuable tool. In practice, the results also highlighted the need of Pakistan to incorporate non-traditional dangers into sense-making foreign policy systems, expand institutional capacity, and seek regional collaboration systems, which proves that successful foreign policy has to react to a complicated security environment that stretches far beyond traditional military computations.

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