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Pakistan's Foreign Policy in a Multipolar World: Balancing the US, China, and Russia

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Abstract
The aim of this research paper is to explore Pakistan's foreign policy in an emerging multipolar world considering the balancing act between the United States, China and Russia. The international political system is undergoing major changes as the world's major powers increasingly grow economically, militarily and diplomatically. The developments have presented new opportunities and challenges to Pakistan in terms of national interests, strategic autonomy and its international position. The study discusses the evolution of the foreign policy of Pakistan and examines its strategic, economic and diplomatic ties with the three great powers. It also examines the US-China strategic competition, Russia's increasing international involvement in Asian countries and evolving geopolitics in the region on Pakistan's foreign policy choices. In addition, the significance of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), economic diplomacy, energy cooperation, regional connectivity and multilateral engagement in the international relations of Pakistan has been examined. The research method used in this study is qualitative research and the data sources consist of academic books, research articles, policy documents and official documents. The results indicate that the nation is facing tremendous economic, regional security, and international political pressures which could be a difficult challenge to Pakistan in balancing with the competing forces in the world. But the world's multipolarity also offers opportunities for Pakistan to broaden its diplomatic and economic relationships. The research calls for the adoption of a pragmatic, balanced and independent foreign policy in Pakistan, which is grounded on strategic autonomy, economic development and regional stability. It has thus concluded that establishing positive relations with the United States, China and Russia, but without entangling them in exclusive geopolitical alliances is important to ensure the preservation of the sovereignty of Pakistan and in furtherance of its long-term national interests in the evolving international scenario.

Keywords: *Pakistan's Foreign Policy, Multipolar World Order, United States, China, Russia, Strategic Autonomy, Great Power Competition, Economic Diplomacy, CPEC, International Relations.*

1. Introduction

The geographical location, security concerns, economic interests and evolving international political climate have always been the pillars of Pakistan's foreign policy. Since independence in 1947 Pakistan has been working towards building good relations with the big powers of the world to safeguard its sovereignty, territorial integrity and national interests. Pakistan's strategic ties with the USA grew close during the Cold War period and it was a part of Western sponsored security pact, the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) & Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO). But, Pakistan's foreign policy started to evolve and gradually expanded its relations with China and other regional and international powers. The nation gained greater flexibility in its foreign policy to meet the changing conditions of the world (Hussain, 2016). The modern international system is becoming multipolar, that is, dispersed in power and influence among several great states, instead of being controlled by a single superpower. Three key players in the new global political and economic landscape are the United States, China and Russia. Despite the decline of its influence in the international community, the United States maintains a strong position in international security affairs, global financial systems and technological advancements, while China has emerged as a huge economic and strategic power with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Likewise, Russia remains a key player in global security, energy and geopolitical affairs in the region. The processes have raised fresh opportunities and issues for nations such as Pakistan, which has to deal with competing global powers (Acharya, 2014).

The geographical location, its proximity with China, Central Asia, Middle East and Arabian sea makes Pakistan an important strategic point of South Asia. It has assumed a special significance with China, vis-à-vis the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) for enhancing regional connectivity, infra-development, trade and economic cooperation. Meanwhile, Pakistan is cognizant of the need to build positive relations with the United States, especially in spheres of trade and investment, counterterrorism, education, and regional security. Additionally, the benefits of a Russia relationship include energy cooperation, trade diversification and diplomacy (Small, 2015). But it is a complicated diplomacy balancing relations with these three powers. China's rising strategic rivalry with the United States and Russia's antagonism with the West is putting Pakistan in a delicate situation. It would not be wise for Pakistan to be entirely reliant on a single global power as it could hamper Pakistan's diplomatic and economic autonomy. Hence, strategic independence, multi-lateralization of international relations and consideration of national interests in foreign policy are key constituents. The research paper discusses the delicate and conducive measures that Pakistan could take to ensure a balance between the United States, China, and Russia in the current multipolar order. It examines Pakistan's past relations, strategic concerns, economic ties, geopolitical issues, and diplomatic prospects with these countries. The study also seeks to provide guidance on how Pakistan can build a robust independent foreign policy without compromising its sovereignty, enhance its economic development and play its role in the region's peace and stability. In conclusion, the study concludes that the state of a multipolar

international system necessitates having a balanced, pragmatic and interest-based foreign policy for Pakistan to maneuver the complexities of the emerging international order.

2. Historical Evolution of Pakistan's Foreign Policy

Since the establishment of Pakistan in 1947, the country's foreign policy has undergone a major transformation in keeping pace with the evolving political landscape of the region and the world. In the initial period of independence, Pakistan was facing serious security, economic, political and territorial challenges, especially with India with regard to Kashmir. These issues shaped the foreign policy agenda of Pakistan where security, territorial integrity and international diplomatic support became the key aspects of its foreign policy. Limited economic and military might made Pakistan seek strategic alliances with the strong countries to boost its position in the international system. As a result, in the initial decades the relation with the U.S. was also included in its foreign policy (Sattar, 2017). In 1950s, Pakistan established close ties with the U.S. and entered into western-backed military alliances such as the Baghdad Pact (CENTO – Central Treaty Organization) in 1955 and the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in 1954. The security concerns and the need for military and economic assistance were the main reason behind Pakistan's involvement in these alliances. This alignment, however, also imposed some constraints on Pakistan's diplomatic autonomy especially in the context of America's strategic priorities not matching its national interests. In Pakistan, gradually the importance of maintaining relations with other major powers, especially China (Sattar, 2017), was realized. Foreign policy of Pakistan was significantly changed in the 1960s through the establishment of closer ties with China. After the Sino-Indian War of 1962, diplomatic and strategic ties between Pakistan and China were further enhanced. The boundary agreement that was signed in 1963 further enhanced bilateral relation and paved the way for a long-term strategic partnership. At this time, the Pak-US relations also faced a problem, in regard of regional security issues.

The war in 1965, between Pakistan and India, followed by the suspension of military assistance by the Americans, revealed the shortcomings of relying too heavily on one international ally (Small, 2015). In the 1970s, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto gave a more balanced and independent foreign policy to Pakistan. Pakistan forged stronger ties with China, furbished its diplomatic posture with Muslim nations and actively contributed to fostering Islamic unity at the 1974 Islamic Summit Conference in Lahore. Pakistan also opened up relations with the Soviet Union and worked to promote economic ties, such as the Karachi Steel Mills project. These developments showed Pakistan's desire to forge new friendships with faraway countries from outside the western world (Sattar, 2017). Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 had a significant impact on the foreign policy of Pakistan in 1980s. The US-backed Afghan resistance against the Soviets made Pakistan a front line state, and the US military and economic support to the Afghan resistance was substantial. Since the Soviet pullout, however, the United States' involvement in Pakistan has waned, and strategic partnerships are more temporary, with a focus on shared security concerns. Following the 9/11 attack in 2001, Pakistan was once again a significant ally of the USA in the War on Terror, apart from retaining its strategic relationship with China (Small, 2015). The foreign policy of the 21st century has been increasingly economic diplomacy, regional connectivity, strategic autonomy and diversified international relations for Pakistan. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which was started in 2015, enhanced the economic and strategic cooperation with China. At the same time,

Pakistan has tried to enhance its ties with Russia in the field of energy, trade and diplomatic cooperation. In this regard, the evolution of Pakistan's foreign policy over the years clearly illustrates the shift in the foreign policy paradigm from alliance diplomacy to a multi-faceted and pragmatic approach. The lessons learned from this historical situation are valuable for grasping Pakistan's quest for balance in the new multipolar world between the United States, China and Russia.

3. Emergence of a Multipolar World Order

There have been enormous changes in the international political system since the end of the Cold War in 1991. Bipolarism, where the United States and the Soviet Union dominated the political world, was the main feature of the Cold War era. But with the fall of the Soviet Union, the United States became the world's dominant superpower and established a unipolar international order. Over the past few decades, China's rapid economic development, Russia's strategic revival and the growing power of regional powers have eroded American supremacy. This is a gradual process towards multipolarity where several strong states influence the world's political, economic, military and diplomatic affairs (Acharya, 2014). Multipolar world order is an international system in which power and influence is shared between many great powers as opposed to few or one great power. Under this new paradigm the U.S. continues to exert influence in key global areas such as international security, financial institutions, technological advances and world diplomacy. But as it grows economically and militarily, Beijing has become a big rival to Washington's sway. China has been increasing its economic and diplomatic reach in Asia, Africa, Europe, and other parts of the world, through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and other projects. What this means is that international cooperation and competition are becoming increasingly different from what they used to be (Ikenberry, 2011). Another key player in the new multipolar world order is Russia. Despite the economic sanctions and geopolitical tensions from Western powers, Russia holds significant influence in the world through its military power, energy resources, diplomacy, and strategic alliances. Its close cooperation with China has further contributed to changing the balance of power in international politics. Russia also wants to deepen its ties with Asian, African, and Middle Eastern nations to de-globalize and limit reliance on Western markets and institutions. The developments indicate that international affairs are not primarily under the domination of the Western powers (Trenin, 2019).

The rise of a multipolar world has also given rise to the significance of regional organizations and developing countries. Regional cooperation and security institutions like BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) offer avenues for economic engagement, political exchange and regional security. These institutions will enable developing countries to diversify their international partnership and increase their active role in global decision-making. In addition, the rise of the emerging economies has provided opportunities for countries to look externally for sources of investment, trade, technology and diplomatic support (Acharya, 2014). The rise of multipolar world order brings opportunities and challenges for Pakistan. Pakistan has always had strong strategic ties with China and has also recognised the significance of its ties with the United States. Pakistan has also tried to strengthen ties with Russia in recent years, especially in the areas of security, regional security, energy, and trade. Pakistan has opportunities in the changing environment of the world to diversify its foreign policy and eliminate over-dependency on any one major player. But with

rising competition between the United States and China, Pakistan is facing diplomatic challenges as it has to safeguard its interests without getting embroiled in a great-power competition. Furthermore, the geographical location of Pakistan is such that it is a key geographic hub in the South Asian region linking it to Central Asia, China and the Middle East. CPEC, regional connectivity, and involvement through international organizations can boost Pakistan's economic and diplomatic power. Hence, in order to ensure a multipolar world, Pakistan must have a balanced, pragmatic and independent foreign policy. To make the best of the evolving international scenario, Pakistan has to be strategic, expand economic ties and foster regional stability.

4. Pakistan-US Relations: Strategic Interests and Challenges

Since the independence of Pakistan (1947), there has been an important, but sometimes controversial relationship between Pakistan and the USA. They have enjoyed close cooperation and strategic partnership, as well as political differences and diplomatic disagreements, in their bilateral relations. In the era of the Cold War, Pakistan emerged as a significant ally of the United States in South Asia due to the shared interest in security and the apprehensions about the Soviet influence. In 1954, Pakistan joined the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) to bolster its security position in order to get military and economic help from the West. However, strategic priorities and American policies toward South Asia (Sattar, 2017) had often a negative impact on the relationship. In the 1980s, Pakistan-US relations improved immensely after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Pakistan emerged as a front-line country in American-backed resistance against the Soviets in Afghanistan. The U.S. supplied military and economic support to Pakistan due to its strategic significance in the region. Soviet pullout from Afghanistan, however, brought about a reduction of American interest in Pakistan. In 1990, the Pressler amendment for sanctions on Pakistan was also imposed, which further harmed the bilateral relations between the two countries due to differences over Pakistan's nuclear programme. It was during this time that they showed how a relationship dominated by short-term strategic interests is difficult. (Haqqani, 2005) The introduction of more significant change in Pakistan US relations was with the occurrence of the terrorism attack on September 11, 2001. Pakistan has become an important ally of the US-led War on Terror and has joined hands in combating terrorism in Afghanistan.

The USA assisted Pakistan militarily, economically and diplomatically. But the relationship was complicated due to differences on the counterterrorism issue, security matters, and the situation in Afghanistan. Further bilateral engagement has been affected by the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021, and the framework of cooperation (Haqqani, 2005), traditionally focused on security, has been diminished. Pakistan-U.S. relations have been increasingly geared towards strengthening economic cooperation, trade, investment, climate change, education, technology, and regional stability in recent years. The USA is still an important trade partner and one of the main destinations of Pakistani exports. Bilateral cooperation in education and people-to-people exchanges also help improve bilateral ties. In addition, both nations share the interests of averting regional instability, fight terrorism and encourage peace in South Asia. Pakistan values positive relations with the U.S. for its economic growth and international engagement. But there are some remaining issues that are continuing to affect the Pakistan-US relations. The increasing strategic unity between U.S. and India, especially in the defense,

technology and security of the region, is one major challenge. This partnership with Pakistan is not given with a smile, because of the potential consequences on the regional balance of power. Another challenge is the increasing US-China rivalry. American worries about the increasing influence of China could lead Islamabad to diplomatic difficulties as it keeps close strategic and economic ties with China. Moreover, the two countries have sometimes been at odds due to disagreements regarding Afghanistan, nuclear security and regional politics (Small, 2015). But, opportunities exist for Pakistan to have a more balanced and mutually beneficial relationship with the United States despite these challenges. Pakistan should not rely solely on military and security cooperation but also give greater importance to trade, foreign investment, technology and higher education, and economic diplomacy. Likewise, there should be frequent diplomatic contacts between both countries to discuss their differences and common interests. The United States is strategically and economically significant to Pakistan and cannot be ignored in this multipolar world. Its foreign policy should thus be directed towards the development of positive ties with Washington, while ensuring the strategic partnership with China and cooperation with Russia are further strengthened. A realistic and equitable solution can be provided to protect the national interest, improve the economic stability and ensure strategic autonomy in the evolving international scenario to Pakistan.

5. Pakistan-China Relations: Strategic Partnership and Economic Cooperation

Pakistan and China have one of the closest and longest bilateral relationships in today's international politics. Their diplomatic ties were established on May 21, 1951, and they have since evolved into a broad and deep strategic partnership of mutual trust and political cooperation, economic interests, and a shared focus on security. China has gradually become one of the most significant strategic partners for Pakistan in the fields of defense, infrastructure development, trade, and regional diplomacy over the decades. This relationship is frequently called 'All-Weather Strategic Cooperative Partnership' because of their continuity even in the face of changing regional and international political environments (Small, 2015). The development of Pakistan-China relations in the past became important in the 1960s. Since the Sino-Indian War of 1962, Pakistan and China have stepped up their diplomatic and military ties. Signing of Sino-Pakistan Boundary Agreement in 1963 further enhanced bilateral relations and provided a platform for future cooperation. China has helped Pakistan in various regional security issues and Pakistan has also been a big help in conveying messages between China and United States in the early 1970s. These developments built confidence between each other, and helped develop their strategic partnership (Small, 2015). One of the most significant aspects of Pakistan-China ties is defense and military cooperation. In the areas of defense production, military technology, training and strategic security, both nations have forged strong ties. Pakistan has received support from China in the modernisation of its defence in the form of military equipment. Executing joint defense projects, such as the Joint Fighter (JF-17 Thunder) program underscore the advancement of technological and military partnership between the two nations.

The proposed cooperation is significant for Pakistan due to the country's regional security issues as well as the evolving dynamics in the field of South Asian studies. Economic cooperation is another significant aspect of the Pakistan-China relations, especially under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). CPEC was started as a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2015, with the goal

of enhancing infrastructure, transportation, energy, and regional connectivity. The construction of Gwadar Port, highways, power generation and industrial cooperation has enhanced the economic and strategic significance of Pakistan. CPEC also provides China with an important trade and connectivity route towards the Arabian Sea and the Middle East. However, good governance, financial sustainability, security measures and institutional coordination are essential if it is to be effective (Wolf, 2016). There are a number of challenges that Pakistani and Chinese face despite the strength of their relationship. Security concerns for Chinese citizens and infrastructure projects in Pakistan are still serious issues. Moreover, Pakistan's economic challenges, debt management problems, political unrest and delayed projects' implementation can impact bilateral cooperation process. These challenges must be addressed with better security arrangements, clear economic policies, and effective institutional coordination, both in the countries. Further strengthening trade diversification and attracting more Chinese investments in agriculture, information technology, manufacturing and renewable energy will further benefit economic cooperation. Pakistan-China relations have strategic significance in the context of a multipolar world. As China rises on the international stage, Pakistan has ample opportunity to enhance its economic and diplomatic opportunities. But it is equally important for Pakistan to have positive relations with other great powers like U.S. America and Russia. It is important to not rely too heavily on one nation or country, or else there would be some sort of economic or diplomatic flash points. Thus, Pakistan must take advantage of Sino-Pakistan relations to achieve the country's development goals with keeping a fair and independent foreign policy. To sum up, the Pakistan-China relationship is a strategic partnership of great importance in the realm of South Asian and international politics. They share opportunities in defense, infrastructure, trade and regional connectivity, as well as cooperate in the defense field.Their cooperation in the defense area creates new opportunities for both countries in the field of defense, infrastructure, trade and regional connectivity. However, to get the best out of this partnership in the context of a multipolar global scenario, Pakistan will have to work on the three pillars of economic sustainability, institutional changes and strategic independence.

6. Pakistan-Russia Relations: Emerging Strategic Cooperation

The history of relations between Pakistan and Russia is a complex one, with ties shaped by Cold War rivalries, regional security concerns, and evolving geopolitical dynamics. In Cold war era, Pakistan established close strategic ties with the USA and Soviet Union with better political and military ties with India. This led to a political divide between Pakistan and the USSR. Despite these differences, however, both nations continued to have relations of their own and sought opportunities for economic cooperation. International events and security threats in the region led to a re-thinking of the Pakistan-Russia bilateral relationship over time (Sattar, 2017). Pakistan and the USSR had several initiatives to promote diplomatic and economic relations during the 1960s and 1970s. One such example is the establishment of Pakistan Steel Mills with Soviet help in the 1970s. This project proved the feasibility of economic cooperation in spite of their divergent general geopolitical orientations. But it sparked tensions between the two nations when Afghanistan was invaded by the Soviets in 1979. Pakistan backed the Afghan resistance against the Soviet troops and was a key ally of the United States in the Afghan struggle. Thus, the relations between Pakistan and the Soviet Union remained tense during most of the 1980s (Sattar, 2017). Since the end of the Cold War and disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991,

new opportunities were provided for the betterment of Pakistan-Russia relations. The international political situation has shifted and traditional political divisions based on ideologies have diminished in significance. Slowly, both countries realised the potential of practical cooperation in areas such as trade, energy, defence and regional security. Russia also started to recognize the geographic significance of Pakistan and its potential in the promotion of stability in South and Central Asia too. In the same way, Pakistan acknowledged Russia as a major global power that had the influence and capabilities in the economic, diplomatic, and military sectors. Defense and security cooperation is also one of the significant aspects of Pakistan-Russia bilateral relations in recent years. The military contacts, joint drills, and talks on regional counterterrorism cooperation have increased in both countries. The series of the joint military exercise between Pakistan and Russia, Druzhba, is indicative of their enhanced military engagement and trust.

The developments suggest that Pakistan and Russia are more interested in a pragmatic approach than in the history of their disputes. But there are also great opportunities for both countries in the realm of energy cooperation. Pakistan is under severe energy crises, which not only include shortage of electricity but also rising prices of fuel and reliance on import of energy resources. Russia has significant oil and NG reserves and can be a great partner in Pakistan energy diversification strategy. Regional cooperation in the field of Russian hydrocarbons imports, energy infrastructure and technical cooperation has opened new opportunities for economic cooperation. The discounted Russian crude oil was also the first shipment to Pakistan in the year 2023, marking a significant milestone in the bilateral energy cooperation (Reuters 2023). However, there are a number of challenges that undermine Pakistan-Russia relations. Since the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, international financial transactions, trade and energy cooperation have been hindered by Western sanctions against Russia. The developments have caused concern for Pakistan, and its reliance on the international financial institutions, as well as its economic relationship with the Western countries. In addition, bilateral cooperation is hindered by various factors, such as divergent regional interests, low bilateral trade volume, transportation issues, financial restrictions, etc. Multipolar world demands to have strong ties with Russia as it will help Pakistan diversify its international relations and not be over-ambitious or over-dependant on traditional economic and strategic partners. Energy, agriculture, technology, trade and regional connectivity can be a source of cooperation for Pakistan's economic development. Pakistan should not, however, take the plunge into exclusive geopolitical partnerships which could have a deleterious impact on Pakistan's ties with the United States or China. In summary, the trajectory of Pakistan-Russia relations is shifting towards a more cooperative and sensible one. The differences in history have not been so relevant anymore as both countries see potential in the economic and strategic benefits each provides the other. There is a need to adopt a balanced policy of national interest, economic diplomacy and regional peace to improve Pakistan's ties with Russia and keeping the relationship with other major powers cordial.

7. Pakistan’s Strategic Balancing between the US, China, and Russia

In the modern international system, with the emergence of multipolar world order and increasing rivalry among key global powers, the course of Pakistan's foreign policy is becoming more and more dominated by these factors. Three actors – the United States, China and Russia – are important actors that have a significant impact on international relations, both politically and economically, as well as by

strategically. Pakistan has strong diplomatic and economic ties with all three nations and upholding a balance is therefore an integral part of Pakistan's foreign policy. The primary goal of this balancing approach is the preservation of the national sovereignty, the promotion of economic development, the enhancement of regional security and the maintenance of diplomatic independence without the prospect of joining rival geopolitical groups (Sattar, 2017). In Pakistan's strategic and economic foreign policy, China is in the middle. The two countries have established a long-term partnership of trust, defense cooperation, economic interests and regional security issues. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has also been a significant catalyst for further enhancing bilateral ties by delivering infrastructure, energy projects, transportation links, and regional connectivity since its inauguration in 2015. China is also Pakistan's key diplomatic and defense aid provider. But Pakistan should be careful not to have a negative impact of its proximity to China on other international partners. Hence, it is crucial for Pakistan's long-term national interests to remain economically diversified and have diplomatic flexibility. (Small, 2015) Meanwhile, Pakistan values the ongoing relationship with the United States. The United States is a key player in international trade, investment, education, technology and security affairs despite some instances of political conflict and diplomatic disruptions. Pakistan also wants the U.S. to assist in bolstering its economy and diplomatic relations in the international arena. But the convergence of strategic relationship building between the United States and India poses problems for Pakistan's regional security calculus. Moreover, Pakistan is finding it challenging to strike a balance between China and America as the latter is gaining ground. Hence, Islamabad must include the economic cooperation, diplomatic engagement and common interests rather than the geopolitical competition in its foreign policy calculus (Haqqani, 2005). Another key area for Pakistan's strategic diversification is Russia. Over the years, the ties between the two nations were shaped by the rivalry and regional affiliation of Cold War countries. With the evolution of the international climate, however, both countries have sought to cooperate more closely in energy, trade, defence and regional security. The government's interest in Russian oil and gas resources marks its move towards a more diversified energy mix and lessening economic dependency. Moreover, there are opportunities for diplomatic engagement and regional stability through cooperation via regional platforms, particularly the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Pakistan may strengthen ties with Russia to widen its foreign relations without cutting its ties with China and the USA (Sattar, 2017).

However, managing relations with these three major powers has its difficulties. As the US-China strategic rivalry intensifies, the pressure on the diplomatic front is increasing for countries that have close ties with the two. Also, after the Ukraine conflict, Russia's confrontation with the Western countries has complicated the international economic and diplomatic relationships. The economic ties between Pakistan and the international financial institutions, trade with the western market and strategic partnership between Pakistan and China must be managed carefully in the light of Pakistan's economic dependence. However, the country's internal political insecurity, economic problems and regional security issues also constrain Pakistan's freedom to take an independent foreign policy. These are the challenges that Pakistan needs to tackle by following a pragmatic and interest-based foreign policy. Economic diplomacy, increased diversification of trade, foreign investment, technology transfer, energy security and industrial development should be given greater importance and will be a key priority.

Furthermore, Pakistan's diplomatic efforts should be intensified in the multilateral forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and the United Nations. Pakistan should promote dialogue, peaceful conflict resolution and cooperation among the key international players, instead of playing one power against another. In conclusion, Pakistan faces a critical challenge of balancing its relations with the United States, China, and Russia, to safeguard its national interests in a multipolar world. Its foreign policy must be strategic autonomy, economic cooperation, diplomatic flexibility and regional stability. Pakistan has to build positive relations with all three powers to minimize external vulnerability, improve economic opportunities and strengthen its international position. The balance and independent action can turn the geo-political problems into opportunities for sustainable national development in Pakistan.

8. Impact of Great Power Competition on Pakistan's Foreign Policy

As a result of the increasing rivalry between the leading powers of the world, Pakistan's foreign policy and its role in the international political system have been significantly affected. The world is in a state of significant geopolitical change as the strategic rivalry between the United States, China and Russia grows. They struggle for political power, economic advantages, military dominance, technological progress and control of key regional interests. Pakistan, being a South Asian country, is directly impacted by these developments due to its strategic location. Because of its geographical location, the close ties with China, historical history of cooperation with the USA and the developing cooperation with Russia, it is an important player in the global order. Thus, Pakistan needs to carefully craft its foreign relations and ensure strategic autonomy (Acharya, 2014). The escalation of great power rivalry between the United States and China is one of the most notable consequences of great power rivalry on Pakistan. China's economic and military rise is a serious threat to the U.S. global leadership. In contrast, China is looking to consolidate its position on the international stage through economics, tech, military modernization and strategic partnerships. Pakistan has been engaged in close cooperation with China, especially in regard to CPEC, an integral part of the Chinese project "Belt and Road". Pakistan is also aware of the significance of having a positive relationship with the United States due to its economic, diplomatic, educational and security interests. This is a diplomatic problem for Pakistan, since it cannot directly get into the strategic conflict between these two big powers (Small, 2015).

The dynamics of relations between Russia and Western countries is yet another aspect of a great power competition. The Russia-Ukraine war started in February 2022 when Russia invaded Ukraine in a full-scale manner, escalating the conflict and worsening the relations between Russia and the United States and its European allies. International trade, energy markets, financial transactions and diplomacy have been impacted by Western sanctions against Russia. Pakistan has been struggling with the two-pronged issues of economic and diplomatic ties with Russia and safeguarding ties with the western countries. Meanwhile, joint cooperation with Russia can help Pakistan diversify its energy sources, expand trade and enhance regional political engagement. Hence, Pakistan should strike a balance and give emphasis on the economic issues while being careful not to take part in unnecessary wars in the international arena (Trenin, 2019). South Asia has also become a strategic region of great power competition. Pakistan's security calculations have been affected by the United States' growing involvement in defense and technology cooperation with India, and in the region in matters of security. Regional military developments and strategic alignments are also important factors for Pakistan to

ensure national security. China's close ties with Pakistan is another factor that is shaping the shifting regional power dynamics. The unfolding situation is a complex geopolitical picture where Pakistan has to carefully consider its strategic partnerships and diplomatic outlook. Regional stability and good relations with the neighbouring countries are thus crucial priorities of Pakistan's foreign policy (Sattar, 2017). There are economic competition issues among great powers too, which pose opportunities and challenges to Pakistan. Economic cooperation is possible through China's investments in infrastructure, America's know-how and capital and Russia's energy supplies.

These opportunities can be availed by Pakistan to diversify its trade markets, bring in foreign investment, help industrialization and enhance its energy security. But over-reliance on the economic power of a single nation or a financial institution at the international level can be problematic and reduce the autonomy of policy. Hence, it remains important for Pakistan's foreign policy to continue to prioritize economic diversification. In addition, in the context of great power competition, multilateral diplomacy has gained importance. Pakistan has the opportunity to promote its interests and interact with the various global powers through its involvement with international organisations, specifically the United Nations and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Diplomatic dialogue and regional cooperation will be a means for Pakistan to play its due role in fostering international peace, economic integration and security cooperation with other countries. To sum up, great power competition has made the international environment complex for Pakistan which poses serious challenges as well as immense opportunities. The nation must retain a balance between U.S., China and Russia and safeguard its sovereignty and economic interests. In the new multipolar global order, Pakistan's pragmatic foreign policy would provide enough buffer to deal with geopolitical challenges without losing its identity.With the prevailing multi-polar world order, Pakistan's foreign policy needs to be independent, pragmatic and diversified enough to enable it to navigate the challenges without compromising its identity.

10. Policy Recommendations

In order to tackle the challenges of emerging multipolar world order, Pakistan's foreign policy needs to be comprehensive and balanced. Till now, the strategic rivalry between the United States, China and Russia has thrown both challenges and opportunities at Pakistan. Pakistan has to pursue a pragmatic foreign policy that is founded on strategic autonomy, economic diplomacy, regional cooperation and national security to protect national interests, boost economic development and preserve its international influence. The following policy suggestions can help Pakistan to enhance its international standing and keep relations with key global powers balanced. First, Pakistan needs to have a balanced foreign policy with respect to the major powers of the world. A key priority of Pakistan's foreign policy should be to foster positive ties with the U.S. and China and Russia. Pakistan should not be a member of any exclusive geopolitical alliance or get into uncalled-for entanglements in great-power games. It should have friendly relations with every country, and cooperate with them in a practical way on the basis of mutual respect and mutual interests. This is where a balanced approach will help Pakistan to enjoy the benefits of international cooperation and be free from dependency on others in terms of diplomacy (Sattar, 2017).

Secondly, Pakistan will need to focus on economic diplomacy instead of relying on security arrangements to a fault. Foreign policy of Pakistan has been mostly centered on National Security and

Military Cooperation so far. But, in the new international context the attention needs to be paid to trade, investments, technology, education and industrial development. Pakistan should improve economic relations with the big powers by enhancing export, bringing more foreign direct investment and access to international markets. Economic stability will enhance Pakistan's foreign policy and lessen its reliance on foreign financial aid.

Thirdly, Pakistan must reinforce its strategic and economic relations with China. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) provides significant prospects for regional connectivity, industrial development, energy production and infrastructure development. Pakistan should prioritise on the successful implementation of the projects of the CPEC and should also seek Chinese investment in the field of agriculture, manufacturing, information technology, and renewable energy. Concurrently, there needs to be sound financial processes, better security measures and institutional changes to achieve long-term economic outcomes (Small, 2015).

Fourth, there should be an enhancement in Pakistan's diplomatic and economic relationship with the United States. In spite of the differences in their strategies, the U.S. is an important partner in international trade, education, investment, technology and security cooperation. Regular diplomatic contacts should be encouraged and efforts should be made to concentrate on areas of mutual concern. Trade opportunities, educational exchanges and American investment are all ways to strengthen bilateral relations. Pakistan also needs to raise a peaceful and diplomatic message on the issue of security to its neighbouring countries. Fifth, Pakistan needs to increase its actual cooperation with Russia. The bilateral engagement should focus on energy security, agriculture development, trade diversification and regional connectivity. Pakistan must seek mutually beneficial deals for energy supply and industrial development, as well as technical cooperation, and should be mindful of international sanctions and financial rules. Improved ties with Russia can offer more economic opportunities and offer Pakistan more international partners. Sixth Pakistan should foster the spirit of peace and economic cooperation in the region. To achieve regional stability, the improvement of relations with neighbouring countries is vital, especially Afghanistan, Iran, India and Central Asian states. Diplomatic efforts, peaceful resolution of conflict, cross-border trade and connectivity in the region should be supported in Pakistan. Diplomatic engagement and collective security can also be enhanced through cooperation between the member countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. Seventh, Pakistan should build up the internal political and economic stability. Foreign policy decisions may be negatively impacted by political uncertainty, weak institutions, corruption and economic instability. So the need is for institutional reform, democratic continuity and better governance and economic planning at the national level. Politically stable and economically strong Pakistan will be able to follow an independent foreign policy more effectively. Last but not least, Pakistan should build up its multilateral diplomacy and strategic autonomy. Pakistan can effectively serve the national interest and play its part in establishing peace and harmony around the world through active involvement in international and multilateral bodies like the United Nations, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, etc. Furthermore, Pakistan should give emphasis to climate diplomacy, sustainable development, technological cooperation and international trade. Finally, Pakistan must have a flexible, balanced and interest-based policy to deal with the challenges of multipolar world. Pakistan can enhance its international relations through better ties with the United

States, China and Russia, and by focussing on economic development, regional cooperation and domestic stability. It is important that its future foreign policy continue to be based on strategic autonomy and economic diplomacy.

11. Conclusion

The foreign policy of Pakistan in a multipolar world is gaining significance in the wake of the evolving global political realities and the competition being faced by major global powers. With the rise of the United States, China and Russia as key players, the international system has evolved and new opportunities and challenges have emerged for developing countries. In this changing global landscape, Pakistan's strategic geographic location, the nuclear status, its economic potential, and diplomatic relations makes it an important country. Pakistan has been consistently changing its foreign policy based on regional security, economic needs and changing international political situations since independence in 1947. The lessons it has learned in its past proves the significance of international cooperation and national sovereignty and strategic independence (Sattar, 2017). The study of Pakistan-US ties reveals that the ties between the two have been characterized by cooperation and conflict at various stages. The United States is a significant player in trade, security, education and international diplomacy, but tensions with the country on regional security and the potential for a US-India strategic partnership has posed a challenge for Pakistan. However, good relations with Washington continue to play a significant role for Pakistan's economic growth and foreign policy. Pakistan should thus, prioritize economic cooperation and build a long-term relationship with them that is based on mutual interests instead of immediate strategic needs. In the same way, Pakistan-China relations are one of the most promising aspects of its foreign policy. The strategic partnership between the two countries has grown and developed into various areas, including defense cooperation, diplomatic efforts, trade, and infrastructure development. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has also further enhanced bilateral cooperation to provide opportunities for transportation, energy generation, industrialization, regional connectivity etc. China is an important economic and strategic partner of Pakistan. To reap the rewards of this partnership, however, it is important to put it into practice, make it economically viable, modify institutions, and enhance security arrangements (Small, 2015). Pakistan-Russia relations have also gained importance in the changing international political environment. Although there were some variations in the past during the "Cold War", a gradual process of cooperation has been taking place in the areas of energy, trade, defense and regional security. Russia provides Pakistan with a chance to diversify its energy sources as well as its economic ties. Improving bilateral ties can help Pakistan improve its strategic agility and minimise the reliance on few countries. But Pakistan's foreign policy towards Russia has to be handled carefully given the western sanctions and continued geopolitics. The study also points out that the growing rivalry between the big powers poses big challenges for Pakistan. Due to the growing strategic contestation between the U.S. and China, and the feuds between China and Russia and between Russia and Western nations, there are more complications in regards to diplomacy. Pakistan should not be too reliant on any individual global power as it could limit Pakistan's foreign policy

autonomy, and expose Pakistan to economic weaknesses. Hence, strategic autonomy, economic diversification and judicious diplomacy should still be the cornerstones of the policy of Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan's foreign policy and international status will also rely on its internal political stability and economic strength. It may not be able to conduct its foreign policy in a free and unfettered manner owing to political uncertainty, weak governance, economic instability and security challenges in the region. Economic reforms, export expansion, foreign investments, technology development and regional connectivity are the key areas that need to be taken seriously by Pakistan. It can also improve its diplomatic status by enhancing its involvement in international organizations, including the UN and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, which can aid regional cooperation.

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