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Post-Afghanistan Withdrawal: Reassessing US–Pakistan Relations, Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

This study examines the evolution of US–Pakistan relations following the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan, focusing on the strategic, political, and economic implications for Pakistan. Drawing on primary sources such as official policy statements, government reports, and interviews, alongside secondary sources including scholarly articles and think-tank analyses, the research explores the shifting dynamics of bilateral ties in a post-Afghanistan context. Key issues analyzed include changes in security cooperation, regional stability, trade and economic engagement, and Pakistan’s strategic recalibration amid US–China competition. The study highlights the challenges Pakistan faces, including reduced U.S. influence in aid and policy support, heightened regional uncertainties, and the need for diversified foreign policy approaches. Simultaneously, it identifies prospects for redefining bilateral cooperation in areas such as trade, counterterrorism, and regional diplomacy. Overall, the research provides a comprehensive assessment of Pakistan’s strategic options and the evolving nature of US-Pakistan relations in the aftermath of Afghanistan’s transition.

Keywords: US–Pakistan Relations, Afghanistan Withdrawal, Post-Withdrawal Dynamics, Regional Security, Economic Implications, Strategic Recalibration, Bilateral Cooperation.

Introduction

The withdrawal of U.S. military forces from Afghanistan in August 2021 marked a historic shift in South Asian geopolitics, closing nearly two decades of American military engagement in the region. This transition not only brought an end to the longest war in U.S. history but also significantly altered the strategic landscape surrounding Pakistan, a neighboring state deeply entwined in Afghan affairs. The nature of U.S.–Pakistan relations has been shaped in large part by developments in Afghanistan, making the post withdrawal period a critical juncture for reassessing bilateral ties. Pakistan’s role as a key U.S. partner during the war on terror granted it strategic importance, but the abrupt exit of U.S. forces exposed Islamabad to new regional pressures

and altered expectations in its politics and security calculus. Scholars argue that the resultant vacuum has reconfigured diplomatic priorities and bilateral engagements between Islamabad and Washington. Farhan et al, (2024)

Afghanistan's security environment provides an important foundation for understanding the broader regional consequences of the U.S. withdrawal and its implications for US–Pakistan relations. Afghanistan's instability has often affected its neighboring countries, leading to changes in these countries' security assessments, alliance formations, and frameworks of regional cooperation. These changes, in the context of the post-withdrawal United States, have once again increased the importance of Pakistan to the United States, especially in the areas of counterterrorism, border security, and regional connectivity. At the same time, these changes have also created new problems involving militancy, refugee migration, and the competing interests of major powers in Central and South Asia. Barfield (2010)

Analyses published on the anniversary of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, including commentary from Middle East–focused research platforms, further contextualize the recalibration of US–Pakistan relations after 2021. The United States recognized not only the closure of a military campaign, but the beginning of a new chapter in the way the U.S. engages with the region. It forced Washington to depend more on relations of diplomacy as opposed to direct intervention. In this context, Pakistan is seen as a partner but also as a problem due to the complexity of mutual distrust, schismatic threat perceptions, divergent regional priorities, and the need to cooperate as the interlaced interests of stability and counterterrorism, in a countervailing manner, is posited for renewed engagement. Mulroy (2022)

Afghanistan's historical instability has always affected the neighboring countries, impacting their security assessments, alliance formations, and patterns of regional cooperation. In the Post withdrawal scenario, these factors have once again made Pakistan strategically important for the US, especially regarding counterterrorism, border security, and regional connectivity, while also presenting new challenges of militations, refugee movements, and the impact of great power rivalry in Central and South Asia. Nourzhanov (2021)

Nevertheless, the legacy of dominant imperial entities, the Cold War, and subsequently the United States, has created and sustained the enduring state system, state fragility, and persistent the regional system of the South Asia subcontinent, in particular the South Asia subcontinent, and the system's regional dominant power Pakistan and its security and foreign policy. This legacy also explains the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan as the United States no longer has any military presence in Afghanistan, but withdrawal has created and developed new systemic conditions, has changed the framework of dominant power relations in the region, and has necessitated the United States and Pakistan to rethink their relations in light of new and changing configurations and dominant power relations.

The Pak-US relationship is a distinct experience concerning foreign policy; however, the historic bilateral relations are strongly connected with foreign aid & economic sanctions. There may be some mutual grievances, which may motivate bilateral relations and intentions for collaboration. Several issues have arisen on both sides originating from the Cold War, and post 9/11 conflicts. While there have been many ups and downs in bilateral relations, there is also the interdependency of the two countries which is an inescapable reality. There is also a multiplicity of issues in relation to Pakistan's foreign policy and economic security. The major foreign interest between the two countries stems from a shared anticipation concerning the future of Afghanistan, US-China and US-India relations, and Pakistan's role concerning the US withdrawal from Afghanistan which will be critical for the region. (Akhtar, 2022).

US withdrawal from Afghanistan had several implications for Pakistan, which shares a long border with Afghanistan due to which, Pakistan has several concerns. Due to instability and the US presence in Afghanistan, there were several implications. The United States' exit from Afghanistan was a significant event that affected Pakistan in a variety of ways, both positive and negative. While there are a number of complexities that accompany the challenges and possible opportunities, the implications i.e. strategically, the withdrawal

of the US from Afghanistan will definitely need a comprehensive framework; strategically, politically, economically and from a security stand point (Muzaffar, Yaseen, and Afzal, 2021). Further, the contested US exit from Afghanistan provides an impetus to examine the waning influence of the US in the region. In this regard, Pakistan, especially in relation to the Taliban, holds a significant position. (Stepanova, 2022).

While emphasizing geo-economic orientation, the US and Pakistan want to change the pattern of interest between the two. Currently, the US military mission has been concluded whereas the US administration wants to change the dimension of Pak-US relations. Pak-US ties are expected to developed from Afghanistan and counter terrorism. These two aspects have been the highest priorities in the past. Conversely, Pakistan is now being seen, from different dimensions, as one of the, major partners, along with the US, in the present context. However, from the perspective of the present decade, one more dimension is of great significance, and that is, the Taliban's conquest is testing Pakistan's longstanding relations with the two countries.

Subsequent the events of 9/11, Pakistan became an ally of the United States forging an alliance which involved the offered military and economic assistance in exchange for military participation and counter-terrorism cooperation. But, with the United States withdrawal, old partnerships discussions on the collaboration and its costs became available for other pre-occupations especially with Pakistan's focus shifting from military interventions toward a strategically competitive policy with respect to China. The withdrawal of diplomacy empirical research shows that Pakistan's current reality is that of the renegotiation of the bilateral security accord with the United States. The renegotiation is in response to the United States new priorities of reduced assistance and a pivot to multilateralism. (Ullah et al, 2023)

The same Pakistan–China relations and US–India partnership will continue to challenge US–Pakistan relations. This is mainly because US–Pakistan relations have not improved because of the US aligning more closely with India. This has led Pakistan to believe it is being situated more towards the outside of the US's core concerns. On the other hand, Pakistan's involvement with China and the China/Pakistan Economic Corridor continues to alarm US decision makers. Pakistan has to promote strategic independence while managing the triangular relationships to stabilize the United States' concerns with her relationships as Pakistan does not have to create a partnership to 'contain' someone. This describes the situation best, Syed et al, (2021). The situation has greatly changed after the US's withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The post withdrawal period is now more pragmatic with US–Pakistan relations. There will be greater cooperation and dialogue around counterterrorism cooperation, health, stability and the environment along with people exchanges as there will be a reduction in distrust and strategic about the relationships. For Pakistan, the best approach is to create direct relations with the United States and avoid the crises approach while the United States will have to move towards recognizing the strategic environment around Pakistan's borders as now not solely focused upon Afghanistan. If both countries take a longer term view focused upon mutual interests, the post-withdrawal era will be the best period in transforming and enriching the relationship. Khan et al, (2024)



Source: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1186/s43093-025-00528-4>

The above chart illustrates four key dimensions shaping U.S.–Pakistan relations—economic aid, military support, diplomatic engagements, and public perception—and shows how each has influenced Pakistan’s strategic responses after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. U.S. economic aid continues to affect Pakistan’s policy choices through conditionality, while declining military support has weakened Pakistan’s defense cooperation at a time when cross-border militancy and threats from groups like the TTP are rising. Diplomatic engagements remain essential for managing regional instability, especially as the Taliban’s return has reshaped regional alignments. Public perception within Pakistan also plays a significant role, as growing mistrust of U.S. intentions affects policy decisions during a period of renewed security pressures emerging from Afghanistan.

Following the withdrawal of the troops from the U.S., Pakistan experienced issues with security due the withdrawal of the U.S troops experiencing issues. Being borders with militant threats, the tightening of alliances and dismissal of the U.S in Afghanistan. The U.S. withdrawal has led to an increase in threats to the territorial integrity of Pakistan, with no protection against the Taliban in Afghanistan. The Taliban in Afghanistan has led to renewed threats to Pakistan’s sovereignty and the need for Pakistan to develop new policies and refine existing counter-terrorism strategies. This has greatly influenced Pakistan’s security policies while focusing on overriding counter-terrorism measures and policies to achieve a balance on policies on Afghanistan issues. This, is in turn, has led to a balance of Pakistani policies on Afghanistan. This has led to a much greater degree of Afghanistan and Afghanistan policies, encouraging Pakistan to confront these new policies with Kabul. This has shifted the Taliban Government’s policies towards India. Bashir (2023) Increased military and diplomatic Pakistan policies and the implementation of new strategies. The United States has shifted focus from threats posed due to counter terrorism to threats posed to Afghanistan, which, to create a balance of control to avoid a counter-terrorism ally, a state military focus with China. This has led to a shift from terrorism to a more complex balance of Pakistan and China. This has led to increased military and diplomatic focus from China and the U.S. to Afghanistan to a level of Pakistan. This has led to a shift in control for Washington on Pakistan to issues that extend from realms of counter-terrorism to economic control over and trade with Pakistan. Akhtar & Holland (2023)

On the issue of economic factors of withdrawal, the U.S and Afghanistan focus towards Pakistan have shifted greatly. During this time, with U.S. financial assistance declining, and Islamabad broadening its economic partnerships, especially with China through its Belt and Road Initiative, the bilateral economic agenda with the U.S. also slowed down. Scholars argue that Pakistan still wants to maintain economic relations with the

U.S. However, the wider geopolitical competition has motivated Islamabad to go for diversifying its economic relations and partnerships. See for instance, Khan et al, (2024).

The decreased economic leverage that the U.S. has over Pakistan has also made it more complicated for Washington to influence Pakistan's internal policies, reforms, and foreign policy decisions, the way it potentially could during the peak of their strategic relations. Another aspect of the relations, especially during the post-withdrawal period, is the role of soft power and people-to-people relations, which has been sorely lacking because of decades of mistrust and fluctuating diplomatic priorities. Past relations were mostly dominated by security concerns, but scholars point to the increasing potential for bilateral relations to be rejuvenated through soft power such as educational exchanges, and economic cooperation that goes beyond the military and humanitarian assistance paradigms, to which both Islamabad and Washington strategically align. Enhancing these dimensions requires both political will and to place the relations within the context of an evolving partnership. See for example, Ayalon et al, (2022). The evolving regional architecture with an increased Chinese presence, the resurgence of Russia, as well as the changing situation in Afghanistan, creates both challenges and opportunities for U.S.-Pakistan relations.

Pakistan's Economic Policy Strategy because of China's influence and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor-China's Economic Policy Frameworks (CPECC) is affected with the incorporation of the Economic Policy Integration (EPI) framework because of Pakistan's diverse geographical positioning. Furthermore, Pakistan has to develop relations with the United States (U.S) relations to make sure Pakistan discretion and Control to further avoid Pakistan being involved in Close strategic partnerships. Balanced relations require sophisticated and streamlined foreign policy with the major building blocks being Economic Growth and Security ((Bano & Afridi, 2023)

Political structure within Pakistan has determined the narrative the country has taken Post Withdrawal. The Civil-Military equations, political leaders, and citizen's perspectives shape the level of cooperation Pakistan is to engage with US counter-terrorism initiatives, trade relations and diplomacy. The interrelation of internal politics and foreign policy actions is the core driver of the Pakistan-United States relations in this epoch (Khan et al, 2024)

Notwithstanding the hurdles, there is scope for redefining bilateral partnerships for in the areas of economic cooperation, environmental actions, and regional diplomacy. Analysts believe Afghanistan changes can lead to improved bilateral relations through cooperation on economic growth, counterterrorism, and regional connectivity. Haftlang, A. K., & Mohaghignia, H. (2023)

US-Pakistan relations in the post Afghanistan withdrawal period sets the stage for a complex realignment where the Pakistan foreign relations and domestic researchers can appreciate the changes for the relations of the two countries. It is to this end that this research will provide a comprehensive analysis of how Pakistan and the US can respond to the new world order. Ziegler (2024)

Significance of the Study

This study focuses on how the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan is impacting the level of the strategic, political, and economic dimensions of US-Pakistan relations. The end of the two-decade-long war is likely to undergo modifications and adjustments to Pakistan's position on and relations with Afghanistan, as Pakistan is compelled to reexamine the durability and the security of the diplomatic relations with the United States. The focus of the study on the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and its implications on the Pakistan-US relations provides framework to policymakers, researchers, security analysts and to the rest of the world to analyze the re-prioritization or the 'Prioritization of Pakistan's Foreign Policy.' The study describes in detail the modifications, re-shuffles and adjustments in the U.S aid and economic interests for Pakistan along the lines of the U.S. tightened and recalibrated counter-terrorism interests, and the restructured aid and economic counter-cooperations to the Pakistan's security and economic vulnerabilities as well as the espionage and diplomatic weaknesses. This also allows for the U.S and Pakistan to align on climate politics, counter-

terrorism, and regional peace, which enables the U.S and Pakistan to align on a variety of issues and allows for a variety of future opportunities. The study tries to help policymakers with a variety of available options in order to improve the U.S-Pakistan relations.

Research Objectives

To analyze how the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan has reshaped the strategic, political, and security dimensions of U.S.–Pakistan relations, with particular attention to emerging challenges such as counterterrorism, regional instability, and shifting power dynamics in South Asia.

To assess the prospects for future cooperation between the United States and Pakistan by identifying areas of mutual interest, potential policy alignments, and obstacles that may influence bilateral engagement in the post-withdrawal regional environment.

Relevant Literature

Batool et al. (2025), Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan in the era of U.S. withdrawal focus on Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan. Most experts argue that of several factors of the Durand Line border dispute, cross-border terrorism, and state-sponsored terrorism, the lack of balance in Pakistan-Afghanistan relations and regional instability is of most concern. In the literature, there is the absence of focus on non-traditional transnational crime, the problems of narcotics, illegal trade of weapons, and the settlement of refugees. Focus on the geopolitics of Afghanistan and Pakistan suggests that the lack of control is not only the result of regional power perception, but there is also the absence of the will of the governing pole. Most experts converge on the fact that the combination of these factors enhances the security of Afghanistan. But in advancing Afghanistan's relations with Pakistan, the security of Afghanistan will be constrained.

In Maaz et al, (2025), the case of the Pakistan–Afghanistan region is a focal point of study within the context of the post-9/11 regional landscape. It has been highlighted that during the long engagement of the United States alongside NATO, the Pakistan–Afghanistan mattered greatly within the scope of International Relations (IR) security politics. It has been stated that while considerable resources were allocated by the United States to counter the Taliban, defeat Al-Qaeda, and assist in the construction of a democratic Afghan state, the differing United States administrations were seemingly unable to formulate a strategy that adequately addressed the complexities of Afghanistan’s social structure, the rivalries of the neighboring states, and the Taliban’s capacity to reorganize. Research is conclusive that these factors not only frustrated the United States objectives, but also exacerbated the security predicament of Pakistan. Pakistan has been affected by the situation in Afghanistan, as it has been a source of growing violence, cross-border terrorism, in addition to the mobilization of the institutional and economic resources of the country, while the government is frustrated due to the lack of trust in bilateral relations.

The impacts of withdrawal from Afghanistan have been the subject of study by Raz (2023), who shows that due to long-standing political, economic and intelligence support to the Taliban of Afghanistan, it was expected that the return to power of the Taliban in 2021 would strengthen Afghanistan- Pakistan relations. However, increasing evidence, like the transition of the Taliban from a non-state actor to a state which brought a change in its strategic focus, explain the unexpected downturn in relations with Pakistan and a rapprochement with India. Using a mixed approach of description and analysis, the study shows that the violations of Afghanistan’s sovereignty by Pakistan, the Taliban’s support of anti-Pakistan militant groups such as the TTP, and the long-standing dispute over the Durand Line resulted in a growing alienation of the hostile triad Pakistan, Afghanistan and the Taliban. The rise in tensions and border skirmishes of the triad have wider implications, primary of which should be the reappraisal of America’s relations with Pakistan in the context of growing American withdrawal from Afghanistan, as the deterioration in Pakistan- Afghanistan relations has increased security challenges for Pakistan and has complicated its counter-terrorism collaboration with other nations and redefined its external relations.

Shaoukat et al (2024) explains how Afghanistan is geopolitically situated at the center of China, Iran, and Pakistan, making it a focal point of interest for global players, and Afghanistan's relationships with all major countries in the region is a complex phenomenon. Pakistan Afghanistan relations are particularly complex, as there is a visible pattern of cooperation, and later, significant mistrust, from 1947 and the Taliban's capture of Kabul in 2021. It is noted that Pakistan's apprehensions toward India's growing influence in Afghanistan are understandable, as it is seen as an encroachment of a major power along Pakistan's strategically important western frontier. The descriptive, analytical and comparative study of Pakistan's policy after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, suggests that Afghanistan's geopolitics, particularly Pakistan's location vis a vis Afghanistan and the regional rivalries, and border insecurities are the major constraints in the policy. Pakistan's apprehension in the new geopolitics will be part of the policy.

Herrera and Wolt (2021) study the U.S. withdrawal and the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in 2021 as a major event in world history, after which the world's political landscape underwent a series of changes. The focus of these changes would, in new post-Taliban Afghanistan, be primarily on Pakistan. The literature suggests that the new power configuration in Kabul has exacerbated the already complex security and diplomatic environment in Pakistan. It has revived the concerns of cross border violence, the flow of refugees and strained economies on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

Mumtaz & Shah (2025) examine the US Incursions in Afghanistan that followed the events of September 11, 2001. They point out that even though the goal of Operation Enduring Freedom was to build democratic governance, develop rule of law, and eliminate the militants and terrorists, the prolonged military engagements and presence did not yield sustainable and stable democratic governance. Even though the military engagements in rule of law and order did not yield stable and democratic governance, the scholars point out that the military presence was too weak and dependent and dominated the Afghanistan national institutions and law enforcement and military. Most studies argue that the gradual and also the accelerated military troop withdrawals that primarily occurred during the Trump presidency, the power vacuum that was created was to the detriment of Afghanistan democratic governance. Recent research placed a greater focus on the fact that the lack of democratic governance in Afghanistan, which could have been established through some form of foundational democratic political legal structures, coupled with the competing interests of the regional and bordering actors and nations, also increased the odds of Afghanistan descending into a situation of civil strife and war once again.

Shafiee (2025) discusses the US strategic, political and geopolitical military withdrawal from Afghanistan and the varying focus of GPS on the US geopolitical focuses and rationale. The vast amount of data and research surrounding this topic is observational and stretches back to Biden era officials' statements that termed the involvement in the Afghanistan conflict as endless and unwinnable and what they compared to the Vietnam War and what they termed the 'Vietnamization' of the conflict. This was analyzed in a light in which the resources and tools of the American state to combat the 'strategic' focus of the United States' competition with Afghanistan in East Asia. There is the added emphasis that the removal of troops, the United States Active Military Conflict engagement, Afghanistan Withdrawal, and Troop Removal, equipped the United States with unstated mechanisms of indirect political power and leverage to be used in the competitors in Afghanistan, and surrounding nations, and China, the Belt and Road Initiative, that is also in the region of Xinjiang. All of this is to state that Afghanistan is no longer viewed as just a buffer. It also allows China and The United States to be very politically active in the territories surrounding Afghanistan. It also allows Afghanistan to be viewed as having political power in the competition bordering Afghanistan.

Munshi (2022) study find that Pak-US relations almost universally labels bilateral engagements as transactional, asymmetrical, and crisis-driven, influenced predominantly by realignments in US strategic interests, as opposed to developing enduring partnerships. Scholars have identified, on the contrary, broken promises, misperceptions, and trust deficits as some of the factors compromising the relational framework's sustainability, both countries possessing wishful thinking concerning the other's policies. The United States'

strategic geographical considerations in Pakistan have, more often than not, been overshadowed by the geopolitical focus on Afghanistan, whether it be during the Cold War, the Soviet invasion, or the post-9/11 War on Terror, leading to periods of episodic engagement and neglect. Other scholarship has documented Pakistan's increasing marginalization due to economic and military sanctions resulting from the perception of abandonment post-fulfillment of US objectives.

Khatoon et al (2024) has documented Afghanistan's geopolitical significance and highlighted the enduring centrality of global power politics and the constant external interventions in the country. It is widely accepted that Pakistan, as a frontline non-NATO ally and during the extended War on Terror, suffered the most in terms of security, political, and economic consequences of the unsustained violence in Afghanistan. The majority of scholarly works have noted that the U.S.-Taliban Peace Agreement of February 29, 2020, was viewed positively at the start, but analyses have focused on the U.S. withdrawal in August 2021, and the Afghan state's sudden collapse. The U.S. withdrawal and the rapid collapse of Afghan security forces, which facilitated a rapid return of the Taliban, have been attributed to the underlying fragility of Afghan governance and external state-building efforts. Most contemporary literature continues to address the consequences for Pakistan, regarding security, political stability and governance, economic and military pressure, and strategic realignment.

Gul (2024) research on South Asian geopolitics points out that throughout history, there have been changes in dominance in the world, and the US, as a superpower, has been and continues to be on a constant move with their attention to various regions; with the shifts of the US, there have been changes (and increases) in the impact on South Asian geopolitics as it becomes more and more interventional). South Asian geopolitics is important to the US due to the South Asian country of focus possessing top tier South Asia security and South Asia economic potential (and South Asia geopolitics overall). South Asian geography (in the middle of Asia, and to the sides with Europe, Africa and the oceans) also is a reason for US South Asia geopolitics focus). There is an agreement of the South Asia historiography perspective of South Asian geography and the South Asia country of focus possessing top tier South Asia security (and also in South Asia economic potential). There also has been historiography focus of India in South Asia and the US (and South Asia) relations as being more positive as there has, and there continues to be, a focus on relations with India and the US, which did and has been, especially in the recent past, in providing more than adequate positive relations to India and the US due to the concerns of China with India Historically, there has been negative relations with South Asia specifically with South Asia geography and South Asia historiography.

Irfan & Ahsan (2025) highlight the complexities of the impact of Pak-US relations between 2008-2022 and its consequential impact on the economic relations of the two countries, stressing the importance of foreign policy and economic collaboration. Given the macroeconomic conditions of Pakistan, the researchers explain the short-lived periods of cooperation, driven by the counterterrorism quagmire, the Afghan War, and Pakistan's macroeconomic challenges. The literature elaborates on the impact of US aid (the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act and other aid-for-support arrangements) on Pakistan's economy and the subsequent improvement on her external economic balances, while also documenting the short-lived and episodic nature of US support, along with the changes in strategic focus (particularly after the withdrawal of NATO from Afghanistan) as factors that revealed the economic fragility of Pakistan. Additionally, the scholars cite the absence of Pak-US economic relations, bilateral trade deficits, conditionality of aid, the contraction of foreign direct investment, and the imposition of sanctions as explanatory variables of the low economic resilience of the two countries. Waheed (2017) studied on US-Pakistan relations emphasizes that despite decades of extensive economic and military assistance, the United States has exercised limited leverage over Pakistan, a challenge that has become more pronounced in the post-Afghanistan withdrawal era. The collapse of the aid-for-leverage strategy, ongoing policy divergences—especially concerning India—and the patron-client relationship dynamics, are said to increase mistrust and strategic drift. Also, China's increased involvement in supporting the military indigenization of Pakistan and the diversification of its arms supplies, which considerably lessened Pakistan's

reliance on U.S. aid and further limited U.S. influence, reshaped the post-withdrawal bilateral relations and their prospects and challenges.

Anuka & Raymond (2024) research on the U.S. foreign policy towards Afghanistan has built understanding on the realist and liberalist perspectives, thus focusing on America's strategic goals while trying to explain the American pursuit of national interest, whether on a short, medium, or long term perspective. When it comes to the studies on the Biden administration, there is an overwhelming reliance on historical analysis and qualitative analysis on secondary resources such as the literature, the media, or the reports and documents of government agencies and it seeks to explain the rationale and consequences of the U.S. withdrawal of soldiers. Kronstadt (2012) studies on economic imbalances have been a persistent issue in Pakistan-U.S. relations, characterized by trade deficits and unequal dependency dynamics. Pakistan relies heavily on exports of textiles and agricultural products to the U.S., while importing high-value machinery, technology, and chemicals, leading to a trade imbalance in favor of the U.S. Furthermore, Pakistan's dependence on U.S. financial aid and loans has further skewed the economic relationship, creating vulnerabilities in its fiscal stability. This imbalance is exacerbated by Pakistan's limited export diversification and structural economic challenges, which hinder its ability to fully capitalize on U.S. market opportunities.

McCartney (2011) study explore that Pakistan's economical vulnerability is rooted in the fact the country relies on foreign funded Schaumburg, 2002 Other Sources of economical vulnerability have to do with Pakistan growing and relying heavily on external funding from trading partners and on foreign workers' remittances. Foreign aid has always played an important role in the Pakistani economy, especially during a crisis, the U.S, Multilateral institutions including IMF and World Bank and some regional partners. This dependence arise due mainly to structural problems such as a poorly diversified export profile, which is dominated by textiles, an albatross of external liabilities, and a worst of all a fiscal deficit.

Shafiq & Yasmin (20121) discusses that Trump administration brought another shift as America shifted to a transactional diplomacy style. Lack of space, problems in Afghanistan, and cut down in US aid and mounting concerns over the support of Pakistan to non-state actors led the country to face the flaws of its trade dependence on USA that formed the major part of its economy. This change happened at a time as the country strengthened its economic relations with China especially through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) although this source of economic cooperation offered debt accumulation challenges.

Sohrab & Choudary (2012) mentioned that future of Pakistan-US relations depends on the ability to move away from this largely security based dictated relationship towards engagement of multiple dimensions of both countries bilateral relationship. Old concerns like counter terrorism, regional security, and stability will continue to matter, but the relationship has to evolve its focus to accommodate new domains of concern and cooperation as climate change, uses of technologies, and development. Amidst pragmatic interests, deepening trade and investment relations and focusing on education and culture exchange and cooperation, as well as in the framework of sustainable development could transform the relationship on more balanced and prospective course.

Implications of the Study

The withdrawal of U.S.-led international forces created serious security gaps in Afghanistan, leading to a sharp rise in swift and deadly suicide attacks. One of the most tragic incidents was the suicide bombing in the Barchi district of West Kabul on 30 September 2022, which killed 53 young girls and women from the Hazara community. These persistent weaknesses in Afghanistan's security framework have had direct and profound repercussions for Pakistan, particularly through heightened threats from IS-K and the TTP. In the post-withdrawal period, Pakistan has continued to face terrorism, militancy, and religious extremism—challenges rooted in its role as a frontline ally in the War on Terror. The Taliban's return to power has further intensified these risks by facilitating the resurgence of domestic militant groups such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, along with sleeper cells linked to transnational terrorist networks including Islamic State and Al-Qaeda.

(Nisar, Amin, & Asghar, 2023).

Insurgencies along Pakistan's western border are of deep concern to Pakistan especially in the border tribal areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. In the former FATA regions, the biggest threat here is the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which is known to be a group that is not completely organized and lacks a unified command structure and is in fact very fragmented. When the US forces left, the TTP's activities raised concern and Pakistan responded by deploying more of their security forces. Additionally, and Pakistan has also raised Balochistan's Separatist Movements that Pakistan alleges are backed by Afghan border, and Pakistan has also stated that it feels India backs these movements which increases the border tensions Pakistan faces.

Initially, it was believed that US backing of these movements would end, but Pakistan stated that the Interlinked Militant Networks are a threat to US backed Separatist Movements. As Pakistan has always stated, Afghanistan is a Strategic Space and has used it against Pakistan in a more Targeted and Focused way, which has seen the Pakistan based Afghan Militant Groups target Pakistan. Using these Afghan based PakMil Groups has always been the way to Target Pakistan's Internal security and Islamabad has presented evidence to the World of India backing these Militant Groups. It has been highlighted that Pakistan is Targeting India's Involvement in Afghanistan and Pakistan is Targeted by Afghanistan.

The Taliban leadership has specifically guaranteed in "Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan between Taliban and US" not to allow the Afghan territory to be used against anyone. However, so far, they could not keep their claim to control terror outfits. Likewise, TTP's newly announced irredentist approach dismissing the Durand Line or the Pak- Afghan border may also find more sympathizers in Afghanistan as the Taliban also have not categorically supported Pakistan's position on the Durand Line (Nopens, 2022).

The consideration of terrorism, particularly the threat posed by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, has been the predominant factor guiding Pakistan's relationship with the Taliban-led administration in Afghanistan. The release of over 800 TTP fighters, including key individuals like Faqir Mohammad, plus the release of Al Qaeda and Islamic State affiliates, from the Pul-e-Charkhi and Bagram prisons, has contributed to a substantial strengthening of the insurgent networks in the region. Resultantly, Pakistan's security environment has deteriorated, with the TTP and BLA operating with impunity, and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan regions have experienced almost 170 terrorist incidents. There has been a particular rise in assaults on Chinese citizens working on CPEC.

The challenges on Pakistan's counter-extremism efforts over the past 20 years, and the costs associated with it, have a great deal to do with the Afghan imbroglio and the historic role of Afghanistan as a source of militant ideology (Khan & Humza, 2022). The Taliban's takeover of Kabul has resulted in the 'return' of Jihadist networks, a phenomenon consistent with the historical pattern of the 1990s, 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror. The Taliban's control, following the U.S. forces' hasty withdrawal in August 2021, was a result of the Taliban's swift takeover of the security vacuum that was left.

Al-Qaeda and IS-K leave no opportunity for exploitation when it comes to security vacuums. Such has been the case after the rapid US international withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent collapse of the Afghan government, which has been their primary target for recruitment and operational planning. The security vacuum is a Swiss cheese of operational exploitable zones for non-state actors. It is hasty to assume and state that IS-K poses little to no threat to the US. The rapid collapse of Afghanistan's government is a strong indicator to the scope of extremism present within Afghanistan, and an emptied Afghanistan posed a severe threat to US.

The aforementioned factors combined create an unmitigated threat for US operations and allies within the region, and on the borders of Afghanistan. Pakistan has been explained, and rightly so, to be the greatest threat of the aforementioned region. Pakistan is the primary state within which the consequences of a rapidly collapsing Afghanistan and subsequent extremist exploitation occur, and is the state which destabilizes the

region and the US's ability to operate within Afghanistan and the surrounding countries. Pakistan has been explained, and rightly so, to be the primary-state jeopardized by such a desolate Afghanistan.

It is this unmitigated, un-refused exploitation of Afghanistan that calls for an isolation of the colliding consequences faced by extremism and Pakistan to prevent it from destroying the security grid surrounding Afghanistan and the western world. It is the unmitigated, un-refused exploitation of Afghanistan that calls for an isolation of the colliding consequences faced by extremism and Pakistan to prevent it from destroying the security grid surrounding Afghanistan and the western world.

Pakistan has been explained, and rightly so, to be the greatest threat of the aforementioned region. It is this unmitigated, un-refused exploitation of Afghanistan that calls for an isolation of the colliding consequences faced by extremism and Pakistan to prevent it from destroying the security grid surrounding Afghanistan and the western world. (Muzaffar, Nawab, & Yaseen, 2021). Therefore, the security concerns have gained prominence even further for Pakistan specifically after the draw-down process. A well-coordinated and collaborated relationship between US and Pakistan is the need of the hour otherwise strained and edgy rapport of the two states would jeopardize the situation and will be an ultimate challenge affecting the entire spectrum of the aspects of security.

Discussion

In 2025, the Taliban's failures may leave Afghanistan in very poor condition, as an extreme case of a weak state, marked by a continuing humanitarian disaster, and a growing presence of armed groups, dictating the state of the country and presenting immediate humanitarian and security problems for Afghanistan's neighbor, Pakistan. Increasing oppression, a deepening of the economic crisis, and even greater ethnic fragmentation of the country has led to a strengthening of groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syraq (ISIS-K) and Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) by filling the void of power in Afghanistan. An Afghanistan abandoned by State power poses a considerable threat to Pakistan; the growing and unregulated movement of armed groups across the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, as well as the introduction and exacerbation of instability in the border regions of Pakistan (i.e. Balochistan) directly leads to greater disruptions in the regional security environment and Pakistan's aging security problems. Afghanistan's humanitarian crisis is leading to a further deterioration of Pakistan's already limited regional security environment. Pakistan possesses, and will continue to suffer, the greatest impact of the new and increased threats of terrorism.

The withdrawal of the US military from Afghanistan marked a new chapter in the politics of South Asia and the west's influence on the regional geopolitics. The sudden withdrawal of the US military from the bases in Afghanistan created a vacuum. The Taliban quickly and efficiently filled this vacuum by taking major cities and controlling huge areas of the border. The humanitarian situation has changed to a major disaster, as the Afghans are suffering from poverty, unemployment, and loss of civil and political rights. The new vacuum has also led to the rise and strengthening of ISIS-K and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, which are significant threats to Afghanistan and the western border of Pakistan. The new vacuum also led to the rise of ISIS-K and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan to a considerable extent. ISIS-K and the TTP are important threats to Afghanistan's internal stability and also to Pakistan's western border national security. The withdrawal has also had a significant impact on Pakistan's internal security situation by enabling cross border TTP and Pakistan's internal security situation on the western border.

The withdrawal has also affected Pakistan, India, Iran and China's the international politics, strategies, and diplomacy of Afghanistan and the new Taliban regime. Pakistan is walking a very fine line between allowing substantive regional rivals to influence the Taliban and Afghanistan and Pakistan's western border and obstructing the US and the vacuum created by the Afghanistan withdrawal. The US withdrawal also has an impact on the stability of Afghanistan and on Pakistan and the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan's (TTP) security situation, and ISIS-K's internal security situation in the Pakistan western border détente.

Conclusion

The U.S. military withdrawal and the Taliban takeover evidence the complicated intersection of external involvement, internal control, and the security of a given area. The rapid withdrawal resulted in both a political and security vacuum, which allowed the Taliban once again to regain control, which in turn worsened the humanitarian crisis. The situation illustrates the foreign military presence and the associated limitations in attempts to build Afghanistan as a sustainable state. The situation also highlights the challenges associated with leaving a conflict zone without a political compromise.

Moreover, this withdrawal situation and its outcomes negatively affected Pakistan. It highlighted vulnerabilities along its borders, especially the threat of transnational terrorism. It also caused a realignment of military and political power in the region, especially among border nations. It required a major realignment of their regional strategies to deal with the Taliban's enhanced power. This situation is a major example of the outcomes of foreign intervention, challenges of state building, and the regional consequences from the intervention.

The study also highlights how the evolving regional context, especially the deepening US–India strategic partnerships and Pakistan's growing attraction to China, of the last three years, has added further complexity to the Pak–US relations. Although the relations are deeply antagonistic, they are characterized by a lack of cooperation and even constructively so. The main structural regional challenges remain, with competing perceptions of the Afghanistan-Pakistan region and the regional security implications of a US exit from Afghanistan. The competing structural challenges remind us of the Pak–US relations' great strategic realism, especially now that they navigate an increasingly multipolar regional context characterized by competition, shifting balances, and diminished reliance on traditional security.

The study also concludes that the United States and Pakistan relations are likely to be defined, and ripe for redefining their relationship during the United States post-Afghanistan withdrawal. The fostering of relations beyond the primary military sphere to include economic diplomacy, climate diplomacy, regional connectivity, and even psychosocial (or, P2P decentrist) relations and law will be catalyst for the reducing of the deficit of trust in and the re-establishment of the cooperative relations of the United States and Pakistan. This approach promises to establish a clear and defined pragmatic approach for even the Pakistan side to adhere to a balanced foreign policy to initiate the post-withdrawal period from a layered construct of uncertainty to a period characterized by caution and constructive relations.

Findings

The US pullout from Afghanistan has been shown to diminish the importance of Pakistan to the US as a center point of strategy, particularly one that focuses on counter-terrorism. An evident reduction in the levels of engagement and security collaboration has reinforced the historically transactional elements in US-Pak relations. The period since the US withdrawal has created a trust deficit which increases in scale and scope as the two countries continue to view one another's strategic importance as declining.

The study also finds that the Pakistan and US relations have also been complicated by the divergence in regional outlook and colliding strategic priorities. The apparent partnership between the US and India and the budding relationship between Pakistan and China have also created a form of geo-politically constituted constraints to the deepening of collaboration. The resultant state of affairs of realignment of geo-political actors, compounded by the divergent perceptions of Afghanistan and the entire region, have tended to cement Pakistan's position in US policy (post-withdrawal) and diminish the state's policy options.

The findings have shown that, regardless of the circumstances, there are opportunities for framing a new Pakistan and US relationship, particularly in the realms which are not considered traditional or militaristic. Pakistan and US relationships on economic affairs, climate, counter-terrorism, and the movement of peoples are likely to restore the relationship and build the trust which has been the center point in the partnership. The research findings highlight the movement from engagement which is designed for crisis to one that seeks to

build a partnership designed for the long term engagement as the relationship seeks to achieve a balance which is sustainable and beneficial to both countries.

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