

Current Affairs

Question

Analyze the evolution of Pakistan's Foreign policy from 1947 to present.

Foreign policy definition:

"Foreign policy is the collection of different policies, policy makers, goals and objectives, and strategies and actions that a state perform to pursue its national interest by establishing ties with other states."

After 1947 independence era, Pakistan's foreign policy has been shaped by geopolitical compulsions, security needs, economic gains and ideological commitments.

1) Search for security and recognition (1947-1953)

In the nascent years of independence, Pakistan's foreign policy navigated a complex web of competing priorities. As Pakistan's inherited weak economic and weak military institutions pushed Pakistan towards west for crucial military and economic assistance during first Kashmir War (1947-49). This proved as blessing in disguise for establishing close ties with western democracy and Muslim world. Although, joining Commonwealth helped Pakistan to get USA attention but on the cost of compromising the sovereignty of country. This period laid foundation for forever grappling with regional security concerns, quest for national identity and evolving global geopolitical landscape type foreign policy.

2) Cold War Landscape and Pakistan's strategic crossroads

The period of 1954-1962 was the period of cold war alliances and alignment with the West. Pakistan became a pawn in US-USSR rivalry and suffered from sanctions, lost autonomy, and faced security challenges later on.

Initially, under the leadership of M. Ali Jinnah, the nation sought a policy of "friendship with all" and non-alignment and this neutrality aimed to secure international recognition and avoid entanglement in cold war rivalries. But as Ayub Khan said:

"Pakistan's location is its destiny."

He highlighted geography as both asset and vulnerability in foreign policy. Pakistan's policy of avoiding involvement in power politics did not favor it. In a tense scenario, Pakistan seek help from USA as its emergence after war of 1938 and 39 was notable and this led to Pak-US and USSR-India alliances. Joining US-controlled bloc rather than the Russian bloc significantly impacted the direction of Pakistan's international policy. In result, Soviet Union extended its assistance to India and Afghanistan regarding the Pakhtoonistan issue and also used its veto power to block any resolution concerning Kashmir within Security Council. Therefore, the cost of opting for USA bloc rather than the USSR was higher than its

disadvantages.

3) Balancing Act and finding New Directions

Since the beginning, Pakistan caught into dependency trap on US but Sino-Indian War of 1962 enabled Pakistan to encourage "all weather friendship" with China that we can see ^{has been} proved unprecedented for Pakistan's strategic outlook. Add fuel to fire, 1965 war with India and 1971 Indo-Pak war - the tragic separation of East Pakistan exposed the fragility of Western alliances and hollowness of external guarantees. So, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto said,

"We wanted arms for our defense, but they gave us lectures."

These reasons laid the foundation for designing more independent foreign policy, focusing on internal determinants and most importantly nuclear program as a credible deterrence. Bhutto's era (1971 - 1977) sought to recalibrate Pakistan's international policy on more independent lines and project Pakistan as a more autonomous actor on the world stage.

4) Strategic Centrality to Strategic Isolation

In 1979, Soviet Union invasion into Afghanistan transformed Pakistan into a front line state of US bloc. The survival of Pakistan was tied to Cold War geopolitics and Pakistan receiving massive military aids and economic gains in return for facilitating Afghan

resistance. Anatol Lieven observed:

"Pakistan has often been a pawn in great power rivalries, gaining short-term benefits but long-term instability."

The withdrawal of Soviet Union caused U.S. sanctions notably Pressler Amendment in 1990s restricted aid and military cooperation for Pakistan. Hence, Pakistan learned the hard lessons that dependency on shifting alliances leaves it vulnerable to abandonment.

5) Double Edged Role of Pakistan

As Noam Chomsky once remarked about US interventions that "violence begets violence",

and Pakistan became an unfortunate test case of this logic. After 9/11 attacks, Pakistan again emerged as front-line state in United States led 'War on Terror' receiving billions of military and economic aid. Although, Pakistan unleashed a torrent internal challenges but at the cost of military, sectarian disruption and economic fragility as the by-product of externally driven policies.

6) Recent Shifts and Realignments

The post 2015 era marked as a strategic diversification. Launch of CPEC under the Belt and Road initiative deepened Islamabad-Beijing axis and shifted the balance away from over-dependence on United States.

Imran Khan captured this shift succinctly, declaring,

"Pakistan's future lies in geo-economics, not in becoming part of global power blocs."

Pakistan's relations with U.S. become transactional, engagement with Middle Eastern Countries had diversified due to economic bailouts and increasing warmth with Russia symbolized a pragmatic realignment. India-Pakistan relations deteriorated sharply after unilateral revocation of Article 370 in 2019. Pakistan's attempt at balancing security imperatives reflects its search for sustainable role in multi-polar world. But Henry Kissinger said:

"A country that demands moral perfection in its foreign policy will achieve neither perfection nor security."

Conclusion:

Pakistan's foreign policy is criticized because of its overemphasis on security, India-centric approach and lack of economic diplomacy. The policy is not self-reliance but over dependent on alliances from other states. The way forward lies in pursuing balanced, economy-centered and economic regional cooperative policy. Only by linking foreign policy with domestic strength can safeguard sovereignty and global standing of Pakistan.