Current Affairs

Q) Analyze Pakistan's foreign Policy shift between the US and China in the context of multipolar world order.

Pakistan's foreign policy has historically revolved around balancing relations with major powers, especially the United States and China. During the Cold War, Pakistan stood close to the US through SEATO and CENTO, but the same time, it also built friendly and strategic relations with China from the 1960s. After 9/11 Pakistan once again became a key ally of the US in the war on terror. However, Pakistan later became disappointed with America's un-reliable support, while China's growing importance in the region made Pakistan look more towards Beijing. Today, as US dominance weakens and the world moves towards a multipolar order, Pakistan is facing the difficult task of maintaining good relations with Both the US and China to protect its security and economic interests.

Background of Pakistan's Relation with US and China:-

1- PAKISTAN - US Relations.

- Strategic alignment in the Cold War (1950s-80s).
- Alliances during the Afghan Jihad (1979-89)
- After 9/11, Pakistan joined the US in the "War on Terror", but the relationship was full of mistrust, especially after the abbottabad raid and the American drone attacks.
- Decline in recent years: suspension of military aid (2018), shifting US focus to India as regional partner.

2- Pakistan - China Relations:-

- Diplomatic breakthrough in 1960s after Sino-Indian War.
- Defence cooperation: joint production of JF-17 thunder jet, missile technology transfer.
- CPEC (2015): Flagship of China's belt and Road Initiative, promising $60+ billion investments in infrastructure and energy.
- China's consistent support in UNSC on Kashmir issue and Shielding Pakistan at FATF (Financial Action Task Force).

Multipolar World Order Context:-

- The US lost its unchallenged dominance after the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the global financial crises, and divisions with-in its own politics.
- China has risen as the world's second largest economy and is building strong military power.
- Russia has re-emerged as an active global player, shown by Ukraine war and its control over energy supplies.
- Regional Group like BRICS, SCO, ASEAN, EU and Gulf states are becoming powerful, creating many centre of influence instead of one.
- New technologies and shift in energy are also changing the balance of powers in the world.

In today's multipolar world, smaller countries like Pakistan should keep good ties with different big powers instead of depending on only one.

Pakistan's Shift :- From US Dependence to China Partnership:-

1- Strategic Security Concerns:-

- US tilt towards India (Indo-US civil Nuclear Deal, Quad Partnership) reduced Pakistan's importance in US decision making.
- China became Pakistan's most trusted defence partner, providing about 70% of its military equipment (SIPRI, 2023).

2- Economic Dependence :-

- IMF loans have Pakistan dependent on Western institutions, but China's CPEC projects have given hope for long term economic growth.
- Trade imbalance with US: Pakistan sells goods worth $6.2 billion to the US in 2023, making America its biggest single export market
- Yet, China is Pakistan's top import source and second largest export destination.

3- Diplomatic Alignment :-

- Pakistan leans on China in UNSC to counter India.
- Still, Pakistan cannot completely distance itself from the US because America has strong influence in IMF, World Bank and FATF.

4- Technology and Connectivity:-

- Cooperation with China in 5G (Huawei, ZTE) and digital infrastructure.
- The US is worried about China's lead in technology, which put Pakistan in a difficult position between the powers as on one side China is offering affordable tech and CPEC digital project and on the other hand,

the US warns against Chinese systems and pressures allies not to depend on them.

Prospects of Leaning Towards China:-

- Economic Gains: Infrastructure development, Gawadar Port, SEZs under CPEC.
- Strategic depth: It means getting reliable defence technology from China, which also helps Pakistan to balance India's power.
- Regional Connectivity:- Pakistan can reach Central Asian markets through China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) routes.
- Multipolar leverage:- In a Multipolar world, joining groups like BRICS and SCO gives Pakistan more bargaining power in global affairs.

Risks and Challenges of Over-Reliance on China:-

- Dept dependency:- Pakistan's loan under CPEC are increasing and paying them back is putting pressure on its external finances.
- Geo-political backlash:- If Pakistan leans too much towards one side (like China), it could upset the US and Western donors.
- Regional Tensions: India and China rivalry could complicate's Pakistan's balancing role.
- Limited export capacity:- Pakistan cannot fully take advantage of access to China's market because its exports our weak.

Pakistan Can't Ignore US:-

1- Trade:- The US remains Pakistan's largest export market (20% of exports)

2- Financial Institutions: IMF, World Bank and ADB are controlled mostly by west but they remain vital sources of support for Pakistan's economy.

3- Diaspora & Education:- Over one million Pakistani's live in the US and there are strong links in education and research between the two countries.

4- Strategic Balance:- Pakistan could face isolation in the world if it moves completely into China's camp.

Critical Analysis:-

- Pakistan's foreign policy is not about fully choosing one side (like only China or only the US), but about balancing between both to reduce risks. It's a hedging strategy.
- The state seeks to capitalise on China's economic and strategic partnership while maintaining minimal but essential ties with the US.
- In a multipolar world, absolute alignment with one camp is risky; successful foreign policy requires multi-vector diplomacy.
- Pakistan can use its geo-economic position as a link between South Asia, Central Asia and the Middle East, but this is only possible if Pakistan stabilises internally.

Way Forward:-

1- Balanced foreign Policy:- Pakistan needs a balanced foreign policy, maintaining equidistant diplomacy with both US and China to maximise its strategic and economic interests.

2- Economic Diversification:- Pakistan must pursue economic diversification by reducing over-reliance on China and broadening its export base towards the US, EU, Middle East and African markets.

3- Leverage Multipolarity: Pakistan can leverage the emerging multipolar order by deepening engagement with plateforms such as SCO, BRICS+, OIC and ASEAN, thereby expanding its diplomatic and strategic space.

4- Domestic Reforms:- Political stability, fiscal discipline and energy security are domestic reforms that would strengthen Pakistan's external bargaining power in a multipolar world.

5- Middle Power Role:- By Capitalising on its geostrategic location, Pakistan should adopt a middle-power role, serving as a mediator and bridge between competing great powers.

Pakistan's foreign policy is carefully adjusting to balance its relations with the US and China because the world is becoming multipolar. China provides strategic support and long-term infrastructure projects, while the US is important for trade, loans and international credibility. Pakistan's main challenge is to hedge benefits from both powers without fully siding with either. In the end, Pakistan's success depends more on internal stability, strong economy, and smart diplomacy that just on which country it aligns with.