

Qno: 4 What are the main determinants of foreign policy? How current national capacity has become major challenge before foreign policy of Pakistan.

① INTRODUCTION:

Nowhere in the world three states are nuclear with such proximity, only unique to South Asia. Thus, Pakistan, being at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and Middle East, has to balance its internal and external factors to achieve national interests at home and abroad. Since domestic politics is foreign policy unit, small geography, population, social fabric all play equal role in determining foreign policy goals. Recent shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics has emboldened Pakistan's domestic and international image too. However, the reduced state capacity has hindered it from realizing its foreign policy goals due to weaker internal stability, unstable economy, low HDI, along with others.

② Determinants of Pakistan's Foreign Policy

(a) Internal Factors

(i) Securitised State

Due to its belligerent and archrival neighbor India, Pakistan had no other option than to see all domestic factors from a security lens. The strategic culture of existential threats from India, prescribing Pakistan to adopt a proactive foreign policy framework.

"Pakistan's foreign policy is more reactive and less proactive," - Malik Lodhi

(ii) Economic Instability

The destabilized economic landscape has forced Pakistan to seek external aid from International Financial Institutions (IMF, WB, ADB), weakening

its bargaining power at the international stage.

"Pakistan's debt amounts to 74% of its GDP" — PES, FY2025

(iii) Population Explosion

Pakistan has been unable to grow a flexible foreign policy stance since it is overstocked domestically. The population explosion of 241 bn and the addition of 6.1 M people each year, has strained its resources which are already meagre in number. Thus, Pakistan has reduced its long-term capacity to shape international relations.

(iv) Low HDI

HDI reflects the educational attainment, health, and income of a country, and Pakistan ranked 168th out of 193 countries. This has limited its capacity for soft power diplomacy abroad. Its voice in global forums lacks the soft leverage

"Low HDI in Pakistan reflects that its foreign policy is skewed towards crisis management, not resolution". — PILDAT.

(V) Political Instability

Frequent leadership changes, governance crisis, and erosion of institutional norms, undermining credibility in international forums. The lack of national ownership in political orientation reflects a narrow vision against the broader foreign policy dimension.

"Foreign policy continuity, along with domestic policy one, are disrupted due to changing governments". — PIDF.

(b) Internal Factors

(i) US-Pakistan strategic shifts

The US exit from Afghanistan in 2021 left reduced the strategic importance of Pakistan. However, the recent Pahalgaon attack with US as the mediator, US' extension of relations beyond counterterrorism in minerals sector and digital landscape show a reorientation of Pak-US relations beyond the past transactional experiences.

"The recent designation of BLA

as a foreign terrorist organization,

will further ease Pak-US relations"

Shaq
Dair

(Deputy PM, FM)

(ii) India-Pak Regional Conflagration

The arch rival India, and Pakistan cut their diplomatic ties since 2019.

However, the US blamed the recent terrorist attack on tourists in Pahalgaon valley of J&K stirred a new

war between them. This regional bilateral

war-like scenario changed the regional geopolitical winds. China, Iran and even US sided with Pakistan's narrative, while France, Russia and UAE whipped up India's narrative 'India lost its international credibility post-PoKhalgam, which is a foreign policy success of Pakistan' — MOFA.

(iii) Global Power Rivalries

Pakistan has always attempted to perform a balancing act between US and China. The tug of war between global power players has affected the foreign policy stances of Pakistan. However, the country has leveraged every opportunity to benefit from both without angering ~~the~~ any.

Pak's US-China
Balancing Act

→ CPEC's \$62bn vs. mineral assets for US

→ China's Hanger-class submarine vs.

Pak's handover of 1st militant

→ Pak's Operation Azm-e-Istehkam men
China's advice vs. changed Afghan
policy due to US

→ Pak's reluctance to complete Iran-Pak
gas pipeline amid US sanctions vs.
Pak-Afghanistan ambassador-level
meeting with China's mediation.

civ) International Trade Order

Under Trump 2017, the international

trade order has disrupted as Trump

introduced "Command Capitalism"

over the traditional free-market economy.

The US imposed 24% tariffs on Pakistan

However, Indo-US ties have strained due

to 50% tariffs on Indian products after

the latter bought Russian oil at cheap

price amid Ukraine war. Also, Trump

called high tariffs of India on US

products. This has

(V) Regional Geopolitics: Shifting Sands

Pakistan is expanding its horizontal diplomatic reach. Pakistan is strengthening ties with Myanmar, Rwanda, and Central Asian states. Now, Pakistan is at a critical juncture around ^{emerging} Indo-Saudi relations. During Pakistan's recent visit, the Saudi Arab finalized a \$100 billion investment deal with India. However, Gaza war and the ongoing Middle Eastern instability have created a perfect storm for Pakistan's foreign policy strategy. Also, the US backing of Israel has emboldened authoritarian tendencies in India too against the 'Held Kashmiris'.

Current National capacity challenge

(1) Administrative Capacity Weakened

Weak institutions and a lack of

political will have made it difficult for the ruling government to adopt a coherent foreign policy framework. STIG for instance, aimed to attract foreign direct investments but its progress has been slow in changing Pakistan's international perception as a business-friendly country.

Constrained (ii) Fiscal capacity

The state has been unable to collect enough revenue to address economic challenges. The lack of export-led economic growth has stalled economic reforms structurally. The tax-to-GDP ratio remains at 9.2%, one of the lowest in South Asia. Even provincial revenue collection is below 1% of GDP.

(iii) Retarded political capacity

Frequent changes in the political leadership disrupts policy continuity.

Political culture in Sherk is a volatile zero-sum game where political rivals are seen as enemies. This does not allow to take bold economic reforms and alone sustain it in the long run. It has created a domestic and international trust deficit.

"Pakistan's political stability index was -193 in 2023" - HRW.

(iv) Governance Capacity

Pakistan's governance indicators have fallen down drastically since 2005. Lack of accountability, transparency, and corruption in the public sector has scared both domestic and international creditors. There are buildings, not institutions; civil service without service; government without capacity, and infrastructure without facilities.

"Pakistan's predatory governance
structures scare away foreign
investors." — PIDE.

Conclusion

It could be concluded in the end that
Pakistan's internal and external
determinants of foreign policy are
changing with shifting sands
in geopolitics and geoeconomics.

Also, the weak administrative,
political, fiscal, and governance
capacity of Pakistan have taken
toll on its foreign policy

objectives, too. "A state weak at
home cannot have a sway abroad."
Thus, Pakistan needs to reduce this
trust deficit to recreate its strategic
location as a full dividend,
not an absolute liability.