

Pakistan's foreign Policy in the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities

I. Introduction

Thesis statement: The 21st Century has brought significant challenges to Pakistan's foreign policy, but also presents opportunities for Pakistan to reassert its role as a key player in regional and global affairs through a principled foreign policy.

II. Understanding the term "foreign Policy"

III. Challenges in the way of Pakistan's foreign Policy in 21st Century

a. Internal political instability is challenging the foreign Policy of Pakistan;

- Case in Point: BTI Report of 2024
- Case in Point: World Bank Report of 2023

b. Poor economy is an obstacle to Pakistan's foreign Policy;

- Case in Point: CEC Report on Pakistan's debt
- Case in Point: GDP growth rate of Pakistan

c. Terrorism is a hurdle to the foreign Policy of Pakistan;

- Case in Point: Global Terrorism Index 2024
- Case in Point: Satp.org data on terrorism

d. Struggling relations with neighbours is a complication in the foreign policy;

- Case in Point: Report of "Foreign Policy"

e. Alliance with big Powers is testing Pakistan's foreign Policy;

- Case in Point: China's Investment in Pakistan

f. Human rights abuse in Pakistan is challenging its foreign Policy

- Case in Point: Amnesty International Report on Pakistan
- Case in Point: Report of Human Rights Watch

IV. Opportunities available to Pakistan for its foreign Policy

a. Geographical location as an opportunity for the foreign Policy of Pakistan;

- case in point: World Bank report on Pakistan's geography
- b. Nuclear Power of Pakistan is an opportunity for boosting its international image
- c. Pakistan's role in war on terror is an advantage for Pakistan's foreign policy;
 - case in point: NACTA Report.
- d. GSP+ status is an opportunity for Pakistan's foreign policy.
- e. Abundant human resources: An opportunity for the foreign policy of Pakistan;
 - case in point: UNFPA report

V. Recommendations for Pakistan to avail these opportunities for its foreign policy and contain the challenges

- a. Economic revival is crucial for Pakistan's foreign policy
- b. Improving relations with neighbors is important for Pakistan to increase its regional influence
- c. Visionary and self-centric foreign policy is necessary for Pakistan global influence
- d. Safeguarding the security of Pakistan is a priority for its foreign policy
- e. Eliminate the growing culture of extremism and violence in Pakistan for better foreign policy

VI. Conclusion

Essay:

"Our project should be peace within and peace without. We want to live peacefully and maintain friendly relations with our immediate neighbors and with the world at large."
- Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah.

The above mentioned statement of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah is the basic principle of Pakistan's foreign policy. Since the birth of Pakistan till now, the foreign policy of Pakistan has been suffering from many ups and downs. The challenges, Pakistan is facing in its foreign policy since the dawn of 21st century includes the internal political instability. Similarly, the poor economy of Pakistan is an obstacle to its foreign policy. In the same way, terrorism is a hurdle in the foreign policy of Pakistan. The struggling relations with its neighbors, is another complication in the foreign policy of Pakistan. However, there are many opportunities like the geographical location of Pakistan, for its foreign policy. Similar to it, the nuclear power of Pakistan, is opportunity for Pakistan to use it as its ~~foreign~~ power in the international relations. Pakistan role in war on terror, is another important opportunity for Pakistan to avail it for its foreign relations. Moreover, there are many recommendations like economic revival, for Pakistan to avail the opportunities and contain the challenges. Similarly, improving relations with its neighbors is important for Pakistan to increase its regional influence. In the same way, the foreign policy which is self-centric, is important for Pakistan in its relations with other states. Although, the 21st century has brought significant challenges to Pakistan's foreign policy, but also presents opportunities for Pakistan to present its role as an important player in global affairs through a disciplined foreign policy.

Foreign policy refers to a country's strategy and approach towards interacting with other nations, to achieve its national interests. According to Kenneth Waltz, "Foreign Policy is a set of actions taken by a state to achieve its goals and protect its interests in the international system." It is the engagement of one state with ~~another~~ other nations, international institutions, and regional organizations to advance national interests. National interests include security, economic welfare, ideology and values. If a nation is interacting with another nation, it keeps in priority these interests. Hence, foreign policy is the relations of a nation with the rest of the world on the basis of its national interests as guiding principles.

Internal political instability is the first challenge in the way of foreign policy of Pakistan in 21st century. Internal political instability means the ~~internal~~ situation within a country where there is a lack of stability in government and institutions. According to the "Political Transformation Index" by BTI, "Pakistan is a hard-line autocratic state and ranking as 99 out of 137 countries." Similarly, the World Bank report of 2023, "Pakistan's political stability is weak. It was minus 1.84 points in 2022 but it is now at minus 1.93 points in 2023." Due to the frequent changes of governments, there is inconsistent policy in foreign affairs. Decision making is difficult, in politically unstable country, in its foreign policy. To sum up, internal political instability is damaging the reputations of Pakistan in its foreign relations.

In the same way, poor economy of Pakistan is an obstacle in Pakistan's foreign policy. The economy of a state is determined by its GDP, ^{Debt} poverty rate, and human development. According to the CEIC report of 2024, "the foreign debt of Pakistan is US \$133.5 billion in 2024." Similarly, the World Bank report of 2024 says, "40.5 percent population in Pakistan is below poverty line." The GDP growth rate of Pakistan is low as compared to region. The GDP growth rate of India in 2024 was 8.2 percent while, ~~the~~ the GDP growth of Pakistan was 2.38 percent in the same time. Another report by UNDP claims that the rank of Pakistan is 164 out of 193 countries in Human Development Index. In such hard economic conditions, Pakistan is dependent on foreign aid, which is damaging the reputations of Pakistan. Hence, ~~economic~~ poor economy is a barrier in ~~the~~ good foreign policy for Pakistan.

Furthermore, terrorism is a hurdle to the foreign policy of Pakistan since the beginning of 21st century. Terrorism refers to the use of violence or threats to create fear and achieve some specific goals. According to Trading Economics, "Pakistan is ranking on fourth position in the Global Terrorism Index of 2024." Similarly, the data of "Statista" shows that from 2000 to 2019, 63,393 people were killed due to terrorism. Due to terrorism, the priority is shifting from relations to security of the state. Countering terrorism good the main concern of Pakistan. Hence, the foreign policy of Pakistan is disturbed by terrorism.

Struggling relations with neighbors, is another complication in the foreign policy of Pakistan. For a good international reputation, good relations with neighbors is necessary. According to Jean-Paul Sartre, "Peace with neighbors makes peace with ourselves." In case of Pakistan, the relations with neighbors are in very hard situation. According to the report of "Foreign Policy," "The trade potential of Pakistan with India is US \$37 billion but, it has only US \$2 billion trade. The trade with Iran is, similarly, very low at US \$842.3 million but having potential of US \$10 billion. The relations with Afghanistan is also critical due to border issue and presence of TTP in Afghanistan. Hence to sum up, the foreign policy of Pakistan is facing complication due to struggling relations with its neighbors.

In the same way, alliance making with big powers is testing Pakistan's foreign policy. Alliance means supporting the US backed bloc or China backed bloc. Historically, Pakistan was in non-alliance bloc. But, the recent rivalry between US and China has made difficult for Pakistan to choose one. The China's investment of US \$65 billion in Pakistan in the form of CPEC has tilted US towards India. In 2024, Prime minister Shehbaz Sharif stated that Pakistan will not sacrifice the relations of China for US. In a nutshell, alliance making with big powers is a challenge to the foreign policy of Pakistan.

Last but not the least, human rights violation in Pakistan is an obstacle to its foreign policy. Human rights are the rights which a person have by his birth as a human e.g. right to life, right to health, and right to free trial. According to Amnesty International 2024, "The military courts trial of

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Eighty-five civilians and mob attacks on basis of blasphemy is violating human rights like right to free trial and right to life. According to Human Rights Watch Pakistan, "Rape, murder, domestic violence, education inequality, and harassment is increasing in Pakistan, and It is a threat to human rights in the country." Similarly, enforced disappearance is a concern in Pakistan despite Supreme Court direction to not to bring these missing persons before the court. So, human rights violation in Pakistan is a concern for its foreign policy.

Although there are many challenges, but the opportunities to Pakistan's foreign policy includes its geographical location. Geography of a state means the presence a location of a state on the map of the world. Pakistan is located in important position in South Asia. According to World Bank report on the geography of Pakistan, "Pakistan is at the crossroads of Asia, makes it important player in the regional trade and economic exchange." The TAPI Project of gas is also passing in Pakistan from Tajikistan to India, which is an important energy project. Similarly, CPEC and Gwadar port in Pakistan are ~~economic~~ important for the region and Central Asian Republics from its trade. Hence, the geographical location of Pakistan is an opportunity for its foreign policy.

Further more, nuclear power of Pakistan is an opportunity for Pakistan to boost its international morale. Nuclear power is the ability of state to has an atomic bomb. The atomic power of Pakistan is balancing the region because India is also an atomic power. Similarly, Pakistan can use nuclear power for energy purpose to fulfill the SDGs-7 and show its serious concern to the world. Chashma and Karachi power plants are environment friendly energy projects, which is important for Pakistan's and energy need and world environment. To sum up, nuclear power of Pakistan is important opportunity for the foreign policy of Pakistan.

In the same way, the role of Pakistan on the war of terror is an opportunity for the Pakistan's foreign policy. The war on terror was started by United States against the terrorists after 9/11 incident in United States. According to NACTA report, "Pakistan has lost more than sixty-three thousand lives in war on terror." Similarly, the economic lost of Pakistan due to war on terror is over US \$ 232 billion dollars. According to US state-

department, "Pakistan is an important ally of America on the war against terrorism." In a brief, the role of Pakistan in the war against terror is an important opportunity to avail in its foreign policy.

Similarly, GSP-plus status of Pakistan is an opportunity for its foreign policy. GSP-plus status is given by European Union to Pakistan and other countries, which includes preferential tariff rates on exports to European Union. Pakistan got this status in 2014. GSP-plus makes it easy to Pakistan to export 6000 products to European Union at zero or reduced tariff of 66 percent. It also enabled Pakistan to prefer human rights implementation in Pakistan due to 27 conventions, necessary for GSP-plus status to sign. After implementation of these conventions, it will boost Pakistan's morale in the international arena. In the end, GSP-plus status of Pakistan is an opportunity for Pakistan to make its foreign policy strong.

Last but not the least, the abundant human resources in Pakistan is an opportunity for the foreign policy of Pakistan. Human resources means the availability of more human force in a state. According to the last census in Pakistan, the population of Pakistan is exceeded from 241 million. According to UNFPA, "The 64 percent population of Pakistan is below 30-years of age i.e. a young country." Pakistan shall avail this young power to develop the state and increase its international reputations. In short, the abundant human resources in Pakistan is an opportunity for Pakistan's foreign policy.

The way forward to avail these opportunities, includes economic revival of Pakistan. Revival of economy means the change in the economic policies to boost it. A strong economy provides the necessary resources and influence to pursue national interests and project power globally. Pakistan shall diversify its economy from textile and agriculture by promoting industries like technology, manufacturing, and services. Pakistan shall increase regional trade through CPEC and Central Asia-South Asia regional integration. Similarly, privatization and liberalization of SOEs and market respectively, is necessary for economic revival to boost FDI. Hence, economic revival is necessary for Pakistan to increase the avail the available opportunities for its foreign policy.

In the same way, improving relations with neighbors are important for Pakistan to increase its regional influence. Pakistan shall enhance trade and economic cooperation with its neighbors. Support for Afghan peace is also necessary for Pakistan to bring security at home. Pakistan shall address border issues with India and Afghanistan for the purpose of its national interest. Kashmir issue with India shall be solved to increase confidence on each other. Iran-Pakistan Pipeline issue shall be solved; otherwise, Pakistan will face a penalty of US \$18 billion. To sum up, good relations with neighbors are important for Pakistan's global influence.

Furthermore, visionary and self-centric foreign policy is necessary for Pakistan's foreign policy. Self-centric policy means that the priority of a relation is always the interest of a state. Pakistan shall identify its core values like sovereignty, territorial integrity, and Islamic ideology. Similarly, Pakistan shall also conduct a comprehensive analysis of its geopolitical environment and regional dynamics. Pakistan shall prioritize its national security and defence. Economic interest shall be a fundamental principle of foreign policy. Hence, visionary and self-centric foreign policy is important for Pakistan.

Similarly, safeguarding the security of Pakistan is a priority for its foreign policy. The security of Pakistan is in threat from the start of 21st century. Pakistan shall present its case of security before SCO members, which is also important for the region. Similarly, Pakistan shall also diversify its international partnerships for security with China, US, European Union, and Russia. Pakistan shall establish strong forces against terrorism. Defence agreements, joint military exercises, and intelligence sharing are also necessary for Pakistan's security. To sum up, the security of Pakistan is a priority for its foreign policy.

Fast but not the least, Pakistan shall eliminate the growing culture of extremism and violence in Pakistan for a good foreign policy. Extremism and violence is the use of force by someone due to his radical ideas. Extremism and violence is an enemy of peace in Pakistan. Pakistan shall establish and promote national counter-narrative to challenge extremist ideologies. Similarly, the educational reform like curriculum update, is necessary to reduce extremist views. Enhance regional cooperation with neighbors, such as Afghanistan, Iran, and

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Indra, to share intelligence. In brief, Pakistan shall eliminate the growing culture of extremism and violence for the purpose to easily avail the opportunities for its foreign policy.

In a nutshell, the 21st century has brought many challenges to the foreign policy of Pakistan, but also presents opportunities for Pakistan to show its role as a key player in international politics through a standard foreign policy. The recommendations to foreign policy of Pakistan is visionary and self-centric for a good influence in the world. Similarly, it is also recommended safeguarding the security of Pakistan shall a priority for its foreign policy. Eliminating the growing culture of extremism and violence is another recommendation for the foreign policy of Pakistan. However, the opportunities available for Pakistan's role in war on terror foreign policy is its role in war on terror. In the same way, GSP-plus status is an opportunity for Pakistan's foreign policy in 21st century. Abundant of human resources in Pakistan is another opportunity for the foreign policy of Pakistan. But, the challenges like struggling relations with neighbors is complicating the foreign policy of Pakistan. Same to it, alliance with big powers is testing Pakistan's foreign policy. Human rights abuse is another obstacle in the foreign policy of Pakistan. As the foreign policy is the relations on the basis of interests, the foreign policy of Pakistan shall necessarily be on the same principle. As Henry Kissinger stated, "The primary objective of foreign policy is to promote and protect the national interest."