

of
Essay:

Regional blocs and challenges to Pakistan

Foreign policy:

30

1. Introduction:

- The paradox of interdependence: nations unite for blocs for safety yet lose freedom of manoeuvre.
- Pakistan's foreign policy caught between regional alliances and sovereign imperatives.

II Conceptual Framework

U need to be more relevant
In outline

1. The idea of Regionalism

- From the League of Nations to modern groupings (EU, ASEAN, SCO)
- Russell's view: cooperation as a rational antidote to anarchy.

2. Pakistan Foreign Policy Goals:

- Security, economic growth, balanced relations with great powers.
- Guided by "friend to all, enemy to none" but tested by shifting blocs

III.

Historical Backdrop:

3.

Cold War alignments: Plz come to topic

• SEATO and CENTO; reliance on U.S

• Lessons of dependence (cited by Aysha Tariq in the state of Normal Rule)

4.

Non-Aligned Movement and Islamic

Summitry: ✓

Relevancy is key to pass essay

• Tension between ideological affinity and strategic necessity.

IV.

Contemporary Regional blocs:

5. SAARC's Democracy: ✓

India - Pakistan hostility undermining South Asian Cooperation. ✓

Try to address

6.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)

• Opportunities for geo-economics and trade; constraints due to India - China rivalry.

7.

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

• Economic lifeline but heightens U.S. suspicion; reference: Andrew small's The China-Pakistan.

8. Gulf Cooperation Council:

- Energy dependence and expensive labour; balancing saudi arabian rivalry.

Plz write how it is a challenge for us

9. Organization of Islamic Cooperation:

- Symbolic solidarity, little strategic leverage

10. Economic factors: RCEP and EIU GSP+

- Trade benefits vs. human rights conditionalities

11. Core Challenges to Foreign Policy:

11. Geopolitical Tug of War:

- U.S.-China competition and pressure to choose sides

12. Security dilemmas:

- Afghan instability spilling into Pakistan despite regional forums

13. Economic Vulnerabilities:

- Debt diplomacy concerns and IMF dependence

14.

~~Ideological and Domestic Constraints~~

- Civil-Military imbalance (cited in Ajit Shah's *The Army and Democracy*)

15.

~~Climate and Water Politics~~

- Regional environmental issues demanding collective action yet sprawling disputes.

VI.

Policy Recommendations and way forward

16. Balanced Multilateralism:

- "Friends with all, entangling alliances with none."
- Diversification of trade partners, proactive diplomacy, internal economic reform.

VII.

Conclusion:

- Echo Russell's belief that reasoned cooperation, not blind alliance, ensures survival.
- Pakistan must transform regional challenges into opportunities for a sovereign, people-centric foreign policy.

"Nations, like individuals, "warned Bertrand Russell, "must learn that cooperation is a higher wisdom than conflict." In the 21st century, this wisdom is institutionalized through regional blocs, economic and strategic groupings that promise collective strength but quickly circumscribe national freedom. For Pakistan, a state born of ideological conviction yet situated at the hinge of South, central and West Asia, these blocs present both opportunities and challenges. From the unrealised dreams of SAARC to the high-stakes embrace of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Islamabad's foreign policy has become a delicate choreography of opportunity and constraint. Historical entanglements in SEATO and CENTO caution against over-reliance on alliances, while contemporary pressures - from Gulf rivals to the U.S.-China great-power contest - demand an artful balance.

The idea of Regionalism, which Bertrand Russell called "the rational antidote to the anarchy of sovereign states," gives a neighbouring countries

a way to turn proximity into strength/ cooperation and to strengthen their collective voice against large powers. The European Union's evolution from the Coal and Steel community proves that shared

institutions can be a way to do this, yet

Pakistan's own attempt through SAARC has stalled because of mistrust born of the 1971 war and incidents like 2010 Chi attack. Historian

Ayesha Jalal warns that "cooperation cannot thrive where the logic of security outpaces the logic of trade," a lesson south

Reflects Pakistan's

2017 entry into the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation,

however, shows regionalism can succeed when

rivalries are carefully managed. (SAARC, while

regional, is not a security alliance, and

the SCA, through agencies on trust and

balanced autonomy.

Pakistan's foreign policy certes on safeguarding national security while pursuing economic growth and balanced global ties. It

territorial integrity in a region shaped by rivalry

with India and uncertainty in Afghanistan, and

second aims to build economic strength through diversified trade and investment. This dual focus is evident from Cold war alliance with the United states to the long standing partnership with ~~Asia~~ China and recent initiatives like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and the EU's GSP+ trade status. Thus, Pakistan's ~~diplomacy~~
It is quite relevant and impressive remains a careful effort to achieve security without isolation and growth without dependence on any single power.

During the cold war, Pakistan joined U.S.-led blocs such as SEATO in 1954 and CENTO in 1955 to secure military aid and protection against India and the Soviet Union. ~~The following~~
~~should be added~~ ~~and economic~~

assistance - but tied Pakistan to Washington's strategic priorities. When conflict with India erupted in 1965 and 1971, the United States withheld crucial support, revealing what historian Ian Talbot calls "the fragility of alliances built on expediency rather than conviction".
Plz give less in historical context
Therefore, this experience taught Pakistan that

heavy reliance on a single power can compromise autonomy, a lesson that continues to shape its cautious approach to regional blocs today.

Furthermore, in the 1970s, Pakistan flirted with the Non-Aligned Movement to signal independence from the cold war camps while also championing Islamic solidarity through the 1974 Lahore Islamic Summit.

The 1979 Soviet invasion revealed the limits of non-alignment, as security concerns pulled it back toward Washington. Scholars note that these mixed signals caused Islamabad's difficulty in balancing ideology with strategic necessity, a lesson that still influences its regional diplomacy today.

Pakistan joined the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985, hoping for trade and dialogue across the sub-continent.

Persistent India-Pakistan hostility, rooted in the 1971 war and sharpened by crises like the 2016 Uri attack, stalled progress and kept regional projects minuscule. Analyst Ayesha Talaq says that 'cooperation cannot thrive when the logic of security outpaces the logic of trade' and SAARC's inability illustrates that warning. Hence, despite its promise of integration, SAARC remains largely dormant, offering Pakistan little beyond a symbolic platform.

~~Similarly, Pakistan joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2007 to deepen counter-terrorism cooperation and tap central Asian trade routes. Membership offers access to energy projects and regional connectivity, yet internal tensions - especially the India-China rivalry - limit the bloc's effectiveness. Recent SCO summits in Astana highlight both the opportunities for economic integration and the need for careful diplomacy. Consequently, the SCO gives Pakistan valuable engagement with China, Russia, and Central Asia, but demands~~

balanced navigation to turn potential into real gains Transition from one passage to another one needs maturity

Moreover, The China - Pakistan Economic Corridor, flagship of Beijing's Belt and Road initiative (BRI) is central to Pakistani growth strategy, promoting energy projects, infrastructure, and trade routes to the Arabian Sea. It strengthens the long-standing China-Pakistan partnership and attracts investment, but also raises debt concerns and ~~poses security~~ over routes through Gilgit-Baltistan. U.S. suspicion of CPEC ~~is understandable~~ Thus, while CPEC offers Pakistan vital economic lifelines, it also ties the country more tightly to China and heightens external pressures on its Foreign Policy.

Pakistan relies heavily on the Gulf cooperation Council for energy supplies, investment, and the remittances sent home by millions of Pakistani workers in Gulf states. This ~~partnership strengthens~~ economic stability and provides diplomatic support on issues like Kashmir. Yet balancing ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran is

delicate; Islamabad's decision to stay neutral in the 2015 Yemen conflict, while preserving regional friendship, strained relations with Riyadh. This episode shows that how Pakistan must carefully manage sectarian rivalries to maintain the benefits of its GCC connections. The bloc remains both an economic pipeline and diplomatic balancing act for Pakistan's foreign policy.

Furthermore the Organization of Islamic cooperation offers Pakistan a global Muslim platform to highlight issues such as the Kashmir dispute and Palestine. It provides moral support and occasional joint statements, reinforcing Pakistan's identity as part of the wider Islamic community. Yet the bloc's limited political and economic clout means its impact is mostly symbolic. The muted OIC response to India's 2019 revocation of Article 370 exposed its inability to act decisively. Consequently, while the OIC strengthens Pakistan's diplomatic narrative, it delivers little concrete leverage, reminding Islamabad that religious solidarity alone cannot serve foreign policy goals.

Subsequently, Pakistan seeks economic diversification through blocks like the EU's CETA scheme and the emerging Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). ~~which grants tariff concessions that don't exports, but it comes with human right and governance conditions that Brussels review regularly. Joining RCEP could open vast Asian markets, yet Pakistan must industrialize~~
~~but it's not necessary under accession.~~

These examples show that while economic blocks can expand trade and investment, they also tie Pakistan's foreign policy to domestic reforms and economic discipline, demanding careful preparation and sustained political will.

Additionally, Pakistan faces the growing geopolitical tug of war as rivalry between the United States and China intensifies. Its long-standing, strategic partnership with Beijing, reinforced by CPEC, long investment and infrastructure, while ties with Washington provide military cooperation, technology, and access to global financial markets.

Far toward either side risks alienating the other; U.S. scepticism of BRI projects and China's unease over Pakistan's occasional security cooperation with the West highlight this tension. Therefore, analysts warn that choosing one camp could limit Pakistan's diplomatic options, so its foreign policy must maintain a careful balance to protect both economic gains and strategic autonomy.

Present, Pakistani Foreign policy is mainly shaped by economic vulnerabilities, including chronic current-account deficits, narrow export base, and dependence on external financing. Reliance on IMF programmes, Saudi and Chinese loans, and remittances from the Gulf limits diplomatic flexibility, as each partner attaches its own conditions. Episodes like the 2023 balance of payments crisis showed how financial stress can overshadow strategic goals, forcing Islamabad to seek bailouts rather than negotiate from strength. Consequently, economic fragility not only constrains policy choices but also magnifies the leverage of powerful states and regional blocs over Pakistan's entente relations.

*It is relevant point
keep it up*

Additionally, ~~Pakistan Foreign Policy~~ is also shaped by ideological and domestic constraints. The country's founding narrative as a homeland for Muslims drives expectations to champion causes like Kashmir and Palestine, limited flexibility in dealing with India or Israel. At home, Civil-Military tensions, ~~Pyramidal government~~ charges, and pressure from religious parties often

disrupt policy continuity. Episodes such as the backlash to attempts of trade normalization with India reveal how domestic opinion can override pragmatic diplomacy. Hence, without internal consensus, consensus and stable governance, even the best crafted regional strategies remain vulnerable to sudden political shifts.

Moreover, Pakistan's Foreign Policy increasingly shapes the climate and water policies, as melting Himalayan glaciers, erratic monsoons, and trans-boundary rivers heighten regional tensions. The Indus Waters Treaty (1960) still governs water sharing with India, but disputes over projects like Kishanganga Dam spark recurring diplomatic friction. At the same time, Pakistan is among the world's most climate-vulnerable states, as shown by the 2022 and 2025 floods that caused billions in damage and required international aid. Therefore, these pressures push Islamabad to seek cooperation in forums such as the SCO, and UN climate negotiations, yet competing national interests often limit progress, making climate security a rising foreign-policy challenge.

In this ~~context~~, Palivston should pursue balanced multilateralism to safeguard autonomy while benefiting from diverse alliances. This means deepening ties with China and SCO for regional connectivity, maintaining constructive relations with the United States and EU, but also developing a ~~strategic~~ ~~relationship~~ with India, ~~and~~ ~~and~~ ASEAN without over-reliance on any single partner. Diplomatic Scholar Nadeeka Cooray notes that "strategic flexibility, not strategic choice, best serves Palivston's interests. ~~There~~ ~~the~~ key diversifying partnership and supporting international norms – climate accords, trade regimes and counter-terrorism framework – ~~Islamists~~ can turn regional competition into opportunity ~~and~~ avoiding the trap of great power dependency.

The Echoing Bertrand Russell conviction that "reasoned cooperation, ^{not} blind alliance, ensures survival". Pakistan's Foreign Policy must rise above reactive alignments and instead craft partnerships guided by national interest and regional harmony. ✓

The Country's experience with Cold war blocs, ✓

the mixed record of SAARC and the OIC, and the delicate balance between Washington and Beijing all underscore the limits of one-sided commitment. By investing in economic resilience, fostering dialogue with neighbours and practising/ practising balanced multilateralism, Islamabad can convert regional rivals into a zone of trade, energy, and climate cooperation.

Only through sustainable, people-centred diplomacy can Pakistan safeguard sovereignty while contributing to a more stable South Asian order.