

Q. Pakistan: Foreign Policy....

Introduction:

Pakistan's foreign policy in its immediate region - South Asia, Afghanistan, and the extended neighborhood including China and Iran, has been ~~deeply~~ ^{on} a complex journey. It is fundamentally shaped by its geopolitical position, the rivalry with India, its Islamic identity, and the quest for economic survival and strategic depth.

Historical Overview:

Pakistan's foreign policy has historically prioritized national security and territorial integrity, largely defined by the existential threat posed by India. This has led to a foreign policy framework focused on:

Balancing India's Power

The core objective has been to maintain a balance of power in South Asia. This led to alliances with United States during cold-war and later to a deep, all weather strategic partnership with China.

The Kashmir Issue

The unresolved dispute over Jammu and Kashmir remains the central pillar and destabilising factor in Pakistan-India relations. Pakistan's diplomatic and strategic efforts are aimed at internationalising the dispute.

Strategic Depth in Afghanistan

For decades, Pakistan sought a friendly regime in Afghanistan to prevent a two-front security challenge. This pursuit led to controversial policies, including support for various militant groups, creating a blowback in form of domestic terrorism and strained relations.

Balancing National Interest with Regional Stability:

Despite regional friction, Pakistan demonstrated effective strategies in securing its interests and promoting stability through diversified diplomatic and economic action.

1. Effective Global Hedging:

Pakistan maintained strong economic and strategic ties with China, while securing vital financial support from the Gulf states (i.e. UAE, Saudi Arabia) and engaging the US, ensuring strategic flexibility.

2. Stable Iran Relations:

The relation with Iran remained consistently pragmatic and functional, focusing on increasing trade, managing the shared border, and cooperation.

3. Conflict Containment Capability.

Following the May 2025 escalation with India, both sides utilized military channels (DGMOs) to negotiate a rapid ceasefire. This showed a preserved technical ability to contain conflict before it becomes catastrophic.

4. Strategic Autonomy Preservation.

By pursuing a multi-aligned foreign policy (engaging SCO, West, and China), Pakistan successfully preserved its ability to make sovereign decisions without becoming overly dependent on any single major power bloc.

Challenges in Balancing:

1. Escalation with India over Kashmir Issue

The Kashmir issue remained continued to dictate policy, overriding

economic engagement goals.

2. Security Friction with Afghanistan:

The need to counter cross-border terrorism (TTP) led to airstrikes in October 2025. While securing a domestic interest, this military approach undermined the trust and stability.

3. Geoeconomic Disruption:

The rapid shift to military action demonstrated that security crises instantly disrupt the declared shift toward a geoeconomic foreign policy, indicating a lack of robust mechanism to insulate economic projects from political friction.

Way Forward for Pakistan's Regional Policy:

1. Drive Economic Connectivity.

Pakistan needs to focus on

Geoeconomic Prioritization, and make trade corridors, pushing projects like CPEC expansion, the TP Gas Pipeline, and Central Asia transit routes. It must diversify partnerships for trade and investments, focusing on stable allies like Iran, Turkey and the Gulf States.

2- Strategic De-escalation with India:

Keeping the 2021 Ceasefire intact and setting up a formal, reliable crisis consultation mechanism to prevent rapid escalations, such as the May 2025 event. Pakistan should also de-securitize non-sensitive trade and ensure compliance with Indus Water Treaty.

3- Stabilize the Western Border:

Achieving Institutionalised Security with Afghanistan requires robust action. Pakistan must establish

Joint Border Mechanism with Afghanistan for intelligence sharing and coordinated counter-terrorism operations against the TTP.

4. Utilize Regional Forums.

Pakistan needs to embrace effective Multilateral Engagement. It should actively use platforms like Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO). This allows the country to facilitate security dialogue and connectivity projects.

Conclusion:

Pakistan's regional policy ~~is~~ demonstrates a conditional pivot towards a geoeconomic policy. It has secured its national interest for economic growth by making strong, balanced deals with countries outside the region like the Gulf states. However, this balancing act is fragile. The security concerns repeatedly

override the official goal of regional peace and cooperation. To truly make its economic policy work, Pakistan must quickly create better systems to manage crises and make sure that its trade goals are separate from political conflicts.