

Q How Pakistan could balance its relations ?

Introduction.

The geopolitical landscape of the 21st century is increasingly defined by the strategic competition between the United States, the incumbent global power, and the People's Republic of China, the rising challenger. Pakistan however, finds itself at a critical geopolitical crossroads in 2023. Historically, Pakistan's relationships with the US has been characterised as a 'transactional alliance', marked by periods of intense cooperation during the Cold War and the War on Terror. In contrast, the partnership with China has evolved into an "all-weather strategic cooperative partnership". The recent re-engagement with the US, ~~after~~ after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan necessitates a multi-pronged strategy. Balancing relationships between US and China requires a multi-vector foreign policy that leverages partnerships in specific sectors while safeguarding national

southern and economic interests.

The Pillars of the China Partnership:

The relationship with China is at the core of Pakistan's foreign policy, characterised by long-term strategic alignment and massive economic interests.

1- CPEC as a National Priority:

CPEC is crucial for Pakistan's energy security, infrastructure development, and long-term economic growth.

Pakistan must ensure its timely completion and balancing must not come at the cost of CPEC's momentum.

2- Strategic Depth and Diplomatic Support:

China provides Pakistan with crucial diplomatic cover at international forums like the UN on sensitive issues like Kashmir.

It is also a key source of military hardware and technology.

Pakistan's armed forces are approximately 70% equipped with Chinese-origin hardware. This must be maintained.

through continuous high-level dialogues and joint military exercises like 'Sea Guardians' (navy) and 'Shaheen' (air force).

3- Economic Lifeline and Financial Stability:

China holds approximately \$30 billion of Pakistan's total external debt, making it the largest bilateral creditor. Bilateral trade has grown significantly ^{with China} being Pakistan's largest trading partner since 2015. China has also provided safe deposits of over \$4 billion and regularly rolled over loans, preventing a potential default.

4- Technology and Digital Partnership:

The cooperation is expanding into the critical domains of technology, space, and digital infrastructure. Chinese companies like Huawei and ZTE are deeply integrated into Pakistan's telecommunications infrastructure. In 2019, Pakistan's first-ever remote sensing satellite, PRSS-1, was launched aboard a Chinese Long March

rocket. This collaboration enhances Pakistan's capabilities in agriculture, urban planning, and security surveillance.

5. People-to-People Ties and Soft Power:

The all-weather nature of the relationship is reinforced by deep cultural and educational exchanges, creating a long-term foundation of mutual understanding. Over 28,000 Pakistani students are currently studying in China, the Confucius Institute program is active in several major Pakistani universities with thousands of Pakistani students learning the Mandarin language.

The Renewed Engagement with United States:-

The recent engagement with the United States is not a zero-sum game against China. It is a necessity driven by shared interests.

1- The 'Green Arizona'

The US is the largest bilateral donor for climate resilience in Pakistan, with a committed portfolio of over \$500 million for 2024-2025.

Key Projects:

Climate-Smart Agriculture	Water Resource Management
Introduction of drought-resistant crops and efficient irrigation.	Building small dams in Baluchistan and KPK to improve water storage and prevent scarcity.

Renewable Energy Expansion
Grants and technical assistance for solar power aiming to add 500MW of capacity by 2026

2- Trade and Investments:

The US is Pakistan's single largest export destination, absorbing over 20% of its total exports. Over \$46 billion of Pakistani exports to the US are textiles and apparel.

3- Security and Counter-Terrorism

US is training and equipping Pakistan's paramilitary forces for counter-insurgency operations. Providing

crucial spare parts, technical support, and software upgrades to maintain Pakistan's fleet of F-16 fighter jets, ensuring they remain a viable part of its air defense.

The Balancing Strategy:

To navigate the intense US-China rivalry, Pakistan must adopt a precise, section-specific strategy.

1. CPEC plus Green Alliance:

Pakistan should invite all partners to contribute to its development.

Section separation: Defining clear Role:

a. China's Role: Position CPEC as the backbone for physical infrastructure this includes.

Energy	Transport	Industrial Base
coal, hydro, solar power plants	Motorways, railways and Gwadar Port	SEZs and manufacturing plants

b. United States Role: Positioning the Green Alliance as the partner for modernization and sustainability. This includes.

Climate Tech	Digital Economy	Edu and Governance
Smart grid technology.	5G infrastructure, fintech, and IT sector	Partnership between universities and public administration

2- Maintaining Strategic Autonomy:

This requires a careful, platform-specific approach to avoid triggering sanctions or alienating either partner.

China

Continue joint development and procurement for the bulk of its defense



Co-producing the JF-17 Block IV fighter jet



Acquiring J-31 stealth fighters and probing Chinese warships, submarines and air defense systems

US

Focus on maintaining and acquiring specific high-tech capabilities



Maintaining existing US-origin platforms like F-16 fighter and Cobra helicopters



Seeking US tech for Maritime Patrol Aircraft, armed drones (UCAVs) and advanced surveillance systems.

Conclusion:

For Pakistan, navigating the complex US-China rivalry is the principal foreign policy challenge of our time. By unequivocally safeguarding its strategic assets with China, especially CPEC, while pragmatically engaging with the US on issues of mutual interests like Afghanistan and trade, Pakistan can carve out

Date: 1 / 120

Day: MTWTF

a sovereign space for Italy.