



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Assessing the Nature of Geopolitical and Geostrategic Summersaults in Pakistan-US Relations (2013-2023)**

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**ABSTRACT**

The history of strategic partnership between Pakistan and the United States goes back a long way. In the backdrop of War against Terrorism, both nations jointly worked to eliminate religious fanaticism practiced by some hardliners harboring in Afghanistan but during the first term of President Donald Trump (2017-2021), the US focus shifted back to a transactional approach, taking advantage of Pakistan's economic vulnerabilities. Moving onwards, the somewhat hasty US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021 during the Presidency of Joe Biden provided Pakistan an opportunity to reevaluate its approach and role in the policies adopted by the US in the region, as political instability, economic challenges, and terrorism has become new normal in the country. By adopting a qualitative approach, the current study comparatively reviews the important developments took place in Pakistan-US relations during first term of President Trump and the first half of the successor US government of President Joe Biden (2013-2023). It finds that the bilateral relationships remained strained during the years nevertheless some improvement and joint working were seen after the regime change of April 2022 in Pakistan. It recommends that since Afghanistan cannot be neglected by the US policy makers therefore measures leading to political and economic stability in Pakistan are equally important for a subsequent and larger regional stability.

**Keywords:** Pakistan-US relations, Terrorism, US Withdrawal from Afghanistan

**Introduction**

The relationship between the United States and Pakistan has undergone significant changes over the years, influenced by strategic interests of both countries and global events. Over the course of their decades-long relationship, many ups and downs have been witnessed in the bilateral relationship of both these countries. The 9/11 incident and the consequent War on Terror brought both the countries closer in the very start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Both the administrations under G.W. Bush in US and General Pervez Musharraf, the President of Pakistan, enjoyed somewhat closer cooperation but the successor regimes of Obama and Trump did not feel the same taste of being on the same page while working with the Government of Pakistan. Despite periods of cooperation, deep-seated mistrust and conflicting geopolitical interests, particularly involving role of other key regional players including India and China, have strained the relationship.

It might be noted that, after 9/11, the Pakistan-US relations were revitalized as Pakistan emerged as a key player in the US-led War on Terror. Nevertheless, mutual trust between the two countries remained elusive despite significant military cooperation and support, which had frequently been overshadowed by conflicting strategic interests and

recurring crises. Throughout this time-period, Pakistan-US relations were primarily based upon security cooperation. The US provided military support and training to the armed forces of Pakistan as part of their joint counterterrorism efforts. Prominent military campaigns in Pakistan, like Operation *Zarbe-Azb* (2014) and Operation *Radd-ul-Fasaad* (2017), targeted extremist organizations and were supported by the US up to differing degrees. It goes without saying that the 2021 decision of US to remove its troops from Afghanistan was a turning point that sparked worries about the stability of the region and the rise of extremist organizations. As both nations struggled to maintain regional peace and stability in a post-US Afghanistan, this withdrawal had a significant impact on Pakistan-US security cooperation.

Throughout the decade (2013-2023), US-Pakistan economic relations had grown while facing difficulties alongside. One of Pakistan's main export destinations continued to be the US, and the country had made efforts to strengthen economic ties with the US through a number of initiatives, including the US-Pakistan Business Opportunities Conference, etc. but security concerns frequently overshadowed economic relations, and discussions regarding the usefulness and dependence over US aid continued while specifically focusing over aid conditions and their effects on Pakistan's economic sovereignty. These difficulties were brought to light by the Trump administration's decision to halt military aid to Pakistan in 2018, which led Pakistan to look for ways to diversify its military and economic alliances (Anwar, 2023).

During this time, social and cultural exchanges also had a big impact on how Pakistan and the US interacted. Educational initiatives like the US-Pakistan Knowledge Corridor and the Fulbright Scholarship promoted bilateral academic exchanges and capacity building, fostering interpersonal relationships and understandings. One of the biggest South Asian diasporas in the US, the Pakistani diaspora, played a crucial role in establishing both cultural and economic ties between the two nations. Even though they are frequently overlooked in policy talks, these social and cultural exchanges were essential in laying the groundwork for mutual respect and goodwill (Hussain, 2016).

The cooperative aspects of relations between Pakistan and the United States from 2013 to 2023 were overshadowed by major challenges, controversial tenures, and issues. The distancing was also rooted in Pakistan's continued implementation of its policy towards India through use of armed insurgents in territorial conflict erupting into full blown crises such as the Mumbai attacks, and recurrent quests for nuclear parity. The zero sum approach over Afghanistan further accentuated this with mistrust between both nations culminating in skepticism about Pakistani duplicity vis a vis terrorism during post-2011 events of Osama bin Laden raid carried out by US Navy at Abbottabad. Those developments somewhat eroded mutual trust between both countries which proved a hurdle in establishing a reliable partnership. It was a fact that these relations really broke down because both states had different strategic interests, and each assessed the regional security dynamics differently. Pakistan also voiced concern over US partnership with India which had been strengthened by the US as a strategy to counterbalance the influence of China in the Indo-Pacific region. However, the Government of Pakistan also balanced this move by strategically aligning with China through CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor), which was formerly a little-known infrastructure project under BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) but now a fully grown commercial project (Mushtaq, 2014).

## **Literature Review**

Markey extensively analyzed the nature of complex and frequently disturbed relationship between Pakistan and the United States. While negotiating through historical, political, and strategic issues, he clarified how Pakistan's relations with the US had been shaped by its internal politics, regional dynamics, and strategic interests. He elaborated Pakistan's crucial role in Cold War geopolitics and its ensuing difficulties navigating the

post-9/11 era, paying particular attention to its support for militant organizations and its involvement in Afghanistan (Markey, 2013).

Ghulam examined the historical developments and current dynamics of the security relationship between Pakistan and the United States, showing the complexity of security perceptions and the influence of outside forces like terrorism and communism over their bilateral relations. The study by Ghulam did a good job of narrating important events, such as the formation of military alliance during 1950s and the changes in US priorities after 9/11, with special attention to Secretary Kerry's visit in 2015 and the conversations around the Coalition Support Fund (Ghulam, 2014).

Najam elaborated the events of 2011, such as the killing of Osama Bin Laden, the attack on the Salala check post, and the Raymond Davis incident, which caused major blows to US-Pakistan bilateral ties. She highlighted the subsequent diplomatic initiatives to restore confidence and collaboration while particularly focusing upon the Strategic Dialogue Process which was intended to resolve issues like counterterrorism, achieve regional stability, and extend economic cooperation (Najam, 2015).

### **Trump Presidency (2017–2021)**

President Donald Trump's announcement of a new South Asian strategy in August 2017 had a big effect on relations between the United States and Pakistan. In a speech on August 21, 2017, Trump unveiled this plan, emphasizing the need for the United States to maintain its presence in Afghanistan while also changing its strategy towards Pakistan. Trump also charged Pakistan of providing safe havens to terrorist organizations, citing the case of Taliban and the Haqqani Network in particular. He claimed that these groups, which carried out attacks on coalition and American forces in Afghanistan, were enjoying sanctuaries in Pakistan. This naked criticism represented a substantial shift from earlier diplomatic language from the United States, which had been more circumspect in assigning direct blame to Pakistan. Trump emphasized that the United States would no longer put up with Pakistan's "double game" of accepting American aid while permitting terrorist activities inside its borders, and he demanded that Pakistan would take more decisive action against these groups. According to this plan, in January 2018, the Trump administration withdrew nearly \$2 billion of security aid from Pakistan in order to put pressure on Islamabad to act more forcefully against militants.

The government of Pakistan refuted the claims that it harbored terrorists emphasizing the great sacrifices it has made in the war against terrorism, including human casualties and financial losses. Successful military operations in areas such as North Waziristan were cited by Pakistani officials as proof of their dedication.

Despite continuous diplomatic and military communication, there remained a noticeable strain in bilateral relations during this time which caused decline in trust and cooperation. While Pakistan highlighted its successes in combating terrorism and denounced the negative effects of U.S. policies on the region, the U.S. persisted in pressuring Pakistan to take more severe action against terrorist organizations (Raza, 2020).

### **Withdrawal of US Military Aid**

By declaring in January 2018 that it would no longer be providing Pakistan with nearly \$2 billion in security assistance, the United States severely damaged its relationship with Pakistan. Washington made this decision in direct response to its dissatisfaction with Pakistan's efforts to combat terrorist networks operating within its borders, especially those that targeted coalition and American forces in Afghanistan. The U.S. dissatisfaction with Pakistan's perceived inaction was made evident by the suspension of aid, which

included payments under the Coalition Support Funds mechanism and a variety of military assistance. Pakistan fiercely protested the aid suspension, seeing it as unfair and damaging to their continued counterterrorism efforts. Officials from Pakistan claimed that the decision did not take into account the financial and human sacrifices that Pakistan had made. Both nations kept up tense diplomatic relations despite the aid cut as they worked to resolve their differences and restore confidence. The aid suspension, however, brought to light the difficulties and complexities that existed in the relationship between the United States and Pakistan, highlighting the necessity of continued communication and collaboration to successfully manage shared security concerns (Ahmar, 2021).

### **Diplomatic Relations**

Even as tensions prevailed between the two countries, both Pakistan and Trump-led US administration continued diplomatic efforts to address common concerns and search for mutual cooperation. In July 2019, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan paid a high-profile diplomatic visit to Washington D.C. where he met the U.S. President Donald Trump. This visit was an effort to reach consensus and heal some of the mutual rifts. Khan's visit underscored Pakistan's capability to influence the peace process in Afghanistan and its strategic importance in the region (Khalid, 2023).

The meeting between Imran Khan and Donald Trump on July 22, 2019, was important for various reasons highlighting the intricacies and possibilities within the Pakistan-US relationship (Iqbal, 2019). The meeting took place amidst the then ongoing negotiations for peace agreement in Afghanistan. The US requested Pakistan's help in facilitating talks with the Taliban to bring an end to the long-standing conflict. President Trump highlighted the crucial role played by Pakistan in the Afghan peace process and urged Mr. Khan to facilitate negotiations with the Taliban. Mr. Khan, on the other hand, reaffirmed Pakistan's commitment to a stable Afghanistan. Both leaders expressed a mutual desire to enhance economic ties, by exploring opportunities for increased trade and investment. Regional security was also a topic of discussion, with Trump acknowledging Pakistan's sacrifices in counterterrorism efforts, and Khan emphasizing the importance of maintaining a balanced relationship that respected Pakistan's sovereignty. Additionally, they talked about humanitarian and development aid, with a focus on finding ways to ensure effective utilization of US assistance to support Pakistan's development and stability (Jaffery, 2022).

In a nutshell, Pakistan remained strategically important to US during 2017 to 2021 because of its role in the peace process in Afghanistan, counterterrorism efforts, and maintaining regional stability. The Doha Agreement, which came about in 2020 as a result of Pakistan's facilitation of US-Taliban peace negotiations, was essential to the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan. The United States acknowledged Pakistan's internal counterterrorism operations in spite of claims that it harbors militants. By interacting with Pakistan in the midst of closer ties between the United States and India in an effort to counter China, the United States also achieved a delicate balance in its geopolitical plans. Economic relations included continuing discussions like the U.S-Pakistan Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) meetings to explore trade opportunities, even though there were few notable agreements (Khan, 2017).

### **Peace Process in Afghanistan / Doha Agreement**

The peace negotiations between the United States and the Taliban, which resulted in the Doha Agreement in February 2020, were largely aided by Pakistan. The two-decade-long conflict would eventually come to an end with the withdrawal of American forces from Afghanistan, which was outlined in this agreement. Pakistan's engagement played a pivotal role in compelling the Taliban to engage in negotiations and guaranteeing the ongoing discourse. The agreement in 2020 was the result of this cooperation, which grew

during 2019 and was viewed as a major improvement in US-Pakistan relations. It emphasized Pakistan's strategic significance in the area and demonstrated its power and sway over the Taliban. The United States, too, recognized Pakistan's critical role in the peace process. This acknowledgment demonstrated the possibility for additional cooperation regarding security and regional stability while also easing some of the earlier tensions between the two countries. Along with reducing violence in Afghanistan, the agreement provided Pakistan more chances to show the United States and other international stakeholders how committed it was to peace and stability in South Asia, which helped improving Pakistan's relations with them (Shams, 2023).

### **The Fight against Terrorism**

The US acknowledged Pakistan's efforts to fight terrorism inside its borders despite its persistent accusations that the country was harboring militants persisted. Pakistan conducted various military operations with the goal of destroying terrorist strongholds and enhancing security, including Operation *Zarb-e-Azb*, which was initiated in 2014, and Operation *Radd-ul-Fasaad*, which began in 2017. Targeting different militant groups, these operations were said to have greatly decreased terrorist activity in tribal areas (Iqbal, 2014).

### **Role of Pakistan in the Afghan Peace Process**

Even though the United States and Pakistan's bilateral relations hit a new low under President Trump's administration, Pakistan's assistance was still required by the United States in order to proceed the Afghan peace process. Both countries had virtually stopped interacting with each other in the civilian sphere during those years. However, it appeared that military cooperation was continuing at the same rate as it was prior to the start of Trump administration in office. The Trump administration attempted to apply pressure in 2018 by slashing \$300 million in military aid to Pakistan because they needed its backing for a secure withdrawal from Afghanistan. Following that, a further \$1.3 billion cut was made to financial aid of Pakistan in 2019. It was a blatant sign that the international community particularly the United States was dissatisfied with Pakistan's efforts to stop money-laundering and the financing of terrorist groups operating in the area. Thus, Pakistan stayed in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)'s grey list until the end of the Trump administration. It might be safely observed that the leadership in Pakistan could not develop effective communication with U.S. institutions because they were unable to thoroughly study and comprehend the U.S. institutional framework, the decision-making process of the Congress, White House, State Department, and Defense Department, as well as the role of think-tanks in US policy formulation.

### **Military and Economic Cooperation**

The military-to-military contacts between the United States and Pakistan persisted despite the suspension of security aid during 2017-2021. Mutual interests like counterterrorism and regional stability were highlighted in these contacts/discussions. Both nations understood the value of continuing their military cooperation to address common security concerns, even though the aid suspension indicated a strain in their bilateral relations. Pakistan's participation in numerous military drills with the United States was one facet of this ongoing military cooperation. These exercises improved tactical skills, increased interoperability between the two militaries, and promoted communication and collaboration in tackling shared security issues. Joint exercises offered a means of preserving military-to-military contacts and guaranteeing that both nations remained involved on issues of strategic importance, even though the aid suspension affected some military assistance programs.

Despite some limitations, the United States continued to be one of Pakistan's largest export markets in that era. In 2018, for instance, U.S. imports from Pakistan amounted to approximately \$3.7 billion, primarily consisting of textiles and garments. This trend continued, with the U.S. remaining a key destination for Pakistani goods, underscoring the importance of trade ties amid broader diplomatic tensions. Efforts to enhance economic relations remained a key topic during Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Washington, D.C., in July 2019. Bilateral trade negotiations in 2020 that addressed trade barriers and expanded market access further demonstrated the continuous efforts to fortify economic relations (Kirk, 2012).

### **Dynamics of Geopolitics**

From 2017 to 2021, U.S. relations with both India and Pakistan were greatly impacted by the geopolitical dynamics between the two nations. As part of a larger plan to counter China's influence in the Indo-Pacific region, the United States aimed to deepen its strategic partnership with India during this time. Strengthened defense cooperation, closer economic relations, and backing for India's pivotal role in regional security were the major aspects of this partnership. The US-India strategic partnership was marked by several key developments. For example, in 2018, the United States granted India with the Strategic Trade Authorization-1 (STA-1) status, which facilitated the sale of high-tech defense and dual-use technologies. Additionally, the inaugural 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue between the U.S. and India, which took place in September 2018, further deepened defense and strategic cooperation. In October 2020, the signing of the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) for geospatial intelligence marked another milestone in US-India defense collaboration.

Given their long-standing rivalry and frequent hostilities, Pakistan saw the improved U.S.-Indian relationship as a possible threat to its own security and strategic interests. Consequently, Pakistan attempted to fortify its relations with other major powers, particularly China, a longstanding ally, in order to balance its foreign policy. Thus, the intricate balance between pursuing more general strategic goals in the region and preserving relations with both India and Pakistan was reflected in the complexity of U.S. foreign policy in South Asia (Rahim, 2020).

### **Paradigm Shift under President Trump**

In the very beginning of the Trump presidency, it appeared that the US would adopt a strategy heavily reliant on "carrots" since Mr. Trump, in an early phone call to Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, showered extravagant praise on Sharif and the Pakistani people. Given the tense relations between the two nations, the conversation's eloquent language was confusing. The US demands for the release of Shakil Afridi, a doctor who assisted in leading the CIA to Osama Bin Laden's hiding place, the US withholding of \$300 million in reimbursements to the Pakistani Army, and the US delaying a deal that would have allowed Pakistan to buy F-16 fighter jets from the US were the main points of contention (Kaura, 2017).

Senior officials of Trump administration already had concluded that Pakistan was an unreliable ally in the war on terror but a total severance of mutual ties would be harmful for them as well. The general consensus was that the deployment of more US troops in Afghanistan would not convince the Taliban to engage in peace negotiations unless greater pressure was applied to Pakistan. The Trump administration's actions were intended to make the Pakistani military a clear decision between continuing to covertly supporting the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network, both of which opposed to US and Afghan forces, or supporting the US, which funded a large portion of its military operations. President Trump also rejected arguments that distinguished between "good"

and "bad" terrorists and declined to give Pakistan significant military and nonmilitary assistance (Trump, 2017).

Significant indignation was expressed by Pakistani pundits in response to President Trump's speech at the Arab-Islamic-US summit in Riyadh in May 2017, which emphasized Pakistan's sacrifices while downplaying India's sufferings at the hands of terrorism. The issue of safe havens of terrorist in Pakistan was one that Trump administration officials, such as US National Intelligence Director Dan Coats and Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency Vincent Stewart, highlighted while contending that Pakistan's security establishment saw India as a threat to regional security hence provided material support to terrorist organizations. The US National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster also urged that Pakistan must stop its contradictory policies and take decisive action against all terrorist organizations (Kaura, 2017).

### **American Withdrawal from Afghanistan**

Following almost 20 years of military engagement, the United States withdrew its forces from Afghanistan in August 2021. A number of factors, including the length of the conflict, shifting priorities, and changing geopolitical considerations, had an impact on the decision to withdraw. The war in Afghanistan had actually become the longest conflict in American history with a cost of more than \$2 trillion (Bukhari, 2023). The administration of President Donald Trump made great progress in putting an end to the war. The Taliban agreed to stop terrorism and hold peace negotiations in exchange for a timeline for the withdrawal of American forces, as outlined in the February 2020 Doha Agreement. Whereas the successor US government of President Joe Biden (2021-2025), in addition to announcing the withdrawal, established a strict deadline. He believed that by eliminating Osama Bin Laden and weakening al-Qaeda, the United States had accomplished its main goals in Afghanistan and staying there would not result in any more notable victories. In February 2020, President Donald Trump negotiated a settlement with the Taliban in an effort to put an end to the "endless wars." The Doha Agreement specified the withdrawal of American forces in return for Taliban pledges to stop terrorism and hold peace negotiations with the Afghan government. In April 2021, President Joe Biden finally declared that all US troops would leave the country by September 11, 2021, but he later pushed back that date to August 31, 2021. Following the withdrawal of American and NATO forces, the Taliban went on the offensive quickly, seizing important cities and ultimately seizing control of Kabul on August 15, 2021 (Akhtar & Holland, 2023).

### **Pakistan -US Relations under President Joe Biden (2021-2023)**

President Biden's recently unveiled National Security Strategy has come under fire for being perceived as "ambitious and unrealistic about America's place in the world."

The Biden administration's relationship with Pakistan did not start out well. He, in fact, recognized China as an issue, acknowledged India as a partner, and totally ignored Pakistan (Sarfraz, 2022). It was clear how the two countries' relations were going under his presidency given Pakistan's nuclear status and the fact that Biden had called Pakistan the world's most dangerous country last year. It was clear that Pakistan would respond to his remarks, and the Pakistani Foreign Office called the US envoy to request an explanation. During a press conference, Pakistan's foreign minister, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, expressed his "astonishment" at Biden's remarks (Shah S. U., 2021).

India's military capabilities were growing as a result of the US-India ever-increasing strategic partnership during the last decade, which unbalanced the region and inflated Pakistan's security concerns. Throughout Biden's presidency, the war on terrorism and Afghanistan policy had largely served as the backdrop. Unfortunately, Pakistan's role as a mediator in the peace negotiations with the Afghan Taliban and its

involvement in the Afghan conflict had drawn constant criticism from the US. Pakistan maintained a major influence in the power dynamics of South Asia because of its prime location as a gateway to both South and Central Asia. Geopolitical conditions were rapidly changing even before the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, as China increased its economic and diplomatic ties and unveiled its Belt and Road Initiative through Pakistan. China has made large investments in Pakistan's infrastructure, energy, and other development initiatives. When it comes to strategy, China and Pakistan remained very close friends. India and the US were not happy with this close cooperation. But Islamabad also wanted to build a stronger and more stable relationship with the US; previously, the two countries had a close working relationship based only on security issues (Lodhi, 2022).

### **Challenges for Mutual Relationship**

After the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, the relationship between Pakistan and the United States underwent significant changes and faced challenges. The U.S. had concerns about regional stability and the potential resurgence of terrorist groups, viewing Pakistan as crucial in influencing the Taliban's behavior. However, mutual distrust persisted, with the U.S. accusing Pakistan of supporting Taliban factions and Pakistan criticizing the U.S. for blaming it for Afghanistan's failures. Despite these tensions, diplomatic engagement continued to address security concerns and counterterrorism efforts. The U.S. also made its economic and military aid to Pakistan more conditional. The withdrawal reshaped the dynamics in the region and solidified Pakistan's position as a key player in balancing relations with the U.S., China, and Afghanistan. However, human rights and governance issues remained points of pressure from the U.S. on Pakistan (Tariq, 2020).

### **Expanding the Relationship**

While the White House remained silent, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Pakistan's foreign minister, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, had multiple conversations and had met in New York in September 2021. The spring of 2022 marked a period of extensive engagement from the State Department, a sort of mini reset that aimed to broaden the relationship. In March 2022, the United States and Pakistan launched a year-long campaign to celebrate 75 years of relations. In April, Donald Blome, the new U.S. ambassador to Pakistan took the charge. In May, Pakistan's new foreign minister, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, met with Blinken in New York. In July, U.S. special representative for Commercial and Business Affairs, visited Pakistan to strengthen mutual ties. In the same month, the two governments initiated a health-related dialogue. Following Pakistan's devastating flooding in August that year, Samantha Power, Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, visited the country to document the catastrophe and U.S. relief efforts. The United States pledged over \$200 million in flood assistance. Mr. Bhutto Zardari and Blinken met again in September to officially celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of U.S.-Pakistan relations at the State Department (Afzal, 2023).

### **Celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Pakistan-US Relations**

In March 2022, Pakistan and the US marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their bilateral relations, which started in 1947. This significant event highlighted the two nations' long-standing and diverse partnership. A range of diplomatic events intended to improve collaboration in a number of sectors were held in conjunction with the commemoration. While recognizing the possibility of greater economic interaction, both nations talked about how to remove obstacles to trade, look into new investment opportunities, and facilitate commerce (Nasreen, 2023). Some of the discussions focused over energy cooperation and starting common projects, especially for the investment promotion in the electricity sector. This meant for exploring possibilities in renewable energy sources as



well as addressing changes towards energy security and grasping technology advancement to improve in efficient usage of energy. Education was emphasized as areas of shared interest which also included academic exchanges. Emphasizing the importance of collaborative education via student exchanges, and academic partnerships were among themes reiterated by both countries (Holland, 2023).

### **The 9<sup>th</sup> US-Pakistan TIFA Meeting (2023)**

The 9<sup>th</sup> US-Pakistan Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA) meeting was held in February 2023. This was the first such ministerial-level meet since 2016 which was intended to allay apprehensions on reciprocal trade and investment, and strengthen economic relations. Both countries discussed the potential for new ways to increase economic cooperation, improve market access and reduce trade barriers. They agreed to resolve persistent trade problems, such as regulatory obstacles, intellectual property rights, and tariff and nontariff barriers. Their main focus of attention was over improving the business climate in such a way to attract investment and foster long-term, steady economic growth. For that purpose, industries including textiles, energy, agriculture, and information technology were singled out for possible cooperation. Both nations sought to broaden and strengthen their economic cooperation by concentrating on these important areas (Anwar, 2023). Following the meeting, a joint declaration was made to maintain communication and take additional steps to guarantee that the measures that were decided upon were carried out. Both nations underlined how crucial it was to have frequent meetings under TIFA in order to track developments and quickly address new problems (Gangul., 2023).

### **The Impact of US Withdrawal from Afghanistan on Pakistan-US Relations**

After 20 years of military presence, the US completed its withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021. Pakistan-US relations were impacted by this incident in a number of ways. Noteworthy, the Taliban's quick takeover of Kabul brought about a change in the country's security landscape. Pakistan faced immediate security concerns due to its long and porous border with Afghanistan. These concerns included the possibility of cross-border terrorism and an influx of refugees. The US-Pakistan relations had to be reevaluated in light of the withdrawal since the US's priorities now shifted to counterterrorism, maintaining regional stability, and controlling the influence of other regional powers like China and India. The US had depended on Pakistan's support for its operations in Afghanistan. To address the new challenges, Pakistan and the US held high-level diplomatic discussions after the withdrawal. These interactions included talks about efforts to stabilize Afghanistan, cooperation in the fight against terrorism, and increase in humanitarian aid. Although there were challenges in the relationship, there were also chances for an enhanced cooperation based on a common interest in regional stability. Moreover, trade routes and economic stability in the area were impacted by the political unrest in Afghanistan which, at the TIFA meeting of 2023, forced both US and Pakistan to look into frameworks for economic cooperation and trade agreements to help lessen these effects (Munshi, 2022).

### **Assessing the Achievements and Setbacks**

For twenty years, the United States and Pakistan were strategic partners in Afghanistan, collaborating in the fight against terrorism. In exchange for security and intelligence support, the United States provided economic assistance to Pakistan. However, trust between the two nations eroded over time due to the prolonged war. The United States' repeated "do more" demands strained the relations which resulted in an increased US partnership with India. That move, in turn, deepened the alliance between China and Pakistan. Following the United States' withdrawal, India's influence in Afghanistan increased, causing concern for both Pakistan and China (Akhtar & Holland,

2023). Despite having some influence over the Taliban, Pakistan struggled to compel them to engage in negotiations. Although the United States hoped that Taliban leaders would eventually be willing to negotiate for peace, it proved to be a challenging task. The consequences of the prolonged conflict, as well as the subsequent U.S. withdrawal, greatly impacted regional dynamics and further strained U.S.-Pakistan relations (Sakib, 2022).

Pakistani perceptions of the US were influenced by a mix of historical experiences, strategic considerations and media spins. US military engagements in the form of drone strikes and alleged interference into Pakistan's internal affairs further bred anti-Americanism up to new levels. The acts were considered by the general public in Pakistan as an overstepping of sovereignty; consequently, the public found it difficult to believe or trust over US. Given this tarnished image, both sides also recognized the importance of US-Pakistan bilateral relationship from a strategic and economic viewpoint. Many Pakistanis agreed with the benefits of US assistance and supported that it had helped to deal with economic and security challenges in their country (Ramsay, 2009).

## **Conclusion**

It has been an interesting and fluid time for Pakistan-US relations from 2013 to date, Subject even few daunting constraints coming out of both sides Geo-centric/Geo political calculus, Economic gaps with protectionist policies or domestic issues have played a big role.

The US-Pakistan relationship during the era under investigation remained defined by converging interests, conflicting strategy and regional complexity. The big American foot in Afghanistan and then its subsequent withdrawal therefrom early in the current decade had a profound effect on bilateral relations as well. Allegations of links with militant groups turned Pakistan's strategic importance into a double-edged sword. Even during the changing dynamics of War on Terror and internal security challenges in Pakistan, both nations were together engaged in counterterrorism efforts. Meanwhile, the two countries also went through a period of leadership change which had its effect on the relationship. From counterterrorism cooperation (Obama) to more transactional relationship with Pakistan as well (Trump), to a nuanced approach based on broader geopolitical consideration of the region (Biden), each had their own ways. It was under this atmosphere that the political landscape of Pakistan itself altered, and so did its policies towards the US. There was also collaboration and competition in diplomatic efforts, particularly on questions of human rights, democracy as well as regional stability. Pakistan-US relations were further complicated by the regional spectrum, which included the ascendancy of China and Indian influence over US perceptions and policies. US-India Strategic partnership at a deeper level, Pakistan's shift towards China through the prism of CPEC, had disrupted regional equilibrium with zero-sum perceptions in South Asia. To conclude on a broader note, both Pakistan and the US need to recalibrate their bilateral partnership in line with their long-term strategic imperatives.

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