

STRATEGIC SHIFTS IN SOUTH ASIA: US-INDIA RELATIONS AND PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC REALIGNMENT AND REGIONAL STABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The geopolitical landscape of South Asia has significantly transformed due to evolving strategic relations between India and the United States with a broad implication on Pakistan. This paper aims to discover Pakistan's strategic realignment in South Asia due to evolving US-India alliances specifically regarding military and economic ties with China. Additionally, it also analyses the resulting instability in South Asia. Historically ties between the US and Pakistan have changed due to short-term security concerns. The United States no longer prioritizes Pakistan, following American forces' withdrawal from Afghanistan and the US shift towards India to compensate for the effect of the region in China. There has been increased instability throughout South Asia, particularly regarding the Kashmir conflict between Pakistan and India. Therefore, Pakistan has strengthened its military and financial ties with China, changing results to balance the region in India. Previously, Pakistan used to change to balance the region with U.S. support. Despite less military support, the U.S. still views Pakistan as a regional ally despite its reduced military assistance. Furthermore, India's opposition to attempts at mediation in the Kashmir issue highlights the difficulties of external involvement in the region. Overall, the growing cooperation of the US with India highlights the need for Pakistan to navigate its relationship with China and the US while tackling regional security issues.

Keywords: Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD), Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP), Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC), Submarine Rescue Diving Recompression System (SRDRS)

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary periods, South Asia's geopolitical situation has undergone significant shifts. This is driven by the interplay of global powers, regional rivalries, and unsettled conflicts. As a region, South Asia holds critical strategic importance for global powers because of its geographical proximity to key maritime routes, its nuclear arms race, and its great economic strength. The competition of strategies among China and US plays a major part in shaping the strategic rivalry distressing the regional stability. The emergence of new US-India alliances and Pakistan's growing dependence on China could disrupt the equilibrium in the region. The relationship between Pakistan and US entered a complicated arena, recognizing Pakistan as a regional ally concerning

counterterrorism efforts while prioritizing India as an international partner to counter China's rise (Rashid, 2022). The regional stability in South Asia is influenced by Pakistan's strategic realignment because of developing cooperation with China and the decline in US-Pakistan relations because of US-India strategic ties.

Amid the rising Chinese economic and military capabilities, global politics experienced a severe transformation during the post-Cold War period. China's aggression for regional supremacy particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, is defined by its economic power (Han & Paul, 2020). In response to its rise, the US had to reassess its foreign policy priorities and feigned a strategic threat to the strategic challenge.

The U.S. formed with India a strategic alliance to prevent China's growth, with India playing a crucial role. Economic aspirations of China, including the Initiatives of Road and Belt, and its military aggression in the Indo-Pacific have caused the US and India to share worries, which have reinforced their partnership. This gives rise to the US-India strategic realignment in their enhanced defence cooperation like LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA and regular joint military exercises including MALABAR. Similarly, to pledge China's advancement in technology like 5G and artificial intelligence, India is working to deepen their economic connection through cooperation in technology and innovation (O'Donnell, 2021). Hence, it results strategic shift in South Asia. India's strategic significance as a possible counterbalance to China's growing inspiration in the region has been acknowledged by the U.S., even if geopolitical alignments during the Cold War made the U.S. wary of India. Therefore, the US and India try to counter China in the Indo-Pacific by intensified their cooperation of security to improve India's defense and technological capabilities (Mohan, 2012). Both the Biden and Trump administrations have highlighted the role of India in countering China's ambitions. In their 2017 South Asia policy, Trump underlined India as an ally in security maintenance in the region (Fly, 2018). In the same regard, the Biden administration has strongly underlined the importance of multilateralism and regards India as a key actor in its over-arching strategic vision for the Indo-Pacific region (Gupta, 2021). Increasing US-India ties may impact Pakistan in three spheres, economically the strong US-India trade and investment relations may marginalize Pakistan, resulting in less economic trade and investment. Diplomatically, this situation impacts the geopolitical landscape of Pakistan where the US strengthening its ties with long-standing adversary India compelling Pakistan to seek alternative economic partners and investments. Moreover, the US may put more pressure on Pakistan to take determined act against the group of military within its borders which are disturbing the peace in the region. Although it does not always mean a zero-sum game for Pakistan, the deepening U.S.-Indian ties certainly affect Pakistan's strategic decisions. During the Cold War and in the result of Terror and War Pakistan has continuously been a significant

U.S. partner. The U.S.-Pakistan relationship has been reevaluated in light of the United States' planned exit from Afghanistan in 2021. Pakistan seems less relevant to the US's current strategic objective in South Asia, which comprises the containment of China. Pakistan's reliance on China has grown significantly as the US-Pakistan military assistance declined by 60% from 2010 to 2017 (Brimelow, 2022). Pakistan has strengthened its military cooperation with China, acquiring advanced battle tanks, fighter jets, naval frigates, and drones. China also devoted heavily in Pakistan in infrastructure through the CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor), further solidifying their strategic partnership (Askari & Iqbal, 2023). Despite acknowledging Pakistan as a regional ally, particularly in counterterrorism activities, the United States has reevaluated its priorities due to the changing geopolitical scenario. The Kashmir conflict has persistently strained the relations between Pakistan and India. The situation further deteriorated in August 2019 when Article 370 was abolished by India unilaterally, withdrawing the special status of Indian-administered Kashmir (Aziz, 2024). Moreover, the United States has not been particularly successful in influencing India's Kashmir policy, despite diplomatic efforts, including a proposal for mediation from Donald Trump.

The balance of power has been disturbed due to the rivalry in the US-China region, and with the US-India growing strategic alliances and Pakistan's dependency on China. With the US prioritizing India as an ally against China, it is unlikely that Pakistan will cut its ties with China over security concerns regarding India. The US-India relations are influencing Pakistan economically, diplomatically, and strategically, driving Pakistan closer to China. Thus, during the coming years, the dynamic great power rivalry in South Asia will cause power dynamics shift in the region, which will have a substantial impact on the strategic choices made by regional players and geopolitical events.

The Historical Evolution of US-India Relations

A major goal of a superpower is to inhibit the rise of a regional superpower that would challenge its dominance. The dominant power uses a buck-passing approach, trying to expand its influence in other areas to offset a developing rival, to

accomplish this. According to (M. F. Khan et al., 2021), growing influence of China in Asia presents a serious threat to the United States' established hegemon status in the contemporary geopolitical scene. Therefore, The US uses a buck-passing strategy to counter potential regional rivals like China, aiming to prevent their rise in Asia and maintain its dominance. During the Cold War, India's nonalignment policy, close link with the Soviet Union, and involvement in the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) resulted mixture of cooperation and friction relations between US-India relations. India and Pakistan received extensive economic aid from the US in the 1950s to 1960s, however, US-India relations remained unstable due to India's criticism of US foreign policy, notably its involvement in Vietnam. (Guyot-Récard, 2015). Furthermore, the US also had concerns regarding India's nuclear program and its reluctance to sign the Nuclear-Non Proliferation Treaty also raised US concerns regarding India. (Ollapally & Ramana, 1995). During the Cold War President Ronald Reagan's administration, US-India relations improved slightly on the issue of combating terrorism yet this relation remains limited due to India-Soviet Union ties. (Ahmad & Najish, 2018). However, the relations start to change after Soviet Union fall, marking a more significant shift to a pragmatic and fruitful partnership.

i. Early Stages of Alignment (1991–2005)

Over the years, there have been several notable turning points in the US-India defence collaboration that have strengthened their strategic cooperation. The early signing of a Mutual Defense Agreement laid the groundwork for future collaboration and prepared the way for the United States and India to deepen their diplomatic relations. The inaugural MALABAR naval exercise, which took place in 1992 and has since become an annual event, marked a crucial turning point in this partnership by encouraging increased engagement and coordination between the naval forces of the two countries (Kumara & Kumarib, 2017). In May 1998, India conducted nuclear tests leading to temporary tension in the US-India relationship. Even the US's early condemnation and sanctions on these nuclear tests highlight the more engaged dialogue regarding security and non-proliferation resulting in more active bilateral ties

(Pant, 2007). President Bill Clinton made his first visit to India in 2000, this visit aimed to strengthen to deepen its strategic and economic ties with India calling it a strategic partnership. It paved the way for increased diplomatic and economic engagement following the 1998 sanctions (Cohen, 2000). The attacks of 9/11 and following US-led war on terror led to increasing US-India cooperation and counter-terrorism efforts. This enhances the idea of a more profound connection between the US and India because the two democracies are the targets of terrorism following the September 11 attacks (Ollapally, 2005). The GSOMIA (General Security of Military Information Agreement) was the first major deal after 9/11 signed in 2002, which allowed both countries to share secret military information. Moreover in 2004a new bilateral program was initiated called NSSP (The Next Steps in Strategic Partnership). The US committed to increasing collaboration in high-technology trade, missile defence, civilian nuclear activities, and space initiatives under the umbrella of this program (Ganguly & Scobell, 2005). In a Joint Statement unrestricted on July 18, 2005, President George Bush and PM Manmohan Singh establish a "global partnership" among through greater collaboration on economic issues, energy and the environment, democracy and development, non-proliferation and security, high knowledge and space. This was the first official visit by an Indian leader to Washington, DC, since November 2001 (Kronstadt, 2005). The Defense Framework Agreement in 2005 signed by Pranab Mukherjee the Defence minister of India and Donald Rumsfeld Secretary of Defence of US in 2005 to deepen collaboration of defense between India and US. The pact described collaboration in preventing the spread of WMDs, upholding stability and security, opposing terrorism and radicalism in religion, and safeguarding land and maritime trade routes. (Samuel, 2007). Therefore, this strategic partnership marks a notable breakthrough in US-India defence relations. Since then, both states continued to cooperate and enhance ties in the regional stability and mutual security through various joint exercises and strategic dialogue.

ii. Strategic Evolution of US-India Defense Relations and Naval Exercises

An important turning point in the bilateral associations among India and US is the strategic

development of their defence relationship. The Indo-Pacific idea was shaped in great part by agreements between the two countries between 1991 and 2005, which were aimed at creating a partnership to counter a shared threat from China. In 2005, the India and US signed the agreement of US-India Defense Relationship, that was a important turning point that laid the groundwork for the rapid and significant expansion of defence cooperation. (Mohanty & Purushothaman, 2011). A significant advancement in the two countries' relationship was also made possible by the 2005 Indo-US Nuclear Deal, which removed technical obstacles preventing India from obtaining advanced nuclear technologies and implicitly recognized India as a de facto nuclear-weapon state. This agreement is an essential part of the two countries' important alliance. The global framework of nuclear non-proliferation is still being undermined by the deal. An NSG waiver, supported by the US, was given to India in 2008, permitting it to exchange nuclear technology and materials with other countries. The waiver extended the Nuclear Deal between the US and India (Jangir, 2012).

The US and India decided for Mutual Defense agreement to jointly address the issue of protection of SLOCs from any hostile forces. From the MALABAR exercises, the U. S. forces sought to enhance the current capacity of the Indian Navy. A significant landmark was achieved in 2006 with the involvement of the U. S. Navy's explosive ordnance disposal squad EOD during the exercises and imparting specialized training to the Indian counterparts. In those simulations, the SH-60 Nighthawk helicopter was also employed. EOD training was one of the components of the complex program aimed at providing the Indian Navy with naval platforms and enhancing the country's naval power (Singh, 2016). In a nutshell, it can be concluded that the partnership under the Mutual Defense Agreement between India and US has boosted the possibilities of ensuring maritime security through MALABAR exercises. In such a manner, the US started the process of extending its domination of the Indian Ocean through the formation of a planned defence treaty with India. Moreover, The US increase the fleet number in the Indian Ocean included in this deployment policy (Kumara & Kumarib, 2017). Preservation of the SLOC and the strategic straits in the region was the

key reason that directed to the expansion of the U. S naval power in the Indian Ocean. To do this the US expanded the size of its navy in the Indian Ocean significantly and delivered it with the latest technologies. This action was very important in enhancing the combat readiness in the area and countering China's aggression that threatens the American interest in the Indo-Pacific region (Lobo, 2021). Therefore, the US has different objectives in the Indian Ocean state as the maintenance of marine security, constraining the Chinese presence, and in sea lane there is free trade flow.

In addition, Deputy Secretary of Defense Carter was appointed by Secretary Panetta to head a new project known as DTTI in 2012. DTTI was an exceptional joint endeavor focusing on more modern science and technological cooperation, setting out open doors for U.S.-India joint production and development, and strengthening the defense trade relationship (O'Donnell, 2021). Moreover, The US and India signed a Memorandum of Arrangement on Logistics Exchange in 2016. (LEMOA) that let the military of the two countries involve military bases for supply, reinforcement, and mechanical repairs. In 2018, both countries marked the Infrastructures Compatibility and Security Agreement allowing them to share and protect correspondence and exchange information during operation and training. The 2020 ratification of the 34 Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) upgraded the essential partnership strategy between India and the US by giving India instant access to delicate US geospatial intelligence information. It allows the exchange of geological, nautical, and aeronautical information, items, and administrations, as well as unclassified and controlled geospatial items (O'Donnell, 2021). The US Indo-Pacific strategy to develop security relationships among "like-minded partners" in the region and beyond is because of China's worldwide expanding geo-political and geo-economics influences (Crabtree, 2022). The administration of Trump first proclaimed that it would consolidate and broaden US alliances in the Asia-Pacific region to comprise China. According to the US strategy, India was designed as the region "net security provider" (Fly, 2018). However, Pakistan rejected the US claim saying that India can't be a net security earner in the region with conflictual relations with all of its neighbors and is

following the strategy of weakening Pakistan. Therefore, the US-India defence partnership has advanced since the 1990s, focusing on countering the impact of China and regional partnerships. The US considered Indian naval forces essential to countering occurrence of China in the Indian Ocean, pointing to hold China through enhanced combat ability and strategic partnerships with India (Kumara & Kumarib, 2017). The 2005 mutual defence agreement has facilitated cooperation on maritime security, with the MALABAR exercises and US-India naval cooperation focusing on modern skills, strengthened naval understanding, and promoted a free and open maritime domain (Khurana, 2022). India's "Look East" policy welcomed Japanese participation, reflecting the growing strategic connection between the US, India, and Japan (Miller, 2017). Hence, the partnership demonstrates a commitment to regional security, addressing threats and promoting a free and open maritime domain.

iii. Balancing Competing Interests and Diplomatic Efforts

The strategic US-India collaboration ongoing to link up with political level of 2009 followed by shared interest. The PM of India, Manmohan Singh, met President Obama to talk about the global challenges in Washington (Mahapatra, 2015). The Obama organization's "rebalancing" or "Pivot to Asia" strategy, that featured India's significance in the Asia-Pacific, "Our challenge now is to build a web of partnerships and institutions across the Pacific that is as durable and as consistent with American interests and values as the web we have built across the Atlantic" (Clinton, 2011). India's "Look East" policy, that was carried out to support financial coordination with South East Asian countries, was complemented by the US's "Pivot" strategy (Haokip, 2011). India's leadership has been instrumental in shaping an agreement towards building a global security partnership with the US, marking a significant shift away from its traditional non-alignment policy. This shift is driven by the perception that the existence of the US in the Pacific Indian Ocean is essential for safeguarding India's national interests.

Indian Strategic Adjustment and China's Rise

The 1990s marked a new way in Indian foreign policy in the Indian Ocean region, which began to increasingly emphasis on cooperation with the US. This new approach was evident with India joining naval exercises like the MALABAR exercise in the Indian Ocean (Mann, 2017). The Indian Navy started to follow the Mahanian theory of sea power which was based on the impression that who controlled the Indian Ocean dominated Asia. India had a strategic outreach in the Persian Gulf region, the Strait of Malacca, and Southeast Asia as envisaged in the "Look East Policy." Indian warships were observed to be accompanying US ships through the Strait of Malacca; and the Indian navy carried out exercises with Vietnam in 2000, with Japan in 2001, and Singapore in 2005. These drills were considered as a reaction to China's rising in the South China Sea and India's unwillingness to recognize its increasing presence in the Indian Ocean.

In 2004, the Indian Maritime Doctrine was formulated, outlining the role of the Indian Navy in securing the country's interests in the Indian Ocean, including the defense of SLOC, Indian Islands, and choke points (Scott, 2006). The doctrine was revised and published in 2007 as "Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy," which emphasized the essential of armed forecast control in the Indian Ocean and linked the growth of the Indian navy to national interests (Voyer et al., 2018).

The US-India deliberate dialogue began in 2010 under President Obama, with annual dialogues focusing on strengthening economic draws, stopping piracy, terrorism fighting, and securing the Indian Ocean. The US began to rely on India's provision to protect its benefits in the area, as evident in the US officials participating in the US-India strategic dialogue for the first time (Mahapatra, 2013). Through this period, Adm Gary Roughead the US Chief of Naval Operations, visited India to enhance security cooperation of maritime and met with the Indian Chief of Naval Staff to increase strategic cooperation between the two navies (Holmes, 2016).

In 2011, the US announced its "Pivot to Asia" policy, aimed at deepening diplomatic, economic, political, and security partnerships with Asian countries. This policy was later renamed the "Rebalance to Asia" policy, which primarily

focused on expanding alliances in Asia and deepening partnerships, with the Indian Ocean remaining a secondary concern (Tehseen, 2017). Under this policy, the US encouraged India to begin relationships with state of central Asian and Southeast Asian, which overlapped with India's "Look East" policy in the Indian Ocean (Ismail & Mohd Sani, 2010).

China was largely concerned with the US's "Pivot to Asia" approach as the United States was required to comprise China's rising effect in the Asia-Pacific section. In response, India, which required enhancing its partnership with the US and challenging China in the Indian Oceans, accepted the US policy. China considered India's rising existence in the Indian Ocean as a threat to its interests; Chinese naval analysts pointed out that India could potentially bar China's access to the Indian Ocean over the Islands of Nicobar and Andaman close to the Bay of Bengal and the Strait of Malacca (Hilali 2014).

By 2010, China's naval activities, including the placement in the Indian Ocean of a nuclear-powered submarine had raised concerns in the US (Tellis, 2015). In response, the US and India began joint exercises, including INDIAEX 2012, which employed the US Submarine Rescue Diving Recompression System (SRDRS) alongside Indian submarines (T. Khan et al., 2022). The US also provided India with anti-submarine warfare technology, including the P-8, to track Chinese submarines (O'Donnell, 2021).

China's aircraft carrier development, including the commissioning of the Liaoning and Type 002, has caused anxiety for India, prompting it to consider constructing its aircraft carrier. India has one aircraft carrier, INS Vikramaditya, which was commissioned in 2008 and obtained from Russia (Scott, 2006). In 2012, India agreed to enter into a Defense Technology and Trade Initiative with the US to counter China's aircraft carrier construction. This agreement marked a shift in the US-India relationship of buyer-seller to a cooperative approach aimed at strengthening India's indigenous industry (M. Khan, 2017). In 2017, Prime Minister Modi's stay to the US marked a significant milestone in strengthening defence relations between the two nations. Following his meeting with President Trump, Indian and US naval officers engaged in discussions to enhance defence cooperation (Rej, 2018). Despite the US efforts to

boost India's military capabilities, India still pauses overdue China in terms of naval power. China's naval forces, which outnumber those of the US, have been deployed in the Indian Ocean, equipped with naval mines and ballistic missiles capable of attacking and destroying moving ships. In addition, China has developed the capacity to attack the Global Positioning System which is critical for the US Navy for communication. China has launched J-16 Sino Flanker, Su-30MKK Flanker G and Xian H-6 anti-shipping aircraft which has boosted the strike capabilities of China in Indian Ocean region. In 2012, the 18th Central Committee of CPC decided to build China into a powerful marine country. The following year China released a 'blue book' that focused on increasing the strategic implication of the Indian Ocean and stressed protecting China's interest in the Indo-Pacific region (Mukherjee, 2017). The publication stressed the importance of safeguarding SLOC in the Indian Ocean and exploring alternative SLOC to mitigate threats from other powers in the region (Jakobson & Medcalf, 2015). China's naval modernization efforts focus on asserting power in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. China has made the security of its SLOC a top priority due South China Sea growing tensions, crucial way of oil shipments from the Strait of Malacca. For the navy of China to develop a powerful submarine force in the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, its capabilities must be strengthened, according to a new policy document.

China's naval transformation encompasses a range of advanced technologies, including anti-ship ballistic and cruise missiles, plane carriers, submarines, surface combatants, UAV and state-of-the-art C4ISR systems (Upadhyaya, 2017). The US policy of Rebalancing to Asia has prompted China to increase its naval forces and capabilities, deploy strategic locations, and provide army and economic support to coastal states in the Indian Ocean to gain ports access.

China faces the "Malacca Dilemma," where most of its imports of petroleum from the Gulf and Africa pass over the Strait of Malacca (Ismail & Mohd Sani, 2010). If hostility towards China in the Indian Ocean were to rise, blocking this Strait would severely impact China's energy security. To address this challenge, China has launched the CPEC under the OBOR (One Belt, One Road) enterprise (Mukherjee, 2017). China has developed

a port in Gwadar, Pakistan, and pledged \$45 billion for the corridor's development, as well as an additional \$28 billion for investment in different projects (Hussain, 2017). While China's investment in Pakistan is substantial, it is driven by economic considerations rather than a desire to establish a naval base (Jakobson & Medcalf, 2015). China's development of ports in littoral states supports its growing workforce, guarantees the security of its SLOC, and safeguards its large-scale investments (Upadhyaya, 2017).

However, India opinions China's rising impact in the Indian Ocean as a risk to its interest strategic. The increased presence of submarines of China in the Indian Ocean, particularly in the the Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea, has caused important concern for India (Jakobson & Medcalf, 2015). The competition strategic between the China and US in the Indian Ocean is intensifying, with implications for regional stability and the balance of power. Coastal states in the Indian Ocean are increasingly cautious about this rivalry, while the US positions itself as the protector of naval security in the region.

Recent Development in US-India

The year 2020 witnessed a significant milestone in the India-US strategic alliances with the signing of the BECA. Under this agreement, the US committed to providing India with advanced satellite geospatial, and aeronautical data, for military purposes (O'Donnell, 2021). Furthermore, in 2022 PM of India Narendra Modi and Joe Biden president of the US held two meetings, during which they studied the partnership of India-US strategy and endorsed their commitment to deepening cooperation to address climate change, economic growth, and improving global health (T. Khan et al., 2022). This development suggests that the India-US strategic corporation is indeed strengthening.

Even with the growing strategic junction between India and the US in the Indian Ocean, India is reluctant to join the US-led grouping. Instead, India is exploring cooperation with different countries to achieve its objectives for regional hegemony. Narendra Modi has made clear that India is not seeking a balancing role, but rather aims to undertake a leading part in the global arena. India's ambition is to become a major power and contribute to a shift from a unipolar to a multipolar

universal order (O'Donnell, 2021). Projections for 2050 suggest that India is likely to develop as a pole in its own right, though weaker than China, the US, and the European Union. India's ability to achieve this goal will depend on its ability to sustain an economic boom, build state capacity, and foster a thriving democratic system.

US-Pakistan Deteriorating Relations

i. Leading Cause to Deteriorating Relations between the US and Pakistan

The relationship between the US and Pakistan has been marked by periods of complex cooperation and tense distancing, with the US primarily engaging with Pakistan based on short-term security concerns or ad-hoc needs. This approach has led to an unstable and often mistrustful dynamic, with periods of alienation frequently overshadowing positive relations. Pakistan, in turn, has strategically leveraged this relationship to achieve its objectives. However, following the US removal from Afghanistan, Pakistan's significance in the US's current South Asian strategic objectives appears to have diminished, particularly as the US focuses on contradicting China's inspiration in the region. As a result, US-Pakistan relations have deteriorated, with Pakistan increasingly relying on China for military and economic assistance.

Similarly, the US and India have increased their partnership strategic based on economic integration, security and technological advancement in the district of Indo-Pacific which has led to the diminishing of strategic partnership among the US and Pakistan and Pakistan has shifted towards China.

Sameer P. Lalwani has characterized China-Pakistan relatives as a "Threshold Alliance," providing suppleness and potential burden-sharing in times of crisis (Lalwani, 2020). In terms of financial assistance, China has launched the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a lead program for China's Belt and Road inventiveness, which includes infrastructural development projects in Pakistan (Elena et al., 2020). Another key pillar of the Pakistan-China association is their military cooperation, including joint exercises such as "Friendship-2004" and "Shaheen 2" (Javid & Ali, 2024). China is likewise the primary dealer of military hardware to Pakistan, providing advanced weapons, including jets, submarines, and missile technology. This cooperation is driven by mutual

security concerns, as both countries view it as a balancing act against India's military might and geopolitical influence.

Meanwhile, the US State Department perceives India as a strategic ally whereas Pakistan is considered an important ally in a strategic area (Iqbal, 2022). This has caused tension and conflicts between the US and Pakistan because of the divergence of their interests. Additionally, the recent developments in the state of Jammu and Kashmir since the annulment of Article 370 and Section 35A of the Indian constitution only fuel this conflict. Pakistan wants the US to intervene and act as a mediator between the two nations, but the US has no leverage over India, resulting in tension between Pakistan and the US.

Impact of strategic partnership of US-India on Pakistan

i. Geopolitical shift of South Asia

Through the Cold War period, the US was hesitant to trade arms with India due to its non-aligned stance and close ties with the Soviet Union. However, in the post-Cold War period, the US reassessed its geopolitical objectives in Asia in response to China's increasing regional effect. As a result, the US began founding a strategic corporation with India, equipping it with modern weaponry to counterweight China's increasing existence in the region (Brimelow, 2022). The US has pursued a policy of containing China since the early 2000s.

During the Trump administration, the US preferred India in its South Asia strategy. The US policy towards containing China has become increasingly assertive under President Joe Biden, who has explicitly stated that the US will prevent China from becoming a global power (Muhammad, 2022). In this context, India is seen as a more appropriate partner for the US associated to Pakistan.

In Pakistan the cold war aligned with the Western powers and fought against the USSR as a proxy. The failure of the Soviet Union, Pakistan joined the global war against terrorism led by America in Afghanistan. Though, the recent US drawing from Afghanistan in 2021 has reduced the significance of Pakistan for the US. According to political analyst Don McLain Gill (2021), the US had relied on Pakistan to establish peace in Afghanistan at the expense of deeper strategic ties with India. The US

withdrawal has allowed India to strengthen its ties with the US without worrying about the Pakistan factor, and the US to reassess its overall South Asia policy.

Pakistan had heavily relied on the financial benefits and modern weapons provided by the US throughout the war on terror. However, the US military help to Pakistan has declined by 60% between 2010 and 2017, leading Pakistan to seek alternative sources of financial and military aid (McLain Gill, 2021). As a result, Pakistan is increasingly looking towards China to balance its relationships with India. China has a main dealer of military hardware to Pakistan, providing battle tanks, fighter jets, and naval assets. The Al-Zarrar Tank and Al-Khalid Tank were manufactured in Pakistan with Chinese aid, while Pakistan and China have mutually manufactured the fighter plane JF-17 and provided Pakistan with the fighter plane J-10C (Iqbal, 2016). Furthermore, China provided Pakistan with drones, and four Zulfikar-class frigates, and is helping Pakistan construct eight Hangor-class submarines (Askari & Iqbal, 2023). China has also provided \$60 billion for construction under project of CPEC that help Pakistan to build strong economic and defense system (Zaman, 2022).

The South Asia geopolitics have been further complicated because of strategic rivalry between America and China. Since 1990s to 2000s the global power of China rises, India has asserted its strategic alliance with the US to counterbalance the increasing influence of China (Sibal, 2015). On the other hand, the relationship, which was once vibrant and mutual between Pakistan and the US in the war on terror has shifted more in the favor of China given the recent drawing of the US from Afghanistan.

ii. Pakistan, a regional partner of the US

The significance of the strategic bilateral relationships between the US and India does not mean that the US is compelled to align it with either Pakistan or India. However, the US considers Pakistan as a regional ally and India as a global ally in its South Asia strategy it wants to sustain both relations (Iqbal, 2022). After the withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan, the US started again dealing with Pakistan because Pakistan is a regional ally against the international terrorist organizations in

Afghanistan and to prevent the hazard of terrorism across the globe.

The United States of America provided 450 million US dollars to Pakistan in September 2022 to enhance the F-16 fighter aircraft (Wolf, 2022). In addition, Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa the former Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan, paid a visit on 5th October 2022 to Washington to renew the defence cooperation between the US and Pakistan. This visit shows that Pakistan is not trying to shift from the US to China but wants to have its relations with both countries. During his visit, Gen Bajwa has a meeting with Lloyd Austin the Secretary of Defense of US to talk about the US-Pakistan relation (Zeeshan, 2022). In its report, the Inter-Service Public Relations, the public face of the Army of Pakistan, said that, besides security matters, the two sides also reviewed the enhancement of bilateral relations in the economic sphere (Zaman, 2022).

Moreover, the US has planned to provide money to Pakistan in its budget for the financial year 2023, which includes \$15 million to improve the security situation on the Pakistan-Afghanistan border as well as \$200 million to support Pakistani women. After the US left Afghanistan, the security situation worsened in the neighbouring country, Pakistan and the US has been forced to release the money to deal with the terrorism (Iqbal, 2022). The gender equality funds are in an attempt to provide Pakistan Social justice between the genders. Therefore the US is not shifting from Pakistan to India; rather, the relations with Pakistan are stable and based on mutual interests like countering terrorism. However, there is some difference between the associations of US with India and Pakistan China and the US has again started the process of friendly relations with Pakistan.

iii. **Kashmir dispute and US**

The issue of Kashmir is still one of the major conflicts between Pakistan and India, which prevents the two countries from attaining peace. On the 5th of August 2019, through a constitutional amendment, the Indian government unilaterally downgraded the status of Indian-occupied Kashmir, changing its position from an autonomous region to a part of the Indian Union (Lalwani & Gayner, 2020). While having a bilateral meeting with Imran Khan in Davos, Switzerland during the World Economic Forum in

January 2020, the then US President Donald Trump took a giant step in the Kashmir issue when he offered his services to act as a mediator between Pakistan and India. However, India quickly rejected Trump's suggestion observing that the Kashmir issue has been a bilateral matter between Pakistan and India and the latter will not agree to allow any third-party mediation or intervention (Hashim, 2020). In October 2022, US Ambassador to Pakistan, Donald Blome, travelled to the Pakistani side of the disputed region of Kashmir for a three-day trip. More importantly, Blome insisted on calling the area 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir', which is in concordance with Pakistan's narrative of the Kashmir conflict (Jamal, 2022). India, on the other hand, reflects "Pakistani-administered Kashmir" as share of India calling it "Pakistan-occupied Kashmir." On the same note, Pakistan views Indian-administered Kashmir as calling it "Indian-occupied Kashmir." Despite the use of the term 'Azad Jammu and Kashmir' by the US Ambassador and Trump previous proposal to intervene on the matter of Kashmir, these statements have their loophole. New Delhi has not budged on its Kashmir policy due to which the US has not been able to change the status quo among two countries despite the growing cooperation strategies. Thus, the main goal is not to act as a mediator between Pakistan and India the rising partnership but then again to curb China's increasing region power for the US.

Conclusion

The evolution and shift in the strategic relationship among India US and its effects on Pakistan have revealed the multifaceted dynamics of the regional and global systems in South Asia. Islamabad has geared up for a stronger relationship with China because Pakistan's role has been sidelined in the US strategic calculation due to the emerging mutual interests of the US and India regarding the increasing Chinese assertiveness in the region. This shift has only added to the regional tension, particularly over the issue of Kashmir and has also raised doubts over the efficacy of the third-party interventions. Despite these challenges, the U. S. recognizes Pakistan's importance as a counter-terrorism partner in the region and still engages with it but with reduced military assistance. To manage this strategic balance in the region, it is important to balance among India and US the rising

corporation and relations that Pakistan has with China. This necessitates diplomacy and conflict-solving instruments to resolve historical grievances and foster security and development in the region.

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