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## AN INSIGHTFUL LOOK AT HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON FOREIGN POLICY OF PAKISTAN

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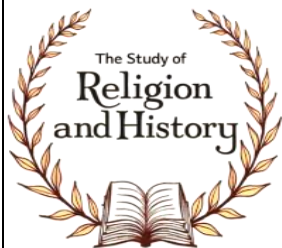
### Abstract

*The foreign policy of Pakistan has evolved in a complicated historical path influenced by historical security issues, economic limitations, ideological views, and changes in global political system. The external relations of Pakistan have been severely affected by the instability in the region, especially its long-term strategic conflict with India, and changing international politics since its formation after the Partition of British India. This study aims to discuss critically the historical development of the foreign policy of Pakistan and to determine the most important structural and contextual factors which shaped its evolution throughout the various historical periods. The study utilizes a historical research methodology that is qualitative in nature. Secondary sources such as scholarly books, peer-reviewed journal articles, official policy documents, and reports of international bodies such as the United Nations are used to collect data. This analysis is done by systematic periodization of the foreign policy of Pakistan into different phases and content and comparative analysis are done to determine continuity and change patterns. The findings and the discussion have shown that there are four key factors that have consistently influenced the foreign policy of Pakistan: security issues about India, economic susceptibility, ideological leaning towards Islam, and the change of the global system to multipolarity rather than bipolar. Although the initial period was characterized by security-related alignment to the Western powers during the Cold War, subsequent stages are characterized by diversification, especially enhancing relations with China and more focus on economic diplomacy and regional connectivity. The paper concludes that the foreign policy of Pakistan is dynamic and flexible, having both the traditional requirements of security and the shifts in economic and strategic needs. Regardless of the great changes, security factor has been kept at the center stage with the emerging world realities redefining its diplomatic perspectives.*

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Pakistan, Historical, Policy, Cold war

### Introduction

Pakistan has undergone a historically multifaceted and strategic sensitive foreign policy that has been influenced by regional conflicts, the politics of global power and the internal developmental pressures. It dates to 1947 after the Partition of British India, which not only established the independent state but also came with immediate diplomatic, political and security issues (Askari-Rizvi, 1983). When Pakistan gained independence, it was beset with such problems as the partitioning of resources, refugees, and weak institutions. The early struggles forced the nation to focus on survival, independence and global acceptance in its foreign policy formulation (Waheed, 2021). Its lack of solid economic bases also contributed to its dependence on outside alliances and foreign relations became one of the core aspects of state-building. Security concerns dominated the foreign policy of Pakistan especially in its initial stages especially because of the hostile relationship that it had with India (M. Hussain, 2023). The status of unresolved conflict over Kashmir and frequent military confrontations strengthened a defensive diplomatic stance. This led to Pakistan actively pursuing alliances that would enhance its military and strategic capabilities. Under the cold war, Pakistan became an ally of the western powers and was a member of security groups like SEATO and CENTO (Altaf, 2021). This congruency was necessitated by the necessity of economic assistance, military aid and political support within a two-polar world order. Nevertheless, this strategy



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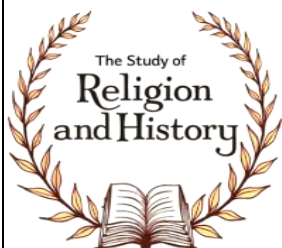
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also curtailed the flexibility that Pakistan had in its diplomacy because the foreign policy of the country became firmly attached to the strategic interests of its allies.

The following decades were marked by great changes in the foreign policy priorities in Pakistan. The collapse of East Pakistan in 1971 was a turning point and the external relations and the national approach were reevaluated. Pakistan started to diversify its diplomatic interactions and enhanced its relations with the Muslim world and actively participated in such organizations like the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (Amin, 2003; Shah et al., 2021). Meanwhile, its relations with China became the foundation of its foreign policies. The partnership was formed based on strategic interests and regional collaboration that grew over the years to economic and infrastructural cooperation, especially in the form of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Fozia et al., 2019). These developments represented a progressive change in policies that were driven by security issues to include more of an economic and geopolitical perspective. The other characteristic stage in the foreign policy of Pakistan was the engagement in Soviet-Afghan War which immensely increased its geopolitical significance. Pakistan turned into a frontline state, which collaborated with the world powers in assisting resistance movements in Afghanistan (Hilali, 2021). Although this engagement was economically and militarily advantageous, it had long-term implications for the stability in the region and the security within the country. Pakistan had to grapple with the problem of re-establishing its foreign policy in the post-Cold War world, where a single superpower, the United States, dominated. It happened on September 11, 2001, once again when Pakistan was at the center of global strategic calculations when it joined the worldwide fight against terrorism (Faheem et al., 2021). This era also brought out the fact that the importance of external relationships still exists and the fact that national interests must be balanced with international expectations.

Over the past few years, the foreign policy of Pakistan has been shifting towards economic diplomacy, regional connectivity and multilateralism. Programs like CPEC signify an attempt to encompass economic growth with the foreign policies, augmenting business, infrastructure, and regional collaboration (Salman et al., 2024). Meanwhile, Pakistan has tried to keep a leveled relationship with great powers, such as the United States, China, and local players in the Middle East and South Asia. The increasing significance of globalization, energy security, and climate issues has further broadened the foreign policy scope to go beyond the usual security issues. This evolution reflects a change in the more pragmatic and multidimensional approach, even though security considerations remain of great importance (Saghir et al., 2025). This paper will be discussing the historical development of Pakistan foreign policy as well as looking at the major factors that have influenced the direction of the Pakistan foreign policy over the years. The importance of the study is to be able to give a holistic view of how historical experiences, geopolitical realities as well as national priorities have shaped the external behavior of Pakistan (Askari-Rizvi, 1983; Bhutto, 1964). Through the process of tracing foreign policy evolution over time, the paper shows trends of continuity and change, providing a glimpse into the thinking patterns that have been used to make decisions. It also focuses on how domestic imperatives intertwine with international pressures in influencing policy outcomes. This kind of analysis is especially significant in the context of comprehending the current state of Pakistan in the world relations and how it reacts to new challenges.



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Moreover, the work has added to the realm of scholarly discussion as it provides a coherent and well-organized analysis of the foreign policy of Pakistan in the historical context. It brings a lot of knowledge to scholars, policy makers and other researchers who want to know the intricacies of international relations in South Asia. Connecting the developments of the past with the present strategies, the research improves the possibility to evaluate the future directions and policy options. On the whole, this introduction creates a clear and coherent basis of the analysis of the historical course of the foreign policy, the strategic determinants, and the changing dimensions of the foreign policy of Pakistan in a systematic and meaningful way.

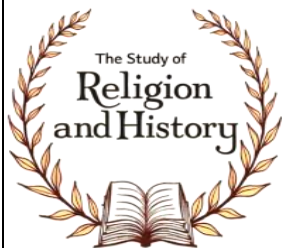
## Literature Review

Since 1947, Pakistan's foreign policy has been driven mainly by security, especially vis-à-vis India, and the search for economic support, while balancing ideology (Islam) and shifting global power structures.

### *Major Historical Phases and Alignments*

Pakistan first came out with a foreign policy vision based on the postulate of friendship to all and malice to none which represented the wish of being a non-partisan nation, coexisting peacefully with others and following the rules of the United Nations (Jinnah, 1970). This strategy conformed to the larger desire not being involved in the great-power politics, especially during the initial years after independence. The realities of statehood soon, however, questioned this utopian pose. The capacity to maintain a neutral position was limited by fragile institutions, economical capabilities, and severe security issues faced by Pakistan (Pande, 2011). The threat posed by India, particularly following the Partition of British India, created a scenario that allowed consideration of security factors to take over in making foreign policy decisions. The pressures slowly oriented Pakistan towards the United States and the larger West during the Cold War (Asad, 2023; Askari-Rizvi, 1983). Pakistan sought military aid, economic aid and diplomatic support, and became a member of major defense alliances like the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Baghdad Pact (which became the CENTO). This was not just an ideological alignment but to a large extent a strategic one so that Pakistan could be able to build its defense infrastructure in response to the threats to the region. Simultaneously, the involvement in such alliances made Pakistan an ally in the international policy of communism containment, which earned this country even more geopolitical interest (M. Hussain, 2023; Waheed, 2021). However, this decision also restricted its diplomatic options as its foreign policy orientation became closely coupled with the Western strategic interests.

This ongoing conflict over Kashmir also strengthened the security-centered and India-oriented foreign policy perspective of Pakistan (Amin, 2003; Bhutto, 1964). The First Kashmir War preconditioned a long-standing conflict that was going to define bilateral relations for decades. Later conflicts such as the Indo-Pakistani War of 1965, the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, and the Kargil War, solidified a culture of competition and mistrust (Askari-Rizvi, 1983). These wars not only increased the security fears, but they also strengthened the view of India being a focal point of the foreign policy of Pakistan, commonly referred to as an Indo-centric foreign policy. Consequently, Pakistan began to overly depend on great-power alliances and the assistance of the outside forces to offset the regional superiority of India (Altaf, 2021; Amin, 2003). This path shows the conflict between the original normative goals of Pakistan and the structural limitations of this geopolitical situation. Although the initial adherence to neutrality



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and the peaceful co-existence was a principled approach, the changed demands of security and regional conflicts required a more pragmatic and alliance approach. In the long run, this change helped the integration of a set of foreign policies where security, alliances, and regional affairs were closely linked.

### ***Security Issues with respect to India***

Security rivalry between Pakistan and India has been the most persistent factor of the foreign policy in Pakistan. The Kashmir issue and frequent military clashes have formed a continuous perception of threat since independence. This image has affected the formation of alliances, planning of defenses, and diplomatic priorities (E. Hussain, 2019; Sathasivam, 2017). The interaction of Pakistan with the international powers has been shaped more by the necessity to balance the regional hegemony of India (Bhutto, 1964). This has often led to a security-based and reactive stance on foreign policy. Suspicion has remained the strategic thinking mechanism in even the times of detente and constrained long term regional collaboration.

### ***Economic Vulnerability***

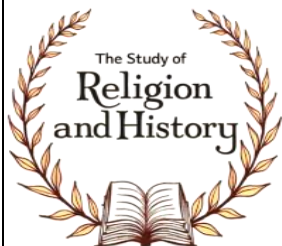
Pakistan has always been economically constrained, and this has been a critical factor in determining her relationships with other countries. During its initial years, the lack of industrial capacity, and financial insecurity forced Pakistan to seek the help of the West, especially the United States. This dependency developed but never faded away with time. In the modern times, there has been increased interaction with China due to economic reasons, particularly due to mega projects like the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Butt & Butt, 2015a; Fazal et al., 2023). These alliances are a sign of seeking to combine the goals of economic development with foreign policy. So the economic vulnerability has not merely shaped the alliance decisions, but also promoted the progressive transformation towards economic diplomacy and regional interconnectedness (Butt & Butt, 2015b).

### ***Islamic Identity and Pan-Islamism***

The foreign policy orientation of Pakistan has also been a result of its ideological premise as a Muslim majority state. The focus on Islamic identity has allowed establishing closer relations with Middle Eastern states and promote the wider Muslim agenda. Pakistan has also been active in forums like Organization of Islamic Cooperation, which aims at fostering unity among the Muslim countries (Askari-Rizvi, 1983). This aspect of foreign policy has expanded the diplomatic reach of Pakistan and has offered a chance to economic and political collaboration. Simultaneously, it has assisted in the formation of its position on critical global matters that have impacted the Muslim world. Nevertheless, this aspect has mostly enhanced security and economic priorities, but not substituted.

### ***Changing Global System***

The international system has played a huge role in shaping the behavior of the Pakistan foreign policy. Pakistan was allied with the United States, and this was in the wider context of containment during the Cold War. The termination of the Cold War and the world becoming a unipolar state posed a challenge to Pakistan with regards to redefining its external relations. Over the last few years, the global system has shifted towards multipolarity that offers new possibilities of diversified engagement (Sathasivam, 2017). Pakistan has reacted by trying to strike a balance with various powers such as the United States, China, and the regional powers. This change is indicative of a more practical and adaptive nature, in order to maximize strategic and economic gain, without over relying on any single partner. These drivers show that the



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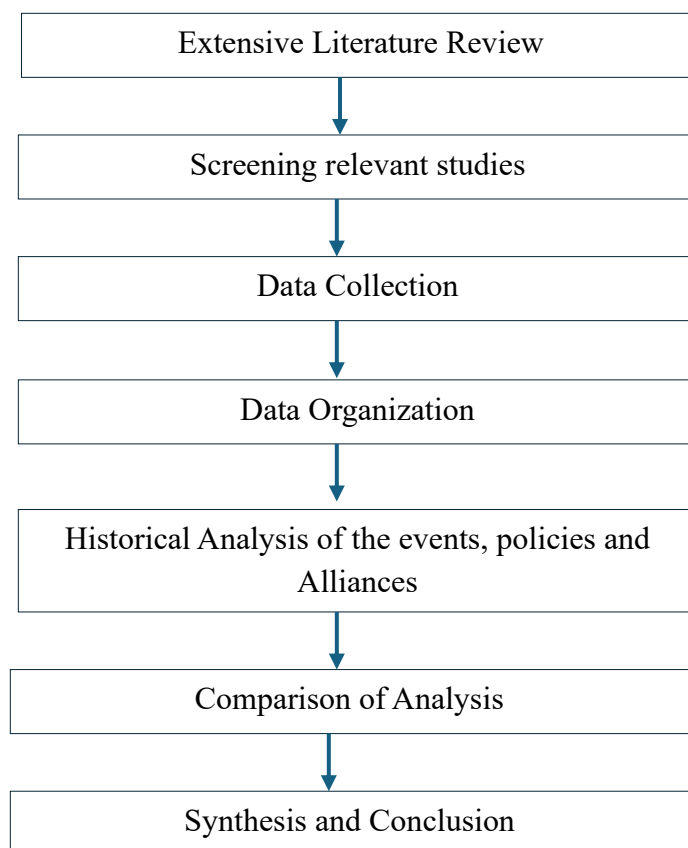
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foreign policy of Pakistan is not determined by one determinant rather is a product of the interplay of security requirements, economic demands, ideological aspects, and structural shifts at the global level. Their combined power is the reason why the same diplomatic behavior of Pakistan has remained consistent throughout the years and is also changing.

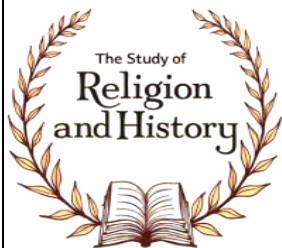
## Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative historical analysis as the sole methodological approach to examine the evolution of the foreign policy of Pakistan. The choice of historical analysis is deliberate, as the research aims to interpret policy development over time by systematically examining past events, decisions, and diplomatic patterns. This approach enables a structured understanding of how foreign policy has responded to changing domestic conditions and international environments. The research is conducted in a stepwise and systematic manner to ensure analytical clarity and coherence as highlighted in figure 1.



*Figure 1 Research Flow Chart*

The initial step defines the area and time boundary of the study, covering period 1947 to present. This categorization enables an analysis of Pakistan foreign policy since independence as one of the four distinct historical periods, including early post-independence period, the Cold War phase, the post-cold war transition, and the multipolar global order. Each phase is treated as a separate unit of analysis to examine continuity and change. Data collection is done next in



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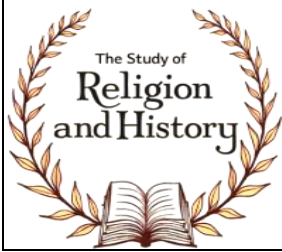
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step 2 using reliable secondary sources. This encompasses scholarly journal articles, specialist books, policy documents, and archival sources. To ensure authenticity and credibility, records and reports from international organizations like the United Nations, etc. Are incorporated. Sources that are relevant to the study and fit its theme are selected for use.

In the third phase, which is data organization and classification phase, the data collected is arranged in chronological order based on the identified historical phases. In every round, countries found the data classified further based on policy levels like security concerns, economic interests, ideological influences, and global alignments. Such classification makes complex historical information simple and helps prepare the detailed study. The fourth step involves analytical interpretation based on a careful look and thinking about the material collected. Patterns and themes as well as turning points are identified in foreign policy behaviour. How big events, alliances and conflicts impact decisions is focused on. The analysis must be interpreted rather than descriptive at this stage. The fifth step is comparative evaluation across phases, which means we look at different time periods and compare them for similarities and differences in policy orientation. An analysis of these developments shows the repeated occurrence of phenomena over time. Security concerns have repeatedly appeared over the past 25 years. Similarly, over time, there is a gradual shift towards economic diplomacy. It furthermore enables the identification of turning points which reshaped Pakistan's foreign policy. Finally, synthesis and inference: the examination of findings from all stages helps us to arrive at informed conclusions about the historical evolution of Pakistan's foreign policy. This step links past developments with current response strategies and draws conclusions from the evidence. By following clearly defined and logically connected steps, qualitative historical analysis ensures a rigorous, coherent and substantive examination of the evolution of foreign policy.

## **Results and Discussion**

The historical analysis of the foreign policy of Pakistan demonstrates a continuous interaction between security imperatives, economic constraints, ideological orientation, and transformations in the global system (Butt & Butt, 2015b; Jinnah, 1970). The findings suggest that although the emphasis of foreign policy priorities has shifted across different historical phases, a set of core drivers has remained consistently influential. The qualitative historical method used in this study highlights both continuity and change, revealing how Pakistan's diplomatic behavior has evolved in response to internal vulnerabilities and external pressures (Pande, 2011). In the early post-independence phase, the results clearly indicate that foreign policy was dominated by security concerns, particularly in relation to India (E. Hussain, 2019). The immediate tensions following the Partition of British India and the emergence of the Kashmir dispute created a persistent security dilemma. This environment forced Pakistan to prioritize defense preparedness and external support over diplomatic neutrality. The analysis shows that Pakistan's alignment with Western powers during the Cold War was primarily strategic rather than ideological (Askari-Rizvi, 1983). Through participation in alliances such as SEATO and CENTO, Pakistan sought to strengthen its position against India. This phase reflects a reactive foreign policy model, driven largely by threat perception and dependency on external security guarantees.



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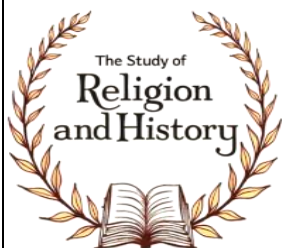
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**Table 1 Key Drivers**

S.No.	Drivers	Historical Role in Policy
1	Security vs. India	Core threat perception shaping alliances
2	Economic vulnerability	Shift toward US aid, later China and CPEC
3	Islamic identity / Pan-Islamism	Basis for ties with Muslim world and causes
4	Global system (bi/unipolar/multipolar)	From alignment to diversified balancing

The second phase, particularly following the 1971 war and the loss of East Pakistan, marks a turning point in foreign policy orientation. The results show that this event exposed the limitations of overdependence on Western alliances and encouraged a diversification of diplomatic partnerships (Altaf, 2021; Fozia et al., 2019; Jinnah, 1970). Pakistan increasingly emphasized ideological and regional dimensions of foreign relations, particularly through engagement with Muslim-majority countries. Strengthened participation in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation reflects the use of Islamic identity as a diplomatic instrument. Simultaneously, relations with China deepened, laying the foundation for a durable strategic partnership (Hilali, 2021; Muzaffar et al., 2016). This phase indicates a gradual shift from a purely security-centered approach toward a more multidimensional foreign policy incorporating ideological and political elements. Findings from the late Cold War and post-Cold War period highlight further complexity in Pakistan's foreign policy behavior. During the Soviet-Afghan War, Pakistan emerged as a frontline state, significantly increasing its geopolitical importance. While this role brought substantial military and economic assistance, it also generated long-term internal security challenges and regional instability. Following the collapse of the bipolar system, the global shift toward unipolarity required Pakistan to recalibrate its foreign policy (Faheem et al., 2021; Salman et al., 2024). The results indicate an attempt to balance relations with the United States while simultaneously expanding engagement with regional actors. This reflects a gradual transition toward pragmatic diplomacy and strategic flexibility in a changing global order. In the contemporary phase, the findings reveal a marked shift toward economic diplomacy and regional connectivity. Initiatives such as the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) illustrate the growing importance of economic factors in foreign policy formulation. The partnership with China has expanded beyond strategic alignment to include infrastructure development, trade, and long-term investment cooperation. This shift demonstrates an effort to reduce economic vulnerability through diversified partnerships (Butt & Butt, 2015a; Fazal et al., 2023). However, the analysis also confirms that security concerns remain deeply embedded in policy thinking, particularly regarding relations with India and regional stability dynamics. Thus, economic and security considerations continue to operate simultaneously rather than independently.

The discussion of these findings suggests that Pakistan's foreign policy cannot be fully explained through a single theoretical framework. Instead, it reflects a combination of realist and constructivist perspectives. The persistent emphasis on security and national interest aligns with realist assumptions, while the influence of Islamic identity and ideological considerations corresponds with constructivist interpretations (Butt & Butt, 2015b; Moskalenko, 1974). Additionally, changes in the international structure from bipolarity to unipolarity and now toward multipolarity have significantly influenced strategic adjustments. Pakistan's ability to



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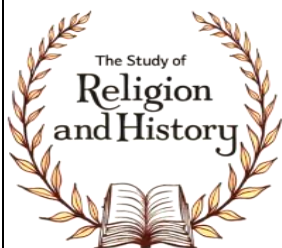
adapt to these systemic shifts demonstrates an ongoing process of policy recalibration. Overall, the results confirm that Pakistan's foreign policy has evolved from a narrow, security-dominated framework into a more complex and multidimensional structure (Asad, 2023; Pande, 2011). While diversification in economic and diplomatic engagement is evident, security concerns especially in relation to India continue to remain central. Economic diplomacy, ideological alignment, and global strategic balancing now coexist with traditional security priorities (M. Hussain, 2023). These findings provide a comprehensive understanding of how historical experiences and global transformations have jointly shaped the trajectory of Pakistan's foreign policy, offering important insights into its present orientation and future direction.

## Conclusion

The historical analysis of the foreign policy of Pakistan demonstrates that its evolution has been shaped by a continuous interaction of security concerns, economic constraints, ideological influences, and changes in the global system. Since independence following the Partition of British India, Pakistan's foreign policy has remained largely influenced by its security-oriented relationship with India. While early strategies focused on Western alignment during the Cold War, later phases reflected diversification through regional partnerships and stronger ties with China. Over time, economic diplomacy and ideological considerations have gained importance alongside traditional security priorities. The study concludes that Pakistan's foreign policy is not static but adaptive, evolving in response to both internal needs and external pressures. Despite diversification, security concerns remain central; while emerging economic and strategic partnerships continue to reshape its global engagement.

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