

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON PAKISTAN'S FOREIGN POLICY: FROM INDEPENDENCE TO CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

Rana Maryam<sup>\*1</sup>, Hamza Ali<sup>2</sup>, Shafique Ahmed<sup>3</sup>

<sup>\*1,2,3</sup>National University of Modern Languages, Hyderabad Campus

<sup>\*1</sup>haraibmaryam77@gmail.com; <sup>2</sup>poet15malik@gmail.com; <sup>3</sup>shafique.ahmed@numl.edu.pk

Corresponding Author: \*

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### ABSTRACT

With a focus on International Relations (IR) theories, this article examines the intricate foreign policy landscape of Pakistan, offering a thorough study from the country's 1947 inception to the present. Pakistan is strategically positioned at the intersection of three major regions: South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia. As such, a variety of variables, such as its diversified neighbors and the constantly changing global power balances, influence Pakistan's diplomatic relations. In order to assess the applicability and pertinence of diverse IR theories to Pakistan's geopolitical situation, the study utilizes a mixed-methods methodology that combines historical analysis with current survey data. The impact of major historical occurrences on Pakistan's foreign policy strategies is examined critically, including the War on Terror, Cold War alliances, nuclearization, and post-partition wars. The results demonstrate how Pakistan's diplomatic strategy is flexible and show how liberalism, realism, constructivism, and other theoretical stances have shaped its interactions with other countries. This study attempts to contribute to the knowledge of Pakistan's foreign policy dynamics and provide insights on the best IR frameworks to direct its future diplomatic efforts by combining primary and secondary research.

**Keywords:** Pakistan Foreign Policy, International Relations Theories, Geopolitical Strategy, Diplomacy, Regional Security

### INTRODUCTION

Pakistan, the fifth most populous country, got independence with India, which is one of its neighboring countries and a profound influence on its foreign policy, in 1947 from the colonial rein of Great Britain. Locating, with Iran, Afghanistan, China, and India, on the most pioneer sea-trade route that connects Asia to middle east countries, it contains a unanimous position in the global and regional politics of the world states.

Since its independence, the diplomatic relations of Pakistan are not static, and have been adapted by the political niche of its different rulers' orders: the leaders and dictators' manifestos with the global powers, such as USA, Russia, and UK; and its neighbors, especially India and Afghanistan.

Pakistan, a non-land-lock country, is surrounded by very distinct Neighbors in nature. In the north and east, it is with communist China and republic

India, while its Locs from west, northern west, and south are demarcated with Shia-nationalist Iran, Sunni majority Afghanistan, and Arabian sea. This complex geographic features of Pakistan raises adaptability in the international relations and raises questions about it to organize its IR diplomatic course and shows the reason for Pakistan's always adapting foreign policies in the arena of international and regional politics which can be seen through the times of post-partition wars, cold war, Russia's invasion in Afghanistan, Russia's withdrawal from Afghan territory, 9/11 attacks, and US entry in Afghanistan for demolishing Al-Qaida's havens in Afghanistan. Pakistan, with all these geographical and demographical features, is liable to work with a well-oriented and adaptable foreign policy.

To dive deeper into what is most suitable for Pakistan to achieve sustainable growth and power

in the global power politics and regional issues, it is erroneous to know the background of Pakistan in IR's perspective, and the theories it has applied and adapted since its independence.

**RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:**

This paper seeks to fill this research gap by following objectives:

1. To Offer a comprehensive analysis of the historical context of IR theories applied to Pakistan since its independence in 1947.
2. To Examine Pakistan's present diplomatic relations with its neighbors and the world's most powerful nations.
3. To explain why the selected IR theory is the best framework for deciphering and evaluating Pakistan's foreign policy actions.

Objectives 1 and 2 will create the foundation by analyzing previous and contemporary situations, and 3, which will explain the reasoning behind this decision and offer insights into the most relevant IR theory for Pakistan. By achieving the aforementioned goals, this research hopes to advance knowledge of Pakistan's foreign policy dynamics in the larger context of international relations theory.

**LITERATURE REVIEW:**

The literature on the application of different International Relations (IR) theories to different countries and regions is quite extensive; nonetheless, there is still a significant void in the thorough examination of whether IR theory is truly appropriate for Pakistan's particular geopolitical setting. There is disagreement over whether international relations theory is most suited to comprehend and navigate Pakistan's foreign policy dynamics, despite the country's importance in both global and regional politics and its advantageous location at the intersection of South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia.

Abdul Sattar (2019) in his book *"Pakistan's Foreign Policy 1947-2019: A Concise History."* provides a detailed account of Pakistan's foreign policy from its inception in 1947 up to 2019. The book covers major events that have shaped Pakistan's external relations, including the Cold War, nuclear proliferation, the War on Terror, and the evolving dynamics with India, China, the United States, and the Middle East. This book

offers historical context that is crucial for understanding the development of Pakistan's foreign policy. It highlights how historical events have influenced current diplomatic strategies and the application of various IR theories to Pakistan's geopolitical context.

Ghulam Ali (2021) in his book *"Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics."* "Explores the recent changes and developments in Pakistan's foreign policy. The book delves into Pakistan's strategic choices, its relationship with neighboring countries, and its role in international organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). This book is essential for examining contemporary issues and challenges in Pakistan's foreign policy, providing insights into the current geopolitical strategies and how different IR theories apply to these modern dynamics.

Maryam Rasheed & Rida Anwar (2020) in their article *"Pakistan's Foreign Policy in Transition: Driving Factors and Emerging Trends."* discuss the evolving nature of Pakistan's foreign policy, focusing on the internal and external factors driving these changes. The authors explore how domestic politics, economic conditions, and regional security concerns shape Pakistan's foreign policy. It provides a detailed analysis of the factors influencing Pakistan's foreign policy transitions, which are crucial for understanding the applicability of various IR theories such as realism and constructivism.

Muhammad Sarmad Zia (2021) in his *"Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Challenges and Opportunities."* analyzes the various challenges and opportunities that Pakistan faces in its foreign policy. It highlights issues such as regional security, economic constraints, and diplomatic relations with major powers. This article offers a comprehensive look at the current state of Pakistan's foreign policy, providing valuable insights into how theoretical perspectives like liberalism and realism can explain and predict future policy directions.

Mumtaz Zahra Baloch (2022) in her article *"SCO Summit: A Significant Achievement in Pakistan's Foreign Policy."* examines the significance of Pakistan's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit. The article discusses how this participation enhances

regional connectivity and strengthens Pakistan's geopolitical stance. This article is important for understanding Pakistan's regional strategy and its implications for international relations theories, particularly in the context of multilateral diplomacy and regional alliances.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research employed a mixed-methods approach (Qualitative and Quantitative) to investigate the application of International Relations (IR) theories in understanding Pakistan's diplomatic interactions with other countries. The study's core methodology was secondary research, which involved a thorough evaluation of books, scholarly journals, and reliable internet sources. Taking into consideration the dominant international relations theories that applied to the specific time periods, each era was analyzed to find diplomatic strategies, alliances, conflicts, and changes in foreign policy.

Surveys were used to gather primary data, and they were given to a wide range of respondents, including professionals and students between the ages of 18 and 40. The purpose of the survey was to find out which international relations theory respondents thought Pakistan's foreign policy should use in order to get the best results. Convenience sampling was used to collect responses, and methodologies for qualitative data analysis were applied to classify and examine the participant insights. The integration of secondary and primary research findings was intended to provide a thorough picture of Pakistan's dynamics in international affairs.

### **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND PREVIOUS THEORIES**

The historical background of Pakistan, tried to bifurcate with the major incidents that shaped its diplomacy, through the lens of IR, In August of 1947, India and Pakistan were on the cusp of independence from the British. The British, led by the then Governor-General Louis Mountbatten, divided the British India empire into the states of India and Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> Pakistan began to exist as a distinct state during this time, and she faced many difficulties, such as the struggle in Kashmir and widespread population migration. 'Historically,

Pakistan believes that Kashmir was illegitimately ceded to India by a ruler who did not represent the people. Additionally, since a majority of the Muslim majority states went to Pakistan, they believe Kashmir should belong to them.'<sup>2</sup> Realist theory can be applied here, as Pakistan was immediately concerned about the security of its borders and the Kashmir territorial conflict. Pakistan's early foreign policy initiatives were motivated by the need to establish secure borders and sovereignty. Pakistan's diplomatic activities were also affected by its quest for legitimacy and recognition in the international system.

During the Cold War, 'In 1954 Pakistan signed a Mutual Defense Agreement with the United States and became a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The following year, Pakistan joined Iran, Iraq, and Turkey in the Baghdad Pact, later converted into the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) after Iraq's withdrawal in 1959.'<sup>3</sup> Security worries regarding India and US economic assistance were the driving forces behind this alignment. Neorealism, which views states as pursuing alliances and other tactics to improve their security in a market-driven international system, can be used to analyze the Cold War background. Pakistan has countered India's influence and improved its own security through its partnerships with the US and membership in regional security groups.

India and Pakistan fought multiple wars, most notably in 1947, 1965, and 1971. 'India became a nuclear power in 1974, and Pakistan became a nuclear power in 1998.'<sup>4</sup> The 1998 nuclear tests by Pakistan signaled the nuclearization of South Asia and gave rise to new security dynamics in the area. This situation lends itself to the security dilemma and balance of power theory. In order to maintain a balance of power in the area, Pakistan's nuclear program was perceived as a reaction to India's nuclear arsenal. It also showed the limitations of nuclear deterrence in averting conflict escalation, as it increased tensions and the likelihood of nuclear conflict.

'Pakistan and Afghanistan have generally had unfriendly relations, barring the brief period when the Afghan Taliban ruled Afghanistan from 1996-2001'.<sup>5</sup> In the aftermath of the Afghan civil war and the Taliban's ascent, Pakistan encountered difficulties in handling the effects of its backing

for the Afghan mujahideen during the Soviet Afghan War. Here, constructivism can be used to highlight how identity, norms, and ideational elements influence the conduct of the state. Understanding Pakistan's perceived national identity and regional interests helps explain its support for specific Afghan factions and its quest of strategic depth.

'The terrorist attacks of September 11 on the United States have qualitatively transformed Pakistani-U.S. relations. Pakistan has moved from the margins of U.S. foreign policy to center stage and has become a key player in the war on terrorism.'<sup>6</sup> Pakistan faced chances and difficulties as a result of this partnership, including charges of backing terrorism, internal unrest, and military assistance and cooperation. This situation illustrates the idea of hegemony and power since Pakistan must balance its alliance with the US with its own internal concerns. Pakistan's participation in the War on Terror demonstrated the difficulties of siding with a hegemonic state by illustrating its attempts to strike a compromise between external pressures and worries about internal stability.

### **CURRENT SITUATION OF PAKISTAN**

At present, Pakistan is experiencing a challenging period, marked by a cascade of unfavorable developments. The country's economy is grappling with significant challenges, including soaring prices and a struggling financial situation that is continuously accelerating the brain drain every year. There are impending discussions regarding seeking assistance from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to address these economic issues. Additionally, Pakistan faces escalating tensions with both traditional adversaries and erstwhile allies, exacerbating concerns about border security. Achieving harmonious civil-military relations is imperative amidst these challenges. Political instability further compounds the situation, while a resurgence in terrorist activities adds to the security woes. Moreover, the mounting circular debt poses yet another pressing concern for the nation.

Pakistan is currently grappling with one of its most severe economic crises, a sentiment echoed by global economic leaders in recent months.<sup>7</sup> World

Bank's Najy Benhassine provides a critical assessment of Pakistan's economic model, characterizing it as ineffective and advocating for a comprehensive overhaul. In a UNDP publication, Benhassine presents a somber portrayal of Pakistan's economic landscape, citing sluggish progress and a reversal in poverty alleviation efforts., Additionally<sup>8</sup>. Al Jazeera reports that the Pakistani rupee has emerged as the worst-performing currency in Asia in 2023, depreciating by approximately 20 percent against the US dollar. Kris Janis Kurstin's, a director at Fitch Ratings, anticipates a continued downward trajectory for the rupee, leading to a narrowing of Pakistan's current account deficit due to the escalating cost of imported goods. The volatile economic conditions in Pakistan have sparked concern among its skilled and professional youth, who form the backbone of the nation's potential for growth and development. Disillusioned by the lack of promised opportunities, many are opting to leave for more stable environments abroad, resulting in a significant brain drain each year.<sup>12</sup> According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 832,000 individuals (about half the population of Idaho) — 400,000 of whom are educated and qualified professionals — have left the country by June this year (in 2023). The figures for 2022 — during which 225,000 Pakistanis emigrated — are three times higher than those for 2021; while 2020 had seen 280,000 individuals leaving the country. Since both 2020 and 2021 were pandemic years with global travel restrictions in place, it makes the current figures even more concerning.; IMF plays a key role in Pakistan's politics and economy. When it comes to making decisions that affect people's lives, the IMF's opinion really matters to the government. Right now, Pakistan is facing some tough times, like the risk of its currency losing value and having to pay back debts to other countries and international groups. Often, the IMF steps in to help when things get tight. Experts say that how stable Pakistan is politically and economically often depends on whether it can get support from the IMF. So, getting help from the IMF is not just about money — it is also about showing that the government is managing things well. In tough times, Pakistan's relationship with the IMF becomes super important because it can make a big difference in

how the country's economy and government are perceived, as in the subsequent months,<sup>9</sup> Islamabad narrowly dodged financial catastrophe by clinching a monumental \$3 billion loan from the IMF – marking its 23rd engagement with the fund since 1958. Yet, this lifeline came tethered with stringent stipulations and contentious reforms, testing the resolve of the nation's leadership amidst a precarious economic landscape, and now,<sup>10</sup>The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has adjusted Pakistan's foreign borrowing needs for this fiscal year to \$25 billion, marking a significant reduction of \$3.4 billion. Thus, it is the most pressing challenge for Pakistan to formulate a long-term financing plan to meet the country's growing external obligations, beginning with negotiations for a longer and larger bailout as the present \$3bn package ends in April 2024

The new government of Pakistan faces a critical juncture as it grapples with the prioritization of foreign policy initiatives amidst an increasingly dire economic situation. Positioned between global superpowers such as China and the United States, Pakistan must navigate diplomatic waters with finesse, as articulated by Baqir Sajjad Syed in the

Dawn newspaper. He further states,<sup>11</sup> "Incoming administration's foreign policy challenges (the current administration's foreign policy challenges) will be underscored by need for economic stabilization, which cannot be achieved without help from key players, such as Beijing and Washington" Economic stabilization hinges on cooperation from key players like Beijing and Washington. Moreover, fostering harmonious relations with neighboring nations like Iran and Afghanistan is imperative, given the resurgence of terrorism in the region. Addressing humanitarian crises in Gaza, Palestine, and Kashmir adds further complexity, demanding a nuanced and principled approach. As Pakistan charts its diplomatic course, guided by Syed's insights, it aims to fortify regional security, uphold international principles, and promote stability and prosperity on the global stage. Pakistan's politics heavily relies on military leadership, vital for sovereignty. The military's influence spans civil institutions and bodies like the NAB and SIFC, respectively. While it is essential for security, its dominance raises

concerns about democracy. Balancing military and civilian roles are key to fostering accountability and pluralism, ensuring Pakistan's democratic future.

### **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY RESEARCH FINDINGS**

By comparing the results of the primary and secondary research, one can gain a more nuanced knowledge of how the theoretical frameworks found in academic literature fit with the historical background and survey responses. Diverse viewpoints surfaced throughout the primary research concerning the application of International Relations (IR) theory to Pakistan's diplomatic dealings. Liberal theory was the front-runner, backed by arguments that it might advance economic interests, peace, and international cooperation through amicable connections with other countries. Liberals emphasised that international organizations, human rights, and cooperative efforts were crucial in creating an atmosphere that was favorable to Pakistan's diplomatic outreach and economic expansion. Additionally, constructivism gained popularity, especially in shedding light on how cultural values, religious beliefs, and historical narratives influenced Pakistan's foreign policy choices. The ability of constructivism to shed light on Pakistan's identity as an Islamic state and its relations with its neighbors, particularly India, was highlighted by its proponents.

In addition, a practical strategy that combined constructivism and realism attracted notice for emphasizing security and power dynamics while supporting cooperation with surrounding countries. But given Pakistan's economic difficulties, doubts were expressed about whether realism could be implemented successfully, highlighting issues of power disputes and escalating inequality. Marxism was also discussed, especially in light of Pakistan's dependence on international financial organizations like the IMF and economic inequality. Although Marxism was thought to have some significance, questions remained about how applicable it would be in Pakistan's modern political and economic environment.

Moreover, secondary research identified five critical junctures in Pakistan's diplomatic history,

offering a thorough framework for comprehending the development of its foreign relations via the prism of IR theories. Every stage of Pakistan's history, including the turbulent years leading up to its independence, the Cold War, wars with India, nuclearization, its role in Afghanistan, and the post-9/11 era, was influenced by the interaction of geopolitical forces, domestic concerns, and the changing global order. These historical reflections highlight the significance of well-informed diplomatic strategies based on historical background and contextualized the current possibilities and difficulties influencing Pakistan's foreign policy decisions.

Furthermore, Pakistan's current circumstances highlight the variety of difficulties it faces, such as political unpredictability, economic instability, security risks, and an increasing brain drain. The necessity of striking a balance between diplomatic efforts and economic stabilization, as well as the nation's reliance on IMF support, underscore the complex interaction between internal demands and global imperatives that shapes Pakistan's foreign policy calculation. In Pakistan's political environment, the military's influence also calls into question civilian supervision and democratic governance, underscoring the necessity of institutional changes that promote plurality and accountability.

The comparative research clarifies the intricate relationship that shapes Pakistan's diplomatic landscape between theoretical frameworks, historical context, and modern reality.

Pakistan is capable of skillfully navigating its diplomatic engagements and efficiently addressing the complex dynamics of international relations by fusing varied theoretical viewpoints with historical insights and modern concerns.

### **RESULTS:**

Diverse viewpoints concerning which International Relations (IR) theory better explains Pakistan's diplomatic interactions with other nations surfaced during our investigation. Liberal theory received the most support of all the theories that were discussed. Liberals contended that liberalism advances international institutions, collaboration, peace, the defense of human rights, and the interests of Pakistan's economy by promoting amicable relations with other countries.

Proponents of constructivism also gained favor, highlighting the influence of religious beliefs, cultural values, and historical narratives on Pakistan's foreign policy choices. Constructivism, they argued, provides insights into Pakistan's identity as an Islamic state and its interactions with other nations, such as India. On the other hand, a realist approach was suggested as a feasible one, especially when mixed with constructivist components. By taking power dynamics and security considerations into account, this strategy sought to foster collaboration and mutual confidence with surrounding nations. Some participants, however, voiced doubts about realism in light of Pakistan's economic difficulties, raising issues with power struggles and the reinforcement of inequality. It was also discussed how Marxism handles class and economic inequality, which is relevant given Pakistan's financial difficulties and reliance on foreign agencies such as the IMF, according to its proponents. However, several questioned if Marxism could still be implemented in the present political and economic environment. Furthermore, noted as significant influences influencing Pakistan's foreign policy choices were the Complex Interdependence theory, regionalism, feminism, interdependence with China and Russia, and the significance of identity and culture. A nuanced approach that integrates multiple theoretical views is necessary to properly negotiate the complexity of international relations, as this thorough analysis highlights the multifaceted character of Pakistan's diplomatic contacts.

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