

# PAKISTAN-UNITED STATES RELATIONS IN THE EVOLVING GLOBAL ORDER

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION REPORT  
11 JULY 2024



# *Conversations*



@Foothills



**PAKISTAN-UNITED STATES RELATIONS  
IN THE EVOLVING GLOBAL ORDER**

**Roundtable Discussion Report**

11 July 2024

**Supervised by**

Dr. Atia Ali Kazmi

Director

Global and Regional Studies Branch

**Prepared by**

Dr. Muhammad Shabbir

Research Fellow

Global and Regional Studies Branch

**Disclaimer:** The discussions and report have followed Chatham House rules. The statements, facts and opinions by speakers do not constitute the official policy of ISSRA/NDU.





## Introduction

- As part of its Conversations@Foothills series, the Institute for Strategic Studies, Research and Analysis (ISSRA) of the National Defence University (NDU) Islamabad organised a roundtable discussion on ‘Pakistan-United States Relations in the Evolving Global Order’ on 11 July 2024.
- Experts with diverse backgrounds and firsthand experience in diplomacy, security, economy, law, and journalism, examined the chequered Pakistan-US relations in the context of a recent report by a senior study group of Washington-based think tank.

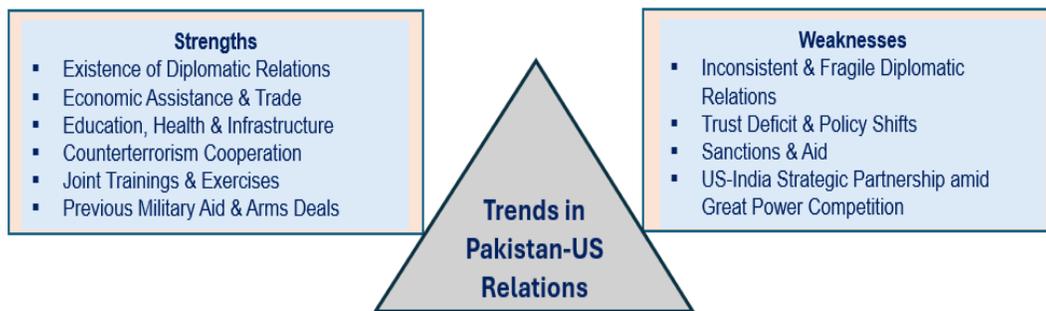
## Key Findings

- Pakistan-US relations have been a complex mix of cooperation and tension. While the US remains the largest destination for Pakistan’s exports, geo-political factors overshadow potential areas of partnership.
- Following the American withdrawal from Afghanistan, anti-Pakistan bias has increased, with some American experts overlooking India’s state-sponsored terrorism in Pakistan and instead framing Pakistan within the broader nexus of terrorism. Pakistan must counter such narratives through effective strategic communication.
- The US frequently criticises Pakistan and pressures it to distance itself from China and Russia, offering limited reciprocal benefits. This pressure complicates Pakistan’s ties with China.
- Moreover, the US is strengthening India as a key partner in its Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS) to contain China, exacerbating Pakistan’s security dilemma. Maintaining reciprocity in bilateral relations is crucial in this context.
- These developments, along with the US biases against Pakistan, like those expressed in the senior study group report, express the American mindset and are a matter of deep concern for Pakistan.

- Pakistan's relations with China are time-tested and essential for its development. Pakistan has the opportunity to fully leverage the benefits from China, such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It is crucial for Pakistan to further integrate into China's broader economic framework.
- To enhance its economic position and strategic relevance, Pakistan must tap into the geo-economic potential of regional and international connectivity, including China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Establishing itself as a key player in the Asia-centric economic order can boost Pakistan's economic prospects.
- Amid intensifying US-China rivalry and American policy to build India as a 'net security provider' in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), Pakistan must diversify its international relations by exploiting opportunities and mitigating risks.
- Improving governance and internal security are foundational to offset the risks in the prevailing and emerging security environment.
- Despite domestic economic hardships, Pakistan should proactively pursue its regional interests including its relationship with Iran, Afghanistan, China and all SAARC countries. In no case, should Pakistan insulate itself from regional developments.

## Summary of Proceedings

- The world order is evolving in a distinct way, shaped largely by US foreign policy and priorities. The US has strategically focused on containing China's rise and Russia's resurgence, a stance clearly reflected in its current National Security Strategy.
- The multifaceted Pakistan-US relations are rooted in historic political, security, and economic ties, which are changing due to systemic changes in the global order.



- Bilateral relations have been largely 'transactional' since the Geneva Accords of 1988, with both states often missing opportunities for strategic alignment. The US has frequently displayed either benign neglect or outright hostility towards Pakistan, as seen in its criticism of Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts and its limited interest in fostering a balanced partnership. For example, while the US provided military aid during the War on Terror (WoT), it simultaneously imposed sanctions, such as the Pressler Amendment, etc.
- The trust gap between the US and Pakistan has widened due to differing American interests, perceptions, and views. This significant hurdle cannot be overcome until there is a paradigm shift in US policy or an improvement in the geo-political environment.
- The current relationship is more 'clinical' compared to the Cold War dynamics, a distinction that must be recognised. To maintain strong trade relations with the US, Pakistan must avoid falling into 'strategic confusion' and ensure clarity in its foreign policy.

- In South Asia, the dynamics of geopolitics are witnessing a significant transformation with the US, strategically identifying India as a key player in its IPS, bolstering it politically, economically, militarily, and technologically while ignoring its proven state-sponsored terrorism on Pakistani territory. With India's regional dominance aspirations, the issue of regional stability becomes more complex, posing potential challenges for regional states and Pakistan.
- The recent report from the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), a Washington DC-based think tank, served as the baseline for discussion. Published in May 2024, the 'Senior Study Group on Counter-terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan' report examines the counter-terrorism challenges in the region from an American perspective.
- The report emphasises three main points: integrating US counter-terrorism efforts into the broader strategic competition with China and Russia, publicly pressuring the Taliban to adhere to counter-terrorism commitments, and implementing targeted preventive measures like 'over the horizon' strikes instead of broad military interventions.
- The roundtable experts critically analysed and rejected most of the USIP report's findings and recommendations, suggesting strategies to safeguard Pakistan's national interests. They evaluated its politico-diplomatic, economic, security, and legal implications, expressing deep concerns over its biased nature.
- The experts agreed that Pakistan must strategise and adapt to the shift in US priorities while ensuring that American bipartisan support for counter-terrorism efforts in Pakistan persists, as reflected in the report.
- Strategic planning is essential for Pakistan to minimise any adverse consequences that could arise from the US government's implementation of the report's recommendations. Unilaterally decided counter-terrorism cooperation and conditional aid and diplomatic engagements are mounting pressure on Pakistan.

- Experts stressed that the report presented incorrect assumptions and propaganda by selectively focusing on a few regional issues while turning a blind eye to Pakistan's concerns, including Kashmir, India's water aggression, and trade barriers.
- The US focus is shifting from the Afghanistan-Pakistan issue to the Indo-Pacific, driven by the need to counter China's influence, as seen in the US-India defence agreements like the Basic Exchange Cooperation Agreement (BECA)<sup>1</sup>, etc. For Pakistan, this shift has strategic implications as it strengthens India's strategic military capabilities against Pakistan and constraints those of the latter.
- Offering an alternative perspective, one expert noted that some sections of the report place emphasis on regional stability, a goal Pakistan has a vested interest in pursuing, and several sections in the report reflect a pro-Pakistan sentiments also.
- While the report does highlight some opportunities for Pakistan, it is important to approach the matter with cautious optimism. The US and Pakistan can explore ways to address mutual concerns and leverage shared interests, but challenges remain.
- Most experts noted predisposition in the report, i.e., it raises concerns about the potential destabilisation of Pakistan and the increased influence of extremist groups. In contrast, it depicts India as a victim of terrorism and stresses that any US assistance for Pakistan should be calibrated to reduce the likelihood that the latter would find the military assistance useful in attacking India.
- The report ignores India's overt and covert terrorist activities in Pakistan. Instead, it tacitly supports it. As per its section on 'managing regional terrorist attack contingency,' the report suggests that US must stay prepared to support India in case of a 'major terrorist attack' on its territory, 'balancing the US-India partnership goals with the risk of a military escalation.'

---

1. BECA is an October 2020 defence agreement between the US and India for sharing geospatial intelligence and satellite data to enhance the accuracy of missile systems and armed drones. BECA is the fourth and final "foundational agreement" between them, following LEMOA (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement), COMCASA (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement), and GSOMIA (General Security of Military Information Agreement). BECA enhances India's military capabilities, particularly in precision targeting and real-time battlefield awareness, further solidifying US-India defence cooperation in the so-called Indo-Pacific.

- Thus, the report predominantly projects Pakistan as part of the problem, especially concerning Afghanistan and broader regional security dynamics, overlooking Pakistan's geo-political imperatives and internal and external security challenges that shape its policies.
- From the legal perspective, discussants dubbed the report as a 'dangerous development' that can have serious consequences for the region if the US shows an inclination to intervene by drawing strength from its domestic law and keeps viewing India as its de facto NATO ally. If the report's recommendations shape US policy, it could lead to a rise in India's influence, potentially impacting Pakistan's regional position.
- An expert also suggested that India's current alignment with the US is temporary, given its limited political resolve to meet the alliance's expectations. Therefore, Pakistan urgently needs to fully operationalise its proactive diplomatic initiatives and strategic partnerships for a counterbalancing strategy.
- The discussants also referred to several recent policy reports published in the US that do not correctly portray Pakistan's image in their strategic calculus. Pakistan is, at times, unfairly held responsible for the US' Afghanistan disaster and viewed as a contributor to regional security challenges, such as counter-terrorism and the issue of the Taliban.
- While analysing state behaviour, an expert noted that the US has often used proxies to achieve its objectives, citing the creation of 'Daesh' as an example, which has neither targeted the US nor Israel, but the Islamic world.
- Experts highlighted that a shift in geo-economic dynamics shape Pakistan's leverage and risk mitigation. Currently, the global economy is based on two value chains: one by the US-led West and the other by China. Pakistan must deftly manage its relations instead of choosing from the US-led Consensus or China's

high-quality development model, which promotes a ‘shared destiny’ for its members. Pragmatically navigating these dual systems is crucial for Pakistan’s strategic economic decisions. A stable internal environment is needed for multinational investments in Pakistan.

- The West, along with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, constitutes the major portion of Pakistan’s trade. In the evolving global landscape, promising areas for Pakistan-US cooperation include climate change, information technology, health, education, and many others.
- Pakistan must leverage advanced technologies, energy sources, and top-tier industries offered by other states, including China, which also offer incentives such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, green energy, analytics, lithium batteries, and minerals.
- Some experts believed that considering the limited and conditional offers from the US, Pakistan should strategically align with China, a rising economy with a stronger financial system. It is suitable and attractive for Pakistan’s development to strengthen economic ties with China, become a part of its value chains, capitalise on investments and opportunities from CPEC, and integrate into the broader Chinese economic framework. However, despite China being Pakistan’s most reliable ally, there is a need to address strategic ambiguity within Pakistan and optimise this partnership. Establishing a clear strategic direction is essential to attract Chinese investments and manage fallout from potential decoupling with Western sources.
- Experts emphasised the need for Pakistan to firmly negotiate against any US policies compromising its sovereignty, including military actions and airspace usage. Amid mounting Western technological denial, Pakistan should continue exploring investment incentives from other countries without undermining its strategic independence.

- The evolving dynamics reflect the US pursuit of power and influence by partnering with India in the region, a move that undermines Pakistan's security. Unlike India, Pakistan's sustainable development is being constrained by political, economic, and technological means.
- Pakistan must adopt an integrated approach to secure national development, particularly under CPEC, and develop offsets to address the exacerbating security dilemma fuelled by US strategic partnership with India. It is essential to develop a unified national vision, set goals, and ameliorate stresses generated by the contemporary and emerging security environment. Pakistan should focus on sustainable development through planning, strategic resilience, and strong alliances, while avoiding involvement in turbulent conflicts.
- Some experts suggested that rather than insulating itself from regional dynamics, Pakistan must leverage its geo-strategic and geo-economic wherewithal to become a key player in all these developments.
- It was also discussed that despite geo-political pressures from US and its allies, Pakistan needs to push ahead with its strategic interests leveraging US-China rivalry factor in its focus rather than be a victim of it.
- The experts carried out an interesting scenario building where Sino-Indian relations continue to improve against the US desires and how it would impact Pak-India relations in the future. This factor signified the need for Pakistan to build upon its relations with China and Russia.
- The experts noted the importance of Pakistan's maritime security in the evolving global order and how it opens up more opportunities for Pakistan, if utilised properly.

# PICTURES GALLERY







## Programme

1030 hrs	Arrival of Guests
1045 hrs	Group Photograph
1055 -1100 hrs	Recitation of Holy Quran
1100 - 1105 hrs	Welcome Remarks by DG ISSRA
1105 - 1325 hrs	Discussion on Pakistan-US Relations in the Evolving Global Order
1325 - 1330 hrs	Vote of Thanks by DG ISSRA
1330 -1430 hrs	Lunch & Dispersal

## List of Participants

Chair	
Major General Muhammad Raza Aizad, HI(M)	DG ISSRA
Moderator	
Dr. Atia Ali Kazmi	Director Global and Regional Studies Branch, ISSRA
Expert Discussants	
Lieutenant General (Retd) Nasser Khan Janjua, HI(M)	Former President NDU
Lieutenant General (Retd) Aamer Riaz, HI(M)	Former President NDU
Ambassador (Retd) Zamir Akram	Advisor to Strategic Plans Division
Ambassador (Retd) Tasnim Aslam	Former Additional Secretary (United Nations and Economic Coordination), Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Dr. Salman Shah	Former Advisor to the Chief Minister of Punjab on Economic Affairs, Planning, and Development
Mr. Ahmer Bilal Soofi	Senior Managing Partner ABS & CO
Ms. Nasim Zehra	Journalist and National Security Specialist
Mr. Saqib Sherani	Economic Security Specialist
Ms. Maria Sultan	DG South Asian Strategic Stability Institute (SASSI)
Brigadier (Retd) Ajab Khan	DS NDU
Barrister Zahid Jamil	Senior Partner at Jamil & Jamil





INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES RESEARCH & ANALYSIS (ISSRA)  
NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY ISLAMABAD