

## **Pakistan-China Renewed Cooperation: Survival Strategy to Balance the United States' Tilt towards India**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of this research paper is to observe US interests in Pakistan and the region of South Asia in the post 9/11 scenario with regard to Pakistan-US alliance using Regional Security Complex (RSC) as a framework. The Pakistan-US relationship is a litany of historically divergent perceptions and interests. Despite periods of close cooperation between both countries during the Cold War and post-Cold War, their interests have waxed and waned due to US global aims and Pakistan's discernment on superpower's assistance or infringement on its national interests. In the US-led global war on terrorism, South Asia proved to be a battlefield, and various major powers such as China, India, Russia, and the United States intervened in Afghanistan through the process of

penetration. This penetration process occurred when security alignments were made with states inside the regional security complex by major external powers to pursue their interests, as Pakistan allied with the United States. Therefore, to explain Pakistan's behaviour and response towards US interests and threats within the South Asian security complex, Regional Security Complex theory has been used. In addition, this study discusses the survival strategies of Pakistan in response to the US interests and threats in terms of growing Indo-US nexus and China-US power politics in the region of South Asia. Lastly, this article suggests that Pakistan and the US need to identify their objectives more clearly while at the same time seeking a way to narrow the difference between their expectations and acts in the South Asian region for better relations in the future.

**Keywords:** *alliance, terrorism, United States, Pakistan, China, India, regional security complexes*

## **1. Introduction**

The origin of the Pakistan-US relationship can be traced back to the treaties signed in 1954 and 1955, respectively, in the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). Both treaties tied Pakistan and the US in a NATO-like defence pact. After Pakistan's withdrawal from these agreements, there were no other formal treaty obligations on both sides. The under discussion contemporary Pakistan-US alliance has a similar stature, which began with the fight against the war on terror in the post 9/11 period. In 2004, President George W. Bush named Pakistan as a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNM) as a way to define America's leading strategic partner without formal treaty obligations set out in Congress in 1989 (Miller, 2012).

China and Pakistan relations can be viewed as a time-tested friendship that has lasted for seven decades. New opportunities for renewed friendship with China arose in light of recent events such as the Pakistan-US alliance on the war on terrorism that started with various convergent interests, increasing Indo-US strategic friendship as a counterweight to China, and the turbulent nature of Pakistan-US relations. This renewed relationship is not limited to Pakistan but also includes various neighbouring countries and international institutions for its “peaceful rise” to Great Power status (Liao, 2016). Therefore, Chinese growing economic activities and influence in the region of South Asia has attained the attention of the United States and the international community.

The geopolitics of South Asia has changed in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States and due to the rise of China, which have profound implications for the security situation of the region. Therefore, it has increased the geostrategic importance of Pakistan not only for the United States but also for the foreign policymakers of China. Following 9/11, China’s dependence on Pakistan had greatly increased due to some aspects of terrorism which were involved in supporting separatist elements in its Xinjiang province of Uyghur Muslims autonomous region (Jacob, 2010) and the prolonged American-led offensive presence in Afghanistan. Therefore, the presence of Islamic extremists and fundamentalist forces in the various parts of Afghanistan-Pakistan and their interaction with the Uyghur Muslims could be an emerging obstacle to Beijing’s power projection and influence in South Asia (Bhatt, 2019) that increases Pakistan’s importance for Chinese interests in the region.

Moreover, Chinese spheres of influence have been taking place in the world amid a combination of broader developments, including increasing major power rivalry, growing ideological tensions, and rising

focus on the digital realm, all of which have been of particular concern for the United States and its allies. Therefore, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has provided itself as the strategic alternative for a more comprehensive regional environment for developing countries, mainly through economic development activities and capturing military hardware markets, including Pakistan's China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). China's ever-increasing prominence and ability to link up with many developing countries have great significance not only for the regional states but internationally (Parameswaran, 2019).

The changing dynamics of South Asia have ramifications for the regional strategic environment and for the CPEC projects that have been facing enormous security challenges. The ongoing insurgency by the Baloch militants in Pakistan's province Baluchistan which is the epicentre of CPEC projects and Gwadar port, is making the situation more complicated. Furthermore, India's hostility towards Pakistan in general and CPEC, in particular, is another aspect of security concern for the CPEC projects. In this context, increasing instability in Baluchistan have been posing an existential threat to CPEC projects, attacks by the Baloch separatist group known as the Baluchistan Liberation Army (BLA) have been rising on the local security personals and Chinese workers (Syed, 2020; Khan, 2019). The Baloch separatists consider China and CPEC as an effort to extract and control the natural resources of their own province Baluchistan (Sial, 2014). Therefore, these increasing security threats to CPEC caused by Pakistan's domestic militancy and regional events have direct implications for Pakistan-China relations which demand renewed strategic cooperation.

Despite rising militant attacks on CPEC projects and Chinese workers, another emerging issue in terms of CPEC projects is China's debt policy that complicates Pakistan's debt spike, which has also received cynicism from the United States. Although the CPEC projects

under the Belt and Road Initiative have increased the lifeline of Pakistan's dying economy as it replaced the US financial assistance to Pakistan, it has also changed US perspective towards Pakistan-China strategic friendship that proved to be challenging for Pakistan in dealing with the two major powers. Instead of opposing CPEC at an earlier stage, former US President Barack Obama's administration voiced a cautious welcome to China's involvement in Pakistan to the extent that it could contribute to Pakistan's economic stability and will enable it to deal more effectively with extremist groups as well as to make a more significant contribution toward American goals in the region. Initially, the projects under CPEC were intended to build physical infrastructures, like power plants and highways, and the United States was seeking ways to harmonise the initiative (Markey, 2020). However, the Trump administration was anxious about the Chinese investments and considered it part of China's so-called string of pearls strategy.

Broadly speaking, after the broader evolution of BRI as China's globe-spanning strategy, the CPEC also moved into a new phase, and President Trump's administration has disclosed a more critical view of China's infrastructure projects in Pakistan. In response, the US warned Pakistan about its prospective International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout package that should not be used to pay off Chinese debt, whose ambitious Belt and Road Initiative is turning Pakistan into another Venezuela (Ren, 2018). Washington's more robust posture reveals its concerns regarding the nature and implication of CPEC, lack of transparency in Chinese financial arrangements with Pakistan that might be involved in a debt trap. In this context, the US principal deputy assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asia, Alice Wells, criticised CPEC in her statement where "a number of firms blacklisted by the World Bank had received contracts in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)" (Malik 2020).

These steps seemingly signify China's regional standing and its objective to decrease the US security presence around its periphery. In contrast, India-US as security partners has the potential for a future worldwide order revealed by a rivalry between the US and China as ultimate components with future implications. With this regional puzzle, it is understandable to anticipate a motivated two-bloc coalition to come to fulfilment in South Asia, i.e., China and Pakistan, versus India and the US (Chandio, 2015).

Another important development for Pakistan-China alignment is the Kashmir issue which has been at the core of Pakistan's foreign policy since its independence. It has been a point of leverage for Pakistan's strategic partners and allies, while Islamabad values those countries who endorsed and stood behind its Kashmir narrative. In the past, China's Kashmir policy was at times neutral and at times in favour of Pakistan in order to balance its relations with Pakistan and India during the period of Cold war and post-Cold war (Garver, 1996; Arif, 2013). However, there are three important factors that are driving the alignment of China-Pakistan to confront India on the Kashmir dispute. First, although the history of China-India standoffs is based on past historical events, since June 2017, ranging from Doklam to recent skirmishes of June 2020, there have been continuous Sino-Indian feuds that have great importance for Pakistan-China relations.

Second, following India's decision to nullify the special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, Pakistan and China have reacted in anger to this move that gave both countries a strong reason to align on this particular issue for both diplomatic and domestic reasons (Joshi, 2020). Moreover, China considers both the abrogation of Kashmir's special status and the formation of the new state under Union territory as a kind of

aggressiveness from India that has increased Chinese assertiveness and interests in this particular region. China rejected the Indian move and declared it as “unacceptable”. China claims the region of Ladakh in Kashmir as its territory given by Pakistan in the agreement in 1963 and resurrected this issue in the Security Council in August 2019 (Rajagopalan, 2020).

A third important factor for China-Pakistan alignment on the Kashmir dispute is China’s growing footprint and influence in the regions of Azad Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan through CPEC projects. The Karakorum Highway (KKH) passes through this region that is also the gateway to CPEC, which is a flagship of China’s BRI. CPEC has entered its second phase and reinvigorated by a series of new deals worth \$ 3.9 billion for two hydro-power generation projects between Beijing and Islamabad. Both hydro-power projects (Azad Pattan Hydropower Project, \$1.5 billion, Kohala Hydropower Project, \$2.4 billion) are located in Azad Kashmir (Jaffery, 2020). To sum up, these are the major factors that constantly matched the interests of both countries and mutual dependence on the Kashmir question. At that same time, when both countries are looking at ways to subvert the Indian standpoint on the Kashmir issue, each country’s utter support is likely to help in ramping up their espousal to stand with each other on the Kashmir issue. China’s reaffirmation regarding its Kashmir policy provides a clue for its long-term interests across the Line of Control and in expanding imprint in Kashmir. This further solidifies ties between China and Pakistan.

The objective of this research paper is to observe US interests in Pakistan and the region of South Asia in the post 9/11 scenario. Specifically, it discusses the survival strategies of Pakistan in response to the compliance with the US interests and threats in the war on terror alliance. Thus, this article attempts to answer the following research

question, “what are the US interests in Pakistan and South Asia in the post 9/11 scenario?” The primary adhesive that bonded Pakistan-US relations into a new security relationship was the war on terror, but friction and mistrust have been developing in Pakistan-US relations due to the changing geostrategic environment in the region, which also includes the deepening of Pakistan-China strategic friendship and the strengthening of Indo-US ties.

This article has been divided into seven sections: The following section reviews the concept of alliances and where the Pakistan-US alliance fits within these concepts. Next, it discusses the background of the Pakistan-US alliance in chronicle order that aims to demonstrate the historically ingrained trends of cooperation and disengagements between both countries. The fourth section looks at the framework of regional security complexes that interprets the regional complexities and interdependence of not only Pakistan and US security interests but also China, India, and Afghanistan as factors. The fifth part is based on US interests in Pakistan and its importance; the sixth section discusses Pakistan’s threat perceptions and behaviours towards the United States concerning the war on terror using RSC as a framework. In particular, this section describes the United States’ tilt towards India and Pakistan’s search for alternative options. The seventh part concludes the whole discussion.

Methodological points should be noted that the research approach for this paper is qualitative and various methods used to collect and analyse relevant data. In the first phase, relevant literature was consulted to identify American interests that determined the Pakistan-US alliance in the post 9/11 period and explored Pakistan’s threat perceptions amid US-India growing nexuses and Pakistan’s survival strategies. In the second phase, primary data was collected from August 2019 to April 2020. A total of 32 online and face-to-face interviews were conducted



with academicians, diplomats, military officers from Pakistan, the United States, and Asia-Pacific (academics from Malaysia and Singapore) to answer the above-mentioned research objective.

## **2. Concept of Alliance**

This section covers the concept of an alliance in International Relations and includes a discussion on the Pakistan-US alliance in the post 9/11 period. In the international system, national security remained an old age problem of states, and states pose different behaviours to achieve their interests through friendly, non-threatening, hostile, and aggressive measures. However, to deal with that problem, many countries enter into alliances with other states to increase their national security and ensure no other state can dominate or outright use force against them (Jackson and Sørensen, 2013). Keeping this in view, alliances have a long history and an established central concern of international relations. An anarchic international system<sup>1</sup> compels states to form partnerships as a key method of their foreign policies to produce and enhance their security (Kuo, 2011).

The traditional definitions and concepts of alliance tend to focus on the existence of a common adversary or threat that drives states to form alliances. Alliances are always designed to counter common threats and rival countries (Ghez, 2011). Therefore, in order to unpack the concept of the alliance, Thucydides was considered as being the first one who discussed the alliance regarding the Peloponnesian War (Salmon, 2006). However, Fedder (1968) explains that alliance is an ambiguous phrase due to extensively diverse definitions used by various social scientists of international relations. The scholars of world politics have emphasised that alliance is a process or technique of statecraft, while some writers view an alliance as a form of international organisations. In eighteenth-

century, alliance as a term combined with international affairs was most probably associated with mutual benefits and limited participation among states (Fedder, 1968).

In relation to explaining the concept of an alliance, Walt (1990), in his book, “The Origins of Alliances”, defines it as “a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states”. This definition is best suited to explain the Pakistan-US alliance because, during the Cold War, Pakistan and the US had a formal alliance; however, after the 1970s, both countries only have security cooperation without formal or informal alliance partnership. Therefore, this definition not only highlights the character of the Pakistan-US alliance but also provides a better understanding of the partnerships between both states within the context of the alliance. In addition, it also includes and justifies both states’ responses to form alliances in a particular situation or to pursue their national interests that emerge spontaneously in an unpredictable manner from the international environment in which both countries have to deal with under an anarchic international system. To be more precise, it remained a goal-directed process from both sides that involved a rational way of thinking about strategies used by Pakistan-US to pursue their national interests throughout the periods of the Cold War and the Post-Cold War. After conceptualising alliances, this article will look into more detail at how this alliance has evolved and the behaviour of both states by describing the background of the Pakistan-US alliance.

### **3. Brief Historical Background of Pakistan-US Alliance**

Before proceeding on the objective of this research paper, it is necessary to review the historical background of Pakistan-US relations in a chronicle order to situate the research question. Since its independence

in 1947, Pakistan has shifted from one crisis to another, and even after seventy-three years of existence, it is still facing multiple challenges and problems. The history of Pakistan-US relations is based on different periods of sanctions and disengagements, followed by various phases of severance. All the periods of Pakistan-US relations are not based on direct or derivative interests but more on Pakistan's attributes that attracted the US in the past, and which could also similarly affect the future of this relationship. The most important attribute is Pakistan's geostrategic location between South Asia, Southwest Asia, and Central Asia. Pakistan's location remained very important for external powers to pursue their interests. As former Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf reiterated the importance of Pakistan's geographic proximity at the sixth summit meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), he said, "Pakistan provides the natural link between the SCO states to connect the Eurasian heartland (Central Asia) with the Arabian Sea and South Asia. We offer the critical overland routes and connectivity for mutually beneficial trade and energy transactions intra-regionally and inter-regionally" (*Dawn*, 16th June 2006). Therefore, from an international strategic perspective, Pakistan's strategic location can be understood in the context of interlocking geopolitical relationships of major powers such as China, India, Russia, and the United States. In addition, Pakistan's foreign policy choices primarily depend on a divisive discourse that upholds the unipolarity concept and adheres to the hegemonic discourse of US strategic interests in the regions of South Asia and Central Asia (Khan and Elahi, 2016).

Historically, the Pakistan-US relationship witnessed three major military engagements ranging from the Cold War era, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (the 1980s), and the engagement that started in the wake of the 11th September 2001 attacks.

The first engagement was at the initial stage of the Cold War when Pakistan just emerged on the world map, and the US was in desperate need of allies to combat communism in South Asia. At the same time, Pakistan was deeply conscious of its economic and military instabilities against India and survival challenges. Pakistan's importance for the US in the period of the Cold War was due to its geostrategic location and such increased security threats from neighbouring countries that afterwards proved a value-added factor for Pakistan in terms of economic and military assistance from the United States.

Furthermore, the uprising of Afghanistan's Mujahidin against the Soviet invasion in the 1980s was a second military engagement that provided another opportunity to put together Pakistan and the US to mitigate gaps on the pretext of combating communism. Throughout this time, which lasted until 1990, Pakistan served as a frontline state in support of US objectives in suppressing communism and was a beneficiary of \$3.2 billion in economic and military assistance packages for its involvement in the Afghan Jihad (Rakisits, 2010). However, Pakistan had lost its importance as a frontline state for the US with the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan.

After the dismemberment of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, this era can be considered as a period of disengagement and sanctions in the history of the Pakistan-US relationship. Pakistan faced sanctions from the US under the Pressler Amendment due to its nuclear program in the 1990s. Therefore, these relations were at a low point due to various issues like the Kargil incident, sanctions against Pakistan due to the 1998 nuclear explosions, and military takeover by General Musharraf in 1999. Despite the above-discussed variations in relations, interestingly, the 9/11 attacks brought Pakistan once again into the fold of another military partnership with the US as a frontline state in the war on terror to counter Al-Qaeda and the Taliban threat. Therefore,

Pakistan's cooperation with the United States was to provide baseline logistics facilities, exchanging military intelligence, catching and handing over suspects of Al-Qaeda, closing off the western frontier of Pakistan, airbases, and airspace accessible for US military action in Afghanistan. Thus, both countries got another opportunity to operate under strong military cooperation to fight against their common enemies.

#### **4. Theoretical Perspective**

This section discusses the concept of regional security complex theory for the theoretical framework. The term "Regional Security Complex" (RSC) was firstly coined by Barry Buzan in his book *People, states, and fear* in 1983 to discuss the security dynamics in the regions of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. Further, Buzan and Waever (2003) updated the application of their theory in their famous work *Regions and powers* in 2003. Hence, like most other theories on regional politics, security complexes also tackle the degree of interaction that is situated between states as individual units and the international system. According to this theory, at regional levels, sub-systems exist and provide an analytical structure to analyse security complexes as a subject (Buzan and Waever, 2003).

Unlike most other theoretical works in the field of international relations, RSC was primarily centred on the idea that "state is an entity and a key platform of security relations in terms of political and military relations in regional sub-systems". This structure is rooted in the fact that relative autonomy of regional security relationships is entangled in an interdependent global security web and place them within the unit (state) and system-level context. But the basic logic of the theory shows that insecurity is often related to proximity, as most political and military threats pass more quickly over short distances than over long distances.

Many states fear neighbouring states rather than external powers, and the interdependence of security and defence over the international system is far from universal. In a geographically fragmented anarchic international system, one of the region-based clusters that mark regional security complexes (RSCs) is the standard pattern of security interdependence. It can be stated that the interdependence of security between states within these RSCs is considerably more important than the countries outside it. Moreover, RSCs deal with the relative strength of inter-state security relationships leading to distinctive regional trends formed by power distribution and historical connections of enmity and friendship. According to Buzan, the original definition of a security complex was “a set of states whose major security perceptions and concerns are so interlinked that their national security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another” (Buzan, 2003). Furthermore, this definition of RSCs was reformulated by Buzan and Waever to shed state-centric and military-political emphasis on the possibility of different actors and multiple security sectors in the following words, “a set of units whose major processes of securitisation, desecuritisation, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analysed or resolved apart from one another” (Buzan and Waever, 2003).

As the security agendas are dominant in Asia in terms of military and political sectors (Buzan and Waever, 2003), the theoretical framework under the regional security complexes theory can best explain Pakistan’s actions and survival strategies concerning the US interests and reactions towards Pakistan during the alliance on the war on terror. Although Pakistan’s threat perceptions were always linked to the India and Afghanistan factors, in the post 9/11 period, another factor added to this particular scenario was the United States. Thus, Pakistan’s behaviour towards the US remained according to the regional security

order. Therefore, security complexes provide a protection strategy that analyses the effects on system and states' relations at both the macro and micro levels by the great powers. In addition, security complexes also emphasise on mutuality or consequences of external influences or interventions that continue to exacerbate and affect local issues. Thus, the concept of security complexes is clearly linked to the conventional notion of balance of power, as in a balance of power structure, it is not difficult to understand the relationship between states as the trend that describes security complexes in various regions of the world (Buzan, 2008).

In light of the above described particular scenario, the case of South Asia provides a simple example of security complexes that have systemic features of international anarchy. It functions as networks in the system not only to define extreme and relatively fragile local patterns but also to direct and shape the effect of greater external pressures on these local patterns. Local and regional trends continue to reinforce one another, and local patterns have a greater effect due to the difference in size and resources. In this context, arms supplies play a prominent role in hardening and intensifying regional conflicts, and the convergence of local and international aggression trends exacerbate instability. Buzan (2008) described that these effects were only partially countered by pressures for reconciliation or restraint exerted by the outside powers on the local complexes, as historically in the case of Soviet mediation after the 1965's war of Pakistan and India, and by the general constraints created around the conflict of India-Pakistan in 1971.

Generally, Pakistan's support for the American-led alliance on the war on terror was due to its security puzzle and systematic external pressures, as explained by the logic of the regional security complex. Regional security complexes provide a useful link between the relative systematic pressures for Pakistan to be an ally with the US and certainly

explains part of Pakistan's security challenges in the context of the Indian factor within a sub-regional security complex because India-Pakistan's security problems are interdependent in nature.

However, it ignores an important fact that Pakistan may indeed be subject to common systemic pressures and felt threatened in the context of the sub-regional system level that was the cause of Pakistan's compliance with US interests in the region of South Asia. In the coming sections, it can be clearly seen that Islamabad's threat perception of those systematic pressures may have well-constituted an incentive for Washington in the war on terror to pursue its interests. On the other hand, Pakistan's specific national interests were translated into conflicting priorities that arranged its terms of cooperation with the United States under a regional security complex that affected the Pakistan-US alliance on the war on terror. In addition to that, Islamabad's cooperation with Washington was developed in a way that underscored its core interests by reflecting its strengths and comparative advantages and minimising its weaknesses against India. Accordingly, Pakistan's calculations of how best to handle its interests have both a global and a regional dimension (Simón, 2017).

## **5. The US Interests in Pakistan in the Post-9/11 Period and Their Importance**

This section describes US interests in Pakistan in the post 9/11 scenario and their importance. In the previous section, the regional security complex theory (RSCT) has been described as a theoretical perspective that helps to explain the post-Cold War order and the relationship between globalising and regionalising trends. Furthermore, RSC describes how the region of South Asia is complex in security perspectives that have influenced the actions of Pakistan and the US



regarding alliance on the war on terror since 9/11. Therefore, RSC has been used as a tool to explain security interdependencies of both countries that have become increasingly regional, resulting in Pakistan as a local, regional state having more room to manoeuvre and the US as a major power, having less incentive and desire to intervene in security affairs outside its own region.

Pakistan-US relations have had an epic history of misunderstanding and are seen as disenchanting allies (Mistry, 2019; Kux, 2001; Haqqani, 2013). Historically the US has had interests in Pakistan to create stability and to contain the spread of communism during the Cold War period. Americans saw the relationship with Pakistan as useful to counter the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics). Pakistan has enjoyed a unique relationship with communist China, and strategically, the United States depended on Pakistan to establish a good relationship with China. Furthermore, Pakistan also assisted the US in its efforts to contain communism through alliances in the Middle East and Southeast Asia. It remained a frontline state against the Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan.

The US has vested interests in Pakistan, but on close examination, it can also be observed that Pakistan's survival was also directly linked to assistance from the United States since its independence. Islamabad received billions of dollars of economic and military aid from Washington to host Afghan refugees and support Afghan mujahideen. However, in the 1990s, Pakistan-US relationships were at low points to the extent that economic and military assistance was terminated by the US due to Pakistan's nuclear weapons program and Pakistan's support for the Taliban regime in Afghanistan (Schaffer and Schaffer, 2011; Markey, 2013; Kugelman, 2018; Kronstadt, 2015; Hathaway, 2017). A former Pakistani diplomat endorsed the historical divergent perceptions and interests on both sides in the following words, "Pakistan had a

relationship of alliance with the US in the late 1950s and 1960s which had its problems. But since the 1970s, both countries do not have any relationship of an alliance even periods of convergence for cooperation were also marked by differences” (Khan, 2019). After the 9/11 incidents, the US and Pakistan attempted to revitalise their security partnership to deal with the situation in Afghanistan, and this relationship again turned into a period of close cooperation. However, their interests had been varied on the part of both sides throughout the alliance on the war on terror.

In the hierarchy of US objectives in Pakistan, first and foremost, “everything was conditioned by the 9/11 incidents, and America in principle wanted Pakistan’s support as a part of the bigger anti-terrorism framework and re-engaged itself in the region that led to a re-establishment of military and political relationship with Pakistan” (Weinbaum, 2019). This overriding importance for the US was to secure Pakistan’s cooperation in the war against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. Therefore, it pursued its interests by deploying its military forces in Afghanistan and by seeking a partnership with Pakistan to get logistic support from Pakistani security forces against common enemies of both countries. Similarly, Christopher Preble noted that “Pakistan’s assistance was required to fight against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, especially in terms of logistics” (Preble, 2019).

The second important US interest in Pakistan is the check on nuclear proliferation regimes. It remained the US national security concern and a crucial policy challenge to shut down the illicit nuclear supplier networks. In this particular context, Abdul Qadir Khan’s network of international nuclear smuggling provides an important logic for the US interests in Pakistan. Abdul Qadeer Khan has been widely viewed as the father of Pakistan’s nuclear program. During the 1980s and 1990s, Khan managed to buy and sell leading nuclear weapons

technologies in four continents with the help of numerous partners and allegedly sold the equipment and expertise to Iran, Libya, and North Korea necessary to manufacture nuclear weapons. However, this network was exposed in October 2003, when a German-owned ship “BBC China” was dramatically seized in the US intelligence-based operation. This vessel was carrying components of fissile material-enrichment centrifuges for Libya’s nuclear weapons program (Albright and Hinderstein, 2005). Pakistan remained the apex of international jihadist terrorism during the war on terrorism and faced several attacks on its defence apparatus by Jihadists in the past decade. Therefore, the US does not want to see Pakistan as a destabilised nuclear power state where its nuclear weapons are being sold in the open market to overcome its economic difficulties. Therefore, the safety of Pakistan’s nuclear assets and inspection of the proliferation of nuclear weapons facilitated by Pakistani nuclear scientists remained important for the United States. Small (2015), in his writings, stated that “A. Q Khan (Abdul Qadeer Khan) and his associates were involved in the proliferation of nuclear technology, designs, materials in the black market”.

Third, a stable and democratic Pakistan with a better economic situation is also important for the US, where it has dedicated efforts to build a liberal and democratic society through trade and investments. The US objectives come from the need to have stability in the region to secure its own interests, as there are concerns that Pakistan can destabilise other parts of the region. This has always been one of the United States greatest concerns. As noted by Adil Najam, “There is nothing good that Pakistan can do for the United States, but there are bad things that can happen to the US because of Pakistan” (Najam, 2019). For instance, “Pakistan could be a constructive player in Afghanistan, or it could be a spoiler. It could help to prevent a deepening civil war in

Afghanistan, or it could fuel civil war by funding and funnelling weapons, assistance to various proxy groups that are continuing a forty years civil war that killed millions of Afghans” (Preble, 2019). This argument helps to explain that Pakistan is a crucial actor for the US to fulfil its interests. As for Pakistan, “the stability of Afghanistan and the region has compelled it to pursue its core national interests through the US. In turn, Pakistan remained important for the US, particularly when it comes to the security of the Gulf region. This is because the instability of Pakistan will have a very negative impact on the stability of the Gulf region, which includes the safety of the oil lanes” (Khan, 2019).

Fourth, the main US interest is to reduce tension between India and Pakistan and prevent the breaking out of a nuclear war in the region. Deep tensions between India and Pakistan have the potential to cause turmoil in South Asia ranging from extremist violence, acute resource shortages, and threats of a nuclear war between both countries (Kugelman, 2019). Therefore, it can be perceived that Washington’s powerful penetration and pressure are the principal points of connectivity between Pakistan and India to decrease tensions between these two old rival countries, which is of vital interest. Finally, in the current scenario of the ongoing peace process of the Afghanistan war, the United States’ supreme interest in Pakistan is to have an agreement with the Taliban and drawdown of US troops from Afghanistan with the help of Pakistan. Thus, Washington requires Islamabad to convince the Taliban to negotiate with the Afghan government and initiate moderating discussions with the Taliban for US troops’ safe exit from Afghanistan and ensure that it would not become a safe heaven for international terrorism again.

The above-mentioned US interests help to explain Pakistan’s importance for the US in terms of regional security complexes. It is interesting to note that except for cooperation in the Afghanistan war,

the rest of the US interests are directly convergent to Pakistan's own national interests. Therefore, the US used various diplomatic tools to pursue its interests; primarily, they have been military cooperation and alliance relationships with Pakistan, including mutual security agreements. More specifically, after 9/11, Pakistan received the status of a major non-NATO ally, and the US used its economic and military assistance as tools to attempt to shape Pakistan's behaviour and make it conform to its interests. On the contrary, within the framework of regional security complexes, the way Pakistan responded is being discussed in the following section.

## **6. Pakistan's Behaviours towards the United States Concerning the War on Terror using RSC as a Framework**

America revisited its foreign policy objectives in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and declared a global war on terror (Boyle, 2008). This reassessment of the US foreign policy was conditioned with a sheer choice to the rest of the world given by President Bush that "every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make, either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists" (Bush, 20th September 2001). This stark warning from the US left Islamabad no room to manoeuvre or to negotiate diplomatically because, in case of non-cooperation, the Bush administration threatened to bomb Pakistan "back to the stone age" (The Guardian, 22nd September 2006). The events of 9/11 changed the posture of general Pervaiz Musharraf's government in Pakistan. "He was given a clear choice between the devil and the deep sea by the United States" (Murphy and Malik, 2009).

Essentially, Pakistan was facing two options to comply: either to stay an ally and support the Taliban or join an alliance on the war on terrorism led by America. Pakistani government needed a realistic and

prudent decision in those difficult circumstances. However, there was no alternative strategic choice, and any delay could provoke the United States to react forcefully against Pakistan and could bring damage to its national security interests. Therefore, by calculating the risks of available choices, General Musharraf's government decided to join the alliance in the war on terrorism and against the Taliban that was once Pakistan's former ally. Islamabad's decision to support Washington in the war on terror saved it from many other threats, including expected military attacks, sanctions, as well as Indian attempts to place Pakistan on the hit list as a source of international terrorism and the destruction of its nuclear assets. Thus, Pakistan came back into the fold of another alliance with the US and became a frontline state. Additionally, Pakistan avoided suffering incalculable loss and pursued its national security interests by joining the United States' led alliance (Akhtar, 2008).

Hence, the above discussed US behaviour in the context of its penetration capabilities was predictable, and Pakistan's vulnerabilities could not be understood without quoting the criteria of regional security complexes. It had a significant effect not only on Pakistan's security and economic problems but also on the region's instability because the preferences of superpowers have far-reaching consequences for smaller states. But the regional security environment has much to say about the survival behaviours of smaller countries, in particular specific security challenges. The US reactions against Pakistan's refusal to support the war on terror were more predictable since former alliances have been axed, and self-preservation strategies have taken centre stage (Telhami, 2003). In other words, Pakistan's response towards the United States' threats was acceptable in terms of its domestic security interests, which involves the Indian and Afghanistan factors.

### ***6.1. The United States' Tilt towards India***

The South Asian region has had a good amount of history in terms of alignments and political relevance with foreign powers that have shaped security dynamics in the international arena. The phenomena of alliance, alignments, and re-alignments unfolded the international dynamics of alliance patterns (Hussain and Javed, 2020). Since its independence, Pakistan has been profoundly conscious of the subcontinent's power imbalance due to its rivalry with India and has been aggressively finding ways to address its security and economic issues. India and Pakistan are two major countries in South Asia. They have fought four wars on the Kashmir dispute, and the whole subcontinent has been under hostility due to the rivalry of these two nations for the last seven decades.

The essential rationale of RSC theory is rooted in the assumption that all the states in the international system are embedded in a global web of security interdependence, and insecurity is often associated with proximity due to military and political threats that have more implications over short distances rather than over long ones (Buzan, 2003).

Therefore, under the regional security complex, Pakistan's foreign policy remained India centric, and Pakistani policymakers like to see the United States as Pakistan's ally in the war on terror be less friendly to India. However, in the particular scenario of great power politics, regional priorities are being redefined, and the Indo-US partnership continues to be strengthened. Furthermore, the US' de-hyphenation policy to separate the automatic link between its relations with India and Pakistan according to its interests is another factor that reduces Pakistan's intrinsic value for the United States' interests. This decoupling approach has often made Pakistan's relation with the United States only transactional and need-based relations. While on the contrary, India is becoming a more important one for the US policy

deliberations (Pant and Joshi, 2017). This increasing inclination of the United States towards India is not only a symbolic snubbing of Pakistan but reflects a different stature of the US for Pakistan and India. The difference between Washington's relationship with India was described by Hillary Clinton as "an affair of the heart", and its relationship with Pakistan was best illustrated by the actual words used by Secretary of Defence Leon Panetta as "complicated, but necessary" (Qazi, 2012).

India-US bilateral ties have recently developed into a strategic partnership that is based on a convergence of interests in regional and world affairs because China's role in South Asia is an irritant factor for the United States. It seems that strengthening the Indo-US relationship is a natural division between Pakistan and the US, which ultimately leads to the weakening of the Pakistan-US relationship. Eventually, it will be challenging to keep a good relationship between the US and Pakistan because their paths are divergent. This emerging cooperation and alignment reveal that India is more resistant to Chinese influence in South Asia. A former US diplomat emphasised that "The US interest in South Asia goes beyond Pakistan. The relationship between India and the United States changed dramatically after 2000. The 9/11 event is not the key moment when the US started down a rather long path towards creating a much more important economic and security relationship with India. That is one of the major interests of the United States in South Asia. But both countries, for that matter, are part of the picture when the United States looks at the region and its impact on the broader regional stability of the Indian Ocean, Bay of Bengal region, and ultimately, world peace" (Schaffer, 2019).

In the 9/11 scenario, the dynamics were different, and US interests, as well as assets, were put in place to curb terrorism in the region of South Asia. Afghanistan was the gravitational point of terrorism, and immediately in the post 9/11 era, the US needed to prove itself as a sole



superpower to counter those countries which harboured terrorist attacks on the United States. However, the emerging great power politics have changed the old dynamics of US interests pertaining to the war on terror. Therefore, geostrategic competition between China and the US has profound implications not only for Pakistan but also for its importance in the international arena. The US interests are changing where they are focused on not just containing China but also maintaining China. The reality is that the war on terror was a time where US interests had been contained in the larger history of the world where it would not be defined as one of the principal foreign policy doctrines of the United States. This was obvious in the case of Pakistan, where it served as a function of the war in Afghanistan. The extent of these interests will remain so long as the war on terror continues and as long as the US is directly or indirectly present in Afghanistan. Overall, “Terrorism and extremism have not been major driving forces for the US in terms of geopolitics” (Najam, 2019).

On the same token, gradually reducing the involvement of the US in Afghanistan and lessening the focus on counterterrorism has changed the dynamics dramatically, and the US is turning to China. In general, Washington’s interests in Pakistan in connection with the war on terror has been gradually shifting towards containing China’s rise. This was an important dimension of cooperation between the two countries. However, the emergence of confrontation between Beijing and Washington has subsequently changed United States’ strategic interests towards India. This scenario has serious implications for Pakistan’s security interests and cooperation with the United States.

The US relations with India is crucial in order to fairly assess the significance of Pakistan-US relations. During the Cold War, India was part of non-alignment and in a Soviet camp. The United States was inclined towards the Pakistan side, where this factor worked in

Pakistan's favour during the Cold War due to its competition with India. However, this is no longer the case due to its experience during the Cold War; India is much more likely to be resistant to the Chinese influence. So, this is a critical factor in this new Pakistan-US relationship.

## ***6.2. Pakistan Looks for Alternative Options***

“Nations have no permanent friends or allies, only permanent interests” (Mingst *et al.*, 2018). As the famous saying transcribes self-interest as a powerful incentive for states to take advantage of others, states make rational choices and desires to protect their own interests and preclude long-term cooperation among countries. Pakistan's foreign policy mainly focuses on the above discussed strategic complexity in the context of the United States' prevailing interests in Pakistan. Since the global war on terror, Washington is dealing with Islamabad through its traditional prudent foreign policy approach. At the same time, Pakistan manages this relationship based on survival tactics combined with Pakistan's close strategic friendship with China regarding its core security interests. In actual fact, the United States needed Pakistan and put immense pressure on it in order to get what it wanted. As noted by Paul D. Miller, a former Director for Afghanistan and Pakistan on the National Security Council staff; White House under Presidents George Bush and Barack Obama, “Pakistan partially provided what the Americans needed and partially did not. Pakistan does not need the United States as much as it used to, and the United States also does not have as much leverage or influence over Pakistan as it used to” (Miller, 2019).

In this way, it can be easily understood that Pakistan's survival tactics and one would have to conclude that the choice of available options could be predictable under regional security complex propositions of the international system. The answers must lie in the

domestic realm of Pakistan's security interests in terms of Indian and Afghanistan factors as well as threat perceptions from America. The above-explained developments reflect asymmetric relations between Pakistan-US strategic alignment since 2001. After the rising of Chinese influence in Pakistan, the United States cannot afford to take things for granted, especially with regard to Pakistan. As argued by one scholar, "America is a superior partner to Pakistan, and Pakistan may just be forced for survival reasons, being a small state, and more importantly for economic reasons, than to face the giant of India to get closer to China. Pakistan is just responding naturally through survival instinct in light of US and Indian pressure. Therefore, it copes with the situation by engaging with China using hedging<sup>2</sup> strategies and not bandwagoning<sup>3</sup>. What Islamabad is doing is not something new, it is just something natural, and at the end of the day, the Americans are going to lose a very important partner just as they had lost Indonesia to China. The United States could potentially lose Pakistan to China. So, China is the future for Americans" (Singh, 2019).

In view of these foreign policy measures, Pakistan pursued its interests through a mixture of leverage and willingness to minimise divergence with the United States while maintaining an engagement to preserve common interests in convergent areas. Broadly speaking, Pakistan's policy towards the United States was one of engagement because its cooperation with the United States in Afghanistan was due to fears of a backlash rather than willing cooperation (Jamal, 2020). In contrast, Pakistan-US relations had also seen a period of estrangement throughout the first decade of the war on terror due to various incidents like regular drone attacks on Pakistani tribal areas, attack on the Salalah check post by NATO forces, the Osama bin Laden raid, and Raymond Davis incident. These factors remained a serious cause of friction between both countries. Further, Islamabad's caution drives its hedging

behaviour towards American interests and pressure tactics, as stated by a Pakistani scholar, “The nature of Pakistan-US relationship has been transactional, and in transactional relationships, there is not much loyalty and affection” (Jalal, 2019).

Likewise, despite its complicated rapprochement with the United States during the alliance on the war on terror, Pakistan’s relations with China have served as its primary hedge against US reactions towards Pakistan. China came to rescue Pakistan on several occasions, and this was most clearly illustrated by the Chinese Foreign Ministry after the US raid in May 2011 that killed Osama bin Laden: “China will continue staunchly supporting Pakistan developing and implementing its own anti-terror strategy based on its own national conditions” (Reuters, 3rd May 2011). Pakistan is moving closer to China, not only because it needs reliable strategic protection against India and economic interests, but also because there are some other bilateral logics involved, including estimates of India’s desire for a greater position in the US-led regional order in Afghanistan and South Asia. In contrast, at the same time, there are limits for Pakistan to hedge against US interests because Islamabad does not want to over-provoke Washington. On the other hand, it is wary of becoming a perceived pawn in the US strategy against China. About managing this relationship by Pakistan, an American Professor has stated that “It has become quite clear and apparent that Pakistan’s strategic partnership with the United States has historically been a kind of one-way street, where the United States interests are involved and supportive of Pakistani strategic interests, and when American strategic interests are served, the United States is quick to sort of pullback. Thus, in terms of what Pakistan thinks about the United States, it is less hedging but rather managing their relationship by recognising that Pakistan is not a country that the US can antagonise. This is a country that you can include depending on issues at hand and potentially exploit

the United States' strategic interests in South Asia. For instance, Pakistan recognises that its involvement in Afghanistan makes it an important entity in South Asia from the US strategic perspective. So, decision-makers recognise that it is a position that can be exploited, which can be used strategically to pursue Pakistani interests. But for the most part, there is no hedging going on, at least not between the United States and Pakistan. However, in Pakistani perceptions, there is a strong feeling that Pakistan's true strategic ally lies in China, but the United States is an actor that can be managed, that can be exploited, and that can be used towards certain strategic gains, but is not really a long-term partner" (M. Shankar, 2020, personal communication, 27th February). On the same account, Daniel Markey also described it as, "there are concerns in Pakistan that the United States has never been a true friend; the fact is that Pakistan also used America. Pakistani leaders dipped into America's deep pockets to serve their purposes, sometimes parochial or corrupt, frequently driven by persistent geopolitical conflict with neighbouring India" (Markey, 2013).

Another supportive argument that helps to explain that why Pakistan is looking for alternative options lies in the views of Keohane (1990), who described that multilateralism tells us about intergovernmental arrangements involving states because transnational ties are critical, and transnational alliances are fascinating. He defined multilateralism as "the practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions" (Keohane, 1990). Therefore, multilateralism guides us that geographically states' expanding relationships give a better option to attain interests; for instance, Islamabad's developing ties with Moscow is not without its steps towards multilateralism.

Pakistan's security relations with Russia have been enhanced over the past years. Pakistan has developed a relationship with Russia that

was in suspended animation since the Cold War era. In 2007, Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov officially visited Pakistan and said that Pakistan occupies an important place in Russian foreign policy. Both countries discussed vast opportunities that existed for cooperation in diverse sectors (Fatemi, 2007). This increasing proximity between Moscow and Islamabad reflects many important actions such as Russia's support of Pakistan's bid to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2011, and Pakistan's chief of army staff ever first visits to Moscow in 2012 depicts overcoming signs of reluctance to develop full-fledged relations on both sides (Kaura, 2018). Pakistan has been mostly receptive to Russian efforts to establish Afghanistan as a secure state in the Asian security landscape. Both countries are also increasing arms cooperation; there was an agreement in 2014 between two states to endorse arms control conducts, economic and counterterrorism efforts. Since 2016, every year, both countries are participating in joint military drills named "Druzhbha", which means Friendship (Khan, 2019a).

Building more robust external alignments with countries that share similar concerns about the US is not just how Pakistan pursues its survival strategies. However, Islamabad is trying to keep the civil-military ties with the US within a suitable range. The current government headed by Imran Khan has not significantly deviated from the traditional proactive foreign policy behaviour of the United States towards Pakistan while depending on conditions, this is changing as stated by Imran Khan, "One main lesson we have learned in the last four decades is that we must not ally ourselves with any country where we have to fight someone else's war" (*Dawn*, 10th January 2020). Therefore, the main departure from the earlier Musharraf government's Washington strategy is arguably changing towards the United States. The former point speaks to Islamabad's traditional posture towards US alignment politics and preferred credentials as Pakistan wants as an

independent state, not as a client state of the US in the region and international politics. Finally, it should be pointed out that the Pakistan-China relationship is about Islamabad's desire to survive against US pressures and tactics as much as it is about the United States' pressure tactics to pursue its interests on behalf of Pakistan. However, for a variety of reasons, Washington is also pursuing its interests through Pakistan, and, to that end, among other actions, it has actively sought to cultivate India as a regional counterweight to China and its partner country in Afghanistan's reconstruction.

## **7. Conclusion**

In this paper, an attempt has been made to explore the research objective, to observe US interests in Pakistan and the region of South Asia in the post 9/11 scenario. It has explained that the US major interests depended on Pakistan, which includes Pakistan support in the war on terror, to prevent nuclear proliferation, a stable and democratic Pakistan for regional security, to manage the India-Pakistan nuclear threshold and Pakistan's support in Afghanistan peace process. However, Pakistan's interests also depended on joining the US alliance on the war on terror in a politically complex regional setting and avoiding challenges that might lead it towards some level of distrust with the United States. Pakistan's alliance with the US also provided some leverage and opportunities to meet its national interests under a security dilemma of India and Afghanistan factors. On the contrary, the US pursued its interests through Pakistan's support to fight against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. This alliance remained strained and informal throughout the global war on terror because both countries had divergent interests. The US needed logistic and military support from Pakistan to fight against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan,

while on the contrary, Pakistan's interests were purely related to counter India under the regional security complex. The US was looking at this alliance only through the prism of the anti-terror campaign; however, Pakistan was playing within the context of regional security complex phenomenon. These factors led this alliance towards the point of trajectory and mistrust. Most importantly, the US tilt towards India is a severe concern for Pakistan which led it to look for alternative strategic options, which includes an existing alliance with China.

Lastly, this article suggests that the Pakistan-US relationship must find a way through its difficulties because Pakistan's geographic proximity and capabilities cannot be dismissed by the US. Both countries will have to come to a better understanding based on mutual interests while recognising where those interests diverge. This could be a win-win situation for both countries and could lead to an enormous contribution towards improving the relationship. Pakistan and the US have a lot to do with the nature of the threats and the potential of cooperation in the region of Central Asia and South Asia. There is no reason why the US and Pakistan should not have a better economic and trusting security relationship. However, this will depend on the changing geostrategic environment of the region and around the world, where both countries will have to take their interests into account before they begin to start cooperating again.

## Notes

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1. The concept of anarchy in an international system refers to a state of disorder or chaos due to the absence or non-recognition of a central authority in a world where all states are pursuing their national interests against each other (Sullivan, 2001).

2. The term ‘hedging’ is defined here as “a behaviour in which a country seeks to offset risks by pursuing multiple policy options that are intended to produce mutually counteracting effects, under the situation of high-uncertainties and high-stakes” (Kuik, 2008).
3. The term ‘bandwagoning’ refers to state’s alignment with the source of danger. It is opposite to ‘balancing’ which is states’ alignment against a source of danger or security threat (Walt, 1990).

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