

## **Foreign Policy Preferences of Pakistan: A Comparative Analysis (2008 – 2018)**

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### **Abstract**

Pakistan's geostrategic compulsions have made it necessary to align with a regional bloc during the beginning of Cold war alignment which coincided with independence of Pakistan. As a nascent state determined to carve its niche in global politics, Pakistan has always strived to balance India's hegemonic designs in the region along with remaining a relevant part of the Islamic states' bloc. Thus, Pakistan has remained a relevant part of the U.S. aligned group since independence. Moreover, due to geopolitical location and a volatile neighbourhood, Pakistan's foreign policy orientation has remained security-driven. This paper deals with Pakistan's foreign policy compulsions while sketching the basic contours of foreign policy during the tenure of Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz governments. Though the linchpin has always remained his focus on overseas powers, which may assist Pakistan in its dire needs, the policy of not expanding diplomatic outreach to neighbouring countries has always remained in the weak position. Nevertheless, the changing international environment has resulted in changing objectives and goals of Pacific powers which in turn has raised the need for Pakistan to realign its foreign policy to suit its national interest. Moreover, there is a greater need for Pakistan to expand its diplomatic outreach to align its policy according to the changing international world.

### **Keywords**

Pakistan, Foreign Policy, PPP Government, PML-N Government,

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## **Introduction**

Foreign Policy in general terms is a plan of action, adopted by one nation for its diplomatic contacts with other nations (Kasuri, 2015). Foreign policies are formed as a systematic mode to deal with matters that may arise with other countries, including but not restricted to the cultural, traditional, economic, sanctuary and technical fields (Mazari, 2002). The scope of international affairs, post-1648 Treaty of Westphalia has prolonged exponentially and gave birth to philosophies and practices regarding relations among states. Given the primacy of particular national securities, governments mostly design foreign policies through elaborate and high-level decision-making systems. The accomplishment of national securities can happen by either through diplomatic collaboration with other countries or through manipulation (Khan, 2015). Typically, outlines of foreign policies are chalked out by the highest power holder in a government whether he is an individual, organization or association, such as a President, Prime Minister, King or a dictator. Among a few nations, the administration also plays an active part in the preparation of the foreign policy. Foreign policies of countries change in scope, direction, absorption and alignment repeatedly. The change is typically a result of elements affecting national safeties of the respective countries such as economic, sanctuary and geo-strategic requirements. The foreign policy of Pakistan has been assessed and reflected in the past, on the other hand, this subject has frequently remained inactive and there are many possibilities to be discovered and particularly the foresight requirements to be inculcated for a complete foreign policy of Pakistan (Khan, 2015).

Khan (2015) has discussed several possibilities as well as increasing challenges to be tackled by Pakistan. He not only emphasized the need for revising national purposes in a nourishing way rather suggested for an overall changing of our foreign policy with all modifications. His writing has unconditionally recommended a vision for the implementation of the innovative method with the national concern of the country as an essential power. Raja (n.d.) has argued properly the several dilemmas and complications that Pakistan has been facing concerning its foreign policy right from independence. Security took

over as the highest priority over all problems prevailing; due to two obvious aspects i.e. India's aggressive project on Eastern border and unpredictable and unfavourable Afghanistan on the Western border. Therefore, security was rendered preference over all developing organizations as well as a durable economy. Similarly, Qazi (2017) stated the role of foreign policy particularly in prioritizing the national securities and even designated it to be a national policy. He explained by stating that if the national mechanism fails, then foreign policy fails too. He has also emphasized upon Pakistan's strategic collaboration with China and China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to be positively perceived as a 'soft option' for industrializing and revolutionizing, which can only be possible with good governance. Kasuri (2015) has cited the two-sided relations of Pakistan and India in PPP's tenure. This paper recommends that some of the organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the European Union (EU) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) etc. can play an effective part to resolve the dispute/subject at regional; and international level. Kasuri has also recommended the future policy-making strategies for peaceful dialogue between Pakistan and India. An interview with Ambassador (R) Salim Nawaz Gandapur, Executive Director, Centre for Excellence, Counter Violent Extremism and Conflict Resolutions (CECVECR) at NDU has also been a great source of knowledge for this field. The paper has been formulated accordingly and it explores some of the conspicuous events and activities followed by some feasible and effective recommendations for the future development of action by the government/state.

### **Research questions**

- Which successes did PPP achieve during its tenure?
- Which successes did PMLN achieve during its tenure?
- How much is the difference between success and failures of PPP and PMLN?

### **Pakistan's Foreign Policy**

Pakistan's designs of foreign policy have been modifying in its part as well as position, both in regional and international political areas; it

has been changing in due course of time. In the present-day pressures of so much dependency among each other as well as the complex international system, Pakistan discriminates that remaining in isolation is neither possible nor logical. The contact with other nations (including regional and international organizations) is compulsory for the security of national interest and independent identity. Similarly, on the disputes of global aspects like poverty, population, environment and energy, human movements, underdevelopment and immigrants, drugs and terrorism, Pakistan has completely cooperated with the connected countries and coped up with the above-related issues in all sides for mutual collaboration. There are no goals and objectives for supposing the role of global or regional power by Pakistan even though it has been following a very pro-active foreign policy for the last few years. The foremost focal safeties of Pakistan's foreign policy are to protect against external as well as internal dangers and challenges to its national individuality, territorial integrity and freedom viz a viz the sound foundation of very close and brotherly relations with the Muslim world (Mazari, 2002).

Pakistan's foreign policy is primarily driven by security concerns while corresponding with internal and external challenges to preserve sovereignty and national consistency. Due to the security-driven approach of Pakistan towards its foreign policy, it is a fact that realism endured a significant piece of Pakistan's foreign policy. A nation like Pakistan demands foreign policy driven by political will and military power not only to improve diplomatic outreach but also to keep a check on antagonistic elements like non-state actors in Afghanistan, aggressive India and ambitions of Soviet Empire that later ended into the spread of socialism. Henceforth, for Pakistan, the emphasis on power and state interests before embracing liberal multilateralism became a form of following prudent realism. Realists believe that the government's major obligation is protecting/ serving the benefits of the national society and it does not represent the moral impulses or moral obligations intermitted in the thesis of multilateralism (Good, 1960). Realism is state-centric; on the other hand, it is bound with rational purposes serving national interest and national ideologies.

By observing the foreign policy designs of Pakistan apart from being security-driven, other foreign policy interests include the cultivation of close and brotherly relations with Muslim states (The Express Tribune, 2014). Pakistan strongly considers that it has to work within the norms and institution of the international system as well as it supports their reformation for bringing them in line with the realities presently attaining in the international system. Pakistan, therefore, upholds a strong faith in the principles enunciated in the United Nations (UN) Charter and takes an active part in the negotiations of the UN and other regional and international establishments. Pakistan also recognizes the political and economic concerns of the unindustrialized countries. Other leading foreign policy goals include a provision to the right of self-determination for the dominated nations, oppositions to apartheid and the remnants of colonialism, peaceful resolution of inter-state clashes, and promotion of peace and stability through international and regional collaboration. The main strategies and mechanisms to follow these foreign policy aims have varied over time. These variations help to identify the main phases in Pakistan's foreign policy. Though each phase is described by a set of major themes and effective strategies, these overlap and reflect continuity and variation.

Pakistan since its freedom has remained a major participant in global alliance structures. Due to its strange geography, the country had apprehended right away that it cannot remain non-aligned and confirm its survival amid grave dangers in the form of India's hostile overtures and unfriendly neighbourhood (Raja, n.d.). The emotional distress, through which Pakistan passed, warranted its leadership to explore and align with consistent and powerful security allies so that the rag-tag detached people of the infant state can be guaranteed of a secure and stable abode. The India-Russia link provided another strong motivation to tilt toward the capitalist bloc and join hands with the US.

Avoiding the long history of ups and downs in Pakistan's US' dominated foreign policy through Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, Central Treaty Organization pacts (Raja, n.d.) to US' betrayal in Indo-Pak Wars and Pakistan's critical role in the Cold War vis-à-vis US' cold shoulder afterwards; Pakistan once again offered its all-out collaboration

and employed approximately half of its security apparatus to fight the menace of transnational terrorism, led by the United States (US) in the post 9/11 scenario. Pakistan's active collaboration received for itself the title of 'major non-NATO ally' as the world looked upon Pakistan to devastate the threat posed by Al-Qaeda and allied groups. The resilience of the Pakistani nation and security forces resulted in the defeat of Al-Qaeda within the region. Despite uncountable sacrifices in both blood and treasure, the US-led global media, instead of acknowledging the same, started to dominate Pakistan, which forced Pakistani policymakers to start looking towards other options, not restricted to warming up relations with Russia and Iran, strengthening historical relations with China being an important strategic partner for China and Turkey and investing in CPEC while trying to seek self-reliance (Qazi, 2017).

Although Pakistan has not-so-impressive statistics, the country has almost always persisted critical and of vibrant importance to global power politics. Its part in the cold war and global war on terrorism has been historic and overtime, it has expanded prominence at regional power and the only Islamic nuclear country. In that leading capability, the country has adopted forward-thinking, optimistic and progressive foreign policy demanding promotion of global peace, regional sanctuary and constancy. It aims to accelerate the national socio-economic progress through innovative initiatives such as CPEC.

The pivotal part of Pakistan's foreign policy has generally been to safeguard its security needs. This very security led factor has played an important and very encouraging role in the shaping of the country's role with all regional as well as other states. After independence, several defence agreements were signed by Pakistan with the USA. However, over time Pakistan realized that by joining the western camp it did not achieve the probable results at the time of emergency or need, by the adoption of a neutral posture. Hence, Pakistan had to resolve the issues with his adversaries in isolation. For that reason, there was a need for a more vibrant security assurance on which Pakistan could be dependent upon successfully. To acquire these objectives, the efforts of Pakistan were directed to attain nuclear ability and likewise, Pakistan came on the list of undeclared nuclear powers along with India and Israel. The

nuclear program of Pakistan has realized the pivotal part of her foreign policy which she could use as dissuasion against all enemies. However, in the post-cold war scenario, the same nuclear issue achieved the most ambiguous and challenging to cope with. The main emphasis of Pakistan's foreign policy, therefore, has been to meet its security requirements. This aspect has played a very essential role in forming its relations with other countries (Mahmood, 1997).

Pakistan's relations with Afghanistan have been of huge importance. India, more recently encouraged by its newly found strategic friendship with the USA has increased significant space in Afghanistan, which has in turn severely hurt Pakistan's interests. The development has also impacted on Pakistan-Afghanistan two-sided relations. Pakistan has always proclaimed that peace and stability in Afghanistan is one of Pakistan's main interests as Pakistan would be the ultimate recipient of a peaceful and progressive Afghanistan. Pakistan has facilitated all tracks of political settlement and has earnestly taken all available means/measures to approach all Afghans (Qazi, 2017).

Right from the beginning of its creation, Pakistan has been facing with miscellaneous challenges/crises. The two glaring aspects which prepared Pakistani leadership for according top priority to the security over all other issues were the neighbouring countries i.e. in East India and on the west unreliable Afghanistan. Security took over and became an assurance of the foreign policy (Baldauf & Tohid 2003; Qazi, 2017).

The foreign policy of Pakistan, like any other country, is greatly affected by the country's internal environment. The political stability, sound economy by good economic policies, leadership following good governance, dynamic institutions and social cohesion are cumulatively interrelated for a stronger foreign policy as well as the goals of the national security and vibrant national interest. Pakistan's foreign policy has been directed by the Quaid-e-Azam's foresight as well as principles as per article-40 (Choudhary, 1974) of the constitution. Therefore, as per the founding father's vision for the composed foreign policy as mentioned in article-40, an in-depth analysis indicates that the foreign policy principles are consistent and smooth.

## **Major Contours of Pakistan's Foreign Policy under PPP and PML-N (2008-2018)**

### **PPP Government (2008 – 2013)**

While PPP's ascension to the power corridors, in the aftermath of ousting of President Musharraf and the fateful demise of Benazir Bhutto remains a distinct history, on the policy front, Gilani led (and Asif Zardari backed) PPP government mainly focused on improving relations with USA, Iran and China. Absence of a clear direction apart, PPP government leaned towards Iran, supported P5+1 Iran nuclear rapprochement. Besides, some of the glorying events fetching laurels the tenure of PPP for five years was almost failing which not only took the country on poor administrative standings rather it also had a financially disordered set up (The Express Tribune, 2014).

The tenure of a democratic government which was labelled as the first full-term was in reality full of challenges on the issues of national interest leading to a weak foreign policy due to disinterested leadership. The tenure of this government witnessed a tale of mismanagements along with negligence on the part of national stance.

The PPP government, along with the weak partners had fully vowed to extend the full hand of its support for the army to eradicate the miscreants-/terrorists following which the terrorist's nefarious designs were exterminated largely and peace prevailed. The operation in Swat was a successful strategy where it was practically demonstrated that how military and civilian political alike untidily abolished the terrorists along with their nefarious agenda; restoring peace and order in the agency smoothly (Choudhury, 1974).

### **PML-N Government (2013-2018)**

The rampant corruption and conspiracies ridden PPP rule itself gave way to a relatively easier transfer of power to PML-N with PTI as emerging national party. During the tumultuous tenure of PML-N government, significant policy shifts were observed taking place, as Pakistan scraped the Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline deal with Iran, warmed-up relations with Kingdom of Saudi Arabia by sending a former Pakistan Army Chief to Command the Saudi led-36 nations anti- Islamic State of



Iraq and Syria coalition and warming up relations with the US, despite the absence of strategic convergences. Pakistan also tried to mend its broken relations with Afghanistan and India and certain peace initiatives were undertaken to restore trust and build confidence. CPEC came out to be a vibrant venture between both the states superimposing bilateral relations into excellent bondage (Rubab, 2018). Similarly, the ties with Russia were reinforced alongside China. Pakistan's initiative for the first time was an outstanding one getting an equal and matching response from the Russian counterparts.

### **Successes of the PPP Government**

Some of the major success stories of PPP government are enumerated as; continuation of functional Pak-US bilateral relations at least through halfway (till Osama Bin Laden incident) mainly driven by US support in the shape of US\$ 7.5 billion Kerry-Lugar-Burman Bill and reciprocal support by Pakistan through kinetic operations namely Rah-e-Rast in Swat and Bajour region and Rah-e-Nijat in South Waziristan agency of FATA (Ahmed, 2018). Formal award of the multi-billion dollars contract for construction and operationalization of Gwadar Port to China was witnessed, in the pretext of what later became as the CPEC project. The official inauguration of the construction work of \$7.5 billion worth Iran Pakistan Gas Pipeline (IPGPL) from Iran to Pakistan is yet another achievement (Ezdi, n.d.). The project was inaugurated despite strong opposition by US and threats of economic sanctions. Diplomatic outreach towards Russia and China was witnessed in a bid to explore avenues of cooperation, sensing future departing alliance with the USA and West (The Economic Times, 2015).

### **Successes of PML-N Government**

Some of the major successes of PML-N government can be cumulatively described as; restoration of severed Pakistan-USA bilateral relations till the departure of US President Barack Obama, initial stability in the economic realm, with proactive diplomacy with the Arab countries, resulting in hefty aids, initiation of Operation Zarb-e-Azb and Operation Radd-ul-Fasad, therein successfully eradicating organized presence of terrorists from Pakistan's soil and receiving global

acknowledgement for the contributions, sacrifices and immense losses in global war against terrorism.

Formalizing the CPEC, which has been called a “game-changer” or a ‘fate changer’, the multi-billion dollars Chinese investment is likely to boost Pakistan’s economy significantly to withstand the global economic competitiveness. Successful management of Pakistan-USA relations after President Trump’s election, where Pakistan did not succumb to US coercion and stayed firm on its position regarding Pakistan’s sincerity in fighting terrorism and not supporting it. Diversification of foreign policy was another milestone. Having its faith shaken by US’ disinterestedness, Pakistan rightly outreached towards Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, KSA and other like-minded states to avoid international diplomatic isolation, pressurize the USA and expanded its options in geo-strategic domains (Baldauf & Tohid 2003).

### **Failures of the PPP Government**

Some of the major failure stories of PPP government are enumerated as: Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was killed by US forces in Abbottabad, ending a nearly 10-year worldwide hunt for the mastermind of the September 11 attacks, while bringing immense global embarrassment for the country. The notorious Memogate Scandal, wherein Mansoor Ijaz, implicated Husain Haqqani, Pakistan’s ambassador to the US, as the courier of a memo allegedly delivered by political government to US Army chief post OBL raid, asking him to assist the government in the face of a probably military coup in the state. Other incidents such as Raymond Davis, US contractor’s episode and US/NATO fighters martyring 25 Pakistani law enforcement agencies’ personnel in airstrikes on two Pakistani posts in Salala region of Mohmand further deteriorated Pak-US relations. The strikes were followed by tensions between both the countries and Pakistan blocked the ground lines of communication of US/ NATO in Afghanistan as a response measure. The Government obtained a record amount of soft and hard loans from local/foreign banks and financial institutions, while the overall external and internal loans of the country doubled during the rule of PPP.

## **Failures of the PML-N Government**

Some of the major failures of PML-N govt. can be summarized as - deteriorating civil-military relationship, mainly over PML-N government's overarching paranoia of the past and pro-India overtures (The Express Tribune, 2014). The divide played negatively as Pakistan's image as a progressive democratic state received blows. Managing Pak-Afghan relations remained a lacking area, where India remained successful in using Afghanistan against Pakistan by running several lethal proxies. However, Pakistan could not effectively counter or project it internationally. Grey-listing of Pakistan at the Financial Action Task Force forum is widely seen as another foreign policy failure by the departing government, where despite last moment efforts, the country could not prevent getting downgraded and betrayed even by the closest friends. Any unstable situation in Afghanistan in reciprocity has a disturbing effect in the sphere of economic, societal as well as political dimensions in Pakistan (Rais, 1994).

Pakistan on different forums like the Geneva Accord have always supported for peace in Afghanistan. Similarly, Pakistan has also urged for peaceful settlement of the Arab conflict with Israel as well as Yemen's crises to be resolved through talks/ negotiations and also hasn't become part of it (The Nation, 2015).

## **Analysis of PPP Tenure**

In PPP tenure, the overall impression of Pakistan's Foreign policy was not a total departure from the conventional principles. The World continued to witness Pakistan's support for the Kashmir cause, albeit with decreased emphasis, Palestine issue and other war-torn countries including Afghanistan. Indo-Pak relations went a downward trajectory, mainly due to Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party government, with its anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistan policies, coming into power in India. Pak-Afghan relations also worsened as India carved space in Afghanistan and joined hands with the US in a bid to shoulder greater role in Indian Ocean region as part of 'USA Asia-pacific rebalance policy'. In the aftermath of the incidents of 2011, a significant dent was observed in

Pak-US relations as both sides suspended strategic dialogue indefinitely. This compelled the policymakers to look east and North-eastwards.

### **Analysis of PML-N Tenure**

Notwithstanding the domestic difficulties faced by the PML-N government in completing its tenure, in the foreign policy domain, the political party performed comparatively better than PPP. The government remained flexible in their approach towards the states. It was vigilant in safeguarding its national interests and it had the realization that the time to shift and manage alliances was around the corner. Pakistan's Afghanistan policy, (though viewed as a failure) was not a disaster. Pakistan facilitated multiple peace and reconciliation tracks and worked in tandem with the international community for peace and stability (Mahmood, 1997). It only lacked in managing the anti-Pakistan lobby which projected Pakistan as a double player in Afghanistan. Many analysts today opine that probably, for the first time, Pakistan is standing at the right side of history.

### **Conclusion**

The goals of Pakistan have, by and large, remained in constant position even though new dimensions were added. The pursuing of these goals through military and diplomatic strategies has been varying over the period. The numbers of changes in such kind of strategies are well familiar as host of factors influence the foreign policy choices of a state which mostly include the dynamics of both kinds of situations i.e., regionally as well as internationally, the probability of available human and material resources and finally depending upon the disposition and priority by the policymakers. At present, Pakistan is part of the globally led fight against terrorism and religious extremism which pose serious threats to global security as well as to the internal peace, stability and economic development of Pakistan. Pakistan has made some difficult decisions in pursuing counter-terrorism and for ensuring peace and stability in the immediate neighbourhood to boost its image at the international level. Now, Pakistan emerges as a modern democratic country which enlightened Muslim polity and ensured them that it does

not allow any extremist group to use its territory against any other groups, country etc.

From 2008 to 2013, the PPP's government had smooth workable relations with three of the neighbours: India, Iran and Afghanistan. The pro-UAE government was at minimal talks and formal terms with Saudi Arabia (Mahmood, 1997). When the electoral results in 2013 came in favour of Nawaz Sharif, it was considered that Pakistan will show greater attention towards the Saudi government as compared to Iran. This policy affected Pakistan's relationship with Iran as a push back to the terms with Iran (Mahmood, 1997).

In 2017, Mr Sharif put the biggest foot in favour of Saudi Arabia. Pakistan became a part of the Saudi-led military alliance and the US president categorically asked to single out Iran. Pakistan has a disenchanted neighbour in the form of Afghanistan, who has serious concerns about its role in their politics and the region. The US has shunned the talks of the strategic alliance with Pakistan and only wants to see a pliant Pakistan that should not disturb India in pursuance of its contain China policy. Both PPP and PML-N governments observed successes and failures on foreign policy front while PML-N performing comparatively better.

## **Recommendations**

Some of the viable recommendations for the potent futuristic foreign policy of Pakistan are proffered as below:

- Pakistan should continue to play its facilitation role in Afghanistan for peace and stability. It should resolve the divergences with Afghanistan, such as the Afghan refugees, cross-border terrorism and border management issues through a joint mechanism and plan of action.
- Backdoor or track-2 diplomacy with India should be initiated based on mutual respect and equality. Kashmir issue should be kept alive and composite dialogue should be revived.
- CPEC is a game-changer but it can only deliver if Pakistan long-term security and stability within the system. Economic progress in fields of energy and agriculture needs to be strengthened as they complement the booming commercial sectors of the industry. Alongside, safety and

security of assets under CPEC is of paramount importance in the face of active effort by hostile states.

- Pakistan should continue to diversify and expand its options in the diplomatic, economic, security and trade realms.
- As Pakistan engages new countries, it must not forget to strengthen ties with the EU and the Arab world. Open and wider access to these markets can give a fillip to the economy, besides decreasing the dependency on the USA and even China.
- Pakistan must strengthen relations with Iran, which is bound to play an extremely critical role in regional geostrategic politics, once Gwadar port is operationalized. Pakistan has legitimate security and economic interests with Iran and to secure those interests, better relations is a precondition.

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