

A Critical Evaluation of the Evolving U.S.-Pakistan Relations

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Abstract

South Asian countries, especially Pakistan, have always been of particular interest to the United States due to their important strategic location. Although the U.S. developed its strategic and military relations with Pakistan soon after its inception, U.S. policy towards Pakistan has been realist and episodic in nature. This has led to the development of a Patron-Client relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan. Predominately, Pakistan-U.S. relations have been defined by U.S. interest in the region; the relations are cordial when the stakes are high for the U.S., and they turn cool when the U.S. has met its immediate objectives. The overall outlook of Pakistan-U.S. relations is of episodic nature in which the U.S. policy towards Pakistan is based on its interests in the region. However, with the emergence of other potential partners like China and Russia, Pakistan-U.S. relations are evolving to adopt the nature of a State-to-State engagement.

Keywords: Global War on Terrorism, Transactional Relation, SEATO, CENTO, Realism, Liberalism, FATF

INTRODUCTION:

After becoming a superpower, the United States developed its diplomatic, economic, and political relations with almost all the countries of the world. The U.S. foreign relations vary from country to country and are based entirely on the interests of the U.S. The United States and Pakistan developed diplomatic relations immediately after the formation of Pakistan. The U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relations were further strengthened with the South Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) or Baghdad pact followed by military and

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economic relations over the subsequent years. U.S.-Pakistan relations primarily revolve around strategic interests. The two countries' diplomatic, economic, and military ties are based on the overall U.S. strategy for South Asia, which has also led to many hiccups in the bilateral relations. The objective of this research paper is to evaluate U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relations in order to provide policy recommendations for promoting the national interests of Pakistan and reducing its dependence on the U.S. Following research approaches have been applied to collect and analyze the data.

- Overall historical evaluation of Pakistan-U.S. relations
- Analysis of U.S.-Pakistan economic (humanitarian and trade) relations
- Analysis of U.S.-Pakistan military relations
- In-depth analysis of the U.S. sanctions and embargos on Pakistan

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Realism is a key framework of analysis for understanding the behaviors of the states in the international system. The theory of realism argues that the nation-state (usually abbreviated to 'state') is the principal actor in international relations. Other bodies exist, such as individuals and organizations, but their power is limited.¹ Second, the state is a unitary actor. National interests, especially in times of war, lead the state to speak and act with one voice. Third, decision-makers are rational actors in the sense that rational decision-making leads to the pursuit of the national interest.² Another important assumption of realism is that the international system is anarchic which means there is no world government that can control the behavior of states. Therefore, states always focus on the pursuit of their national interest and the maximization of power. The international system does not have a hierarchy of power/authority; hence, there is no institution that can control the behavior of states.³ Power politics and competition are at the center of the realist approach, which means that states are always in quest

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for balancing out or subjugating other states through military power. Moreover, power politics also challenges the survival of states and due to the anarchic world system, every state is responsible for their survival and attempts to maximize their military and economic capabilities to ensure that. A state's power is mostly calculated in terms of its military capabilities.⁴ Realist theory argues that states are focused on the maximization of their security muscles in order to achieve their security objectives that in turn enhance their influence.⁵

In light of the above, an interpretivist paradigm is used to interpret and understand the pattern and changes in Pakistan-U.S. relations. This approach argues that we can only understand someone's reality through their experience of that reality, which may be different from another person's reality as it is shaped by the individual's historical or social perspective. Changes in U.S. policy towards Pakistan can be understood by understanding the changed strategic and security environment of South Asia, particularly from the U.S. perspective.⁶

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

After the second World War, the landscape of international politics changed, and the United States emerged as the sole superpower of the world; however, the world order was still bipolar which led to the Cold War between the U.S. and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), grounded in their respective political and economic doctrines of Capitalism and Communism that they wanted to expand. The U.S. initiated and strengthened its diplomatic, economic, and defense relations with other countries in order to prevent the expansion of communism and to ensure the spread of capitalism. Around this time, Pakistan was seeking economic, defense, and humanitarian support from the developed world for its survival, which became a source of closer ties

between the U.S. and Pakistan. The geographic location of Pakistan also contributed to the improvement of Pakistan-U.S. relations. Indeed, the U.S. was one of the few countries that had recognized Pakistan instantly after its formation. The U.S. press announced the recognition of Pakistan during the visit of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan in 1950.⁷

Although Pakistan and the United States have always been very close allies since the inception of Pakistan, relations between the two countries have faced many ups and downs in response to the fluctuations in the interests of both countries. Bilateral relations were further strengthened through the signing of defense and economic agreements. The U.S. and Pakistan established their diplomatic relations in the 1950s followed by Mutual Defense Assistance Agreements namely SEATO and CENTO in 1954 and 1955 respectively, which further strengthened the relations.⁸ The purpose of both SEATO and CENTO partnership was to prevent the expansion of communism in the region.⁹ In this context, the U.S. introduced Eisenhower's doctrines which were to support all those states who were resisting communism.

Strategically, Pakistan remained a very important ally in South Asia and was considered to be the "Most Allied Ally"; however, on the other hand, Pakistan also faced enormous sanctions by the U.S. including economic sanctions in the 1990s.¹⁰ The U.S. has consistently realized the strategic importance of Pakistan from the very beginning. In particular, U.S. and Pakistan joint chiefs of Staff underscored the strategic and geographic importance of Pakistan and of the view that Lahore and Karachi bases could be used for targeting the Soviet Union as well as protecting oil reserves in the Middle East. In 1951, the U.S. also provided limited military aid to Pakistan.

During the period of President Eisenhower, the U.S. was focusing on establishing relations with Muslim countries in order to expand their network of allied states to contain communism and other possible threats to the U.S. interests in South Asia. President

Eisenhower announced the doctrine of “Massive Retaliation,” which encouraged the U.S. to develop cordial relations with Muslim countries, especially Pakistan in South Asia, and to develop the “Northern Tier of Defense”. During the Kennedy administration, bilateral relations with Pakistan and the U.S. started to decline due to President Kennedy’s rapprochement with the USSR. The U.S. cut down the rent for Peshawar bases followed by a decrease in the military assistance program. Moreover, in this period, the U.S. also suspended the \$4.3 million aid to Pakistan due to Pakistan’s close ties with China.

Afterwards, relations between the two countries suffered during President Nixon’s administration because of the U.S. rejection of Pakistan’s request for support against the security pact of 1959. In this period, the U.S. security interests also reduced as ties between US and China were growing after Henry Kissinger’s secret visit to China in 1971. The U.S. assistance to India and its indifference towards the Indian nuclear test also created resentment against the U.S. In 1979 however, President Jimmy Carter emphasized the non-proliferation of nuclear technology. In this regard, President Carter pressurized Pakistan into stopping the nuclear program and simultaneously forced France to not sell nuclear technology to Pakistan.

During the Ronald Regan administration (1981-1989), relations between Pakistan and the U.S. strengthened due to the growing interest of the U.S. in the Middle East and the Gulf. The U.S. was inclined to have allies in Southwest Asia for the protection of these interests. Therefore, the country signed a \$3.2 billion assistance agreement with Pakistan in 1981 including \$1.74 billion in military aid, and another \$4.2 billion agreement for the period 1988-93 was sanctioned that included the requisition of F-16 aircrafts. During this period, Pakistan was also in the process of processing weapon-grade uranium, which annoyed the U.S. as the policy of non-

proliferation of nuclear weapons was their priority. In addition, the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Afghanistan dampened the U.S. interest in the region. This led to the ceasing of \$4 billion in military and economic aid, and the delivery of the F-16 aircrafts was halted by George W. Bush in 1990 under the Pressler Amendments.¹¹

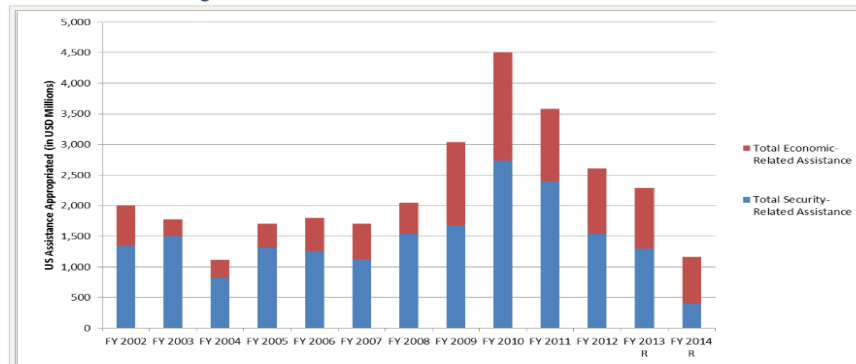
In 1998, Pakistan conducted a nuclear test which led to the imposition of a series of sanctions on Pakistan by the U.S. under the Arms Export Control Act 58 of Glenn Amendment. The nuclear arms race between India and Pakistan was a major concern to the U.S. for the security of South Asia. Again in 1999, the U.S. imposed sanctions on Pakistan followed by a halt of all sorts of aid under the Foreign Assistance Act (Section 508) due to the military coup by General Musharraf on October 12, 1999.

However, the attack on World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, drastically changed the pattern of relations between the United States and Pakistan. As the U.S. started its Global War on Terror (GWOT) against Al-Qaida, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, it pressurized Pakistan to join the war and subsequently to provide logistic support to the U.S. for targeting Al-Qaida hideouts in Afghanistan. In addition, Pakistan provided the services of its intelligence agencies and also facilitated the use of its military bases and airspace. As a result of this support, Pakistan received an end of diplomatic boycotts, and was provided military support, and economic aid including writing off of debts. Indeed, bilateral relations between the U.S. and Pakistan became so strong that in 2004 Pakistan was considered a “Major Non-NATO Ally” of the U.S. Pakistan received \$1.2 billion in initial three years in armaments exports, \$ 1 billion additional funds, and \$1 billion in debt exemption. Pakistan was also given \$3 billion economic aid for improving the professional skills and competencies of the armed forces. But GWOT left a huge impact on Pakistan in terms of economic, infrastructure, and human resource loss. Subsequently, Pakistan faced terrorist attacks on its land as an aftermath of the attacks in Afghanistan by the U.S.¹²

THE U.S. ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO PAKISTAN

In addition to military assistance and military advancement funds, Pakistan has been receiving economic assistance from the U.S. since its inception. The U.S. economic assistance to Pakistan has been directly linked to foreign policy and strategic interests of the U.S. in the regions such as soviet expansionism. During these years, many times the U.S. has suspended economic assistance to Pakistan with the change in U.S. interests in the region and the consequent imposition of different sanctions on Pakistan. The U.S. provided economic assistance for the development of Pakistan under several instruments such as Economic Support Fund (ESF), Food for Peace Title II, Global Health and Child Survival, International Disaster Assistance (IDA), and Migration and Refugee Assistance (MRA).¹³ According to a think tank, the London Center of Global Development, the U.S. disbursed \$67 billion (in constant 2011 dollars) to Pakistan between 1951 and 2011.¹⁴

Figure 1: U.S Assistance to Pakistan FY 2002-2014¹⁵



Source: Center for Global Development “Aid to Pakistan by Number” <https://www.cgdev.org/page/aid-pakistan-numbers> accessed on December 13, 2022

Between FY 2002 to 2014 only 30% of foreign assistance given to Pakistan was for economic activities while the remaining 70% was for military purposes, though aid for economic-related activities was increased to 41% from 2010 to 2014 after the KLB authorization. In 2009, the U.S. Congress approved Enhanced Partnership for Pakistan Act (also known as the Kerry-Lugar-Berman bill, or KLB) in order to separate development and security and facilitate long-term planning and development through geo-military interventions.¹⁶ Moreover, KLB authorization was intended to increase non-security assistance to Pakistan because a stable, prosperous, and democratic Pakistan was envisioned to play a more constructive role in global affairs.¹⁷ KLB act also resulted in the tripling of economic assistance for Pakistan to around 7.5 billion over the next five years (2009-2014) to improve governance, economic growth, and human development.

Table 1: U.S. Assistance to Pakistan from 2015 to 2019¹⁸

| Sr.no | Year | Total Assistance | Military | Economic |
|-------|------|------------------|----------|----------|
| 1 | 2015 | \$1.1 Billion | 26% | 74% |
| 2 | 2016 | \$780 Million | 35% | 65% |
| 3 | 2017 | \$837 Million | 34% | 66% |
| 4 | 2018 | \$423 Million | 0% | 100% |
| 5 | 2019 | \$242 Million | 0% | 100% |

Source: USAID Foreign Aid Explorer “Aggregation of military and economic aid Pakistan” <https://www.foreignassistance.gov/> accessed on December 14, 2022

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE U.S. RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN

Pakistan and the United States have been close allies since the inception of Pakistan. But this partnership is dominated by the security/strategic interests of the United States. This relationship

ostensibly is formed on a Patron-Client pattern in which Pakistan is completely dependent on the extended support of the U.S., and alternatively Pakistan has been serving the interests of the U.S. in the region.¹⁹ During the Cold War period, the U.S. did not have long-term policy objectives linked with South Asia; rather, it was using episodic or realist nature of policy in South Asia, which means when the interests in South Asia were high and of great strategic importance then the U.S. invested a lot and after attaining those interests, it shifted its priorities.

In the patron-client relationship paradigm, Pakistan has always been the frontline state for the U.S. to achieve its strategic objectives. In the Cold War period, Pakistan was a great support to the U.S. to limit the expansion of communism in South Asia, and in the post-Cold War period, Pakistan was an important part of the U.S. Afghanistan policy and also worked as a buffer state for the U.S. coalition forces to launch attacks in Afghanistan. Subsequently, in the Global War on Terror, Pakistan was one of the leading states for providing logistic support and intelligence sharing and also played a key role in the dialogues between the Taliban and the U.S., and the eventual U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, this patron-client relationship is gradually changing to a state-to-state relation because of changes in the political and strategic landscape of the region.

The United States always catered for its strategic interests in the region through Pakistan and after accomplishing those interests it abandoned Pakistan even in critical times when it needed the U.S. support. In addition, Pakistan also faced discrimination under SEATO and CENTO agreements whereby although the U.S. was bound to provide defensive support to Pakistan, but during the 1965 war, the U.S. refused to provide defensive support on the ground that India was not a communist state. Furthermore, it was believed in the U.S. that the main contest in Asia would be

between communist China and democratic India, later considered the battleground of the Cold War. Moreover, the U.S. also provided India with huge economic loans and grants and purchased about \$55 million in military equipment even though India was not part of SEATO and CENTO. The U.S. gave \$80 million in military assistance to India after the 1962 India-Sino war.²⁰

John F. Kennedy was also very much tilted towards India predominately because of the communist China factor. After joining office, John F. Kennedy started executing its Pro-India policies. To make his decisions effective towards India, he reorganized the World Bank aid-to-India Consortium, which provided \$2225 million, of which the U.S. contribution was \$1045 million. These pro-India policies of John F. Kennedy made Pakistan disappointed, and the U.S. came to be considered a non-trustworthy ally.²¹ Likewise, in the 1971 war, the U.S. did not provide substantial military support to Pakistan as only a limited supply of arms was provided.²² The primary security and ideological concern of the U.S. in South Asia was the containment of communism. Détente and the signing of SALT treaties also contributed to shifting the U.S. attention from Pakistan.²³

Pakistan's role in the Soviet-Afghan war (1979-1989) is another example of Pakistan's contribution to the U.S. interests. The containment of communism and Russian influence in South Asia was a concern primarily for the U.S. Pakistan played a significant role in halting the expansion of the USSR in Afghanistan by providing guerrilla training, weapons, and funds to the Mujahadeen. In collaboration with Central Investigation Agency (CIA), Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Pakistan organized training camps in the tribal areas of Pakistan. With this, Pakistan also consulted religious and political organizations for the recruitment of the Mujahadeen from madrassas, schools, and colleges. As a result, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan gave rise to militarization, radicalization, and battle-hardened militant groups along Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas. Moreover, Pakistan's

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support to mujahadeen during the Soviet war became a stumbling block in bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan.²⁴

Right after Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the disintegration of the USSR, the U.S. changed its behavior towards Pakistan. The U.S. started objecting to the nuclear programme of Pakistan and suspended \$621 million in economic and military aid. Joint military exercises and mid-career training programme for Pakistani military officials were also stopped. Prior to this, the U.S. had overlooked the nuclear programme of Pakistan and was interested to maintain friendly relations with Pakistan.²⁵

The U.S. reengaged with Pakistan after the attack on the World Trade Center. Pakistan played a pivotal role and became a frontline state in the U.S.-led global war on terror and provided all sorts of support including logistics and intelligence sharing for operations in Afghanistan. Pakistan also captured and handed over al-Qaida terrorists to the U.S. In addition, as part of the war on terror Pakistan closed its western border, and provided two naval bases, three air bases, and airspace to the U.S. military for its operations in Afghanistan.²⁶ According to some estimations, Pakistan faced a \$252 billion economic loss which is much higher than aid given by the U.S. Besides, 70,000 people were killed as a result of the war, of which 35% were civilians, 11% were security personnel, and 54% were terrorists.²⁷

The U.S. also used economic assistance as a tactical weapon for achieving military/strategic interests in South Asia. Over the last 70 years, the U.S. has suspended both military and economic assistance several times to make Pakistan comply to its policy objectives. The major portion of economic assistance given to Pakistan is for strategic/military purposes. However, the above-given statistics highlight that between 2002-2014, 70% of foreign assistance was for military purposes and 30% was for economic

development. The ratio of military and economic assistance was designed in light of the global war on terror and Pakistan's role in it.²⁸ The economic assistance is also linked with military activities. For instance, under Glenn amendments, the U.S. imposed sanctions on Pakistan in 1979 due to its nuclear programme, and all economic assistance including the provision of credits, military sales, and loans were suspended. In 1990, the U.S. again stopped military and economic assistance to Pakistan under the 1985 Pressler Amendment. Military and economic assistance worth \$564 million for the fiscal year 1991 were stopped immediately due to Pakistan's nuclear programme. However, the U.S. did not impose similar sanctions on India even though India had already done nuclear tests. The end of the Cold War in 1989 and the withdrawal and subsequent disintegration of the USSR changed the U.S. behavior towards Pakistan. The U.S. no longer needed Pakistan as an ally, therefore, it was free to impose sanctions on the country.²⁹

Pakistan-U.S. Relations Under the Donald Trump Administration

President Donald Trump's era further deteriorated the relations between the United States and Pakistan as Trump labeled Pakistan as an untrustworthy ally in the Global War on Terror. Trump wanted Pakistan to stop alleged support of the Taliban and the Haqqani network in Afghanistan. He insisted on the military leadership of Pakistan to choose between supporting the U.S. operations or the Taliban in Afghanistan. During his speech at Arab-Islamic-U.S. summit in 2017, President Donald Trump mentioned India as one of the countries which suffered the most from terrorism. It created resentment among military and civilian leadership of Pakistan because Trump did not acknowledge Pakistan's contribution to as well as losses from GWOT. The Trump administration demanded that Pakistan take strict actions against the Haqqani network and eradicate it from Pakistan's soil; pressure the Taliban for peace talks; and hand over Dr. Shakeel Afridi.

Indeed, Trump consistently blamed Pakistan for not taking decisive and concrete actions against terrorist organizations. On January 1, 2018, President Trump tweeted: “The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!”³⁰ In September 2018, Donald Trump cancelled \$300 million in military aid to Pakistan for not taking substantial steps against the Haqqani network and the Taliban.³¹ In another tweet on November 19, 2018, Donald Trump stated: “We no longer pay Pakistan the \$Billions because they would take our money and do nothing for us, Bin Laden being a prime example, Afghanistan being another. They were just one of many countries that take from the United States without giving anything in return. That’s ENDING!”³² Thus, the U.S. further cut military and economic aid to Pakistan. In addition, Trump also included seven Pakistani companies in the “foreign entities” list for alleged involvement in nuclear trade.³³

Following the tweets against Pakistan, Trump seized the \$300 million and \$500 million aid to Pakistan under Coalition Support Fund on the ground that Pakistan has failed to take decisive and concrete actions against militant’s safe havens in Pakistan.³⁴ Against it, Pakistan’s former foreign minister Khawaja Asif shared a statement that the U.S. behavior towards Pakistan is like “a friend who always betrays” (Reuters, 6 January. 2018, n.p). In addition, former Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the statements and behavior of Donald Trump intentionally humiliate the Pakistani nation and that Pakistan should retaliate to these statements. He further emphasized that Pakistan should halt its relations with the U.S. by extraditing excessive diplomatic, non-diplomatic, and intelligence personnel.³⁵

In September 2018, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo visited Islamabad in order to reinvigorate bilateral ties with Pakistan. He further emphasized that both states could find a common ground for cooperation, however, distrust continues to prevent this cooperation. In December 2018, Donald Trump sent a letter to Imran Khan requesting to facilitate talks with the Taliban. In March 2019, the outgoing commander of the U.S. Central Command General Joseph Votel told the Congress: “We’ve seen Pakistan play a more helpful role in helping to bring Taliban representatives into negotiations.”³⁶

Nevertheless, Prime Minister Imran Khan visited the USA in July 2019 in order to revive bilateral relations. During this visit, Prime Minister Imran Khan and President Donald Trump discussed various issues such as Global War on Terror, U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, talks with the Taliban, and the Kashmir dispute. Trump appreciated Pakistan’s role in GWOT and showed friendly and cooperative behavior towards Pakistan. This visit changed the negative narrative about Pakistan, and the sacrifices of Pakistan in GWOT were recognized, which ultimately improved the trust between the two states.³⁷

However, while Khan’s visit to the U.S. was expected to be a turning point in bilateral relations, contrary to popular expectations, the relations between the U.S. and Pakistan could not beat the deep-seated distrust and suspicion. Though Pakistan-U.S. relations may have improved, there was not a complete shift in the relations as the U.S. has always been interested in pursuing its hardcore strategic objectives with the help of Pakistan. During Donald Trump’s presidency as well, U.S.-Pakistan economic relations were linked with Pakistan’s performance in the dialogue with the Taliban; their subsequent withdrawal from Afghanistan; and the elimination of militant hideouts in Pakistan. Collectively, Donald Trump’s policy toward Pakistan was entirely based on the patron-client framework in which the U.S. used its military and economic power to shape Pakistan’s behavior according to its will and ultimately achieve its security objectives in the region.

Conclusion

An overview of the history of Pakistan-U.S. relations highlights the realist nature of the U.S. policy towards Pakistan. The U.S. never accepted Pakistan as an equal with the intent to establish long-term relations with the country. Instead, the U.S. established interest-based and time-based relations with Pakistan. The U.S. has used power tactics and military means to attain its policy objectives vis-à-vis Pakistan. In recent years, however, the pattern of the relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan is changing from a patron-client to a state-to-state relationship with the changing regional strategic landscape. This change in the relations is primarily triggered by the strategic expansion in Pakistan's foreign policy by strengthening economic, military, and strategic relations with China and Russia.

Recommendations

Pakistan has always depended on the U.S. for short-term economic grants and packages but now Pakistan should replace the short-term development aid with long-term sustainable goals and business relations. Pakistan should work with the U.S. on long-term economic projects including energy projects, industrial investments, agricultural advancement projects, trade enhancement, etc. Based on the lesson learned from the past, Pakistan should improve its economic and military relations with Russia, France, and Japan. These countries can be good economic and military support for Pakistan, and this bilateral expansion will also reduce Pakistan's heavy reliance on the United States. Military advancement in terms of equipment, skill training, and technical support can also be acquired from these countries. The U.S. has always played an economic support card to use Pakistan for its strategic gains. Therefore, it is necessary for Pakistan to explore other avenues of economic collaboration such as China,

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Russia, Japan, or other major powers through diplomatic initiatives, cultural exchange programs, bilateral trade opportunities, and people-people contacts.

End Notes

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