

Navigating Regional Geopolitics: Pakistan's Role in Balancing Alliances and Challenges

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INTRODUCTION

The study of the interaction between geography and politics is known as geopolitics. In order to distinguish between the objective examination of politico-geographical elements and power-political conjecture in the subject of geopolitics, which lacks a generally agreed definition, thorough analysis is required. The core of geopolitical analysis is how international political power relates to the geographical environment. With the shifting patterns of geographical contexts and how individuals understand the underlying change, geopolitical conceptions evolve (Whittlesey, 1940). Furthermore, political forces within certain regions may be created by individual's political ideals. In this context, the term 'political idea' refers to any political notion, not merely the notion of a state (Jones, 1954). Areal differentiation stands out as the core of geographical theory, whereas the core of political geography is the differentiation of political phenomena from place to place (Cohen, 1973). The study of geopolitics draws on political geography, history, and military planning. The geographic characteristics of a state, such as its location, size, form, natural resources, human population, industrial potential, and political structure, greatly influence its strength or weakness. The study of politico-territorial organisation, as well as the geographical and spatial dimensions of power, is the focus of geopolitics.

A state's geographic characteristics present it with both opportunities to take advantage of and hazards to avoid. Pakistan was able to take advantage of its geographic advantages while avoiding the dangers they presented. Geostrategic and geopolitical studies take shape when a state discovers how to utilise its topography to the best of its political and strategic objectives. While Pakistan's location provided the nation with a wealth of material advantages, its careless use also encouraged unrest in the area. The geography of Pakistan was negatively

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impacted by the 'New Great Game' and the 'Global War on Terrorism' since it is the entryway to Central Asia and a viable path for World Powers to enter landlocked Afghanistan. But things are changing right now. The Western border with Afghanistan is pursuing the TAPI (Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India) Gas Pipeline, while the Northern border with China is preparing to bring in billions of dollars in investment following CPEC. The South Western border with Iran will also eventually be movable for the Pakistan-Iran Gas Pipeline. The newly operational port of Gwadar in Pakistan and the strategic significance of its proximity to the Gulf States are two recent additions to Pakistan's geographic significance.

Pakistan's raison d'être

Pakistan was established as a separate political entity on the grounds that Muslims in India constituted a distinct nation and as such had a right to their own state. The Radcliffe Awards served as the foundation for the division of the subcontinent and the establishment of Pakistan's political borders. This was in accordance with the Lahore Resolution, also known as the Pakistan Resolution, which was passed in March 1940 and stated that no constitutional plan would work in this nation or be acceptable to Muslims unless it was designed with the basic tenet that the regions where Muslims are numerically in a majority, such as the north-western and north-eastern zones of India, should be autonomous and sovereign. As a result, Pakistan's territoriality as an independent state was founded on religion (Datta, 2001).

The state notion was primarily unified by religion when it first arose and came into being in August 1947. However, it seemed as though there was only a very shaky connection between the dispersed, isolated, and remote regions of Pakistan. The desire of the Muslims in the Northwest and Northeast of British India to achieve economic independence, as well as the right to lead a life free from internal and external economic exploitation, may also be included and taken into consideration in addition to religion as the reason for existence. The subcontinent was divided in a fast, uneven, and incomplete manner. The geographical allocations and the real political splintering brought forth more issues than they seemed to solve. At the very beginning of this new country in 1947, Pakistan faced enormous socioeconomic and political issues, and the country was preoccupied with facing its first real test- the transfer and relocation of more than seven million refugees from India- an unprecedented human migration in the history of mankind. As a result of the subcontinent's division in 1947, Pakistan acquired over 7000 kilometres of borders. These included internationally accepted borders, such as the Pakistan-Iran border in the southwest and the Durand Line in the north-west. As with Bahawalpur and Sind, several State and provincial borders as well as some district and tehsil borders have been recognised as international borders (Syed, 1976).

Cold War: Pakistan's Alliances and Geopolitical Challenges

The Indo-Pakistan Subcontinent is frequently referred to be a place of complicated diversity, and it is true that a major portion of this massive landmass has a hilly topography, extremely fertile soil, and beautiful scenery. The majority of people in the South Asian Subcontinent's northwest and northeast are Muslims. With 55% of the people living in dense

rural areas, East Pakistan is the region with the highest population density. Geographically, West Pakistan is far more varied than East Pakistan. West Pakistan has a greater variety of cultures and languages, with several main mother tongues being spoken in different parts of the province (Papanek, 1973). Pakistan's geopolitical significance is underrated, despite the fact that it plays a crucial role in maintaining the stability of South and Central Asia. Without Pakistan playing a significant role, a solution to the long-term peace in Afghanistan would not be achievable. And only by working closely with Islamabad will the fight against international terrorism be won. The Pakistani military, which has a fair amount of public respect, is not only politically powerful but also has significant sway over many sectors of the economic community and other facets of society.

The Pakistani administration, which was established in Karachi in August 1947, confronted a formidable issue right away: how to assure its existence and deal with the power imbalances in the area without the resources, documents, equipment, or any other needs necessary to operate. Pakistan's need for financial support pushed it to contact the United States, which at the time was working to reduce Soviet influence by forging an alliance of Asian nations. While enhancing Pakistan's military capabilities and providing help for development, the U.S. simultaneously supported Islamists and other anti-democratic and reactionary forces in the nation (Sunawar and Coutto, 2015).

During the Cold War, Pakistan sided with the West and the United States. India, on the other hand, adopted a non-alignment policy. Particularly during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, Pakistan was an essential partner of the United States in the area. Pakistan was on the front lines of the Cold War in 1979 as a result of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. It received significant military assistance from the United States, and its covert agency, the Inter-Service Intelligence, or ISI, prepared mujaheddin to oppose the Soviet invasion forces in Afghanistan. Since that time, Pakistan has exerted significant control over its western neighbour (Kreft, H.).

The Soviet Union and Pakistan have always distrusted one other because to Pakistan's aggressive engagement in advancing US strategic goals during three different Cold War eras:

- In the days before satellites, Islamabad gave the US with air bases and intelligence assets on Pakistani land, enabling reconnaissance on and monitoring of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union routinely voted against Pakistan's interests in all international fora as a superpower during the Cold War.
- In the 1970s, Pakistan helped President Richard Nixon organise the strategic meeting that led to improved relations between China and the US. In retaliation, the Soviet Union signed the Mutual Friendship Treaty with India in August 1971.
- The Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Pakistan is a bridge between South Asia, South West Asia, and Central Asia, making it geo-strategically more significant than other South Asian States. Moreover, Pakistan offers a more affordable route to India for the IPI line project. However, there are other, more expensive channels via which India can trade with Iran. Pakistan serves as a bridge that connects Afghanistan and India, and India and Afghanistan desire to trade through the Chaman to Wagha border through Pakistan. The strategic importance of Pakistan's position has

occasionally caused issues for Pakistan. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in an effort to access Pakistan's strategic location and warm waters. In her proxy war against the USSR, the US exploited Pakistan as a frontline state (Rogers, 1994).

Global geopolitical factors made it possible for Pakistan to receive help from the US without being forced to fulfil conditions like entering US-led security pacts to bind China, for example. When it came to stopping Soviet expansion, Pakistan became 'America's most allied ally' in the 1950s. Geopolitical considerations at the regional level were also very important to Pakistan's foreign policy (Khan, 1967). There didn't appear to be any little nation that shares the dubious distinction of having three such powerful neighbours, along with the USSR, the People's Republic of China, and India. The topography of Pakistan before to the war of 1971 was unusual. It was divided into two halves, the West and the East, and they were separated by 1,000 miles of Indian Territory (Paul, 2006).

Geographical Importance in Post Cold War Era

Even if the country's geography is the same, the interpretations of interests related to it have somewhat improved due to shifting regional and global dynamics. This may be assessed under the new headings, such as the Gwadar port, the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline, and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor.

– Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline

The project for the gas pipeline known as TAPI was supported by the Asian Development Bank. Its objective is to provide the four aforementioned nations with natural gas from the Caspian Sea. Pakistan hopes to gain from the project as a result of its proximity to the Central Asian Republic geographically. Additionally, it highlights India's reliance on Pakistan for access to the natural riches of the Central Asian Republics (CARs). The project's construction started in December 2015 (Jaffry, 2016).

– Gwadar port and Persian Gulf

The 'Persian Gulf' is formed by the 'Gulf of Oman' and the 'Strait of Hormuz', which are accessible from Pakistan's Gwadar Port. Iran, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Iraq round this gulf. Gwadar port provides access to all of these nations, the majority of which are wealthy in oil resources, as well as the Persian Gulf. The Pars Gas Field, the biggest natural gas reserve in the world, is located in the Persian Gulf and is shared by Iran and Qatar. When a country has experienced prolonged energy shortage, its closeness to such massive areas of natural resources boosts its geographic significance (Jaffry, 2016).

– Marine Border

In 2000, Pakistan and Oman reached a settlement to their maritime dispute in accordance with the International Law of the Sea. This maritime border sharing with the friendly nation of Oman may be used to explain Pakistan's geographic

significance in terms of access to Oman's subsea energy resources. The Persian Gulf and its coastal states can also be reached by the maritime route (Habib, 2017).

– **Peace Pipeline**

The project, sometimes referred to as the 'Peace Pipeline', is just another outcome of Pakistan's strategic location. Although the pipeline project was initially launched in 2013, there have been several controversies that have prevented it from becoming operational. Pakistan abandoned the project mostly because to American anti-Iran sentiment. However, since the US-Iran Nuclear Deal, things have changed and Iran is no longer subject to severe sanctions. At the same time, Pakistan never completely abandoned the initiative (Perkovich and Prasad, 2005).

Conclusion

Pakistan chose to join the US-led coalition against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban because it had few other options and would incur significant costs if it did not. India quickly offered to join a global alliance since it was cognizant of Pakistan's geostrategic position. Because it jeopardises Pakistan's security and economic interests in South and Central Asia, Pakistan has long been worried and views the expanding Indian involvement in Afghanistan as a serious danger to its national security. Whether it was the USSR's containment effort or coping with the fallout from 9/11, Pakistan's role has remained vital. Pakistan's position has grown even more crucial in every way as a result of the shifting geopolitical and geostrategic terrain of South Asia. Most people agree that Afghanistan is currently experiencing a situation that is somewhat similar to the post-Soviet departure in the late 1980s. The region's instability was caused by the US abandoning Afghanistan while India secretly took part in hostile and anti-Pakistani operations. Thus, a civil war in Afghanistan sprung out as a result of competing interests among the neighbouring nations.

There is convergence of interest as a result of the present geopolitical scenario, particularly the US competition with Russia and China. Iran, Pakistan, and the Central Asian Republics all support peace in Afghanistan as a result of China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) initiative, which is shared by Russia and China. The opening of economic activity, commerce, and oil and gas pipelines among the neighbouring nations will be the dividend of peace in Afghanistan.

Another difficulty for Pakistan is keeping its relations with the US and China stable. According to the declared policy of the present administration, Pakistan would not join any alliance with major world powers. A sensible strategy for Pakistan would be to keep its attention on economic improvement, work towards political stability, and put a stop to extremism and terrorism in light of its domestic problems. Pakistan must take use of its advantageous geographic position within the region and abroad. Pakistan has to improve its interaction with the world community. Even if Pakistan's options are severely limited by budgetary restrictions, a proactive and realistic foreign strategy might provide larger benefits. While making sure to protect Pakistan's strategic interests, it is important to make the most of regional connections. Pakistan must carefully manage its connections with China and the US because the Indo-US strategic cooperation is concerning and Pakistan's lean towards

China is increasing. Pakistan has consistently argued that there is only a political solution that can be discussed amongst the parties involved and that there is no military solution to the Afghan crisis.

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