


ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

 Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 04 No. 01. July-September 2025. Page#.111-122

 Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)

 Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)

South Asia's Power Play: Pakistan, India, China, and the USA in Strategic Relations
Dr. Syed Munib Ali Bukhari

 Assistant Professor of Political Science at Govt. Hashmat Ali Islamia Associate College,
Rawalpindi

ABSTRACT

Predictably, the study delivers a detailed view on modern South Asian strategic context, accentuating deep Triangular Security complex of China-Pakistan-India relations as well as addressing the impact of US presence in the region. Considering the current and emerging global and regional politics this research focuses on the nature of interests and affiliations that shape them and rivalry that underlines them. About conflicts of interests such as borders, militarization, economics, and diplomacy, are discussed in detail. Further focus has been provided to the analyzing of potential consequences of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the Indian strategic perspective and the US strategic interests in the region. As such, through integrating these issues, this study intends to bring forth the complexities of those large powers' interests and intents as well as their influence over the stability of the regions and global security.

Keywords: *US, China, India, Kashmir, CPEC, BRI, Counterterrorism, Extremism, Economics, Strategies, Diplomacy, Bilateral*

Introduction

South Asia is a strategic region of the world and currently, it is a place full of competition and animosity. It is an area of eight countries which is suffering from historical issues, political division, and security threats. However, the essential conflict at the center of this intricate matrix is the one between Pakistan, India, and China – the three countries that possess nuclear weapons and have opposing goals and objectives. Each of these countries has its own goals and objectives and thus the United States has tried to maneuver in this area to balance relations with all three of these countries ¹.

This conflict is based on the historical background of two nations, Pakistan, and India, which emerged from the division of British India in 1947. The formation of Pakistan and India later caused a long-standing conflict over the territory of Kashmir. This disagreement has led to a chain of battles such as three major wars and is still active which is very dangerous to the stability of the region. Continued growth of China has changed the balance of power in the region. Pakistan to offset the rise of India has further strengthened relations with China; similarly, India to offset the rise of China has also attempted to form strategic relations. The United States has tried to cozy up to both India and Pakistan due to China's growing influence in the region and has had a rather tense relationship with China ².

The role of the US in South Asia is not limited to any specific purpose. On one side the US has aimed at curbing terrorism and extremism in the region by supporting militarily Pakistan and Afghanistan. On the other hand, the US has tried to maintain good relations with both India and Pakistan; however, the strategic alliance between the US and India to counterbalance China is

more prominent. The relations within the region are further influenced by the existence of other countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka ³. All these nations have their own stakes and agendas which are often in tandem with one or more of the superpowers of the region.

South Asia is a strategically important region with tensions and geopolitical interests. The conflict between Pakistan and India, both backed by China is a major threat to the stability of the region and the interference of the United States only complicates the situation. It is for this reason that there is need for the policymakers in the region to grasp the complex relations to foster stability and development in the region ⁴.

A theoretical approach of Pakistan India relations over the strategic interest of China and USA

The relations of Pakistan, India, China, and US in South Asia entail several theoretical lenses through which their relations, conflicts, and cooperation can be understood ⁵. Here are some key theoretical frameworks that shed light on these complex relationships:

Realism

Realism theory focuses on power, security, and self interest in the international relations. In the context of Pakistan, India, China, and US relations every country aims at achieving the most power and assurance which results in formation of associations and animosities based on threats and capacity. For example, the roles of India's strategic alliances with the USA are considered as mitigating China's dominance across the region. Steps taken to increase the security of one state might be viewed by other states as unfriendly or even threatening for instance military build-up or forming of alliances⁶. This is evident in the case of nuclear weapons competition between Pakistan and India which is due to their security needs.

Geopolitics

Geopolitical theories are primarily concerned with the role of geography, resources, and location in the conduct of international relations. Geographically, Pakistan is placed at the crossroads of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East and thus is significant for China's Belt Road Initiative (BRI) and relations with India and the USA. The dominance of India over the Indian Ocean and its conflict with China in the maritime sphere is the examples of geopolitical goals to gain control over the sea routes and to strengthen one's position in the region ⁵.

Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory that focuses on ideas, norms, and identities in the formulation of the international system. In Pakistan, India, China, and US relations history and national images are important for understanding and interpreting the world and people's contacts. For instance, the Kashmir issue, which remains outstanding to this date, is a part of the national identity of both Pakistan and India and shapes their foreign and domestic policies. Membership in the international community and the norms of sovereignty and non-intervention affect the diplomatic and economic relations between the countries in the PAKISTAN, INDIA, CHINA, AND US and other countries ⁷.

Economic Interdependence

The theory of economic interdependence highlights how trade, investment, and economic ties influence political relationships: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) provides an insight as to how economic interaction, for instance, investment, trade, and facilities can enhance the political relationship and decide the shift of power in a region. It also shows that China continues to apply economic diplomacy to expand its influence in South Asia ⁸. The economic relations

between Indian and the US are growing and especially in areas such as technology and defense, there would be great incentives for the two countries to work together and reduce tensions in other fields of their relations.

Regional Hegemony

The theory of regional hegemony explores how dominant powers seek to establish and maintain influence over neighboring states: Thus, the desire for regional domination contributes to India's relations with the other small countries of South Asia and its approach to China and Pakistan. This is well illustrated by the "Neighborhood First" policy which seeks to improve cooperation at the regional level. BRI projects including in Pakistan are perceived as the attempt to expand its economic and strategic presence in South Asia and beyond, including in the areas that are traditionally considered to belong to the spheres of interest of other great powers ⁹.

India-Pakistan: A Complex Web of Rivalry and Cooperation

India and Pakistan are two nuclear powers that have been entangled in a bitter relationship since the two countries got their independence in the year 1947. Their strategic dynamics are characterized by competition and sometimes even conflict, but also cooperation. The division of Subcontinent by British resulted in the creation of a long-standing issue of the territory of Kashmir that caused tensions and wars, including three. The war of 1971 led to the formation of Bangladesh which added more tension to the relations. India's nuclear test in 1974 and Pakistan in 1998 created questions on nuclear spread and security in the area. Both countries have gone nuclear, and this has brought some form of threat in the rivalry between the two nations. Terrorism and particularly cross-border terrorism is still a serious concern especially in the Indian administered Kashmir where India has accused Pakistan of supporting terrorist organizations ¹⁰. The Mumbai attacks in 2008 and the Pulwama attack in 2019 showed that the attempts towards peace are quite volatile. However, both the countries have tried to come forward for several peace processes such as the ceasefire in 2003 and the resumption of the peace process in 2015 through the Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue. Trade relations and cooperation in energy has also been discussed ¹¹.

The terrorist attack occurred in Pulwama in February 2019, followed by military skirmishes demonstrated that the peace process remained very delicate. The scrapping of Article 370 in Kashmir by India has also contributed to worsening of the situation. Economic and military power has shifted towards India, and this has developed a strategic competition with Pakistan. The relations with China and the nuclear capabilities have brought new characteristics to this conflict ¹².

Rapprochement between India and China

India and China are two emerging superpowers of the world, and they have a multiple faceted relationship. Their strategic dynamics are symbiotic, yet they are in a constant state of competition. Their relation is defined by the border war that took place in 1962 and tensions that followed. But in the recent past both countries have attempted to enhance their relations through trade and diplomacy. India and China both have economic relations, and the volume of their trade is over \$ 80 billion. China and India are largest trading partners ¹².

Due to the increase in India's economic and military strength it has become a strategic competitor with China. This development has provoked the Indian side since China continues to extend its influence in the Indian Ocean region and supports Pakistan. Border issues are still an issue of contention between the two countries since both lay claim to some of the territories.

However, India and China have collaborated in some international matters such as climate change and terrorism. Indeed, the diplomatic relations between two countries have improved over the recent years through initiatives like the 2018 Wuhan Summit ¹³.

The BRI and India's Act East policy have established new regional relations. India has shown apprehensions about BRI in terms of sovereignty and integrity of the country. Both nations are in the process of military modernization, relying on technology and strategy. In the global governance areas, India and China have reached consensus on the UN Security Council reform and multipolarity ¹⁴.

India-US Amicable Ties: A Strategic Partnership

India and the United States enjoy a complex and comprehensive relationship based on the principles of democracy, trade, and security. Both countries have maintained friendly relations through diplomatic relations, economic interaction, defense relations, and cultural and social interaction. The US is the second largest trading partner of India with the bilateral trade crossing \$ 140 billion. India is also a large market for US exports with many American companies investing in the Indian market. India and the US have good defense ties, and the US is among the biggest suppliers of defense equipment to India. They both carry out annual bilateral military exercises and collaborate on defense issues ¹⁵.

India has a strong counter-terrorism relationship with the US and the two countries share intelligence and conduct joint exercises. They also cooperate in the fight against the international terrorism. The two also engage in research cooperation such as space research and development of clean energy sources. India and the US have a strong cultural exchange program which fosters people to people relations. The two also collaborate in cultural conservation and sharing of cultural values between the two countries. India and the US collaborate on regional matters including Afghanistan and the Indo-Pacific region. They also act in concert on international management matters such as climate change and non-proliferation ¹⁶.

India and the US are space partners and have several projects ongoing with NASA and ISRO. The bilateral relations between the two nations are enhanced by the Indian Americans since more than 4 million of them reside in the United States ¹⁶.

Pakistan-US Alliance

The relations between Pakistan and the United States can be described as a strategic partnership since Pakistan's independence in 1947. The alliance has been through phases of cooperation and integration as well as conflict and rivalry during the Cold War period. This relationship has therefore been shaped by geopolitical strategies, security and economic factors, and changes in international politics ¹⁷. Here is an exploration of the key aspects and phases of the Pakistan-US alliance.

Cold War Era (1950s-1980s)

The Cold War was the first period of the partnership between Pakistan and the United States of America where both the countries had common interests in the Soviet threat in South Asia and the rest of the world. Key developments during this period include SEATO and CENTO: Pakistan became a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) both of which were anti-Soviet containment organizations. These alliances made Pakistan as a strategic partner of the USA in the region. The USA supported Pakistan a lot in terms of military and economic assistance because Pakistan was considered an important ally in the Cold War. This support was in form of supplying military hardware, training, and other

financial aids. The Soviet Afghan War was fought from 1979 to 1989. Pakistan was one of the frontline states that supported Afghan mujahideen against the Soviet invaders. The USA together with Saudi Arabia provided considerable military and financial assistance to the mujahideen through Pakistan ¹⁸.

Post-Cold War and 9/11 Era (1990s-2010s)

The dynamics of the Pakistan-US alliance underwent significant shifts following the end of the Cold War and particularly after the September 11, 2001, attacks. In the 1990s Pakistan was put under US sanctions because of the nuclear weapons development program. The Pressler Amendment also caused the halt in military aid and deteriorated the relations between the two countries. After the tragic incidence of 9/11, Pakistan was turned into an ally of the United States in the war against terrorism. The USA offered military and financial support to Pakistan in return for cooperation in combating Taliban and Al-Qaeda operatives based in Pakistan's frontier areas. The application of the US drones to eliminate the militant leaders in the Pakistan's tribal region generated concern and negative perception of the USA in Pakistan ¹⁹.

Recent Developments (2010s-Present)

In recent years, the Pakistan-US alliance has continued to face challenges amid evolving regional dynamics and diverging strategic interests. Some of the issues that have influenced the relationship between Pakistan and the United States of America include Pakistan's perception of America's policies in Afghanistan, which include support of India's influence in Afghanistan, and allegations of Pakistani support for militant groups. There has also been economic interaction in the form of trade and business; the USA is one of the largest trading partners of Pakistan and a major source of Pakistan's remittance earning community ²⁰. Thus, Pakistan has expanded its foreign policy and has tried to develop relations with countries like China and Russia due to which it has been seen that it is reacting to the US unpredictability and changing priorities.

Challenges and Future Prospects

It must be noted that the relationship between Pakistan and the United States still have significant issues such as lack of trust, different perception of threats and opportunities and internal politics between both countries. But there are common grounds in maintaining stability in the region, fighting against terrorism, and developing economic relations.

Regional Stability: Each country has interest in stability in Afghanistan and the rest of South Asian region which might prompt them to revive their cooperation.

Economic Cooperation: Strengthening the economic cooperation and trade relations can become a stabilizing factor and contribute to the mutual beneficial cooperation.

Counterterrorism: Both nations still need to maintain cooperation in counterterrorism despite the differences in the approach and strategies occasionally ²¹.

China's Strategic Imperatives in South Asia

China feels threatened by India and the possibility of India rising to become a regional superpower that will threaten China's supremacy. China is worried by the refugee problem in Nepal and India, especially the Tibetans who China fears may incite rebellion in the region. China is aware of Uyghur separatists that are present in Pakistan and Afghanistan and the possibility of them inciting violence in Xinjiang. China is also worried about obtaining 'hearth and home' access to ports in the region, like Gwadar in Pakistan and Hambantota in Sri Lanka. China is interested in stability in the region to ensure it gets its needs of oil and gas from Pakistan and Bangladesh respectively ²². China has its concerns regarding the acts of terrorism in the area especially in

Pakistan and Afghanistan. China shares its borders with several countries in South Asia and these are India, Nepal, and Bhutan. China is apprehensive of other powers in the region, and it includes the United States, Japan and Australia. China cares for stability in the region especially in Afghanistan and Pakistan. China has economic stakes in the region in terms of investments, citizens and infrastructure projects which are of concern to it. These are the concerns that shape China's foreign policy and investment strategies in South Asia to secure its interests in the region²³.

US Strategic Focus in South Asia

The United States has several interests in South Asia. The US is concerned about the terrorist groups that are still in the region, including al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The US wants to ensure stability in the region especially in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The US has uncertainties over nuclear capability within the region especially in Pakistan and India. The US has strategic interests in the region especially in the areas of energy, especially oil and gas from Pakistan and Bangladesh²⁴.

There are great trade and investment stakes for the US in the region especially in India and Pakistan. The US supports human rights and democracy in the region including Sri Lanka and Bangladesh and other countries. The US is interested in the security of sea lines of communication in the Indian Ocean especially the Strait of Malacca. The United States has security concerns in the region regarding China and wants to balance the powers in the region. The US currently enjoys a strategic relationship with India and the two nations collaborate on issues such as defense and trade, counterterrorism²⁵. The US has an interest in the rebuilding and stabilization of Afghanistan especially after they pulled out the military. These interests define the US foreign policy and its relations with South Asia since it aims to foster stability, security and economic development in the region.

US Strategies to Curtain China in South Asia

The US has used several tactics in South Asia to counter China's economic influence, which is more a manifestation of global power politics and strategic considerations in the region. Such strategies include political, economic, military and security partnerships with the regional actors. Here are some key strategies²⁶. Here are some key strategies:

Diplomatic Engagement and Alliances

The USA, India, Japan, and Australia are the member countries of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or the Quad. Created to balance China's power in the Indo-Pacific region, the Quad mainly deals with security cooperation, the rules-based order, and infrastructure development. As not limited to South Asia, the Quad's actions are relevant to the stability and economic development of the region. The USA has enhanced its diplomatic relations with the South Asian nations such as India, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. These engagements seek to deepen trade relations, increase security collaboration, and offer options to Chinese financing and control²⁷.

Economic Initiatives and Trade Policies

The USA has supported economic measures like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework which focuses on infrastructure, connectivity, and trade in the region. This undertaking seeks to offer solutions to the Chinese-led projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The USA has been trying to enter in trade relations and investment cooperation with South Asian countries to diversify its relations and to cut the dependence on Chinese investments. They include bilateral trade talks and marketing of the US private sector interests in the key sectors²⁸.

Military Cooperation and Security Assistance

The USA has enhanced defense relations with countries such as India through offering military support, training, and sharing of technology. These partnerships are designed to improve the security capacity of the region as well as the cooperation between the member forces. The USA offers security cooperation programs to the countries of South Asia to fight terrorism, strengthen borders, and increase maritime situational awareness²⁹. These programs facilitate the processes of preserving stability and preventing threats from the outside world.

Technological and Innovation Initiatives:

The USA encourages technology and innovation cooperation with the South Asian countries in areas such as telecommunication, digital infrastructure, and cyber security. These initiatives are to counter technological dependencies and to find ways to avoid the reliance on Chinese technologies³⁰.

Humanitarian and Development Aid:

The USA gives humanitarian aid and development cooperation to fund socio-economic, health, education, and humanitarian needs in South Asia. These initiatives are to raise the standard of living, increase stability, and to challenge China through soft power diplomacy.

Challenges and Considerations:

The countries in South Asia have different political systems, historical enmities, and developmental statuses. These complexities must be managed by the US strategies while fostering cohesion amongst the allies and partners. China perceives the US strategies in South Asia as a part of the containment policy and interference in its affairs. Beijing has its own economic, diplomatic, and military countermeasures and thus the relations are becoming more competitive in the region³¹. Therefore, the effectiveness of the strategies that are implemented by the United States of America in South Asia highly depends on the local response, political commitment, and the strategies' compliance with the national interests. Some of the countries in the region may maintain relations with both the US and China depending on the interest and circumstances back home.

China's Strategic Vision Unfolding in South Asia:

China's prospective in South Asia is complex and can be viewed from the following dimensions. South Asia is considered of significant strategic importance to China because of its geographical position between East Asia and the Middle East and its access to the Indian Ocean. China's BRI involves many South Asian countries as stakeholders and the purpose of this Belt and Road Initiative is to give a boost to the developing economic conditions of the participating countries. China is viewed as a rival to India in South Asia because of its increasing influence in the region. China's economic power is rising in South Asia through the investments in infrastructure, energy, and trade. China is already participating in regional organizations like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectorial Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)³². China has a significant role in shaping conflict patterns in South Asia; the China-Pakistan axis is growing while the China-India relationship is increasingly adversarial. China's increasing attention to the smaller South Asian states like Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh is viewed as a bid to gain more influence in the region. China's economic development propositions in South Asia are appealing to many countries but they are accompanied by costs like debt burden and loss of sovereignty. China wants stability in

Afghanistan so that violent anti-China militant groups cannot find haven and China supports the current peace process.

Navigating the Future: Key Factors Shaping US Engagement in South Asia:

Several factors will define the future of the US in South Asia which is a strategic region and is characterized by new geopolitics, economic potential, and threats.

Geopolitical Competition with China:

The competition between the United States and China is one of the key trends in the modern world and the South Asian region. The region is of geostrategic importance, sea lines of communication and resources which makes it a theatre of competition between the two superpowers. The BRI projects of China in South Asia which includes CPEC, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are problematic for US influence. The US will most probably persist with balancing China's economic and strategic moves through other alliances and investments ³³.

Security and Counterterrorism:

The withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan has consequences regarding the security and stability of the region. The US will continue to be involved in counterterrorism, training Afghan security forces and countering threats from terrorist organizations that might pose a danger to South Asia. The future US military relations with countries such as India, Pakistan despite the issues and other countries will involve building capacity, conducting military exercises, and ensuring security in the Indian Ocean region ³⁴.

Economic Engagement and Trade:

The US will try to advance economic cooperation with the countries of South Asia by signing trade, investment, and market access agreements. Emphasis will be made on eliminating trade imbalances, fair trade, and encouraging the American private capital in strategic areas of technology, infrastructure, and energy. Humanitarian aid, development assistance and capacity building programs will remain relevant in the social and economic growth of South Asia to tackle issues like poverty, health, education, and infrastructure ³³.

Diplomatic Initiatives and Alliances:

The US will further deepen diplomacy with countries in South Asia including India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and others through diplomacy, military and regional group including the Quad comprising of USA, India, Japan and Australia. In this regard, the US may also act as mediator and participate in the conversation and reconciliation of many issues including the Kashmir issue between the two nuclear states of India and Pakistan, can use its diplomatic power and diplomacy ³⁵.

Technological Advancements and Innovation:

New partnerships in IT & communicating, cyber security, and other digital infrastructure and innovative fields will also be important for U.S. interaction with South Asia. Efforts to expand the digital infrastructure, protect cyber space, and improve technical systems will benefit both the economic health and security collaboration ³⁶.

Climate Change and Environmental Cooperation:

It will involve itself in the region in combating climate change and other sustainability issues to contain the impacts. These are some of the ways of practicing good environment: encouraging use of renewable sources of energy, conserving the environment and preparation towards disaster.

Challenges and Considerations:

Still, the politics of each South Asian nation as well as historical animosities and socioeconomic conditions will have to be addressed by US strategies in the region. As a result, the reaction to such initiatives will be much less likely to be positive; therefore, some significant challenges will be identified, including the necessity to comprehend local concerns, priorities, and cultural backgrounds. A lot of BRI projects, economic investments and diplomatic outreach in recent years threatened the US stake in that region ³⁷. The mild level of contention indicates that competition dynamics will have to be carefully balanced with cooperation. Evaluations of regional and internal issues of South Asian countries like governance problems, corrupt practices, and ethnic problems and human rights abuses put an effect on the policies and measures of US.

Pakistan's Inferences from India, China, and US in the Region

The three major powers that have influenced the Pakistan's foreign policy and the regional context of the past, present and future are India, China, and the USA. The relations between the two countries have been strategic and have been formally established since the 1960s. This was due to the common strategic interests such as containing India's influence in South Asia and as a balance of power against the United States during the Cold War period ³⁸.

Over the past few decades, the relationship between Pakistan and China has become rather close and has expanded from the military cooperation to the economic cooperation. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is one of the most significant projects of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that has institutionalized the economic relations between China and Pakistan. Pakistan considers China as an important economically and a source of support in the realm of security. The future cooperation is expected to be centered on the further development of CPEC, improvement of access, and development of cooperation in various spheres including trade, technology, and defense ³⁹.

Historical enmity can be seen in the bilateral relations between Pakistan and India especially the issue of Kashmir. Their relations have been mostly hostile with wars and small-scale border conflicts as the most common activities of their diplomacy, although they have tried to establish peace from time to time. The two countries are still in a state of conflict with each other and there are occasional skirmishes across the Line of Control in Kashmir. In this case, diplomacy is not permanent because it is affected by internal politics and security issues such as terrorism and nuclear weapons. The future of Pakistan-India relations is unpredictable, and the prospects of the two states reaching a point of no-war and no-victory are contingent on the continuation of the process of dialogue and acts of confidence-building and possibly, mediation. It is worth stating that economic cooperation and regional stability depend on the settlement of the existing conflicts ⁴⁰.

The relations between Pakistan and the USA can be traced back to the Cold War when military and economic assistance was provided in return for cooperation. The relationship was characterized by ups and downs depending on the US needs in South Asia and Pakistan's contribution to regional security. During the last few years, the relations between the United States and Pakistan have been tense due to the differences in the approach towards Afghanistan and the counter-terrorism cooperation and human rights issues ⁴¹. This paper identifies that the change in USA's policy towards India and the internal instability in Pakistan has influenced the cooperation. The future of the relations between the US and Pakistan will continue to depend on the counter-terrorism cooperation, stability in Afghanistan after the American troops'

withdrawal, and economic relations. Diplomatic interaction may be based on cooperation around security while at the same time reconciling conflicting strategic objectives⁴².

The relations between Pakistan and China, India, and the USA are quite diverse and can be explained by historical experiences, political and economic competition, and cooperation. It is expected that in the future, Pakistan will continue to keep the relations balanced while managing the regional and the global power shifts. The main directions of Pakistan's foreign policy in the South Asian region and beyond will be the preservation of its strategic independence, the development of economic relations, and the regulation of security threats.

Conclusion:

The interactions between China, Pakistan, India, and the USA in South Asia are a multifaceted and evolving process that shapes the regions political and security environment and its economic structure. These four nations have a large influence over the region, because of their own specific interests, in the context of historical animosities and modern international trends. China's engagement in South Asia is defined by the grand strategy of the BRI with CPEC as the flagship project. China is a vital economic partner for Pakistan, especially in the CPEC that focuses on infrastructure and energy investments to support Pakistan's development agenda. Nonetheless, the Sino-Indian relations are marked by geopolitical rivalry and territorial disputes over the Himalayan region. China's increasing power poses a threat to the old order in the region and brings new power relations into play. The relationships between Pakistan and China and between Pakistan and the USA are the most significant factors affecting the country's foreign policy. In the past, Pakistan has relied on China for strong military and economic backing, which it considers a counterbalance to India's influence. Pakistan's relations with the USA have been rather oscillating; both countries cooperated during the Cold War and the War on Terror, but there were many moments of distrust and different strategic interests. India as a regional hegemon is in a precarious position of balancing between its strategic ally – the USA and its more than complicated relations with China.

South Asia's strategic architecture is dominated by the US. It encompasses counterterrorism, stability in Afghanistan after the withdrawal, economic relations, and checkmating China's rise. The US partners with India as a democratic country and as a counterbalance to China in the region, which is a part of the USA's Indo-Pacific strategy. However, the bilateral relations between the US and Pakistan are still in the process of transformation according to the security interests and regional security necessities. Thus, the future of strategic relations in South Asia will depend on how these four countries manage their relations in the context of new tendencies. Issues like the settlement of historical issues, regional integration through connectivity, technology, and climate change will define the stability and prosperity of the region. Balancing competition with cooperation between Pakistan, India, China, and US is essential to address common threats, maintain peace and develop sustainably in the region.

References

1. Amit, R. "The US Pivot to Asia and South Asia: Rebalancing the Strategic Triangle." *Asian Security* 12, no. 2 (2016): 117-138.
2. Kux, Dennis. *The United States and Pakistan 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies*.
3. Bhasin, Kiran. "US-China Rivalry and Its Impact on South Asian Geopolitics." *Asia Policy* 18, no. 3 (2023): 45-67.
4. Beck, Michael. *China's Influence in South Asia: A New Power Dynamics*. London: Routledge, 2022.
5. Center for Strategic and International Studies. *China's Belt and Road Initiative: Implications for South Asia*. Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 2021.
6. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. *The United States and South Asia: The Emerging Geopolitical Landscape*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie, 2024.
7. Council on Foreign Relations. *India and the United States: A New Strategic Partnership*. New York: CFR, 2020.
8. Choudhury, Ghulam M. "The Dynamics of Sino-Pakistani Relations: Economic and Strategic Aspects." *Strategic Studies* 42, no. 4 (2018): 501-523.
9. Miller, Richard E. *The Great Game in South Asia: Strategic Rivalries and Alliances*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.
10. Ganguly, Sumit. "India's Strategic Response to China's Rise." *International Affairs* 94, no. 1 (2018): 85-101.
11. Ganguly, Sumit, and Rahul Mukherji, eds. *India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2018.
12. World Bank. *The Impact of China's Belt and Road Initiative on South Asia*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2021.
13. Garver, John W. *China's Quest for Great Power: Ships, Oil, and the World's New Power Map*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2016.
14. Haider, Syed A. "The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: Strategic Implications for South Asia." *Journal of South Asian Studies* 42, no. 3 (2019): 377-397.
15. Koshy, S. "India's Role in the Indo-Pacific and Its Strategic Implications." *Asian Security* 14, no. 2 (2018): 156-173 Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001.
16. Modi, Narendra. *The Modi Doctrine: The Foreign Policy of India*. New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2020.
17. Mohan, C. Raja. "The US-India Strategic Partnership and its Impact on Regional Security." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 38, no. 1 (2016): 1-23.
18. Cohen, Stephen P. *The Idea of Pakistan*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004.
19. Huang, Yanzhong. "China's Geoeconomic Strategies in South Asia." *Global Asia* 10, no. 1 (2015): 45-56.
20. Khurshid, Nadia. "Pakistan's Foreign Policy: The Role of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor." *South Asian Studies* 38, no. 2 (2022): 221-240.
21. International Crisis Group. *The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: An Assessment*. Brussels: ICG, 2019.
22. Singh, Pradeep. "The Strategic Triangle: China-Pakistan-India Relations." *Journal of International Affairs* 71, no. 2 (2018): 103-120.

23. United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research. *Nuclear Strategies in South Asia: India, Pakistan, and China*. Geneva: UNIDIR, 2017.
24. Rashid, Ahmed. *Descent into Chaos: The United States and the Failure of Nation Building in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia*. New York: Viking, 2008.
25. Nair, B. "The USA and South Asia: Analyzing the Strategic Partnership." *South Asian Politics* 29, no. 2 (2020): 233-251.
26. RAND Corporation. *India's Strategic Posture and Its Implications*. Santa Monica: RAND, 2022.
27. The Heritage Foundation. *US Policy in South Asia: Challenges and Opportunities*. Washington, D.C.: Heritage, 2018.
28. Sharan, Shubhi. *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor: A New Geopolitical Paradigm*. New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2018.
29. Mearsheimer, John J. *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001.
30. U.S. Department of Defense. *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*. Washington, D.C.: DoD, 2023.
31. Perkovich, George. *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
32. Zia, Adeel. "Pakistan's Strategic Dilemma and its China Alliance." *Middle East Policy* 24, no. 1 (2017): 112-124.
33. Young, Oran R. *Governance in South Asia: Regional Security and Cooperation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
34. Subrahmanyam, K. *India and the World: The Strategic Dimension*. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 2006.
35. Wilson Center. *Pakistan and the United States: A Strategic Review*. Washington, D.C.: Wilson Center, 2022.
36. Schia, N.N. "The Cyber Frontier and Digital Pitfalls in the Global South." *Third World Quarterly* 39, no. 5 (2018): 821-837.
37. Basu, P.P. "Religion and Politics in South Asia: Select Case Studies." In *The Routledge Handbook of South Asia*, edited by R. E. Palmer, 110-130. Routledge India, 2024.
38. Bibi, S. "Key Words: United States, China, Economic Rivalry, Impact on Pakistan's Economy and Future of Pakistan's Economy." *Global Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research* 2, no. 2 (2023): 1-15.
39. Hussain, R., M.S. Arshad, and F.Y. Awan. "America's 'Pivot to Asia' Policy: Implications for the Indo-Pacific Region." *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 7, no. 7 (2023): 82-96.
40. Fazal, I., W.A. Khan, and M.I. Ali. "Geo-Economic Benefits of the CPEC Project for Pakistan." *Pakistan Social Sciences Review* 7, no. 4 (2023): 573-589.
41. Ali, S., and S.K. Alqama. "Analyzing the Dynamics of the Deadly Embrace: A Study of Pakistan-US Relations from Cold War Alliances to Contemporary Challenges." *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 7, no. 2 (2023): 173-182.
42. Youhana, A. "A Critical Evaluation of the Evolving US-Pakistan Relations." *Pakistan Journal of American Studies* 41, no. 1 (2023): 100-119.