

# Pakistan's Foreign Policy: A Comparative Analysis of Isolation in the 1990s and the Contemporary Era

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## Abstract

*Pakistan's foreign policy during the 1990s navigated a complex global landscape marked by post-Cold War uncertainties and regional realignments, resulting in a degree of international isolation. This research examines this period, analyzing the factors contributing to this isolation, including strained relations with key partners, nuclear proliferation concerns, and domestic political instability. It then explores the resurgence of isolationary tendencies in the contemporary era, comparing and contrasting the current context with the 1990s. This analysis investigates whether similar factors are at play or if new dynamics, such as shifting geopolitical alliances and economic pressures, are driving Pakistan's current international position. The study aims to identify patterns and offer insights into the cyclical nature of isolation in Pakistan's foreign policy and its implications for its regional and global role.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Foreign Policy, Isolation, New World Order, Sanctions.

## Introduction

Pakistan's foreign policy has been a topic of much discussion and analysis, especially in recent times. The country has faced numerous challenges and conflicts on both regional and global levels, which have significantly shaped its foreign policy decisions. In this context, one key aspect that stands out is the issue of isolation. The 1990s saw Pakistan adopt an isolationist approach towards its foreign relations, while the contemporary era presents a dilemma for the country as it faces increasing isolation due to various factors. In the 1990s, Pakistan's foreign policy was heavily influenced by its strained relations with neighboring India and its ongoing internal conflicts. This led to a period of isolation for the country, as it faced international sanctions and isolation from the global community. However, the situation has changed significantly in the contemporary era, with Pakistan facing a different isolation dilemma.

This can be attributed to various factors, such as its tense relationship with the United States, growing tensions with India, and the country's struggle to fight against terrorism.

In this research paper, we will undertake a comparative analysis of the isolation faced by Pakistan in the 1990s and the current isolation tendencies in the contemporary era. It will explore the key factors that have contributed to this isolation, the consequences it has had on the country's foreign policy, and the strategies adopted by the government to overcome these challenges. Through this analysis, we aim to gain a better understanding of Pakistan's foreign policy and its position in the global arena.

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## Historical Context

In the 1990s, the President, Prime Minister, and Army Chief (musical chairs) molded the country's political landscape. The Prime Ministers remained in a squabble with the Presidents and Judiciary over the appointments of Army Chiefs and judges. Similarly, military leaders engineered the politics and judiciary, increasing civil-military conflicts on foreign policy and nuclear program. On the other hand, PML-N and PPP were engaged in counter-allegations of corruption and mismanagement against one another. All these developments deteriorated the political landscape and declined the country's prestige in the international community (Ziring, 1999).

The Foreign Policy of Pakistan in the 1990s was restructured in the paradigm of the New World Order. The collapse of the Union of Soviet Republics (USSR) in 1991 transformed the multi-polar world into a unipolar one. Now, the Capitalist-US remained the sole power in the world to redesign the order; as a result, the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) has become the core determinant of its policy under which Pakistan had faced sanctions for its nuclear program (Hussain, 2005). Seeming a paradigm shift in Western policies, Pakistan has contained policy options and engaged in regional politics with new Central Asian states (CARs). Similarly, the support of Taliban and Indian charges for infiltration in Kashmir provoked the West to keep Pakistan on a terrorist watch list. The relations of Pakistan with the international community reached its ebb when it conducted nuclear tests on 28 May 1998. The crisis of Kargil and then the Musharraf coup further increased diplomatic tensions and the dilemma of isolation (Amin, 2010).

Pakistan, regionally, too, is trapped in problems. The ties with India deteriorated over the issue of insurgency in Kashmir and the crisis of Kargil. Later in the 90s, Iran supported the Shias minority groups and Persian-speaking people in Afghanistan against the Pashtun Taliban. Thus, Iran has had grave differences with Pakistan in the support of Pashtun Taliban factions. In contrast, the role of Pakistan in the reconciliation of Afghan warlords and the then recognition of Mullah Omar's government came close to both countries (Bergen, 2001).

Pakistan did not remain the good books of the USSR due to befriending the US against their strategies. The US later alienated itself from Pakistan because it had no more strategic objectives in the region after the withdrawal of the USSR. Meanwhile, countries like Japan, Saudi Arabia, China, and UAE supported Pakistan when the global community tightened the sanctions after its nuclear tests. In brief, Pakistan's relations of Pakistan with its neighbors and the international community were strained, and it was struggling under the umbrella of embargoes during the decade of the 90s (Sattar, 2017).

## Shifts in Foreign Policy Paradigm

Pakistan's foreign policy has been strained in perplexity in the 90s, but few manipulated measures indicated its direction. Regardless of pressure from the US, European Union, United Nation's International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and India, Pakistan gave an emotional tit-for-tat response to its Indian counterpart by testing its nuclear arsenals (Farooq et al., 2016). In terms of Afghanistan, Pakistan considers a peaceful and stable Afghanistan beneficial to its interests. Consequently, it has tried to establish peace in Afghanistan, particularly during the rule of warlord groups, which was beneficial to the doctrine of Strategic Depth. This policy was reflected in the recognition of Mullah Omar's government in Kabul in 1996 (Ahmad, 2012, March). Throughout the 1990s, Kashmir was the primary objective of Pakistan's policy, which was reflected later in the Kargil episode. However, at the same time, late in the 90s, the government of Nawaz Sharif adopted the policy of befriending India. Pakistan's foreign embedded in the region instead of

focusing on the New World Order (NWO), which enclosed Pakistan in the perplexed dilemma, 2014)

As stated earlier, the containment and engagement of Pakistan in the regional issues curtailed the policy options to follow the New World Order. As a result, the policymakers failed to establish good relations with new Central Asian Republics (CARs) and reestablish cordial relations with the US (the sole hegemon of NWO). Furthermore, Pakistan was dragged into the terrorist sponsor states list by the West in the early 1990s due to the policy of infiltration of Mujahedeen into the valley of Kashmir and the support of the Taliban. In addition, Pakistan had also paid the cost in the shape of severe embargoes and termination of all kinds of aid due to the continuation of the nuclear program and the then 28 May tests. Therefore, this paradigm shift in the framework of policies isolated Pakistan globally (Amin, 2010).

In "Pakistan's foreign policy: an analytical study," Z.A. Bhutto evaluated the past when Pakistan was involved in bloc politics. It remained the core ally of the US after signing SEATO in February 1955 and the Baghdad Pact on 23 September, 1955-latter CENTO- against the USSR. However, in the 1960s, it succeeded in establishing balanced relations with three major powers of the world (the US, the USSR, and China. Nevertheless, the cut of US aid in 1974 and the USSR's support for the crisis of Bengal strained the country's balancing relations with the two big powers. The bloc politics once again transformed into wider conflict when the USSR assaulted Afghanistan in 1979 (Bhutto, 1996). In this scenario, Pakistan, which had tense relations with the US, now became the ally of the US against the USSR in Afghanistan; as a result, Pakistan received overwhelming military and economic aid. Meanwhile, the US had closed its eyes on the nuclear program.

In contrast, the decade of the '90s proved harsh in terms of foreign relations because the USSR no longer remained in Afghanistan; consequently, the objectives of the West ended in the region, and Pakistan lost its strategic importance for the West. Now, the West once again glanced at the nuclear program of Pakistan by imposing sanctions. Additionally, the NWO restructured the globe, but Pakistan did not follow the order timely and instead engaged in regional power dynamics with India (Khan, 2011).

### **Regional Dynamics**

The relations between India and Pakistan has remained unfriendly during 1990s. India accused Pakistan for supporting Lashkar-I-Tayyiba and Jash-I-Muhammad the organizations which penetrated Mujahedeen into the valley of Kashmir. In response to resistance in the valley, the Indian military officers has rethinking for air strikes on particular targets in Pakistan. This obfuscated policy of the ruling elite of Pakistan on Kashmir culminated in miscalculation of Kargil crisis; conversely, the global powers criticized Pakistan of misadventure. Similarly, India gained success on diplomatic front when Nawaz Sharif stated in London that, "the intruders are not in our control" (Chaudhry, 2008). The state of affairs with India escalated more when it conducted five nuclear experiments and issued the warning to Pakistan to 'realize the change in geo-strategic situation' and 'role back its anti-India policy; the then statement of Indian Home Minister that: "Pakistan should accept the new realities imposed by tests", and the Indian Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Madan Lal Khurana warning to Pakistan as, "to fix a time place where it wanted to fight the fourth round". Such an incredible statements and warnings from Indian counterparts had escalated the situation that jeopardized the security and stability of the region (Khan, 2017). On the other hand, the public, opposition, civil society, religious figures and few Islamic countries exerted pressure on the government of Nawaz Sharif to respond India.

Consequently, Pakistan on 28 of May 1998 gave an emotional respond with six nuclear experiments. In a statement Sharif insisted: "*Pakistan settled the score*". While in late 90s Nawaz Sharif adopted the policy of '*befriending India*' so for in this correlation the resumption of dialogue was a great play card on diplomatic front. Moreover, the Vajpayee-Nawaz negotiations on Wagah border, the initiation of bus service and Lahore summit were the gestures of friendliness that restored Pakistan's prestige internationally (Ahmad, 2017).

The civil war in early 1990s and then the rise of Taliban in 1996 in Afghanistan have jeopardized the security of the region. The Pakistan support for both Gulbadin Hikmatyar (leader of Pashtun group), and the late Mullah Omar administration deteriorated its relations with other regional states (Ahmad, 2012, March). Over these grounds India was of the view that the Afghan Mujahedeen under the nose of Pakistan infiltrated into Kashmir for the purpose of Jihad. Whereas Iran has also concerned related to Pakistan's support for Hikmatyar and latter Taliban against their Shia proxies. The CARs too, did not happy with the fundamentalist principles of Taliban. Equally Turkey, too, considered Taliban a threat to its secular democracy, and the Western states criticized Taliban for their harsh Islamic dogmas. Thus, Pakistan's support for Taliban dragged it into Isolation (Khan, 2011).

Apart from regional dynamics Pakistan had to take benefit from the ties with Islamic world because, the stability of Pakistan would be more influential and progressive in OIC. Furthermore, its nuclear arsenals, trained military and geo-strategic location would give it the leading role in Islamic coalition. Thus, none of the Islamic states excluding Iran have had resisted to Pakistan's policies with respect to Afghanistan or nuclear program. Nonetheless, after 28 May tests all the Gulf Nations including Iran came into the support of Pakistan (Khan, 2017). In crux, a balancing paradigm shift has seemed in relations to the gulf nations.

### **Global Diplomacy**

Haqqani (2010) and Haqani (2013) critically assessed the Pak-US ties in both of his books that Post-Cold World War, new paradigm shifts had been appeared in the US policies to South Asia and particularly to Pakistan. Analyzing the unilateral coercive sanctions of the US on the subject of nuclear proliferation, Pakistan was frankly impacted. For instance, the Pressler Amendment under which sanctions had been imposed over Pakistan in earlier 1990. To evaluate Pak-US ties in the decade of 90s, it was based on strategic interests which replicated in Brown Amendment passed in 1996 to eliminate some of strict rules from Pressler Amendment in terms of aid relaxation toward Pakistan. After Brown Amendment, once again Pakistan came under the umbrella of Glenn Amendment related to cut off aid to non-NTP countries those import nuclear apparatus or technology. In order to further eradicate the obstacles those restricted the Brown Amendment from implementation the US Senate in July 1997 had passed an alternate amendment to "*Foreign Operation Appropriations Bill*" (FOAB) known as Harkin Warner Amendment to preserve strategic interests in South Asia; consequently, the visits of several diplomats were scheduled. In addition to the above amendments, Symington Amendment approved in 1998 which also cut off aid to non-NTP countries tended to develop or import nuclear tools. The US-Pakistan ties touched the lowest ebb, when Al-Qaida in 1999 targeted the US consulates in South Africa, the US accused Taliban for providing safe heavens to Al-Qaida in Afghanistan; on the other hand, the US forced Pakistan to sever its ties with Taliban regime (Bergen, 2001). In nutshell, Pak-US relations in 1990s were restricted to strategic interest in South Asia.

Pakistan has also lost its strategic importance after Cold-World War, because it has no more ally of the US against USSR. While Pakistan has less room diplomatically in the unipolar world. The

relations between India-China, China Russia, and US-China have improved. Now, Pakistan desired to get benefits diplomatically of new dynamics and had have played trilateral card. For instance, it played China card against India by presenting a resolution over the issue of human rights violation in Indian held Kashmir in UN Human Rights Commission; however, China did not backed the resolution. It means Pakistan has failed on diplomatic front even to convince its reliable friend China (Sattar, 2017). This paradigm shift perplexed Pakistan in unipolar system of the world.

The relations in between Pakistan and international organizations have passed through dilemmas. When it conducted nuclear experiments in response to India, the global community cut off all aids and diplomatic activates with Pakistan, while the OIC came into support. In contrast, the UN, IAEA, World Bank, the Security Council, World Trade Organization (WTO) and Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) condemned the tests and suspended the economic, cultural, political, diplomatic missions and trade relations with Pakistan (Ali, 2014).

### **Determinants Contributing in Isolation in 1990s**

Safdar Mehmood, the writer of the book “Pakistan’s political roots and development” wrote as the politics and decision making in Pakistan were engineered by troika (the President, Prime Minister and Military leadership) during 1990s. Since clear rifts had been found on the domain of foreign policy among civil-military leadership of the country. In 1994 Benazir as Prime Minister cued green signal to Taliban to consolidate economy and security of their country. She replaced ISI Chief over the grounds of Afghan problem which angered military leadership. Thus, the government of Benazir Bhutto and military leadership were divided on the crisis of Afghanistan. On the other hand, the latter policy of Nawaz Sharif’s government of befriending India disliked by military Junta, because the Junta perceived that Nawaz Sharif ignored the issue of Kashmir in Lahore Summit. Therefore, to analyze the political landscape of Pakistan in term of foreign policy, there were misperceptions among political and military leaders over the issue of Kashmir, Afghanistan crisis and on nuclear program (Mehmmood, 2002).

Additionally, the economic difficulties for Pakistan had been increased due to continuity of its nuclear program. Despite of the US embargoes in earlier 1990, the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADP), World Trade Organization (WTO), international NGOs, the UN, European Union (EU) and other major powers of the world had too, cut off their aids and suspended trade with Pakistan as of its miscalculated nuclear tests. In this circumstances, only OIC states had supported Pakistan economically. Whereas the foreign debts and the amount of payment per annum had increased sharply day by day. The frozen of foreign reserves and accounts made Pakistan an incompetent for the world which discouraged direct foreign investment. The least but not last the political instability, fragile economy and bad governance had declined the morale and prestige of the country globally (Hussain, 2005).

In a research article published in *Pakistaniaat* titled “US Sanctions against Pakistan: Rational and Impact (1990-2001)” insisted that in 80s, the nuclear program of Pakistan was secured- however, the deterrence from Indian counterpart accelerate it. After the withdrawal of USSR, the US enclosed Pakistan in the packets of sanctioned laws which paved the way for the nuclear program. Bill Clinton urged on Pakistan to “roll back” their nuclear program without take into account the Indian nuclear program and its fabricated speculations regarding Comprehensive Nuclear-Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) (Anwar, 2013). On May of 11, 1998, India tested five nuclear arsenals and reiterated one more test on 13 May, which endangered the peace, security and stability of the region. India also warned Pakistan by delivering threats to Pakistan; for instance, Indian Home



Minister stated that: “Islamabad should realize the change in the geo-strategic situation in the region and the world; roll back its anti-India policy, especially with regard to Kashmir” (Chaudhry, 2008) these new developments restructured the power pattern and balance of power in between the two countries. Therefore, the horizon of Islamabad was in puzzlement as either “to test or not” or ‘to waste or to exploit’ the golden chance of “no or never”, but it was the question of morale and prestige. On the contrary, the Islamic world perceived Pakistan as a big brother who may lost its confidence or it may was the question of “Islamic bomb”. Whereas the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was aware of the emerging situation and on 18 of May he indicated a “*green signal*” to the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission (PAEC). On 28 May 1998 in the hills of Chagai, the PAEC had tested five designed nuclear explosives of various scales, subsequently on 30 May Pakistan tested its sixth explosive device. Thus, the horizon of Islamabad shocked the globe; while there was euphoria and confidence among the public of Pakistan, comment on the tests Nawaz Sharif said, “Pakistan settled the score”. Although, the Islamic world applauded for the big brother. (Sattar, 2017) Aftermath of the tests the “UN security council resolution 1172” had indicated showed deep concern by reiterating on denuclearization, avoidance of nuclear hardware, weaponization and stop the development of ballistic missiles that may destabilize the entire global community. The resolution also urged on Pak-India dialogue on the issue of Kashmir. The UN considered the problem a threat to global peace and security, because any miscalculation among both countries can jeopardized the humanity of the world. (Khan, 2011)

### **Responses and Adaptations**

In Journal of Diplomatic Studies, “the impact of isolation on Pakistan’s foreign policy in the 1990s” evaluate the Pakistan policymakers struggled to effectively navigate the changes in their international relations during 1990s (Mehmmod, 2013). Firstly, it had failed to convince US about the continuation of the nuclear program, culminated in severe economic and military implications. Secondly, Pakistan’s Afghan policy failed, because the status of frontline given to it was solely for the peaceful resolution of conflict instead of it opposed the pro-communist regime of Najibullah in Afghanistan that exposed Pakistan’s confused policy toward Afghanistan. In Cold World War Pakistan established nexuses with Hekmatyar; but in the NWO the nexuses remained irrelevant because, Hekmatyar did not fulfill Pakistan’s objectives in Afghanistan. Thirdly, a major blow to Pakistan’s foreign policy had seemed when US extended support to India and negotiated over joint naval training in the Indian Ocean which sabotaged Pak-American ties; however, Pakistan had succeeded in attaining US acknowledgment on Kashmir dispute (Ali, 2014). Meanwhile the Indian hegemony and interference in South Asia also disappointed Pakistan in the region. In addition, Pakistan was putted in terrorist watch list over the allegation of infiltration of Afghan Mujahedeen in the valley of Kashmir, it was a new constrain which declined its prestige internationally. Another dilemma with India on diplomatic front was the war of Kargil. In the battle field Indian counterpart performed desperately, but succeeded diplomatically in the spreading of propaganda by isolating Pakistan internationally. The government of Pakistan in order to convince the public insisted delusively that the world was with us, the US and G-8 states also blamed Pakistan for violation of Line of Control (LOC) through “sending intruders”. Similarly, Pakistan claimed the assistance of Chinese during the war of Kargil, but in reality China adopted the policy of non-interference (Memoon, 2014). The only platform backed Pakistan in the grave circumstances was OIC. After serious tensions with India our political decision makers proceeded toward normalization and adopted the policy of befriending India at the end of 1990s;

however failed due to Musharraf Coup. In crux, the foreign policy of Pakistan was enclosed in the security of the region amid NWO (Amin, 2010).

Apart from contained foreign policy strategies and options an efforts had been done from Pakistani side to the peaceful resolution of Kashmir dispute which was echoed in US acknowledgment of Kashmir as a disputed area between India and Pakistan. In connection to Afghanistan, Pakistan under power sharing agreement united all the seven factions of Mujahedeen to end the civil war among them. Obviously, it was the good step taken by Pakistan for the peace and stability of Afghanistan. To ease tensions with Indian counterpart and to resolve all disputes with India peacefully, Pakistan extended hands to befriend India, this goodwill gesture culminated over the visit of A.B Vajphayee to Lahore and on the resumption of bus survives between both states. Pakistan also expressed its desire for signing Criminal Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) for the security and stability of the region over the prerequisite that India should also be agreed upon the treaties (Sattar, 2017).

### **Review of Isolation in the 1990s and Isolationary Tendencies in Contemporary Era**

In The EurAsian Time's report what is occurring today is rooted in history. For instance, how the India and Pakistan conducted retaliatory air strikes in each other territories in February 2019 and then how on 5<sup>th</sup> of August 2019, the government of India has suspended the article 370 of the constitution which granted a special status to Kashmir as a global disputed area (The EurAsian Times, 2020). To analyze the subject of retaliatory strikes, the question of diplomacy is bear in mind. Because both acts committed by India unilaterally, but the international community including UN and our trustworthy friends' i-e, China and Saudi Arabia emphasized on restraint instead to condemn the Indian counterpart for an act of first aggression in Balakot. It highlights how the civil-military leadership has failed in establishing good relations with other states (Nabeel, 2014).

The issue of Kashmir had been adopted the status of flashpoint during 1990s; however, at least its constitutional status was maintained. In past the dispute endangered the security dilemma for both India and Pakistan than ever today. This present situation shows how the lobby and diplomacy of Pakistan has been failing in convincing global stakeholders about the termination of article 370 on the subject of Kashmir by India. (Notezai, 2021)

Government of Pakistan, in Pakistan's Foreign Policy stated; Pakistan regards China as the most dependable and trustworthy friend. The policy makers of Pakistan quoted to Pak-China friendship as "all weather friendship", sometimes the civil-military leadership of Pakistan cite the friendship with China "deeper than sea, sweeter than honey and higher than the mountains of Himalayas". (Government of Pakistan, 2003). But the question is; does China has the same opinion and trust on Pakistan blindly, the way Pakistani elites perceive? To understand the question let's think for a while on the war of Kargil; how the ruling elite of Pakistan had deceived their public in a statements that China was with us? In reality the government of China urged on both India and Pakistan to draw back their forces to original position. Now let's observe carefully the stance of China's foreign ministry on the airstrikes committed by India in Balakot in February 2019. It stated "we hope that both India and Pakistan can exercise restraint and adopt actions that will help stabilize the situation in the region and improve mutual relations". The Diplomat, a magazine for Asia-Pacific reported in an article, "what happened to China Pakistan economic corridor?" that China has deep concerns on the attacks on its consulates, workers and Engineers working in CPEC or other projects. The report elaborates that it is known to every stakeholder that the attacks are committed by separatist group Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) in Pakistan. Therefore, due to lack

of proper security and instability the country has lost the trust and confidence of China. The phenomena of lack of trust portrays in the incident of killing of five Chinese engineers worked in Dasu dam project in Shangla in March 2024. Similarly in response to attack China sent their own investigation team to inspect the crux of the incident. It portrays the lack of trust over the investigation capacity of law enforcement agencies of Pakistan. Aftermath the Chinese companies' suspended civil works in all dams and hydropower projects in Pakistan (Notezai, 2021).

In United States Institute of Peace's report "the current situation of Pakistan", analyze the failure of state institutions to ensure peace and stability that driven the public to extremism as an alternative. The country saw political calm from 2013-18, although, deep polarization has seemed before to prepare for next election of 2023. Alongside, the economy of the country has been on the brink of collapse. Regionally the relations with India has been deteriorating despite of ceasefire agreement in 2021 on LOC. The country has also been facing the resurgences of extremism and militancy along Durand Line with Afghanistan, which has intensified its relations with Taliban-led government. China as a key stakeholder and major ally of Pakistan in the region has have the potential to ameliorate the unrest in the region. (United States Institute of Peace, 2023).

Another contemporary issue of the day is the economic crisis facing by the country. Perhaps the current dynamics are different than that of 1990s, but, as mentioned earlier, there were severe economic sanctions on Pakistan, however, presently the country's economy is declining day by day without having any foreign embargoes.

The Human Right Watch in 'crisis of impunity-Pakistan's support for Taliban' the Pakistan Afghan policy had failed in 90s without getting a positive outcome (Human Rights, 1998). Presently, after Taliban's takeover of Kabul since 15 of August 2021, Pakistan expected the same what had been expected in 90s, but, once again the diplomacy and strategies have been failing miserably in getting its strategic objectives. Both political and military leadership of Pakistan have been optimistic over the triumph of Taliban in 2021, but the leadership of Taliban proved that they have no longer remained the good boys of Pakistani elites, what they had been perceived about them in previous decades. Since again the policies of Pakistani to Afghanistan is at sixes and sevens by repeating the same slip-ups.

In the 1990s OIC, the sole platform stood with Pakistan at the times of complications by supporting the country economically and diplomatically (Sattar, 2017). Currently on account of weak militaristic-engineered diplomacy and politics it has lost the significance of the forum. The outcome has observed in the OIC neutrality on Kashmir after India suspended article 370. Furthermore, the strategic engagement of Saudi Arabia and King Salam's visits to India too rises the sign of interrogation over lobby and diplomacy of Pakistan toward Islamic States.

(Rizvi, 2005) in Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Challenges in 21st Century elaborated that in 1990s Iran whom Pakistan has had tense relations in early 90s, but later supported Pakistan's nuclear tests. In contemporary era, Iran-likewise in earlier 90s- has been adopted hostile attitude toward Pakistan. Iran charge Pakistan for backing Jaish-al-Adal, a Sunni anti-Iranian organization based in Baluchistan. Though, Pakistan balanced the allegation and made Iran responsible for supporting Baloch Liberation Army (BLA) settled inside Iran. Thus, the counter allegations provoked both the countries into retaliatory strikes against in each other territories in January of 2024, finally it culminated over the suspension of diplomatic relations temporarily (Nabeel, 2024).

Akbar (2017) in "correct narrative on pressler" evaluate Pakistan's foreign policy critically in the light of famous quotation that "What we learn from history that we do not learn from history",



so, unlike that of 90s in which Pakistan had to face the US sanctions for the continuation of its nuclear program. The current situation does not look like that. Nevertheless, Pakistan once again lose the strategic importance as a “front line state” against war on terror after the withdrawal of US from Afghanistan. Now the dynamics of US policy is changed and it looks the partnership with Pakistan in the paradigm of Pak-China nexuses; Pak-Taliban nexuses; and its role in bloc politics over the crisis of Ukraine by keeping in view the Pak-Russian strategic partnership.

Unlike 90s, Pakistan, does not has ideal relationship with OIC states, for instance, after August 5<sup>th</sup> unilateral act of India and the neutral position of OIC states indicates their policies shift toward Pakistan. Likewise the rifts in our military and political leadership on the problem of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) have caused setbacks to unite OIC states and Gulf nations on the issue. On diplomatic front it seems like Pakistan trapped again in bloc politics, because its difficulties in balancing relationship with Russia and US on Ukraine war and the then contradictions among political and military leadership over the Ukrainian dilemma shows bewilder policies. It is the sign of interrogation on the civil-military relationship (Khan, 2020).

The morale and prestige of the country is diminishing day by day, same like 90s. For example, it seems in the contemporary era that the political elites are squabbling for power, they are charging each other over corruption, maladministration and mismanaging same like that was in 1990s. It caused the severe polarization in the society which makes the public violent an alternative to peace and stability. Another example is the inclusion of Pakistan in Financial Action Task Force’s (FATF) “grey list” in 2018 for sponsoring terrorism in the region which absolutely exposed the strategic objectives and worse policies of Pakistan in the region (FATF, 2022). Additionally, the failure of our civil-military leadership and democratic institutions to ensure peace, stability and consolidate the economy has not only affected the foreign investment; but also the country’s close friends-UAE, Saudi Arabia and China- have lost their confidence over the fragile polices. (The World Bank, 2024) evaluate the financial condition provided insight together with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is providing loan over strict prerequisites which frankly effected the public and society. So, to analyze comparatively the isolative perspective in the period from 1990 to 1999, and the then isolationary tendencies in the contemporary era, it would not be incorrect to summarize that Pakistan is facing the same challenges of Isolation, as in 1990s (Siddiqui, 2019).

## Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Pakistan’s foreign policy in the 1990s and the contemporary era reveals significant shifts in the nature and implications of isolation. In 1990s, Pakistan’s isolation was largely a consequence of its nuclear program, strained relations with major powers, and the fallout from Afghan jihad. This period was marked by economic sanctions, diplomatic marginalization, and a reliance on asymmetric strategies to maintain regional relevance. In contrast, contemporary isolation tendencies stem from a complex interplay of domestic instability, geopolitical realignments, and the challenges of navigating a multi polar world order. While the 1990s isolation was externally imposed, the current era portrays of self-imposed policies and external pressure particularly due to Pakistan’s ambiguous stance on issue like counter terrorism and US-China rivalry.

In international relations there is no permanent foes or permanent friends but permanent interest prevails. Therefore, Pakistan should correct there narrative to balance its relationships in the region. China a key player in the region has have the potential to engage Pakistan and ameliorate the situation. The policy makers need to formulate such strategies which minimize their

interdependency on global powers and determine long term objectives in the best national interests of the country.

In order to correct the scope of diplomacy and foreign policy, the country's policy and decision makers should have to articulate the post-modern and pragmatic way of tendencies in their geostrategic, geopolitical, and geo-economics approaches instead in trapping any more in regional security dilemmas or in bloc politics.

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