# Pakistan's foreign policy: determinants, phases from 1947 and current challenges

The determinants give you the analytical frame, the phases the chronology, the bilateral and multilateral sections the evidence, and the evaluation section the judgements that lift an answer to high marks.

## 1. Objectives and determinants

### 1.1 What foreign policy is

> **Foreign policy** is the sum of the principles, decisions and actions by which a state pursues its national interests in its relations with other states and international organisations. It is shaped by factors inside the state (geography, economy, ideology, leadership) and outside it (the structure of the international system and the behaviour of other powers).

In a broadcast to the American people in February 1948 the Quaid-i-Azam said that Pakistan's foreign policy would be one of friendliness and goodwill towards all nations, with no aggressive designs against any country, and support for the United Nations Charter. Two themes in that statement still run through the policy: peace with neighbours as an aspiration and the UN as the preferred forum for disputes.

### 1.2 Core objectives

1. **Sovereignty and territorial integrity**, which in practice has meant security against India since the first Kashmir war of 1947-48.
2. **Kashmir**: self-determination for the people of Jammu and Kashmir under the UN Security Council resolutions of 1948 and 1949.
3. **Economic development**: aid, loans, markets, investment and remittances; since the 2022 National Security Policy this is officially framed as geo-economics.
4. **Solidarity with the Muslim world**, which Article 40 of the 1973 Constitution lists as a principle of policy.
5. **A credible nuclear deterrent** and resistance to a regional order dominated by India.
6. **Good neighbourly relations** and the image of a responsible state in multilateral forums.

### 1.3 Geography

Pakistan sits at the junction of South Asia, Central Asia, West Asia and China, bordering India, Afghanistan (along the Durand Line of 1893), Iran and China, with roughly 1,000 km of Arabian Sea coast close to the Strait of Hormuz. The consequences:

- A permanent two-front problem: a hostile India to the east and an unsettled Afghanistan to the west.
- Strategic value to outside powers: the United States in the Cold War and the war on terror; China today through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and Gwadar, a route to the



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sea that bypasses the Strait of Malacca.

- Transit potential: the shortest route to warm water for Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- Water dependence on rivers that enter from Indian-administered territory, which made the Indus Waters Treaty of 1960 a security document.

### 1.4 Security

Pakistan was born vulnerable: a larger hostile neighbour, an unresolved Kashmir dispute, a small share of the colonial military stores, and a western border that Afghanistan rejected (it cast the only vote against Pakistan's UN admission in 1947). Security has therefore been the largest determinant: it explains the alliances of the 1950s, the China opening of the 1960s, the nuclear programme after 1971 and 1974, and the preference for a friendly government in Kabul. Critics call this a security-first policy that has starved economic diplomacy; defenders reply that a state that has fought four wars with its neighbour has had no choice.

### 1.5 Economy

A weak economy narrows choices. Pakistan has entered more than twenty IMF programmes since 1958, relies on remittances from Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, and has depended on American aid whenever it was strategically useful and on China and the Gulf when it was not. The economy both drives policy (the search for aid, markets, investment and GSP+ access to the European Union) and limits it: a state that needs a rollover of deposits from Riyadh or Beijing cannot easily say no to either.

### 1.6 Ideology

Pakistan was created as a homeland for the Muslims of South Asia, and the Objectives Resolution of 1949 and the 1973 Constitution give the state an Islamic identity. In foreign policy this has meant support for Palestine and non-recognition of Israel, founding membership of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in 1969, close ties with Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran, and the framing of the Afghan resistance as jihad. Ideology also constrains: it rules out Israel and complicates neutrality between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

### 1.7 Leadership and institutions

Leaders matter in a state with weak institutions: Liaquat Ali Khan chose Washington over Moscow in 1950, Ayub Khan signed the alliances and then opened to China, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto built the Islamic orientation and launched the nuclear programme, Zia ul Haq committed Pakistan to the Afghan jihad, and Pervez Musharraf reversed the Taliban policy after 11 September 2001. The military has had a decisive voice on India, Afghanistan, the nuclear programme and the United States throughout; parliament, the Foreign Office, parties, the religious lobby and public opinion are the other inputs.

### 1.8 The international system

Bipolarity pushed Pakistan into the Western camp; unipolarity after 1991 left it sanctioned until 2001 made it useful again; today's multipolar drift gives it more room to manoeuvre and more risk of being caught between camps.

> **Worked example: using the determinants.** Question: "Security, not ideology, has been the main determinant of Pakistan's foreign policy. Discuss." Plan: (1) define determinants; (2) show security at work in each phase (alliances 1954, China 1963, the bomb 1972-98, Afghan policy 1979 and 1994-2001); (3) show ideology at work (OIC, Palestine, Lahore 1974, the framing of the Afghan



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jihad) but argue that it either coincided with security or was subordinated to it, for example parliament's refusal to send troops to Yemen in 2015; (4) conclude that security has been primary, ideology the language, and the economy is now challenging both. Definition, thesis, evidence for, evidence against, weighed conclusion: that structure earns the analysis marks.

## 2. Phase 1 (1947-1958): from neutrality to alliances

### 2.1 The early choice

Pakistan joined the UN in September 1947; India referred Kashmir to the Security Council on 1 January 1948 and Pakistan filed its own complaint later that month. The UN Commission for India and Pakistan (UNCIP) resolutions of 13 August 1948 and 5 January 1949 called for a ceasefire, withdrawal of forces and a plebiscite; the ceasefire took effect on 1 January 1949, the plebiscite was never held, and the search for a backer on Kashmir became a driver of alignment.

Liaquat Ali Khan received an invitation to Moscow in 1949 but visited Washington in May 1950. The commonly taught reasons: the United States could offer aid that the Soviet Union could not, India under Nehru was already leaning towards non-alignment and Moscow, and Pakistan's leadership was uncomfortable with communism.

### 2.2 The alliance decade

| Date | Agreement | What it did |
|---|---|---|
| May 1954 | Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement with the United States | Opened the flow of US military aid and advisers |
| September 1954 | South-East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), Manila Pact | Collective defence against communist expansion; Pakistan was the only South Asian member |
| September 1955 | Baghdad Pact (Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, United Kingdom) | Northern-tier barrier against the Soviet Union; renamed the Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) in 1959 after Iraq left |
| March 1959 | Bilateral Agreement of Cooperation with the United States | US commitment to assist Pakistan against communist aggression |

The gains: roughly 1.5 billion US dollars of military and economic aid between 1954 and 1965 (figures vary by source), modernised armed forces and a seat at the Western table. The costs: the pacts were aimed at communism, not India, so gave nothing on Kashmir; they cost Pakistan the goodwill of the Soviet Union, which from 1957 vetoed Kashmir resolutions, and of the non-aligned world. India won Soviet support without any alliance.

**Definition to learn: the northern tier.** The American concept in the 1950s of a line of pro-Western states (Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan) along the southern border of the Soviet Union to contain Soviet expansion towards the Gulf and the Indian Ocean. The Baghdad Pact of 1955 was its institutional form.



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## 3. Phase 2 (1958-1971): strained alliances, the China opening and two wars

### 3.1 Ayub Khan and the limits of alliance

Ayub Khan's government (1958-1969) began as the most pro-American in Pakistan's history, allowing a US base at Badaber near Peshawar from which the U-2 shot down over the Soviet Union in May 1960 had flown. The Indus Waters Treaty, brokered by the World Bank and signed on 19 September 1960, was the one durable agreement with India from this period.

The turning point was the Sino-Indian war of October 1962, after which the United States and Britain rushed arms to India with no condition on Kashmir. Pakistan concluded that its alliance did not protect its core interest and diversified: the Sino-Pakistan boundary agreement of 2 March 1963 settled the Karakoram border, air links with China opened in 1964 and the Karakoram Highway was built between the mid-1960s and 1978. Ayub's book *Friends Not Masters* (1967) summarised the disillusionment.

### 3.2 The 1965 war

After skirmishes in the Rann of Kutch in April 1965, Pakistan launched Operation Gibraltar in Kashmir in August, India crossed the international border on 6 September, and war lasted until the ceasefire of 23 September. The United States embargoed arms to both sides, which hurt Pakistan far more because its forces were American equipped. The Soviet Union brokered the Tashkent Declaration of 10 January 1966, restoring pre-war positions. Lessons the state drew: the Western alliances were worthless in a war with India, China was the dependable friend, and the Soviet Union could be a mediator.

### 3.3 The 1971 war

The East Pakistan crisis was primarily a domestic failure, but its foreign dimension matters. India signed a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union in August 1971, securing a Soviet veto and Soviet arms. Pakistan had in July 1971 provided the channel for Henry Kissinger's secret visit to Beijing, which produced the American "tilt" in December, including the USS Enterprise task force in the Bay of Bengal, but no military help; China gave diplomatic support only. The war of 3-16 December 1971 ended with the surrender at Dhaka, the creation of Bangladesh and about 90,000 prisoners of war. Pakistan left the Commonwealth in January 1972 and SEATO in November 1972.

## 4. Phase 3 (1971-1979): Bhutto's bilateralism and the Islamic world

> **Definition to learn: bilateralism.** Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's policy of dealing with each major power on its own terms rather than through alliance blocs, so that relations with the United States, the Soviet Union and China could improve at the same time and no single patron could dictate policy.

### 4.1 Simla and the Islamic turn

The Simla Agreement of 2 July 1972 between Bhutto and Indira Gandhi secured the return of prisoners and territory, converted the Kashmir ceasefire line into the Line of Control, and committed both sides to settle disputes bilaterally and peacefully. India reads the bilateral clause as excluding third-party mediation; Pakistan reads it as not superseding the UN resolutions. Pakistan recognised Bangladesh



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in February 1974, on the eve of the second OIC summit at Lahore, attended by King Faisal, Anwar Sadat, Muammar Gaddafi and Yasser Arafat. The 1973 oil boom created the Gulf labour market that still provides most remittances, and Pakistani troops went to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf. Pakistan joined the Non-Aligned Movement in 1979 after CENTO dissolved.

### 4.2 The nuclear decision

Bhutto called the Multan meeting of scientists in January 1972 and, after India's "peaceful nuclear explosion" at Pokhran on 18 May 1974, made the bomb a national priority. Enrichment at Kahuta began under Abdul Qadeer Khan in 1976. The United States pressed France to cancel a reprocessing plant sale (1978) and passed the Symington Amendment of 1976, under which aid was cut in April 1979. The nuclear question has been the main irritant with Washington whenever Pakistan was not indispensable.

## 5. Phase 4 (1979-1989): the Afghan jihad

### 5.1 The Soviet invasion and the response

The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan on 24-27 December 1979. For Pakistan this meant Soviet forces on the Durand Line, a fear of encirclement with India, and a refugee flow that exceeded three million by the mid-1980s. Zia ul Haq chose to resist: Pakistan hosted and armed the mujahideen through the Inter-Services Intelligence, with the United States, Saudi Arabia, China and others supplying money and weapons. Zia dismissed President Carter's offer of 400 million dollars in 1980 as "peanuts"; the Reagan administration agreed a 3.2 billion dollar six-year package in 1981, including F-16 aircraft, and a second package of around 4 billion dollars in 1986. Pakistan became the "front-line state", and the nuclear programme was tolerated: the Pressler Amendment of 1985 required an annual presidential certification that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear device, and presidents certified every year while the war lasted.

### 5.2 Outcomes

The Geneva Accords of 14 April 1988, signed by Pakistan and Afghanistan with the superpowers as guarantors, set the timetable for Soviet withdrawal, completed on 15 February 1989. The gains: a superpower reversed on the border, a decade of aid and a rehabilitated military. The costs: a "Kalashnikov culture" of weapons and heroin, armed groups and madrasas that later turned on the state, sectarian violence funded from the Gulf and Iran, a permanent refugee presence and an unresolved Afghan civil war. Zia died in an air crash on 17 August 1988; in October 1990 the United States invoked Pressler and cut off aid, confirming the pattern of engagement when useful and abandonment afterwards.

## 6. Phase 5 (1990-2001): the nuclear decade and isolation

### 6.1 Sanctions, the Taliban and the tests

With the Cold War over, Pakistan lost its strategic value. Pressler sanctions blocked delivery of F-16s already paid for; the Brown Amendment of 1995 gave partial relief. Pakistan backed the Taliban from 1994 as a force that could end the Afghan civil war, provide a friendly government and open a trade route to Central Asia, and was one of only three states (with Saudi Arabia and the UAE) to recognise their government in 1997. This entrenched the idea of "strategic depth" but tied Pakistan to a regime



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that sheltered al-Qaeda.

India tested on 11 and 13 May 1998; Pakistan responded at Chagai on 28 and 30 May despite heavy American pressure and certain sanctions. Deterrence was now overt. The Lahore Declaration of 21 February 1999, after Vajpayee's bus journey, promised confidence-building measures, but the Kargil conflict of May-July 1999 ended that opening; Nawaz Sharif's meeting with President Clinton on 4 July 1999 produced a withdrawal to the Line of Control. The Musharraf coup of 12 October 1999 brought Commonwealth suspension, and the Agra summit of July 2001 failed.

> **Definition to learn: minimum credible deterrence.** Pakistan's declared nuclear doctrine: a force large and survivable enough to make any Indian attack irrational, without an arms race, and with no "no first use" pledge because Pakistan reserves the nuclear option against a conventional defeat. Since 2013 the term "full spectrum deterrence" covers short-range weapons against a limited Indian conventional strike.

## 7. Phase 6 (2001-2013): the front-line state after 9/11

### 7.1 Musharraf's choice

Within days of 11 September 2001 Pakistan accepted American demands for intelligence, air space, logistics and an end to support for the Taliban; Musharraf's speech of 19 September justified the reversal by the need to protect the nuclear programme, the Kashmir cause and the economy. Sanctions were lifted, debt rescheduled, Coalition Support Funds paid for military operations, and Pakistan was named a major non-NATO ally in 2004; US assistance since 2002 is commonly put at over 30 billion dollars. The Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act of 2009 promised 7.5 billion dollars of civilian aid over five years, with conditions the military resented.

### 7.2 India and the costs of the war

The attack on the Indian parliament in December 2001 produced a ten-month stand-off in 2002. A Line of Control ceasefire in November 2003 led to the Composite Dialogue from 2004, which came close to a Kashmir formula by 2007; the Mumbai attacks of 26 November 2008 froze it.

The war came home: the Pakistani Taliban (TTP) formed in 2007, suicide bombings multiplied after the Lal Masjid operation of July 2007, and drone strikes became a public grievance. Trust with Washington collapsed in 2011: the Raymond Davis affair in January, the Abbottabad raid of 2 May that killed Osama bin Laden without Pakistani knowledge, and the Salala attack of 26 November, in which NATO fire killed 24 Pakistani soldiers and led Pakistan to close the NATO supply routes until July 2012. Pakistan puts the economic cost of the war above 120 billion dollars, with tens of thousands of lives lost.

## 8. Phase 7 (2013-2021): the CPEC era

### 8.1 Pivot to China, friction with America

President Xi Jinping's visit in April 2015 launched CPEC as a flagship of the Belt and Road Initiative, with an initial 46 billion dollars that later grew to about 62 billion. The first phase built power plants that ended the worst electricity shortages, motorways and the Gwadar port. The relationship was named an "all-weather strategic cooperative partnership", and Pakistan became a full member of the Shanghai



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Cooperation Organisation in June 2017, alongside India.

Operation Zarb-e-Azb from June 2014 and the National Action Plan after the Army Public School attack of December 2014 cut terrorism sharply. Relations with Washington declined: President Trump's South Asia strategy of August 2017 accused Pakistan of harbouring militants and security assistance was suspended in January 2018, while the Financial Action Task Force grey-listed Pakistan from June 2018 to October 2022. Yet Pakistan was indispensable to the US-Taliban talks that produced the Doha Agreement of 29 February 2020.

### 8.2 India after Pulwama

The Uri attack of September 2016 and India's claimed "surgical strikes", then the Pulwama attack of 14 February 2019 and India's Balakot air strike of 26 February, followed by Pakistan's response and the capture and return of an Indian pilot, showed that nuclear deterrence does not prevent limited strikes. India withdrew Pakistan's most favoured nation status and on 5 August 2019 revoked the special status of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370. Pakistan downgraded relations and suspended trade; the Kartarpur corridor opened in November 2019, and the Line of Control ceasefire was reaffirmed in February 2021.

## 9. Phase 8 (2021 to the present): post-American Afghanistan, geo-economics and the 2025 crisis

### 9.1 The Taliban return

The Taliban took Kabul on 15 August 2021. Pakistan expected a friendly government; instead the TTP, sheltered across the border, escalated attacks, and the Taliban refused to recognise the Durand Line or act against it. Pakistan responded with the repatriation plan for undocumented Afghans announced in October 2023, repeated border closures and, in 2024, air strikes inside Afghanistan. Strategic depth has become a strategic liability.

### 9.2 Geo-economics and hedging

The National Security Policy of January 2022, the first to be published, declared economic security the core of national security. In practice this has meant the Special Investment Facilitation Council (2023) to court Gulf and Chinese investment, repeated IMF programmes, deposits from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, China and Qatar, discounted Russian crude from 2023, and abstentions at the UN on Ukraine. Pakistan's 2025-26 Security Council term, its eighth, gave it a platform.

### 9.3 The 2025 India-Pakistan conflict and the Gulf pact

After the attack on tourists at Pahalgam on 22 April 2025, India held the Indus Waters Treaty "in abeyance" and closed the border; Pakistan suspended the Simla Agreement and warned that stopping water would be treated as an act of war. On 7 May India struck targets in Pakistan and Pakistani-administered Kashmir, and four days of missile, drone and air exchanges followed before a ceasefire on 10 May, which the United States claimed to have brokered and India described as bilateral. The crisis confirmed that the Line of Control is no longer the only front, that water has become a weapon, and that great-power mediation remains a Pakistani objective that India rejects; it was followed by a visible warming with Washington. In September 2025 Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signed a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement under which aggression against either is treated as aggression against both, formalising a relationship that dates from the 1951 Treaty of Friendship and the 1982 protocol on



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stationing Pakistani troops in the Kingdom.

## 10. Bilateral relations

### 10.1 India

The relationship is defined by the Partition disputes (Kashmir, water, assets, minorities), four wars (1947-48, 1965, 1971, 1999) and the 2025 conflict, the nuclear balance since 1998, and India's growing weight. Every dialogue (Simla 1972, Lahore 1999, the Composite Dialogue 2004-08, back-channels in 2021) has been ended by a militant attack (Mumbai 2008, Pathankot 2016, Pulwama 2019, Pahalgam 2025). Pakistan holds that Kashmir is a disputed territory awaiting self-determination; India since 2019 holds that only the Pakistani-administered part remains to be discussed. Trade is a fraction of its potential, SAARC is paralysed and the water treaty is contested. The structural problem is asymmetry: India can afford not to talk; Pakistan cannot afford not to deter.

### 10.2 China

Pakistan recognised the People's Republic in January 1950, settled the border in 1963, bridged the US-China opening in 1971 and has received Chinese support on Kashmir, in the nuclear and missile programmes, in defence production (JF-17 fighters, submarines, frigates) and in the Security Council. China is Pakistan's largest arms supplier and bilateral creditor. The frictions are the slow second phase of CPEC, attacks on Chinese nationals (Dasu 2021, Karachi 2022, Besham 2024), debts to Chinese power producers, and Pakistan's wish not to choose between Beijing and Washington. China has never fought for Pakistan and never promised to: the relationship is strategic, not a defence pact.

### 10.3 United States

The relationship has run in cycles: alliance (1954-65), estrangement (1965-79), partnership (1979-90), sanctions (1990-2001), partnership (2001-11), suspicion (2011-21), neglect (2021-24) and a renewed opening in 2025. Each cycle followed a change in American strategic need, not in Pakistani behaviour. The constant disputes have been nuclear proliferation, India (now an American partner against China), Afghanistan and terrorism; the constant assets have been Pakistan's location, its army and its usefulness as a channel. Pakistan now seeks a relationship not routed through Afghanistan or India.

### 10.4 Afghanistan

Afghanistan has never accepted the Durand Line, pursued the Pashtunistan claim in the 1950s and 1960s (the border was closed from 1961 to 1963), and has been close to India in every period except Taliban rule. Pakistan in turn hosted the mujahideen, backed the Taliban in the 1990s and tolerated them after 2001. Since 2021 the TTP dominates, with transit trade, refugees and recognition as the other items; options range from pressure (closures, deportations, strikes) to engagement (trade, recognition in step with others, regional formats).

### 10.5 Iran

Iran was the first state to recognise Pakistan, supported it in 1965 and 1971, and was a partner in the Regional Cooperation for Development (1964), which became the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) in 1985. After the 1979 revolution relations cooled over sectarian conflict, Afghanistan (Iran backed the Northern Alliance, Pakistan the Taliban) and Pakistan's closeness to Saudi Arabia and the United States. The gas pipeline agreed in 2010 is unfinished on the Pakistani side because of US sanctions. In January 2024 the two states exchanged missile strikes on militant targets, then restored



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relations within weeks; the Chabahar-Gwadar rivalry and the Baloch insurgency on both sides keep the relationship cautious but never hostile.

### 10.6 Saudi Arabia and the Gulf

Saudi Arabia is Pakistan's largest source of remittances, a lender of last resort and a co-sponsor of the Afghan jihad. Pakistan has trained and stationed troops in the Kingdom since the 1960s, and a former army chief led the Saudi-based Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition from 2017. Parliament's 2015 refusal to send troops to Yemen strained relations; the 2025 defence agreement repaired and deepened them. The UAE is the second largest remittance source and Qatar supplies LNG. The constraints: the Gulf has invested heavily in India, is normalising with Israel, and expects Pakistan's security services in return for its money.

### 10.7 Russia

Relations were damaged by the 1950s alliances, the U-2 affair, Soviet vetoes on Kashmir, the 1971 treaty with India and the Afghan war, though Moscow built the Karachi steel mill and mediated at Tashkent. After 2014 Russia lifted its arms embargo, sold Mi-35 helicopters, began annual Druzhba exercises and agreed the North-South gas pipeline; Imran Khan's visit on 24 February 2022 coincided with the invasion of Ukraine. Pakistan buys discounted Russian oil and cooperates in the SCO, but Russia's partnership with India and Pakistan's dependence on Western markets limit how far this can go.

### 10.8 European Union

The EU is one of Pakistan's largest export markets, mainly for textiles, and since January 2014 Pakistan has had duty-free access under GSP+, conditional on implementing 27 conventions on human rights, labour, environment and governance. The Strategic Engagement Plan of 2019 covers trade, migration, security and climate; European governments also matter in the FATF, the IMF and the Security Council.

## 11. Multilateral forums

### 11.1 United Nations

Pakistan has argued its Kashmir case in the Security Council since 1948 and still cites the UNCIP resolutions. It is one of the largest contributors of troops to UN peacekeeping (more than 200,000 personnel since 1960), has served eight terms on the Security Council, most recently 2025-26, and uses the General Assembly for Kashmir, Palestine and Islamophobia. It is outside the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and opposes the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty in its current form.

### 11.2 Organisation of Islamic Cooperation

Pakistan is a founding member (Rabat, 1969), hosted the 1974 summit and the extraordinary session on Afghanistan in December 2021, and has a standing OIC Contact Group on Kashmir. The OIC gives a platform but rarely concrete action: its members trade with India, and Saudi-Iranian rivalry limits its unity.

### 11.3 Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

An observer from 2005 and a member from 2017, Pakistan uses the SCO for counter-terrorism cooperation through the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure, for connectivity with Central Asia and for



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engagement with Russia and China on Afghanistan; it hosted the heads of government meeting in Islamabad in October 2024. The SCO decides by consensus and contains both India and Pakistan, so it cannot touch their disputes.

### 11.4 SAARC and other forums

Founded in Dhaka in 1985, SAARC produced SAFTA in 2006 but little else: its charter excludes bilateral disputes and India-Pakistan hostility blocks consensus. No summit has been held since 2014; the 2016 Islamabad summit was cancelled after Uri, and India has shifted to BIMSTEC, which excludes Pakistan. ECO, the D-8 group of Muslim economies (1997), the Commonwealth (left 1972, rejoined 1989, suspended 1999-2004 and 2007-08) and the Non-Aligned Movement complete the picture, with "Vision Central Asia" and "Engage Africa" as newer outreach policies.

## 12. Current challenges and options

### 12.1 Challenges

1. **India**: a larger, richer neighbour, no dialogue, a contested water treaty and a demonstrated willingness to strike across the border.
2. **Afghanistan and the TTP**: cross-border terrorism from a government Pakistan helped bring to power, with the Baloch insurgency targeting CPEC in parallel.
3. **Economic weakness**: debt, repeated IMF programmes and dependence on friendly deposits reduce autonomy and credibility.
4. **Great-power rivalry**: American pressure to limit Chinese influence; Chinese pressure to deliver CPEC and protect its nationals.
5. **Middle East realignment**: Saudi-Israeli normalisation, Iran-Israel conflict and the Gulf's turn to India test Pakistan's ideological commitments.
6. **Image and institutions**: civil-military imbalance, instability and past association with militancy shape how partners see Pakistan.

### 12.2 Options

- Make geo-economics real: export growth, regional trade with Central Asia, Gwadar as a transit hub and investment protection, so that partners value Pakistan as a market, not only as a security asset.
- Hedge rather than align: China as core partner, the United States as market and technology source, the Gulf as finance, Russia and Central Asia as energy, without joining any bloc against another.
- Reduce the Afghan burden: pressure on the Taliban over the TTP, engagement through regional formats, a humane but firm refugee policy.
- Manage India with deterrence plus dialogue: keep the balance, accept quiet back-channels, press the water issue through the treaty's own mechanisms.
- Strengthen the institutions of policy: parliamentary oversight, economic expertise in the Foreign Office, consistent civil-military messaging.

## 13. Evaluation points



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- **Continuity versus change.** The determinants have hardly changed since 1947; what has changed is the patron: the United States in the Cold War, China decisively since 2015, the Gulf for finance throughout.
- **Alliances cut both ways.** Every alignment has brought aid and arms but also dependence, sanctions when the patron's interest changed, and blowback.
- **The India fixation.** Alliances, China and the bomb were all means of balancing India. Critics say this crowded out economic diplomacy; defenders cite 1971 as proof that a weak Pakistan is not left alone.
- **Strategic depth has failed.** Twice (1996 and 2021) a Taliban Kabul produced more insecurity, not less.
- **Nuclear weapons bought survival, not peace.** Deterrence prevented all-out war after 1998 but opened space for sub-conventional conflict and limited strikes (1999, 2019, 2025).
- **Geo-economics is declared, not achieved.** Exports, investment and regional trade have not yet grown enough to change how others see Pakistan.
- **Agency within structure.** The system constrained Pakistan, but leaders made real choices in 1950, 1954, 1963, 1979, 1998, 2001 and 2015 and should be judged on them.

## Quick check

1. State four core objectives of Pakistan's foreign policy. (4 marks)
2. Explain how geography has shaped Pakistan's foreign policy. (8 marks)
3. Why did Pakistan join SEATO and the Baghdad Pact, and what did it gain and lose? (12 marks)
4. Describe the effect of the 1962 Sino-Indian war on Pakistan's foreign policy. (6 marks)
5. Explain the significance of the Simla Agreement of 1972. (8 marks)
6. "The Afghan jihad of 1979-1989 was Pakistan's greatest foreign policy success and its greatest mistake." Evaluate this statement. (20 marks)
7. Explain why relations between Pakistan and the United States have followed a cycle of engagement and estrangement. (12 marks)
8. State the main features of Pakistan's nuclear doctrine and explain why Pakistan has not signed the NPT. (8 marks)
9. Evaluate the usefulness of the OIC and SAARC as instruments of Pakistan's foreign policy. (12 marks)
10. Critically examine the claim that Pakistan's foreign policy has shifted from geo-strategy to geo-economics. (20 marks)

**1.** Any four of: sovereignty and territorial integrity; self-determination for Kashmir under the UN resolutions; economic development; solidarity with the Muslim world (Article 40); a credible nuclear deterrent; good neighbourly relations and a responsible image in international forums. One mark each.

**2.** Geography has (a) created a two-front problem, India to the east and an unsettled Afghanistan to the west, which explains the security-first character of policy; (b) made Pakistan valuable to outside powers because it borders Iran, China and Afghanistan and lies near the Strait of Hormuz,



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hence the 1950s alliances, the front-line role in 1979-89 and after 2001, and CPEC and Gwadar; (c) made it a transit route for Afghanistan and Central Asia, hence Vision Central Asia and ECO; (d) made water a security issue because the Indus rivers enter from Indian-administered territory, hence the 1960 treaty and the 2025 crisis. Two marks per linked point.

**3.** Reasons: security against a larger India after 1947-48 and the failure to obtain a plebiscite; the need for aid that the Soviet Union could not offer; an anti-communist leadership; the hope that Western backing would help on Kashmir. Gains: about 1.5 billion dollars of aid between 1954 and 1965, modern equipment and training, a seat in Western councils. Losses: the pacts were against communism, not India, so gave nothing on Kashmir; Soviet vetoes on Kashmir from 1957; the non-aligned world saw Pakistan as a client; the 1965 arms embargo showed that the alliance did not cover an Indian war. Four marks each.

**4.** The United States and Britain armed India after October 1962 with no condition on Kashmir, so Pakistan concluded that its alliance did not protect its core interest. It diversified: the boundary agreement with China of 2 March 1963, air links in 1964, the Karakoram Highway, Ayub's *Friends Not Masters* (1967), and a working relationship with the Soviet Union, which mediated at Tashkent in 1966. Two marks for the cause, four for the consequences.

**5.** Simla (2 July 1972) formally ended the 1971 war, secured the return of about 90,000 prisoners and captured territory, and converted the ceasefire line into the Line of Control. Its key clause commits both states to settle differences bilaterally and peacefully: India reads this as ruling out mediation and UN involvement, Pakistan as not cancelling the UN resolutions. It has been the reference point for every later dialogue and ceasefire, and Pakistan's suspension of it in April 2025 shows how central it had been. Four marks for content, four for significance.

**6.** Success: a superpower on Pakistan's border was forced to withdraw by February 1989 under the Geneva Accords; Pakistan received over 7 billion dollars in two American packages, F-16s and a rehabilitated military; the nuclear programme proceeded under annual Pressler certifications; Pakistan's standing in the Muslim world rose. Mistake: the policy created the armed groups, madrasas and intelligence links that later became the Taliban, sectarian militias and the TTP; weapons and heroin flooded the country; millions of refugees stayed for decades; the state became attached to the illusion of strategic depth; and when the war ended the United States applied Pressler in 1990 and left. Judgement: in narrow security terms the policy succeeded, but the long-term costs (the war on terror after 2001, the 2021 outcome) have outweighed the gains; the deeper error was not resisting the invasion but failing to plan for the peace and to keep the instruments of jihad under control. A top answer weighs the counterfactual of a neutral Pakistan with Soviet forces on the Durand Line.

**7.** The cycle (alliance 1954-65, estrangement 1965-79, partnership 1979-90, sanctions 1990-2001, partnership 2001-11, suspicion after 2011, renewed opening 2025) tracks changes in American need: containment, detente, the Afghan war, non-proliferation, the war on terror, the pivot to India. When Pakistan is useful it receives aid and tolerance of the nuclear programme; when the need passes, the standing disputes (proliferation, militants, Afghanistan, India) come to the front and sanctions follow (1965 embargo, Symington 1979, Pressler 1990, the 2018 suspension). Pakistan's contribution to the cycle is over-reliance on the patron and divergent interests in Afghanistan and Kashmir. Evidence from at least three cycles for full marks.

**8.** Doctrine: minimum credible deterrence, a force large and survivable enough to make an Indian attack irrational without an open-ended arms race; no "no first use" pledge, because the weapons



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offset Indian conventional superiority; since 2013 full spectrum deterrence, including short-range weapons against a limited Indian thrust; control through a National Command Authority. NPT: Pakistan will not join as a non-nuclear state because it would have to disarm while India, also outside the treaty, keeps its weapons; it also opposes the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty because it would freeze an Indian advantage in stocks. Four marks each.

**9.** OIC: useful as a platform (Lahore 1974, the Kashmir Contact Group, the December 2021 Islamabad session on Afghanistan) and as a sign of standing in the Muslim world, but it acts by consensus, has no enforcement, its members trade with India, and it has never changed Indian policy. SAARC: produced SAFTA in 2006 but its charter excludes bilateral disputes, no summit has met since 2014 and India prefers BIMSTEC; it has delivered almost nothing for Pakistan. Judgement: both are instruments of legitimacy rather than power; the OIC is more useful because it does not contain India. Six marks each.

**10.** For the shift: the 2022 National Security Policy put economic security at the centre; the Special Investment Facilitation Council courts Gulf and Chinese capital; Pakistan has pursued GSP+, Vision Central Asia, Russian oil, Qatari LNG and mineral deals; CPEC is itself economic; the 2025 opening with the United States has been framed around trade and minerals. Against: security still dominates practice, as the 2025 conflict with India, the Afghan strikes and the Saudi defence pact show; exports and investment have not grown enough to change the pattern; IMF programmes and friendly deposits are security-driven rent, not economic diplomacy; and the civil-military balance has not shifted towards economic ministries. Judgement: the rhetoric and some instruments have changed, but geo-economics cannot succeed while the India and Afghanistan fronts are open and the economy is in a recurring balance of payments crisis; the shift is declared, partial and conditional.



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