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Q1. Youth Bulge: A Demographic Dividend or a Demographic Bomb?

Outline

- Introduction: Pakistan's youth bulge as the defining demographic reality of the twenty-first century
- Understanding the concept of youth bulge and demographic transition theory
- Pakistan's demographic profile: statistical overview of the youth population
- The dividend scenario: how a youth bulge can accelerate economic growth
- Case studies of successful demographic dividends: East Asian Tigers, India's IT boom
- The bomb scenario: unemployment, radicalization, and social unrest
- Structural bottlenecks in Pakistan: education, skills mismatch, and labour market rigidity
- Political and institutional dimensions: governance failures compounding the risk
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- Regional and international best practices Pakistan can emulate
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Introduction

Every nation, at some point in its history, is handed a fleeting gift by demography, a narrow window during which the balance of its population tilts overwhelmingly toward the young and the productive. Pakistan stands today at precisely such a crossroads. With nearly sixty-four percent of its population below the age of thirty and a median age hovering around twenty years, the country possesses one of the youngest populations on earth. This reality is neither accidental nor permanent; it is the product of decades of high fertility rates gradually giving way to declining mortality, and it will not last forever. The question that confronts policymakers, economists, and ordinary citizens alike is whether this youth bulge will be harnessed as an engine of prosperity, a demographic dividend capable of transforming Pakistan's economic trajectory, or whether it will detonate as a demographic bomb, fuelling unemployment, disillusionment, and instability. The

answer does not lie in the numbers themselves but in the choices Pakistan makes in the years immediately ahead.

Understanding the Concept

A youth bulge occurs when a country's population pyramid becomes disproportionately weighted toward younger age cohorts, typically as a consequence of the second stage of the demographic transition, where death rates fall faster than birth rates. Demographers and economists have long argued that this stage carries within it an extraordinary opportunity: as the ratio of working-age individuals to dependents rises, a country experiences a temporary but powerful boost to per capita income, provided that this expanding labour force is productively employed. This is the essence of the demographic dividend, first theorised in relation to the East Asian miracle economies, where falling fertility combined with sound economic policy produced decades of double-digit growth. Yet the very same demographic structure, when mismanaged, produces the opposite outcome. Idle, undereducated, and frustrated young people, unable to find dignified work or a stake in their society, become a source of social friction rather than economic dynamism. The dividend and the bomb are, in this sense, two faces of the same demographic coin, and which face Pakistan encounters depends

entirely on policy choices rather than fate.

Pakistan's Demographic Profile

Pakistan is the fifth most populous country in the world, and its population continues to grow at a rate that outpaces most of its regional peers. Roughly two-thirds of its more than two hundred forty million citizens are under the age of thirty, and over sixty percent are of working age or approaching it. Every year, millions of young Pakistanis enter the labour market, a number of new job seekers that dwarfs the economy's current capacity to absorb them. Unlike China or South Korea, which rode their demographic waves alongside export-oriented industrialisation, disciplined savings mobilisation, and heavy investment in universal education, Pakistan's growth has remained sluggish, undiversified, and consumption driven. The demographic window, economists estimate, will remain open for perhaps two to three more decades before Pakistan's population begins to age in earnest. This is not an abundance of time; it is a narrow corridor that must be used with urgency and precision.

The Dividend Scenario

When properly nurtured, a youth bulge becomes an unmatched engine of national transformation. A larger

working-age population means a larger pool of labour, entrepreneurship, innovation, and consumption, all of which can combine to lift gross domestic product growth substantially above what an ageing society could achieve. Young populations tend to be more adaptable to new technologies, more willing to migrate for opportunity, and more receptive to the kind of structural economic change that older, more risk-averse societies resist. If even a fraction of Pakistan's youth were equipped with globally competitive skills, in software development, manufacturing, renewable energy, agritech, and services, the country could position itself as a hub for outsourced labour and innovation in a manner similar to India's software revolution. The dividend is not merely economic; a productively engaged youth population also tends to be more invested in stable governance, rule of law, and civic participation, creating a virtuous cycle between economic opportunity and political stability.

Lessons from Success Stories

The clearest illustration of a well-managed demographic dividend comes from the East Asian Tigers, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong, which between the nineteen sixties and nineteen nineties transformed largely agrarian societies into industrial and

technological powerhouses. Central to their success was an unwavering commitment to universal, high-quality education, aggressive investment in physical infrastructure, export-led industrial policy, and macroeconomic discipline that channelled domestic savings into productive investment rather than consumption. India offers a more contemporary and geographically proximate model. Its investment in technical and engineering education from the nineteen fifties onward, though imperfect and unevenly distributed, eventually produced the human capital base that fuelled its information technology boom of the nineteen nineties and two thousands, turning cities like Bengaluru and Hyderabad into global technology hubs. These examples share a common thread: none of them treated demography as destiny. Each treated it as raw material requiring deliberate shaping through sustained public investment.

The Bomb Scenario

Pakistan's own recent history offers sobering evidence of what happens when a youth bulge is neglected. Youth unemployment and underemployment remain stubbornly high, with a significant proportion of graduates unable to find work matching their qualifications, let alone their aspirations. Millions of young Pakistanis, particularly in

urban slums and economically marginalised regions such as parts of Balochistan, southern Punjab, and interior Sindh, grow up with limited access to quality schooling, healthcare, or vocational opportunity. This combination of aspiration without avenue has historically proven fertile ground for extremism, criminality, and social unrest. Militant organisations across Pakistan's turbulent decades have disproportionately recruited from precisely this demographic, disillusioned young men with few prospects and an abundance of grievance. Beyond violent extremism, the bomb scenario also manifests more quietly, in the form of a "brain drain" as ambitious, educated youth increasingly seek opportunity abroad, depriving the country of the very human capital it needs to escape the middle-income trap. Every year, hundreds of thousands of skilled and semi-skilled Pakistanis migrate to the Gulf, Europe, and North America, a haemorrhage of talent that, while providing valuable remittances, also represents a failure to create opportunity at home.

Structural Bottlenecks

The roots of this failure are structural and deeply embedded. Pakistan's education system remains bifurcated between an elite private stream and an underfunded, overcrowded public stream, producing

vastly unequal outcomes and reinforcing class divisions from the earliest years of schooling. Enrolment figures mask a deeper crisis of quality: even among those who complete secondary and tertiary education, learning outcomes remain poor, and curricula are frequently disconnected from the needs of a modern, technology-driven economy. Technical and vocational education and training, which in countries like Germany forms the backbone of youth employability, remains a marginal and stigmatised path in Pakistan, chosen by too few and funded even less. The labour market itself compounds these problems: rigid regulations, a narrow industrial base concentrated in low-value-added textiles, and chronic underinvestment in manufacturing and technology mean that even well-qualified graduates struggle to find formal sector employment, pushing the majority into a sprawling informal economy characterised by low wages, no social protection, and limited productivity growth.

Governance and Institutional Failures

Beneath these sectoral challenges lies a broader governance deficit. Pakistan's chronic macroeconomic instability, recurring balance of payments crises, high inflation, and a narrow tax base have repeatedly forced governments to prioritise short-term stabilisation over

long-term human capital investment. Education and health, the twin pillars on which any demographic dividend must rest, consistently receive a smaller share of public expenditure than in comparable developing countries, a consequence of both fiscal constraint and misplaced political priority. Devolution of education and health to the provinces after the eighteenth constitutional amendment, while conceptually sound, has in practice suffered from uneven capacity, weak accountability mechanisms, and insufficient provincial financing, leading to wide disparities between provinces and even between districts within the same province. Corruption, elite capture of public resources, and political instability further erode the state's capacity to deliver the sustained, patient investment that demographic transformation requires.

The Gender Dimension

No honest accounting of Pakistan's demographic potential can ignore its most underutilised resource: young women. Female labour force participation in Pakistan remains among the lowest in the region, held back by cultural constraints, safety concerns, inadequate transport and childcare infrastructure, and persistent gaps in girls' education, particularly in rural areas. This represents not merely a matter of social justice but an

enormous economic opportunity foregone. Studies across developing economies consistently show that closing gender gaps in labour force participation could add several percentage points to national income. A genuine demographic dividend strategy for Pakistan must therefore place female education, skills training, and safe access to employment at its centre, rather than treating gender equity as a peripheral concern.

Charting a Policy Roadmap

Converting the youth bulge into a dividend requires a coherent, multi-pronged national strategy sustained across electoral cycles. First, education reform must move beyond enrolment targets to focus relentlessly on quality, teacher training, curriculum modernisation, and the integration of digital literacy from the earliest grades. Second, technical and vocational training must be scaled up dramatically and destigmatised, aligned closely with the actual needs of industry through public-private partnerships, so that young people leave training programmes with skills employers genuinely want. Third, Pakistan must pursue an industrial policy that diversifies the economy beyond textiles into higher value-added manufacturing, information technology, and services, sectors capable of absorbing large numbers of young workers at rising productivity and wages. Fourth,

entrepreneurship must be actively encouraged through accessible credit, simplified business registration, and incubation support, recognising that a young population is also a potential population of job creators rather than merely job seekers. Fifth, investment in reproductive health and family planning services remains essential, not to suppress the youth bulge but to ensure future population growth remains manageable and does not overwhelm the gains achieved.

Technology and the Digital Economy

Pakistan's rapidly growing freelance and information technology sector offers a glimpse of what is possible when young Pakistanis are connected to global markets. The country already ranks among the top freelancing nations worldwide, with hundreds of thousands of young people earning foreign exchange through digital platforms in software development, design, and content creation, often entirely outside the constraints of the formal domestic labour market. Expanding broadband access, digital literacy, and English-language proficiency, particularly in smaller cities and rural areas, could multiply this success many times over. Special technology zones, startup incubators, and government-backed digital skills programmes, if implemented with consistency and free from bureaucratic

obstruction, could allow Pakistan to leapfrog some of the infrastructure constraints that have historically limited traditional industrialisation.

Learning from the Region

Beyond East Asia, Pakistan can draw practical lessons from closer contexts. Bangladesh, despite starting from a similarly constrained position, has achieved remarkable gains in female labour force participation, particularly through its ready-made garment industry, alongside significant improvements in primary education and health indicators, demonstrating that South Asian societies with comparable cultural and resource constraints can nonetheless make substantial demographic gains through targeted policy. Vietnam offers another instructive case, having used export-oriented manufacturing and consistent investment in basic education to absorb its own youth bulge into productive employment over the past three decades. These are not distant, alien models but achievable benchmarks rooted in comparable starting conditions.

The Cost of Inaction

The consequences of failing to act are not hypothetical; they are already visible in rising youth frustration, growing rates of irregular migration, and the persistent

undercurrent of social unrest that periodically surfaces across Pakistan's cities. Every year of policy drift narrows the window during which the demographic dividend remains available, as the current youth cohort ages without having acquired the skills or opportunities needed to become fully productive citizens. Meanwhile, global competition for investment, trade, and skilled labour intensifies, meaning that the cost of delay is not merely stagnation but relative decline against peer economies that are moving decisively to capture their own demographic advantages.

Conclusion

Pakistan's youth bulge is neither an automatic blessing nor an inevitable curse; it is a challenge of governance, imagination, and political will. The raw material for extraordinary national transformation exists in the energy, adaptability, and aspiration of its young population. What remains uncertain is whether the state can summon the institutional capacity and policy consistency to convert that raw material into a genuine demographic dividend. History offers both the warning and the roadmap: nations that invested decisively in the education, health, and productive employment of their young people reaped decades of accelerated growth, while those that neglected this task inherited instability

and lost opportunity. Pakistan still has time, though not unlimited time, to choose which path it will take. The ticking clock of demography can be Pakistan's greatest asset or its gravest liability; the choice, ultimately, rests not with fate but with policy.

Q2. Local Government System: The Missing Link in Pakistan's Governance Structure

Outline

- Introduction: the paradox of a federation without functioning local government
- Conceptual foundations: subsidiarity, devolution, and grassroots democracy
- Historical trajectory of local government in Pakistan from British India to the present
- Constitutional provisions: Article 140-A and the eighteenth amendment
- The cyclical pattern of military patronage and civilian neglect
- Case study of the 2001 devolution plan and its unraveling
- Post-eighteenth amendment provincial local government laws and their weaknesses
- Fiscal starvation: the absence of genuine financial autonomy
- Political resistance: provincial legislators and the fear of a rival power centre
- Comparative lessons from India's panchayati raj and other federations

- Consequences of the missing link: service delivery failures and democratic deficit
 - The way forward: constitutional guarantees, fiscal transfers, and capacity building
 - Conclusion: completing the architecture of Pakistani federalism
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Introduction

Pakistan describes itself as a federal parliamentary democracy, yet for most of its seventy-eight-year history, the third tier of government closest to the citizen, the local government, has existed more as an afterthought than as a genuine pillar of the state. Elections to union councils, municipal committees, and district governments have been held sporadically, often under military rulers seeking a civilian façade of legitimacy, and just as often suspended or diluted once elected provincial governments regained the upper hand. This missing link in Pakistan's governance architecture is not a minor administrative gap; it is a structural void that undermines service delivery, weakens democratic accountability, and leaves citizens perpetually distant from the decisions that shape their daily lives. Understanding why local government has never taken firm root in Pakistan, and what it would take to finally institutionalise it, is essential to understanding the deeper pathologies of Pakistani

governance itself.

Conceptual Foundations

At the heart of local government lies the principle of subsidiarity, the idea that decisions should be made at the lowest level of government capable of addressing them effectively. Matters such as sanitation, primary healthcare, local roads, water supply, and primary education are, in most functioning democracies, managed by elected local bodies who are directly accountable to the communities they serve and who possess the granular knowledge necessary to allocate resources efficiently. Local government is also the training ground of democracy itself, the space in which ordinary citizens, including women, minorities, and those without access to national political networks, can first enter public life, build political experience, and hold power accountable at a scale where accountability is actually possible. Without this tier, democracy remains an event that happens every five years at the ballot box rather than a continuous, lived practice of citizen engagement.

Historical Trajectory

Ironically, some of the more consequential experiments with local government in the subcontinent predate

Pakistan's own independence, rooted in colonial administrative structures designed primarily for revenue collection and control rather than democratic empowerment. After independence, Pakistan's civilian governments largely neglected local government, focusing instead on consolidating national and provincial power amid the turbulence of constitution-making and political instability. It was, paradoxically, Pakistan's military rulers who most consistently promoted local government, not out of democratic conviction but as a mechanism to build a loyal political base beneath the feet of provincial and national politicians they distrusted. Ayub Khan's Basic Democracies system in the early nineteen sixties, Zia-ul-Haq's non-party local bodies elections in the nineteen eighties, and Pervez Musharraf's far more ambitious devolution plan of 2001 all followed this pattern, each dismantled or diluted soon after the military ruler's exit from power, as civilian politicians moved quickly to reassert control over the resources and patronage networks local government represented.

Constitutional Provisions

The eighteenth constitutional amendment of 2010, celebrated for transferring substantial legislative and administrative authority from the federal centre to the

provinces, also inserted Article 140-A into the Constitution, obligating each province to establish a local government system and devolve political, administrative, and financial responsibility to elected representatives. On paper, this represented a historic constitutional guarantee for local self-governance. In practice, however, the same amendment that empowered provinces relative to the federation left the actual design, timing, and substance of local government law entirely in provincial hands, and provincial assemblies, dominated by legislators who saw local government as a direct rival for constituency-level resources and political credit, have consistently used this discretion to keep local bodies weak, underfunded, and subordinate.

The Cyclical Pattern

This produces a recognisable and repeating cycle in Pakistani politics. A military or caretaker administration, seeking legitimacy or reform credentials, establishes a relatively empowered local government system, complete with directly elected mayors or nazims and meaningful fiscal transfers. Once civilian, party-based government resumes, provincial legislators, whose own electoral relevance depends on controlling development funds and patronage at the constituency level, move to curtail the powers of local government, delay elections

indefinitely, or rewrite local government laws to strip elected local representatives of real authority over planning, budgets, and bureaucratic appointments. The result is a governance structure that oscillates between top-down empowerment and legislative strangulation, never allowing local government the institutional continuity needed to mature, build administrative capacity, or earn genuine public trust.

Case Study: The 2001 Devolution Plan

General Pervez Musharraf's devolution plan of 2001 remains the most ambitious local government reform in Pakistan's history, creating a three-tier structure of district, tehsil, and union governments with directly elected nazims, dedicated development budgets, and a formal role in local police oversight through public safety commissions. For a brief period, this system delivered visible improvements in local infrastructure and brought a new generation of grassroots leaders, including many women through reserved seats, into public life. Yet the plan was designed and imposed without genuine political consensus, bypassing provincial assemblies and existing bureaucratic structures, which bred deep resentment among the very provincial politicians and civil servants whose cooperation it needed to endure. When democratic government returned after 2008, elected

provincial assemblies moved swiftly to dismantle the 2001 system, restoring the colonial-era commissioner and deputy commissioner administrative structure and delaying local government elections for years in several provinces.

Post-18th Amendment Weaknesses

The local government laws passed by provinces since 2013 have generally proven far more conservative than the 2001 model. Elected mayors and chairpersons typically possess limited authority over planning and development, with real decision-making power retained by provincial departments and bureaucrats who report upward to provincial ministers rather than downward to local voters. Local governments frequently lack independent secretariats, control over their own staff, or the ability to levy and retain meaningful local taxes, rendering them administratively dependent on provincial goodwill for even routine functioning. Election schedules have been repeatedly delayed through litigation, administrative excuses, or outright non-compliance, and in several instances local governments have been allowed to complete only a fraction of their constitutionally mandated terms before being dissolved or left without fresh elections for years.

Fiscal Starvation

Perhaps the single greatest structural weakness of Pakistani local government is its fiscal dependency. Genuine local autonomy requires genuine local revenue, whether through property taxes, user charges, or a guaranteed, formula-based share of provincial resources analogous to the National Finance Commission award that governs federal-provincial fiscal relations. In most provinces, no equivalent Provincial Finance Commission mechanism operates with the same predictability and constitutional protection, leaving local governments to negotiate annually, and often unsuccessfully, for discretionary transfers from provincial finance departments. Without secure, formula-driven financing, elected local representatives cannot plan multi-year development programmes, cannot be held accountable for outcomes they lack the resources to deliver, and remain perpetually supplicant to provincial politicians and bureaucrats.

Political Resistance

The deeper obstacle to durable local government reform in Pakistan is not technical but political. Provincial legislators derive much of their electoral relevance from their ability to claim credit for local development schemes, road construction, drainage repair, school upgrades, funded through discretionary development

grants channelled through their own offices. A genuinely empowered local government would strip provincial assembly members of precisely this patronage function, redirecting both resources and credit toward directly elected mayors and councillors. It is little surprise, therefore, that provincial assemblies across party lines have shown remarkable consistency in resisting meaningful devolution to the local level, regardless of which party happens to be in power nationally or provincially. This is a structural conflict of interest embedded in Pakistan's political economy, not merely a matter of individual political will.

Comparative Lessons

India's constitutional seventy-third and seventy-fourth amendments of 1992, which mandated regular elections to rural panchayats and urban municipalities, reserved seats for women and marginalised castes, and established State Finance Commissions to guarantee fiscal transfers, offer an instructive, geographically proximate model, despite India's own uneven implementation across states. The key lesson is constitutional entrenchment: by making local elections, reservations, and fiscal transfers a binding constitutional requirement rather than a matter of ordinary provincial legislation, India made it considerably harder for state

governments to indefinitely delay or hollow out local government, even where political incentives to do so existed. Pakistan's Article 140-A, by contrast, mandates only that provinces establish some local government system, without specifying election timelines, fiscal formulas, or minimum devolved functions, leaving enormous room for provincial legislatures to comply in form while resisting in substance.

Consequences of the Missing Link

The absence of a functioning local government tier has tangible, measurable costs. Basic municipal services, garbage collection, urban drainage, street lighting, local water supply, remain chronically poor across Pakistani cities and towns, in significant part because no directly accountable elected body exists with both the mandate and the resources to manage them effectively. Development spending, channelled instead through provincial legislators' discretionary schemes, tends to be fragmented, poorly planned, and vulnerable to political favouritism rather than need-based allocation. Citizens, meanwhile, are left with no accessible, accountable point of contact for the vast majority of governance functions that most directly affect their daily lives, deepening public disillusionment with democracy as a system capable of delivering tangible benefits.

The Way Forward

Reversing this pattern requires several interlocking reforms. First, Article 140-A should be strengthened through constitutional amendment to mandate fixed local government election cycles, minimum tenures, and specific, non-negotiable devolved functions, removing the discretion that has allowed provinces to indefinitely delay or dilute local government. Second, each province must establish a Provincial Finance Commission with a transparent, formula-based revenue-sharing mechanism analogous to the National Finance Commission, giving local governments predictable, adequate financing independent of annual political negotiation. Third, local governments need genuine administrative control over their own staff and departments, rather than remaining dependent on provincial bureaucracies whose loyalty and accountability flow upward rather than downward. Fourth, sustained investment in the administrative and technical capacity of local councillors and staff is essential, since decades of institutional discontinuity have left most local governments without the trained personnel needed to plan and execute development programmes effectively. Finally, civil society, media, and international development partners can play a constructive role in sustaining public pressure for local government reform, ensuring that the issue does not

disappear from the national agenda between election cycles.

Conclusion

Pakistan's governance architecture will remain fundamentally incomplete so long as its third tier continues to function as an intermittent afterthought rather than a permanent, empowered pillar of the state. The pattern of military-imposed empowerment followed by civilian legislative strangulation has repeated itself often enough to demonstrate that piecemeal, provincially discretionary reform will never produce durable local government in Pakistan. Only a genuine constitutional guarantee, backed by secure fiscal transfers, real administrative authority, and sustained capacity building, can finally close this missing link. Until that happens, Pakistani democracy will continue to function at the national and provincial level while leaving citizens largely disconnected from the institutions of government that most directly shape their everyday lives, a gap that no amount of national-level political reform can, by itself, ever fully close.

Q3. Cyber Security as the New National Security Frontier

Outline

- Introduction: the silent battlefield of the digital age
- Redefining national security in the information era
- Pakistan's expanding digital footprint and attack surface
- Categories of cyber threats: state-sponsored, criminal, and terrorist
- Critical infrastructure vulnerabilities: power grids, banking, and defence networks
- Case studies of major global and regional cyberattacks
- Pakistan's cyber security incidents and near misses
- Institutional and legal framework: PECA, NCCS, and gaps therein
- The India-Pakistan cyber dimension amid conventional rivalry
- Economic dimension: fintech, e-commerce, and data as a national asset
- Human capital deficit: the shortage of cyber security professionals
- International cooperation and norms in cyberspace
- Policy recommendations for a resilient national cyber posture

- Conclusion: securing the invisible frontier
-

Introduction

War no longer announces itself only with the roar of artillery or the crossing of borders. Increasingly, the decisive battles of the twenty-first century are fought silently, in milliseconds, across fibre-optic cables and satellite links, where a single line of malicious code can cripple a power grid, drain a national treasury, or paralyse a country's defence communications without a single soldier crossing a frontier. For Pakistan, a nuclear-armed state locked in an enduring rivalry with a technologically sophisticated neighbour, and simultaneously undergoing rapid digitisation of its banking, governance, and communication systems, cyberspace has emerged as an inescapable new frontier of national security, one that existing doctrines of territorial defence were never designed to address.

Redefining National Security

Traditional conceptions of national security in Pakistan have long centred on territorial integrity, conventional and nuclear deterrence, and internal stability against terrorism and insurgency. The digital transformation of virtually every sector of modern life, finance, energy,

healthcare, transportation, and defence command systems, means that a hostile actor no longer needs to breach a physical border to inflict strategic damage. A well-executed cyberattack on a national power grid can plunge cities into darkness; an intrusion into banking infrastructure can trigger financial panic; a breach of military communication networks can compromise operational secrecy in ways that rival any conventional intelligence failure. Cyber security, therefore, is not a peripheral technical concern for IT departments but a core component of comprehensive national security, deserving the same strategic seriousness historically reserved for conventional military threats.

Pakistan's Expanding Digital Footprint

Pakistan has undergone a remarkable digital transformation over the past decade, with internet penetration rising steadily, mobile banking and digital payment platforms expanding rapidly, and government services increasingly moving online through initiatives in e-governance, digital identity, and online taxation. This digitisation, while economically beneficial, dramatically expands the nation's attack surface. Every new digital service, every connected device, and every online government portal represents a potential entry point for malicious actors, and Pakistan's rapid pace of digital

adoption has, in many cases, outpaced the corresponding investment in cyber security infrastructure, regulation, and professional capacity, leaving critical systems more exposed than their sophistication would suggest.

Categories of Cyber Threats

The threats Pakistan faces in cyberspace are diverse and multi-layered. State-sponsored actors, often linked to rival intelligence agencies, conduct espionage campaigns targeting government networks, defence contractors, and diplomatic communications, seeking strategic intelligence or the capability to disrupt critical systems in a future crisis. Cyber-criminal networks, operating for financial gain, target banks, e-commerce platforms, and ordinary citizens through phishing, ransomware, and data theft, exploiting weak cyber hygiene and limited public awareness. Terrorist and extremist organisations increasingly use digital platforms for radicalisation, recruitment, and propaganda, while also probing the potential for more disruptive cyber operations against critical infrastructure. Hacktivist groups, motivated by political grievances, periodically deface government websites or leak sensitive data, embarrassing institutions and eroding public confidence even when the technical damage is limited.

Critical Infrastructure Vulnerabilities

Among the most alarming vulnerabilities Pakistan faces are those affecting critical infrastructure, systems whose disruption would have cascading, potentially catastrophic effects on public safety and economic stability. The national power grid, increasingly managed through digital supervisory control and data acquisition systems, presents an attractive target whose compromise could trigger widespread blackouts. The banking and financial sector, now heavily reliant on interconnected digital platforms for everything from interbank settlement to mobile wallets, faces constant probing from criminal and state-linked actors seeking to exploit vulnerabilities for financial theft or systemic disruption. Defence communication networks, air traffic control systems, and increasingly digitised government databases containing sensitive citizen information similarly represent high-value targets whose security posture often lags behind the sophistication of the threats they face.

Lessons from Global Incidents

The global record of major cyberattacks offers sobering lessons for Pakistan. The Stuxnet worm, which sabotaged Iranian nuclear centrifuges through a sophisticated state-designed cyber weapon, demonstrated that critical infrastructure could be

physically damaged through purely digital means. The WannaCry ransomware attack of 2017, which crippled hospitals, businesses, and government systems across more than one hundred fifty countries, illustrated how quickly a single vulnerability could cascade into a global crisis. Closer to home, repeated reports of intrusions into Indian and Pakistani government and defence-linked networks, attributed by various cyber security researchers to state-affiliated groups on both sides, underscore that South Asia's conventional rivalry has already extended fully into cyberspace, with both countries investing in offensive and defensive cyber capabilities as an extension of their broader strategic competition.

Pakistan's Own Incidents

Pakistan has not been immune to significant cyber security breaches. Various government websites and databases have periodically suffered defacement or data breaches, exposing sensitive citizen and institutional information. Banking sector incidents, including reports of unauthorised transactions linked to compromised payment card data, have periodically shaken public confidence in digital financial services. Telecommunications infrastructure has also faced disruption attempts, underscoring the vulnerability of

systems that now underpin much of Pakistan's economic and administrative functioning. While Pakistani authorities have generally managed to contain and respond to these incidents without catastrophic consequences, their frequency signals a persistent and growing threat environment that current defensive capacity has not yet fully matched.

Institutional and Legal Framework

Pakistan has taken meaningful, if incomplete, steps toward building a cyber security governance framework. The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, passed in 2016, established a legal basis for prosecuting cybercrime, though critics have raised concerns about provisions that could be used to restrict legitimate online expression alongside genuine criminal conduct. The establishment of a National Computer Emergency Response Team and a National Cyber Security Policy reflects growing institutional recognition of the challenge, aiming to coordinate incident response and set baseline security standards across government and critical infrastructure sectors. Yet implementation has lagged behind policy ambition: many government departments and even critical infrastructure operators lack dedicated, adequately resourced cyber security units, mandatory security audits remain inconsistently enforced, and

coordination between military, civilian intelligence, and regulatory bodies responsible for different dimensions of cyber security often remains fragmented rather than unified under a coherent national command structure.

The India-Pakistan Cyber Dimension

Given the enduring conventional and nuclear rivalry between Pakistan and India, cyberspace has naturally become an extension of their broader strategic competition, offering both sides a means of signalling capability, gathering intelligence, and potentially degrading the other's critical systems below the threshold of open conflict. This dynamic raises distinct escalation risks: unlike conventional military movements, cyber operations can be difficult to attribute definitively, creating the danger of miscalculation or unintended escalation during periods of heightened tension. As both countries continue to digitise their military command and control systems, the imperative for robust cyber defences, clear doctrine on cyber deterrence, and, ideally, some framework for restraint in targeting critical civilian infrastructure becomes increasingly urgent.

The Economic Dimension

Beyond national security in the narrow sense, cyber security has become integral to Pakistan's economic

future. The rapid growth of fintech, digital banking, and e-commerce platforms depends fundamentally on public trust that these systems are secure; a major breach could set back years of progress in financial inclusion and digital economic growth. Data itself has become a strategic economic asset, and questions of data localisation, cross-border data flows, and protection of citizens' personal information increasingly intersect with both economic policy and national security considerations. Foreign investment in Pakistan's growing technology sector similarly depends on confidence in the country's digital infrastructure and legal protections against cyber risk.

The Human Capital Deficit

Perhaps Pakistan's most fundamental cyber security constraint is not technological but human. The country faces an acute shortage of trained cyber security professionals capable of designing, defending, and continuously updating secure systems across government and critical infrastructure. University curricula have only recently begun to incorporate specialised cyber security training at scale, and competitive private sector and international salaries frequently draw the limited pool of skilled professionals away from public sector roles where they are most

urgently needed. Closing this human capital gap through dedicated academic programmes, professional certification pathways, and public sector career incentives is arguably as important as any technical investment in hardware or software defences.

International Cooperation

Cyber security is inherently a transnational challenge, and Pakistan's response cannot succeed in isolation. Engagement with international bodies working on cyber norms, information sharing arrangements with allied states, and participation in global initiatives against cybercrime can strengthen Pakistan's defensive posture while also contributing to the broader international effort to establish rules of responsible state behaviour in cyberspace, an area where global consensus remains fragile and contested among major powers.

Policy Recommendations

A resilient national cyber posture requires several coordinated interventions. Pakistan needs a unified national cyber command structure that integrates military, civilian, and regulatory efforts under clear lines of authority and accountability, avoiding the current fragmentation across multiple agencies. Mandatory, regularly audited security standards for critical

infrastructure operators, in energy, banking, and telecommunications, must be enforced rather than merely recommended. Significant investment in cyber security education, from university degree programmes to public awareness campaigns on basic digital hygiene, is essential to build the human capital base the country currently lacks. A dedicated national cyber security fund, insulated from the short-term budgetary pressures that typically deprioritise long-term infrastructure investment, could ensure sustained financing regardless of political cycles. Finally, Pakistan should pursue active international engagement on cyber norms and confidence-building measures, particularly with regional rivals, to reduce the risk of miscalculation in this increasingly consequential domain.

Conclusion

Cyber security is no longer an optional add-on to Pakistan's national security architecture; it is fast becoming its central nervous system. The country's growing digital dependence, combined with an unresolved conventional rivalry and a still-developing institutional and human capital base for cyber defence, leaves it exposed to risks that could inflict damage far beyond what conventional threats alone might achieve. Just as Pakistan invested decades of strategic thought

and resources into building conventional and nuclear deterrence, it must now bring comparable seriousness, coherence, and sustained investment to securing its digital frontier, for in the wars of the future, the decisive battles may well be fought and lost not on any physical battlefield, but in the invisible architecture of the nation's networks.

Q4. Pakistan in the Emerging Multipolar World Order: Opportunities and Risks

Outline

- Introduction: the fading unipolar moment and the rise of multipolarity
- Defining the emerging multipolar order and its key power centres
- Historical context: Pakistan's alignment patterns during the Cold War and after
- The US-China rivalry and Pakistan's precarious middle position
- CPEC and Pakistan's deepening relationship with China
- Relations with the United States amid strategic recalibration
- The Gulf and Middle Eastern dimension: economic lifelines and religious ties
- Russia's re-entry into South Asian calculations
- Regional dynamics: India's rise and Pakistan's relative position
- Opportunities of multipolarity: diversification and strategic space
- Risks of multipolarity: great power competition on Pakistani soil

- Economic diplomacy and the search for balanced partnerships
 - Policy recommendations for navigating a multipolar world
 - Conclusion: from bloc politics to strategic autonomy
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Introduction

The post-Cold War era of unchallenged American primacy, often described as the unipolar moment, is giving way to a far more complex and contested international order, one in which economic weight, technological capability, and strategic influence are increasingly distributed among several major centres of power rather than concentrated in a single hegemon. The rise of China as an economic and military peer competitor to the United States, the resurgence of Russia as a disruptive force in European and Middle Eastern affairs, the growing assertiveness of regional powers such as India, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia, and the accelerating economic weight of blocs such as the expanded BRICS grouping, together signal the arrival of genuine multipolarity. For Pakistan, a country whose foreign policy has historically been shaped by its relationships with dominant external powers, this shift presents both a rare opportunity to diversify its strategic

options and a considerable risk of becoming an arena for great power competition beyond its control.

Defining the Emerging Order

Multipolarity refers to an international system in which power is distributed among several roughly comparable centres rather than concentrated in one or two dominant states, as was the case during the bipolar Cold War or the unipolar decades that followed the Soviet collapse. Today's emerging order features the United States retaining substantial but no longer unchallenged military and technological pre-eminence, China rising as an economic and increasingly military peer with global ambitions expressed through initiatives such as the Belt and Road, a defiant Russia leveraging energy resources and military intervention to reassert influence in its near abroad and beyond, and a constellation of increasingly assertive middle powers, India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Brazil, and others, pursuing more independent, interest-based foreign policies rather than automatic alignment with any single bloc. This diffusion of power creates a more fluid, transactional international environment in which smaller and middle-sized states like Pakistan can, in principle, extract greater strategic flexibility, provided they navigate it skilfully.

Historical Context

Pakistan's foreign policy has long been shaped by its search for external patronage to offset the persistent asymmetry with India. During the Cold War, Pakistan aligned closely with the United States through membership in Western-sponsored security pacts, receiving military and economic assistance in exchange for its strategic location and, later, its pivotal role in the anti-Soviet campaign in Afghanistan. This alignment, however, proved episodic and transactional rather than durable, with American engagement fluctuating dramatically according to Washington's shifting strategic priorities, most notably the sanctions imposed following Pakistan's nuclear tests and the dramatic swings in the relationship after the September 2001 attacks and the subsequent war in Afghanistan. This history of alignment followed by abandonment has left a deep imprint on Pakistani strategic thinking, fuelling a persistent quest for more diversified and reliable partnerships.

The US-China Rivalry

The defining geopolitical contest of the emerging multipolar order is the intensifying strategic rivalry between the United States and China, spanning trade, technology, military posture, and influence across virtually every region of the globe. Pakistan finds itself in a particularly delicate position within this rivalry, given its

decades-long, deeply institutionalised relationship with China, often described by both governments as an all-weather friendship, alongside its historical, if now more limited, security and economic ties with the United States. Washington's growing strategic partnership with India, driven substantially by shared concerns about China's rise, further complicates Pakistan's position, as it finds itself increasingly on the opposite side of a regional alignment that pairs the United States with India against a Pakistan drawn ever closer to Beijing.

CPEC and the China Relationship

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, launched in 2015 as a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative, represents the most concrete expression of Pakistan's deepening alignment with Beijing, involving tens of billions of dollars in Chinese investment in energy, infrastructure, and, more recently, industrial and agricultural cooperation. For Pakistan, this partnership offers access to capital, infrastructure development, and a reliable diplomatic and military partner largely insulated from the periodic swings that have characterised its relationship with Washington. Yet this deepening dependence also carries risks, including concerns over debt sustainability, the transparency of project terms, and the degree to which Pakistan's strategic autonomy

may be constrained by its growing economic and security reliance on a single major power, however friendly.

Relations with the United States

Pakistan's relationship with the United States, while diminished in strategic centrality since the drawdown of American forces from Afghanistan, remains significant across counterterrorism cooperation, trade, and Pakistan's continued reliance on institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, where American influence remains considerable. Washington's growing strategic focus on countering China, and its parallel deepening of ties with India as a counterweight in the Indo-Pacific, means Pakistan can no longer expect the kind of centrality in American strategic calculations it once enjoyed during the Cold War or the post-2001 period. Pakistan's challenge lies in maintaining a functional, mutually beneficial relationship with Washington on trade, economic support, and counterterrorism, without this relationship being perceived by Beijing as compromising the depth of the China partnership, a genuinely difficult balancing act.

The Gulf Dimension

Beyond the great power triangle, Pakistan's relationships with Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, remain vital pillars of its foreign policy, providing critical financial support during balance of payments crises, employment for millions of Pakistani expatriate workers whose remittances form a crucial pillar of the national economy, and religious and cultural ties reinforced by Pakistan's role in Islamic diplomatic forums. As Gulf states themselves pursue more diversified, multi-aligned foreign policies, balancing relationships with the United States, China, and Russia simultaneously, Pakistan's own Gulf partnerships increasingly reflect and reinforce the broader multipolar pattern, offering another avenue of strategic and economic diversification beyond the US-China axis.

Russia's Re-engagement

Russia's renewed interest in South Asia, including expanding energy and defence cooperation discussions with Pakistan and its long-standing, deepening strategic partnership with India, adds a further layer of complexity and opportunity to the region's multipolar dynamics. While Pakistan-Russia relations remain far less developed than either country's ties with China, incremental cooperation in energy supply and limited defence engagement suggests Islamabad is deliberately

exploring additional avenues of diversification, consistent with a broader multipolar hedging strategy rather than continued reliance on a narrow set of traditional partners.

Regional Dynamics and India

India's continued rise as a major economic and strategic power, increasingly courted by the United States, the Gulf states, and even, cautiously, by China itself, sharpens the relative pressure on Pakistan to secure and diversify its own external partnerships. As global attention and investment increasingly gravitate toward India's large market and growing strategic weight, Pakistan risks being perceived as a secondary regional actor unless it can leverage its own strategic assets, geographic position, demographic potential, and relationships across multiple power centres, to maintain diplomatic and economic relevance.

Opportunities of Multipolarity

A genuinely multipolar order offers Pakistan meaningful opportunities that a unipolar or bipolar system would not. Diversified partnerships reduce Pakistan's vulnerability to the abrupt policy swings of any single patron, as multiple power centres compete for influence and offer alternative sources of investment, trade, and diplomatic support. Pakistan's geographic position, at the crossroads of

South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East, and China, gains renewed strategic value in a multipolar world where connectivity, energy corridors, and trade routes matter as much as traditional military alliances. Skilful diplomacy in this environment can allow Pakistan to extract more favourable terms from each of its partners by credibly demonstrating the availability of alternatives, a leverage largely unavailable to smaller states in a unipolar system dominated by a single indispensable power.

Risks of Multipolarity

These opportunities, however, come paired with genuine risks. Multipolar competition can transform smaller states into arenas of proxy rivalry, where great powers pursue their competition indirectly through influence over local politics, economics, and security arrangements, rather than direct confrontation with one another. Pakistan's deepening economic dependence on China, combined with continued reliance on Western-dominated international financial institutions, creates potential points of friction should Beijing and Washington's rivalry intensify to the point where Pakistan is pressured to choose more explicitly between them. Domestic political instability and economic fragility further compound this risk, as external powers may be tempted to exploit

internal divisions to advance their own strategic interests within Pakistan.

Economic Diplomacy

Navigating multipolarity successfully requires Pakistan to pursue economic diplomacy with the same strategic seriousness traditionally reserved for security relationships. This means actively courting diversified trade and investment partnerships beyond its traditional patrons, pursuing regional connectivity initiatives that link Pakistan to Central Asian and Gulf markets, and building the domestic economic reforms, macroeconomic stability, ease of doing business, and export competitiveness, necessary to make Pakistan an attractive partner in its own right rather than merely a strategic dependency of any single power.

Policy Recommendations

Pakistan's navigation of the multipolar order should rest on several principles. First, a policy of genuine, balanced diversification rather than rhetorical non-alignment, actively cultivating substantive economic and diplomatic relationships across all major power centres rather than drifting by default into excessive dependence on any single patron. Second, domestic economic and political stability must be treated as a strategic priority in its own

right, since internal fragility is precisely what invites external interference and reduces Pakistan's leverage in its dealings with more powerful partners. Third, Pakistan should invest in building genuine, transferable strategic assets, human capital, technological capacity, and economic competitiveness, that make it valuable to multiple partners on its own merits rather than solely as a geographically strategic location. Finally, Pakistan's diplomatic corps and foreign policy institutions require modernisation and professional strengthening to manage the increasingly complex, multi-directional diplomacy that a genuinely multipolar world demands.

Conclusion

The emergence of a multipolar world order represents neither an unambiguous opportunity nor an unavoidable danger for Pakistan, but rather a strategic environment whose outcome depends substantially on the skill, coherence, and consistency of Pakistani statecraft. A country long accustomed to navigating between a limited set of dominant patrons must now learn to manage a far more complex web of relationships, extracting the benefits of diversification while avoiding the pitfalls of becoming a battleground for others' rivalries. Success will require Pakistan to move beyond reactive, crisis-driven foreign policy toward a more deliberate,

long-term strategy of balanced engagement, anchored above all in the domestic stability and economic strength that alone can secure genuine strategic autonomy in an increasingly multipolar world.

Q5. The One Who Controls the Sea, Rules the World

Outline

- Introduction: the enduring truth of maritime power
- Mahan's theory of sea power and its historical validation
- Historical empires built on maritime dominance
- The contemporary strategic significance of sea lanes and chokepoints
- The Indian Ocean as the new global centre of gravity
- Pakistan's maritime geography: Gwadar and the Arabian Sea coastline
- China's maritime strategy and the String of Pearls debate
- India's naval buildup and its implications for the region
- Naval dimensions of the US-China rivalry
- Economic dimension: global trade, energy security, and blue economy
- Pakistan's naval capability and strategic vulnerabilities
- Non-traditional maritime security threats: piracy, smuggling, and climate change
- Policy recommendations for Pakistan's maritime future

- Conclusion: securing Pakistan's stake in the maritime century
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Introduction

Sir Walter Raleigh's timeless observation that whoever commands the sea commands trade, and whoever commands trade commands the riches of the world, remains as relevant in the age of satellites and cyber warfare as it was in the age of sail. Approximately ninety percent of global trade by volume still moves across the world's oceans, and control over the sea lanes through which this trade flows continues to translate directly into economic prosperity, military reach, and geopolitical influence. As the twenty-first century increasingly comes to be described as a maritime century, with the Indian Ocean emerging as its central strategic arena, the ancient maxim that whoever controls the sea rules the world has acquired renewed and pressing relevance, nowhere more so than for Pakistan, a nation whose long-neglected coastline may yet prove decisive to its future.

Mahan's Theory of Sea Power

The American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan, writing in the late nineteenth century, argued

systematically that national greatness had historically depended on maritime supremacy, control of the seas enabling both the projection of military power and the accumulation of commercial wealth through unimpeded trade. Mahan's analysis of history, from the rise of ancient maritime republics to the naval dominance that underpinned the British Empire, demonstrated a consistent pattern: nations that built and sustained powerful navies, secured strategic maritime chokepoints, and protected their sea-borne commerce tended to achieve outsized global influence relative to their land area or population, while land powers lacking maritime reach, however formidable on land, struggled to project sustained global power.

Historical Empires and the Sea

History offers abundant evidence for this thesis. The Portuguese and Spanish empires of the sixteenth century, though modest in continental size, achieved global reach through naval exploration and control of key maritime routes. The Dutch built a commercial empire on the strength of their merchant marine and naval power. Most decisively, the British Empire, at its zenith commanding roughly a quarter of the earth's land surface, rested fundamentally on the supremacy of the Royal Navy, which secured Britain's trade routes,

protected its colonies, and allowed it to project power to every corner of the globe from a comparatively small island base. The decline of British global primacy in the twentieth century coincided closely with the relative decline of its naval dominance, while the rise of the United States to global pre-eminence after the Second World War was similarly built upon, and sustained by, the unmatched reach of the United States Navy across every ocean on earth.

Contemporary Strategic Significance

In the contemporary world, the strategic logic of sea power has, if anything, intensified. The global economy depends on an intricate, largely invisible web of maritime shipping routes connecting producers and consumers across continents, with a handful of narrow chokepoints, the Strait of Hormuz, the Strait of Malacca, the Suez Canal, and the Bab-el-Mandeb, serving as critical arteries whose disruption could send shockwaves through the global economy within days. Energy security, in particular, remains inseparable from maritime security, as the majority of the world's oil and liquefied natural gas continues to move by sea from producing regions in the Middle East to consuming economies in Asia, Europe, and beyond, making control over these maritime routes a matter of vital strategic interest for virtually every major

power.

The Indian Ocean's Rising Centrality

Among the world's oceans, the Indian Ocean has emerged as the pre-eminent strategic arena of the twenty-first century, a status reflecting both its role as the primary conduit for energy shipments from the Gulf to Asia's booming economies and its position astride the sea lanes connecting the Atlantic and Pacific trading systems. This has drawn intensifying great power attention and competition, with China expanding its naval presence and port investments across the region, India pursuing an ambitious naval modernisation programme explicitly framed around securing what it regards as its natural sphere of maritime influence, and the United States maintaining substantial naval presence to preserve freedom of navigation and counterbalance rising Chinese influence. Pakistan sits directly astride this contested and increasingly consequential maritime space.

Pakistan's Maritime Geography

Pakistan possesses approximately one thousand kilometres of coastline along the Arabian Sea, positioned at the confluence of South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia, a geography of considerable, if historically

underexploited, strategic value. The deep-water port of Gwadar, located near the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz through which a substantial share of the world's seaborne oil trade passes, gives Pakistan a position of genuine strategic significance in global energy security calculations. Karachi, Pakistan's principal port and economic hub, similarly anchors the country's connection to global maritime trade, through which the vast majority of Pakistan's own imports and exports, including critical energy supplies, currently pass.

China's Maritime Strategy and Gwadar

China's development of Gwadar port as the maritime terminus of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor reflects Beijing's broader maritime strategy of securing reliable access to the Indian Ocean and diversifying the routes through which its energy imports and export trade can flow, reducing dependence on the narrow and potentially vulnerable Strait of Malacca chokepoint. Analysts have long debated whether Gwadar forms part of a broader Chinese "String of Pearls" strategy of establishing a network of friendly ports across the Indian Ocean region to support both commercial and, potentially, future naval operations. For Pakistan, Gwadar represents both an opportunity to become a central node in regional connectivity and trade, and a

source of geopolitical sensitivity, given the intense scrutiny and concern the port's development has attracted from India and other regional and global powers wary of expanding Chinese maritime presence so close to critical Indian Ocean shipping lanes.

India's Naval Buildup

India has pursued an ambitious and sustained naval modernisation programme over the past two decades, including indigenous aircraft carrier construction, nuclear-powered submarine development, and a rapidly expanding surface fleet, explicitly framed by Indian strategic planners around securing what New Delhi regards as its natural sphere of maritime pre-eminence across the Indian Ocean region. This buildup, driven substantially by India's own concerns about growing Chinese naval presence in waters it considers its strategic backyard, has direct implications for Pakistan, whose comparatively modest naval capabilities face an increasingly pronounced and widening asymmetry relative to India's expanding maritime power.

The Naval Dimension of US-China Rivalry

The broader strategic rivalry between the United States and China increasingly plays out at sea, with American

naval strategy focused on preserving freedom of navigation and countering what it regards as expanding Chinese maritime assertiveness, from the South China Sea to the Indian Ocean, while China continues to expand both its blue-water naval capabilities and its network of overseas port access and logistics support. This great power naval competition inevitably shapes the strategic environment in which Pakistan's own maritime interests, and its close partnership with China, must be navigated, adding another layer of complexity to Islamabad's maritime calculations.

The Economic Dimension

Beyond pure strategic competition, the maritime domain carries enormous, often underappreciated economic significance for Pakistan. The overwhelming majority of Pakistan's international trade moves by sea, making the security and efficiency of its ports and shipping lanes directly consequential for national economic performance. The concept of the blue economy, encompassing fisheries, offshore energy resources, seabed minerals, and maritime tourism, remains substantially underdeveloped in Pakistan relative to its coastline's potential, representing a significant untapped source of economic growth and employment that a more deliberate national maritime strategy could help unlock.

Pakistan's Naval Capability and Vulnerabilities

Despite its strategically significant coastline, Pakistan's naval capabilities remain considerably more modest than those of India, creating a persistent asymmetry in the maritime domain that mirrors, and in some respects exceeds, the broader conventional military imbalance between the two countries. Pakistan's naval modernisation efforts, including the acquisition of new frigates and submarines with Chinese assistance, aim to narrow this gap and enhance deterrence, but resource constraints amid competing conventional and nuclear force priorities have historically limited the pace and scale of Pakistan's maritime buildup relative to the scale of the challenge it faces.

Non-Traditional Maritime Threats

Beyond great power competition, Pakistan's maritime domain faces a range of non-traditional security challenges, including piracy and armed robbery at sea, narcotics and arms smuggling along its coastline, illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing that depletes marine resources vital to coastal livelihoods, and the growing threat of climate change, including rising sea levels and increasingly severe cyclones, which threatens coastal infrastructure and communities along the Sindh and

Balochistan coastlines. Addressing these challenges requires sustained investment in coast guard capacity, maritime domain awareness, and regional cooperation mechanisms, alongside purely military naval capability.

Policy Recommendations

Pakistan's maritime future requires a coherent, sustained national maritime strategy that goes well beyond naval force modernisation alone. This includes accelerating the development of Gwadar and associated infrastructure to realise its full potential as a regional trade and logistics hub, rather than allowing it to remain underutilised amid security and connectivity challenges. It requires deliberate investment in developing Pakistan's blue economy, fisheries, offshore resources, and maritime tourism, through supportive policy and infrastructure. It requires continued, carefully calibrated naval modernisation to maintain credible deterrence against a numerically superior neighbour, alongside enhanced maritime domain awareness and coast guard capacity to address non-traditional threats. Finally, it requires skilful diplomacy to manage the geopolitical sensitivities surrounding Gwadar and Pakistan's naval cooperation with China, ensuring these relationships strengthen rather than complicate Pakistan's broader strategic position.

Conclusion

The ancient wisdom that dominion over the sea confers dominion over trade, and dominion over trade confers global influence, has lost none of its force in the contemporary world, and indeed carries renewed urgency as the Indian Ocean emerges as the central arena of twenty-first century great power competition. Pakistan's roughly one thousand kilometres of Arabian Sea coastline, anchored by the strategically vital port of Gwadar, represent a significant national asset whose full potential remains substantially unrealised. As global attention increasingly turns toward the maritime domain, Pakistan's ability to develop its naval capability, its blue economy, and its strategic maritime infrastructure will play an increasingly decisive role in determining its broader economic and geopolitical trajectory in the decades ahead.

Q6. There Is Nothing So Likely to Produce Peace as to Be Well Prepared to Meet an Enemy

Outline

- Introduction: the paradox at the heart of the deterrence doctrine
- Origins and meaning of the maxim across military philosophy
- Theoretical foundation: deterrence theory in international relations
- Historical validation: the Cold War and nuclear peace
- Pakistan's own experience: nuclearisation and strategic stability
- The 1998 nuclear tests and their aftermath
- Conventional deterrence and the balance of power on Pakistan's borders
- Preparedness beyond weapons: economic and diplomatic dimensions
- The counter-argument: arms races, security dilemmas, and the risk of miscalculation
- Balancing preparedness with diplomacy and confidence-building
- Pakistan's internal security preparedness against non-state threats

- Comprehensive national security in the modern context
 - Policy recommendations for balanced preparedness
 - Conclusion: strength as the foundation, not the substitute, for peace
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Introduction

The maxim that nothing produces peace so reliably as being well prepared to meet an enemy captures one of the oldest and most enduring paradoxes in the history of statecraft and strategic thought: that the surest way to avoid war is often to be visibly and credibly capable of winning one. Far from being a call to militarism for its own sake, this principle, echoed across centuries of military philosophy from the Roman maxim "if you want peace, prepare for war" to modern deterrence theory, reflects a sober recognition that adversaries and potential aggressors are deterred not by goodwill or good intentions, but by a realistic calculation that the costs of aggression would outweigh any conceivable benefit. For Pakistan, a nation whose modern history has been shaped decisively by conflict, insecurity, and an enduring rivalry with a much larger neighbour, this principle has not merely been an abstract theory but a lived strategic reality underpinning some of the most consequential

decisions in its national history.

Origins and Meaning

The wisdom underlying this maxim predates modern international relations theory by millennia, finding expression in the writings of ancient strategists from Sun Tzu to Roman military thinkers, who consistently observed that weakness invites aggression while credible strength discourages it. The core insight is not that preparation for conflict is desirable in itself, but that visible, credible military and strategic capability alters the calculations of a potential aggressor, transforming what might otherwise appear to be an attractive, low-cost opportunity for conquest or coercion into a prohibitively costly and uncertain gamble. Peace, in this framework, is not the natural absence of conflict but an actively constructed equilibrium, sustained by the mutual recognition among rival states that neither can achieve its objectives through force without incurring unacceptable costs.

Deterrence Theory

Modern international relations scholarship has formalised this ancient insight into the theory of deterrence, which holds that stability between rival states can be maintained when each possesses sufficient

capability to inflict unacceptable costs on the other in response to aggression, thereby removing any rational incentive to initiate conflict. Deterrence theory distinguishes between deterrence by denial, possessing sufficient defensive capability to prevent an aggressor from achieving its military objectives, and deterrence by punishment, possessing the capability to inflict devastating retaliation regardless of the outcome of the initial engagement. Both forms rest on the same underlying logic: that credible preparedness, rather than passivity or unilateral disarmament, offers the most reliable foundation for avoiding war between rival powers.

Historical Validation: The Cold War

Perhaps the most consequential historical validation of this principle emerged during the Cold War, when the United States and the Soviet Union, possessing arsenals capable of mutual annihilation, avoided direct military conflict for over four decades despite intense ideological rivalry and numerous proxy confrontations across the globe. The doctrine of mutually assured destruction, however unsettling in its logic, produced what historians have termed the "long peace," a sustained absence of direct great power war precisely because both superpowers understood with complete clarity that any

attack would be met with devastating retaliation. This period stands in stark contrast to the preceding decades of the twentieth century, when relatively balanced but less clearly deterrent military postures failed to prevent two catastrophic world wars.

Pakistan's Nuclearisation

Pakistan's own strategic history offers a direct and consequential illustration of this principle in action. Following India's first nuclear test in 1974, Pakistan faced a stark strategic reality: an increasingly pronounced conventional military asymmetry with its much larger neighbour, compounded by the demonstrated nuclear capability of a rival with whom it had already fought three wars. Pakistani strategic planners concluded, consistent with deterrence theory, that only a credible nuclear capability of its own could restore strategic balance and prevent India from being tempted to exploit its growing conventional and now nuclear advantage to impose a decisive military or political outcome on Pakistan.

The 1998 Tests and Their Aftermath

Pakistan's decision to conduct nuclear tests in May 1998, in direct response to India's own tests earlier that month, was widely condemned internationally and triggered

significant economic sanctions, yet from the perspective of Pakistani strategic calculus, it achieved its core objective: establishing a credible mutual deterrent that has, since that point, prevented any full-scale conventional war between the two nuclear-armed neighbours, despite several serious crises, including the Kargil conflict of 1999, the 2001-2002 military standoff following the attack on the Indian parliament, and periodic escalations following major terrorist incidents. Even during these episodes of acute tension, both sides have consistently exercised restraint from allowing conflict to escalate toward full-scale war, a restraint many strategists attribute directly to the stabilising, if paradoxical, effect of mutual nuclear deterrence, sometimes termed the "stability-instability paradox," whereby nuclear deterrence prevents large-scale war even as it may permit lower-intensity confrontations to continue.

Conventional Deterrence

Nuclear weapons alone, however, do not exhaust the logic of preparedness. Pakistan's conventional military posture, its army, air force, and increasingly modernised defence industry, similarly serves the function of raising the costs and uncertainties of any potential aggression along its borders, complementing rather than substituting

for nuclear deterrence, particularly given the stability-instability paradox that allows conventional friction to persist even under a nuclear umbrella. Maintaining credible conventional forces, alongside continued investment in modern military technology, missile defence, and joint military exercises with allied nations, reinforces the broader deterrent posture that has underpinned Pakistan's relative security despite its persistent rivalry with a considerably larger and more resource-rich neighbour.

Preparedness Beyond Weapons

The principle of preparedness, properly understood, extends well beyond military hardware alone. Economic resilience, diplomatic alliances, intelligence capability, and social cohesion all contribute to a nation's genuine capacity to deter and, if necessary, withstand external pressure or aggression. A nation burdened by economic crisis, political instability, or internal social fracture, however impressive its formal military arsenal, presents a far less credible deterrent posture than one combining military capability with genuine national resilience across these dimensions. Pakistan's own experience of economic vulnerability, including recurring balance of payments crises, illustrates how economic fragility can undermine the credibility of even substantial military

preparedness, since adversaries and international observers alike recognise that sustained conflict would be considerably more difficult for an economically strained state to bear.

The Counter-Argument

Yet the logic of preparedness is not without serious risks and legitimate critics. Excessive emphasis on military buildup can trigger classic security dilemmas, whereby one state's defensive preparations are perceived by rivals as offensive or threatening, prompting reciprocal buildups that escalate tension and divert resources from development without necessarily enhancing genuine security. Arms races, historically, have sometimes preceded rather than prevented major conflicts, as in the years leading up to the First World War, when competitive military buildups among European powers contributed to an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and rigid mobilisation planning that made de-escalation during the July 1914 crisis extraordinarily difficult. Nuclear deterrence itself, while it has prevented major war between India and Pakistan, carries the ever-present risk of catastrophic miscalculation, accident, or unauthorised use, a risk that grows rather than diminishes as both countries continue to modernise and expand their nuclear and missile capabilities.

Balancing Preparedness with Diplomacy

The historical record suggests that preparedness produces peace most reliably not as a substitute for diplomacy but as its necessary complement, providing the stable strategic backdrop against which meaningful diplomatic engagement, confidence-building measures, and eventual conflict resolution become possible. Pakistan's own experience illustrates this: periods of relative strategic stability created by credible deterrence have, at various points, opened space for diplomatic initiatives, including composite dialogue processes with India addressing issues from trade to Kashmir, even if these initiatives have often subsequently stalled amid renewed political tension. A purely military conception of preparedness, divorced from parallel diplomatic effort, risks producing not peace but a prolonged, costly, and precarious standoff rather than genuine, durable stability.

Internal Security Preparedness

For Pakistan specifically, the logic of preparedness extends beyond external, state-based threats to encompass the internal security challenges posed by militancy and terrorism that have exacted an enormous human and economic toll over the past two decades. The gradual improvement in Pakistan's internal security

environment following sustained military and law enforcement operations against militant networks demonstrates that preparedness against non-state threats follows a similar logic to preparedness against state adversaries: sustained investment in intelligence capability, security force training, and coordinated civil-military response has proven considerably more effective in restoring stability than reactive, underfunded, or inconsistent approaches to internal security.

Comprehensive National Security

A modern understanding of national preparedness must therefore be comprehensive, integrating military deterrence with economic resilience, internal security capability, diplomatic engagement, and social cohesion, recognising that vulnerabilities in any one of these dimensions can undermine the credibility and effectiveness of strength in the others. Pakistan's strategic planners increasingly recognise this broader conception, even as resource constraints and competing priorities continue to complicate its full implementation across every dimension simultaneously.

Policy Recommendations

For Pakistan, translating this principle into sound policy requires maintaining credible, cost-effective conventional

and nuclear deterrence without allowing military expenditure to crowd out the economic and social investment necessary for genuine long-term national resilience. It requires pairing deterrent capability with active, sustained diplomatic engagement, seeking confidence-building measures and crisis-management mechanisms with India that reduce the risk of miscalculation even as underlying strategic competition persists. It requires continued investment in internal security capacity, addressing the roots of extremism through both security and developmental means rather than security measures alone. Above all, it requires recognising that genuine national strength is comprehensive rather than narrowly military, encompassing economic stability, institutional capacity, and social cohesion alongside traditional defence capability.

Conclusion

The maxim that preparedness produces peace has proven itself repeatedly across history, from the nuclear stability of the Cold War to Pakistan's own experience of nuclear deterrence preventing full-scale war with India despite repeated crises over more than two decades. Yet this wisdom carries an essential caveat: preparedness produces peace only when it is calibrated, credible, and

paired with genuine diplomatic engagement, rather than pursued as an end in itself or allowed to spiral into an unconstrained arms race that increases rather than decreases the risk of catastrophic miscalculation. For Pakistan, situated in one of the world's most persistently volatile strategic environments, the enduring lesson is not that strength alone guarantees peace, but that credible strength, wisely calibrated and combined with sustained diplomatic effort, remains the indispensable foundation upon which any lasting peace must ultimately be built.

Q7. Revitalising the Agriculture Sector of Pakistan

Outline

- Introduction: agriculture as Pakistan's forgotten backbone
- Historical and current significance of agriculture in the national economy
- Structural profile of Pakistani agriculture: crops, land, and labour
- The productivity crisis: yield gaps compared to regional peers
- Water scarcity and the crisis of irrigation management
- Land fragmentation, tenancy issues, and the feudal legacy
- Climate change impacts: floods, heatwaves, and shifting patterns
- Input inefficiencies: seed quality, fertiliser misuse, and mechanisation gaps
- Market distortions: support prices, middlemen, and export restrictions
- Access to credit and the exclusion of small farmers
- Research, extension services, and the knowledge gap
- Success stories and pilot models worth scaling

- Comprehensive policy roadmap for agricultural revitalisation
 - Conclusion: reclaiming Pakistan's agrarian potential
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Introduction

Long before Pakistan's cities swelled with industry and its economy began its uneven march toward services and technology, it was the soil of the Indus basin, among the most fertile river systems on earth, that sustained civilisations for millennia and continues today to feed and employ a substantial share of the nation's population. Yet despite this deep agrarian heritage and abundant natural endowment, Pakistan's agriculture sector today stands as a study in unrealised potential, contributing a shrinking share of national output, plagued by stagnant productivity, water mismanagement, and structural neglect, even as it remains the primary source of livelihood for nearly forty percent of the labour force and the foundation of the country's food security. Revitalising this sector is not a matter of nostalgic sentiment for a rural past but an urgent economic and strategic imperative for a nation facing growing population pressure, water scarcity, and mounting import bills for basic foodstuffs.

Significance of Agriculture

Agriculture remains the single largest employer in Pakistan, directly and indirectly sustaining the livelihoods of the majority of the rural population, and continues to contribute a substantial share of gross domestic product, even as this share has gradually declined relative to services and industry over recent decades. Beyond direct output, agriculture forms the backbone of Pakistan's textile industry, the country's largest export earner, through cotton production, while also underpinning food security for a rapidly growing population that will exceed three hundred million within the coming decades. Any serious strategy for national economic stability, poverty reduction, or export diversification must therefore reckon centrally with the health and productivity of the agriculture sector, rather than treating it as a residual concern behind industrial and service sector policy.

Structural Profile

Pakistani agriculture is dominated by a handful of major crops, wheat, cotton, sugarcane, and rice, cultivated predominantly across the fertile plains of Punjab and Sindh, irrigated by the world's largest contiguous irrigation network fed by the Indus River system. Despite this irrigation infrastructure, the vast majority of Pakistani farms remain small and fragmented, with a large

proportion of landholdings falling below economically optimal size for mechanised, efficient cultivation. This structural fragmentation, combined with widespread tenant farming arrangements that often leave cultivators with limited incentive or capital to invest in long-term land improvement, constrains the sector's capacity to modernise and achieve the productivity gains realised by comparable agricultural economies.

The Productivity Crisis

Perhaps the most striking indictment of Pakistani agriculture's underperformance lies in its persistent yield gap relative to regional and global peers. Despite comparable or even superior natural endowments in several respects, Pakistani yields for major crops including wheat, rice, and cotton consistently lag behind those achieved in India, China, and other comparable agricultural economies, reflecting deep-rooted inefficiencies across seed quality, water management, fertiliser use, mechanisation, and farming practices. Closing even a fraction of this yield gap through targeted reform could substantially increase national agricultural output without requiring any expansion of cultivated area, offering perhaps the single most significant lever available for improving both farmer incomes and national food security simultaneously.

The Water Crisis

Water scarcity represents perhaps the most existential threat to Pakistani agriculture's long-term viability. Pakistan's agriculture depends almost entirely on the Indus River system, whose flows are increasingly strained by population growth, inefficient irrigation practices, and the accelerating impacts of climate change on Himalayan glacial melt patterns that feed the river's headwaters. Pakistan's irrigation system, despite its impressive scale, suffers from substantial water losses through unlined canals, inefficient flood irrigation practices that waste enormous quantities of water relative to crop water requirements, and outdated water pricing structures that provide farmers little incentive to conserve. Pakistan today ranks among the most water-stressed countries in the world, with per capita water availability having fallen dramatically over recent decades, a trajectory that, left unaddressed, threatens to undermine the very foundation of the country's agricultural economy.

Land Fragmentation and Tenancy

The structural legacy of Pakistan's historical land tenure system, characterised by large landholding elites alongside a vast population of smallholders and landless tenant farmers, continues to shape agricultural outcomes

in ways that constrain productivity and perpetuate rural poverty. Tenant farmers, often cultivating land under sharecropping arrangements that leave them with limited security of tenure and correspondingly limited incentive to invest in soil improvement or long-term productivity enhancement, represent a substantial share of the agricultural workforce. Meanwhile, large landholding elites, in several regions, continue to wield disproportionate political influence that has historically obstructed meaningful land reform, agricultural taxation, and policies that might otherwise redistribute opportunity more broadly across the rural population.

Climate Change Impacts

Pakistan ranks among the countries most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change despite contributing minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions, and agriculture bears a disproportionate share of this vulnerability. The catastrophic floods of 2022, which submerged vast agricultural areas across Sindh and Balochistan, destroyed standing crops, and devastated rural livelihoods, offered a stark preview of the escalating climate risks facing Pakistani agriculture, including more frequent and severe flooding, intensifying heatwaves that stress crop yields and livestock, and shifting rainfall patterns that disrupt traditional cropping calendars.

Building climate resilience into agricultural planning, through drought and flood-resistant crop varieties, improved early warning systems, and climate-smart farming practices, has become an urgent rather than optional component of any serious agricultural revitalisation strategy.

Input Inefficiencies

Beyond water, Pakistani agriculture suffers from significant inefficiencies across other critical inputs. Certified, high-yield seed varieties remain inconsistently available and adopted, with many farmers continuing to use saved or lower-quality seed that underperforms relative to improved varieties available through modern agricultural research. Fertiliser application patterns are frequently imbalanced, with excessive use of some nutrients and insufficient use of others, reflecting inadequate soil testing infrastructure and extension advice reaching individual farmers. Mechanisation, while expanding, remains limited among smallholder farmers who often cannot afford modern equipment, perpetuating labour-intensive, lower-productivity farming methods that limit both yields and farmer incomes.

Market Distortions

Pakistan's agricultural markets have historically been shaped by a complex web of government interventions, including minimum support prices for key crops such as wheat, periodic export restrictions intended to manage domestic food prices, and extensive involvement of middlemen and commission agents who capture a substantial share of the value chain between farmer and final consumer. While intended to protect farmers and consumers, these interventions have frequently produced distortions, encouraging overproduction of politically favoured crops such as sugarcane at the expense of more water-efficient or higher-value alternatives, while export restrictions imposed during periods of domestic price pressure have periodically undermined farmer incomes and Pakistan's competitiveness in international agricultural markets.

Credit Access

Access to affordable, timely agricultural credit remains a persistent constraint for the majority of Pakistani farmers, particularly smallholders lacking the formal land titles or collateral typically required by commercial banks. This exclusion from formal credit markets forces many small farmers to rely on informal lenders, often at exploitative interest rates, or on commission agents who provide credit in exchange for the right to purchase the farmer's

crop at below-market prices, perpetuating cycles of rural indebtedness and limiting farmers' capacity to invest in productivity-enhancing inputs and technology.

Research and Extension Gaps

Pakistan's agricultural research institutions, while possessing considerable technical expertise, have historically suffered from chronic underfunding, weak linkages to actual farming practice, and an agricultural extension system, the mechanism through which research findings and improved practices are meant to reach farmers, that remains understaffed, under-resourced, and often disconnected from the realities of smallholder farming. Bridging this knowledge gap between agricultural research and on-the-ground farming practice represents one of the most cost-effective avenues available for boosting productivity, given that many of the improved seed varieties, water management techniques, and farming practices needed already exist but remain inadequately disseminated to the farmers who could benefit from them.

Success Stories Worth Scaling

Despite these systemic challenges, pockets of genuine agricultural innovation offer instructive models for

broader reform. Drip and sprinkler irrigation pilot programmes, where implemented, have demonstrated substantial water savings alongside yield improvements. Contract farming arrangements between agribusiness companies and smallholder farmers in some regions have provided access to quality inputs, credit, and guaranteed markets, improving both productivity and farmer incomes. Digital agricultural advisory platforms, delivering weather forecasts, pest alerts, and market price information directly to farmers' mobile phones, have begun to demonstrate the potential of technology to partially bridge the extension gap even where formal government extension services remain thin.

Policy Roadmap

Revitalising Pakistani agriculture requires a comprehensive, sustained reform agenda. Water sector reform must prioritise canal lining, adoption of efficient irrigation technologies such as drip and sprinkler systems, and rational water pricing that incentivises conservation without imposing undue burden on smallholders. Land reform, including formalising tenant rights and improving land titling, would enhance farmers' security of tenure and incentive to invest in long-term productivity. Agricultural research and extension systems require substantially increased funding and

modernisation, including greater use of digital platforms to reach farmers directly. Credit access must be expanded through targeted microfinance and formal banking sector outreach to smallholders, potentially supported by innovative collateral mechanisms such as warehouse receipt financing. Market reforms should reduce distortionary interventions in favour of policies that reward productivity and quality, while investing in cold storage, processing, and value-chain infrastructure that allows farmers to capture a greater share of final product value.

Conclusion

Pakistan's agriculture sector, despite decades of relative policy neglect, remains the foundation upon which the nation's food security, export earnings, and rural livelihoods continue to rest. The persistent yield gaps, water mismanagement, and structural inefficiencies that constrain the sector today are not immutable facts of nature but the product of policy choices and institutional neglect that can, with sufficient political will and sustained investment, be reversed. As Pakistan confronts a growing population, intensifying climate pressures, and mounting food import costs, revitalising agriculture is not merely an option among competing development priorities but an existential necessity, one

capable, if pursued seriously, of simultaneously advancing food security, rural poverty reduction, and export competitiveness for generations to come.

Q8. Countering the Growing Menace of Beggary

Outline

- Introduction: begging as the visible symptom of deeper societal failure
- Defining and categorising the phenomenon of beggary
- Scale of the problem in Pakistan: statistics and urban visibility
- Root causes: poverty, unemployment, and the social safety net gap
- The organised begging mafia: exploitation and forced begging
- Child beggary and its intersection with trafficking and abuse
- Religious and cultural dimensions that inadvertently sustain begging
- Rural-to-urban migration and displacement as contributing factors
- Disability, mental health, and the absence of institutional care
- Legal framework: existing laws and their poor enforcement
- Comparative approaches: how other countries have addressed begging

- Economic and social costs of unchecked beggary
 - A comprehensive policy roadmap for rehabilitation and prevention
 - Conclusion: from charity to systemic solutions
-

Introduction

At virtually every traffic signal, market entrance, and mosque courtyard in Pakistan's cities, a familiar and troubling scene repeats itself daily: men, women, and children, some visibly disabled, some carrying infants, some simply worn down by circumstance, extending their hands for alms from passing strangers. Beggary has become so normalised a feature of Pakistani urban life that its scale and complexity are often overlooked, dismissed as an inevitable feature of a developing economy rather than confronted as the symptom of deep, interlocking failures in social protection, economic opportunity, and law enforcement that it actually represents. Countering this growing menace requires moving beyond the reflexive charity of a few coins passed through a car window toward a serious, systemic policy response that addresses both the immediate human suffering visible on the street and the underlying structural forces that produce and, in many cases, actively organise it.

Defining and Categorising

Beggary in Pakistan encompasses a far more heterogeneous phenomenon than casual observation might suggest. It includes genuinely destitute individuals with no other means of survival, often elderly, disabled, or otherwise unable to participate in the formal or informal labour market. It includes children, frequently deployed by parents, guardians, or, disturbingly often, by organised criminal networks that exploit them for profit. It includes individuals suffering from untreated mental illness, wandering without family support or institutional care. And it includes, controversially, a segment of professional or habitual beggars for whom begging has become an established, sometimes lucrative, informal occupation, occasionally connected to organised networks that manage begging as a coordinated criminal enterprise. Any effective policy response must distinguish carefully between these categories, since the appropriate intervention for a destitute elderly widow differs fundamentally from that required for a trafficked child or a member of an organised begging syndicate.

Scale of the Problem

Reliable, comprehensive data on the scale of beggary in Pakistan remains scarce, itself a reflection of the low policy priority the issue has historically received, but

available estimates and visible urban patterns suggest a substantial and, in many cities, growing population engaged in begging, concentrated disproportionately in major urban centres including Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, as well as around religious sites and during periods of heightened charitable giving such as Ramadan. Periodic government and civil society surveys have suggested the presence of large populations of beggars in major cities, with a significant proportion identified as belonging to organised networks rather than acting independently, underscoring that the visible scale of street begging represents only the most immediately apparent manifestation of a considerably larger underlying phenomenon.

Root Causes

The fundamental driver of beggary in Pakistan remains poverty, compounded by chronic unemployment and underemployment that leaves a significant share of the population without reliable, dignified means of livelihood. Pakistan's social safety net, while it has expanded meaningfully through programmes such as the Benazir Income Support Programme, remains insufficient in coverage and adequacy to fully protect the most vulnerable segments of the population from falling into destitution, particularly those without formal identification

documents, stable addresses, or the administrative capacity to navigate bureaucratic enrolment processes. For individuals and families facing this combination of poverty, limited employment opportunity, and inadequate social protection, begging can become, however degrading, one of the few immediately available means of survival.

The Organised Begging Mafia

Perhaps the most disturbing dimension of beggary in Pakistan is its frequent organisation by criminal networks that recruit, coerce, and in many documented cases physically mutilate vulnerable individuals, including children, to maximise their earning potential as beggars, subsequently confiscating the majority of their daily earnings. These begging mafias operate with a level of coordination that includes assigning specific territories to individual beggars, providing transportation to lucrative locations, and, in the most egregious cases, deliberately inflicting disabilities on children to increase public sympathy and, consequently, alms collected. This organised exploitation transforms beggary from a simple manifestation of individual poverty into a form of modern slavery and human trafficking, deserving the full weight of criminal law enforcement rather than mere social welfare intervention.

Child Beggary and Trafficking

Children represent a particularly vulnerable population within Pakistan's begging economy, frequently deployed by parents facing acute poverty or, more disturbingly, trafficked and controlled by criminal networks entirely separate from their families. Child beggars face not only the immediate deprivations of lost education and childhood, but often severe physical abuse, malnutrition, and in the most extreme documented cases, deliberate physical mutilation intended to increase sympathy-driven donations. This dimension of beggary intersects directly with Pakistan's broader challenges around child protection and human trafficking, demanding coordinated action from law enforcement, child protection agencies, and international anti-trafficking mechanisms rather than treatment as a purely domestic social welfare issue.

Religious and Cultural Dimensions

Pakistan's strong cultural and religious traditions of charitable giving, rooted in Islamic obligations such as zakat and sadaqah, while representing a genuinely admirable social value, have inadvertently created conditions that sustain and, in some respects, incentivise street begging as a viable means of livelihood. The relative ease and immediacy of direct alms-giving, compared to engaging with formal charitable institutions

or advocating for systemic policy reform, means that individual charitable impulses, however well-intentioned, often perpetuate rather than resolve the underlying phenomenon, particularly when directed toward organised begging networks rather than genuinely destitute individuals or vetted charitable organisations equipped to provide sustainable support.

Rural-to-Urban Migration

Pakistan's rapid and largely unmanaged urbanisation, driven by rural poverty, agricultural distress, and the search for economic opportunity in cities, has produced substantial populations of migrants who arrive in urban centres without adequate housing, formal employment prospects, or social support networks. For a segment of this migrant population, particularly those arriving with limited education, skills, or documentation, begging becomes one of the few immediately accessible means of urban survival, further swelling the ranks of the visible begging population in Pakistan's largest cities.

Disability and Mental Health

A significant proportion of Pakistan's begging population consists of individuals with physical disabilities or untreated mental illness, populations for whom Pakistan's institutional care infrastructure remains

grossly inadequate. The near-total absence of accessible, quality state-run rehabilitation centres, psychiatric care facilities, and disability support services leaves many such individuals with no viable alternative to street begging, a failure of the state's basic social protection and healthcare responsibilities that cannot be addressed through law enforcement or criminalisation alone, but requires substantial investment in institutional care capacity.

Legal Framework and Enforcement

Pakistan does possess legal provisions addressing begging, including provincial anti-begging ordinances that criminalise both begging itself and, more importantly, the organised exploitation of vulnerable individuals for begging purposes. In practice, however, enforcement of these laws has historically proven inconsistent and superficial, often manifesting as periodic, poorly coordinated police sweeps that detain visible beggars without addressing the organised criminal networks profiting from their exploitation, or providing any meaningful rehabilitation or alternative livelihood support for those detained. This pattern of enforcement without rehabilitation tends merely to displace the visible manifestation of begging temporarily, without addressing its underlying causes or dismantling the criminal

networks that sustain its most exploitative forms.

Comparative Approaches

Other countries facing similar challenges offer instructive lessons. Several nations have adopted comprehensive approaches combining targeted law enforcement against organised begging and trafficking networks with substantial investment in social welfare programmes, vocational training, and institutional care for vulnerable populations, recognising that criminalisation of individual beggars without addressing root causes and organised exploitation tends to prove ineffective and, in many cases, counterproductive. Successful models generally emphasise identification and rehabilitation of genuinely vulnerable individuals, alongside serious criminal prosecution of those who organise and profit from exploiting others through forced begging, particularly involving children.

Economic and Social Costs

Beyond the immediate human suffering it reflects, unchecked beggary imposes broader economic and social costs on Pakistani society. It represents a significant loss of human productive potential, particularly among children whose education and development are sacrificed to begging rather than

schooling. It damages Pakistan's international image and tourism potential, with visible urban begging frequently cited by visitors as a stark indicator of unresolved poverty and governance failure. It also, less visibly but perhaps most importantly, represents a moral and social failure of the state's basic responsibility to provide a functioning safety net and institutional care infrastructure for its most vulnerable citizens.

Policy Roadmap

Addressing beggary effectively requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged strategy rather than reliance on periodic law enforcement sweeps alone. Expanding and improving the coverage and adequacy of social safety net programmes, ensuring vulnerable populations, including those without formal documentation, can access support, represents a foundational priority. Dismantling organised begging networks requires sustained, well-resourced criminal investigation and prosecution, treating child exploitation for begging purposes with the seriousness of a trafficking crime rather than a minor public order offence. Expanding accessible institutional care for individuals with disabilities and untreated mental illness would address a population for whom begging currently represents the only available option. Vocational training

and livelihood support programmes targeted at rehabilitated beggars, alongside genuine reintegration support, are essential to ensure that removal from begging does not simply push vulnerable individuals into equally precarious alternatives. Finally, public awareness campaigns encouraging donation through vetted charitable institutions rather than direct street alms-giving could help redirect Pakistan's strong charitable impulse toward channels that address root causes rather than sustaining organised exploitation.

Conclusion

The growing visibility of beggary across Pakistan's urban landscape is not merely an unfortunate but inevitable feature of a developing economy; it is a direct, measurable indicator of failures in social protection, child protection, mental health care, and law enforcement that deserve far more serious and sustained policy attention than they have historically received. Countering this menace effectively demands moving decisively beyond the comfortable but ultimately inadequate response of individual charity toward a comprehensive state strategy that combines expanded social protection, serious criminal enforcement against organised exploitation, institutional care for the vulnerable, and genuine rehabilitation pathways. Only through such a systemic

response can Pakistan begin to address not merely the visible symptom on its streets, but the deeper structural failures that produce it.

Q9. Politicisation of Sports: A New Challenge

Outline

- Introduction: sport as both unifier and battlefield
- Historical roots of politics and sport intertwining
- Global case studies: Olympic boycotts and sporting diplomacy
- Cricket as the prism of India-Pakistan political relations
- Domestic politicisation: sports federations and governance interference
- The Pakistan Cricket Board as a case study in political interference
- Economic dimension: sponsorship, broadcasting rights, and political patronage
- Athletes as political actors and instruments of soft power
- Social media era: amplified politicisation and public pressure
- Consequences: talent attrition, institutional instability, and lost opportunity
- Sports diplomacy as a potential positive counter-force
- International governance bodies and their uneven enforcement of neutrality

- Policy recommendations for depoliticising sports governance
 - Conclusion: reclaiming sport's unifying promise
-

Introduction

Sport, at its idealised best, is meant to transcend the divisions of politics, offering a shared arena in which nations and individuals compete on the basis of talent, discipline, and fair play rather than ideology or power. Yet the history of modern sport, and Pakistan's own experience within it, reveals a persistent and increasingly pronounced tendency for political considerations, from international diplomatic rivalries to domestic institutional patronage, to intrude upon and often distort the world of athletic competition. The politicisation of sports represents a genuinely new and intensifying challenge in an era of hyper-connected media, nationalist politics, and governance structures in which sporting institutions frequently answer more directly to political patrons than to the athletes and fans they ostensibly serve.

Historical Roots

The entanglement of sport and politics is not a new phenomenon but has deep historical roots, from the ancient Olympic truce that briefly suspended Greek

city-state conflicts to allow athletic competition, to the notorious 1936 Berlin Olympics, which Nazi Germany sought to exploit as a propaganda showcase for its ideology. The Cold War era saw sport become an especially prominent arena of political competition, with the United States and Soviet Union each treating Olympic medal counts as tangible evidence of ideological and systemic superiority, culminating in the mutual boycotts of the 1980 Moscow and 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. This history establishes that the politicisation of sport is a recurring, structural feature of international competition rather than a wholly novel development, even as its specific manifestations continue to evolve.

Global Case Studies

Beyond the Cold War Olympic boycotts, numerous episodes illustrate the persistent intertwining of sport and international politics. Sporting boycotts and isolation played a meaningful role in the international campaign against apartheid South Africa, demonstrating sport's potential as a tool of legitimate political pressure against genuine human rights violations. Conversely, the awarding of major international sporting events, including World Cups and Olympic Games, to nations seeking to enhance their international image or deflect attention

from domestic political controversies, illustrates how authoritarian and democratic governments alike have consistently sought to harness sport's global visibility for political purposes, a practice sometimes termed sportswashing by critics.

Cricket and India-Pakistan Relations

Nowhere is the politicisation of sport more starkly visible in Pakistan's own experience than in the fraught relationship between cricket and India-Pakistan diplomatic relations. Bilateral cricket between the two nations, once a regular and passionately followed fixture, has been effectively suspended for over a decade outside of multilateral tournaments, a direct casualty of the broader political and security tensions between the two countries. Even within multilateral tournaments such as the Cricket World Cup or Asia Cup, matches between India and Pakistan are inevitably enveloped in intense political symbolism, nationalist media coverage, and diplomatic manoeuvring over hosting arrangements, illustrating how thoroughly what should be a sporting contest has become inseparable from the broader political relationship between the two nuclear-armed neighbours.

Domestic Politicisation

Beyond the international dimension, Pakistan's sporting institutions have long suffered from domestic politicisation, with sports federations frequently subject to government interference in leadership appointments, funding decisions, and institutional governance, often driven more by political patronage considerations than by the developmental needs of the sport itself. This pattern has affected numerous sporting disciplines beyond cricket, including hockey, once a source of immense national pride and Olympic success for Pakistan, whose decline in international competitiveness has been attributed substantially to chronic governance instability, inconsistent funding, and politically motivated leadership changes that have undermined long-term institutional planning and athlete development.

The Pakistan Cricket Board Case

The Pakistan Cricket Board offers a particularly instructive case study in the challenges of politicised sports governance. Leadership of the board has frequently changed hands in direct correlation with shifts in the national political landscape, with incoming governments often replacing board chairmen closely associated with the outgoing administration, regardless of their cricketing credentials or ongoing institutional initiatives. This pattern of politically driven leadership

turnover has repeatedly disrupted long-term strategic planning, talent development programmes, and institutional continuity, contributing to the inconsistency that has periodically characterised the Pakistani national cricket team's performance and broader domestic cricket structure development over the past several decades.

Economic Dimension

The politicisation of sport is further entangled with significant economic interests, as sponsorship deals, broadcasting rights, and the allocation of hosting privileges for major sporting events increasingly involve political considerations alongside purely commercial or sporting merit. Political patronage networks frequently extend into decisions regarding domestic sporting infrastructure investment, franchise ownership in leagues such as the Pakistan Super League, and the allocation of lucrative broadcasting and sponsorship contracts, creating incentive structures in which political connections can outweigh purely sporting or commercial considerations in shaping the sporting economy.

Athletes as Political Actors

Individual athletes themselves have increasingly become both subjects and agents of political expression, whether through symbolic gestures during competition, public

statements on political issues, or their subsequent recruitment into formal political roles, a pattern clearly visible in Pakistan's own political landscape, where prominent former athletes have transitioned into significant political careers, leveraging their sporting fame and popularity for electoral and policy influence. While this crossover reflects legitimate athlete agency and the genuine popularity that sporting success can generate, it further blurs the boundary between sport as an autonomous domain of competition and sport as an extension of national political life.

The Social Media Era

The rise of social media has dramatically intensified the politicisation of sport, providing instantaneous platforms through which nationalist sentiment, political controversy, and public pressure on athletes and sporting institutions can amplify rapidly and globally. Athletes today face immediate and often intense public scrutiny of any perceived political statement, association, or omission, while sporting contests themselves, particularly those carrying geopolitical significance such as India-Pakistan cricket matches, generate social media discourse that frequently overshadows the sporting contest itself with nationalist rhetoric and political point-scoring.

Consequences

The cumulative consequences of pervasive sports politicisation in Pakistan have been substantial. Chronic governance instability driven by political interference has undermined long-term talent development and institutional planning across multiple sporting disciplines. Promising athletes have, in various instances, faced their careers disrupted by institutional dysfunction rather than genuine sporting failure. Pakistan's broader sporting reputation and its ability to attract international events, sponsorship, and talent development partnerships have suffered from the perception of politically unstable and unpredictable sports governance, representing a significant lost opportunity for both athletic achievement and the substantial soft power and economic benefits that successful sporting institutions can generate.

Sports Diplomacy's Potential

Despite these challenges, sport retains genuine potential as a positive instrument of diplomacy and reconciliation when deliberately harnessed for that purpose rather than allowed to become a mere extension of political rivalry. Historical instances of cricket diplomacy between India and Pakistan, including high-profile matches attended by senior political leadership from both countries during periods of relative détente, illustrate sport's unique capacity to create shared moments of national

engagement even amid broader political tension, offering a template that more consistent and deliberate diplomatic strategy could potentially build upon in future periods of improved bilateral relations.

International Governance Bodies

International sporting governance bodies, including the International Olympic Committee and various international sports federations, formally maintain principles of political neutrality and have, on occasion, sanctioned national federations or countries for excessive government interference in sports governance. In practice, however, enforcement of these neutrality principles has often proven inconsistent and selective, shaped by the broader political and economic influence of the countries involved, limiting the effectiveness of international oversight as a check on domestic politicisation of sports governance in countries like Pakistan.

Policy Recommendations

Addressing the politicisation of sport in Pakistan requires structural reforms to insulate sporting institutions from short-term political interference. This includes establishing genuinely independent, professionally staffed sports federations with fixed institutional tenures

and merit-based leadership selection processes that are not automatically subject to wholesale replacement with each change in government. It requires transparent, rules-based allocation of public sporting funding and infrastructure investment, reducing the scope for politically motivated patronage. It requires stronger, more consistently enforced conflict-of-interest provisions governing the relationship between political office holders and sporting institution leadership. Finally, it requires cultivating a broader national consensus, across political parties, that sporting institutional stability serves the national interest and athletic development in ways that transcend any single government's short-term political advantage.

Conclusion

The politicisation of sport represents a genuine and intensifying challenge, one that has repeatedly compromised Pakistan's sporting institutions, disrupted the development of promising athletic talent, and transformed contests meant to showcase athletic excellence into extensions of political and diplomatic rivalry. Yet the same qualities that make sport vulnerable to political exploitation, its immense popularity, emotional resonance, and capacity to unite mass audiences, also make it a potentially powerful instrument for positive

diplomacy and national development when governed with genuine institutional independence and long-term vision. Reclaiming sport's unifying promise in Pakistan will require deliberate structural reform to insulate sporting governance from the short-term calculations of political patronage, allowing athletic excellence, rather than political convenience, to once again become the primary measure of sporting success.

Q10. Nations Have No Permanent Friends and Enemies, They Have Only Permanent Interests

Outline

- Introduction: Palmerston's maxim as the enduring logic of statecraft
- Theoretical foundation: realism and the primacy of national interest
- Historical validation: shifting alliances across centuries of diplomacy
- Pakistan's alliance history: the United States as an illustrative case
- The Afghan jihad partnership and its subsequent unraveling
- Pakistan-China: an apparent exception and what sustains it
- Pakistan-India: enduring rivalry rooted in permanent interests
- Pakistan-Saudi Arabia and the Gulf: interest-based religious diplomacy
- Contemporary illustrations from the broader international system
- The counter-argument: values, institutions, and the limits of pure realism

- Balancing interests with principles in modern diplomacy
 - Implications for Pakistan's future foreign policy conduct
 - Policy recommendations for interest-based but principled diplomacy
 - Conclusion: the compass of national interest in a shifting world
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Introduction

When the nineteenth-century British statesman Lord Palmerston declared to the House of Commons that Britain had no eternal allies and no perpetual enemies, only eternal and perpetual interests, he articulated what remains perhaps the single most enduring and empirically validated principle in the entire history of international relations. Stripped of sentiment and ideology, this maxim asserts that the relationships between nations are fundamentally transactional, shaped by the calculation of national advantage rather than by enduring bonds of friendship or fixed hostility, and that any state's alliances and rivalries will inevitably shift as the underlying interests that once aligned or opposed them evolve. Pakistan's own turbulent diplomatic history, marked by dramatic swings from close alliance to open estrangement with the same powers

across successive decades, offers perhaps one of the clearest contemporary illustrations of this timeless principle in action.

Theoretical Foundation

Palmerston's maxim finds its fullest theoretical elaboration in the realist school of international relations, which holds that states, operating within an anarchic international system lacking any overarching authority to enforce agreements or guarantee security, are compelled to prioritise their own survival and advancement above all else, forming alliances and rivalries instrumentally according to shifting calculations of relative power and interest rather than fixed ideological or sentimental attachment. Realist theory does not deny that shared values, cultural ties, or historical friendship can influence the texture and ease of particular relationships, but it insists that these factors remain ultimately subordinate to the harder calculus of strategic and economic interest, which alone can explain why yesterday's allies so frequently become tomorrow's rivals, and vice versa, whenever the underlying strategic environment shifts sufficiently.

Historical Validation

The historical record across centuries of international diplomacy offers abundant validation of this principle. European alliance systems shifted repeatedly across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the balance of power evolved, with nations that had fought bitter wars against one another subsequently forming alliances against a newly emergent common threat, only to see those same alliances dissolve once the shared threat receded or the relative power of the alliance partners shifted. The Second World War itself produced perhaps history's starkest illustration, as the United States and the Soviet Union, ideological adversaries separated by an unbridgeable political chasm, became essential allies against Nazi Germany, only to become the defining rivals of the subsequent Cold War within just a few years of their shared victory, a transformation driven entirely by the shifting calculus of interest and power rather than any change in their fundamental ideological character.

Pakistan and the United States

Pakistan's relationship with the United States offers a particularly vivid and repeated illustration of Palmerston's maxim within Pakistan's own diplomatic history. During the Cold War, Pakistan aligned closely with Washington through membership in American-sponsored security pacts, receiving substantial military and economic

assistance in exchange for its strategic value against Soviet influence in South Asia. This alignment cooled substantially once Cold War strategic imperatives receded, particularly following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, leading to a period of American sanctions and diplomatic distance through much of the nineteen nineties, driven by concerns over Pakistan's nuclear programme once the shared anti-Soviet interest that had previously overridden these concerns no longer applied.

The Afghan Jihad Partnership

The clearest single illustration of the interest-driven, rather than sentiment-driven, nature of the Pakistan-United States relationship emerged from their partnership during the Soviet-Afghan War of the nineteen eighties, when Pakistan became the central conduit for American, Saudi, and other international support to Afghan mujahideen resistance fighters, a partnership both sides publicly celebrated as a shared struggle against communist aggression. Yet almost immediately following the Soviet withdrawal and subsequent Soviet collapse, American strategic interest in Pakistan diminished sharply, leading to the abrupt imposition of sanctions over Pakistan's nuclear programme, a policy reversal Pakistani officials have long characterised as evidence of American unreliability, but which realist

theory would interpret simply as the predictable consequence of a shared interest that had run its course, illustrating precisely the transactional logic Palmerston described.

Pakistan-China: An Apparent Exception

Pakistan's relationship with China, frequently described by both governments as an all-weather friendship transcending changing circumstances, might appear at first glance to contradict Palmerston's maxim of purely interest-based diplomacy. Closer examination, however, reveals that this relationship's remarkable durability rests precisely on a sustained, multi-decade convergence of core strategic interests, both countries share a wary strategic relationship with India, both have found mutual benefit in economic and infrastructure cooperation through initiatives such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and both value the stability and reliability the relationship offers amid their respective, more complex relationships with the United States. The relationship's endurance thus validates rather than contradicts the underlying principle: it persists not because of sentiment alone, but because the fundamental strategic interests that first brought the two countries together have remained remarkably stable and aligned across changing governments and international circumstances

on both sides.

Pakistan-India: Rivalry Rooted in Interest

Pakistan's enduring rivalry with India similarly illustrates the interest-based logic of Palmerston's maxim, even though it manifests as persistent hostility rather than shifting alliance. The core interests dividing the two nations, competing territorial claims over Kashmir, divergent regional strategic ambitions, and deep-seated mutual security concerns rooted in their shared and contested partition history, have remained sufficiently stable across more than seven decades to sustain a correspondingly persistent rivalry, punctuated only occasionally by periods of diplomatic thaw when leaders on both sides calculated that improved relations might temporarily serve their respective interests, before renewed tension over the same underlying, unresolved interests reasserted itself.

Pakistan-Saudi Arabia and the Gulf

Pakistan's relationship with Saudi Arabia and the broader Gulf region further illustrates how shared religious and cultural affinity, while providing an important diplomatic vocabulary and facilitating trust, ultimately operates alongside, rather than in place of,

hard calculations of mutual interest, including Gulf financial support during Pakistani balance of payments crises, employment opportunities for millions of Pakistani expatriate workers, and Pakistan's periodic military and security cooperation with Gulf states. When these interests have occasionally diverged, as during Pakistan's parliamentary decision to remain neutral rather than join the Saudi-led coalition in the Yemen conflict, the relationship has experienced genuine strain, demonstrating that even relationships grounded in strong religious and cultural affinity remain ultimately subject to the same interest-based calculus Palmerston described.

Contemporary Global Illustrations

Beyond Pakistan's own experience, the broader contemporary international system continues to validate Palmerston's maxim repeatedly. The remarkable normalisation of relations between several Gulf Arab states and Israel through the Abraham Accords, following decades of official hostility, reflected a shared strategic interest in counterbalancing Iranian regional influence rather than any fundamental change in underlying values or historical grievances. Similarly, the fluid and rapidly shifting alignments visible in the ongoing competition between the United States and China, in which numerous middle powers deliberately avoid firm

commitment to either side, pursuing instead pragmatic, interest-based relationships with both simultaneously, exemplifies the same underlying logic operating at the heart of contemporary great power competition.

The Counter-Argument

Yet Palmerston's maxim, however empirically well-supported, is not without important limitations and legitimate critics. Constructivist and liberal institutionalist scholars of international relations have argued persuasively that shared values, democratic governance, and institutionalised multilateral cooperation can indeed produce more durable, values-based alignments than pure realist theory would predict, as illustrated by the remarkable durability of the transatlantic alliance between the United States and its European partners across more than seven decades, sustained substantially by shared democratic values and institutionalised cooperation through NATO and other multilateral frameworks, even through periods of significant policy disagreement. This suggests that while interest remains the dominant driver of international relations, shared values and robust institutional frameworks can meaningfully moderate the volatility that a purely transactional, interest-only conception of diplomacy might otherwise predict.

Balancing Interests with Principles

The most sophisticated and durable approach to statecraft, therefore, likely lies not in choosing definitively between pure interest-based realism and idealistic values-based diplomacy, but in recognising that enduring national interest itself is often best served by consistent, principled conduct that builds long-term credibility and trust, rather than purely transactional relationships that maximise short-term advantage at the expense of reputation and reliability. Nations that develop reputations for consistency and reliability in their international commitments often find themselves able to secure more favourable and durable partnerships precisely because other states can trust that shared interests, once identified, will be honoured over time rather than abandoned at the first more attractive alternative.

Implications for Pakistan

For Pakistan specifically, the lesson of Palmerston's maxim is not that alliances and partnerships are inherently worthless or fleeting, but that foreign policy should be conducted with clear-eyed recognition of underlying interests on all sides, avoiding both excessive dependence on any single external patron and unrealistic expectations of permanent, unconditional

friendship from any partner, however close the relationship may currently appear. Pakistan's repeated historical experience of dramatic swings in its relationship with the United States, from close Cold War alliance to sanctions-era estrangement to renewed post-2001 partnership to more recent relative distance, illustrates the practical costs of foreign policy approaches that fail to anticipate and prepare for the natural evolution of interest-based relationships over time.

Policy Recommendations

Pakistan's foreign policy would benefit from several principles informed by this understanding. First, systematic diversification of strategic and economic partnerships, reducing excessive dependence on any single external relationship and thereby reducing vulnerability to the inevitable shifts in that partner's own calculation of interest. Second, sustained investment in Pakistan's own domestic economic and institutional strength, since a materially and institutionally strong Pakistan possesses more durable, interest-based value to potential partners than a dependent, fragile state whose relevance rests primarily on external strategic calculations beyond its own control. Third, cultivating a reputation for consistency and reliability in international commitments, recognising that this reputation itself

constitutes a valuable, interest-serving asset in a world where trust, however conditional, remains a scarce and valuable commodity among states pursuing their own interests. Finally, maintaining pragmatic, interest-based engagement with all major powers simultaneously, rather than binary alignment with any single bloc, consistent with the broader logic of navigating an increasingly multipolar international order.

Conclusion

Lord Palmerston's nineteenth-century observation that nations possess no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests, remains as analytically powerful today as when it was first articulated, validated repeatedly by the historical record of shifting alliances across the international system and, perhaps most vividly, by Pakistan's own turbulent diplomatic history of dramatic swings in its relationships with major powers. Yet the deepest lesson of this maxim for Pakistani statecraft is not cynicism about the possibility of genuine partnership, but clear-eyed realism about its foundations: durable relationships, whether with China, the United States, the Gulf states, or any other partner, will endure only for as long as the underlying interests that created them remain genuinely aligned, and Pakistan's own long-term security and prosperity depend ultimately on

building the domestic strength, institutional reliability, and diversified partnerships that allow it to navigate this permanent reality of international politics from a position of genuine strategic autonomy rather than dependent vulnerability.