**[Pakistan’s Foreign Policy and Emerging Geopolitical Situation: Opportunities and Constraints](https://ipripak.org/pakistans-foreign-policy-and-emerging-geopolitical-situation-opportunities-and-constraints/" \o "Permanent Link to Pakistan’s Foreign Policy and Emerging Geopolitical Situation: Opportunities and Constraints)**

**Introduction:**

Geo-strategic environment is constantly changing. In this geo-strategic environment, determinants of national power are constant and they essentially play their role in shaping foreign policy of any country. Existing literature of foreign policy suggests that nations usually face four types of environments including convulsive environment, deliberate environment, spirited environment and habitual environment. Convulsive environment refers to high degree of change in the strategic environment which leads to the drastic changes in foreign policy of a country. Sometimes countries do bring deliberate change in strategic environment in order to achieve their national interest. Spirited environment refers to a low level of strategic change while habitual environment is the normal strategic environment. Pakistan has been confronted with the convulsive strategic environment since its inception. In this environment Pakistan had to make high level of strategic shifts at regional and international levels. Resultantly, it remained reactive to this high degree of external strategic changes.

**Elements of National Power and Pakistan:**

According to a former Central Intelligence Agency’s officer, Mr. Ray Cline, national power of any state can be measured through estimating economic output, military capability, strategic purpose, territory, national will and population. His famous formula is known as Cline’s formula for measurement of national power. Pakistan has all those essential features of Cline’s formula of national power, but there is a need to exploit those elements to achieve national objectives. Beyond acquiring of nuclear power capability, there is also a requirement to achieve national consensus on major foreign policy issues including future of Pakistan’s role in the Middle East and bilateral relations with Iran and Afghanistan. There is also a need to pursue good relations with the US and Russia.

**Pakistan’s Foreign and Domestic Policy Principles:**

Initially, Pakistan’s founding fathers and later the 1973 Constitution had laid down two fundamental principles for Pakistan’s foreign and domestic policies. Firstly, according to Article 40 of 1973 Constitution of Pakistan, “The State shall endeavour to preserve and strengthen fraternal relations among Muslim countries based on Islamic unity, support the common interests of the people of Asia, Africa and Latin America, promote international peace and security, foster goodwill and friendly relations among all nations and encourage the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means.” In this article, the priority was given to Muslim states while the major powers were not given much attention. Later, Pakistan’s foreign policy kept focusing on major powers particularly towards the US and China for economic and strategic interests.

Secondly, Article 256 of the 1973 Constitution had banned private armies. However, under the pressure of the US and changing regional security environment Pakistan neglected this fundamental principle of its domestic policy. To resist Soviet’s intervention in Afghanistan, Pakistan got aligned with the US. In the aftermath of Soviets withdrawal from Afghanistan, the armed groups, like the Taliban, became very powerful to rule Afghanistan in 1990s. In the aftermath of 9/11 and coalition forces intervention in Afghanistan, when Pakistan became a non NATO ally in the war on terror, some armed groups such as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) became a menace for Pakistan. Its military and civilian people had to give lot of sacrifices to fight and defeat those terrorists.

**Pakistan and Geo-strategic Environment:**

As discussed above, there are constant determinants of national power, which shape the foreign policy of any country. In case of Pakistan, geography, regional and global environment, perceptions or image of a state, economy and Indian assertion for regional supremacy are major determinants which shape its foreign policy.

1. **Geography:**Pakistan is confronting with the issue of contested borders since its inception. India and Afghanistan are constantly challenging Pakistan over territorial disputes. Resultantly, Pakistan has been seeking security umbrella through different means in order to secure its territory. Firstly, it had joined South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and now it has joined the Islamic military alliance.
2. **Regional and International Environment:**Initially, international strategic environment was the focus of Pakistan’s security and foreign policy makers. However, since the regional security environment mainly affects Pakistan; it has focused on regional security since 9/11. Afghanistan’s stability, India’s regional hegemonic designs, Pak-Iran relations and China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are currently the major geo-strategic issues impacting Pakistan’s foreign policy.
3. **Indian Rivalry:**The incumbent government has been following a policy of rapprochement towards India. Pakistan has tried to normalize relations with India since 2014. Despite internal political pressure, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif attended the swearing in ceremony of Mr. Modi. Pakistan has tried several times to resume bilateral talks with India to resolve bilateral disputes. On the other hand, Modi’s policy is moving towards opposite direction. He has announced policy to isolate Pakistan at the regional and global levels. In this regard, Pakistan should revisit its policy of rapprochement with India.
4. **International Image:** Though some segments of society in Pakistan do not accept it, but the reality is that Pakistan’s international image has been tarnished during the war against terrorism mainly due to India’s propaganda. Hence, Pakistan should make concerted efforts to improve its global standing.
5. **Economy of Pakistan:**Though Pakistan’s economic situation has improved in recent years, yet the annual growth rate is not sufficient to cater for country’s economic requirements. According to the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Pakistan’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) will grow by 4.8 percent in next two years; although the World Bank’s recent report has estimated that Pakistan’s GDP will grow by 5.2 percent. Yet, the same report estimates that Pakistan has to create more than one million jobs annually to accommodate its youth. Since, Pakistan can only create 40,000 jobs annually with the above mentioned growth, it needs to attract foreign direct investment and enhance its trade to increase its growth rate to the desired level. Otherwise, lack of job opportunities will create resentment among youth, which will largely affect Pakistan’s internal strategic environment.

**Major Future Challenge:**

Since its independence, Pakistan had existential threat from India. However, in post 9/11 period, Pakistan’s strategic environment had become complicated. For the last sixteen years, Pakistan had to fight terrorism in a major way. However, successful military campaigns against terrorists and signing of CPEC agreement with China has made the strategic environment favorable to Pakistan. India will remain a major national security threat to Pakistan as it is busy in destabilizing the country by using Afghan soil and it is also implementing a policy of isolating Pakistan. Therefore, there is a need that while Pakistan should continue to pursue its policy of a negotiated peace with India, it should also continue to highlight India’s anti-Pakistan designs to the major powers and other friendly countries.

**Major Future Opportunity:**

The drawdown of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) from Afghanistan, resurgence of Russia, China’s increased stakes in Pakistan after announcement of CPEC and Iran’s favorably poised behavior have reshaped regional strategic environment. Resultantly, Pakistan has greater diplomatic options as compared to the past, which will help it in stabilizing its economy and improving its international image. Furthermore, the NATO’s drawdown from Afghanistan has made Pakistan more important in the region. Currently, the US, Russia and China are seeking Pakistan’s role as a facilitator of the Afghan reconciliation talks. Pakistan should therefore capitalize on this strategic opportunity in its favour.

**Major Policy Recommendations:**

* Pakistan should pursue a policy of keeping balance in its relations with the Saudi Arabia and Iran.
* Pakistan is relying too much on the CPEC. The construction plan of the CPEC is of longer duration and therefore it may not match the requirements of Pakistan’s economy. Therefore, Pakistan should struggle for investments from other countries as well to boost its economy.

**Conclusion:**Over the years, Pakistan has learned from its strategic experiences. The recent overtures of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Chief of Army Staff (COAS), General Qamar Javed Bajwa towards Afghanistan seem to be a good move to reconcile Pakistan’s differences with that country. It is hoped that this policy and signing of CPEC with China will prove beneficial for raising Pakistan’s standing at the regional and global level.