

## PAKISTAN US RELATIONS; BUILDING PARTNERSHIP THROUGH STRENGTH

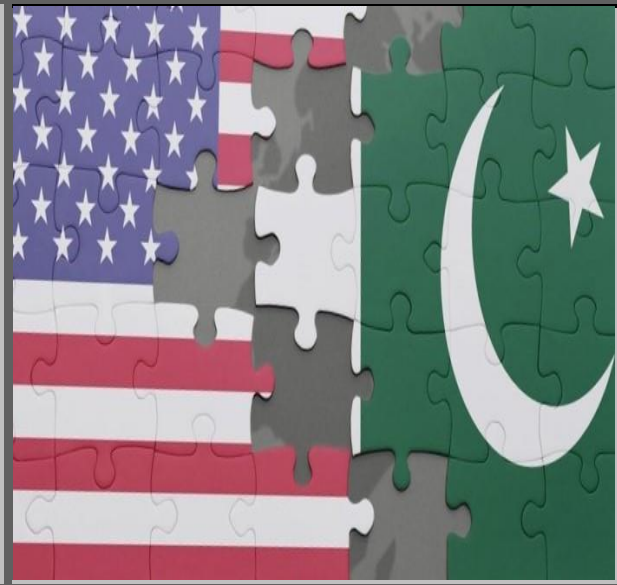
By  
Tooba Bilal  
Intern

Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP), ISSI

Supervised by  
Mahrukh Khan

August 24, 2022

*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



With the shift in global power dynamics and Washington’s policy of containing China’s global outreach, the reassessment of Pakistan-US relations based on Pakistan’s intrinsic importance is more crucial now than ever. While US-China relations present a tough balancing act for Pakistan, both relations, however, need to be anchored on factors extraneous to bilateral relations. The prospects of which are provided by Islamabad’s inclination towards a shift from geo-politics to geo-economics and Washington’s withdrawal of military troops from Afghanistan and its interest in re-building US-China relations. Keeping in mind the competing global environment it is imperative to build relationships and partnerships through strength and the positives that already exist. The expectation of a broad-based relationship between Pakistan and the US seems to be on track.

On May 18 2022, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari met with the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken in New York and participated in the Ministerial Meeting on ‘Global Food Security Call to Action.’<sup>1</sup> Shortly after, in July 2022, the Foreign Minister of Pakistan received a phone

<sup>1</sup> “Foreign Minister participates in the Ministerial Meeting on ‘Global Food Security Call to Action’ in New York,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, 19 May 2022, <https://mofa.gov.pk/foreign-minister-participates-in-the-ministerial-meeting-on-global-food-security-call-to-action-in-new-york/>

call from Antony Blinken and met with the US Special Representative on Business and Commercial Affairs Dilawar Syed in Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

The focus of the meetings remained on non-traditional challenges. During the interaction and meetings reiterated its stance on developing all-encompassing relations and emphasized the importance of elevating food security and nutrition challenges through working collaboratively and between countries.<sup>4</sup> Pakistan has repeatedly stressed upon its economic potential and the opportunities for trade growth and investment that can be achieved and enhanced through partnership and collaboration between Islamabad and Washington. The meetings between the officials of both capitals represent positive prospects of not only addressing non-traditional challenges but also encouraging investment thus encouraging economic growth in Pakistan. With the focus on food security, health, energy, and climate change further points of convergence are provided for Pakistan's US diplomatic relations and are a step of progress towards a reassessment of the bilateral relationship and away from the security lens.

## Overview

The diplomatic relations between Pakistan and the United States have long remained tangled in a complex push and pull from one extreme to another. Trapped in a cyclical pattern between highs and lows for the past many decades, the relations have constantly swung from either being an intimate partnership to a relationship of extensive friction and disengagement.

The relationship has often been referred to as transactional and clientelistic, deeming it a relationship that can be easily transferred or reassigned in its nature and practice; reflecting a lack of a shared vision, differing national interests, and global and regional geopolitics. The reason for the tumultuous character of the relations has largely been due to the lack of ideological affinity<sup>3</sup> between the two states. Despite the mistrust, however, the relationship between the two countries has largely remained cordial owing to the different tiers that exist in the relationship whether strategic, political or economic.

Following the US invasion of Afghanistan up until the withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan, Pakistan-US relations remained dominated by and limited to a security and terrorism-oriented framework. Owing to Pakistan's geographical proximity to Afghanistan, its history and issues over

---

<sup>2</sup> "Press Releases the Office of the Spokesperson Releases Statements, Media Notes, Notices to the Press and Fact Sheets on a Daily Basis," Ministry of Foreign Affairs Pakistan, July 6, 2022, <https://mofa.gov.pk/category/press-releases/>

<sup>3</sup> Dennis Kux, "The United States and Pakistan, 1947-2000: Disenchanted Allies," Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2001, <http://books.google.com/books?id=cKN1AAAAMAAJ>

counterinsurgency during the Global War of Terror (GWOT), the trajectory of Pakistan-US relations was solely defined and influenced by the Afghan lens. The situation in Afghanistan became the pivot for Pakistan-US diplomatic and strategic relations.

### **Partnership through Strength:**

The US's invitation to Pakistan for the 'Global Food Security Call to Action' in New York was crucial for two reasons. The first is a reinforcement of resetting the ties between Pakistan and the US, and the second is acknowledging and addressing the challenge of food security in Pakistan.

### ***Food and Human Security:***

According to the International Food Security Assessment conducted by the US Department of Agriculture, Pakistan is at the risk of being the second most food insecure country as a result of being severely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change.<sup>4</sup> The UN World Food Program (WFP) cites chronic poverty, recurring disasters, and political and economic volatility as the main drivers of under-nutrition and food insecurity in some areas of Pakistan.<sup>5</sup>

The ministerial meeting in this regard, represented an important converging point in Pakistan-US relations, as it opened up prospects of cooperation in addressing non-traditional challenges including food security challenges in Pakistan while also broadening the lens from being security-centric to a comprehensive non-traditional lens.

The like-minded approach towards the issue highlighted the graveness of food security and what it means for Pakistan and the world. It also brought to light the difference support from developed nations can make as well as the importance of organizations such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) in addressing issues of such nature in developing nations. Thus providing grounds for mutually benefitting collaboration and cooperation over not just food security but also assisting with agricultural innovation in light of climate change to not only address a humanitarian crisis but also meet the needs of the global market. The prospects of which not only

---

<sup>4</sup> Felix Baquedano, YacobAbreheZereyesus, Constanza Valdes, and KayodeAjewole, "International Food Security Assessment, 2021–31, GFA-32," July 2021, US Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, <https://unric.org/en/the-un-and-the-war-in-ukraine-key-information/>

<sup>5</sup> "Food Assistance Fact Sheet – Pakistan, Food Assistance -U.S. Agency For International Development", 2021, USAID,<https://www.usaid.gov/pakistan/food-assistance>

endanger the population of Pakistan but also pose a threat to goods trade with the United States, Pakistan's largest export market as of 2020.<sup>6</sup>

### **Trade:**

As of 2019, Pakistan was US's 56th largest goods trading partner with \$6.6 billion in total (two-way) goods trade,<sup>7</sup> dominated by textile and agricultural products. Hence the threats posed by the challenge of food security can impinge on Pakistan itself; it can also risk its capability to trade in its prime trading articles such as textiles and agricultural products.

U.S. Goods Trade with Pakistan (in billions of dollars)							
	2009	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total	4.8	5.2	5.5	5.6	6.4	6.6	6.6
Exports	1.6	1.5	1.8	2.1	2.8	2.9	2.6
Imports	3.2	3.7	3.7	3.4	3.6	3.7	3.9
Balance	-1.5	-2.2	-1.9	-1.3	-0.8	-0.9	-1.3
U.S. Agricultural Trade with Pakistan (in billions of dollars)							
	2009	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total	0.4	0.4	0.6	0.7	1.1	1.6	1.3
Exports	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.6	1.0	1.4	1.2
Imports	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Balance	0.2	0.1	0.3	0.5	0.9	1.3	1.1
U.S. Manufacturing Trade with Pakistan (in billions of dollars)							
	2009	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Total	4.3	4.6	4.9	4.6	5.0	4.7	4.8
Exports	1.2	1.0	1.3	1.3	1.5	1.1	1.0
Imports	3.1	3.6	3.6	3.3	3.5	3.6	3.8
Balance	-1.9	-2.6	-2.3	-2.0	-2.0	-2.5	-2.8

**Source:** Office of the United States Trade Representative<sup>8</sup>

The negative impact on bilateral trade not only threatens the prospects of transformation of the Pakistan-US relations from being a patron-client relationship to one that focuses on diplomacy, trade and technology but also the possibility of re-engaging with the Biden administration in areas of trade, investment, energy and economic cooperation.

<sup>6</sup> "Pakistan - Country Commercial Guide," 27 January 2022, International Trade Administration, <https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/pakistan-market-overview>

<sup>7</sup> "Pakistan," 2 October 2020, Office Of The United States Trade Representative, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/south-central-asia/pakistan>

<sup>8</sup> "Pakistan," 2 October 2020, Office Of The United States Trade Representative, <https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/south-central-asia/pakistan>

The possible impacts may include:

- A decline in exports from Pakistan to the US will harm the trade imbalance.
- A reduction in market access for Pakistani goods, especially textiles.
- Considering climate change and the impact on crop yield may result in a reduction in agricultural exports further aggravating the trade imbalance between the two countries.

Countries	Jul, 2021 To Mar, 2022		Jul, 2020 To Mar, 2021	
	Value	% Share	Value	% Share
<b>Total</b>	4,018,757.72	100.00	3,020,243.97	100.00
1 U.S.America	854,293.37	21.26	593,591.46	19.65
2 China	428,446.16	10.66	292,943.89	9.70
3 United Kingdom	277,077.77	6.89	245,316.10	8.12
4 Germany	220,035.56	5.48	187,667.04	6.21
5 Netherlands	207,006.46	5.15	150,637.71	4.99
6 United Arab Emirates	174,626.91	4.35	118,853.27	3.94
7 Spain	159,335.10	3.96	108,126.21	3.58
8 Italy	138,599.50	3.45	92,642.74	3.07
9 Bangladesh	125,140.98	3.11	78,348.06	2.59
10 Belgium	96,080.90	2.39	74,251.58	2.46

Source: Pakistan Bureau of Statistics <sup>9</sup>

Month	Exports	Imports	Balance	
January 2022		290.5	493.1	-202.6
February 2022		369.1	479.2	-110.2
March 2022		306.8	550.5	-243.7
April 2022		310.0	528.5	-218.5
May 2022		270.1	630.2	-360.1
June 2022		259.1	480.5	-221.4
<b>TOTAL 2022</b>		<b>1,805.5</b>	<b>3,162.0</b>	<b>-1,356.5</b>

Source: United States Census Bureau<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, bilateral trade including agreements and efforts to ensure continuous trade is crucial to not only sustain the shift of the nature of Pakistan-US relations from geopolitics to geo-economics

<sup>9</sup> "Cumulative Exports by Major Countries," Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, Government of Pakistan, March 2022, <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/trade-tables>

<sup>10</sup> "Trade in Goods with Pakistan," United States Census Bureau, 2022, <https://www.census.gov/foreign-trade/balance/c5350.html>

but also to address non-traditional challenges such as climate change which threatens bilateral trade and the challenges posed by food insecurity.

### ***COVID-19 and Health Assistance:***

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought the world to its knees. Besides posing a health threat to the global population, the pandemic brought the global market to a complete halt; the effects of which are still being seen today with the looming recession and global inflation. However, if one was to state a positive outcome that came from the pandemic then it would be the importance of diplomatic relations.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic brought forth and asserted the crucial role bilateral collaboration between Pakistan and the US plays in the development of the health sector in Pakistan. Pakistan was able to efficiently combat the COVID-19 pandemic through the US's generous vaccine and ventilator donations<sup>11</sup> and assistance with training the health workers, through utilizing radio and television programs to disseminate information, among many others. The US has donated more than 77 million COVID-19 vaccine doses; one million rapid diagnostic tests and critical health supplies; \$70.4 million in direct and \$13.8 million in in-kind support as well as planned \$20 million in USAID in funding to support vaccination efforts in Pakistan.<sup>12</sup>

With Pakistan and the United States celebrating 75 years of diplomatic relations this year, the Pakistan-US health dialogue hosted on July 25, 2022, represented an important development in the broadening bilateral cooperation,<sup>13</sup> with its primary focus on strengthening health sector collaboration. The discussions were centred on identifying areas of mutual engagement through "establishing a Pakistani Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), global health security, childhood immunizations, COVID-19, maternal and child health, and non-communicable diseases."<sup>8</sup>

The bilateral communication through the Health Dialogue and ministerial meetings highlighted the trajectory of the bilateral relations and their move from a security-oriented framework to a broad-based non-security framework. It represents prospects for future cooperation and collaboration

---

<sup>11</sup> "The United States Has Donated Over 50 Million COVID-19 Vaccines to Pakistan," U.S Mission in Pakistan, U.S. Embassy and Consulates in Pakistan, 9 February, 2022, <https://pk.usembassy.gov/the-united-states-has-donated-over-50-million-covid-19-vaccines-to-pakistan/>

<sup>12</sup> United States Provides Mobile Laboratory to Strengthen COVID-19 Testing Capacity, US Embassy and Consulates in Pakistan, August 4, 2022, <https://pk.usembassy.gov/united-states-provides-mobile-laboratory-to-strengthen-covid-19-testing-capacity/>

<sup>13</sup> "U.S.-Pakistan Health Dialogue Launched to Deepen Health Sector Cooperation," US Department of State, 25 July 2022, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-pakistan-health-dialogue-launched-to-deepen-health-sector-cooperation/>

between the two countries and thus, signaling yet another step towards a positive momentum of development between Pakistan and the United States.

**Moving Forward:**

With Pakistan seeking relations anchored in a mutually benefitting bilateral exchange, a shift from the uni-focal traditional security lens is imperative. As a consequence of transforming regional and global dynamics, the present phases of relations are currently in transition. With the realignment of relations taking place in both countries, a reassessment of bilateral relations becomes crucial. It requires a partnership that is predicated on developing the relationship exclusive of singular agendas and factors extraneous to bilateral relations. Moreover, the relations must seek a broad-based association and alliance that is multifaceted and multi-tier with an increased focus on non-traditional challenges such as climate change, energy, water scarcity, and food and human security.

Moreover, with the US's mission in Afghanistan coming to an end, there is a larger need to address the nature of relations and reset the pivot of mutual interest and partnership. Pakistan and the US must seek to build relations that are mutually beneficial and further establish new partnership parameters without a uni-focal approach. Equally important is to address the rising competition between China and the US which is leading to an unfavourable geopolitical environment in the region as both powers seek to secure close ties with the other's strategic partner to gain ground in the region.

There are multiple opportunities for collaborations in areas that are non-security in nature. Pakistan-US relations even during the lowest of the lows have remained workable and cordial. As Pakistan pivots its focus to geo-economics it can reset as well as leverage its relations with the US in multiple non-strategic and non-security areas. The ingredients needed to build a secure and broad-based relationship are there it only needs to be anchored correctly.