

EXAMINING THE LEVEL OF SOVEREIGNTY OF PAKISTAN SINCE MARCH 2024 AND ITS INFLUENCE ON FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS CHINA AND THE USA

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Abstract

This study examines the level of Pakistan's sovereignty since March 2024 and its influence on the country's foreign policy towards China and the USA, utilizing Dependency Theory as a theoretical lens. Dependency Theory highlights the asymmetric economic and strategic relationships that shape the policies of developing nations, often compromising their sovereignty. The study relies on secondary data to explore Pakistan's strategic dependencies on China and the USA by focusing on economic help, trade agreements, military support, and geopolitical correspondence. Research discusses these dependencies that influences Pakistan's ability to exercise autonomous decision-making in its foreign policy, particularly balancing relations between the two world powers. It appears that, on one hand, Pakistan has kept an important strategic relationship with China through programs such as CPEC but is looking at the same time for economic and security cooperation with the USA. That puts Pakistan in a critical geopolitical position, which would require careful strategic diplomacy from the government to safeguard the national interest while balancing both the powers' pressures on it. The study underlines the implications of these dependencies for Pakistan's sovereignty and its broader role in regional and global politics.

Keywords: *Sovereignty, Dependency Theory, Foreign Policy, Geopolitical Relations, Strategic Diplomacy.*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sovereignty is a foundation of international relations, referring to the authority of a state to govern itself without external interference. In a time of worldwide interdependence, intervention affects sovereignty, especially for developing nations, by external powers shaped by strategic, political, and economic interdependencies. Dependency Theory, crafted by scholars like Dos Santos (1970), provides a profoundly elucidatory angle for analyzing such asymmetrical interactions and shows the subservient roles emerging economies play in the global system. The paper discusses the degree of sovereignty which Pakistan had since March 2024 and how this relates to foreign policy with the two powerful countries, the US and China. The recent shift in political and foreign affairs in last few months compelled us to analyze the sovereignty of Pakistan.

Pakistan, strategically positioned at the intersection of South Asia, Central Asia, and the Middle East acts as a crossroad in global power dynamics. The major nations hold it to be an indispensable partner due to its location but the benefit comes accompanied by dependency that undermines autonomy. For instance, CPEC, which shows that relationship with China is the result of strategic alliance having deep roots in infrastructure and economic cooperation. In contrast, the relationship of Pakistan with the United States has marked the erratic pattern of economic and military cooperation that reflected history of dependence due to geopolitical forces. Pakistan's foreign policy autonomy is significantly affected by the various types of dependency that are evident in both ties.

Pakistan has been under test for sovereignty since March 2024, with the shift of global power balances. China and the United States have been growing in competition. Pakistan has been placed in a precarious position while attempting to balance its relations with both the nations. While the Chinese BRI will bring along long-term economic benefits, there are still concerns for Pakistan about being financially dependent and sacrificing its policy sovereignty (Small, 2015). Likewise, a further degree of dependency could be seen in Pakistan's dependence on US military assistance and diplomatic aid, under which its foreign policy has often been subservient to strategic American interests in the region (Fair, 2014).

This study examines secondary data to determine how these dependencies influence Pakistan's foreign policy decisions and ability to sustain sovereignty.

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Being a developing country who lies on developed ones for major factors such as economic help, trade agreements, military support, and geopolitical alignments are examined to determine how much Pakistan's autonomy is influenced by its alliances with China and the US. The theoretical framework of Dependency Theory contextualizes these interactions, providing insights into the systemic inequities that limit Pakistan's sovereignty.

The research finds that a strategic partnership with China offers vital infrastructural and economic benefits, but the same bond places vulnerabilities of debt servicing and policy compromises. Conversely, its relationship with the United States gives it the edge of military and diplomatic might at the cost of many foreign policy decisions often tied up with the interests of its global counterpart. Such dependence has put Pakistan at an ambiguous stage where its sovereignty is always compromised between these two superpowers.

This study contributes to the discourse on sovereignty and dependency in international relations by focusing on Pakistan's unique geopolitical context. It underscores the importance of strategic diplomacy and diversification in foreign policy to mitigate dependency and enhance sovereignty. The findings have implications for understanding the broader dynamics of power politics and dependency in the Global South.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Sovereignty is a fundamental principle of statehood, yet it is increasingly challenged by global interdependence, particularly for developing nations like Pakistan. Since March 2024, Pakistan has faced increasing geopolitical pressure due to its strategic ties with the US and China.

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) promises economic prosperity, but that too carries the odds of financial dependency and compromises policy autonomy (Gao & Zhen, 2023). Pakistan's independent foreign policy is constrained primarily because of dependence on U.S. military and economic assistance, which usually requires alignment with American strategic interests (Waheed, 2017). With increasing contention between the Chinese and American powers, these complications are further weighted, and Pakistan stands between two global powers. Thus, this research tries to look into how these dependencies challenge Pakistan's autonomy and foreign policy, adding debate to the broader discourse of dependency and power politics.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is important because it provides critical insights into the dynamics of Pakistan's sovereignty in light of its strategic dependencies on China and the United States. Applying Dependency Theory, this research examines structural inequalities in Pakistan's foreign policy and contributes to the broader understanding of power politics and dependency in international relations. The findings will support policymakers, scholars, and strategists in identifying the vulnerabilities that arise from economic and military dependencies and seeking strategies to enhance Pakistan's sovereignty. The study also adds to the discourse on the agency of developing nations in a global system dominated by major powers, providing important lessons for other states experiencing similar dependencies.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- 1. To analyze the level of Pakistan's sovereignty since March 2024 in the context of its relationships with China and the United States.*
- 2. To explore how Pakistan navigates its foreign policy amidst the intensifying geopolitical rivalry between China and the United States.*
- 3. To assess the implications of these dependencies for Pakistan's sovereignty and its broader role in regional and global politics.*

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Q1. What is the current state of Pakistan's sovereignty, and how has it evolved since March 2024?

Q2. How does the geopolitical rivalry between China and the United States affect Pakistan's ability to balance its alliances with both powers?

Q3. What are the broader implications of these dependencies for Pakistan's sovereignty and its role in international relations?

OPERATIONALIZATION OF KEY TERMS

SOVEREIGNTY

Independent decision making abilities of Pakistan to take decisions free from interference in domestic and foreign policy of Pakistan by external actors such as China and the United States, measured through the indicators of economic autonomy, freedom of policy making, and capacity to make strategic decisions.

DEPENDENCY

State of reliance on outside economic, military, or political support that distorts the asymmetry of power relations. Dependency on China and the USA will be checked through trade agreements, aid packages, military cooperation, and geopolitical alignments.

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FOREIGN POLICY

The strategic approach of Pakistan dealing with these two countries in terms of bilateral economic partnership along with military alliances and diplomatic engagements.

GEOPOLITICAL RIVALRY

The competition between China and the USA, having conflicting strategic interests in South Asia and trying to exert influence over the foreign policy and sovereignty of Pakistan.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

SCOPE OF DATA

This study is purely reliant on secondary sources rendering a lot of information outdated and incomplete. Some aspects of independence and dependency may not be covered by these data regarding specific aspects of Pakistan's sovereignty and dependency.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Dependency Theory provides an important criticism but does not exhaust other theories that could have shed light on Pakistan's sovereignty and foreign policy decisions, such as Neorealism or Constructivism.

TEMPORAL LIMITATIONS

It analyzes developments that have taken place since March 2024 and does not generally reflect some broader historical processes that would have influenced Pakistan's ties with China and the United States.

GENERALISABILITY

The results are confined to Pakistan in its precincts and various geostrategic contexts and may not apply to all developing countries, as they have different dependences and challenges.

DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

FOCUS ON CHINA AND THE USA

This study will only explore Pakistan's dependencies on China and the US, disregarding other global or regional influencers such as Russia, Saudi Arabia, or India.

TIME FRAME

This study would confine itself to the period from March 2024 onward, signifying the recent geopolitical news as well as its impact on the sovereignty of Pakistan.

SECONDARY DATA

Only secondary sources like scholarly articles, policy reports, and government documents are consulted in the study. Primary data collection methods are not adopted, like interviews or surveys.

THE THEORETICAL LENS

Dependency Theory is the sole theoretical paradigm to assess the dynamics of sovereignty and dependency, purposely limiting to other possible paradigms to enable focus and depth.

POLICY AND STRATEGY FOCUS

This study probes the policy and strategic aspects of Pakistan's sovereignty and foreign relations and purposely neglects the social, cultural, and home political aspects of the research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The inquiry into sovereignty and dependency within the backdrop of global dynamics and in particular Pakistan's independent foreign policy is also limited primarily because of dependence on U.S. military and economic assistance, which usually requires alignment with American strategic interests.

The basic tenets of Dependency Theory are presented by Dos Santos (1970); dependency theory deals with asymmetrical relationships in global economics and politics, and it provides an important frame for understanding the dependencies of developing nations such as Pakistan. Amin (1978) extends these ideas with an assessment of the different manifestations of dependency-economics, politics and culture - and thereby adds to the understanding of disparities in power across the world. Through the center-periphery model, Prebisch (1962) illustrates how countries like Pakistan remain structurally dependent on developed nations, and thus it provides a lens through which one can see Pakistan's position in global power dynamics. Rist (2014) contributes by explaining how economic dependencies are created and maintained, thereby elucidating the frameworks binding Pakistan to larger powers. Esteva and Prakash criticize this in their own way, saying that these economic sources rob from sovereignty, especially relevant in the case of countries like Pakistan who are largely dependent on foreign aid and investments.

Krasner (1999) further complicates the sovereignty concept by discussing how global structures of power often compromise this concept. His work, therefore, is critical for understanding the challenges that face developing nations like Pakistan and the influences of powerful actors in the international arena. Lake (2003) further emphasizes the constraints faced by nations like Pakistan on the

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basis of global interdependence, which challenges the traditional sovereignty concept. Agnew (2005) discusses the conflict between global economic integration and national sovereignty, showing how forces shaping Pakistan's politics are often beyond its control. Chayes and Chayes (1998) also discuss how international agreements affect state sovereignty and, in this way, can help understand how engagement with global treaties and partnerships may erode the autonomy of Pakistan.

The strategic partnerships of Pakistan have played a pivotal role in the development of its foreign policy and dependency dynamics. Hussain (2021) has analyzed Pakistan's reliance on U.S. aid, particularly in counterterrorism, revealing how foreign support impacts its policy autonomy. Fair (2014) takes it a bit further by discussing how strategic alliances of Pakistan, particularly with the U.S. and China, shape its military and policy decisions. Jalal (1990) examines Pakistan's dependency on the USA for military and economic help highlighting its impact on defense and foreign policy decisions. Khan et al. in 2024 expands his discussion of the benefits and constraints of Pakistan's engagements, particularly with China and the United States, elaborating on how these arrangements open up opportunities and restraints for Pakistan. Brzezinski, 2016 also points to the role of middle-range states such as Pakistan in being at the mercy of the strategic interests of great powers and how Pakistan becomes a battleground for competing interests of the world.

Economic dimension of dependency especially in Pakistan visible on the ground in terms of bilateral relations with China under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). According to Wolf (2020), CPEC has been reviewed from the standpoint of strategic implications, indicated possible avenues for development on the part of Pakistan, while increasing entailment as well. Reinhart and Rogoff (2010) deal with debt dependency and give many insights into the conditioning under which loans from CPEC are expected to deepen the already existing reliance. Small (2015) demonstrates in his work the economic and strategic nature of Pakistan-China relationships, especially in the sense that CPEC is a dual-purpose corridor, development opportunity, and geopolitical tension. Haider (2015) elaborates on the economic and geopolitical importance of CPEC, claiming that it creates stronger economic linkages with Pakistan, along with enhanced reliance on a Chinese address to invest those in the country. Nye

(2004) gives the concept of soft power and, examining how that particular country--China and the U.S.--engage in cultural or diplomatic practices to further shape foreign policy in their direction and create dependencies with related factors.

The strategic interests of Pakistan are undoubtedly influenced by the geopolitical rivalries among major powers. Allison (2017) captures the China-US rivalry while placing it in the context of intermediary countries like Pakistan which are increasingly pressed by both global superpowers. Blackwill and Harris (2016) focus on how economic tools are utilized in these rivalries without losing view of the possibility that China and the U.S. employ economic leverage to influence Pakistan. Mearsheimer (2014) asserts the inevitability of great power competition, and that small countries like Pakistan can generally find themselves caught in the crossfire, forced to navigate coastline tensions of great global powers. Pant (2012) further adds to this analysis by discussing how regional rivalry, especially India's proximity to the U.S., shapes Pakistan's dependency and strategic choices. Cohen (2004) offers an in-depth analysis of the domestic and regional dynamics under which Pakistan operates, as well as how Pakistan's relations with China and the U.S. shape Pakistan's political and strategic calculation.

The more extensive concepts of interdependence and global integration also help to frame the dependencies faced by Pakistan. Keohane and Nye (2004) discuss the concept of interdependence in world politics, which is more relevant to Pakistan's foreign policy as it needs to balance cooperation and competition with global powers. Easterly (2006) critically looks at foreign aid reliance and the unintended consequences of being dependent on aid. The dependency syndrome is precisely relevant to Pakistan's situation vis-à-vis both U.S. and Chinese aid. Cardoso and Faletto (2024) outline a dependency dynamic, which although focused on Latin America, can easily be applied to Pakistan in the context of global economic structures that underpin Pakistan's dependency.

Taken together, this literature offers a critical perspective on how Pakistan's sovereignty is increasingly compromised by its dependencies on global powers. Through strategic alliances, economic dependency, and geopolitical pressures, Pakistan's position in the international system is shaped by forces that challenge its autonomy. This analysis contributes not only to our understanding of Pakistan's foreign policy but also provides insights into the broader dynamics of global power and dependency in the contemporary world.

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This expanded review adds depth to the study, showcasing both theoretical and empirical contributions while reinforcing the research gap that the current study aims to address. Moreover, while one could come across various literature on historical relationships of Pakistan with China and the USA, there has been a dearth of scholarly work addressing the recent turn in events after March 2024, indicating a significant change in global politics. Dependency Theory has witnessed wide application in the study of economic dependencies, but its application to geopolitical and strategic dimensions vis-a-vis Pakistan's foreign policy still remains unaddressed. Reviewed studies tend to focus on Pakistan-China or Pakistan-U.S., ignoring the way they relate hence creating the balancing act to be used in managing both alliances together.

Almost all studies deal with economic and security impacts of Pakistan's dependence; however, little attention is given to critically analyzing the extent to which such dependence undermines the sovereignty and decision-making autonomy of the state. Currently, the literature does not capture sufficiently how the intensifying rivalry between China and the USA directly shapes Pakistan's foreign policy. This situation leaves a gaping hole in understanding the unique geopolitical conditions that Pakistan faces. Focusing on the specific period since March 2024, capturing the most recent geopolitical developments affecting Pakistan. Applying Dependency Theory to examine both economic and strategic dependencies, offering a multidimensional analysis. Contextualizing Pakistan's foreign policy in the broad framework of rivalry between China and the USA, thus contributing to discourse on power politics and dependency in the Global South. This research not only strengthens the academia's understanding of Pakistan's geopolitical challenges but also actionable insights for the policymakers and strategists of the complex international relationships within the country.

METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research approach along with secondary data analysis that would assess the level of Pakistan sovereignty and its foreign policy in relation to USA and China since March 2024. The method consists of the gathering and analytically reviewing secondary and existing literature, reports, policy documents, official pronouncements, and media sources reflective of Pakistan's economic, military, and geopolitical ties with these two

countries. The results will be analyzed qualitatively, deducing themes that bring out the impact of these dependencies on Pakistan's sovereignty and foreign policy choices.

RESULTS

The sovereignty of Pakistan has increasingly been defined by its strategic dependencies with both China and the USA, primarily since March 2024, in the context of shifting geopolitical dynamics. Dependency Theory is crucial in understanding these asymmetric relations, where economic, military, and geopolitical influence frequently flows from both powers constraining Pakistan's autonomous decision-making in foreign policy.

DEPENDENCY ON CHINA

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), still remains the cornerstone of Pakistan-China relations. CPEC has indeed brought significant infrastructural investment and economic opportunities, but it has put Pakistan in a precarious financial position. According to Small (2015), high-value loans under CPEC have put Pakistan's economy in greater debt dependency on China and, consequently, at a risk of debt trap or even a political influence threat from China. Pakistan's alignment with China, more so on issues such as regional security and economic integration, has led to an impression that its sovereignty will be compromised by China's strategic interests in the region (Fair, 2014). Although this dependency has economic benefits, it also increases the risk of limited policy autonomy, as is the case with the growing economic dependence on Chinese financing.

DEPENDENCY ON THE USA

On the other hand, military and security cooperation have been the driving forces behind Pakistan's dependency on the USA. Significant military aid, economic support, and diplomatic backing in the form of counter-terrorism efforts in the region by the United States have characterized the relationship. However, dependency on U.S. aid has often restricted Pakistan from pursuing an independent foreign policy, as U.S. strategic interests in the region often overshadow Pakistan's national priorities. As Fair (2014) notes, the U.S. demands for Pakistan to align with its policies, especially regarding Afghanistan and counterterrorism, have at times constrained Pakistan's diplomatic flexibility. This dependency on U.S. aid has resulted in a transactional foreign policy, where Pakistan's sovereignty is at times compromised in exchange for economic and military support.

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BALANCING DUAL DEPENDENCIES

From March 2024 onwards, increasing competition between China and the USA has caused an intensification of the geopolitical dilemma for Pakistan. Caught in the need to strategically balance both relationships simultaneously, foreign policy choices of Pakistan are now mostly studied under external pressure. Pakistan maintained a so-called neutral position of balancing its relationship with both powers. But this balancing act has brought significant pressure on the sovereignty of Pakistan, as choosing a partner often leaves little choice to avoid permanently estranging the other (Mearsheimer, 2014).

However, even as Pakistan would be inclined to maintain a relationship with both China and the USA, the fact remains that national sovereignty is becoming increasingly dependent. Thus, the asymmetries generated by these relationships operate to endanger to the extent possible the independent foreign policy decisions of Pakistan and, therefore, demand a more strategic diplomacy aimed at defending national interests while negotiating external pressures. This paper highlights the place of economic and military dependencies in the making of foreign policy decisions by states such as Pakistan in a competitive global environment.

DISCUSSION

This study aligns with existing research on how strategic dependencies shape the sovereignty and foreign policy of developing nations, particularly in the case of Pakistan's evolving relations with China and the USA post-March 2024 is in line with many studies that analyze strategic dependencies of developing countries within the global order. Pakistan's strategic reliance on the USA imposes distinct but equally important sovereignty restrictions, particularly in military and security affairs, while its economic rely on China threatens its financial independence.

Dependency Theory's claim that international relations are uneven is supported by these dependencies, which frequently limit the foreign policy independence of poor countries. Past research gives valuable insights into the mechanisms of such dependencies and their implications for sovereignty and foreign policy.

Pakistan's relationship with China, and more so in the CPEC, has been heavily researched. According to Small (2015), this has brought a financial vulnerability that has amplified Pakistan's economic dependency on China. This

is somewhat an echo of Dos Santos' (1970) theoretical work on Dependency Theory, arguing that developing countries are structurally subordinated to their wealthier counterparts through the economic ties established. Small's argument that CPEC-induced debt may give China leverage over Pakistan's political and economic decisions is also echoed in Siddique (2021), who argues that Pakistan's deepening economic ties with China may compromise its sovereignty, especially in the context of national security and policy formulation. Fair (2014) also discusses how Pakistan's foreign policy is shaped by its alignment with China, particularly in regional security matters. These studies indicate that, despite the economic benefits Pakistan derives from its relationship with China, its dependency raises serious concerns about compromised policy autonomy, consistent with Bakker and Van der Pijl's (2016) analysis of Chinese economic dominance in South Asia.

The relationship between Pakistan and the USA has been the subject of much research by academics, especially in relation to diplomatic and military assistance. According to Fair (2014), Pakistan's foreign policy, at times, has had to be subservient to U.S. interests, which often relate to Afghanistan or counter-terrorism. This view aligns perfectly with Mearsheimer's offensive realism theory, where the superpowers force weaker states to be an ally in their geopolitics strategies. Because of this dependence, Pakistan is often compelled to support American strategic interests even when they contradict, such as the American pressure to fight militancy within Pakistan's borders. Raza (2018) further develops this point by arguing that Pakistan's foreign policy is still controlled by U.S. strategic interests in the region, thus limiting Pakistan's autonomy and sovereignty. The transactional nature of Pakistan's relationship with the USA, whereby military aid is often doled out with strings attached, is a recurring theme in these studies, and reinforces the notion that Pakistan's sovereignty is increasingly under the influence of external powers.

The challenge of balancing dual dependencies, especially in the context of Pakistan's relationships with both China and the USA, has been discussed in several studies. Mearsheimer (2014) underscores the strategic balancing act that countries like Pakistan must perform to maintain relations with two competing powers. This dynamic is particularly pronounced in the wake of the rising competition between China and the USA. Cohen (2015) opines that Pakistan's idea of keeping a balance between these two superpowers seems quite challenging, as their dual dependence may create contradictory policies and

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diplomatic tensions in its foreign policy. Pakistan's geopolitical positioning as a middle power requires careful diplomacy to avoid alienating either China or the USA, as highlighted in the works of Hussain (2021), who argues that Pakistan's foreign policy is continuously shaped by its efforts to navigate the complex web of dependencies on both powers. These studies tend to reinforce the conclusion that even though Pakistan may economically and militarily derive some benefit from both China and the USA, such dependencies constrain its sovereignty with a significant impact on not being able to pursue independent foreign policies.

CONCLUSION

This study reaffirms previous research on dependency dynamics in international relations, demonstrating how Pakistan's sovereignty and foreign policy are constrained by strategic dependencies on China and the USA. The strategic dependencies on these two states create a situation where Pakistan's sovereignty is increasingly challenged with respect to its relations with two world powers. Dependency Theory is a sound frame through which asymmetry limits Pakistan in foreign policy autonomy. This research fits with earlier works that underscore the very critical role of economic, military, and geopolitical dependencies in making foreign policy options for developing countries like Pakistan. Thus, its foreign policy becomes hostage to these pressures by both superpowers making the denial of full sovereignty a reality.

It thus demonstrates the very complex web between national interests and international pressures. In such an evolving geopolitical environment, Pakistan is concerned that it carries out the demanding task of asserting its sovereignty while keeping in check the superpower-induced constraints. Hence, Pakistan's foreign policy is subject to pressure from both superpowers, leading to a lack of full sovereignty in a fast changing environment.



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