
Pakistan's Foreign Policy in a Multiplex World: The Logic of Hedging

Saria Ahmad¹

ABSTRACT

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The international order is undergoing profound transformation, generating renewed debate over the concepts through which it should be understood. While much of the existing discourse describes these changes in terms of multipolarity, this paper posits that the concept of 'multiplexity', which takes into account both the multiplicity of actors and the complexity of their interactions, provides a more comprehensive explanation of the nature, dynamics, and organisation of the emerging order. Using a qualitative and interpretive research design based on academic literature, official documents, and expert insights, the study examines the implications of an increasingly multiplex international system for Pakistan's foreign policy. It argues that while balancing and bandwagoning remain important strategic responses to changes in the distribution of power, neither provides a satisfactory framework for advancing Pakistan's interests in the contemporary international order. The paper concludes that hedging offers Islamabad the most viable strategy for managing competing security, economic, and diplomatic interests while preserving flexibility.

Keywords: World Order, Multiplexity, Multipolarity, Pakistan's Foreign Policy, Hedging

Introduction

The international order is undergoing a period of profound transformation. Longstanding assumptions about global governance, economic

¹PhD Scholar, Department of International Relations, National Defence University (NDU), Islamabad, Pakistan.

Corresponding author: sariaahmad0786@gmail.com



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interdependence, and the role of the United States in world affairs that underpinned the liberal hegemonic order are increasingly being questioned. Debate is rife in policy and academic circles regarding the concepts through which these changes should be studied. While most observers describe these developments in terms of multipolarity, this characterization overlooks the deep-seated changes underway, not just in the distribution of power but in the overall organization of the international system. Multipolarity involves relatively equal distribution of material capabilities among at least three or more powers. With the United States still ahead of all others in almost all measures of power by a considerable margin, it is quite misleading to suggest - as a number of pundits do - that the world has become multipolar. It is also true that its lead is shrinking due to the rise of others, particularly in the economic domain. The resultant configuration may be labelled as partial unipolarity but a parochial focus on the tangible resources of great powers conceals the complexity and cross-cutting nature of interactions between and among different state and non-state actors, including regional powers, international institutions, corporations, and transnational networks, on a variety of issues (Brooks & Wohlforth, 2023). Clearly, a new set of concepts is required to grapple with this period of transition that coincides with the decline of liberal hegemony and Washington's retreat from aspects of the liberal international order it once championed. This constitutes the central question of this research, followed by an examination of the course Pakistan must pursue in its foreign relations in a world that is becoming more decentered yet more intricately connected than ever.

Scholarship on the future of the international order offers a range of competing perspectives. Some scholars contend that the diffusion of power away from the West is giving rise to a post-American world in which emerging powers and regions are growing in influence (Zakaria, 2008). Others argue that the current moment is defined by the absence of effective global leadership, resulting in a fragmented world marked by institutional paralysis and weakened collective action. Ian Bremmer calls it the G-Zero world (Bremmer, 2012). Still others have highlighted the possibility of concert-like arrangements among major powers and the proliferation of alternative centres of governance beyond the Western core (Kupchan, 2012; Buzan & Lawson, 2015; Patrick, 2023). More recently, Acharya (2017; 2018) has challenged the narrow focus of these approaches on the distribution of power by proposing the concept of multiplexity, which lays emphasis on the importance of interaction capacity, regional actors, overlapping institutions, and transnational networks in determining pathways to a future order.

A parallel debate concerns states' response to the changing international order. Traditional realist literature suggests that states confronted with systemic

change pursue either balancing or bandwagoning (Waltz, 1979; Walt, 1985; Schweller, 1994). Recent studies have drawn attention to the growing adoption of hedging as a middle strategy to navigate uncertainty and avoid rigid alignments (Goh, 2006; Kuik, 2008; Lim and Cooper, 2015). Pakistan's foreign policy has been analyzed through each of these frameworks, including recently through the lens of hedging (Siddiqi, 2022). However, most of these studies situate the country's strategic choices within the context of great-power competition. This paper contributes to the literature by examining Pakistan's hedging behaviour against the backdrop of an increasingly multiplex order and argues that Islamabad's diplomatic conduct is shaped not only by shifts in the balance of power but also by the interconnected and decentralised nature of the emerging order.

The study employs a qualitative and interpretive approach based on analysis of academic literature, official statements, policy reports, and other relevant primary and secondary sources. These methods are well-suited to understanding complex political phenomena and the ideas and interactions that inform foreign policy choices (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2014). It also draws upon insights obtained through discussions with scholars and practitioners of foreign policy, including Pakistan's former ambassadors to the United States, China, Indonesia, and the United Kingdom. By combining conceptual and policy-oriented perspectives, this paper investigates how shifts in the organization of the international system influence the strategic options available to Pakistan and the extent to which hedging offers an effective response.

The remainder of the article proceeds in four parts. It first examines the transition from liberal hegemony to multiplexity and explains why the latter provides a more comprehensive framework for understanding the emerging international order. It then discusses the principal strategic responses available to states - balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging - before applying these concepts to Pakistan's foreign policy. Finally, it evaluates the viability of hedging as a strategy for advancing Islamabad's interests in an increasingly multiplex world.

From Liberal Hegemony to Multiplexity

Traditionally, the international order has been analyzed by policymakers and scholars in terms of polarity. The Cold War period was characterized by competition between two superpowers, i.e., the United States and Soviet Union for international supremacy and labelled as bipolar. The end of the Cold War was followed by the dominance of a single power, that is, the United States of America and the resultant order labelled as unipolar. Starting in the 2010s, with the rise of China and others, the term multipolar is increasingly

used to describe the emerging world order. As a concept, polarity has its strengths as well as weaknesses. While it has enabled analysts to unravel the differences between a world with only one superpower and that with two or more, it cannot fully capture the broader changes involved in the transition from one international order to another. Besides, the usual means of determining polarity is the distribution of material capabilities at a given point in time. It does not take into account other factors such as leadership, ideas, norms, and patterns of interaction that are also crucial to the making of a world order. Furthermore, the concept evokes the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe to maintain balance of power in the continent. It was a system that revolved exclusively around great powers and involved few multilateral institutions. On the other hand, the contemporary international order consists of a variety of global and regional institutions and norms which play a vital part in the provision of public goods and organization of cooperation. To overcome the conceptual weaknesses associated with polarity, Amitav Acharya has proposed an alternative concept based on interaction capacity to trace the evolution of world order (Acharya, 2017). Labelled as multiplexity, its defining features include the following:

- 1) Notwithstanding the existence of power inequalities and hierarchical relations among nations, absence of global hegemony
- 2) Rapid increase in the number of consequential actors in international politics. These include not just great powers but also global and regional institutions, social movements, corporations, and people themselves in addition to criminal networks and non-state actors posing a threat to stability and sovereignty
- 3) An extensive pattern of interdependence not just limited to trade but also encompassing supply chains, production networks, investment flows, common ecological threats, and other transnational issues
- 4) A pluralizing and dynamic global governance architecture coupled with an emerging multilevel governance architecture consisting of subnational, regional, and global layers, with hybrid structures, networks, and informal and formal institutions
- 5) Political, cultural, and ideological diversity offering a variety of pathways to peace, stability, and prosperity

In order to grasp the essence of this concept, it is helpful to draw distinction between multiplexity and two other ideas which dominate contemporary discourse about the nature of the international order, i.e., liberal hegemony and multipolarity. Multiplexity and multipolarity are different in several ways. As pointed out by Barry Posen, multipolarity is traditionally associated with relatively equal distribution of power among three or more states (Posen, 2009). However, in a multiplex world, it is not only great powers but also

institutions, corporations, social movements, extremists, and other non-state actors that have the capability to influence global outcomes and generate order or cause disorder. Similarly, and as mentioned earlier, polarity describes a static distribution of power, mainly military and economic power at a given time period. On the other hand, multiplexity is a broader notion that deals not only with dynamic patterns of interaction among states, big and small but other than material factors, it also covers normative and ideational forces (Acharya, 2018). And unlike the concert system that prevailed in Europe before the Second World War, a large number of states in the multiplex world are former colonies that chafe at western dominance and demand a greater role in global governance and international and regional institutions. This implies that any future multipolar order is likely to differ significantly from its historical predecessors and be framed by many of the features associated with multiplexity.

There are also salient differences between multiplexity and liberal hegemony. To begin with, the main driver of the liberal international order is the overall global dominance of the United States of America. Conversely, a combination of leading global and regional powers as well as non-state actors make up the multiplex order. Herein, an increasingly consequential role is also ascribed to the global South. Second, while liberal democracy and market capitalism are promoted as the central organizing principles of the liberal hegemonic order, liberal, civilizational, radical, and communitarian ideas coexist and compete in the multiplex order. Third, economic interdependence in the liberal hegemonic order is mainly western and U.S. -centered, revolving around trade and investment. In the multiplex world, a variety of actors and several forms of interdependence exist including those created by transnational threats like pandemics and climate change. Finally, for most part, international cooperation in the liberal hegemonic order is organized around the United Nations and related institutions established after World War II and dominated by the United States and other western powers. Conversely, cooperation is more pluralized in the multiplex world, with greater focus on bilateral, regional, and other plurilateral arrangements, sometimes outside the ambit of the UN system.

The ongoing shift in economic power, reduced prominence of Washington in the global governance system, declining trust in American leadership, and emergence of a variety of global and regional bodies in which countries from the global South play an increasingly important role aligns well with Acharya's multiplex framework. Although estimates of economic shift are subject to unanticipated and continuing crises, they clearly point to the relative decline of the West and rise of others – Asian nations in particular. Based on World Bank approximations, China's GDP in terms of purchasing power

parity surpassed that of the United States in 2016 (World Bank, 2025). In 2024, China's GDP (in PPP terms) stood at around 37.07 trillion dollars whereas that of the United States was 26.88 trillion dollars. From 34.6 per cent in 2010, the share of developing countries as percentage of global GDP has increased to 45 per cent and is expected to make up almost 60 per cent in 2026 (World Bank Group, 2025, IMF, 2025). Discussions about the potential 'deglobalization' of international economy, sparked by the Great Recession of 2008-9 factor in the political implications of China's rise, the narrowing gap between developing and developed countries, the unequal benefits of trade and integration, and the proliferation of new technologies. These trends have only accelerated in recent years, underscoring the importance of agile, secure, and resilient value chains.

The weakening of postwar multilateralism at the global level has brought into being a more pluralized trade and security architecture. The expansion of BRICS (originally Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) from five to eleven members at its summit in August 2023 by including Iran, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Egypt, and Argentina is a case in point (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). Since then, Indonesia has joined, Argentina has pulled out, and Saudi Arabia is hedging its invite, but it is still significant. The group's internal conflicts (such as those between Egypt and Ethiopia, between China and India) and its diversity stand out and are likely to enhance its geopolitical impact in due course. The expansion occurred during a time when the United Nations Security Council was paralyzed owing to tensions stemming from the Ukraine War and despite Washington's imposition of sanctions on Moscow – a member of BRICS – as well as warning of secondary sanctions on other countries for providing assistance to Russia. It is also likely to scale up BRICS' existing financial cooperation and development mechanisms such as the Contingent Reserve Arrangement and the New Development Bank.

In the economic realm too, the authority of the World Trade Organization and other institutions championed by Washington in the post-World War II era is eroding and giving way to new regional cooperation initiatives encompassing actors, also from the global South. Two initiatives in particular - one spearheaded by Japan, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and the other championed by Beijing, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) – underline this competition. Comprising fifteen countries of the Asia-Pacific that represent almost thirty per cent of global GDP, the RCEP is the largest free-trade agreement aimed at gradual elimination of tariffs on intraregional trade (World Economic Forum, 2021). It also does not stipulate conditions related to environmental protection, labor standards, or promotion of state-owned

enterprises. This flexibility of rules provides greater incentive for supply chain integration across the region. Europe and the United States are launching their own initiatives in response to those led by Asian nations. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity launched by the United States in early 2022 is an example. However, it is not certain whether this initiative, focused on areas like trade, infrastructure, supply-chain resilience, anti-corruption and tax matters, decarbonization, and clean energy will gain enough traction.

The growing decentralisation of international politics has important implications for Pakistan. Unlike the binary framing of strategic choices during the Cold War or the unrivalled dominance of the United States in the post-Cold War period, Islamabad's existing foreign policy landscape is characterized by a wider range of partnerships, institutions, and issue-specific alignments. This diffusion of influence expands room for maneuver but also poses challenges. Pakistan's security concerns, economic development, trade, access to international finance, energy security, and climate resilience entail engagement with different actors whose interests do not always converge. Resultantly, decision-making has become considerably more complicated, and the country's external relations can no longer be conducted solely through the prism of great-power rivalry; instead, they are increasingly shaped by interactions that cut across global and regional domains involving states, international institutions, markets, and other non-state actors.

Balancing, Bandwagoning, and Hedging

States can respond to changes in the international distribution of power and organization of world order in a variety of ways. Of these, two approaches have received particular attention in realist international relations scholarship: balancing and band wagoning. Balancing entails either the formation of an external alliance and/or the strengthening of a state's own capabilities through internal military buildup (Williams, Lobell, & Jesse, 2012). The purpose of this strategy is to maintain autonomy and ensure security against the threatening state. However, external balancing may expose the state to the risk of abandonment and entrapment, whereas internal balancing requires the diversion of resources that may be needed elsewhere. On the other hand, bandwagoning involves alignment with the rising or stronger power through the accommodation of its interests and preferences. This behaviour can be construed as a response to avoid harm to itself or a means to maximize profit (Schweller, 1994). Although security is achieved, it is often accompanied by the sacrifice of autonomy or acceptance of a subordinate position (Murphy, 2017). Several prominent scholars contend that balancing is more prevalent in international politics than bandwagoning. Waltz, for example, argues that during periods of systemic change, weaker states tend to align against the concentration of power rather than with it (Waltz, 1979). This argument has

been further refined by Walt who maintains that states do not necessarily balance against power but against perceived threats (Walt, 1985). This tendency is particularly strong when the aggregate capacity of the rising power is also accompanied by aggressive intention, offensive capability, and geographical proximity. When security and autonomy are at stake, balancing by means of an alliance offers a state greater freedom of action than submitting itself to the whims of a potentially menacing power. This Realist perspective has, however, been challenged by more recent scholarship examining Asian responses to China's rise. Many countries that maintain security ties with the United States have simultaneously cultivated close economic and diplomatic relations with Beijing (Koga, 2018). Such behaviour does not fit into neat categories of balancing or bandwagoning. Instead, it reflects a third choice aimed at reducing the costs and risks associated with both. This strategy is commonly described as hedging. According to Goh, it encompasses a 'set of strategies' employed by states to plan for contingencies or avoid them through the adoption of middle ground in situations where it is difficult to choose one side or policy position at the expense of another (Goh, 2006).

While scholars differ on the exact meaning and scope of hedging, it is possible to situate it within the balance-of-power theory on the strategic continuum between balancing and bandwagoning to cater to a state's interests in three broad fields of foreign policy: security, economy, and diplomacy. The inclusion of different fields demonstrates the strategy's multidimensional nature and accounts for contradictory behavior within and between them depending on the interest a state seeks to promote and the priority accorded to it. Thus, it is not unlikely for economic cooperation to subsist side by side with security competition and vice versa. The U.S.- China relationship itself offers a case in point. In broad terms, hedging may be defined as an insurance-seeking behavior in an uncertain international environment and comprises three main attributes: (a) aversion to rigid alignment with one power or the other, (b) occasional incongruity between policies in order to counterbalance risks across multiple (economic, political, and security) domains, and (c) pursuit of a diversified foreign policy to foster a fallback position. In this way, hedging not only offers a mechanism to circumvent some of the repercussions of systemic uncertainty but can also enable a state to ward off the negative consequences of overdependence on one power such as getting embroiled in great-power rivalry, loss of autonomy, and dwindling of its international role.

How is hedging practiced? According to Kuik, most foreign policy behaviors reside between the two extremes of acceptance and rejection – in other words, pure band-wagoning and pure balancing (Kuik, 2008). Hedging is an intermediate strategy that encompasses a variety of behaviors to maximize benefits and limit risks including dominance-denial, limited band-wagoning,

indirect balancing, binding-engagement, economic pragmatism, and economic diversification. Each of these elements relates to and involves trade-offs in different fields of foreign policy. For example, trade-offs between protecting national security and diminishing the risks of abandonment and entrapment in case of military hedging, trade-offs between enhancing influence through partnership with a great power and preservation of autonomy to avoid entanglement in the disputes of others in case of political hedging, and trade-offs between economic dependence to promote growth and diversification to minimize the risks associated with overreliance in case of economic hedging. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of ways in which it can be implemented, hedging almost always involves countervailing behaviors of competition and cooperation either between and/or also within various spheres. But since there is no imminent threat, only indirect behaviors, i.e., soft policy instruments are adopted. It is the combination of the opposites of soft band-wagoning and soft balancing that make up the hedging strategy (Hornung, 2014). Whereas soft band-wagoning lends it the cooperative element, soft balancing contributes to the competitive element. While these instruments are not unique, it is their combination that gives hedging its distinct character.

The appeal of hedging becomes particularly pronounced in a world marked by overlapping institutions, multiple centres of influence, and uncertainty regarding the future distribution of power. In contrast to balancing and bandwagoning, which presuppose strategic certainty and relatively clear strategic choices, hedging employs a mixture of the two as an insurance against the uncertain intentions of target states – both present and future (Goh, 2006). Alongside engagement, states pursue indirect balancing policies by cultivating political, economic, and diplomatic relations with third states or organizations, which can be leveraged when circumstances require. As a strategy designed to preserve autonomy, diversify options, and manage risk, hedging is especially relevant for middle and secondary states striving to keep their options open while navigating a complex international environment.

Pakistan's Hedging Logic

What makes hedging the pertinent foreign policy choice for Islamabad in an increasingly multiplex world? Pakistan's strategic predicament is more complex than is often assumed. The foremost strategic threat to the country emanates from its immediate neighborhood, particularly its protracted rivalry with India. Therefore, Islamabad's balancing efforts have been primarily directed towards countering the threat from New Delhi and to achieve this end, it has often sought the support of extra-regional powers like the United States of America and China by band-wagoning with them. For most part, Pakistan was able to navigate between its relationship with the two almost effortlessly. However, it is no longer the case. The meteoric rise of China in recent decades

has drastically changed Washington's threat perception of Beijing and it is intent on containing it, including by cultivating New Delhi as an offshore balancer. This makes it unlikely for the United States to offer any substantial assistance to Pakistan in its quest to balance against India.

The dominant streak of thought is that it leaves Islamabad with no option but to bandwagon with Beijing. However, this line of argument is simplistic because it would yield considerable strategic benefit for Pakistan only in the case of a complete breakdown of Sino-Indian relations. Given the density of their trade and business ties, this is not likely to transpire in the near future. Notwithstanding the intensification of their border conflict in 2017 and again in 2020, trade between China and India has continued to flourish, amounting to US \$115.82 billion in 2023 (Embassy of India, Beijing, n.d.). Similarly, despite the possibility of tight alignment offered by Sino-American competition, New Delhi continues to adhere to 'strategic autonomy' in its foreign policy, manifest in its stance in the United Nations Security Council on Russia's invasion of Ukraine (Mishra, 2024).

In sharp contradistinction to previous periods of geopolitical rivalry, the contemporary international order no longer revolves exclusively around the actions and interactions of great powers. Instead, it is marked by the growing importance of regional actors, institutions, economic networks, and issue-based partnerships. Notwithstanding the salience of security concerns, Pakistan's interests cannot be confined to a single domain or realized through a single relationship. Consequently, the challenge facing Islamabad is to concurrently pursue diverse and, at times, competing interests without estranging or becoming excessively dependent on any one actor.

Security

In the security sphere, Islamabad's principal concern is the preservation of its territorial integrity and national sovereignty; China is its natural and longstanding strategic partner in this domain because it shares many of the country's concerns not only about India's growing power but also separatism and terrorism. A militarily strong Pakistan helps offset New Delhi's dominance which aligns with Beijing's broader regional interests. China is the largest supplier of military hardware to Pakistan which includes tanks, aircraft, missiles, and submarines. From 2018 to 2023, Pakistan imported almost 82 per cent of its defense supplies from China (SIPRI, 2024). While China's military support undoubtedly enhances the country's capabilities, excessive dependence can be detrimental and lead to loss of leverage with both, Beijing and Washington. In the event of U.S. sanctions on China or supply chain disruptions, it would make arms procurement extremely difficult for Pakistan. It is therefore important for Islamabad to keep its military ties intact with

Washington to whatever extent it is possible and find alternative sources for modern defence equipment and technology. In this regard, Turkey has already emerged as an important partner (Haider, 2025), while cooperation with Gulf states and selected European suppliers can provide additional avenues for procurement, training, and technology transfer. The objective is not to supplant one partner with another but to reduce vulnerabilities associated with inordinate reliance on a single supplier. The renewal of the Communications Interoperability and Security Memorandum of Agreement between Pakistan and the United States in 2023 that covers joint operations, exercises, basing, training, and equipment is a significant step in this direction (Yousaf, 2023). Despite U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, counterterrorism, maritime security, and regional stability remain areas of concern for Washington and both sides recognize the utility of robust military ties and mutual benefits of continued collaboration.

Economy

The flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor represents a significant upgradation of Sino-Pak economic ties. It is estimated to have already brought capital worth almost forty-six billion U.S. dollars to Pakistan in the form of commercial debt, concessionary loans, and investment backed by state guarantees (Salman, 2022). The project has been sternly criticized by the United States for corruption, lack of transparency, and mounting debt costs to Islamabad. At the same time, rising terrorism and political instability in Pakistan continue to impede successful realization of CPEC. Since 2016, more than sixty Chinese workers have suffered injuries or lost their lives in multiple attacks (Patki, 2024). This may prompt Beijing to increase its security footprint in Pakistan or halt the project. Fears also abound that CPEC may result in asymmetric interdependence and curtailment of Islamabad's policy autonomy, but as of now, Beijing does not present any compulsion. Washington presents both, an economic threat and opportunity for Islamabad. On one hand, the U.S. can penalize Pakistan by exercising its economic leverage to place it on the Financial Action Task Force's grey list (Iqbal, 2021). Contrarily, it can play a crucial role in securing loan for the country from the International Monetary Fund to keep it afloat (Iqbal, 2024). The United States is also the top destination for Pakistan's exports (News Desk, 2025). Hence, it is vital for Islamabad to pursue constructive and multisectoral engagement with Washington as well as Beijing instead of focusing only on the latter. The same applies to Pakistan's economic ties with the Gulf states, international financial institutions, and emerging markets. The Gulf remains an indispensable source of remittances (Shahid, 2023), investment, and energy supplies, while institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank

continue to play a vital role in macroeconomic stabilization and development financing. Beyond traditional partners, greater connectivity and engagement with emerging markets in Asia, Africa, and beyond can help diversify trade and investment flows. Although at this stage, it is far-fetched to contemplate the coexistence of BRI and the G7-sponsored Build Back Better World in Pakistan, it is an idea that is worth exploring to overcome the country's infrastructure gaps. But infrastructure alone is not enough. There is also a dire need to promote industrialization and skills development to enhance manufacturing capacity and implement governance reforms to attract sustained foreign investment and realize Pakistan's economic potential.

Diplomacy

In the diplomatic domain, Beijing has solidified its strategic partnership by unequivocally supporting Islamabad's stance at international fora from the United Nations Security Council to the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Following the Pulwama/ Balakot crisis, China was outright in its condemnation of India's violation of Pakistan's territorial sovereignty. In marked contrast, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo labelled India's airstrikes deep inside Pakistan as counterterrorism action (Noor, 2024). Indeed, Beijing's multi-billion-dollar investment in Pakistan and the enormous volume of its trade with India mean that any escalation in crisis between the two countries is inimical to China's interests. But as recent U.S. sanctions on entities associated with Pakistan's missile program and placement of the country on FATF's grey list denote, Washington has the capacity to inflict real harm on Islamabad (U.S. Department of State, 2024). Its elevation of Pakistan as a major non-NATO ally and castigation as a safe haven for terrorists, both have global reverberations. Given the extent of America's reach, its vast network of alliances, and outsized influence in international institutions, Pakistan cannot afford to alienate the U.S.

When it comes to hedging, the fundamental premise is risk-minimization, profit-maximization, and keeping all options open for as long as it is possible. The keyword here is diversification. In order to benefit from the evolving geopolitical situation, it is imperative for Islamabad to develop a multifaceted approach. One such step in this direction is improvement of ties with Russia. Just as Saudi Arabia manages to have close relations with both, Pakistan and India, and India maintains good terms with archenemies, Israel and Iran, Pakistan needs to cultivate strategic partnerships with countries in the region and beyond irrespective of its rivalry with India. For example, it can open up to and offer an energy and trade route to Central Asian republics. The platform of Shanghai Cooperation Organization can be utilized for this purpose.

Similarly, Islamabad can expand its influence in the Middle East through tactful participation in the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition and reviving its role in the Organization of Islamic Conference. This will not only expand Pakistan's diplomatic footprint but also position it to benefit from emerging opportunities across different regions and forums. However, the ability to capitalise on these openings depends on domestic capacity. A diversified foreign policy must therefore be accompanied by political stability, economic development, and governance reforms.

Conclusion

The central argument of this paper is that changes underway in the organization of the international system cannot be understood through the concept of polarity alone. While the distribution of power remains fundamental, it does not capture the full extent of transformation taking place in world politics. Acharya's framework of multiplexity provides a more useful lens to understand this transition. It draws attention not only to the diffusion of power but also brings to the fore the growing importance of interaction capacity, proliferation of consequential actors, and pluralization of global governance. In the present environment, elements of the liberal international order compete and coexist with alternative forms of ordering across different regions and issue areas.

Pakistan's foreign policy must adapt to these changes taking place in the international system. It must resist the temptation to reduce world order to strategic competition between the United States and China. Equally important is the need to move beyond an India-centric conception of its external relations. Islamabad's interests are dispersed across multiple domains and relationships. This makes rigid alignment with one power or the other neither feasible nor desirable. Instead, it must develop its political, economic, and military ties on the basis of rational self-interest, not only with Washington and Beijing, but also with other regional powers, international institutions, and emerging centres of power. By pursuing a hedging strategy, Pakistan can advance its security goals and expand its economic opportunities while minimizing the risks of entrapment, abandonment, and marginalization.

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