

PAKISTAN



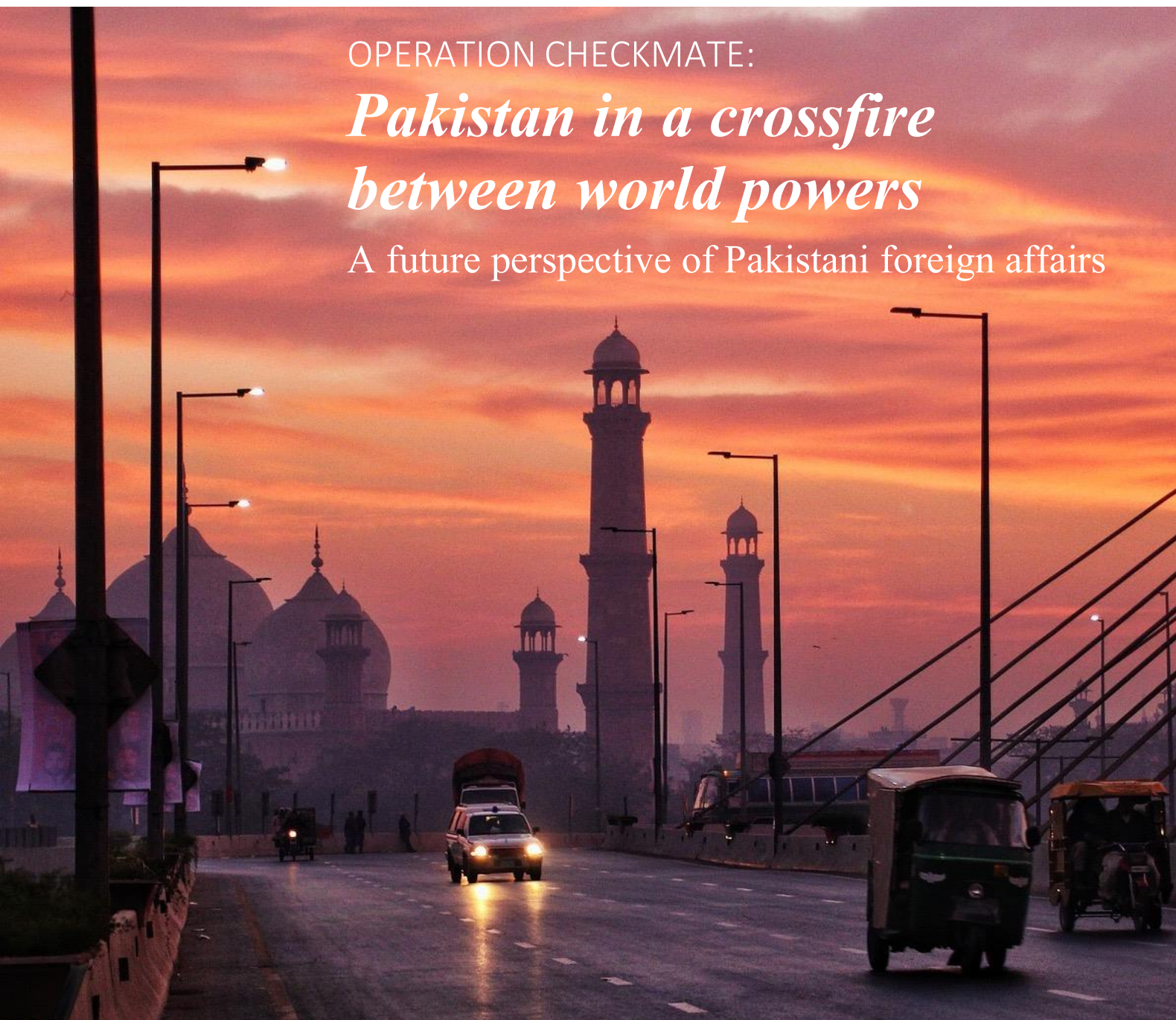
STRATEGIC ANALYSIS REPORT / MAY 2020

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OPERATION CHECKMATE:

Pakistan in a crossfire between world powers

A future perspective of Pakistani foreign affairs



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*Operation Checkmate: Pakistan in a crossfire between world powers.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report has been aimed at examining the future prospects for Pakistan in the 2025 horizon in relation to other States and to present various scenarios through a prospective strategic analysis.

The research draws upon the fact that, despite the relatively short space of time, Pakistan is likely to undergo several important changes in its international affairs and thus feel forced to rethink its foreign policy. This strategic analysis suggests there could be considerable estrangement between the U.S. and Pakistan and, therefore, the American influence will decrease considerably. Their security alliance could terminate, and Pakistan would cease to be in U.S.' sphere of influence. Moreover, with the new BRI and CPEC projects, China could move closer to Pakistan and finally become its main partner in the region. The CPEC is going to become a vital instrument for Pakistan, so it could significantly increase Chinese influence. Yet, the whole situation risks jeopardizing Pakistan's sovereign independence.

India-Pakistan longstanding dispute over Kashmir seems to be stagnated and will possibly remain as such in the following years. India has taken steps to annex its administered territory in Jammu and Kashmir and Pakistan could potentially follow. The possibility of an open conflict and a nuclear standoff remains possible as both nuclear powers have very different strategies and conceptions which could lead to a misinterpretation and a nuclear escalation.

In the quest to rethink its foreign policy, the U.S.-Taliban peace and the empowerment of the group has come as a bolt from the sky for Pakistan. Through its ties with the Taliban, Pakistan could gain itself a major presence in the region namely by reaching out to Central Asia and advance its interest to curtail India's influence. Amid a dire economic crisis, with regards to the Saudi Iranian Cold War, Pakistan could seek a way in which it can recalibrate its stance in favor of the resource-rich Saudi alliance while it appeases sectarian groups who could strongly oppose this potential policy.

Pakistan ought to acknowledge that significant changes ought to be made in both the national and international sphere and that decisive challenges lay ahead.

INTRODUCTION

Geopolitical Perspective

World power has been changing holder from Europe before the First World War, to the United States during the 20th century, but now seems to be the time for Asia. The geographical theory of the *Rimland*, together with one third of the world's resources and population, transform South Asia into the perfect playground for the competition among the major global powers to become the hegemon. However, with political and economic developments, the control of the region has been diverted to benefit the interests of the superpowers. With that, they need to exercise their power through their economic, political and military capabilities. Thusly, since the beginning of this century and with an ongoing war in Afghanistan, South Asia's geopolitical conditions have changed, great powers' interests have created an atmosphere of total regional strife.¹

Pakistan is located in a strategic geographical area, therefore, it cannot stay out of the power struggle between great regional and world powers such as the People's Republic of China (China), India and even the U.S. Interestingly, Pakistan has become one of the superpowers' main target for greater prominence and influence in South Asia. The U.S., since the collapse of the Soviet Union, had acquired a leading role in the region and, above all, in the post-9/11 attacks rapprochement to Pakistan. Currently, however, the relationship between Pakistan and the U.S. has diminished considerably due to China's harmonizing towards Pakistan. For this reason, the U.S. has been forced to change its regional strategy, improving its relationship with India. On the other hand, Pakistan continues to face external conflicts. Ongoing disputes with India and Afghanistan are a persistent source of violence and a menace to regional security. Pakistan's geopolitical conflict par excellence is with India and is mainly focused on the aspects of territory, power, status and national identity.² Also, this conflict is the perfect context for Pakistan's highly ambitious realpolitik strategy. In other words, Islamabad sees the need to maintain a proactive security policy to balance itself with its neighbour.³ Pakistan dreams with parity between itself and India. Major powers like the U.S. and China have helped in the pursuit of such parity, and Pakistan's elite has used its relations with these powers to maintain a position of strength against India. The quest for strategic concilement with India is one of the main reasons why Pakistan remains a warrior state obsessed

¹ Naeem Khalid Lodhi, "Regional Geopolitical Review and Future Prospects," *The Nation*, December 10, 2019, <https://nation.com.pk/10-Dec-2019/regional-geopolitical-review-and-future-prospects>.

² Paul, T.V., *The Warrior State, Pakistan in the Contemporary World*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p.95.

³ Ibid, p. 95.

with its national security, that is, financing and supporting extremist groups, and unable to transform itself into a moderate, developed and democratic country.⁴

Pakistan is also said to have some antagonism with Afghanistan. Afghanistan and Pakistan border has become a constant headache, not only for these two countries but also for the regional powers. Several terrorist groups and tribes live along the border, mostly people belonging to Pashtun ethnic group. Pashtuns are a key element to understand current Afghanistan and Pakistan ties as they have a desire to create a new independent state. This desire is supported by countries like Afghanistan and India, for which Pakistan is strongly opposed.⁵ On the other hand, in a realistic perspective, a weak and subordinate Afghanistan is essential for Pakistan's security because it has found in the Taliban a powerful ally to advance its regional aims against Indian, besides from keeping Afghanistan in its sphere of influence. Furthermore, it is worth highlighting the role played by the new moderate government of Imran Khan, in search for a real rapprochement to India and Afghanistan to change the region's geopolitical course.

Below, for a closer look to the situation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan and for a better understanding of the report, a SWOT analysis has been implemented.

SWOT analysis of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan

Strengths:

- Key strategic location for trade, as a link between Centre Asia, South Asia and the Middle East.
- A moderate and open to dialogue government.
- Major role in Afghanistan's fate.
- Consolidated nuclear arsenal.
- Commitment to promote and protect HR.

Weaknesses:

- Homeland of extremist/terrorist groups.
- Economy in recession and shortage of energy.
- The military is involved in the political process.
- Difficulty to control Taliban's radical impulses.
- Lack of strategic depth of the country to defend the country against an invasion.

Opportunities:

- Chinese CPEC project.
- Multidimensional and comprehensive relations with the EU under the SEP and the GSP+.
- Consolidated ties between both the KSA and Iran.
- Possible peace deal in Afghanistan.
- Pakistan could become the shortest corridor for Central Asia oil and gas pipeline.

Threats:

- U.S. rapprochement to India.
- Indian Cold Start strategy.
- Nuclear arms race with India.
- Strong economic dependency on the KSA.
- Closer economic ties with China.

⁴ Ibid, p. 95.

⁵ Ibid, p. 101.

PAKISTAN AND THE GREAT POWERS

The United States of America

There are no alliances other than those drawn by interests. It may seem like a cliché, but it is the reality for Pakistan and the U.S. Direct and formal relations started when Pakistan joined the U.S. to contain the influence of the Soviet Union and China in Asia. These relations have not always been good and free of tensions, but despite all the problems Pakistan has continued next to the U.S., that is, within SEATO to counter communism geopolitical expansion, in the diplomatic rapprochement of the U.S. with China, against the proxy war of the USSR in Afghanistan and, finally, to counter terrorism after the 9/11.⁶ Currently, the main interest of the U.S. in Pakistan is the fight against terrorism and the Taliban in Afghanistan. However, this led to an estrangement due to differences between Pakistan and the U.S. in how to deal with the Taliban. Also, it should be noted that there is a dimensional problem, that is, the partnership is not characterized as multidimensional, but one-dimensional focused mainly on security. Islamabad in the post-9/11 era wanted to maintain more open cooperation with the U.S. in areas other than security but Washington prioritized the fight against terrorism.⁷ So to say, the U.S. has used so far, a one-off policy in Pakistan with zero-sum view.

Relations between Pakistan and the U.S. have been forged on trust issues due to erroneous perceptions of the national security policies of one another. Moreover, relations have been at a low point since 2018 because Pakistan failed to take action against the Taliban and the Haqqani network, earning itself a spot on the grey list of the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) as a funder and supporter of extremist groups. Nonetheless, the U.S. determination to end the long conflict in Afghanistan has become a starting point to renew the partnership between both countries.⁸ Furthermore, the next 2020 U.S. presidential elections ought to be taken into consideration. Relations with Pakistan could change considerably in certain aspects, but general U.S. strategy will likely prevail following U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf government headed by Khan is willing to dialogue. Also, Trump expressed at the last Davos conference in January 2020 that relations between Islamabad

⁶ Weinbaum, Marvin G et al. "Seizing the Moment for Change Pathways To a Sustainable Us-Pakistan Relationship," *Middle East Institute* (Washington,DC). (2020, March). 2. <https://www.mei.edu/publications/seizing-moment-change-pathways-sustainable-us-pakistan-relationship>.

⁷ Ibid, p. 2.

⁸ Nabeel, Fahad. "One Year in Office: Revisiting Imran Khan's Foreign Policy," *South Asian Voices* (Washington,DC) (2019, September). <https://southasianvoices.org/one-year-in-office-revisiting-imran-khans-foreign-policy/>.

and Washington were better than when Pakistan received economic and military aid.⁹ Yet, cooperation in the next years will be decreased due to three main reasons. First, because of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan. The American withdrawal would mean a decrease in military cooperation between the two countries; therefore, economic and security aid would also be considerably reduced. Pakistan could be quite sceptical about the steps taken by Washington since a reduced U.S. presence in Pakistan could jeopardize Pakistan's sovereignty and security vis-à-vis India. In addition, the withdrawal of the U.S. from Afghanistan could mean an approach of India to Kabul, something that Islamabad fears. If Kabul falls under New Delhi's influence then Pakistan could find itself encircled, fearing for its territorial integrity. Finally, Pakistan may believe that if instability does not end, this situation could reignite the problems in its tribal areas and cause another great wave of Afghan refugee across the eastern border, in the so-called FATA.¹⁰

Second, the approach of Trump's administration to India. In February 2020, Donald Trump visited India to strengthen ties and regain lost trust with India after the trade demands required by the U.S. Also, the U.S. administration has stressed the importance of India as a strategic partner to counterbalance China's growing influence, therefore, Trump announced a deepening security relationship to promote better military exchanges. On the other hand, Trump also expressed his desire to mediate and to reduce tensions and seek stability in South Asia.¹¹ This approach would be a drawback for Islamabad because of the influence that India could have on the U.S. regarding the territorial disputes over Kashmir.

Lastly, relations between Pakistan and the U.S. could be weakened by China's approach to Pakistan. Washington would not welcome the approach of Pakistan to China. Given the diminishing value of U.S. security assistance and China's recent investments in Pakistan, Islamabad could seek military aid from Beijing.¹² With the suspension of U.S. aid, Pakistan could encourage China to leverage its influence with positive measures against domestic and regional instability. However, neither the Khan government nor the U.S. administration are interested in developing

⁹ The White House. "Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Khan of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan Before Bilateral Meeting | Davos, Switzerland," *The White House*, 2020. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-prime-minister-khan-islamic-republic-pakistan-bilateral-meeting-davos-switzerland/>.

¹⁰ Weinbaum et al. (2020). "Seizing the Moment for Change Pathways To a Sustainable Us-Pakistan Relationship." 4-6.

¹¹ Lalwani, Sameer. "Trump's India Trip Didn't Produce a Trade Deal. Here's What Did Result.," *The Washington Post*, February 27, 2020. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/02/27/trumps-india-trip-didnt-produce-trade-deal-heres-what-did-result/>.

¹² T. White, Joshua, "Beyond the Trumpian Bluster: Is There a Longer Game on Pakistan?," *Brookings Institute* (Washington,DC). (2018, February). 4-5. <https://www.brookings.edu/research/beyond-the-trumpian-bluster-is-there-a-longer-game-on-pakistan/>.

bad relations between the two, so they could look for certain common fields for cooperation. But, it is clear that relations will cool down and both countries will no longer be common allies. Regarding military and security cooperation, we could say that it has been the main element in bilateral relations between the two countries. Despite investing billions of dollars in economic and military aid over the years, the U.S. exercises limited influence in Pakistan.¹³ That is, the exorbitant flow of dollars has been a consequence of the rise of the U.S.'s strategic and geopolitical interests in the region. Thus, given the dominant role the Pakistani military has played in politics due to their obsession with national defense and security, the situation has led to a deeper interest in military rather than economic aid.

Nevertheless, military partnership at the present time has been lowered. In 2018 the U.S. State Department suspended most of the security aid and funds to Pakistan after claiming that was providing safe haven to terrorists performing in Afghanistan, something that Islamabad denied.¹⁴ Despite Khan's visit to the White House in 2019 and his conciliatory and moderate stance, he did not achieve changes regarding the increase of military aid, but solely a delivery of technical support to the fleet of F-16 aircraft.¹⁵ With this estrangement, China could become Pakistan's main military ally. The Sino-Pakistani partnership would play a crucial role in weakening U.S. influence in South Asia. China and the U.S. are two major powers that have struggled to influence Pakistan and its decision-making through their own strategic interests. The U.S. has had an intermittent friendship, that is, the interests between both only converged when the strategic interests of the U.S. were at stake. However, China's partnership with Pakistan has remained constant since the 1960s as a trusted ally. Currently, China has surpassed the U.S. as the largest weapons supplier to Pakistan and is expected to increase in the following years. In addition to this, Pakistan is the largest buyer of Chinese sophisticated weapons, from tanks, modern combat aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicles to military platforms and softwares. According to SIPRI data, China has supplied weapons worth \$6.4 billion to Pakistan in the last 10 years, with the U.S. coming in with \$2.5 billion.^{16 17}

¹³ Waheed, Ahmed Waqas. "Pakistan's Dependence and US Patronage: The Politics of 'Limited Influence.'" *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 4, no. 1 (April 2017): 69–94. doi:10.1177/2347797016689220.

¹⁴ Smith, Saphora. "Trump Admin Cancels \$300M Aid to Pakistan over Terror Record," *NBCNews*, September 2, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/trump-admin-cancels-300m-aid-pakistan-over-terror-record-n905786>.

¹⁵ Agency Anadolu. "US Approves \$125M in Military Assistance to Pakistan," *Daily Sabah*, July 28, 2019, <https://www.dailysabah.com/defense/2019/07/28/us-approves-125m-in-military-assistance-to-pakistan>.

¹⁶ Pubby, Manu. "China Backs 'Iron Brother' Pakistan with Primary Weapons and Complex Exercises," *The Economic Times*, March 15, 2019. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-backs-iron-brother-pakistan-with-primary-weapons-and-complex-exercises/articleshow/68418192.cms?from=mdr>.

¹⁷ SIPRI, "SIPRI Arms Transfers Database," *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*, 2020, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers>.

Therefore, despite the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and the reduction of military implications in Pakistan, it is very likely that Islamabad will not cease its relations with terrorist and extremist militias as they are part of its identity. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the "founder" of Pakistan, argued long ago that in today's world, a weak and defenseless could invite aggressions from others, thus, Pakistan's support for extremist groups and militias is somewhat inherent to its own existence. Militant sponsorship is viewed by Pakistan's military establishment and intelligence agency (ISI) as an important mechanism for maintaining Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity towards India and to counter regional insecurity.¹⁸ As long as there is no effective solution to avoid instability and insecurity, the ISI will continue to support radical groups against India. Pakistan is highly unlikely to fundamentally alter its behavior. Hence, the U.S. concern over Pakistan's support for militias will endure and closely monitor them, since their engagement in the country could continue to menace the U.S. influence and interests in the entire region.

Considering this situation, the U.S. would not abandon the pressure on Pakistan, but it could change its strategy. That is, it could seek to avert Pakistan's support to militias by avoiding coercion and economic-military pressure—which have been proven to bring no changes in Pakistan's strategic policies—and emphasizing more on other aspects such as in the non-military financial field. For instance, Washington has significant influence over international financial organizations. Thus, the U.S. government could use its position in the FATF to pressure Pakistan to end funding extremist groups, as well as its influence in the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to condition Pakistan's financing. Without the help of the IMF, Pakistan should consider difficult political measures that would provoke the general discontent of the Pakistani civil society.¹⁹ Hence, it is quite likely that in the coming years the current government could execute some economic reforms to make the financial system more robust. First, Khan's government has made a great effort to tackle corruption and money laundering in order to make the state more transparent towards the citizens. Second, after the 2019 IMF loan, Pakistan should impose urgent economic reforms to show solvency and transparency to the IMF in case it has to ask for assistance again in the future. Another concern the U.S could have regarding the militias is that, given the legitimacy of the Afghan Taliban, from now on all the militant groups operating in the region will

¹⁸ Felbab-Brown, Vanda. "Why Pakistan Supports Terrorist Groups, and Why the US Finds It so Hard to Induce Change" *Brookings Institute* (Washington,DC) (2018, January), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/01/05/why-pakistan-supports-terrorist-groups-and-why-the-us-finds-it-so-hard-to-induce-change/>.

¹⁹ T. White (2018). "Beyond the Trumpian Bluster: Is There a Longer Game on Pakistan?". 5-6.

demand talks and deals with Pakistan, Afghanistan and India.²⁰ With this reality, the U.S. would not agree to accept these groups as important actors, since a radical ideological expansion could provoke a new Afghanistan case.

Moreover, depending on who wins the 2020 election, then the U.S. foreign policy regarding the use of military drones could change. From what has been verified during the months of campaigning for the Democratic primaries there is something undeniable and is that candidates want to intervene in the drone's policy and change it. The question now is whether the use of drones in Pakistan would directly change or cease. Among the top two runners for the Democrats, Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden, both would accept the use of drones in external territory –despite being against the strike on Qassim Soleimani in January 2020– but getting back to the Obama program with greater control over the attacks.²¹ However, the two candidates specified that in the event of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan and with no reasonable interests for its own security, they would withdraw the drone's capacities from Pakistan. On the other side, if Trump and the Republicans are still in the White House, then the use of drones will continue under Trump's new rules and with the strikes on FATA.²² But only if the interests of the U.S are threatened.

Therefore, there is no doubt that the U.S. needs to remain connected with the region and with Pakistan. Trade and economy could be a valuable option, but it is not entirely easy for the U.S. to offer Pakistan an economic cooperation and leverage since China has taken the lead with a much more expansive and attractive partnership. However, it could try to regain influence in Pakistan by offering different options or even explore new opportunities. The new U.S. Development Finance Corporation, together with other U.S. government trade and investment financing agencies, can mount a major and coordinated project together with Pakistan to identify key investment fields of potential interest for U.S. companies, like the textile industry.²³ In this case, the U.S. would not seek to mount a project of such dimensions as the China's CPEC, but could ensure key industries for Americans firms.

²⁰ Afzal, Madiha. "America's Responsibilities on the Cusp of Its Peace Deal with the Taliban" *Brookings Institute* (Washington,DC). (2020, February), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/02/28/americas-responsibilities-on-the-cusp-of-its-peace-deal-with-the-taliban/>.

²¹ Salhani, Justin. "Bernie Sanders Wouldn't End Obama's Drone Program, Promises To Use It 'Very Selectively,'" *Think Progress*, August 31, 2016, <https://archive.thinkprogress.org/bernie-sanders-wouldnt-end-obama-s-drone-program-promises-to-use-it-very-selectively-16aca710a8e6/>.

²² Baker, Sinéad. "Trump Quietly Rewrote the Rules of Drone Warfare, Which Means the US Can Now Kill Civilians in Secret," *Business Insider*, March 7, 2019, <https://www.businessinsider.com/trump-executive-order-stop-reporting-civilian-drone-strike-deaths-2019-3?IR=T>.

²³ Weinbaum et al. (2020). "Seizing the Moment for Change Pathways To a Sustainable Us-Pakistan Relationship." 6-10.

Furthermore, the U.S. is not interested in pressuring Pakistan to move away from China because it could take advantage of these new relations and gain Pakistan's confidence. The post 2020 U.S. administration could offer Pakistan alternative options and opportunities that China would not have considered. In other words, it could try to offset its bilateral relations, along with the reality of the growing Chinese presence in Pakistan. Furthermore, CPEC's delay has come to the fore some opacities concerns, therefore, the U.S. could assist Pakistan.²⁴ Nevertheless, it is quite complicated for this type of collaboration to happen due to the objections of interference that China could claim on the U.S. as a direct competitor after the trade war they had in 2019. Finally, Pakistan could see the rapprochement between the U.S. and India as an obstacle to peace and security, especially in Kashmir. This could imply the growth of anti-Americanism and the mistrust within Pakistani military elites. Currently, there is an ethnic-religious conflict in India, where the Muslim minority is being harassed by the Modi's government. With Trump's approach to India, anti-U.S. sentiments could raise in Pakistani civil society. The U.S. turning its back on them after so many years, side by side, fighting against terrorism could provoke instability within the country and against American people. Above all, the greatest consequence could be to belittle the economic improvement once more and bring security in the core of national politics.²⁵

The People's Republic of China

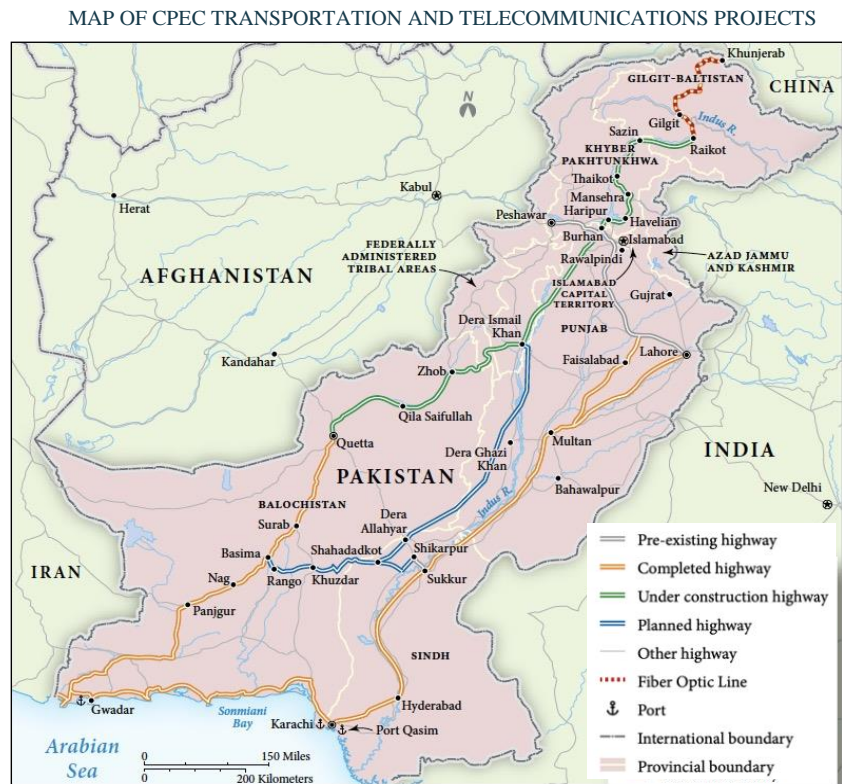
Friends are those who hunch when they both need each other, and that is what Pakistan and China did. The all-weather friends' relationship started in 1950, but it was not until few years later when their cooperation increased due to their relations with India. When the different Indo-Pakistani wars took place, China supported Pakistan politically and by being its biggest arm sales provider. On the other hand, when the Sino-Indian war broke out in 1962, Pakistan sided with China to defend their territorial sovereignty. In other words, the origin of the strategic cooperation between Pakistan and China was mainly focused on India.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

²⁵ Paul, T.V., (2014). "*The Warrior State, Pakistan in the Contemporary World*". p 18.

²⁶ Munir, Muhammad. "Pakistan-China Strategic Interdependence : Post-9 / 11 Imperatives," *Institute Strategic Studies Islamabad* 38 (2) (Islamabad). (2018, August): 22–23, http://www.issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/2-SS_Muhammad_Munir_No-2_2018-1.pdf.

Currently, the cooperation is based on the geostrategic and multidimensional element. For Pakistan, the strategic partnership with China is vital to its foreign policy as a means to maintain an acceptable military capability against India. For China the relationship has been motivated by its desire to extend its influence in this region through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and more specifically through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).²⁷ Today, with the U.S. approaching India, Pakistan and China aim to prevent the India-U.S. alliance from having an influence in South Asia. Hence, the friendship between the two countries is comprehensive and based on the principles of mutual respect, mutual trust and mutual benefit.²⁸ If we look to the core of this relationship, we ought to focus on two main areas: The economic-commercial and military patterns. In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping presented the BRI which is a macro-project to connect China with other parts of the globe in order to grow as a global economic and trade power. In the same year and as part of the plan, China presented a sub-project for Pakistan: The CPEC. With CPEC, Pakistan becomes a more important partner for China due to its links to Central Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and giving a direct access to the Indian Ocean. The CPEC project could be considered pivotal for the economic development of Pakistan. For example, the proposed oil pipelines from Gwadar and Iran to Kashgar through Pakistan, would be helpful in overcoming the energy crises in this country.²⁹ Also, the entire project



Source: Author research and CPEC Portal (www.cpecinfo.com).

Adapted from artwork by Lucidity Information Design, LLC for USIP (based on Planning Commission of Pakistan Information)

Source: Author research and CPEC Portal (www.cpecinfo.com).
Adapted from artwork by Lucidity Information Design, LLC for USIP (based on Planning Commission of Pakistan Information)

²⁷ Faisal, Muhammad "Impact of Geo-Economics on Pak-China Strategic Relations," *Institute Strategic Studies Islamabad* 3, no. 1 (Islamabad). (2019, April): 66–84, <http://issi.org.pk/impact-of-geo-economics-on-pak-china-strategic-relations/>.

²⁸ Rai, Bina. "Time Tested China-Pakistan Strategic Partnership," *Journal of Emerging Technologies and Innovative Research* 6, no. 3 (2019): 692–98,

https://www.academia.edu/38752257/Time_Testing_China_Pakistan_Strategic_Partnership

²⁹ Ibid, p. 696.

could make Pakistan's prosperity possible and provide a satisfactory economic level of development for the Pakistani population.

Having said that, a new scenario with a closer cooperation between both countries within the CPEC framework is likely to happen. In Pakistan, in order to successfully accomplish the CPEC, it is necessary for the government to take measures in certain crucial fields. That is, currently, the project is being slowed down due to Pakistan's lack of resources and capacity.³⁰ To avoid this situation, the Khan's government could carry out reforms focused on strengthening agriculture, education, health, poverty alleviation, improvement of water and irrigation systems and, above all, vocational training.³¹ However, after Pakistan's economic downturn and subsequent IMF loan in 2019 it is quite likely that Khan will not be able to make these reforms alone. On the other hand, China has an interest in finishing CPEC as soon as possible. With the increasing tensions between China and the India-U.S. alliance, China wants to prevent the transit of commercial vessels through the Strait of Malacca and southern India. Thus, China could decide to support and cooperate in Pakistan's reforms by increasing the sending of specialised professionals as well as financial aid to speed up the project. This cooperation could be very necessary for China if it does not want more delays and jeopardize its large investment in Pakistan.

On the other side, regarding the military cooperation, China has become an important contributor in maintaining peace and security in South Asia. The war on terrorism, the increase of China's economic relations and the growing alliance of the U.S. with India have impacted on the military field.³² However, if we were to define military and security relations today, we should focus mainly on two issues: The U.S.-India alliance and the CPEC's security. Therefore, it is clear that the military partnership between China and Pakistan will deepen as long as the BRI and the CPEC remain in force. In 2018, two weeks after the U.S. president shut down the military aid to Pakistan, the Pakistani and Chinese officials signed a proposal to expand the development of military aircraft, weapons and other hardware.³³ China is already taking advantage of the estrangement between Pakistan and the U.S. to woo the neighbouring country into its sphere of influence. By Pakistan's side, this deeper relationship will help to strengthen its capabilities against

³⁰ Prasso, Sheridan. "One of China's Most Ambitious Projects Becomes a Corridor to Nowhere," *Bloomberg*, March 2, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-03-02/a-china-belt-and-road-project-becomes-a-corridor-to-nowhere>.

³¹ Ahmed, Faisal. "BRI & CPEC: Venturing into the Future" *Islamabad Policy Institute* (Islamabad). (April, 2019). 19-20. <https://ipipk.org/web/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/BRI-CPEC-Venturing-into-the-Future.pdf>.

³² Munir (2018). "Pakistan-China Strategic Interdependence : Post-9 / 11 Imperatives,". 26-28.

³³ Abi-Habib, Maria. "China's 'Belt and Road' Plan in Pakistan Takes a Military Turn," *The New York Times*, December 19, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/12/19/world/asia/pakistan-china-belt-road-military.html>.

India in a possible confrontation. However, the evolution of the geo-economic dimensions in the relationship between Pakistan and China has introduced new problems. China would therefore be using CPEC for its military and security purposes in the region, despite reiterating that BRI and CPEC have no other objective than trade.

Ensuring security within the CPEC is one of the China's priorities as it is essential to ensure the good construction and its use away from any type of threat. The fight against terrorism and the instability in Afghanistan are two of the main concerns regarding the regional security for China and for the project achievement.³⁴ So much so that Beijing is concerned on Balochistan increasing violence as well as the tensions between the Han majority and the Uyghur Muslim minority in Xinjian, which has already sparked several waves of violence and terrorist acts in recent years. In response to these events, the Chinese regional government cracked down on the Uyghurs with total impunity and with the silence of Pakistan.³⁵

Therefore, based on the stated above, it is quite plausible a new security cooperation between Pakistan and China could occur within the CPEC framework. This cooperation could be in intelligence and radar technology. That is, Pakistan could play a central role in China's Beidou satellite navigation system. Currently, Pakistan has been granted access to the system's military service, allowing more precise targeting for missiles, ships, and aircraft.³⁶ In addition, with the Huawei fibre optic installation from Khunjerab to Raikot,³⁷ the network could be extended throughout the country and, above all, in Special Economic Zones (SEZ) in the coming years due to the location of key CPEC infrastructures. Furthermore, the port and the SEZ in Gwadar give China a rapid route to trade in the Arabian Sea as well as a strategic advantage if tensions arise between China and India-U.S. alliance. The case of a possible Chinese military base in Gwadar is unlikely to happen in the coming years. Right now, China's priority is to finish and launch the CPEC. There has not been so far any kind of announcement by China or Pakistan about a naval base in Gwadar. But since 2015 the Pakistani military has increased its presence and the purchase

³⁴ Stanzel, Angela. "Fear and Loathing on the New Silk Road: Chinese Security in Afghanistan and Beyond," *European Council on Foreign Relations* (London). (2018, July), https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/new_silk_road_chinese_security_in_afghanistan_beyond.

³⁵ Rubin, Michael. "How China Is Humiliating Pakistan," *The National Interest*, 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-china-humiliating-pakistan-126101>.

³⁶ Abi-Habib (2018). "China's 'Belt and Road' Plan in Pakistan Takes a Military Turn,".

³⁷ Schwemlein, James. "Strategic Implications of the ChinaPakistan Economic Corridor," *United States Institute of Peace* (Washington, DC). (2019, December). 10. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/12/strategic-implications-china-pakistan-economic-corridor>.

of land around the Gwadar's port.³⁸ In other words, more than a Chinese military base, it's likely to be a Pakistani military base with China's right to use it in case its interests in the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea are compromised. Thus, with the close military partnership between the two countries and China's ability to use the CPEC and Gwadar port for military purposes will enhance China's naval capabilities in the region.³⁹ Notwithstanding, it is difficult to foresee more collaboration between the two countries in different fields other than the ones commented above. The main Chinese interest with Pakistan is, at the moment, the CPEC and the BRI, in addition to control the balance of power with India and the U.S.

Finally, something to consider is the power of China to pressure and dominate the countries that are involved in the BRI and get everything from them. Pakistan is currently unable to cope with CPEC costs, thus, it is quite likely to fall into China's debt trap, as it needs to pay to China more than it owes to the IMF.

CPEC is a project with an initial budget of \$46 billion, however it was increased to \$62 billion.⁴⁰ The financing of the CPEC has been based on different financial instruments, from Chinese companies' investments, to concessional loans and interest-free loans. Much of the CPEC's contribution is given by Chinese companies, such as China State Construction Engineering that finances a total of \$3 billion.⁴¹ Pakistan's economic situation since Khan came to power has been worsening due to the great recession it has had, as well as by the currency's devaluation and the commercial deficit. As a consequence, in 2018 Pakistan asked for loans to allies like China and Saudi Arabia worth \$9.2 billion. However, this was not enough, and it was forced to request a loan worth \$6 billion to the IMF.⁴² The IMF highlighted the risks that mismanagement of CPEC investments could represent for Pakistan's economy due to China's possibility to design debt traps through which it could obtain concessions.

Originally, the CPEC was some sort of Marshall Plan for the construction and improvement of highways, ports, energy infrastructure, among many others. But seven years later, the reality is

³⁸ Habibi, Nader et al. "What CPEC Means for China's Middle East Relations," *The Diplomat*, January 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/what-cpec-means-for-chinas-middle-east-relations/>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Siddiqui, Salman. "CPEC Investment Pushed from \$55b to \$62b," *The Express Tribune*, April 12, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1381733/cpec-investment-pushed-55b-62b/>.

⁴¹ Khudadad Chattha, Muhammad. "Financing Structure of CPEC," *China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Info*, 2019, <http://cpecinfo.com/financing-structure-of-cpec/>.

⁴² Lipton, David. "IMF Executive Board Approves US\$6 Billion 39-Month EFF Arrangement for Pakistan," *IMF*, 2019, <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2019/07/03/pr19264-pakistan-imf-executive-board-approves-39-month-eff-arrangement>.

totally different. Less than a third of CPEC's projects have been completed. Pakistan is largely to blame for not having enough financial resources to finish the Corridor, in addition to the COVID-19 pandemic which has caused the delay in the shipment of materials from China to Pakistan.⁴³ Thus, it is difficult for the project to be finished within the intended time.

Therefore, the question that arises is whether CPEC is profitable or not for China. The Corridor is part of China's global strategy, thus, it not only prioritises connectivity and trade with the rest of the world, but also the CPEC and BRI investments can be an incentive to increase China's political and strategic influence in the coming years.⁴⁴ Although Beijing does not obtain the expected economic results, this is not a total failure since its influence may continue to increase. There is some reluctance with the steps taken by China since the BRI is serving to build the String of Pearls, which is the location of key strategic points for influencing and controlling the region.⁴⁵ A clear example of China's debt trap can be seen with Sri Lanka and the Hambantota port. Like CPEC, the construction of Hambantota's harbour began with loans from China. However, when Sri Lanka was unable to repay the loans, it handed over the port and 15,000 hectares of land for 99 years to Beijing.⁴⁶ That is what could happen to Pakistan if China controls the CPEC, apart from the power it could acquire in the decision-making of foreign affairs affecting both China and Pakistan. Pakistan's decision-making power would be greatly reduced.

The European Union

Regarding the partnership between the European Union (EU) and Pakistan, this has its origins in 1962 when the first contact between Islamabad and the European Community has established. However, it was not until 14 years later when the first trade agreement was signed. Basically, relations between the EU and Pakistan have been based on trade, economic and development cooperation. Furthermore, in the 1990s they were extended to the field of security and governance.⁴⁷

⁴³ Prasso, Sheridan. "One of China's Most Ambitious Projects Becomes a Corridor to Nowhere," *Bloomberg*, March 2, 2020, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-03-02/a-china-belt-and-road-project-becomes-a-corridor-to-nowhere>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Schwemlein (2019). "Strategic Implications of the ChinaPakistan Economic Corridor,". 6.

⁴⁶ Abi-Habib, Maria. "How China Got Sri Lanka to Cough Up a Port," *The New York Times*, June 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/25/world/asia/china-sri-lanka-port.html>.

⁴⁷ Sultana, Tasneem. "An Overview of EU-Pakistan Relations : Focus on Democratization of Pakistan," *Journal of European Studies* (Karachi). (2013, April), https://www.researchgate.net/publication/256059151_An_Overview_of_EU-Pakistan_Relations_Focus_on_Democratization_of_Pakistan.

Focusing on trade, the EU is Pakistan's most important trading partner, accounting for 23.7% of total Pakistani exports.⁴⁸ This is due to Pakistan joining the EU Generalised Scheme of Preferences Plus (GSP+) agreement in 2014.⁴⁹ Likewise, it is not only a simple commercial agreement but also a way to extend European principles and values. Article 2 of the Treaty of the EU is thus regarded to be one of the Union's most valued pillars. The values and principles expressed in the Union's Magna Carta have always been vital and have served as the scheme for any EU agreement and foreign policy. As follows, in order to bring forward the agreement, Pakistan had to comply with these values and principles, as well as from those aligned the United Nations (U.N.).⁵⁰ These agreements thus constitute not only a commercial tool but also form a unique blend between hard and soft power that must be integrated in such affairs.

Hence, the EU as a global trading power has the capacity to influence and leverage Pakistan in order to achieve its objectives. For Pakistan, the GSP+ is necessary to contribute to national development, but to do so it had to adopt the measures required by the EU. Pakistan, since joining the GSP+ and with the election of PM Khan, has made positive progress in combating human rights violation, respect for the rule of law and gender equality, but has a long way to go. That is, the implication of improvements in trade status has made Pakistan less effective, on certain occasions, in protecting these issues. For instance, trade opening and progress of its industries, especially garment industry, have caused an increase in labour exploitation.⁵¹ However, the EU, being above all an economic power, does not have a great capacity to coerce Pakistan if it does not deal correctly with the situation. The EU believes that cutting off trade relations or the GSP+ and imposing sanctions will not have a positive effect on the change of Pakistan's policies. Therefore, EU would be ready to negotiate instead of imposing punitive measures and shutting down the established agreements.⁵² Actually, the EU has renewed GSP+ with Pakistan until 2022. Since 2014, Pakistani exports to the EU have increased from 4,538 million euros in 2013 to 7,492 million euros in 2019.⁵³ Furthermore, Pakistan has approved human rights legislation which includes the establishment of

⁴⁸ European Commission, "EU-Pakistan Trade," *European Commission*, 2019, <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/pakistan/>.

⁴⁹ European Commission, "Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP)," *European Commission*, 2020, <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/development/generalised-scheme-of-preferences/>.

⁵⁰ EEAS, "Share Joint Press Communiqué: Fourth Pakistan - EU Strategic Dialogue," *European Union External Action Service*, 2019, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/60161/joint-press-communiqué-fourth-pakistan-eu-strategic-dialogue_en.

⁵¹ Ali Khan, Shahbano. "Millions Working in Pakistan's Garment Industry Suffer Abuse and Labour Rights Violations: Report," *Dawn.Com*, January 27, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1459119>.

⁵² Sultana (2013). "An Overview of EU-Pakistan Relations : Focus on Democratization of Pakistan".

⁵³ Mustafa, Khalid et al. "EU Extends GSP Plus Status to Pakistan till 2022," *The News*, March 7, 2020, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/625091-eu-extends-gsp-plus-status-to-pakistan-till-2022>.

a human rights commission, the National Action Plan and laws to prevent women murders and rapes.⁵⁴ The EU believes that with constant cooperation a real change in Pakistan could be induced.

In addition to that, another feature between the EU and Pakistan is the new EU-Pakistan Strategic Engagement Plan 2019 (SEP). At the Pakistan-EU Strategic Dialogue, held in March 2019, a range of areas for cooperation were discussed. Both parties reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening bilateralism and agreed on the creation of the new SEP. This new plan is a successor to the EU-Pakistan 5-year Engagement Plan, which differs in scope and deepening of cooperation in areas such as security and the reinforcement of democratic values.⁵⁵ The new SEP is an ambitious plan that will denote an improvement in relations between Pakistan and the EU and will set the direction for greater partnership in new areas such as energy, education, culture, or climate change. Peace and security are crucial for EU-Pakistan relations and the SEP foresees the establishment of a Security Dialogue for more regular discussions and meetings.⁵⁶ Having a look on the relations' improvement, it is quite likely that they could deepen and expand under the SEP, but there might be difficulties. It should be noted that other actors, such as China, are also knocking on Pakistan's door for deeper cooperation. The EU's objective is to make its partnership with Pakistan increasingly comprehensive,⁵⁷ nonetheless, the ambitious Chinese CPEC project is already attracting Pakistan for greater cooperation. Thus, The SEP can be a tool for the EU to counter China's approach to Pakistan since it is the great rival in the field of trade and governance in Asia.

Finally, regarding peace and stability in the region, the EU plays a role in the Kashmir conflict between Pakistan and India. In August 2019, when India decided to revoke article 370 of its constitution and eliminate Jammu and Kashmir autonomy, Federica Mogherini, the former High Representative and Vice President of the European Commission, contacted the foreign ministers of India and Pakistan to stress the importance of avoiding an escalation of tensions and supporting

⁵⁴ Iraqi, Khalid M. et al. "The European Union's Multi-Annual Indicative Program around the World and in Pakistan," vol. 35 (Karachi). (2019, August). 13. <https://ojs.asce-uok.edu.pk/index.php/JES/article/view/109/119>.

⁵⁵ EEAS (2019). "Share Joint Press Communiqué: Fourth Pakistan - EU Strategic Dialogue".

⁵⁶ EEAS, "High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini Met with the Foreign Minister of Pakistan Shah Mahmood Qureshi," *European Union External Action Service*, 2019, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/64608/high-representativevice-president-federica-mogherini-met-foreign-minister-pakistan-shah_en.

⁵⁷ European Commission, "The EU Special Incentive Arrangement for Sustainable Development and Good Governance ('GSP+') Assessment of Pakistan Covering the Period 2018 - 2019" *European Commission* (Brussels). (2020, February), <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/e01fc63a-5327-11ea-aece-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>.

a bilateral political solution.⁵⁸ Regarding this conflict, the EU has urged the need to find a peaceful solution to the crisis and the importance for a common ground to restore the rights and freedoms of the Kashmiris. The risk of the EU deciding to support one of the parties is minimal since with no consensual political solution, there is no stability in South Asia and, as a result, an escalation of tension could occur.

Despite EU's opposition to the last attempts by the Indian government against the Kashmiris, the EU may be tempted to continue its approach to India as it is a much-needed emerging market for a large quantity of products consumed in Europe. Furthermore, according to the current HR/VP Josep Borrell, the emergence of China as a commercial rival in the region is a challenge, both for the EU and India.⁵⁹ Therefore, there could be a rapprochement between the EU and India to counter the effects of China's influence. But in no case would this imply a position in favor of India in the Kashmir territorial conflict. Indeed, the EU will be mindful with the development of events in Kashmir regarding the violation of human rights and the repression that Kashmiris currently suffer. Taking this into account, the new president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, together with Josep Borrell, could try to remodel Brussels into an important geopolitical player to be decisive in improving the situation of international conflicts such as the Kashmir one. With that said, the EU could cooperate with both parties in order to reach a political and satisfactory solution.

PAKISTAN IN THE REGION

Pakistani-Afghan relations following the U.S.-Taliban deal. Possible scenarios

Pakistan's long consolidated ties with the Taliban arose in the 1990s during the Afghan civil war when Islamabad saw the Pashtun as a proxy against the distrustful factions that were assisted by India. Despite this, relations took a turning point after the 9/11 attacks when it became clear that Al Qaeda had plotted the strikes from a safe haven the Taliban had provided them with.⁶⁰ These facts gave rise to Bush's administration putting pressure on Pakistan to choose whether to sever ties with the Taliban and become America's partner in the war, or become a target in such

⁵⁸ D'Ambrogio, Enrico, "India-Administered Kashmir: Current Situation," *European Parliament* (Brussels). (2019, September),

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/640157/EPRS_ATA\(2019\)640157_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2019/640157/EPRS_ATA(2019)640157_EN.pdf)

⁵⁹ AFP, "Indian FM Defends Citizenship Law as He Promotes EU Ties," *Euractiv.Com*, February 18, 2020,

<https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/indian-fm-defends-citizenship-law-as-he-promotes-eu-ties/>.

⁶⁰ *International Crisis Group*. "Twelve Ideas to make Intra-Afghan Negotiations work." (Kabul, Washington, Brussels). (2020, March). N°160. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/b160-making-intra-afghan-negotiations-work-twelve-ideas>.

war.⁶¹ However, Islamabad never entirely cut ties with the Taliban as it provided them with safe havens and its Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), which was thought to have some level of control over the Taliban for years, supplied them with military expertise and fundraising assistance.⁶²

The U.S.-Taliban peace deal sets a timetable for a U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan by May 2021. The Taliban and Pakistan's military that sponsors them see this as a victory.⁶³ Pakistan, whose political and military establishment has deeply longed for an end to the crumbling violence in Afghanistan and the eventual withdrawal of American forces from Afghan soil, ⁶⁴ regards these talks as an opportunity to make its so-called clandestine ties open and legitimate. Underlining the latter is the fact that Pakistan will be more at ease if the Taliban acquire a high position in its neighbor country rather than if the present government in Kabul does.

The negotiations aimed at acquiring a U.S.-Taliban peace deal were protracted and anxious, and they almost failed last September. But as difficult as these were, they lack merit in comparison to what lies ahead: successfully concluding a formal intra-Afghan peace process between the government in Kabul and the Taliban.⁶⁵ At this stage there is bickering around Afghanistan's election results which affects legitimacy and representation in prospective intra-Afghan talks. In order for an agreement in the intra-Afghan talks to be reached, both parts in the deal ought to have the strength it is needed to conduct such challenging negotiations. It is thus inconceivable to expect the long-awaited intra-Afghan peace agreement without resolving the current constitutional crisis that Afghanistan is facing. Unless the haggle is solved between Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah, talks with the Taliban will not be held.

The 2014 presidential election was equally controversial and led to months of political disarray in Afghanistan. However, Washington's intervention at that time quelled the dispute by forming a National Unity Government (NUG) which allowed Ghani to become president and Abdullah to hold the newly created Office of Chief Executive (OCE).⁶⁶ Given the urgent need for peace, the international community is rather reluctant to support new elections and Ghani seems to

⁶¹ Lawrence Ziring. "Pakistan: At the Crosscurrent of History". (*Manas Publications*, 2005). p. 315.

⁶² Maizland, Lidsay. "U.S.-Taliban Peace Deal: What to know." *Council on Foreign Relations* (US). (2020, March) 3-5. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-taliban-peace-deal-agreement-afghanistan-war>.

⁶³ *International Crisis Group* (2020). "Twelve Ideas to make Intra-Afghan Negotiations work."

⁶⁴ *Ibid*.

⁶⁵ Kugelman, Michael. "Will Pakistan continue to play a constructive role in the Afghan Peace Process?" *World Politics Review*. (2020, March) <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/28586/will-pakistan-continue-to-play-a-constructive-role-in-the-afghanistan-peace-talks>.

⁶⁶ Kaura, Vinay. "Uncertainty and Chaos as Afghanistan's Political Crisis deepens". *Middle East Institute*. (2020, March). <https://www.mei.edu/publications/uncertainty-and-chaos-afghanistans-political-crisis-deepens>.

hold more international legitimacy.⁶⁷ U.S.' interests are now being directed towards 2020's presidential elections and thus, lessening its influence in Afghanistan significantly, is becoming a means to satisfy a tired and fatigued electorate whose desire is to see the U.S. far from Afghanistan. Although a dual executive –and a revision of the National United Government (NUG) which grants more power to the chief executive officer –seems to be what is needed to solve the political crisis,⁶⁸ U.S.' desire to disengage in Afghan affairs, which is thus followed by its reluctance to solve the Afghan political discord, is likely to cause the political situation in Afghanistan to undergo a protracted period of stagnation.

The Taliban have gained ground, and it is slightly improbable that this will disappear in the upcoming years. They control large parts of the Afghan countryside — far from the control of the American-backed government in Kabul⁶⁹ — ensuring that Pakistan's longtime proxies operate significant control over the country's direction. Asked whether the Taliban might overrun the country, Trump remarked that “it's not supposed to happen that way but its possibly will...countries have to take care of themselves.”⁷⁰ Pakistan has been a key influence in Afghanistan through the Taliban and Pakistani cooperation will be pivotal to ensure that the U.S.-Taliban deal holds together.⁷¹ As follows, Washington wants Islamabad to use its influence with the Taliban to push insurgents on key demands by pressing the Taliban to agree to a cease-fire early on in the intra-Afghan dialogue, and to keep committed to the prospective negotiations. Yet, Pakistan could be conditioned by its strained relations with Kabul: Afghan government officials and political elites deeply distrust Pakistan and resent it for sheltering the Taliban's command.⁷² Islamabad now desires an Afghan government that includes the Taliban and is friendlier towards Pakistan than it is to India.⁷³ As such, it is important to acknowledge that Pakistan is not beholden to Kabul, and that the current instability seems to come as an opportunity for Pakistan to gain influence in the country through its most worthy insurance policy: the Taliban.

Besides, Afghanistan's other neighbors are also acknowledging that while the group at one point may have peddled instability in the region, they are now a lesser evil. As follows, Russia is

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Nishat, Zalmi. “The Inauguration of 2 Presidents: Afghanistan's Constitutional Crisis”. *The Diplomat*. (2020, March). <https://thediplomat.com/2020/03/the-inauguration-of-2-presidents-afghanistans-constitutional-crisis/>.

⁶⁹ *International Crisis Group* (2020). “Twelve Ideas to make Intra-Afghan Negotiations work.”

⁷⁰ Kaura (2020). “Uncertainty and Chaos as Afghanistan's Political Crisis deepens”. *Middle East Institute*.

⁷¹ Constantino, Zachary. “The India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan.” *United States Institute for Peace*. (2020, January). P. 12. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2020/01/india-pakistan-rivalry-afghanistan>.

⁷² Kugelman (2020). “Will Pakistan continue to play a constructive role in the Afghan Peace Process?” *World Politics Review*.

⁷³ Kaura (2020). “Uncertainty and Chaos as Afghanistan's Political Crisis deepens”. *Middle East Institute*.

clearly concerned about what may come after Washington's impending withdrawal from Afghanistan. In the recent years, Russia has been engaging in talks with the Taliban without the presence of the Afghan government representatives.⁷⁴ Russia could properly consolidate its ties with the Taliban. Considering itself nearly a next-door neighbor and a key player in Afghanistan's fate, Russia is aware that aligning its interests with Kabul—characterized by ethnic divisions and differences among former warlords – is not a worthy move. Following anti-Russia sentiments in the Kabul, and in order to ensure Russia remains a trusted arbiter in Afghanistan, Moscow has recalibrated its relationship with the Taliban.⁷⁵ In a quest to consolidate its hegemony in the region it will seek to strengthen its influence by winning the Taliban who will repel the Islamic State of Khorasan (IS-K).⁷⁶

Furthermore, Beijing's interests in Afghanistan revolve around guaranteeing Chinese investment and security in the region. China is Afghanistan's biggest source of foreign investment and it is interested in tapping Afghanistan's vast natural resources as well as integrating it into the Belt and Road Initiative.⁷⁷ Beijing fears that instability in Afghan soil could cause terrorists to utilize the country as a means to establish links against China.⁷⁸ The Taliban have never attacked Chinese infrastructure projects, nor have publicly pledged support of Uyghur Muslims—that would awake violence in Xinjiang—so all of this provides enough reason for the Chinese to consider them allies following U.S' withdrawal.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, China will not go beyond only pledging its support to the Taliban as any attempt to fill U.S' boots in Afghanistan would aggravate tensions over Washington's resistance against the BRI in South and Central Asia.⁸⁰ Consequently, although it will maintain a friendly and constructive distance during intra-Afghan talks, it could persist supporting the Taliban through its influence on Pakistan. Remarkably, following Iran's economic interests that revolve around Chabahar Port, Taliban's animosity toward the U.S. and the IS-K threat have overshadowed Iran's longstanding hostility towards the groups. Also, Tehran has

⁷⁴ Ramani, Samuel. "Russia's Falling Out with Kabul". *The Diplomat*. (June 6, 2019).

<https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/russias-falling-out-with-kabul/>.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ramani, Samuel. "In the Demise of the Taliban Peace Talks, Russia is the Winner". *Foreign Policy*. (September 11, 2019). <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/11/in-the-demise-of-the-taliban-peace-talks-russia-is-the-winner/>.

⁷⁷ Maizland (2020). U.S.-Taliban Peace Deal: What to know. *Council on Foreign Relations*.

⁷⁸ Khattak, Daud. "The Taliban's Diplomatic Reemergence." *The Diplomat*. (October 25, 2019)

<https://thediplomat.com/2019/10/the-talibans-diplomatic-reemergence/>.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Hussain, Tom. "What China has to fear from a US-Taliban Peace Deal in Afghanistan". *South China Morning Post*. (February 22, 2020). <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3051861/what-china-has-fear-us-taliban-peace-deal-afghanistan>.

already started working to ameliorate ties with the Taliban as drug trafficking from Afghanistan through Iran and opium addiction in Iran are problems in both countries.

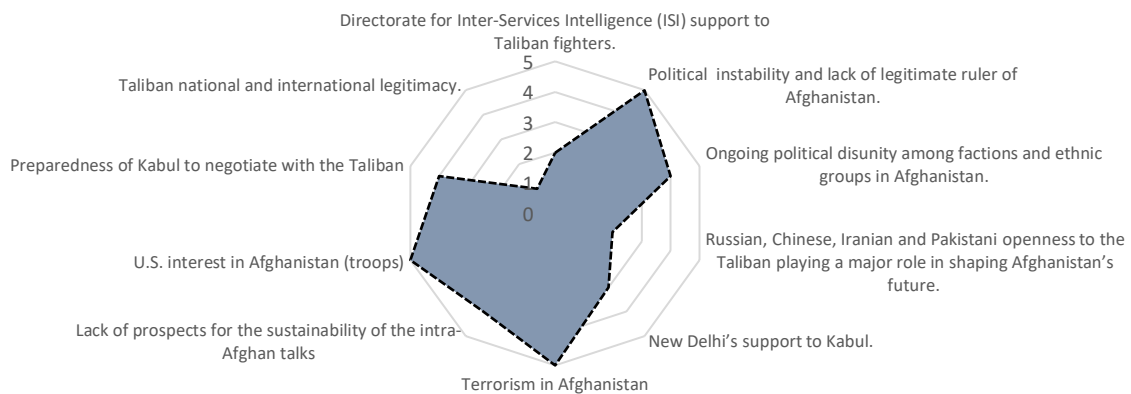
Taking all of the above into account the present paper aims at building a chart which will portray four simple scenarios in the context of the development of Pakistani-Afghan relation in the 2025 horizon, being they next 5 years the most predictable. The present paper will attempt to address how these possible outcomes in Afghanistan could synchronously affect future prospects for Islamabad.

Graph 1-4: Simple scenarios on Pakistani-Afghan relations in the 2025 horizon.

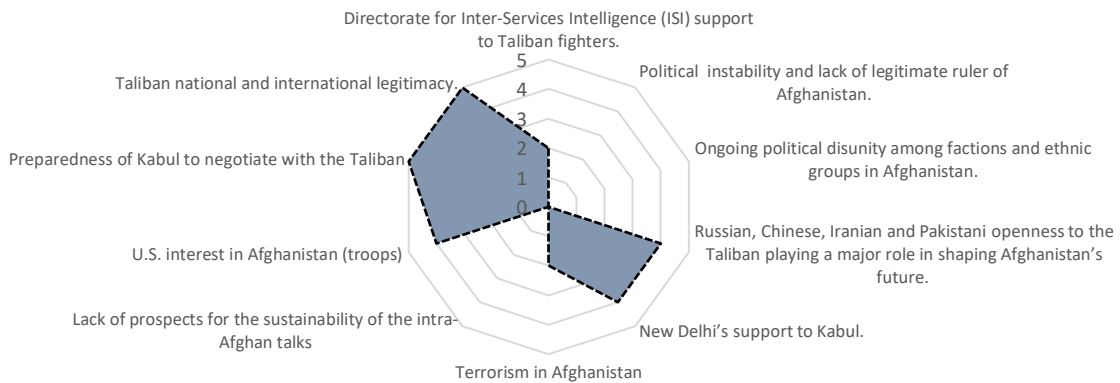
Legend:

- 5→ Very high impact on the plausibility of the scenario.
- 4→ High impact on the plausibility of the scenario.
- 3→ Mild impact on the plausibility of the scenario.
- 2→ Low impact on the plausibility of the scenario.
- 1→ Very low impact on the plausibility of the scenario.
- 0→ Null impact on the plausibility of the scenario.

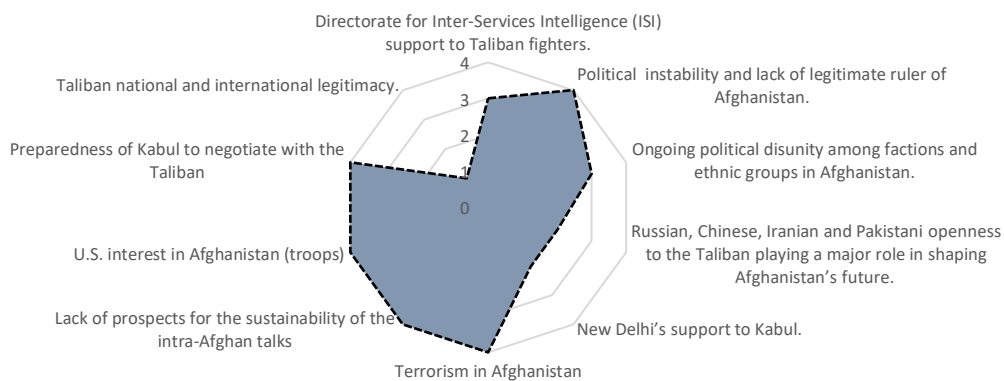
Scenario 1: Agreement is not reached. American withdraw leads to a further descent into chaos that fuels a full-scale civil war



Scenario 2: An agreement is reached between Taliban and Ghani.
Coalition government.



Scenario 3: An agreement is not reached between Taliban and Ghani.
War continues with low intensity



Scenario 4: The return of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.



Source: Author's elaboration

The first scenario is the result of the Afghan parts not coming up with an agreement and tensions being heightened due to Taliban impatience. A full-scale civil war could cause Pakistan to be dragged into an enduring conflict. A spillover effect of instability and chaos in Afghanistan could cause afflictions for Pakistan in the form of increasing refugee flows, cross-border terror, and heightening of drug trade. A strengthening of the Taliban due to chaos, could rise favourable conditions for Pakistan to hurt India through asymmetric means.⁸¹ In this scenario India could: either revert to its prior pattern of 1990s and support partisans with lethal aid, ⁸² or acknowledge it has constrained room for manoeuvre—due to limited capacities, non-Islamic identity and lack of geographical proximity—and disengage in the dispute. Furthermore, groups like the Lashkar e Tayyiba (LeT) may not need much encouragement to tamp up violence against Indian personnel and facilities in Afghanistan.⁸³

The second scenario, and least likely one, is an agreement being reached between Taliban and Ghani. A scenario plausible if Kabul regains the strength is needed. Pakistan could begin a winding up process towards Kabul. This would enable Pakistan to have allies in the Afghan government whose most radical instincts are controlled. There will no longer be a basis for the U.S. to keep military presence of any type as an agreement has been reached and the international community could thus call upon Pakistan to curb terrorist financing. In the scenario of a consensus government, by incentivizing them through economic means, the U.S. could encourage intelligence cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan to tackle militant groups such as Al-Qaeda and the Islamic state.

The third scenario, and most probable one, is that of peace talks not been initiated or being stagnated; scenario in which the conflict continues with low intensity. This is rooted in the current situation whereby talks have been delayed⁸⁴ and low-scale attacks in non-key enclaves occur. U.S.’ potential desires to maintain troops solely for counter terrorism purpose, could be affected because Kabul’s forces would try to rely on the U.S. in their fight against the Taliban. Consequently, Afghanistan’s political crisis, along with the Taliban gaining ground, seems favorable for Pakistan as it could influence long into the future its weak neighbor in the quest for diminishing India’s role in the region.

⁸¹ Constantino (2020). “The India-Pakistan Rivalry in Afghanistan.” *United States Institute for Peace*. p. 16.

⁸² Ibid, p. 17.

⁸³ Ibid, p. 16.

⁸⁴ Sediqi, Abdul & Ahmad, Jibran. “Taliban refuses to talk to new Afghan government negotiators”. *Reuters*. (March 28, 2020). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-afghanistan-taliban-idUSKBN21F0MM>.

The fourth scenario draws the return of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. A more Islamic government in Afghanistan could embolden Pakistan's own Islamists and extremists, who have long clamoured for stricter Islamic laws in Pakistan.⁸⁵ This will likely be accompanied by concessions to these groups, and an aggravation of minority rights. In addition, for Pakistan whose military conveyed the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), the hard-won gains of its kinetic victory against the TTP will be threatened.⁸⁶ The TTP could be inspired to launch cross-border attacks on Pakistan, or to return to Pakistan's northwest.⁸⁷ Although Pakistan wants the Taliban empowered to some degree, this scenario serves as an example of how Islamabad could fear an empowered Taliban if it comes at the expense of its own security.

Central Asia and regional connectivity

In a region ruled by such turmoil Pakistan could start to pave new ways to enhance its presence by seeking new alliances. Bangladesh could be an interesting ally in the quest for countering India's presence in the region. Nonetheless, in order for Pakistan to engage in relations with Bangladesh the first step would be to apologize for the atrocities it carried out in 1971 and this seems far from probable.⁸⁸ Pakistan apologizing would challenge its pride as it would have to acknowledge that its ways of conducting foreign policy towards its eastern province were wrong. More importantly, in a country plagued by sectarian afflictions, Pakistan has no desire to spark opposition among organizations like JeM or LeT and their advocates. Although without Bangladesh Pakistan will do nothing but continue damaging its public image, it cannot afford sparking anxieties among its sectarian groups. Along these lines, in aiming at changing its foreign policy, Pakistan will search new ways in which it can threaten India's sovereignty without affecting its own.

The Central Asia Republics (CARs) are known to be immensely energy-rich but rather inaccessible. Pakistan appears inclined to see the Gwadar port and other projects under CPEC as means to build ties with the CARs in order to decrease India's presence in the region. Although none of the CARs share borders with Pakistan, Afghanistan appears to be the conduct to develop

⁸⁵ Afzal, Madiha. "America's responsibilities of the cusp of its Peace Deal with the Taliban." *The Brookings Institution*. (2020, February). <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2020/02/28/americas-responsibilities-on-the-cusp-of-its-peace-deal-with-the-taliban/>.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Younus, Uzair. "Time for Pakistan to apologize to Bangladesh". *The Diplomat*. (December 16, 2017). <https://thediplomat.com/2017/12/time-for-pakistan-to-apologize-to-bangladesh/>

its advance its ambitions. Pakistan will not be able to make a move in Central Asia without securing an Afghan government that goes in line with its preferences and that would not only enable it access into Central Asia, but also would help undermine India's role. Importantly, although Pakistan may seem to hold a better geostrategic position than India towards Central Asia, if instability persists in Afghanistan, Central Asian states will continue to deem Pakistan as the blameworthy country that fueled Afghan Islamic fundamentalism and drug-trafficking. For this reason, gaining the trust of the CARs through what these would regard as an adequate outcome of the Afghan conflict is the first step for Pakistan to develop its strategy in Central Asia.

This strategy in Central Asia revolves around the idea that, by having the Taliban empowered in Afghanistan, Islam and tradition have to be paramount means to deepen its print in the region. Pakistan could seek communalities of culture, religion and traditions that would bring it closer to the CARs. Furthermore, Pakistan could also seek support on Kashmir from the Central Asian states. In the economic realm, Pakistan could become the shortest corridor for oil and gas exports through Gwadar and Karachi ports if it is able to use the Afghan asset in its favor. In the event of a favorable outcome of the Afghan political dispute happening, Pakistan could establish possible channels of communication such as pipelines and railroad systems that link Pakistan and the CARs. These projects could potentially attract foreign investment and convert them into a prosperous plan.

Russia is aiming at enhancing its print in the region and cooperation with both China and Pakistan could bring grains to each one of them and would enable Russia to advance its commercial capabilities. Growing ISIS presence in Afghanistan concerns Russia, which fears that the Islamic State in Afghanistan could draw in Chechen and Uzbek militants, fomenting instability in Russia's periphery.⁸⁹ In order to prevent this, Moscow has started cooperating with historic rivals. At a time in which U.S.-Pakistan relations are depreciating, Moscow could take advantage of the opportunity to ameliorate its status quo in Central Asia and the Middle East.

Pakistan is a key player in the CASA-1000 electricity grid and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline.⁹⁰ Yet, Pakistan's role is being overlooked by the CARs. Both of these projects collapse when been translated from paper to reality. As such, Pakistan

⁸⁹ Younous, Uzair. "Pay Attention to Russia's South. Asia Strategy". *The Diplomat*. (June 7, 2018). <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/pay-attention-to-russias-south-asia-strategy/>

⁹⁰ Michel, Casey. "Sharif attempts to boost Pakistan- Central Asia Ties". *The Diplomat*. (May 29, 2015) <https://thediplomat.com/2015/05/sharif-attempts-to-boost-pakistan-central-asia-ties/>.

could take advantage of the new leverage it has on Afghanistan in order to make these projects work out by gaining the confidence of the CARs.

Yet, Pakistan's ceaseless politico-security instability and the failure to advance a strong foreign policy hinders positive prospects.⁹¹ Moreover, complication such as the insurgencies in Baluchistan ceaselessly threaten Gwadar. In is now time for Pakistan to identify its weaknesses and come up with the effective measures necessary to overcome the challenges that lay ahead. Lastly, Pakistan does not hold the economic dependency to broker these projects. The latter could be made possible by acquiring the necessary means namely through Russia and China.

Iran vs. Saudi Arabia: Pakistan's balancing act

Since discrepancies in Mohammed's years, both the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and Iran have had mutually excluding views about their own ways of living Islam. Religion is the backbone of both countries and thus they have become archenemies to one another in what most of their affairs entail. Following the consolidation of the Islamic republic of Iran, both have engaged in a battle to seek influence not only in the Middle East but all throughout the Muslim world. The Middle East now embodies an arena consumed by political and religious tumult and in this regional tug of war Pakistan's role is interesting to analyze.

Regarding Saudi-doing in Pakistan, clear links between madrassas, Saudi funding and the rise in sectarianism can be found. The Soviet-Afghan war became a mechanism for the Saudi's to control Sunnism in Pakistan through a "behind the scenes" funding of Ahl-e-Hadith and Deobandi madrassas. According to academic Vali Nasr, 80% of the Madrassas in Pakistan are de facto Deobandi and that, symbolically, these madrassas are aligned forming a wall which blocks Iran off from Pakistan.⁹² Furthermore, in the political realm, Pakistan's two main Islamist parties, the Jamiat-Ulema-e-Islam and the Jamaat-e-Islami are said to follow the Deobandi tradition. ⁹³

Similarly, Iran has sought influence in Pakistan through Shia madrassas which are said to receive funding from Iran. The KSA and Iran have thus radicalized their Islamist supporters in Pakistan for years by quietly funding thousands of Sunni and Shiite seminaries in Pakistan and influencing through a variety of means. An example of the latter is how the Saudis have used benign

⁹¹ Sofi, Mohammad. "The Dynamics of Pakistan-Central Asia Engagement". *Daily Sabah*. (2019, January). <https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2019/01/15/the-dynamics-of-pakistan-central-asia-engagement>.

⁹² Afzal, Madiha. "Saudi Arabia's hold on Pakistan". *The Brookings Institution*. (2019, May) <https://www.brookings.edu/research/saudi-arabias-hold-on-pakistan/>.

⁹³ Ibid.

conduits, namely Paigham TV, to promote their version of Islam.⁹⁴ Some Sunni and Shiite graduates from these seminaries are alleged to have carried out attacks on members from different sects; something that has fed Pakistan's long-running sectarian anxieties.⁹⁵

Although Chabahar entails harmonizing towards New Delhi, this does not mean that Iran is willing to give up Pakistan. In fact, Iran seems to play one country against the other in order to maximize its benefits to compensate the dreadful effect sanctions are having on its economy. Such a finesse is said to come easy given Pakistan's attitude, which tries hard not to calibrate too much in favor Iran.⁹⁶ Yet, trust issues are making stakes high for Pakistan to give up Iran amid crisis with India. Additionally, Pakistan is a gas importer and Iran needs to sell its gas. Having Khamenei mentioning the Kashmir issue in one of his homilies—comparing the injustices suffered to those of the Palestinians—and Iranian Foreign Minister offering Pakistan and China the opportunity to participate in Chabahar,⁹⁷ is an allegory of how Pakistan is not the only one that balances its interests between archenemies. Regarding the Saudis, while it is true that their relationship has been a lengthy one, it has not been an unconditional one. In 2015, right after the KSA granted Pakistan a \$1.5-billion loan, Pakistan's parliament voted to stay neutral in the Saudi intervention in Yemen against the Houthis.⁹⁸ The decision took the KSA surprisingly as it had fully assumed it could rely on Pakistan's full support. To this decision, Jamiat-Ulema-e-Islam and Jamaat-ud-Dawa responded by leading large street protests all over Pakistan. ⁹⁹Additionally, Jamaat Ahle Sunnat members demonstrated asking for “unconditional support to Saudi Arabia”¹⁰⁰ being this an example of how the triangle of Saudi donors, Pakistani rulers and jihadi groups is not free of tensions.

The problem with the latter is that it failed to take into account Pakistan's own interests. Pakistan's military did not want to be involved at the same time it fought in Afghanistan and wanted to be vigilant against India. Additionally, Pakistan's parliament, in rejecting to pick a side was expressing its wariness for domestic sectarian afflictions. Yemen was largely debated within the

⁹⁴ Jaffrelot, Christophe. “The Saudi Connection”. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. (2017, July). <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/07/05/saudi-connection-pub-71444>.

⁹⁵ Lipin, Michael, Mohammad, N & Ali, Mubashir. “Why Pakistan Isn't Taking Sides After Outbreak of US-Iran Conflict”. *Voa News*. (January 25, 2020). <https://www.voanews.com/middle-east/voa-news-iran/why-pakistan-isnt-taking-sides-after-outbreak-us-iran-conflict>.

⁹⁶ Jaffrelot, Christophe. “The Friend of My Enemy”. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. (2018, April) <https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/04/05/friend-of-my-enemy-pub-76001>.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Afzal (2020). “Saudi Arabia's hold on Pakistan”. *The Brookings Institution*.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Jaffrelot (2017) “The Saudi Connection”. *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.

military. Ultimately, the military feared that there would be a sectarian backlash within the military itself if it got involved in the Saudi Iranian proxy war in Yemen.¹⁰¹ Yet, Pakistan made sure they let the Saudi know that, although they would not help them in Yemen, in the event that Saudi sovereignty being affected, Pakistan would be there for them—as in past times. In fact, although it may be true that Pakistan has not sent troops to Yemen, its soldiers have been deployed on the other side of the border, allegedly to protect the holy cities.¹⁰² It is thus the fear for sectarian militancy that leads Pakistan to oppose sanctions or any attack on Iran and Khan's imploring to Washington for a halt in sanctions amid Iran's struggles with COVID-19¹⁰³ serves as another example.

Fortunately for Pakistan, up until now, not having to choose sides has been made possible. In several crises in the past such as the invasion of Afghanistan, the Iran–Iraq War, the First Gulf War, the Iranian nuclear program and current manifestations of Iran–Saudi rivalry, Pakistan has cautiously conducted its relations with all sides.¹⁰⁴ Yet, the series of oil tanker attacks in the Persian Gulf last year and upheavals in neighboring countries including Yemen, Iraq and Syria have been a wake-up call that past efforts to mediate have been shattered.¹⁰⁵ Currently, Pakistan is grappling with a severe economic crisis while facing heightened pressures from India. Hence, this raises the stakes for Pakistan to handle its severe balance of payments through a recalibration of its stance in favor of the KSA. What proves to be undisputable is that the evolution of Iran-Pakistan relations will depend on the pressures the Saudis exercise on Pakistan. In a moment in which Iran is undergoing huge adversities in both the international and national spheres, Pakistan could change its course and find ways in which it can pursue and maximize its own interests.

In the recent months, Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) and Khan have formed an opportunistic friendship forged by Khan's willingness to overlook Khashoggi's plot that has won Islamabad MBS's financial backing.¹⁰⁶ Another event that may serve as an example of Khan tilting more in favour of MBS is the December 2019 Kuala Lumpur Summit to which the KSA was not

¹⁰¹ Aslam, Ömer. "Balancing between Iran and KSA: the shahs, ayatollahs and kings." *Alsharq Forum*. (2017, September).

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319910395_PAKISTAN_BALANCING_BETWEEN_IRAN_AND_SAUDI_ARABIA.

¹⁰² Jaffrelot (2018). "The Friend of My Enemy". *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*.

¹⁰³ Siddiqui, Usaid. "Pakistan PM Urges US to halt sanctions on coronavirus-hit Iran". *Aljazeera*. (March 20, 2020). <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/03/pakistan-pm-urges-halt-sanctions-coronavirus-hit-iran-200320155952750.html>.

¹⁰⁴ Aslam (2017) "Balancing between Iran and KSA: the shahs, ayatollahs and kings." *Alsharq Forum*.

¹⁰⁵ Keynoush, Banafsheh. "Why mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran keeps failing". *Atlantic Council*. (2020, January). <https://atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/why-mediation-between-saudi-arabia-and-iran-keeps-failing/>.

¹⁰⁶ Afzal (2020). "Saudi Arabia's hold on Pakistan". *The Brookings Institution*.

invited. Khan, –leader of the world’s second most populous Muslim country—who had been one of the prime movers behind the summit, made the delayed decision to miss the meeting and Pakistan officials blamed this on pressures coming from Riyadh.¹⁰⁷ Growing unease with Saudi Arabia’s leadership among Muslim-majority countries has contributed to a desire the Saudis out of the equation. Yet, unlikely other Muslim countries, the KSA had Islamabad’s backing.¹⁰⁸

Khan’s pledge to support good terms between Iran, the KSA and the U.S., underling Pakistan’s strategy to build strong economic ties and strengthen his powerbase in Islamabad may have reached its expiry date. Iran’s attitude—and KSA’s hatred towards it—is something Kahn cannot contain. As follows, even though Islamabad has been carrying out efforts to de-escalate tension by proposing several multilateral regional security facts, the KSA will not tag along unless it sees a change in Tehran’s behavior first.¹⁰⁹ As Iran, makes no secret that it does not seek to alter its regional behavior, any mediation seems meaningless. As such, although Pakistan delicately balanced its relationship with the KSA and Iran, while affirming its friendship with and support for Riyadh, taking sides may not be an option for long and at the moment, the Saudis, seem to have the lead. If, for instance, tensions between Iran and Pakistan were to emerge, we could expect to see Pakistan attempt to rebalance toward Riyadh.

Saudi Arabia’s money buys Pakistan’s influence and this leverage is the optimal candidate to what will drive Pakistan to pick a side. Additionally, Pakistan is aware Iran is not an unconditional tie as it cannot trust Teheran regarding the Indo-Pakistani conflict. Pakistan could now take on KSA’s side while it seeks to contain sectarian tensions. Besides from madrassas in Pakistan, the Pakistani labor-drain in Saudi Arabia (2.6 million) and the economic incentives they receive could be means for these workers to become more radicalized on Saudi soil. As a matter of fact, in 2009, U.S. Secretary of State Hilary Clinton warned that Saudi money was the most significant source of funding to Sunni terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda, the Taliban and LeT.¹¹⁰ This provides the KSA an alternative ground for radical brainwashing. If Pakistan’s dire economic crisis keeps pushing it towards Saudi dependency, this situation, rather than being prevented, is likely to prevail in the medium term. It is also likely that the KSA and the UAE will push Islamabad

¹⁰⁷ Kalin, Stephen & Sipalan, J. “Saudi Arabia, Pakistan snub Malaysia’s Muslim summit”. *Reuters*. (December 18, 2019). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-malaysia-muslimalliance/saudi-arabia-pakistan-snob-malaysias-muslim-summit-idUSKBN1YMOG3>.

¹⁰⁸ Cafiero, Giorgio & Al-Jaber, Khalid. “Kuala Lumpur Summit: A challenge to Saudi leadership?”. The Middle East Institute. (2019, December). <https://www.mei.edu/publications/kuala-lumpur-summit-challenge-saudi-leadership>.

¹⁰⁹ Keynoush (2020) “Why mediation between Saudi Arabia and Iran keeps failing”. *Atlantic Council*.

¹¹⁰ Walsh, Declan. “Wikileaks cables portray Saudi Arabia as a cash machine for terrorists.” *The Guardian* (Islamabad). (December 5, 2010). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/dec/05/wikileaks-cables-saudi-terrorist-funding>.

to halt counter-terrorism cooperation with Tehran. Pakistan could even be called upon to take a role in coordinating help for *Jaish al-Adl* operations against Iran.¹¹¹ Furthermore, Pakistan cannot afford to lose the KSA and the UAE as its crude oil suppliers and in the gas realm, Islamabad could replace Iran and Qatar by acquiring most of its gas from the UAE and Singapore.¹¹²

What seems rather indisputable is that Pakistan–Iran relations are changing. Pakistan could now recall that the Saudis are an important relationship while Iranians are more of a neighbor. Although, Pakistan will insist calling for calm and mediation –exercising its wisest approach to maintain a balance—Islamabad cannot remain oblivious seeing its economy crumble while it undergoes pressures come from both Washington and Riyadh. On that account, MBS’ pledge of \$20 billions of investment and UAE’s \$6.2 billion aid packages, seem to come as a salvation for Pakistan that has sealed Pakistan’s intended presence in the Sunni alliance against Iran.

Sending a nuclear message to Iran. Saudi-Pakistani nuclear cooperation?

In the nuclear realm, all these flows of money could serve as an investment for the Saudi to acquire nuclear weaponry from Pakistan. As a matter of fact, Riyadh is believed to view Islamabad as a potential rapid source of atomic bombs if it ever feels enough threatened.¹¹³ This idea is not far from reality as Saudi oil is rumored to have financed the initial development of Pakistan’s uranium enrichment plant in the 1970s¹¹⁴, and in a context in which Iran is said to be advancing its nuclear capabilities, Pakistan could serve as a potential nuclear-provider to the KSA.

The KSA is now pressing ahead its plans to build civilian power plants and theories on its reasons to do so are being intensified. As a matter of pride, Saudi incentives to boost nuclear capabilities are rooted in its resentment towards Iran. Teheran having nuclear weaponry comes as an insult to the Saudis. As soon as Iran showed signs of breaching the nuclear deal –by pursuing nuclear research and training experts—the kingdom responded by building nuclear reactors.¹¹⁵ The KSA seems to be sending a message to Iran that any nuclear move made by the latter could be tackled by the KSA. Although Pakistan and the KSA deny having any agreement, Pakistan has

¹¹¹ Tanchum, Micha’el. “Pakistan’s Balancing Act between Iran and Saudi Arabia teeters as tensions simmer.” *East Asia Forum* (Jerusalem). (2019, April). <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/04/04/pakistans-balancing-act-between-iran-and-saudi-arabia-teeters-as-tensions-simmer/>.

¹¹² Aslam (2017) “Balancing between Iran and KSA: the shahs, ayatollahs and kings.” *Alsharq Forum*.

¹¹³ Henderson, Simon. “Money for Missiles? Reassessing the Saudi Visit to Pakistan”. *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*. (2019, January). <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/money-for-missiles-reassessing-the-saudi-visit-to-pakistan>.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Young, Michael. “Does Saudi Arabia Intend to Develop a Nuclear Weapons Capability?” *Carnegie Middle East Center*. (2018, March). <https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/75723>.

every reason to be concerned about a full-fledged Iranian nuclear capability as, after all, it has India and China as neighbors. Hence, helping Riyadh develop nuclear weapons could be an advantage.

So far, the KSA had become a party to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and has a comprehensive inspection agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).¹¹⁶ Yet, in the context of Saudi Vision 2030, the KSA informed that it is searching alternative sources of energy in order to reduce its dependency on oil; one of which is uranium. To many skeptics, this seems to be perfect bluff to counter Iran's moves. Hence, concern is being built upon the idea that uranium enrichment could be an eventual use towards nuclear weapon building. For the moment, KSA is focused on becoming what scholars call a nuclear "hedger"—a power that lacks a detail nuclear weapon program but that can weaponize rapidly, thanks to an advanced enrichment and reprocessing capability.¹¹⁷ As MBS stated, "without a doubt if Iran developed a nuclear bomb, we will follow suit as soon as possible".¹¹⁸

Pakistan's nuclear tipped missiles could be sent to the kingdom either to boost Saudi deterrence against Iran or even to safeguard part of Pakistan's strategic force in time of crisis with India.¹¹⁹ These facts are said to be reconfirmed every time there is a change of government in Pakistan or change of throne in the KSA.¹²⁰ Russia, China, South Korea and France have already expressed their interest to build Saudi reactors for almost a decade. Nevertheless, each of these suppliers seem to lack what it takes. Firstly, buying Russia equipment could be a mistake as it would inform Tehran about its intentions.¹²¹ Moreover, Chinese and French reactor are over-budget and delayed.¹²² Lastly, South Korea's reactors incorporate American technology which gives the U.S. the power to prevent the purchase.¹²³ This leaves us Saudi-funded Pakistan.

Unlike Iranian capabilities, the KSA lacks the sophistication and expertise, something that would frustrate the attempt. As follows, a Saudi missile cooperation with both Pakistan and China could occur. A report by the Washington Post suggested that a new installation in the Saudi desert

¹¹⁶ Henderson (2019). "Money for Missiles? Reassessing the Saudi Visit to Pakistan". *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

¹¹⁷ Gheorghe, Eliza. "Iran's nuclear program seems to be accelerating. Will Saudi Arabia take a similar path?" *The Washington Post*. (2019, July). <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/07/12/irans-nuclear-weapons-program-seems-be-accelerating-will-saudi-arabia-take-similar-path/>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Henderson (2019). "Money for Missiles? Reassessing the Saudi Visit to Pakistan". *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Pierson, Charles. "Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and the Bomb". *Counterpunch*. (2019, March) <https://www.counterpunch.org/2019/03/08/saudi-arabia-pakistan-and-the-bomb/>.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

was in fact a facility for constructing more-capable solid-fuel ballistic missiles¹²⁴ This factory is similar in size and layout to one that was secretly built in Pakistan in the 1990s to supply the Pakistanis with equipment from China.¹²⁵As follows, Pakistan could help the Saudis put together the Chinese DF-11 (Dong Feng-11/M-11/CSS-7) that form part of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. Indeed, if the Saudis were to trust Pakistan in their "hedging" strategy, Pakistan could assist Riyadh in enhancing its nuclear capabilities if it sought to replace U.S. aid as a means to detach itself from Washington's influence.

CONFLICT WITH INDIA

Pakistan-India's nuclear rivalry

In May 11th and 13th, 1998, India conducted a total of five nuclear explosions. Immediately after, the Islamabad felt pressured to respond and claimed to have tested 6 nuclear devices; 5 to match New Delhi's tests and one in response to India's 1974 peaceful nuclear explosive. With these tests, Islamabad and New Delhi proved to the world and to each other that they held the capability to retaliate with nuclear weapons in response to threats. These events changed the nature of India-Pakistan relations in a way that a possible conflict could potentially escalate into a nuclear disaster.

We could argue that this new chapter could be compared to the Cold War and therefore predict both parties' behaviour according to their historic predecessors, USSR and the U.S. However, there are some differences to mention for the India-Pakistan case that make them unique and not comparable to the Cold War. For example, the nuclear arsenals in South Asia are likely to remain smaller and less sophisticated than U.S. and Soviet were.¹²⁶

In addition, the USSR and the U.S. both eventually developed a tight civilian control system and an assertive command over their nuclear weapons. Although India does have this kind of security systems, it is not the case for Pakistan where the military are in complete control over the nuclear arsenal with only marginal influence from civilian political leaders.¹²⁷ Geographically speaking, Americans and Soviets were on opposite sides of the globe whereas India and Pakistan share borders. This fact makes flight times shorter and therefore decision making highly

¹²⁴ Henderson (2019). "Money for Missiles? Reassessing the Saudi Visit to Pakistan". *The Washington Institute for Near East Policy*.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Sagan, Scott Douglas, and Kenneth Neal Waltz, *The Spread Of Nuclear Weapons*, 3rd ed. (New York: W W NORTON & CO, 2012), p. 138

¹²⁷ Ibid

compressed, which elevates the likeliness of a chain of accidents that could lead to a catastrophe. Finally, the Cold War between the USSR and the U.S. was deep rooted in ideological rivalry between capitalism and communism but held no disputed territory between them. On the other hand, India-Pakistan rivalry is deep seated in the territorial dispute over Kashmir.¹²⁸

India's nuclear strategy

India possesses a nuclear arsenal that counts between 80 to 100 nuclear weapons, based on the calculation of the inventory of plutonium usable in nuclear weapons, as well as the number of systems capable of launching nuclear weapons. Although the number may seem less than that of Pakistan, the combination of the type of weapons and ranges exceeds the Pakistani arsenal. We are talking of India's ambitions to form his nuclear triad.

A nuclear triad has three main components: strategic bombardment, ICBMs, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles. If a country suffers a nuclear attack, the triad provides the potential benefit to respond quickly and massively in its nuclear resources even after a first attack. This strategy significantly increases the deterrence capacity of a nation, since it ensures the destruction capacity of the population and government of the aggressor country even if the country is hit first. As a matter of fact, India adheres to the no-first-use policy, so its deterrence policy lies on the survivability of the nuclear arsenal after an attack and its capacity to counter back.¹²⁹

India's ground-based nuclear weapons program consists of four operational ballistic missile systems: Prithvi-II, Agni-I, Agni-II and Agni-III missiles.¹³⁰ India is further developing the Agni-IV and the Agni-V having a range of 4,000 and 5,000 km each, giving India the capability to strike targets in nearly all of China. Regarding its ballistic missile defence (BMD), another key element to disrupt the nuclear balance and have strategic advantage, India has finally announced its completion this year.¹³¹ Additionally, India has tested its newly anti-satellite weapons permitting

¹²⁸ Ibid, p.139

¹²⁹ Fernández-Díez, Miguel Gallardo, "¿Destrucción Mutua Asegurada (MAD) En Asia Meridional? Pakistán, India Y China Triángulo Nuclear", *Instituto Español De Estudios Estratégicos* (Madrid). (2015, October). 19. <http://www.ieee.es/publicaciones-new/documentos-marco/2015/DIEEEM23-2015.html>

¹³⁰ Center For Arms Control And Non-Proliferation, "India's Nuclear Capabilities", 2019, <https://armscontrolcenter.org/indias-nuclear-capabilities/>

¹³¹ Gady, Franz-Stefan, "India's Homemade Anti-Ballistic Missile Shield Ready", *The Diplomat*, January 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/2020/01/report-indias-homemade-anti-ballistic-missile-shield-ready/>

attacks on enemy satellites disrupting communications, as well as advancing technology base for intercepting ballistic missiles.¹³²

The INS Arihant, India's first ballistic missile submarine (SSBN) was commissioned in 2016 and there are 4 more of its type on planned construction. The INS Arihant's armament consists of four tubes for four submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) K-4 with a 3,500 km range or for 12 K-15 SLBM (four per launching tube) with a 700 km range. K-15s could potentially reach Pakistan's targets whereas K4s would target most of the strategic means in China. The commissioning of these type of submarines constitutes a milestone: India is the first non-permanent member of the UN Security Council capable of designing and building nuclear submarines.¹³³

There is another strategy to mention in the Indian portfolio that could also entail some risks. This strategy is based on the clear superiority of Indian conventional forces, which was demonstrated in the 1971 War on East Pakistan. "Cold Start" is the name given to this strategy consisting in a limited war designed to seize Pakistani territory rapidly without, in theory, risking neither a nuclear conflict nor an international engagement. Its roots come after the bitter experience of 2001 attack on the Parliament, which was carried out by terrorist groups allegedly used as proxies by ISI India's response to it came late and ineffectively (Operation Parakram) and by the time its forces were mobilised, Pakistan had already prepared its defences. Additionally, the International community had already engaged in the conflict diplomatically. Cold Start is an attempt to draw lessons from this: to inflict significant harm before international powers demand a ceasefire and pursue strategic aims giving a narrow space to trigger a nuclear strike.¹³⁴

Pakistan's nuclear strategy

In 2018, SIPRI estimated that Pakistan has between 140 and 150 nuclear warheads, adding an estimate additional 10 per year given the capability to produce plutonium and enriched uranium (fissible materials)¹³⁵. However, even the estimates of some 140 nuclear warheads has a strong

¹³² Miglani, Sanjeev, and Krishna N. Das. "Modi Hails India As Military Space Power After Anti-Satellite Missile Test". *Reuters*, March 27, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-satellite/modi-hails-india-as-military-space-power-after-anti-satellite-missile-test-idUSKCN1R80IA>

¹³³ Baqués, Josep, "El Poder Naval De La India: De Las Armas Nucleares Al Refuerzo De La Flota Oceánica", *Grupo de Estudios en Seguridad Internacional (Granada)*. (2016, January). <http://www.seguridadinternacional.es/?q=es/content/el-poder-naval-de-la-india-de-las-armas-nucleares-al-refuerzo-de-la-flota-oceánica>

¹³⁴ Gady, Franz-Stefan, "Is The Indian Military Capable Of Executing The Cold Start Doctrine?", *The Diplomat*, January 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/01/is-the-indian-military-capable-of-executing-the-cold-start-doctrine/>

¹³⁵ SIPRI, "SIPRI Yearbook 2019", Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019, <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2019>

speculative component and in reality, neither the quantity of fissile material that Pakistan possesses nor the new one that it generates each year or the type of designs of its nuclear weapons are known.¹³⁶

Adding to this, Pakistan does not have a formally declared nuclear doctrine nor stated if it abides to the doctrine of “no first use”, so it remains unclear under what conditions Pakistan might use nuclear weapons. Pakistan is not a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), and is the sole country blocking negotiations of the Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT). Pakistan argues that in the face of India's increasing conventional capability, it is unreasonable to expect Pakistan to cap its fissile materials production. Pakistan has also consistently refused to sign the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). In general, Pakistan's position on nuclear disarmament is that it will only give up nuclear weapons if India gives up its own nuclear arsenal. However, this argument seems very weak given the fact that the *raison d'être* of the Pakistani Nuclear Program is to balance India's conventional military superiority, therefore Pakistan is unlikely to consent to a denuclearization agreement.

Yet, Pakistan has demonstrated commitment over Nuclear Security Programs and taken steps forwards in collaboration with the IAEA. Historically, the security of Pakistan's nuclear arsenal has been a matter of concern to the international community especially concerning terrorism and the possibility of a nuclear theft by terrorist groups. After 9/11 and the scandal of A.Q. Khan,¹³⁷ measures have been taken to ensure nuclear weapons' security and enforce command and control systems. Likewise, Pakistan has established a tight control over its Personnel Reliability Program (PRP) to prevent any radicalised person to be related to Pakistan's nuclear facilities.

With U.S. assistance, Pakistan has developed robust and redundant technologies and practices necessary to ensure the security of its weapons and facilities. Of these measures, the most representative are the Pakistani version of the Permissive Action Link (PAL; which prevents weapons to be used in the event of theft), the use of highly centralized activation and authentication codes to prevent irrational employment by Pakistani military personnel and its aforementioned PRP. Additionally, since 2001 the nuclear arsenal of Pakistan has been divided into separated locations keeping nuclear warheads separately from its delivery systems. Despite these efforts,

¹³⁶ NTI, "Pakistan Nuclear Weapons Program", *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, 2019, <https://www.nti.org/learn/countries/pakistan/nuclear/>

¹³⁷ Collins, Catherine, and Douglas Frantz, "The Long Shadow Of A.Q. Khan", *Foreign Affairs*, January 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2018-01-31/long-shadow-aq-khan>

Pakistan still is one of the countries with the lowest security measures regarding its nuclear arsenal according to the Nuclear Material Security Index.¹³⁸ What is undeniable is that the growing Pakistani nuclear arsenal, the increase in terrorist activity in Pakistan and the chronic instability that has been established in the country are a challenge to the nuclear security of the area. The number and dispersion of facilities in which nuclear material is produced, stored and used, and the number of people who have access to this material continues to grow steadily, making it increasingly difficult to control personnel and the safety of facilities.¹³⁹

Pakistani strategic doctrine during the recent years has evolved to counter and adapt to Hindu one. Although Pakistan lied on the minimum deterrence strategy to which Pakistan would hold a minimum number of nuclear warheads sufficient to retaliate to an Indian attack, the doctrine has changed. India has, as explained before, adopted a “Cold Start” strategy of rapid invasion to the Pakistani territory putting at risk Pakistani communication facilities, strategic posts and possible nuclear arsenals. As a consequence, Pakistan has developed tactical nuclear weapons to be able to respond to rapid penetrations in Pakistani territory by Hindu armoured forces. As a consequence, we could state Pakistan has evolved from a minimum deterrence to full spectrum deterrence not only at the strategic level but also at the tactic and operational.¹⁴⁰

Accordingly, Pakistan has developed SRBM (short-range ballistic missile) nuclear-capable missiles Abdali (180 km range) and Nasr (60 km range).¹⁴¹ In addition to these developments, Pakistan (and China) has started developing Multiple Independently-targetable Re-entry Vehicles (MIRVs) to overwhelm Indian antimissile defences.¹⁴² However, although these developments entail some benefits, they also pose some risks. Firstly, tactical nuclear weapons can help the Pakistanis to increase the credibility of their nuclear deterrence threat. Tactical nuclear weapons are relatively small and can be employed against military targets, so the threat to use them is therefore less momentous unlike the threat to launch large scale strikes against Indian civilians. Nevertheless, assuming that the launch authority for Pakistani tactical nuclear weapons is to be pre-delegated to field commanders at some point in a crisis, the decision to escalate the conflict from the conventional to the nuclear level may not be fully in the hands of national leaders. Their

¹³⁸ NTI, "NTI Nuclear Security Index: Theft And Sabotage", *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, 2018, https://ntiindex.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/NTI_2018-Index_FINAL.pdf

¹³⁹ Fernández-Díez, (2015). "¿Destrucción Mutua Asegurada (MAD) En Asia Meridional? Pakistán, India Y China Triángulo Nuclear". 13.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid, p.11

¹⁴¹ Pulido, Guillermo. "La estrategia nuclear de Pakistán" *Ejercitos* no. 4 (July 2018): 4-7.

<https://www.revistaejercitos.com/>

¹⁴² Ibid, p.7

decision could be in the hands of more junior military officers in the thick of battle that may be more inclined to use the weapons.¹⁴³

The Doomsday clock is closer to midnight

As we have seen, neither the situation is much the same to the Cold War nor the actors follow a similar strategy. Therefore, it is hard to believe that there is zero risk of a nuclear conflict between the parties as would defend some neorealist authors such as Waltz¹⁴⁴. Although from the 90's afterwards there has not been any major conflict between India and Pakistan, there has been escalations and low scale conflicts that could potentially have distorted this peace. As a matter of fact, only a year after 1998's nuclear tests, India and Pakistan did fight a war along the line of control near the Indian town of Kargil. Only after Bill Clinton's engagement in the conflict did the parties come to a ceasefire.

This conflict, apart from being a huge loss of lives, proved that Pakistani military was short-sighted in the strategic consequences of their tactics believing that the new nuclear balance between India and Pakistan permitted more offensive actions to take place with impunity. It is this trend that should concern the international community. The acts that Pakistan commits still answer to the tactical level (performing actions in view of their immediate effects instead of the long run results).

Pakistan's support to Islamism proxies could serve as an example. After December 13 terrorist attack against the Indian parliament the Indian government sent massive military forces to the Pakistani border and threatened to attack unless Pakistan stopped supporting radicals operating in Kashmir. In February 2019, a young Kashmiri man in the town of Pulwama staged a suicide bombing that killed more than thirty Indian security forces. Jaish-e-Mohammad, a Pakistan-based terror group with close ties to the ISI claimed responsibility. India retaliated by sending jets launching limited strikes in Pakistani territory for the first time since a war in 1971. Soon thereafter, Pakistan claimed it had shot down an Indian fighter jet and captured the pilot.¹⁴⁵

Finally, the Pakistani development of a strategy to use tactical nuclear weapons in the event of an Indian invasion to the territory as "Cold Start" predicts, seems to be very risky. Having tactical nuclear weapons makes it less difficult to make the decision of their potential use, since the decision to use them is not made on the basis of whether or not to annihilate a city or a huge amount of

¹⁴³ Kapur, S. Paul, *Jihad As Grand Strategy*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 125

¹⁴⁴ Sagan et al, (2012). "The Spread Of Nuclear Weapons". P. 157-164

¹⁴⁵ Kugelman, Michael, "India And Pakistan Are Edging Closer To War In 2020", *Foreign Policy*, December 2019 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/12/31/afghanistan-taliban-nuclear-india-pakistan-edging-closer-war-2020/>

innocent population as it happens with strategic weapons but its objective is more limited. For everything above mentioned, the assessment is that the doomsday clock for India-Pakistan is still closer to midnight than to any other time and the risk of a nuclear war is on the table.¹⁴⁶

Kashmir territorial dispute

The dispute over Kashmir seems to be at the core of the confrontations between India and Pakistan. According to the Indian Independence Act 1947, India was divided into two states known as Pakistan and India. The case of the creation of Pakistan was based on what was known as the “Two nations theory”¹⁴⁷, which maintained that Indian Muslim community and Hindu community constituted two separate nations, so they needed separated homelands. According to the partition rules, the former 562 princely states had to decide whether to opt to belong to India or to Pakistan by honouring their territories’ religious demographics; and binding to geographic realities. Out of all princely states, Kashmir was one of the most precious for both Pakistan and India¹⁴⁸.

Pakistani ambitions to annex Kashmir had several grounds. Firstly, to allow Kashmir to remain part of India would suggest that a Muslim majority territory did not need to be part of a Muslim political entity, which would directly contradict the arguments that Jinnah made when promoting the Pakistani dream of a homeland (the two nations theory)¹⁴⁹. Additionally, Pakistan found himself very weak strategically after the partition. One thousand miles of Indian territory separated East and West Pakistan, forcing the Pakistanis to divide their military assets. West Pakistan moreover was physically narrow, lacked strategic depth and two of the major cities, Islamabad and Lahore, were located within one hundred miles of the Indo-Pakistan border¹⁵⁰.

Maharaja Hari Singh, who governed Kashmir, remained undecided as whether to join India or Pakistan. His choice could not be clarified by the two factors above mentioned as Kashmir was located in between the two states and although the majority of population was Muslim, himself was a Hindu. This situation of uncertainty led the two countries to act for their own interests, which led to the first of many wars. After approximately one year, the conflict ground to stalemate ending

¹⁴⁶ Ibid

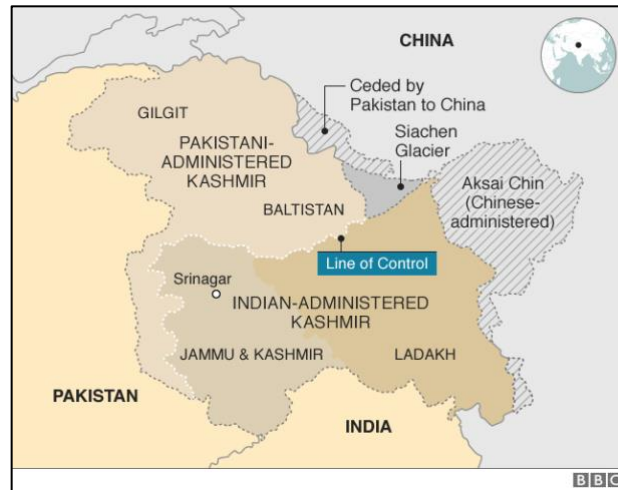
¹⁴⁷ Kermani, Secunder, "How Jinnah Still Shapes Pakistan's Identity", *BBC News*, August 18, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40961603>

¹⁴⁸ Majid, Abdul, Shoukat Ali, Fazal Abbas, and Shazia Kousar, "Kashmir: The Major Source Of Conflict Between Pakistan And India". *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, no. 2 (July-December 2019): 367-382, http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/csas/PDF/2_v34_2_19.pdf

¹⁴⁹ Ziring, Lawrence, *Pakistan at the Crosscurrent of History*, 1st ed. (Oxford: One world, 2003), p. 69-70.

¹⁵⁰ Kapur, (2017). “Jihad As Grand Strategy”. P. 33

with a UN sponsored ceasefire on January 1, 1949¹⁵¹ (Karachi Agreement). The ceasefire left one third of the territory in Pakistan hands (Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Kashmir) and two thirds under Indian control (Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh), essentially the same division of territory that nowadays is distributed to both countries. The territorial dispute remains blocked after decades of wars and negotiations that have not changed the situation. At the moment and with the latest political events, the situation does not give a clear pathway to any solution.¹⁵²



Source: BBC News.

Impact on the revocation of article 370

During the last months, we have seen how prospects of a long-term peace seem to be difficult to achieve. On August 5, 2019, the Government led by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi from the nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party decided to repeal sections 370 and 35A from the Constitution. As a consequence, the special status given to both territories in a form of semi-autonomy was revoked and both Indian administered Jammu and Kashmir are now Union territories.

When the ruler of Jammu and Kashmir Maharaja Hari Singh signed the October 1947 treaty of accession to the Dominion of India, it wasn't under no conditions. These conditions were translated to Articles 370 and 35-A, introduced soon thereafter into the Constitution of India.¹⁵³ These two articles institutionalized a significant level of autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir within

¹⁵¹ UN, "Agreement Between Military Representatives Of India And Pakistan Regarding The Establishment Of A Ceasefire Line In The State Of Jammu And Kashmir (Karachi Agreement)", *UN Peace Agreements Database*, 1949, <https://peacemaker.un.org/indiapakistan-karachiagreement49>

¹⁵² Cohen, Stephen P., "India, Pakistan And Kashmir". *Brookings Institute* (Washington, DC). (2002, December). 24-31. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/india-pakistan-and-kashmir/>

¹⁵³ Shah, Hijab, and Melisa Dalton, "Indian Revocation Of Kashmir's Special Status". *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, 2019, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/indian-revocation-kashmirs-special-status>

Indian law. Eliminating these provisions that the Kashmiris have enjoyed for decades could therefore have significant implications for Jammu and Kashmir's Muslim-majority citizenry, grave ramifications for already tense India-Pakistan relations and could lead to violence in the region.

It is important to mention that article 35A made illegal to non-permanent residents to buy permanent belongings or land in this region and accede to public government jobs or scholarships. Consequently, by allowing non-Kashmiris to settle and purchase land in the region, what the Government of India seems to be seeking (as seen by Kashmiris) is to change the Sunni Muslim-majority demography of Jammu and Kashmir. According to the official website of Jammu and Kashmir Government, Muslims form 97% of population in Kashmir Valley whereas this number reduces in Jammu and Ladakh where Hindus and Buddhist are majoritarian.^{154 155}

However, in the view of the Government of India, article 35A was part of the Constitution of India added by Presidential Order in 1952 without being discussed and approved by the Parliament. Additionally, this provision discriminated on the basis of caste, class, gender, and place of origin in clear contravention to the fundamental rights regarded in the constitution of India. Article 370 was supposed to be temporary and as a matter of fact, it sits under Part XXI of the Indian Constitution titled as *Temporary, Transitional and Special Provisions*.¹⁵⁶

However, as the High Court of Jammu and Kashmir had in October 2015 ruled, article 370 couldn't be annulled as the clause of the article bestows the power to rescind the article upon the state constituent assembly. Nevertheless, the Constituent Assembly was disbanded in 1956 and almost all members are presumably dead.¹⁵⁷ The Government of India has thus maintained that the revocation of both articles has been legal and an internal affair of Indian politics. What the Government of India seeks to promote with this measure is to develop an industrial economic network by enabling foreign investment (non-Kashmiri) to the state and the development of tourism.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁴ Dutta, Prabhash, "Kashmir: Curious Case Of Demographic Realities And Perceptions", *India Today*, August 19, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story/kashmir-curious-case-of-demographic-realities-and-perceptions-1582376-2019-08-19>

¹⁵⁵ Aljazeera, "Demographic Flooding: India Introduces New Kashmir Domicile Law". April 1, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/flooding-india-introduces-kashmir-domicile-law-200401100651450.html>

¹⁵⁶ Kartha, Tara, and Jalil Jilani, "The Latest Kashmir Conflict Explained". *United States Institute Of Peace*. (Washington, DC). (2019, August). <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/08/latest-kashmir-conflict-explained>

¹⁵⁷ BBC, "What Happened In Kashmir And Why It Matters", *BBC News*, August 6, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-49234708>

¹⁵⁸ Bajaj, Dr. Richa. 2020. "Annulment of Article 370 : Rectification of A Historical Wrong". *Our Heritage*, no. 1 (January 2020): 40-44. <https://archives.ourheritagejournal.com/index.php/oh/article/view/1931>

Reactions to the bill within Jammu and Kashmir are difficult to grasp given the fact that the region was summoned to a total communications blackout, raising concerns regarding press freedom. Prominent Kashmiri politicians including two former chief ministers, Omar Abdullah and Mehbooba Mufti, were placed under house arrest. What we can deduct is that the escalation of violence has deteriorated especially in the Kashmir Valley rather than in Jammu and Ladakh, as the former is the most Muslim majoritarian one and where the revocation of both articles affects the most to Muslim rule. As a matter of fact, four terrorists, belonging to Lashkar-e-Tayyiba (LeT) and Hizbul Mujahideen (HM) were killed in an encounter with security forces in Anantnag district on March 14, 2020.¹⁵⁹ Attacks such as this one have been followed despite coronavirus.¹⁶⁰

As of today, the situation remains under high surveillance. The Internet is still restricted though 2G connexions have been allowed.¹⁶¹ However, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, India has been summoned into a total lockdown, which includes Jammu and Kashmir. Educational institutions are therefore closed in Jammu and Kashmir, but students are unable to continue virtual education due to continued restrictions on 4G Internet services. Additionally, the Pakistani Foreign Office has issued a statement requesting the India to release Kashmiri political prisoners.¹⁶² All things considered, the situation remains locked and COVID-19 has further affected this situation, leaving already 523 positive cases.¹⁶³

On the other hand, Pakistan could potentially follow the same steps on the Pakistani occupied Kashmir (PoK). Pakistan-administered Kashmir has historically retained an especial status as its Indian counterpart by holding a president, prime minister and a legislative assembly. However, there is strong influence of Islamabad over the administration of Azad Kashmir as most

¹⁵⁹ The Economic Times, "4 Let, Hizbul Terrorists Killed In Encounter In Jammu & Kashmir", March 15, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/4-let-hizbul-terrorists-killed-in-encounter-in-jammu-kashmir/articleshow/74638917.cms>

¹⁶⁰ Aljazeera, "India Troops Kill Rebels In Kashmir Amid Coronavirus Lockdown". April 22, 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/india-troops-kill-rebels-kashmir-coronavirus-lockdown-200422094829029.html>

¹⁶¹ The Economic Times, "2G Mobile Internet Services Extended Till April 3 In Jammu & Kashmir", March 26, 2020, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/2g-mobile-internet-services-extended-till-april-3-in-jammu-kashmir/articleshow/74835663.cms>

¹⁶² Pak Tribune, "Lifting Of Restrictions In Indian Held Jammu-Kashmir In COVID-19 Pandemic: FO", March 30, 2020, <http://www.paktribune.com/news-details/lifting-of-restrictions-in-indian-held-jammu-kashmir-in-covid-19-pandemic-fo>

¹⁶³ The New Indian Express, "Lockdown Restrictions Tightened In Kashmir Due To Spike In COVID-19 Cases; Tally Rises To 523", April 27, 2020, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2020/apr/27/lockdown-restrictions-tightened-in-kashmir-due-to-spike-in-covid-19-cases-tally-rises-to-523-2135927.html>

senior bureaucrats are non-Kashmiris sent by Islamabad who do not answer to the elected legislative body.¹⁶⁴

The role of China in Kashmir

As a reaction to these events, China, a close ally of Pakistan, called a private meeting to discuss Kashmir, the first time an international body had done so in nearly half a century (since 1971). However, India's diplomatic efforts led to neutralise any statement after the meeting and it only remained symbolic as Pakistan received support only from China. This shows that the UN Security Council is divided in the matter and does not seem to be an independent third party nor have any engagement in the matter.¹⁶⁵

We have to remember that under the 1963 Sino-Pakistan Agreement (which is not recognized as legal by India) Pakistan recognized Chinese sovereignty over portions of Northern Kashmir (Gilgit-Baltistan) and Ladakh (Aksai Chin). To China, Aksai Chin is logistically vital to military and internal security operations, because the highway that passes through connects Xinjiang to Tibet.¹⁶⁶ Additionally, there are claims that China is placing troops on the ground in Pakistan administered Kashmir to secure its projects regarding the CPEC and to prevent Kashmir to be a safe haven for Uighur jihadists.

India is concerned about China's role in case hostilities break out with Pakistan. The acquisition of China of these territories and the presence of the Chinese troops within the territories of Pakistani occupied Kashmir (PoK) has raised a security dilemma for India of fighting a two-front war.¹⁶⁷

India-Pakistan territorial dispute: No prospects of an agreement

After nearly 70 years of conflict over Kashmir and the most recent events, it is needless to say that any prospect of settlement seems to be far. It is clear that neither of the parties is willing to abandon its bids and even less to renounce to their occupied territory.

¹⁶⁴ S. Khan, "Kashmir: Is Pakistan Planning To Take Direct Control Over Its Part?", *Deutsche Welle*, December 30, 2019, <https://www.dw.com/en/kashmir-is-pakistan-planning-to-take-direct-control-over-its-part/a-51835450>

¹⁶⁵ Siddiqui, Zeba, and Fayaz Bukhari, "India, China Clash Over Kashmir As It Loses Special Status And Is Divided", *Reuters*, October 31, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-kashmir/india-china-clash-over-kashmir-as-it-loses-special-status-and-is-divided-idUSKBN1XA0M9>

¹⁶⁶ Dutta, Prabhash K, "Kashmir: How Deeply China Is Entrenched In J&K". *India Today*, August 20, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/news-analysis/story/kashmir-how-deeply-china-is-entrenched-in-j-k-1582656-2019-08-20>

¹⁶⁷ Bhatt, Parjanya, "Revisiting China's Kashmir Policy", *Observer Research Foundation* (New Delhi). (2018, November). <https://www.orfonline.org/research/revisiting-chinas-kashmir-policy-58128/>

Any hope for a reasonable settlement based on the four-point formula that became the basis during the 2004-08 peace process and envisaged self-governance for Kashmiris, demilitarization, travel across the Line of Control and a monitoring mechanism, while also protecting the vital interests of the two countries has been extinguished after the latest events in the area in our opinion.

Bilateral relations have remained tense over the last year. Ever since its resounding re-election victory last spring, India's Bharatiya Janata Party has pursued its Hindu nationalist agenda in an increasingly aggressive way. Consequently, Pakistan, not wanting to show weakness, does not want to give in. After the revocation of the Kashmir autonomy and the total blackout, India's parliament passed a controversial new citizenship law that allowed religious minorities (except from Muslims) fleeing persecution in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, and Pakistan to obtain Indian citizenship faster. The new law angered Islamabad not just for excluding Muslims, but because of the implication of these acts, which indirectly meant that Pakistan persecuted its Hindu and Christian communities.

These prolonged tensions often hide the bitter reality that both parties face: economic struggle. India suffered its biggest economic slowdown in six years, and Pakistan confronts a serious debt crisis. These two factors are connected: Given the inability of New Delhi and Islamabad to fix their economies, both governments arguably see political advantages from the distractions of confrontation through nationalism. This trend, in our opinion, can further intensify with COVID-19 future economic effects.

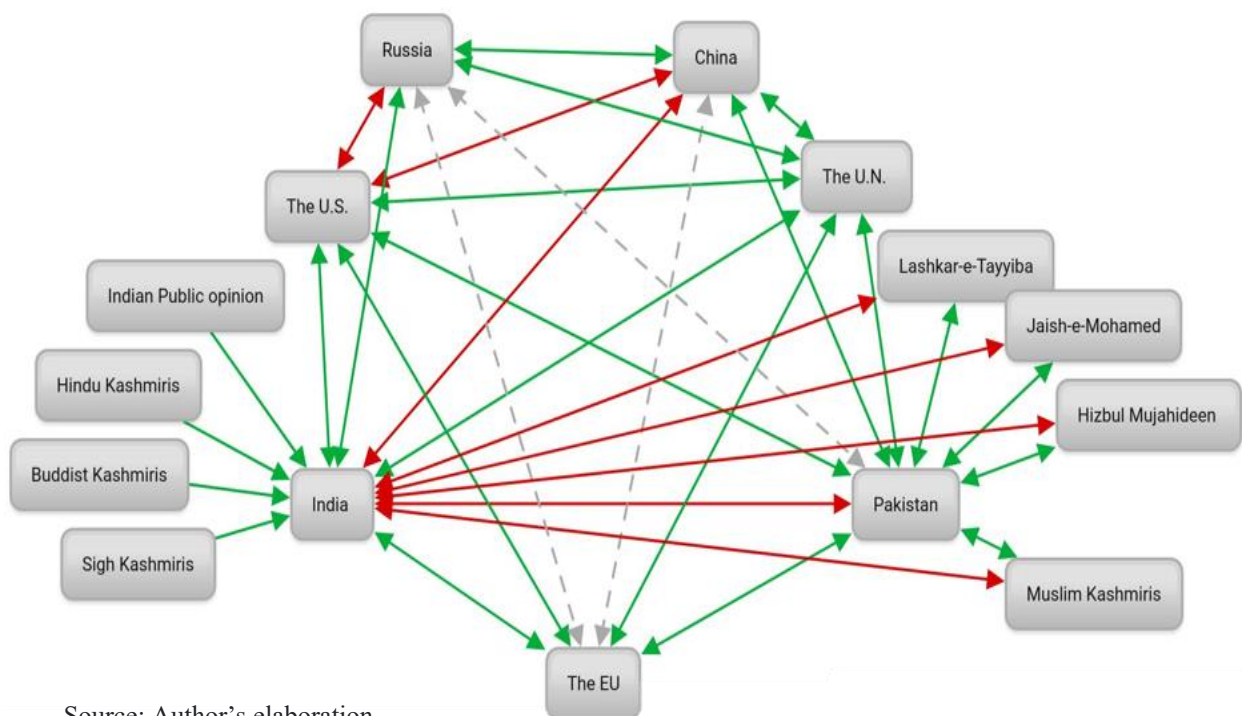
Against these tense moments, there have been some acts by Pakistan that in the right context could have had major impact on Indo-Pakistani relationship. The opening in November of a new border corridor that enables Indian Sikhs to enter Pakistan visa-free to worship at a holy shrine (Kartarpur corridor) and the pilot's release several days after the February 2019 incident show that Pakistan is willing to deescalate the conflict. However, in nowadays context, these acts have few impact on the tense relationship between the parties.

Any development in Kashmir has to come through a peace between both India and Pakistan. Narendra Modi of India and Imran Khan should take a careful look at the idea of a no-war agreement to calm India-Pakistan relations. They could take seriously the commitments that their countries have already made to recognize each other's security concerns and agree to take war off

the table. Territorial disputes are not going to be settled straight away, there has to be a peaceful situation to favour this dialogue.¹⁶⁸

Chart 1. Simple scenarios in the context of the development of the Kashmir dispute.

Taking all of the above into account, we have proceeded to build a chart that will display firstly the map of actors involved and draw five simple scenarios in the context of the development of the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan in the 2025 horizon.



Source: Author's elaboration

¹⁶⁸ Mian, Zia, Abdul Nayyar, Sandeep Pandey, and M. V. Ramana, "India, Pakistan, Kashmir: Taking The War Option Off The Table", *Bulletin Of The Atomic Scientists* (Chicago). (2019, September). <https://thebulletin.org/2019/09/india-pakistan-kashmir-taking-the-war-option-off-the-table/>

DRIVERS OF CHANGE	Simple scenarios				
	1	2	3	4	5
	Stagnation of the situation: India increases its presence in Jammu and Kashmir while Pakistan adheres its administered territory.	Indo-Pakistan Peace talks that lead to a reduction of violence in Kashmir	Open conflict on the Line of Control	Sino-Indian agreement over territorial disputes	Genocide against Muslims in Indian administered Kashmir.
Pakistan's support to Islamic militias.	+	--	++	+/-	++
Polarization within Kashmir population.	+	+/-	+/-	+/-	+
Diplomatic and military support of China to Pakistan over the Kashmir dispute.	+	-	+	--	+
Both powers increasing their nuclear capacities and capabilities.	+	--	+	+/-	+/-
Economic crises in India and Pakistan	++	-	+/-	+	+/-
Increasing Indian nationalism.	+	-	+	+/-	+
India's overwhelming military presence in Kashmir.	+	-	+	+/-	+
Imran Khan's peaceful initiatives	-	++	--	+/-	--
U.S. influence in South Asia.	-	+	-	-	-
Rogue attitude by Kashmir militant groups	+	-	++	+/-	+

Legend:

++→ Very high impact on the plausibility of the scenario.
 +→ High impact on the plausibility of the scenario.
 +/-→ Mild impact on the plausibility of the scenario.
 -→ Low impact on the plausibility of the scenario.
 --→ Very low impact on the plausibility of the scenario.
 0→ Null impact on the plausibility of the scenario.

Source: Author's elaboration

The first scenario drawn is a possible stagnation of the conflict and a continued presence of India and Pakistan in its administered territories. Scenarios 2 and 3 draw opposite situations. On the one hand, the scenario of a development of peace talks towards a no-war deal that could eventually reduce violence in Kashmir, and the opposite scenario that highlights an open conflict over the line of control. The fourth scenario analysed sets, given the fact that Pakistan and India do not seem to give in their territorial claims, a possible dispute settlement between China and India

that could reduce tension over Kashmir by eliminating one actor from the equation. Finally, scenario 5 foresees a less probable yet plausible scenario of a genocide on Muslim Kashmiris in Indian administered territory.

As we can see, all the drivers seem to point out the first scenario as the most plausible, except if Imran Khan's actions towards peace finally have an impact on India's behaviour and if the U.S. changes its perspectives and takes a more active role on dispute settlement (they also affect on the plausibility of scenarios 3 and 5). Once again, both two drivers mentioned could be essential in the event of a peace process between India and Pakistan (scenario 2) but have some other drivers against, specially the fact that Pakistan (and ISI specifically) continues its support to terrorist organisations and both powers increasing nuclear capacities & capabilities. As we have seen, Pakistani military seems to take risks towards a possible conflict in the belief that their nuclear capabilities offer them a nuclear umbrella that would deter India from responding, risking the fragile stability. In addition, India's main security concern continues to be the terrorist threat so any terrorist attack on India administered Kashmir or in Indian territory could hamper any peace prospect. It is in fact the terrorist threat (fostered by Pakistani support) and their rogue attitude can cause an open conflict over the line of control, something we have seen in the latest events very plausible. It has happened already, and it could happen again now that India seems to be covered into nationalism and is more willing to react to any Pakistani threat under Modi Administration.¹⁶⁹

A Sino-Indian agreement over territorial disputes, more specifically Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh, could come as a very interesting scenario. The drivers above described on its majority do not affect to the plausibility of the scenario to happen, only the continuous Chinese support to the Pakistani's thesis over the Kashmir dispute, which undermines its plausibility. However, China has raised this possibility of land swap several times in history and it could be beneficial for all the parties involved in Kashmir. Aksai Chin does not pose any strategic advantage for India nor Arunachal Pradesh for China. Yet, Chinese has ambitions in Aksai Chin and India with Arunachal Pradesh. A possible agreement could remove a layer on the complexity of Kashmir

¹⁶⁹ Dalton, Toby, and Gaurav Kalwani, "Might India Start The Next South Asia Crisis?", *War On The Rocks* (Washington, DC). (2019, November). <https://warontherocks.com/2019/11/might-india-start-the-next-south-asia-crisis/>

territorial dispute, reduce the possibility of an open conflict and set a ground on the recognition of each parties' de facto territories in Kashmir which would give peace to the region.¹⁷⁰

Finally, in scenario number 5, the plausibility although positive, given the drivers taken into account, seems far from reality. It is true that Indian nationalism and the constant polarisation of Kashmir society is triggering social unrest added to Modi's actions (revocation on the Kashmir status and the citizenship law) effect on the plausibility. For instance, these violations of human rights could be linked to a possible conflict between Pakistan and India that would provoke Indian citizens, or an action taken by the Government on the pretext of an anti terrorism policy after some terrorist attacks on Indian soil.

Punjab Region

Punjab constitutes another dimma in India's partition history. What was one of the most prosperous regions of India with a long singular history, language and culture had to split into two in 1947 creating one of the most brutal displacements in the record of humankind. As a consequence, about 6 million Muslims had to run for their lives from what became the Indian East Punjab and around 4.5 million Hindus and Sikhs had to do the same from the Pakistani West Punjab. Between 500,000 to 800,000 were killed and by March 31, there were allegations of an ethnic cleansing achieved on both sides of the divided Punjab.¹⁷¹

Nowadays, Pakistani Punjab is the most populous province of Pakistan containing more than half the country's total population and the second largest in size after Baluchistan. Additionally, Punjab is one of the most industrialized provinces in Pakistan given its manufacturing industries of textiles, electrical appliances and others. Pakistan's main north-south road and railway system that connects Lahore-Islamabad and the ocean port of Karachi crosses Punjab.¹⁷² As we can see, Punjab is the pillar in which Pakistan lays its own existence so a potential Pakistan without Punjab seems to be economically impossible and once again inconceivable on the basis of the very dreamed two nations theory of Jinnah, as around 97% of the population in Pakistani Punjab is Muslim. Even though the opening of the Kartarpur corridor is a step towards a rapprochement of

¹⁷⁰ Shats, Daniel, "Following Kashmir Reorganization, China And India Should Negotiate A Land Swap", *The Diplomat*, December 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/following-kashmir-reorganization-china-and-india-should-negotiate-a-land-swap/>

¹⁷¹ Ahmed, Ishtiaq, "The Truth About The Partition Of Punjab", *Daily Times*, February 6, 2018, <https://dailytimes.com.pk/196069/truth-partition-punjab/>

¹⁷² Encyclopedia Britannica, "Punjab | Province, Pakistan", 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Punjab-province-Pakistan>

both sides of Punjab, 70 years have gone by and both India and Pakistan have developed a sense of identity that makes Punjabis gain a sense of isolation.

Punjab is also very strategic on the basis of resources. The very name of Punjab means “five rivers” as the Jhelum, Chenab, Ravi, Beas, and Sutlej rivers (tributaries of the Indus River) drain this land. Agriculture is the chief source of income and employment in Punjab (wheat and cotton are the principal crops), so Pakistan is strongly dependant on the waters of these rivers, which pass through India in first instance. That is why both nations already agreed in 1960 the distribution of waters for the six rivers that start in India but form a crucial lifeline for Pakistan. The treaty effectively gives use of three rivers to India and three to Pakistan and is considered to be a success in diplomacy and dispute settling.

However, India has recently used water as a diplomacy tool to threat Pakistan. During the last year, India has constantly mentioned the water distribution treaty in response to Pakistani actions. Four years ago, after a Pakistan-based group killed 19 Indian soldiers, Modi reportedly told government officials “blood and water cannot flow together”.¹⁷³ India already uses about 94 per cent of the Eastern rivers waters and is moving ahead with projects to utilize what remains rather than let those waters flow to Pakistan. As Nitin Gadkari, India’s water resources minister, stated: “there were calls for India to prevent even a single drop of water from going to Pakistan”.¹⁷⁴ ¹⁷⁵ Under the treaty, India has full use of the three eastern rivers in the system, so technically is not violating any part of the agreement, while Pakistan gets the waters from the three much larger western rivers. India can also use the waters of the western rivers for certain purposes such as local irrigation and hydroelectric projects that do not restrict the flow of water. This part is where India is menacing to act and could actually become a violation of the agreement. But using water as a weapon is not as simple as it sounds. Although the threat seems very dangerous, as Pakistan is strongly dependant on irrigation of those rivers, to squeeze Pakistan, India would have to build dam-like infrastructure on the western rivers, violating the treaty. These are not temporary projects due to the fact that carrying out attempts to divert or block water is something that takes decades.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³ Slater, Joanna, "India Wants To Use Water As A Weapon Against Pakistan. A 59-Year-Old Treaty Stands In The Way", *The Washington Post*, February 22, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/02/22/indias-threats-pakistan-offer-hint-future-water-wars/>

¹⁷⁴ Ibid

¹⁷⁵ The Economic Times, "India To Expedite 3 Projects To Stop Its Share Of Indus Waters From Flowing Into Pakistan", November 25, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-to-expedite-3-projects-to-stop-its-share-of-indus-waters-from-flowing-into-pakistan/articleshow/66793674.cms?from=mdr>

¹⁷⁶ Slater, (2019) "India Wants To Use Water As A Weapon Against Pakistan. A 59-Year-Old Treaty Stands In The Way"

CONCLUSION

All things considered, Pakistan is likely to undergo remarkable changes in its international affairs and, therefore, feel forced to rethink its foreign policy. In a great chess play the International arena resembles, Pakistan has to move forward and align its interests with those of the Great powers. On the one hand, U.S. and Pakistan relations are at odds and could change in the near future due to U.S.' withdrawal from Afghanistan and its rapprochement towards India in an attempt to contain China. The restrictive and sanctioning policies of the U.S. have not succeeded in halting Pakistan's support for militias, so it should look for alternatives to terminate the relationship between Pakistan and extremist groups. Therefore, Washington has enough capacity to leverage but must be careful as it could end up causing more instability in both Pakistan and the South Asia.

In this situation, Pakistan has shifted its interests towards China and begun a very promising relationship that could bring economic benefits to Pakistan and long infrastructure projects such as the Gwadar Port in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. Despite the all-weather friendship China and Pakistan have, Islamabad must be on guard not to fall into a debt trap caused by the inability to face CPEC costs. With regards to the future of Pakistan and the EU, these two sides are destined to understand each other and deepen their relationship towards better trade and development cooperation. The rapprochement of the EU is a golden opportunity for Pakistan and its development, both economic and social. Therefore, Pakistan should not miss this moment.

Following the U.S.-Taliban deal, the stakes are high for Pakistan to exercise its influence through the Taliban in order to advance its interests in Afghanistan and in the broader region. Islamabad now desires an Afghan government that includes the Taliban and is friendlier towards Pakistan than it is to India. In this context, it is important to acknowledge that Pakistan is not beholden to Kabul, and that the current instability seems to come favorable for Pakistan to exercise control in Afghanistan. By all means, the Taliban empowerment and legitimization is likely to become Pakistan's main insurance policy in the region. As follows, in a quest to rethink its policies in the region, Pakistan could use its influence in Afghanistan as a means to achieve Islamic and economic goals in Central Asia and even become the shortest corridor for oil and gas export through Gwadar and Karachi.

In a moment in which Iran is undergoing huge adversities in both the international and national spheres, it is becoming latent that Islamabad's mediation stance has perished. One of

Pakistan's biggest concerns in maintaining a balance between Iran and the KSA to avoid sectarian blacklashes within Pakistan. Yet, amid a dire economic crisis, Pakistan is being forced to recalibrate its stance in this balance. As follows, it could seek a way in which it tilts towards the resource-rich Saudi alliance while it appeases sectarian groups who could strongly oppose this policy. Iran-Pakistan relations will now depend on the pressures the Saudi exercises on Pakistan which can even push Islamabad to assist Riyadh in enhancing its nuclear capabilities to escalate deter Iranian presence in the region.

All in all, as we have analysed through the latest events and drawing some simple scenarios in the 2025 prospective, India-Pakistan longstanding dispute over Kashmir seems to be stagnated and will possibly remain during the next years to come. India has taken steps to annex Jammu and Kashmir through the revocation of article 370 of its Constitution, reinforcing then its position and reducing the possibility of an Independent Kashmir to zero. Another scenario drawn in the analysis foresees a possible conflict over the line of control that could be reinforced by the fact that Pakistan still supports terrorist networks operating in Kashmir. However, if the U.S. takes a leading role on dispute settlement and Imran Khan's active steps towards peace influence India's behaviour, the situation could turn to a possible No-war agreement between India and Pakistan. Finally, in the event of a possible conflict, a nuclear standoff is still on the table, so the doomsday clock is still running and closer to midnight.

Even though ever since both India and Pakistan have developed nuclear devices, there has not been any major conflict, tense situations have continued to be regular. The situation is not comparable to the U.S.-USSR Cold War. Different strategies and conceptions have led India and Pakistan to take different ways on conceiving their nuclear arsenals and their use, leading to uncertainty over how the parties would react in the event of a conflict. For instance, Cold Start strategy by India and the Pakistani reaction on the development of tactical nuclear weapons seems to further deteriorate this fragile equilibrium.

All thing considered, changes in both the regional and international orders, could come as a steppingstone for Pakistan to advance its interests in the region. Pakistan ought to acknowledge that significant changes ought to be made in both the national and international sphere and that decisive challenges lay ahead. Yet, by carrying out strategic calculations on the path to take Islamabad could significantly advance its game towards the so-intended regional checkmate.

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