

## RISE OF MIDDLE POWERS IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD AND ITS IMPACT ON PAKISTAN

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### Abstract

Human societies exist in a constantly evolving and unpredictable world. From Hobbes' Social Contract Theory to Darwin's Theory of Evolution, the transformation of social and political orders has remained inevitable. In the contemporary era, the international system is shifting away from a unipolar structure toward a more complex multipolar order. Since 2010, several emerging middle powers—such as Pakistan, India, Brazil, and Turkey—have strengthened their positions and expanded their influence in global politics. This study explores the role of middle powers in shaping global governance within a multipolar world and examines the implications for Pakistan. Adopting a qualitative approach, the research draws on secondary sources, including books, peer-reviewed journals, and research papers. A purposive sampling technique was employed to focus on literature addressing the rise of middle powers in military, economic, and political dimensions. Data analysis was conducted through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) using NVivo 14, which generated three core themes: (1) the role of middle powers during the Cold War, (2) the multipolar world and the growing influence of middle powers, and (3) Pakistan's position in a multipolar order. The study concludes that for Pakistan to maximize the opportunities of a multipolar system, comprehensive reforms are required, particularly in the areas of energy security, industrial development, and governance capacity.

### INTRODUCTION

The term middle power was firstly used at the end of World War two, when countries such as Canada, Australia and Netherlands were striving to get influential positions within the structure of United Nation Organization and to distinguish themselves from small countries. However, the historical root of this term lies in German's scholar writings. In 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Germans used a term "MITTELMACHT" which has two meaning middle power or central power. This term was referred to both "geopolitical position" (location of Germany between great powers like France, United Kingdom and Soviet Union) as well as to a "medium rank" position between great and small powers. According to Germans middle power position is vital for

balancing world order because they are the states who stop small countries to spread uncertainty and help great powers to balance the status quo. That's why for them middle power should be powerful enough to repulse an enemy's attack on their own which led to the annexation of Poland in 1939. Middle power countries are defined as, a state who lacks wide range influence, as great powers have, but possess resources and capabilities which distinguish them from small states (Holbraad, 1971).

In cold war there were two options for middle powers whether to join one block and swallowed up by one of the rivals or become a victim of central rivalry. In cold war, between these two extremes, the equilibrium point was "detente" a mixture of both rivalry and

cooperation. At that time the role of middle power was very crucial because they were the one who try to moderate the policies and attitudes of leading states. However, there role was not just limited to moderate between super powers but there was a time where they influenced great power decisions like in 1968 Poland and East Germany pressed the Soviet Union to invade Czechoslovakia (Holbraad, 1971).

After cold war United State of America enjoyed a unipolar world for more than 2 decades. However, there is no new order, since the old order, established after the Cold War, is waning. Unlike the 1960s, when all countries were required to choose a main bloc, today we live in a world where middle powers have other choices. Super powers no longer have the same “dominance” they had during the cold war. In 1950, these two sides (U.S, NATO, Australia and Japan\ Soviet Union, China, and Easter block) made up 88% of global GDP, but their share currently is down to 57%, according to Aydıntaşbaş et al. Previously, during the cold war, the defense expenditure from the middle power non-align states was very low at only 1% of the total, so they were often ignored. But today, since their defense spending is 15% and rapidly increasing, they have now become major influential figures in world politics.

In addition to level of dominance, current super powers are also lacking attractive ideologies. In the past, ideologies played very important role in moving elites and public motivation and support. But unfortunately, today both super powers lack clear and convincing ideologies. China has merged its communist’s ideology with capitalist feature in its economy. Meanwhile the sentiments attach to American liberal democracy has been tarnished by the abuse of unipolar era such as Iraq war (Aydıntaşbaş et al., 2023). This lack of ideology enables middle powers to easily engage with other powers without aligning themselves to one.

In the past, world orders were determined by super powers like the U.S did in post-cold war. However, currently due to the raise of middle powers in multipolar world especially in terms of contribution to global GDP, their expenditure in military and having bulk of

population, their role in the emerging world order will be prominent and inevitable.

The thing which makes middle power countries as a group, is their distinct approach of foreign policy, which only focuses at maximizing their sovereignty and oppose any subscription to any specific ideology. This approach enables middle power states to both cooperate and compete with other players based on its interests and its values. This study will explore how middle power decision on their relationships with super power will determine where the new world order will land and how country like Pakistan will be affected by new multipolar world order. In the last portion this study will discuss what Pakistan should do in order to gain maximum benefits with lowest cost.

#### Literature review

After first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the era of bipolarity was started to decline because many new states became prominent in world trade and politics. With the rise of new powers, the structure of world order has evolved into multipolarity, where middle powers are striving to get increase their influence by increasing their share in global trade, investing in their military and technology. Middle power is a state\ position where both, once great powers like France and Germany exhausted but rich in experience of power politics and new, energetic and potential powers meet. Middle powers are very flexible they can play a global role as well as act as a small state depending on the situations. In cold war they act as a small state because of the major power rivalry however, in multipolar world their role has changed, currently they are engaging to acquire their own influence in international affairs.

Historically, the literature has predominantly focused on great powers, often neglecting the contributions and strategies of middle powers (Holbraad, 1971). This omission is important because, by virtue of their position, middle powers can be stabilizing powers in a multipolar world activating their unique position as buffers between greater powers to resolve conflicts and to foster cooperation between greater powers. They may frequently rely on their knowledge of the current

geopolitical field, as well as on their relationships with the great and the small powers.

Middle powers have become more important as world power structures tend toward multipolarity. Those states that have relatively moderate defence budgets and considerable financial resources are major players in shaping global order and promoting cooperation in terms of a broad array of countries (Anthony, 2018). His research literature review is a synthesis of the most recent studies that analyse middle powers functioning in the multipolar world system and reviewing a selection of works, which illuminates their primary functions and global positioning.

Acharya (2023), present the notion of "multiplexity" as a framework for examining the evolving global order, highlighting the critical role of interaction capacity among nations in contrast to conventional power metrics. Their research indicates a transition from a unipolar dominance characterized by the United States towards a more decentralized international framework in which middle and smaller powers are increasingly asserting their influence. This evolution emphasizes the opportunities available for middle powers to assume leadership roles in targeted domains of international collaboration, thereby augmenting their diplomatic agency and promoting a more pluralistic global order.

Aydıntaşbaş (2023), urged in their paper that the world is changing and middle powers of the world except EU are preparing for multipolar world by establishing new trade and military alliances. Despite the ability to play the powerful role on the global scale, the EU nevertheless suffers from institutional set-up constraints, which in the regular mode combine the EU and U.S. in mutual values. A rising tide of strategic autonomy is building in the EU in an effort to reduce its dependence on the US and give the bloc the ability to navigate its way on world affairs, particularly in regards to energy security and competition for precious resources with China. By highlighting the need to review the process of European states' interaction with each other and major powers, the paper asserts that, real

communication is critical to increase unity and cooperation in the time of a complicated multipolar world.

Jorge F. Garzón (2015), explores how the presence of several rising powers changed the role of regionalism in world affairs. Unlike others who expect multipolarity to strengthen the links between countries in an area by helping regions, he argues that it may lead to social forces that separate the countries within a region instead. With knowledge from both rational-choice and IR theories on regionalism, he demonstrates that seeing multiple major powers in multiple regions and the choices this allows smaller nations, lessens the appeal of tightly integrated regions. Fluctuations in intra-regional trading patterns and realignments among a number of smaller states in Latin America and elsewhere confirm that multipolarity can stop or reverse the development of strong regional schemes. His main point is that distant places are not controlled by just a few global authorities. Consequently, nations adjust to the influence of important powers by establishing ties with several other countries, instead of only focusing on the one big country in their region. Because of this situation, people are questioning the purpose and success of many supranational groups and this challenges the idea that transferring world power promotes more regionalism.

Huang, J. (2024), considers the European Union's search for strategic autonomy within its relations with China where middle powers could play key roles in this undertaking. The research explains how Europe's strategy to sustain its values, and interests in the changing global dynamics requires interaction with middle powers that can change the balance of power. Through facilitating constructive relationship, middle power can support EU in navigating the intricacies in global politics, as well as position it well in the world hence attesting to role the in multipolar world.

In their research "Megre, M., (2024)" explain that BRICS is seeking change from a system ruled by only one power to a true multipolar world, where members focus on economics, the value of each other's sovereignty and minding their own business, rather than sharing a common ideology. After being

known as BRIC in 2008 and BRICS+ in 2023, the association has provided support to countries in the Global South by enabling them to use non-U.S. currencies in trade and joining countries that provide major energy sources as its members. It suggests that when countries in a coalition are both diverse and independent, they can remain united and support each other in launching sustainable and multipolar governance, working against Western-led organizations.

The concept of transfer reinforcement learning, explored by Barekatin, M., (2019), offers an innovative perspective on the adaptability of middle powers in diverse contexts. Their work researching about multi-source policy aggregation demonstrates how the middle powers could build up their strategic abilities in studying wide international activities. This adaptability is crucial in a multipolar world, where the ability to navigate complex relationships and leverage knowledge from multiple sources can significantly influence a nation's effectiveness in global governance.

Writing A role theory approach to middle powers "(Dunne & Schmidt, 2014) come forth with a conceptual framework that is based on role theory to make sense of a middle powers' role and position in the international system - "Making Sense of Indonesia's Place in the International System". They believe that the status of middle power is, not entirely, a matter of material clout or self attested status but a consequence of being recognized by others, of a perverse, somewhat determined role playing when it comes to peace-keeping, coalition-building and preservation of multilateralism. Using Indonesia as an example, the authors demonstrate how a state may transform into a middle power because of its regional function as part of ASEAN regional bloc, its direct participation in UN peacekeeping operations and its overall adherence to multilateral diplomacy. This role-based account resolves an array of exiting definitions - hierarchical, functional, behavioural and rhetorical - and offers a more relational and socially constructed conception of middle powers.

Western options in a multipolar world were explored by (Burrows, 2017). According to

him, throughout history multipolarity has been less stable than unipolar or even bipolar distribution of power. His research proposed that in multipolarity there no only increase number of states in world affairs but also the growing power of non-states actors specifically violent non-states actors. In his research he mentioned 3 alternative scenarios. The first scenario is when the rules are unclear and the potential for conflict between China and USA is high. The second scenario is the elaboration of new consensus based on mutual interests not values. The last scenario is the devolution of multipolarity into bipolarity by creating blocks.

In the realm of security cooperation, "Caballero (2023)" propose a decision-analytic framework that emphasizes the importance of middle powers in defence diplomacy. Their study also explains how these nations get to use their peculiarities in positions when faced with alternative offers of military help to maximise their expected utility. Not only does this approach enhance the decision-making capacity of the middle powers, but this approach also reveals how middle powers can change security politics in a multipolar world, where traditional power construction is at challenge.

Middle powers often resort to military force and security roles to expand their influence, without wanting to be the world hegemon. Scholars note that they usually act as regional peacekeepers and conflict-managers using their forces to pacify crises. For instance, middle powers "support regional security efforts, peacekeeping, and conflict mediation" through the use of trained militaries in conjunction to diplomacy (Fareeha, 2024). Canadian professional armed forces have participated in the UN peace keeping missions in the Middle East, Balkans, Africa for long. While Australia is in the lead in chairing regional security meetings (eg. Sends its troops in the humanitarian missions in Oceania, and ASEAN regional forum (Fareeha, 2024). Turkey, a "middle power" which is sometimes qualified as an "activist" one, shows more zealous attitude: it went straight to intervene in Syria's civil war and against all odds, made it possible for Assad's overthrow by 2024. Comments admit Turkey's long-term support

to opposition forces “has paid off”, which lets Ankara today to “leverage to shape” post-war Syria (Kutlay, 2025).

The middle powers can still deliver a weight of punch despite the lack of budgets of the super powers on their abilities and defense industries. Turkey’s domestic defense sector rise is strange: industriously ignoring it’s becoming a parade ground for the new kind of Europe’s power politics. it went big on drones-arms; its Bayraktar TB2 UAVs being sold off from Libya to Ukraine. According to the figures, by 2024 Turkey’s defense and aerospace exports reached \$7.2 billion a hike of 30 percent in a year, which was testimony to the manner in which it pursued the combination of a military output and foreign policy objectives (Kutlay, 2025).

Complementing such view Watson (2015) argues that his research examines the strategical behavior of the informal middle power grouping of Korea, Indonesia, and Australia (KIA) with regard to the global climate governance. The article highlights that these middle powers are not returning to old bloc politics but are rather switching to flexible, net-based strategies in form of “minilateralism”. These states practice issue-specific diplomacy particularly in green development, environmental policy, to forge peer-based partnerships and niche influence without hassling the major powers. This approach is a part of a wider tendency in which middle powers are influencing the global governance through exploitation of the voids of leadership created by great powers and realignment of agendas to cooperation and inclusion driven initiatives. Watson’s analysis is especially important in looking at what middle powers such as Pakistan can do to have an effective role in a multipolar international order through selective, pragmatic, and multilateral diplomacy to increase their global image and strategic autonomy.

### **Theoretical framework**

In order to fully understand what will be the role of middle powers in this anarchical structure of the world, this study opted for neorealism also known as structural realism. Neorealism was introduced by Kenneth Waltz

in the late 1970s which emphasize how the structure of the world shapes the behavior of states within the global hierarchical order. Structural realist believes that the international system is by nature anarchic which lead states to only rely on its own power (Waltz, 1979). That’s why every state is trying to maximize their military and destructive forces.

In this dynamic multipolar world this theory will help the research to understand and analyze the strategies of the middle powers. Within this unpredictable global framework, middle powers are establishing alliances and assert regional dominance to bolster their autonomy and protect national interests. According to Aydıntaşbaş et al., (2023) the role of middle powers which used to be a passive observer has changed and now they are more proactive agents manoeuvring between dominant powers such as the U.S. and China, in alignment with neorealism’s focus on self-sufficiency and relative advantages. This phenomenon signifies a transition towards a fragmented international system, characterized by a more dispersed distribution of power, thereby amplifying the significance of neorealist scrutiny.

### **Research problem**

The world order, which was introduced and protected by Western powers, a unipolar world that was led by the USA, is changing as new states that are not superpowers but still possess considerable influence are emerging and increasingly taking center stage in world politics. In international relations, there is a huge amount of literature reviewing great powers like the USA, China, and Russia. However, the role of new emerging middle powers remains underexplored in shaping regional or global governance in a multipolar world and how it affects Pakistan. These emerging middle powers are key players in areas like regional security, trade, and international norms, but their strategies and their influence on global order and its impact on Pakistan are not well understood.

### **Significance**

Traditionally in international relation the major area of focus was on topics which

concerns great powers politics such as U.S.A, China and Russia that's why there are many literature and research papers present on them but unfortunately there is a very limited research work done on the role of middle powers in shaping global and regional governance in multipolar world and how it will affect Pakistan. This research will function as a bridge between traditional literature and modern research problem in international relations and it will help Pakistan's strategists as well as policy makers to introduce reforms which will help Pakistan in multipolar world order. Ultimately this research will raise new prospective in academicians' minds like professors and students who are interested in global politics and middle powers.

### Methodology

The philosophical worldview adopted in this study was Constructivism. Constructivists holds that individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences—meanings directed toward certain objects or things (Creswell, 2013). The goal of the research is to investigate “the role of middle powers in shaping global and regional governance in multipolar world and how it will effect Pakistan” which is dependents on the experiences and ideas of the experts. This study adopts qualitative approach, a method used for several purposes, such as exploring phenomena, understanding perspectives and experiences, and developing theory (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This study utilizes a case study design to investigate the impact of multipolarity on Pakistan. The focus of the inquiry lies in the gathering and analysis of unstructured interviews and questionnaire as the primary sources of empirical data as well as reviewing secondary data like research papers and journals. The population of the research is known as a collection of people who acquire relevant characteristics of your research in a particular area. (Bashir, S., Naseer, F., Karim, H., Farooq, K., Zafarullah., & Sultana, 2021) The total population of this study will be all the exports of Pakistan who are proficient in geopolitics and the target population will be those who are mostly associated with academia and think tanks. Due to practical constraints

the accessible population will be those experts who are from Balochistan. The sampling technique used in this study will be snowball sampling and purposive non-random sampling techniques. To accomplish the research objective “Reflexive Thematic Analysis” (RTA) will be used to analyses the data. The analysis was done using computer software NVivo 14. It's considered as the best tool for analysing Qualitative research data because of Comprehensive Data Management, Advance Coding and Analysis, Visualization of data, and Integration with other software like Microsoft Words and Excel.

### Discussion

#### ROLE MIDDLE POWER IN COLD WAR

After World War Two, United states of America and Soviet Union are the sole super powers who are less affected in war and rise to the super power role. Before World War two, United Kingdom was the super power because of its colonies however, most of the powerful colonial states were affected by the war, and were in no position to continue their role as a super power. After the establishment of united nation organization, the ideological rivalry between USA and Soviet Union was started, since both states had a nuclear capability, they opted for the indirect war (cold war).

In cold war, both super powers strive to increase their influences by making more and more allies. For that USA introduced several significant **economic, military, and strategic aid plans** aimed at **containing communism, rebuilding war-torn regions, and expanding U.S. influence**. One the best example is Marshall plain of 1948-52, a plain in which USA will provide \$13b to help western European states to rebuild their industries, destroyed by World War two. Apart from economic plain there were security plain too such as MUTUAL SECURITY ACT of 1951, SEATO and CENTO and many more just to contain communism in rest of the world.

In response to US containment, Soviet Union has announced its own strategic, military, political, and economic initiatives such as COMECON (Council for Mutual Economic Assistance) in 1949, to coordinate the economies of eastern bloc countries like east Germany, Poland, Hungary and Romania.

Warsaw Pact (1955–1991) and Brezhnev Doctrine (1968) were the security plain of Soviet Union in response to western security plains. Due to these plains, many important events occurred in which super powers played active role like Korean war, Afghanistan war, Cuban missile crisis etc. however, they never confronted each other because of nuclear deterrence.

In the Cold War, international relations were mostly about superpowers, and middle powers were given little attention since they lacked strong military or economy. Middle-power countries were left unprotected when the world's leading nations decided to go to war, which was often about increasing their presence on the world stage, including the conflicts in Cuba, Turkey, and Italy. At first, the United States backed Fulgencio Batista in Cuba; after Fidel Castro came to power by revolution in 1959, the countries lost diplomatic ties. The United States did not give Turkey and Italy freedom in their affairs but instead put nuclear missiles in their land to defend against Soviet troops in Cuba. In response, the Soviet Union placed nuclear missiles in Cuba, and this brought the world very close to disaster during the short Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962. The result was that the Soviet Union agreed to take its missiles out of Cuba, and the United States said it would dismantle its missiles in Italy and Turkey while promising not to attack Cuba in any way. It is evident that, primarily, the dominant global powers prioritized their own interests, disregarding the entitlements of less powerful nations and the tranquility in the regions impacted by conflict.

In Afghanistan, the same thing happened as well. The rivalry between the U.S. and the Soviet Union in the Cold War caused many difficulties for people in Afghanistan. The communist government in Afghanistan welcomed Soviet soldiers in 1979 since some people believed that strictly following Islam would stop the Soviets from taking over. As a result, Afghan groups that were fighting the Soviets were assisted financially and in practical terms by the US, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia. Because Afghanistan shares borders with important areas and is facing political instability, negotiations were worked out

peacefully by all sides. As a result of the war, Afghanistan suffered many difficulties, drove many to leave, and led to the rise of both the Taliban and al-Qaeda. Similarly, the Cold War had led the great powers to use Cuba, Turkey, and Italy as tools, and they followed the same pattern years later by always causing problems for Afghanistan and its government.

During the Cold War, middle powers could either choose a side or be shaped by the influence of both blocs. At that point, most middle power countries were made to join a single bloc, including Pakistan. For some time after gaining independence in 1947, Pakistan struggled, and its resources were very scarce. It inherited a nation with little political stability, no strong military, and an unprotected economy. As India was stronger and Pakistan lacked many options, it was necessary for Pakistan to join the Western bloc to preserve its own security. Thanks to SEATO and CENTO (formed in 1954 and 1955), which provided military and economic assistance from the United States and its allied countries (Central Intelligence Agency, n.d.), to Pakistan that helped early governments during the 1950s and early 1960s. Pakistan was important in Cold War mostly for its geopolitical impact, not for reasons of similarity. It was obvious in the 1965 war with India, as the U.S. arms ban seriously affected Pakistan (Thapliyal, 1998). During the war in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1971, support from the Western bloc was not very strong. What Pakistan's leaders experienced caused them to believe that the West might not trust them. Like other small countries in the Cold War, Pakistan saw its independence and security reduced as big nations mostly saw it as a key weapon in their strategy.

This happens in Turkey and other nations as well. Turkey's economy lagged after World War II, which allowed the Soviet Union to attempt to occupy the Turkish Straits. As it was concerned over communism, Turkey turned to the U.S. by accepting a large share of aids from projects like Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plain (*National Archives, n.d.*). This decision to put nuclear missiles, Jupiter, in Turkey under U.S. command played crucial role in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Turkey, though, still struggled because the Western

world was often reliable (Brumage, 2015). The Cyprus crisis of 1974 caused the U.S. to ban the sale of weapons to Turkey, leading to a much worse relationship. Many claim that Turkey kept the West safe because of where it was located, not by adopting the West's culture. The more competition the better, Pakistan is benefiting much more from the CPEC. It will generate thousands of jobs and revenue worth billions of dollars for both countries, only an enemy would want Pakistan to lose that. (Ullah, S.2020)

#### **MULTIPOLAR WORLD AND INCREASE ROLE OF MIDDLE POWERS (MILITARY, ECONOMICALY AND POLITICALLY).**

In the early 1990s, the Soviet Union was disintegrated into 14 parts, and America remained the sole hegemon of the world. The United States of America has introduced the liberal world order. A world that was governed by rule-based institutions and the US remained the world policeman to maintain its hegemony and stability. However, since the beginning of the new millennium, this sole hegemony has started to decline as middle power started to build multilateral organizations as more middle-ranking nations have grown economically, become diplomatically active, and want a world order without one dominating power.

One of the prominent organizations is BRICS (Mukherjee & Arkalji, 2024). The term was coined by Jim O'Neill, an economist in his paper, titled "Building Better Global Economic BRICs". In his paper he introduced BRICS countries as fast-growing economies, that would in the future play a significant role in shaping global economic and political affairs. After that, this idea was practically implemented by the establishment of the BRICS institution in 2006. The purpose of the institution is to provide an alternative within the existing framework, providing their perspectives in the decision-making process. What makes it prominent is that it possesses over 40% of the world's population and about 32% of the global GDP. In 2024 BRICS have accepted other countries' membership like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Egypt, Iran etc., significantly increasing its influence.

Another example of a Middle powers led multilateral organization is G20 (Patrick, 2024), it was established during the global financial crisis in 2008. Its members include India, Brazil, South Korea, Turkey, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa, and Argentina. The purpose of this group is to coordinate international economic discussions among the most advanced and growing economies, especially on topics of financial stability, sustainable growth, and growth that benefits everyone. It comprises eighty-five percent of the global GDP and seventy-five percent of international commerce.

After the Cold War, middle power countries have seen a sharp rise in their defense, which reflects their increasing role in regional and global security. As indicated by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) in 2024, the world's military expenditure reached \$2.7 trillion, recording its greatest growth since the end of the Cold War. Also in 2024, Germany and India joined the U.S.A., China, and Russia as manufacturing countries that topped the top 5 lists of military spending (Liang et al., 2025). India has been increasing its defense expenditure year after year because it believes in being dominant and wants modern military capabilities. In 2024, India allocated around \$86 billion for defense, which gave it the 4th rank among countries spending the most on defense. By spending so much, not only does India demonstrate a desire to be a leader in security, but it has also caused a problem by unsettling the security balance in its region. This increase in military spending shows middle powers trying to be more influential in their parts of the world and actively contribute worldwide (Ott, 2025). In addition to this, Because of border disputes and domestic trouble, Pakistan spends a significant part of its budget on defense. Though the details for 2024 are not in the open, Pakistan always keeps its military budget strong, and government authorities continue to warn about a potential big conflict over Kashmir during international gatherings (Economic Times, 2025). Turkey increased its military budget last year, spending \$15.8 billion on defense, which was good enough for 22nd place in the world. The purpose was to develop Turkey's domestic weapons sector and

make it clear that it takes care of its own strategic matters. Therefore, middle powers are now capable of participating more in world security, instead of just supporting superpower interests.

Economically, after the end of the Cold War, middle-power countries have experienced substantial growth in their economies, which has led to enhancing their sphere of influence in global politics. For instance, India had a dramatic economic growth in the early years of the 21st century, which positioned it as the world's 5th largest economy by 2024, with a nominal GDP exceeding \$3.7 trillion. On the other hand, middle power countries like Brazil and South Africa also experienced significant economic development, enabling them to be key players in their respective regions (World Bank, n.d., 2024). This economic empowerment not only helped middle power countries to invest more in infrastructure, education research and development, and technological innovations that not only improved domestic prosperity but also further solidified their influence in international affairs, but it also increased their capacity to participate actively in shaping international economic policies and institutions (International Monetary Fund, 2024). At the same time, Germany which is one of the strongest industrial nations, remains Europe's top economy with a GDP of over \$4.5 trillion in the year 2023 which also strengthens its influence in the EU and worldwide trade. The same economic climb is seen in the rise of other middle powers. After shrinking in FY23, Pakistan's economy grew again in FY24 due to a better agricultural year and other measures to stabilize the economy (World Bank, n.d., 2024). Moreover, Islamabad set up the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) to make the process of investing for foreigners smoother and aim for \$5 billion in FDI. Even though inflation is a problem, Turkey continues to impress with a \$1.32 trillion GDP in 2024 and a 5.1% increase, plus projections that it will rise to \$1.47 trillion in 2025 (Cetinguc, 2025). Because of reforms and efforts to innovate, Turkey is now a hub of economic activity between Europe and Asia. These case studies indicate that middle powers are experiencing

economic expansion and playing an important role in shifting global trade, making them important parts of a wider, decentralized, multipolar world economy

Due to their improved military and economic strength, middle powers are gaining a attention in global affairs. South Africa, India, Brazil and other countries, have become important in groups such as BRICS and the G20, suggesting reforms that would make global governance structures fairer to emerging economies. They play a role in settling conflicts, protecting the environment, and negotiating on trade as a sign of trying to create a fairer and multipolar world. After being known for its stability in Europe, Germany has started to set important EU policies and respond to worldwide problems. Following the crisis in Ukraine, the EU worked to increase its access to alternative energy sources and sponsored both trustworthy humanitarian aid and military support to Ukraine via the organization (European Union, 2025). Doing this shows that middle powers are shifting from a background role to an important part in dealing with international issues, using their expanded military and economic resources to affect worldwide policies and standards (Patrick, 2024).

Likewise, Pakistan and Turkey have joined many international efforts, become members of several alliances, and been involved in solving regional disputes. The fact that Pakistan hosted the 2024 Shanghai Cooperation Organization Summit was seen as meaningful recognition of its work in the areas of economic development and fighting terrorism in Central and South Asia. Additionally, Pakistan is working to change how it is seen abroad, build better relationships with countries around it, and receive more worldwide support through public diplomacy (Wikipedia contributors, 2024). Turkey's position and culture have played a role in making it influential in international affairs, so it moderated the early meetings on the Russia-Ukraine crisis in Istanbul and also helped to mediate conflicts in the Middle East (Chao-Fong et al., 2025). The country has become closer to nations in the Gulf and sub-Saharan Africa, which has

made it more influential on a worldwide scale apart from the traditional Western powers. So, middle powers are now taking part in making regional pacts and contributing to creating world rules, proving they should be included as power shifts away from central control.

### **Pakistan in a Multipolar World: Strategy, Opportunities, and Nuclear Leverage Strategic Autonomy and Foreign Policy Realignment**

With the international system moving towards a multipolar system after a long unipolar phase, Pakistan is confronted with a mixture of old and new challenges as well as opportunities. The rise of multiple poles of power, i.e., China, the United States, Russia, the EU, and the rising middle powers, gives Islamabad the chance to reaffirm its strategic alignments. As a result of the examples of other countries, such as Turkey and Indonesia, who have already managed to put the multi-vector diplomacy into practice, Pakistan will manage to build the relationships with the variety of international agents without being deprived of the independence in the decision-making process. Such a shift towards strategic autonomy would enable Pakistan to have greater freedom of action, i.e., pursuance of national interests without being dependent on one power.

The de facto shift of the attention of Pakistan, who previously followed the U.S.-centric foreign policy, to the diversified foreign policy started with the concept of the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as one of the projects of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The migration reveals the eastward shift of Pakistan and the Pakistani urge to be associated with the region. Nevertheless, the strategic autonomy can not be one-sided: getting too close to China without the corresponding symmetrical relationship with the U.S., EU, and the Gulf partners threatens Pakistan with restricting its own diplomatic freedom of manoeuvre. Islamabad has to pursue an active relationship with the West as it pursues stronger ties with the East, in emulating the Turkish example that was done successfully.

Moreover, Pakistan must be motivated by the multi-vector course of Kazakhstan, which has

managed to lure the investment of both east and west without compromising the political sovereignty. Pakistan can work towards strategic depth and volatility hedging simultaneously, just like Turkey does with its NATO membership, ties with Russia, and BRICS. Such equilibrium would be realized by institutional planning and a well-defined foreign policy doctrine that emphasizes on independence but not hostility.

### **Economic Diplomacy and Regional Integration**

Economic diplomacy is one of the foundations middle powers are relying upon to acquire power in the multipolar world. Pakistan boasts of a geostrategic location that inherently puts the country at an advantage of being a trade and energy corridor between China, Central Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia. Through CPEC, Pakistan is already tasting over 20 billion Chinese yuan worth of investments in infrastructure and energy projects, which means that it could be potentially turning it into an economic hub within the region. This potential, however, is not fully utilized due to issues of governance, economic mismanagement and political instability.

Pakistan must embrace the economic outreach of Turkey. Trade between Turkey and Africa has increased by more than 50 percent between 2014 and 2024, and Ankara has radically expanded the number of its embassies in Africa. On the same note, Pakistan can deepen its connection with the Global South, particularly in the OIC and South-South cooperation forums. Active participation in Africa, Southeast Asia, and Latin America via trade missions and soft loans would spread out the export market of Pakistan and improve the economic resilience. Besides this, another blueprint is given by the ability to attract balanced foreign direct investment in Kazakhstan through good tax policies and institutional reforms. Pakistan ought to invest in the ease of doing business, fiscal transparency, and governance to get quality foreign capital. Pakistan must concentrate on the relationships that are based on investment, rather than aid or loans,

because the latter contribute to sustainable development and regional connectivity.

### **Multilateral Engagement and Institutional Visibility**

Trying to be a reputable middle power, Pakistan should uplift itself in both international and regional multilateral organizations. Pakistan has already become a member of such organisations as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), mediation of international organizations, and G77; the country can also enjoy the benefits of being an observer or full member of such organizations as BRICS+ or ASEAN regional dialogue. The engagement has ensured development of global agendas, rule-making as well as flexibility on key issues such as climate change, migration and finance within the development.

Based on the experience of Turkey and its diplomatic aggressivity, Pakistan can utilise niche diplomacy as a method of power. The example of Ethiopia and Somalia mediation by Turkey can be emulated as well as the soft power branding by the Turkish Airlines. This is one way through which Pakistan can assume the leadership role in issues relating to the use of Islamic finance, enemy of Islamophobia campaigns, and climate resilience programs within the Muslim world.

Pakistan also needs to make foreign policy planning an institutionalized process by institutionalizing think tanks, diplomatic academies, as well as strategic communications units. Embarking on building specific teams on multilateral engagements would not only professionalize the Pakistani diplomacy but also enhance uniformity on the international front. A healthier institutional presence can guarantee a shift in Pakistan to dynamic diplomacy formation.

### **Nuclear Capabilities and Strategic Deterrence**

The nuclear weapons possessed by Pakistan continue to play a central role in the security of the country and its strategic independence. A zone of power imbalance eases Pakistan to use nuclear weapons in the provision of

credible deterrence against conventionally superior forces, such as India. With the emergence of deeper multipolarity and the changing nature of regional alliances, nuclear deterrence proves even more important in the protection of sovereignty and maintenance of strategic balance.

According to experts South Asia is now characterized as a nuclear multipolarity, not only India and Pakistan, but also involving China. This tripartite equilibrium makes strategic calculations difficult, but also increases the place of Pakistan in the world security discourse. The full-spectrum deterrence doctrine developed by Islamabad and consisting of the low-yield tactical nuclear, can be viewed as the tool used to protect against the escalation, as well as to indicate about the parity at the strategic level.

Pakistan should, in the future, use a weapon of nuclear power as a deterrence element in addition to being a factor of diplomacy. This may be achieved by means of arms control negotiation, confidence-building measures, and non-proliferation measures in the region to improve the image of Pakistan as a reasonable nuclear state. Joining operations like the Conference on Disarmament or initiating a South Asian nuclear risk-reduction process would raise the credibility and gain the leverage of Pakistan as much as possible in a multipolar system.

### **Conclusion:**

#### **Toward a Multipolar Strategy for Pakistan**

The multipolar world gives Pakistan a chance of increased independence, greater manoeuvrability, and international significance. All this, however, will be on the mark by the utilization of chance by means of internal reforms, establishment strengthening, and balanced foreign policy decisions. Pakistan can adopt the examples of Turkey and Kazakhstan and model them on their own local realities to establish themselves as positive middle power.

It will imply tempering strategic outfits, economic modernization, enhanced multilateral presence and judicious utilization of its nuclear power. Its way ahead is not risk-free, given the intelligible platform and solid

institutions, Pakistan has the potential to convert multipolarity into a stage of national renovation and leadership in its region.

### Conclusion

This paper affirms that international power system and affairs are moving away to a complex multipolar structure due to the decline of bipolar (or unipolar) order. In the historic perspective, middle powers were weak beyond their areas. Most nations, such as Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, and Turkey among others, continued to build up their economic, military, and diplomatic capability since the early 2000s. Rodrik (2024) contends that middle powers such as India, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, Turkey, and Nigeria are well placed to specify leadership on important global issues, providing an alternative blueprint for the world economy that does not depend on U.S. or Chinese hegemony. According to neorealist language, the international system is anarchical, without any central authority, all the states have to take care of their own security and they have to survive by collection of power. Thus, the emergence of numerous moderately powerful states unconsciously decentralizes the power; now there are many players that count.

The research finding was that the world is not returning to an easy bipolar confrontation but into an asymmetrical multipolar. Cooper (2023) argues that this new order is a scenario whereby the “power is indeed diffusing toward middle powers” although the U.S. and China are still strong, the destinations of other powers in the region also count. The 21st century will be an era of proliferation of middle powers shaping world order and not the major powers. As it has been observed today, there are now more middle powers in each region and each of them has the desire to demand weight in world affairs (Elliott, 2024). Simply, power is increasingly spreading in the regions, thereby complicating international politics and rendering it more multipolar than during the Cold War period.

### Policy Directions for Pakistan

Pakistan needs to have a mixed approach that favors a diversified strategy in pursuing international relations to have a smooth transition of things to come in the post-multipolar world.

#### Diversify and balance partnerships:

Pakistan should also handle the relationship with large powers carefully (China, the U.S., Russia, and neighbors in the region) and find new friends. Hussain (2025) encourage Pakistan to adopt a strategic autonomy approach- one that asserts its core relations across the board (i.e., China), but allows it to continue to increase its diplomatic affiliates across the board. This implies, among other things, strengthening connections with countries of Central Asia and the Middle East and Africa as well as to the developing powers (e.g., Turkey, Southeast Asian nations) without moving away from the existing partners.

#### Leverage economic corridors wisely:

The connectivity projects such as CPEC and others are growth prospects and a hub role. Pakistan ought to utilize them to its benefit through use of infrastructure and trade rights yet be cautious not to become heavily reliant on one competitor. In order to have economic sovereignty, the sources of investing have to be diversified, and the infrastructure projects should be sustainable. This is practically done by negotiation of terms that safeguard the interests of Pakistan and by building industries of their own that would down play long term exposure.

#### Engage robustly in multilateral forums:

To form coalitions, Pakistan should take an active part in regional and the global organizations (such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, OIC, ECO, and others). It can also contribute to norms and initiatives instead of being marginalized through its contribution in multilateral dialogues. As an example, befriending other Islamic and South Asian states against terror or climate change, the voice of Pakistan can be strengthened.

**Strengthen institutions and strategic planning:**

The one thing that the Pakistani system needs now in this new multipolar world is to modernize its foreign policy bureaucracy to make it be nimble-footed. The analysts would recommend faster decision-making, online diplomatic solutions, and scenario playing. Pakistan will be able to respond to changes (e.g. new trade blocks or security issues) more efficiently by planning in advance and having a sense of the future in the mind. Breeding and developing a breed of shrewd and deft hands at diplomacy and instill in the diplomats a culture of foresight will help Pakistan to take a multifaceted direction and be in a position to keep an unpacked ground in the uncertain multipolar world.

To conclude, multipolar transition is an important element of the path that Pakistan needs to take which consists of diversification of relationships, using the economic opportunities wisely, and developing soft and institutional power. The strategies will assist it to maintain sovereignty and seek its interests with the rise of middle powers. In that manner, Pakistan will be able to make out of the complex new world order the opportunity to be secure and develop.

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