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THE UNITED STATES – PAKISTAN (BUREAUCRATIC) RELATIONS (A MAJOR HURDLE IN DEMOCRACY IN PAKISTAN)

Dr. Ahmed Raza

Assistant Professor, DHA Suffa University, Karachi

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Corresponding Author: *
Dr. Ahmed Raza

Abstract
By the time, the World War II seemed to have culminated in 1945, the signs of another conflict, popularised as the Cold War had already appeared on the horizon. In 1947, the world was deeply embroiled into an unprecedented series of armed conflicts ignite by the process of decolonisation among which the partition of India is just one case which claimed millions of lives. Both India and Pakistan decided to be aloof from the quagmire of destruction. But the elite which was destined to rule Pakistan concocted a narrative of "the fear for survival in the face of its larger foe, India" which the subsequent phase of India-Pakistan history befittingly proved false. The United States, after India's refusal to join its Capitalist bloc opted for the best out of the worst options during the Cold War build-up. In this context, the US structured its relations with Pakistan on the basis of "geopolitical pragmatism" instead of "genuine democracy". Although, the US has been emphasising constitutionalism in Pakistan guaranteeing the rule of law, and fundamental freedoms, but the "US bureaucratic mechanisms" especially the Department of State, the Pentagon, and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) have always accorded top priority to transactional stability, counterterrorism cooperation, and regional security over democratic order. The US bureaucratic framework continues to balance its long-term strategic needs, such as regional stability, counterterrorism, and nuclear non-proliferation, against its public support for democratic values, stepping up its criticism only when institutional imbalances directly threaten regional or financial stability. Amidst this scenario related to the US – Pakistan relations, this study explores the most impactive impediment which has thwarted efforts for the inculcation of true democracy in Pakistan even after almost eight decades.

Prelude

Historical accounts especially declassified documents reveal that terrorism, predominantly the crude form of violence against personnel and property constitutes one of the fundamental instruments of foreign policy of a state pursuing national interests in the region where its sponsored proxies are in a state of war which renders cost-effectiveness and asymmetric nature of armed conflict. The sponsor country employs local groups, popularly known as non-state actors to conduct violent operations comprising raids on government and its associated institutions' installations, ambush convoys and columns, sabotage by bombings and assassinations of important personalities like the elimination of Pakistan's first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan on 16th October 1951. Although, there is no declassified document divulging Central Intelligence Agency's role in the assassination as claimed by the print media but unfolding of developments during the fast-escalating Cold War

convincingly deduce the involvement of a foreign hand in the slain (Husain, 2006). After the (so-called) independence, Liaquat Ali Khan's government pursued the foreign policy of 'non-alignment' thereby maintaining strict aloofness from the ideological conflict which had spurred the Cold War between the Capitalist west led by the United States of America (US) and Communists under the leadership of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (Dawn, 2010). He pioneered diplomatic relations with USSR on 1st May 1948 as the result of negotiations between Pakistan's Foreign Minister Muhammad Zafarullah Khan and the USSR's Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko in New York (Pakistan, 2026). He recognized Communist China on 4th January 1950 and formal diplomatic relations were established on 21st May 2051. In this context, western media especially the US' print segment like *"The New York Times"* and *"The Washington Post"* and prominent British publications; *"The Times"* and *"The Economist"*, extensively condemned Pakistan and expressed sheer anxiety with regard to its diplomatic choices with USSR and PRC (Peoples Republic of China) in the early 1950s (Khan M. N., 2022), a period of fast-heightening Cold War during which the US and its western allies desired nothing but total alignment of Pakistan with the anti-communist (USSR and PRC) alliance. By that time, it had become clear to the US and its western allies that as long as Liaquat Ali Khan stays in power, Pakistan's total commitment into the anti-Communist alliance would remain a haunting dream. It was indeed, highly disturbing for the US when Pakistan refused to dispatch military contingents for operational deployment the Korean War (25th June 1950 – 27th July 1953). The US plan to establish air bases in Pakistan along its northwestern borders in order to monitor the USSR military's activities was shelved because of Pakistan's refusal. The US insistence to sever relations with PRC was also rejected by Pakistan. In fact, this particular scenario seems to have persuaded the US and its allies to seek the first regime change in Pakistan within a span of four years since its emergence in 1947 which was chosen to be an eastern bastion against the Communism. But, Liaquat Ali Khan was a barrier in achieving this goal. Under these circumstances of extreme nature, the US President Harry Truman after thorough determination, may have authorized the conduct of a clandestine operation which was imminent to assist in pursuing US foreign policy objectives and, was exceptionally critical for the national security (Institute, 2026).

Purpose of the Study

This study analyses how the peculiar dynamics of US-Pakistan relations have hindered the path **of democracy** in Pakistan, causing widespread public disenchantment that poses an existential threat to the country.

Literature Review

The relationship between the United States and Pakistan is often described as a "roller coaster". It moves between close cooperation and deep mistrust. Scholars view this dynamic through various lenses, including patron-client theory, realist security paradigms, and bureaucratic/institutional interests (Ahmar, Changing Dynamics of Pak-US Relations and the Challenge of Soft Power, 2021). A synthesis of key themes and historical phases in the academic literature regarding US-Pakistan relations is described as under:

The Formative Years and the Cold War (1947–1979);

A Marriage of Convenience: Initial days' literature accentuates correctly that Pakistan's alignment with US in the 1950s, through military pacts; SEATO and CENTO, was motivated by its quest for security against India. Contrarily, the US considered Pakistan a strategic asset to contain Soviet influence. *"The US never committed to Pakistan any assistance against India."*

The Patron-Client Dynamic: The US-Pakistan relations were asymmetric in nature. President Eisenhower declared Pakistan as the *"most allied ally,"* while the US opted to be a *"distant patron"* whose commitments fluctuated based on its global

priorities in which Pakistan never figured out concertedly.

The 1971 War: Even prior to the 1971 War with India, every US administration's response to Pakistan against India has been disappointing. The US (so-called) lack of assistance to Pakistan during the East Pakistan crisis which led to the creation of Bangladesh, proved to be the first major episode of mistrust in Pakistan.

The Afghan Jihad and Nuclear Friction (1979–2001)

The Soviet Invasion: Following the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan became the frontline state for channeling covert U.S. aid to the Afghan Mujahideen. Literature highlights this as the peak of tactical convergence (Khan M. , Issue Brief on "Pakistan-U.S. Relations – Building a Futuristic Partnership", 2024).

The Pressler Amendment and Sanctions: Once the Soviet threat receded, U.S. bureaucratic focus shifted to non-proliferation. The invocation of the Pressler Amendment in 1990 cut off U.S. military and economic assistance, leading Pakistani policymakers to view the U.S. as a fair-weather partner (Khan M., 2024).

The Post-9/11 "War on Terror" (2001–2011)

Frontline Partnership: After 11th September 2001 attacks, Pakistan which had been abandoned by *"the US Bureaucratic Troika"* comprising the US Department of State, Pentagon and CIA as the (so-called) Afghan Jihad ended, once again leaned towards Pakistan and designated it a "major non-NATO ally". According to experts it was not Pakistan's war in which it was dragged to serve the US global interests involving China, Central Asia and, most of all, Iran. (Affairs, 2014).

The "Do More" Mantra: The US engaged its conventional forces in Afghanistan to fight unconventional armies of warlords. Failure to defeat guerilla contingents, induced Americans to concoct an excuse of blaming Pakistan for not fulfilling its operational obligations. They accused Pakistan for sheltering terrorists who were fighting the US led NATO. The US wanted Pakistan to wipe out alleged terrorists' hideout / safe havens but Pakistan contrasted with the US oppressions. (Ahmar, 2021).

The Year 2011 – The Most Disturbing Phase. The literature highlights the year 2011 as the lowest point due to a cascade of events such as the Raymond Davis murder incident in Lahore, the clandestine unilateral US air raid that eliminated Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, and the Salala border airstrike that killed a number of Pakistan Army personnel including officer and soldiers. The worst anti-American feelings surged in Pakistan which still exist (Qadir, Khan, & Ali, US-Pakistan Relations during 21st Century: An Expository Analysis, 2026).

Divergence, Pivot, and Recent Dynamics (2017–Present)

The Trump Administration's Re-evaluation: The literature highlights a sharp deterioration during President Donald Trump's administration resulting into the suspension of security related assistance in 2018 which marked decoupling from traditional security aid frameworks.

The Geopolitical Pivot: Since the time of partition in 1947, every US administration was more inclined towards India due to its geostrategic importance in the Indian Ocean, South-east Asia, the Middle East and Africa. Pakistan has never been a preferable option for Americans while comparing it with India. The policymakers of Pakistan in 1947 leaned towards the US but, in the meantime, People's public of China was growing at a tremendous speed. Observing the US response, Pakistani leadership switched over to China economic and strategic alignment.

Post-U.S. Withdrawal from Afghanistan: In 2021, the US President Joe Biden unilaterally announced the withdrawal of US forces from Afghanistan while abandoning its NATO allies in a state of lurch, the most unprofessional and unethical decision in the modern military history. Even the USSR did not withdraw from Afghanistan in this manner which will be

considered as a black mark in any country's military history. The US sources blamed Pakistan for this US humiliating defeat at the hands of Taliban supposedly supported by Pakistan's ISI. This is how, the US-Pakistan relations slipped into more deterioration. However, there emerged a re-evaluation process in which counter-terrorism and trade are areas of intermittent dialogue. Presently, the US-Pakistan relations have transitioned away from large-scale military cooperation to limited issue-based engagement. In this regard, China has emerged as the toughest competitor against the US.

Research Methodology

The conduct of academic research on the US-Pakistan bureaucratic relations demands a structure which is capable of exploring through the public-facing rhetoric of diplomacy. However, within the context of international relations (IR), bureaucratic relations at any level concentrate on the "black box" of governance. The research specifies and explains the modus operandi of each governmental institution such as military / non-military apparatuses, intelligence agencies, and civil services interacting behind doors (Khan, Irfan, & Khurshid, 2023). A robust research methodology tailored to this specific topic requires a structured approach across several key components.

Theoretical Framework. To analyze *bureaucratic* relations rather than broad state-to-state relations, you must choose theories that focus on the internal mechanisms of governments:

Bureaucracy / Organizational Process Model (Graham Allison): Ideal for explaining how decisions emerge from the routines and internal politics of specific agencies (e.g., the U.S. State Department vs. the Department of Defense, or Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs versus the General Headquarters (GHQ) / Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) rather than a unified "national interest."

Principal-Agent Theory: Useful for studying transactional periods, evaluating how the U.S. (principal) attempted to direct Pakistani institutional actors (agents) through conditional aid, and where institutional slippage occurred (Qadir, Khan, & Parveen, 2025).

Neorealism / Complex Interdependency: Provides macro-level context on how overarching security fears (e.g., India, China, or terrorism) dictate institutional mandates (Khan Z., 2013).

Research Design. Because bureaucratic inner workings are highly secretive and complex, a ***qualitative, descriptive,*** **and** ***historical research design*** is standard for this domain (Rasool, Khan, & Mustafa, Pakistan Strategic Prospect with USA during PTI Government, 2023).

Explanatory Case Study: Focus on specific institutional flashpoints (e.g., the institutional handling of the 2011 Raymond Davis case, the Salala incident, or aid suspensions under the Trump administration) to track how individual bureaucratic bodies reacted.

Comparative Analysis: Compare how different civilian vs. military bureaucracies handled a singular crisis or policy shift (Qadir, Khan, & Ali, 2026).

Data Collection Methods. Researching bureaucracy requires a dual-track approach to gather both official stances and hidden procedural insights:

Primary Sources

Declassified Archives & Official Correspondence: Access repositories like the US National Archives or the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series to read actual memos passed between embassies and intelligence headquarters.

Elite Semi-Structured Interviews: Conduct confidential interviews with retired diplomats, military attaches, former civil servants, and think-tank analysts from organizations like the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI) or the United States Department of State.

Official Congressional Hearings & Reports: In order to assess and analyse testimonies presented / submitted by the US officials such as Generals, CIA high ranking officers or the US State Department officials to the US Congress, the US Senate and the White House policy briefs (Khan Z., 2013).

Secondary Sources

Scholarly Literature & Journal Articles: Capitalising on forums and venues such as ResearchGate, relevant websites, thinktanks channels and academic scholarly journals specializing in the South Asian studies focusing on security to chalk out prevalent paradigms (Saeed, Sheikh, & Abbasi, 2026).

Investigative & Disclosed Reports: Utilize leaks that reveal bureaucratic disconnects, such as the *Afghanistan Papers* published by *The Washington Post* (Shamil, 2024).

Data Analysis Strategy. Raw text and documentation must be processed using rigid qualitative metrics:

Thematic Analysis: In this context, every document should be coded for tenacious institutional themes which have been impacting the US-Pakistan relations in the past such as "sovereignty / independence challenges," "aid / support dependency," "intelligence friction," or "inter-agency belligerence / rivalry".

Process Tracing: It is one of the most critical instruments in the domain of International Relations which permit the researcher to associate a specific cause such as a routine replacement / change in the Pentagon leadership to an effect like modified / adjusted military assistance to GHQ of Pakistan by demonstrating every step of the bureaucratic channels.

Content Analysis: It pertains to the US-Pakistan bureaucratic relations on the external side while the civil-military relations on the internal side at Pakistan level. In addition, it requires evaluation of semantic differences between civilian state departments and military / non-military defense and intelligence agencies while describing bilateral agreements within the US administration (Abbas, Hussain, & Ali, 2018).

Methodological Challenges & Limitations. It is the acknowledgment of weaknesses and limitations in the study that enhances its validity:

Information Asymmetry & Secrecy: The nature and complexion of the subject understudy comprise highly confidential bureaucratic records related to the US-Pakistan relations which can only be divulged through the de-classified documents, interviews, investigations and interrogations. Otherwise, intelligence and defense relations are always heavily redacted or classified under the national security rules and regulations.

Selection Bias: This tendency would hinder the credibility and validity of the study. It is certain that exclusive reliance on the US, western or pro-western declassified sources amidst strict classification of materials in Pakistan would result in a one-sided "western-centric" narrative. In this regard, researchers should ethically explore the corresponding policy stances of Pakistan's decision makers especially their memoirs to draw balance in the researched perspectives (Rasool, Khan, & Mustafa, 2023).

US dissatisfaction regarding Pakistan's alignment with China

In 1950s, the United States maintained a policy of non-recognition toward Mao Zedong's communist government, choosing instead to support the Nationalist government (Kuomintang) in Taiwan. In this case, the US maintained a composed stance towards Pakistan's moves to befriend **China**, because Americans were resorting to the policy of restraint in Asia before the geopolitical landscape hardened. However, Pakistan's decision occurred during a phase of rapidly escalating tensions, as the US was aggressively pursuing a strict global containment policy against communism. The Chinese Communist Party came to power on 1st October 1949 which the US and its western allies refused to recognise. Nevertheless, defying the US

pressure, Pakistan extended recognition to PRC, making Pakistan the first Muslim country to establish diplomatic ties its neighbour. In fact, Liaquat Ali Khan's government pursued an independent foreign policy related to PRC, declining to align with Western moves which dictated to impose strict trade embargoes on China during the Korean War in which PRC was the main rival of the US and allies. As the event unfolded, within five month of Pakistan's establishing diplomatic relations with China on 21 May 1951, Liaquat Ali Khan was assassinated on 16 October 1951.

The post-Liaquat Ali Khan spell initiated one of the most devastating phases in the political history of Pakistan. There emerged a relentless political unsteadiness and vicious religious strife which unquestionably blemished nation's democratic foundations. The rapid succession of governments under different prime ministers followed Liaquat Ali Khan's assassination in a state of constant political factions' violent clashes for power, leaving the central government fragile and fragmented. Amidst this precarious environment, unelected bureaucrats filled the vacuum by grabbing the power, paving the way for the military rule, an eventuality that led to the 1958 coup d'état. A prominent scholar Hamza Ali theorized a prominent political concept, popularly known as "the Bureaucratic – Military Nexus", illustrating how the civil bureaucracy paired up with the military establishment inherited from the British India's colonial apparatus emerged as the powerful, dominant and overlapping centers of political power that overshadowed inexperienced and short-sighted democratic institutions (Ansari, Raza, & Islam, 2019) (Mubarak, Nawaz, & Khalid, 2024).

The political history of Pakistan reveals that the "Bureaucratic-Military Nexus" has invariably accorded top priority to the US led western interests at the devastating cost of whole nation during several critical eras such as;

In 1950s, during the early-stage Cold War, this Nexus (a non-elected elite totally devoid of respect and honour for the public sentiments) marshaled the nation into western defense agreements; like South-East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) created on 8th September 1954, and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) established on 24th February 1955 despite political leadership's pursuance for the non-alignment representing general public's preferences.

On 5th March 1959, Field Marshal Muhammad Ayub Khan signed a Bilateral Executive Agreement of Cooperation with the US in Ankara (Türkiye) according to which the US was obliged to come to Pakistan's assistance in case of aggression against it (Khan Z. , A Retrospective Perspective on Pakistan-United States Relations: 1947-1977, 2013).

In 1979, under General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, Pakistan became the frontline state of the US against the USSR. It did bring massive foreign aid and military hardware at the ruinous expense of long-term challenges especially weapon proliferation *(the Kalashnikov Culture),* drug trafficking socio-political and religious violence.

On 19th September 2001, General Pervez Musharraf joined the US led War on Terrorism whose hub was Afghanistan. He succumbed to the US threats for intelligence sharing, logistical support, and the use of airspace and airfields for operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Pakistan – United States Relations and CIA

The CIA operates under the statutory authority defined by the National Security Act of 1947 (outside the domain of direct constitutional articulation), as an independent civilian foreign intelligence service within the executive branch. It has a comprehensively documented chronicle of clandestine operations with the objective of manipulating, manoeuvring and coercing political structures worldwide while its relationships with Pakistan have always been one of the most labyrinthian in modern geopolitics. The CIA's covert operations with objectives of toppling down governments (regime changes); Operation Ajax to overthrow the elected Prime Minister of Iran Mohammad Mosaddegh (1953), the coup against the elected President Salvador Allende in Chile (1973) and a number of regime changes especially during the Cold War are distinct episodes of documented history of clandestine operations.

Related to Pakistan, Americans have generally operated through "the engineered strategic dependency" coupled with military aid and counter-terrorism collaboration instead of direct regime-change operations. However, intersections between operations conducted by CIA and the political stability in Pakistan encompass following areas.

Historically, political or even apolitical occurrences in Pakistan strongly indicate the involvement of foreign hand which inadvertently destabilized democratic structure of Pakistan like the assassination of Benazir Bhutto on 27th December 2007.

Americans have always heavily financed and reinforced Pakistan's military over civilian governments. During the USSR invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1988), the CIA worked straightforwardly with the military regime headed by General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq to funnel billions of dollars into special operations to be conducted by Pakistan-Afghan forces against Russian armies. In this context, Operation Cyclone is the most glaring example in the Afghan War. Undoubtedly, this immense US support thoroughly solidified military's influence over the national politics.

Americans often employed the financial and military aid to secure unconditional collaboration from the military leadership of Pakistan relegating the democratic order which remained incubated as per the dictates of sponsor. Following the demolishment of Twin Towers on 11th September 2001, the US government exaggeratedly supported General Pervez Musharraf. This peculiar dynamic repeatedly coercively manipulated Pakistan's leadership to balance American demands against highly volatile domestic public opinion which consistently stoked severe internal political unrest. Since outbreak of the War on terrorism (2001), the CIA's extensive drone campaign in Pakistan's tribal areas [Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and Provincially Administered Tribal Areas (PATA)] engaging militant groups has become a highly ponderous dilemma of political friction. According to the international law and the United Nations charter these unilateral operations undermined already eroded democratic order and violated the national sovereignty which fueled anti-government sentiments and granting the leverage to extremist factions.

The extreme nature of relationship between the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) of Pakistan and the CIA has not consistently but repeatedly deteriorated into "unending furtive confrontations". Both sides, but predominantly the CIA never hesitated in playing "double games". High-profile incidents like the Salala incident on 26th November 2011 when the US led NATO killed about 28 Pakistan Army soldiers on false reporting by the CIA, Raymond Davis' arrest for killing two citizens in Lahore on 27th January 2011, and the unilateral US air raid which eliminated Osama bin Laden without coordinating with Pakistan and a number of clandestine operations which the CIA conducted inside Pakistan resulting into unprecedented jolting the political landscape of Pakistan, straining diplomatic relations, and causing intense domestic political fallout.

United States – Pakistan Military Centric Relations. In the 1950s, the United States, spearheading a western endeavour to curtail Communism by USSR established a network of defense pacts around the world among which Pakistan opted to be a part of two major alliances (SEATO and CENTO) as a venture for strategic military cooperation. President Dwight D. Eisenhower called Pakistan "America's most allied ally in Asia".

Focus on Combating Communism: Historically, the US Administration under President Harry Truman was never inclined towards Pakistan (being in the embryonic state of its emergence) rather they were pursuing India (being greater and strategically unignorable country in Asia) to join their war against Communism but Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru differed with American plans and opted to be non-aligned in the global powers' game that ignited the Cold War. In fact, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) defeated the Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) led by Generalissimo Chiang Kai-Shek, assumed full

administrative control over the Mainland China and CCP leader Mao Tse-Tung proclaimed the establishment of People's Republic of China on 1st October 1949. At this juncture, the Truman Administration considered India as a vital democratic counterweight to Communism but Pundit Nehru refuted the idea. Then, Americans frustratedly tilted towards Pakistan considering it a substitute of India in their strategy against Communism. In October 1949, President Truman invited Prime Minister Nehru on a state visit during which the visiting dignitary strongly disagreed with the US strategy of military containment of Communism. He, rather floated a geopolitical idea of "non-alignment" aimed at bringing peace and harmony in the world. On 7th July 1950, he officially solidified India's rejection to dispatch combat troops to the US led Western military forces in the Korean War (June 25, 1950, to July 27, 1953). Amidst this scenario, there must not be any ambiguity that President Truman considered Pakistan just a "backup option to secure a foothold in the region". It was the last resort which may be termed as the best out of the worst options that US could secure to confront Communism. Conversely, Pakistani leadership felt insecure while having India in the neighbourhood which, at that time posed no threat to Pakistan. There exists no document which comprises any threatening gesture by India against Pakistan. So, a contention that Pakistan's relations with US are defined predominantly by security reasons is absolutely flawed. This fact must never be ignored that US never supported Pakistan against India which was strategically more important to US and the west. Nevertheless, subsequently US and Pakistan cooperated in the fields of counterterrorism, and regional conflicts; all favourable to US and the west.

Constant US Engagement with Pakistan's Establishment: Even the US Administration acknowledges that dealing with Pakistan's Establishment (predominantly military and intelligence institutions) is more conducive being steady and reliable in a shifting region. In order to achieve strategic objectives, almost every US Administration starting from President Truman (1947), American officials always interacted directly with Pakistan's military leadership rather than elected civilian governments. This by-design course of action by US and the western governments inadvertently solidified the dominant role of the military in the state affairs, thus marginalizing democratically elected civilian institutions. This US dealing irreversibly stunted the democratic maturation in Pakistan which suited the American and western policy makers who enjoyed innumerous leverages to manoeuvre favourable decisions for their own national interests while disregarding Pakistan's public sentiments.

The Role of Every US Administration in Pakistan's Politics. There is no doubt that the **US wielded an unchallenged dictate** over Pakistan's national politics through its military support and financial aid. The elite of Pakistan, fully aware of their depleted popularity among the masses, **remain (ed) subservient to the US**. During the general election crisis in 1977, then Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto publicly accuses the US of conspiring to topple his administration amidst the political agitation launched by Pakistan National Alliance (PNA), a coalition of nine opposition political parties.

Regime Changes;

The Rise and Fall of Field Marshal Ayub Khan (1969). Declassified US State Department and CIA documents confirm that General Muhammad Ayub Khan cultivated deep personal relations with a number of American officials even before becoming Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of the Pakistan Army on 23rd January 1951 (Historian, 330. Letter From Secretary of State Dulles to President Mirza, 1958). Declassified diplomatic records indicate that this direct, independent lobbying bypassed standard civilian and military protocols. He was appointed by then Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan on the recommendations of the Defence Secretary Iskandar Mirza, while superseding four senior generals. Historical records and analyses suggest that the United States played a supportive, behind-the-scenes role in General Ayub Khan's rise to power and consolidation of control during the late

1950s (Editors, 2009). He proved the US' closest Cold War ally in Asia. He inducted Pakistan into pro-Western military alliances (SEATO and CENTO) and permitted the CIA to operate spy flights over the Soviet Union from an airbase near Peshawar. A declassified document from American Counsel General (AMCONGEN) Lahore dated 13th February 1953 contains that Field Marshal Muhammad Ayub Khan was allowed to impose Martial Law in the country anytime he desired. According to analysts Pakistan military was regularly assisted and guided by Americans on the basis of Pakistan's geostrategic importance and its inclination towards the west against Communism (AMCONGEN, 1953). Nevertheless, cracks in US-Pakistan relations emerged in 1962, when Americans extended unprecedented military support to India against China. At the same time, President Kennedy's insistence, President Ayub Khan assured Pundit Nehru that Pakistan would not exploit India's vulnerability during the India-China War. At that time, Pakistan was expecting to resolve the Kashmir issue with the American support which was not provided. Dismayed by the US response, Pakistan concluded the boundary agreement with China on 2nd March 1963. The United States was deeply displeased with the Agreement. At that time, the Kennedy administration was aggressively cultivating closer relations with India, especially after the 1962 Sino-Indian War which provided a golden opportunity to American. There exists a strong rationale to be convinced that US military aid to India during the conflict, left Pakistan feeling abandoned and prompted it to seek a counterweight in China. The China Pakistan Boundary Agreement (1963) led to subsequent trade and aviation deals (making Pakistan International Airlines the first non-communist airline to fly into China), signaling a tangible breach in the U.S.-led containment policy against communist states. During the India Pakistan War in 1965, the US temporarily suspended military and financial assistance which deteriorated President Ayub's economic and political position. After three months or so, the Tashkent Declaration, a peace accord was signed on January 10, 1966, by Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Pakistani President Ayub Khan and the 1965 War ended. The US became concerned about **Soviet mediation**. The talks were hosted and mediated by Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin in Tashkent (then part of the Soviet Union). The US Administration was worried that the successful Soviet mediation would immensely enhance the Soviet influence and prestige around the world, especially in South Asia at the expense of the United States (Raikar, 2026). Historians and political analysts unanimously agree that a dramatic shift in the US policy severely weakened Ayub's regime, setting the stage for his exit. Realizing he had lost the support of both the civilian populace and the full backing of his military generals, Ayub Khan resigned on March 25, 1969**.** In his resignation letter, he explicitly invited General Yahya Khan to take over the administration of the country, bypassing the constitutional process that should have handed power to the Speaker of the National Assembly.

The Elevation of General Agha Muhammad Yahya Khan. On assumption, General Yahya Khan announced martial law, abrogated the constitution (1962), and took over as the Chief Martial Law Administrator (and later, President). The primary catalyst was a massive, violent popular uprising led by students, labour unions, and opposition political figures (such as Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in West Pakistan and Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in East Pakistan). This widespread movement brought the country to near anarchy. Amidst this scenario, public resentment had been growing over economic inequality resulting from his decade-long policies, the controversial outcomes of the 1965 Tashkent Agreement following the war with India, and a complete lack of genuine political representation (Editors E., 2026). There is a broad historical consensus that Yahya Khan neglected the marginalized East Pakistan economically, politically, and militarily. This decades-long alienation was the core driver of the Bengali nationalist movement led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman and the Awami League. He presided over Pakistan's first free and fair democratic elections in December 1970**.** However, when the Awami League won an outright

democratic majority, the military establishment and West Pakistani politicians resisted transferring power to a Bengali-led government. Yahya Khan's subsequent decision to launch Operation Searchlight (a violent military crackdown in East Pakistan) is widely viewed by historians as a catastrophic blunder that made civil war and the breakup of Pakistan inevitable. As the leader of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), which won the majority of seats in West Pakistan, Bhutto adamantly opposed allowing Mujibur Rahman to form a government without West Pakistani concession. His boycott of the National Assembly session heavily pressured Yahya Khan. Many historians argue Bhutto's refusal to sit in the opposition catalyzed the political deadlock, though Yahya Khan maintained ultimate executive and military authority. In fact, Ayub Khan's decade in power heavily centralized authority in West Pakistan, worsened economic disparities between the two wings, and suppressed Bengali political dissent. Yahya Khan inherited this deeply flawed systemic structure when Ayub resigned and handed power to him in 1969. The Bengali Awami League, led by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, won a massive majority in Pakistan's first general election, taking 167 of 313 seats. They earned the democratic right to form the government and write the new constitution. President Yahya Khan and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto—whose Pakistan People's Party (PPP) placed second—strongly resisted handing power over to East Pakistan. Bhutto famously opposed the National Assembly session scheduled for March 1971, threatening drastic measures against any West Pakistani politician who traveled to Dhaka (The Media Group, , 2017). In fact, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto emerged as a major character in igniting the political crisis that ultimately created so-called plausible causes to launch Operation Searchlight on March 25, 1971. Historical consensus and records abundantly prove that the military junta under President Yahya Khan's planned crackdown on Bengalis had overwhelming support of Bhutto. There is no doubt that Pakistan People's Party (PPP) shared a substantial political responsibility in thwarting a peaceful transfer of power to Awami League. Military crackdown in East Pakistan distinctly exposed egos of some West Pakistani politicians aligned with incompetent military hierarchy which proved to be devoid of comprehending and addressing the political dilemma that posed a real existential threat to Pakistan. According to experts on the politics of South Asia, united Pakistan could have been secured provided the Punjabi-Muhajir dominated military-bureaucratic leadership had accepted the results of General Elections-1970.

Amidst the most critical phase of political history of Pakistan, the U.S. response to Operation Searchlight and the 1971 crisis in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) was defined by historians as the "Tilt towards Pakistan," orchestrated by President Richard Nixon and his National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger. Rather than remaining purely dormant out of negligence, the U.S. administration made a deliberate geopolitical choice to support Pakistan's military regime under **General Yahya Khan**, despite being fully aware of the atrocities taking place. The primary objective of US policy during this crucial period was the top-secret initiation of diplomatic relations with **Communist China.** President Nixon and Kissinger were dealing with President Yahya Khan, as their intermediary to coordinate President Nixon's historic 1972 visit to Beijing. At this particular moment, Dr Henry Kissinger considered the Cold War realignment against the USSR as the top priority geo-strategic goal. He anticipated that reprimanding Pakistan over East Pakistan would cause disruption in rapprochement with China and undermine US credibility with its allies. Nixon felt a strong personal and political loyalty to Yahya Khan due to his unconditional rather selfless assistance with China. Nixon famously disliked Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, which further cemented his alignment with Pakistan. While Bhutto was seen as highly nationalistic and sometimes unpredictable, the US ultimately viewed the West Pakistani political establishment as the legitimate center of a unified, pro-Western Pakistan. Despite Mujib's Awami League winning a democratic majority, the US administration viewed his regional autonomy movement with suspicion. U.S. policymakers feared that a breakaway East

Pakistan would be weak, unstable, and highly vulnerable to influence from **India** and the **Soviet Union** (who signed a Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation in August 1971). It is an extremely important matter to know that the U.S. administration did not lack accurate information. Archer Blood, the U.S. Consul General in Dhaka, sent multiple urgent cables to the State Department, most popularly "The Blood Telegram", explicitly exposed Pakistani military of committing "selective genocide." But President Nixon and Henry Kissinger deliberately ignored these warnings, bypassed official State Department channels, and eventually sidelined Archer Blood for protesting their policy. Instead of pressuring President Yahya Khan to find a peaceful political settlement with Mujib-ur-Rehman, the US administration contemplated several active diplomatic measures to shield Pakistan's highhandedness against its own citizens who played the most pivotal role in the creation of the largest Muslim state of the time. Although the US Congress imposed a number of restrictions on direct military aid to Pakistan, the Nixon Administration resorted to dodging ways to continue providing military hardware and allied operational and logistical services through third-party states like Iran and Iran. In December 1971, when India openly intervened in the war, the U.S. deployed the aircraft carrier *USS Enterprise* to the Bay of Bengal. But the US did not seek any military engagement with India rather the aim was to deter it from excessive use of force against Pakistan. The US priority was the balance of power in the region. It must not be ignored that at that particular time of domestic actions by the Pakistan military, there were the US-China rapprochement through Pakistan.

The Assumption of Premiership by Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. During the 1971 war, Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's role in events leading to the separation of East Pakistan remains one of the most controversial. Historians unanimously agree that the disintegration of united Pakistan was driven by the structural, economic, and political grievances spanning over two decades, Bhutto's political intransigence coupled with power-sharing deadlock accelerated the break-up of Pakistan (Khalique, 2018). Bhutto's responses during the 1970–1971 constitutional crises have always been considered as a primary catalyst for the final rupture. Bhutto adopted a pragmatic approach and facilitated President Richard Nixon in establishing historic communication channels with China. *He* withdrew from SEATO, pivoted toward the Non-Aligned Movement, and championed Islamic solidarity through the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). He sought strategic breathing room away from superpower hegemony. Nevertheless, the breaking point in US-Bhutto ties arrived when he pursued a nuclear reprocessing plant agreement with France. The US opposed it to prevent nuclear proliferation. In his final spell of rule (1977), he publicly accused the US of colluding with the political opposition (the Pakistan National Alliance) to topple his government amid post-election turmoil. This US-Bhutto episode leads to a conclusion that US did not want Pakistan to be strong enough where it thinks of getting out of the US ORBAT (order of battle).

Operation Fair Play – General Zia ul Haq's Seizure of Power. Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was staunchly of the view that the CIA was operating to orchestrate his removal from power. His suspicion peaked during the mammoth political agitation spurred by alleged rigging in general elections in March 1977 that ultimately led to the military take over. On April 28, 1977, Bhutto delivered a famous, emotionally charged speech to a joint session of the National Assembly of Pakistan and openly accused the CIA of financing, planning, organising and coordinating a massive involvement in Pakistan's domestic political matters by fueling opposition's violent street protests almost in every part of the country. He spelled out two major reasons basing on which CIA engaged itself to remove him. He claimed that during a 1975 meeting, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger warned him that the US would set "a horrible example" of him in case of his continued efforts to develop a nuclear weapon. Moreover, Bhutto had aggressively switched Pakistan toward an independent and anti-

imperialist posture aimed at forging closer relations with Communist China, USSR and the socialist bloc. He planned to mediate between Arabs and Israel. He championed the "Third World" solidarity movement. Following the July 1977 military coup led by General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq ("Operation Fair Play"), both Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and his daughter, Benazir Bhutto, remained steadfast in their belief that the CIA and the military junta toppled his government. The declassified CIA documents from that era indicate that US intelligence closely monitored Bhutto's political vulnerabilities and anticipated the military taking over. Basing on CIA's modus operandi around the world even inside the US, Bhutto's claims of CIA orchestration cannot be ignored.

While historical theories frequently point to a alignment of interests between the U.S. and the Pakistani military regarding Bhutto's removal, declassified archives and historical analyses indicate that the July 1977 coup, codenamed Operation Fair Play, was primarily triggered by severe domestic political turmoil, institutional military dynamics, and a breakdown of civilian authority within Pakistan.

Historians and political analysts are divided on whether the US actively engineered Bhutto's downfall, meaning the threats were backed by intent, or if his removal was the result of domestic Pakistani dynamics. But it is a fact that less than a year after the meeting, on July 5, 1977, Bhutto's government was overthrown in a military coup led by General Zia-ul-Haq. Proponents of this view point to a history of US tacit or active support for military dictatorships that aligned better with Western interests, and argue that Washington stood by or gave a "green light" to Zia's takeover as a way to sideline a defiant Pakistani leader. Bhutto himself famously alluded to foreign pressure and a "noose" tightening around him in his posthumous testament *"If I Am Assassinated"*. Henry Kissinger didn't issue a formal, direct public denial of the "horrible example" quote using those exact words, but the historical record shows that the phrase does not appear in the official declassified U.S. State Department memos of his 1976 meeting with Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Declassified records from related diplomatic communications *do* show U.S. officials warning that Congress or the administration would make a "horrible example" or take punitive non-proliferation steps against Pakistan, but Kissinger's own recorded conversational stance in official meeting notes was more focused on how reprocessing facilities would be handled, and he even privately expressed a degree of cynical sympathy for Bhutto's difficult position regarding conventional vs. nuclear parity with India (Historian , 1977).

General Zia-ul-Haq's relations with the US were more complex rather than mere obedience. While he remained a pivotal American ally during the Afghan Jihad, experts consider him as a pragmatic leader who manipulated the alliance to serve the national strategic and geo-political objectives instead of blindly following the US orders (Burr, 2012).

General Pervez Musharraf's Coup Against an Elected Government. When General Musharraf staged a coup against the government of Prime Minister Muhamad Nawaz Sharif on 12th October 1999, **the United States did openly express deep concern and formally condemned** the military action. President Clinton publicly called for the "earliest possible restoration of democracy" and urged a prompt return to constitutional, civilian rule. The US placed strict economic and military sanctions on Pakistan because of its 1998 nuclear tests and Musharraf's 1999 military coup (Khan I. , 2025). But after 11th September 2001 attacks, U.S. policy reversed which needed Pakistan's geographic access, intelligence, and logistical support to target Al-Qaeda and the Taliban in neighboring Afghanistan. Their leadership set aside concerns regarding democratic backsliding in Pakistan to work directly with Musharraf, who agreed to support the U.S. campaign (Archive, 2004). Musharraf agreed to share intelligence, close borders to fleeing militants, and grant US forces access to Pakistani airspace and military bases. In return, the US restarted economic assistance, provided military aid, and helped stabilize Pakistan's economy, turning a diplomatic outcast back into a vital strategic ally.

General Pervez Musharraf heavily manipulated the Constitution of Pakistan during his rule, following a historical playbook very similar to his military predecessors, General Ayub Khan and General Zia-ul-Haq. Like the dictators before him, Musharraf used legal decrees, forced judicial oaths, and structural amendments to centralize executive power, validate his coup, and legitimize his prolonged tenure. His rule (1999–2008) is widely viewed as a major setback for democracy in Pakistan, (Razzaq, 2024). Facing pressure from an independent judiciary, Musharraf suspended the constitution a second time, placed restrictions on the press, and detained numerous judges, lawyers, and political activists (Nasr, 2007).

General Pervez Musharraf amassed control over the state institutions which is considered the most ironic in historical context of Pakistan's political history (Ahmed, 2020). Following his military coup in 1999, General Pervez Musharraf issued the Legal Framework Order (LFO) of 2002, which amended the Constitution of Pakistan. This order granted the president sweeping executive authorities, most notably the unilateral power to dismiss the National Assembly (parliament) and all provincial assemblies**.** The judiciary granted legal cover to this overreach; the Supreme Court validated Musharraf's coup and his extra-constitutional legal maneuvers under the controversial legal precedent known as the "Doctrine of Necessity". These powers were later formalized in the constitution via the **17th Amendment in 2003.** It is worth noting that Musharraf was following a playbook written decades prior by another military ruler, **General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq**. In 1985, Zia introduced the notorious **Article 58(2)(b)** through the 8th Amendment, which initially created this presidential power to dissolve elected bodies (Sarwar, Azhar, & Baig, 2024).

Conclusion

The US-Pakistan bureaucratic relations reveal a patch-up characterised by **"**transactional necessity", "incompatible expectations", and "systemic institutional divergences"**.** Historically oscillating between intense geopolitical alignments and severe diplomatic alienations, these relationships are best understood as a non-traditional alliance as well as highly complex, localised bureaucrat-to-bureaucrat arrangement managed under shifting international security parameters. Moreover, it explores a profound, long-standing systemic paradox; the US' operational workflows heavily disincentivise the normalisation of democracy in Pakistan. While American public diplomacy consistently endorses civil liberties, institutional governance, and constitutional values.

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