



## PAKISTAN MEDIATION ROLE FUELING THE WORLD'S MULTI-POLARIZATION CONFLICT

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### **Abstract:**

This paper examines Pakistan's mediation within the broader context of the strategic rivalry between the United States and China for global influence, with particular emphasis on South Asia as a critical geopolitical arena. It addresses the following research question: how does the current convergence between the United States and Pakistan constrain Islamabad's ability to maintain a balanced relationship with both major powers? The study argues that the emerging rapprochement between Washington and Islamabad—manifested in Pakistan's mediation role in the U.S.–Iran conflict and reinforced through recent economic engagements across sectors such as oil, cryptocurrency, mining, and hospitality—has the potential to complicate relations between China and Pakistan. More specifically, Beijing, which seeks to ensure that Pakistan prioritizes the stabilization of Afghanistan in order to safeguard its economic and strategic interests, particularly those linked to the Belt and Road Initiative, has expressed growing concern over Islamabad's recent diplomatic posture. China's strategic objective centers on fostering stability in Afghanistan as a prerequisite for the successful implementation of regional connectivity projects associated with the BRI. However, Pakistan's mediation efforts and its deepening engagement with Washington are perceived in Beijing as indicative of a shift in strategic priorities. The paper concludes that China interprets these developments as evidence that Pakistan may be privileging U.S. interests, potentially at the expense of Chinese economic objectives. Such a perception not only risks undermining bilateral cooperation but may also contribute to prolonging instability in Afghanistan, thereby jeopardizing regional projects and, potentially, facilitating a renewed U.S. strategic presence in the country.

**Keywords:** mediation, hegemony struggle

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## 1. Introduction

The past year has witnessed a notable intensification in the strategic engagement between Pakistan and the United States, particularly during the presidency of Donald Trump. This convergence has been driven by multiple factors, most prominently large-scale economic agreements spanning sectors such as cryptocurrency, mining, and hospitality. Within this evolving context, Pakistan has emerged as an increasingly consequential diplomatic actor, assuming the role of an “unexpected mediator” in the ongoing tensions between the United States, alongside its ally Israel, and Iran. Islamabad has actively sought to facilitate de-escalation by engaging in diplomatic efforts aimed at brokering a ceasefire between the principal parties, namely Washington and Tehran. Notably, this mediation is confined to the United States and Iran, given the absence of formal diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Israel and the divergence between Israeli and American strategic objectives in the conflict.

Since the outbreak of hostilities, Pakistan’s diplomatic focus has shifted from its tensions with Afghanistan to its prospective role as a “peace broker” in the Middle East. Although this role may appear novel, it is, in fact, rooted in a longer historical trajectory of Pakistani mediation in international conflicts. Contemporary diplomatic initiatives have been accompanied by a convergence of perspectives between the civilian government and the military establishment in Islamabad, reflecting a coordinated national approach. Amid ongoing military confrontations, Pakistan undertook mediation efforts by facilitating communication and coordination between the United States and Iran, culminating in a ceasefire agreement on 8 April 2026. This development can be situated within a broader historical pattern, as Pakistan previously contributed to diplomatic breakthroughs, including its support for Henry Kissinger’s backchannel diplomacy in 1971, which played a role in reshaping Cold War dynamics.

Pakistan’s selection as a mediator can be attributed to its relative acceptability and credibility among the parties involved. Islamabad maintains cooperative relations with both Washington and Tehran. Its strategic ties with the United States are reinforced through longstanding military cooperation, while its relationship with Iran is underpinned by historical recognition, shared socio-religious linkages, and sustained diplomatic engagement. Moreover, Pakistan’s involvement in mediation efforts is not solely altruistic; rather, it is also informed by national strategic interests, which this study examines in detail. Contrary to claims that characterize Pakistan’s mediation as abrupt, the country has a well-established record of facilitating dialogue between Tehran and Washington, including the role played by Yahya Khan. In addition, Pakistan contributed—albeit discreetly—to facilitating the Doha Agreement<sup>ii</sup>.

Despite receiving recognition from various regional and international actors, Pakistan’s recent diplomatic role has been met with pronounced skepticism in China. Beijing has publicly urged Islamabad to prioritize the resolution of tensions with Afghanistan, reflecting broader strategic concerns. This study situates such Chinese

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<sup>ii</sup> Xinting, D., & Yueyao, Z. (2026, April 20). Pakistan Mediation Between the U.S. and Iran reflects Profound Evaluation of the International Landscape. (I. C. Center, Ed.) *International Cooperation Center*.

apprehension within the larger framework of intensifying competition between the United States and China for global influence and leadership within the international system. Accordingly, the central question guiding this research is: why does Beijing view Pakistan's mediation in the U.S.–Iran conflict with such concern?

## **2. Research Problem**

The foreign policy of Pakistan seeks to maintain constructive relations with all states, including major powers such as Russia, the United States, and China. To a considerable extent, Islamabad has succeeded in sustaining a delicate balance in its relations with these three influential actors. However, the recent rapprochement with the United States—driven by emerging trade agreements and Pakistan's mediation efforts in the U.S.–Iran conflict—has raised questions regarding Islamabad's future capacity to preserve this strategic equilibrium.

### **2.1 Research Hypothesis**

Pakistan's mediation role in U.S.-related regional conflicts, combined with deepening economic engagement with Washington, generates perceptions of strategic realignment in Beijing, which in turn increases bilateral tensions with China and constrains Pakistan's ability to maintain equilibrium in its foreign policy between the two rival powers.

### **2.2 Research Question**

Why does Pakistan's increasing diplomatic engagement with the United States through mediation efforts generate strategic constraints in its relations with China within the context of U.S.–China rivalry?

## **3. Research Methodology**

This study adopts a qualitative Process Tracing methodology, as it is particularly suited to addressing research questions framed in terms of “how” and “why.” This approach enables the systematic examination of causal mechanisms underlying Pakistan's engagement in mediation between the United States and Iran. Specifically, it facilitates an in-depth analysis of the factors motivating Pakistan's diplomatic role, while also allowing for the exploration of the anticipated response of China to this evolving rapprochement.

### **3.1 Research Chapters**

In order to address the research question and test the proposed hypothesis, this study is structured around several interrelated thematic sections. It begins by outlining the conceptual foundations of mediation within the field of International Relations, providing a clear definition and theoretical grounding for the analysis. It then examines the core principles and strategic objectives underpinning the foreign policy of Pakistan, thereby situating its diplomatic behavior within a broader policy framework.

Building on this foundation, the study explores the key motivations driving Pakistan's engagement in mediation, followed by an assessment of the diplomatic instruments and mechanisms it employs in this role. Subsequently, the paper evaluates the effectiveness of Pakistan's mediation efforts, considering both immediate outcomes and broader geopolitical implications. Finally, the analysis situates Pakistan's mediation within the context of the intensifying strategic competition between the United States and China, with particular emphasis on the implications of this rivalry for regional order and global power dynamics.

#### 4. What is Mediation

Mediation is a process in which a neutral party makes efforts to settle a dispute between other parties, who can talk to themselves in a direct way. What distinguished negotiations from mediation is that the later depends on the aid given by the mediator to settle the dispute. In mediation, the role of the mediator is to help rather than deciding an outcome that shall be decided by the conflict parties themselves. Mediation may be defined as a type of negotiation that is supported and assisted by a neutral third party that seeks to reach an amicable settlement that meets the needs of the parties of the conflict. In all cases and forms of mediation, mediators never impose a solution, but they can advise and consult parties to help them to reach a mutually agreed solution to the problem. Hence, mediation is a facilitative negotiation built on assistance given by a neutral third party. The reason behind mediation is the difficulty that the parties of the conflict face in understanding the aims and the interests of each other due to political, cultural, economic or ideological reasons. This highlights the role of a mediator to advise the parties of the conflict until they find alternative solutions and a settlement for their disputes. There are different types of mediation: facilitative and evaluative. The facilitative mediation means that mediators attempt to reopen communication between the parties in order to explore options for settlement. On the other case of evaluative mediation, mediators are eligible to express opinions about different issues<sup>iii</sup>.

There are some characteristics of mediation as neutrality, voluntariness, privacy, confidentiality, no prejudice and the necessity to reach an agreement. The mediation process consists of three main phases that are: pre-mediation, when parties agree to mediate and prepare for it; the mediation itself, when direct and indirect mediations take place along with post-mediation, when they reach some outcomes. Mediations have some advantages as reducing the time and the cost needed to settle disputes, providing satisfactory outcomes for disputes, minimizing further disputes, building new channels for communication, enhancing relationships, saving money and time and empowering all parties. Along with managing and controlling the mediation process, mediators shall fulfill other roles as: gathering information to identify the goals of each party, helping the parties to take a realistic value of the dispute, thinking in a creative way to help the parties to construct positive overviews about the issue, re-channeling the energy of the parties

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<sup>iii</sup> Gould, N. (2026, March). Mediation guide - the basics. (Fenwickelliott, Ed.) *Fenwickelliott*.

to adopt new solutions, supervising the settlement process, prompting the parties towards the settlement along with managing the entire process. This usually happens through five activities, which are: investigation, empathy, persuasion, invention and distraction<sup>iv</sup>.

In the next part of the research, this paper will highlight the principles and the objectives of the Pakistani mediation before it moves to the motives that caused Islamabad to play the mediator role in this conflict.

## 5. Pakistani Foreign Policy Guiding Principles

The Pakistani foreign policy seeks to achieve lots of objectives and interests. First of all, it aims at advancing the country's national interests, and it makes a great contribution to promoting peace and prosperity among the different nations of the world. Islamabad also works hard to preserve and strengthen the fraternal relations with all the Islamic countries in addition to supporting the common interests with countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. The Pakistani foreign policy boosts the stability of the international order and international stability. The country depends on different economic, cultural and social tools to achieve its foreign policy objectives. Islamabad also respects the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of other countries, and it believes in the peaceful settlement of disputes. The most important objective and the most relevant to this paper is to develop friendly relations with all the countries of the world, including the superpowers or the giants of the world, China, the USA and Russia. In this respect, this paper will highlight the Pakistani mediation role in the US-Iran conflict and the consequences or the impacts of that mediation on balancing its relations with the superpowers, especially the USA and China<sup>v</sup>.

To achieve these objectives, Islamabad depends on different tools as providing development assistance, entering bilateral and multilateral agreements, promoting the Pakistani culture, granting scholarships for international students, and promoting the peaceful settlement of conflicts. The Pakistani foreign soft power is derived from three main sources: culture, political values and foreign policy. In terms of culture, it depends on media, tourism, history, religion, language, people and entertainment. Regarding the political values, it depends on democracy, diversity along with civil society, and it also depends on trade, cultural diplomacy and mediation to achieve all these goals<sup>vi</sup>. Mediation in conflicts is not a direct tool of the Pakistani foreign policy, but it seeks to promote the peaceful settlement of disputes. And as mediation is one of the tools for peaceful settlement of disputes, this paper highlights it, focusing on the impacts of that on Islamabad's ability to balance its relations with the two giants, the USA and China. Before we highlight this issue, this research will discuss the different motives that caused the sudden role of Pakistan as a mediator in conflicts.

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<sup>iv</sup> Previous Reference.

<sup>v</sup> Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2026). *Foreign Policy*. Islamabad: Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>vi</sup> Saifullah, K., & Qaisrani, I. H. (2022). *Soft Power in the Foreign Policy of Pakistan: Prospects and Potentials*. (t. I. Islamabad, Ed.) *the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad*.

## 5.1 Pakistan's Motives for Mediation in the US-Israeli-Iranian Conflict

Pakistan emerged as a key mediator conveying messages between Tehran and Washington quite unexpectedly due to its global standing, internal challenges, and strained relations with President Trump during his first term. However, various political, economic, and security motives drove Pakistan to assume this mediating role. These factors will be elaborated upon in more detail below.

### 5.1.1 Economic Motives

United States–Pakistan relations have witnessed notable improvement in recent years, particularly following the conclusion of several economic agreements between the two countries across diverse sectors, including cryptocurrency development, mining, and hospitality. Nevertheless, a number of economic indicators suggest that the ongoing war could exert adverse effects on Pakistan's economy. These concerns have likely motivated Pakistan to pursue mediation efforts aimed at preventing potentially severe economic repercussions. This concern is particularly significant given Pakistan's substantial dependence on two critical economic sources: energy-related revenues linked to the Gulf region and remittances from the large Pakistani diaspora residing there. The failure of mediation efforts would therefore expose Pakistan to considerable economic shocks, particularly if disruptions in energy supplies were to persist. Such disruptions would likely intensify inflationary pressures and further aggravate the country's already strained financial conditions. The situation is further complicated by domestic unrest following demonstrations organized by segments of Pakistan's Shiite community in response to the killing of Iranian Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. These protests, which erupted across several Pakistani cities, have heightened concerns within the government in Islamabad about the potential resurgence of sectarian tensions between Sunni and Shiite groups. Such instability could pose significant political and economic challenges for the Pakistani state<sup>vii</sup>.

The Pakistani economy previously suffered the consequences of the Iran-Iraq War when oil became scarce and expensive. Inflation worsened at that time, further straining an already struggling Pakistani economy. Pakistan is reluctant to see its foreign workers in the Gulf return home due to the security situation, especially since their remittances are a vital contribution to the Pakistani economy (Peters, 2026). Indeed, these remittances have already declined. From an economic perspective, Iran serves as a transit country for Pakistani goods, despite the frequent smuggling operations between the two countries across their shared border.

US President Donald Trump's satisfaction with Pakistan increased last year because Pakistan responded to US mediation in its conflict with India in a way that portrayed him as a peacemaker and boosted his chances of winning the Nobel Peace Prize. Trump viewed Pakistan's stance as an attempt to appease or ally with him, as it enhanced his chances of receiving the Nobel Peace Prize. In this context, it is important to

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<sup>vii</sup> Rumi, R. (2026, March 31). USA-Iran-Gespräche: Pakistan steht unter Erfolgsdruck. (DW, Interviewer) DW. DW, Bonn.

distinguish between US-Pakistani relations during Trump's first term and those during his second term.

These relations were extremely strained during Trump's first term, but improved significantly in his second term thanks to several factors, most notably, as mentioned, Trump's successful mediation in the long-standing Pakistani-Indian conflict over Kashmir. Added to this was the mutually friendly relationship between Donald Trump and the Pakistani army chief, General Munir. Perhaps the most important reason, however, remains the Trump family's close business ties with Pakistan, particularly in cryptocurrencies and mining, which fostered a high degree of mutual trust between the two sides.

In the same vein, Islamabad spent millions of dollars on a Pakistani lobby in Washington working to improve Pakistan's image in the United States. This was reinforced by the presence of Whitson and Jared Kushner, who are not diplomats as much as they are international businessmen who traveled to Pakistan at the beginning of the year for trade deals with Islamabad and concluded huge deals in cryptocurrencies and real estate. Trump promised Pakistan significant American investments in the Pakistani oil sector without specifying which wells would be drilled for oil.

Wittkopf promised Pakistan a massive real estate deal involving the redevelopment of a historic Manhattan hotel for Pakistan International Airlines. Trump also made promises regarding Pakistani gold and copper mines, pledging billions of dollars in investment. Furthermore, Trump reduced US tariffs on Pakistani exports to 19%, a move that angered Pakistan's rival, India<sup>viii</sup>.

Many analysts see the Pakistani mediation as a chance to rebrand the country internationally. Added to this is Pakistan's strong desire to play a diplomatic role that would help, even slightly, to erase the negative stereotype of Pakistan as a country that has participated in many wars, in addition to the historical Western accusations against Pakistan of supporting jihadist movements, especially the Taliban. The world has not forgotten that Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden was killed in Pakistan in 2011 by US special forces, and Pakistan now finds itself playing a mediating role to improve its image in light of its competition with its neighbor, India.

We must not forget the role of competition with India in Islamabad's mediation efforts, as this will enhance Pakistan's international standing. India views Pakistan's mediation role with suspicion, since mediators often enjoy good international media coverage and benefit greatly from it (Wagner, 2026). There is a consensus within Pakistan regarding Islamabad's current policy of mediating in this conflict, particularly among Pakistani public opinion, the civilian government, and the military. This current consensus is unprecedented for the Pakistani state. Furthermore, Pakistan maintains good relations with both the US and Iran.

This was not always the case; relations between Washington and Islamabad have witnessed a series of tensions, most notably in the 1980s, when Washington enlisted Pakistan's support for the Afghan mujahideen in their fight against the Soviet Union, both

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<sup>viii</sup> Von Schwerin, U. (2026, March 31). Pakistan ist der wichtigste Vermittler im Iran-Krieg. Warum gerade dieses Land zu Trumps Liebling wurde. (NZZ, Ed.) NZZ.

militarily and ideologically. After achieving its objective, Washington abandoned its former ally, Islamabad, to face these same Islamist jihadists. A second period of significant tension in Islamabad-Washington relations was from 2001 to 2021 (the period of the US military presence in Afghanistan), during which Washington repeatedly accused Islamabad of supporting the Taliban. In the same vein, Washington believes that this same Pakistani support contributed to the return of the Islamist mujahideen to power in Afghanistan.

It should be noted that since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran, Pakistani embassies and consulates have handled Iran's consular and diplomatic functions in the United States. In Tehran, Swiss embassies and consulates serve Washington in this capacity. Currently, Islamabad seeks to move beyond this past and strengthen its relationship with the United States, building upon its positive relations with Iran and the Gulf states.

What strengthened Pakistan's role as a mediator in this conflict was the absence of US military bases on Pakistani soil. Unlike the Gulf states, which were targeted by Iran for hosting US bases, Pakistan has not been a target of Iranian attacks. Despite the disagreements between Tehran and Islamabad, high-level contacts between officials of the two countries have been maintained, to the point that Donald Trump declared that no one knows Iran like Pakistan<sup>ix</sup>.

In terms of political motivations, it's important to note that the positive relationship between Beijing and Islamabad is a strong incentive for Pakistan's mediation diplomacy, as China is among the countries most affected by the disruption to oil flows. Pakistan is attempting to leverage its network of relationships to elevate its geopolitical influence and global role. Simultaneously, the issue of Indian-Pakistani rivalry in South Asia and India's rapid rise in the region must be considered, a rise that has led to Pakistan's decline and its marginalization as a regional power. To be seen as a global power, Pakistan needs such mediation, utilizing its existing relationships with China, the United States, the Gulf States, and Saudi Arabia.

India now fears that the Pakistani administration might manipulate Trump's mindset, as they did when they nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize. Pakistan has been deeply concerned about the growing trade ties between the United States and India. Through this mediation, Pakistan is attempting to shift the balance of power between the two countries, especially given India's long-term and sustained development. The Pakistani mindset now believes it can undermine the strong US-Indian relationship, and Washington has become Pakistan's target for competing with India in South Asia.

Pakistan is also attempting to compete with India for influence among the Gulf states, which are also affected by this war. Should its mediation efforts succeed, Pakistan seeks to secure the best possible deals from the countries and leaders involved in the negotiations, in addition to, of course, increasing its influence within the international

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<sup>ix</sup> Lercher, N. (2026, April 1). Pakistan: Weshalb eine Kriegspartei nun Frieden stiften soll. (Waston, Ed.) *Waston*.

system. Pakistani mediation remains an opportunity to move beyond competition with India and play a different role in the international system<sup>x</sup>.

### 5.1.2 Security Concerns

Islamabad fears a deterioration of relations with its neighbor Iran, with which it shares a 900-kilometer land border, especially given the history of border conflicts between the two countries, the most recent of which occurred in 2024 in the Baluchistan region. At that time, a brief but intense clash took place between the two sides. Iranian fighter jets launched airstrikes against Pakistani separatists, followed by Pakistani attacks on Iranian territory. While the situation has since stabilized, and Pakistan now enjoys good relations with the leadership in Tehran, Islamabad is deeply concerned about the ongoing conflict in neighboring Iran, fearing that the war or its repercussions could affect Pakistan.

Furthermore, the Pakistani military is heavily reliant on arms from the United States and Saudi Arabia, and both countries stand to be significantly affected by this war, especially if it drags on. It is worth noting that a defense agreement already exists between Islamabad and Riyadh. Therefore, Pakistan views mediation as a preferable course of action to becoming embroiled in this conflict. It fears that the current war could escalate into a regional conflict, triggering severe economic crises. These economic crises could then lead to internal tensions or popular protests against the government, further eroding trust between the Pakistani people and their government.

Pakistan is reluctant to escalate the conflict into a regional war in which it would also be drawn, especially given its existing war against the Taliban and another against armed separatists in Iran's Baluchistan province. For Pakistan, instability in Iran translates into instability in Baluchistan, including disruptions to energy supplies and internal instability. These factors create strong incentives for Pakistan to manage the conflict to prevent these domestic repercussions.

Should the conflict escalate into a regional war and Saudi Arabia become involved, Islamabad would find itself under pressure to provide support, even if only symbolic, especially since any Pakistani military intervention would be unwise and destabilizing. Furthermore, Pakistani doctrine precludes treating Iran as an adversary should Saudi Arabia request military assistance from Pakistan. Islamabad also seeks to avoid any military complications with Iran that would further complicate the existing border issues between the two countries<sup>xi</sup>.

Pakistan also fears that the internal security situation could be exacerbated by the presence of 20% Shia Muslims (the second-largest Shia population in the world after Iran), who might sympathize with the Iranian side. This hypothesis is reinforced by the protests that erupted in the Gilgit-Baltistan region of northern Pakistan following the assassination of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. These protests resulted in a significant number of casualties, prompting authorities to impose a curfew. Pakistan, which has a long history of sectarian tensions, fears that this conflict could provide the

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<sup>x</sup> Staniland, P. (2026, April 1). Why Pakistan is Mediating Between the United States and Iran. (T. C. Affairs, Ed.) *The Chicago Council on Global Affairs*.

<sup>xi</sup> Previous Reference.

groundwork for a larger sectarian conflict within its borders. Developments in Iran often have repercussions on the Pakistani domestic scene<sup>xii</sup>.

### 5.1.3 Pakistani Mediation Tools

Islamabad is offering a mediation role in the current conflict through a well-known method: direct contact, such as conveying Trump's fifteen demands to Iran. Pakistani mediation efforts are led by Prime Minister Shehbar Sharif and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, who have conducted approximately twenty telephone conversations to try to de-escalate the situation, bridge the divide, and prevent further escalation. Islamabad is also employing a second mediation tool: official meetings. The Pakistani Foreign Minister has already hosted his counterparts from Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia in Islamabad. Pakistan has also announced another official meeting to be held later between American and Iranian officials in Islamabad.

To date, there has been no official statement regarding the formality of future meetings for negotiations, but Trump has repeatedly affirmed that mediation efforts with the Iranian side are well underway. In addition to the Pakistani Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, General Syed Asim Munir, the Pakistani Army Chief and de facto leader in the country, is personally engaging with the parties to the conflict, particularly US President Donald Trump. Thanks to his tact and diplomatic skills, he has cultivated strong relationships with President Trump, who has received him at the White House several times and referred to him as "my favorite field commander"<sup>xiii</sup>.

Pakistan also employs what is known as shuttle diplomacy, exchanging messages with multiple parties and holding meetings with other regional powers both within and outside Islamabad. The Pakistani Foreign Minister traveled to Beijing in an effort to reach a mutually acceptable agreement. Furthermore, it utilizes telephone diplomacy, as described by the New York Times, employing a range of contacts with officials in various countries to de-escalate the situation<sup>xiv</sup>. Since communication between the two sides of the conflict—Washington and Tehran—remains indirect, this diplomacy is also indirect due to the lack of direct contact between them, with all communications conducted through intermediaries<sup>xv</sup>.

### 5.1.4 Prospects for the Success of Pakistani Mediation

Pakistani mediation diplomacy appears to have considerable prospects for success, largely due to strong domestic backing. There is a broad consensus among the military establishment, the government, civil society, and public opinion regarding the significance of this diplomatic role. Moreover, Pakistan possesses substantial incentives to ensure the effectiveness of this mediation, as successful engagement would enhance its international diplomatic standing. Nevertheless, while these factors increase the likelihood of success, the overall outcome remains uncertain at this stage.

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<sup>xii</sup> Previous Reference.

<sup>xiii</sup> Fährnders, T. (2026, March 30). Warum Pakistan im Irankrieg vermittelt. (F. A. FAZ, Ed.) *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung FAZ*.

<sup>xiv</sup> New York times. (2026). *Pakistan's Telephone Diplomacy*. New York: New York times.

<sup>xv</sup> Mediate. (2026). *How Pakistan emerges as key mediator in US-Iran war, what we know so far*. Mediate.

Additional momentum is provided by Pakistan's close relations with key Gulf capitals, particularly Riyadh, with which it has concluded defense agreements. Furthermore, regional support from Egypt and Turkey—evidenced by recent visits of their foreign ministers to Pakistan and meetings with Pakistani diplomatic officials further reinforces the prospects for successful mediation<sup>xvi</sup>.

In addition to regional backing, Pakistan's mediation diplomacy also benefits from a degree of international support, particularly from China, which has publicly signaled its endorsement of Islamabad's mediating role, thereby potentially enhancing its prospects for success. However, some analysts argue that the composition of the U.S. negotiating team—reportedly led by Witkoff and Kushner—may constitute an obstacle to effective Pakistani mediation. This concern is linked to their perceived involvement in previous efforts that weakened Iranian nuclear negotiations, contributing to the escalation that ultimately led to the outbreak of conflict<sup>xvii</sup>.

There are multiple opportunities for the success of Pakistan's mediation efforts; however, any potential failure would likely be attributed to a range of external factors beyond Islamabad's control. Even in the event of unsuccessful outcomes, Pakistan's diplomatic initiative is likely to be interpreted in good faith, and any shortcomings would not be associated with a lack of competence on the part of Pakistan. Instead, failure would more plausibly be linked to the involvement of highly volatile and unreliable actors within the negotiation process. Moreover, enduring mistrust between the United States and Iran continues to constitute the most significant structural impediment to the success of Pakistani mediation diplomacy<sup>xviii</sup>.

There is a prevailing view that the primary impediment to the success of Pakistani diplomacy lies in the absence of goodwill between Washington and Tehran, a condition reinforced by the continuation of U.S. military actions against Iranian targets. In this regard, all parties are expected to undertake confidence-building measures prior to the initiation of direct negotiations. Concurrently, there appears to be a growing convergence among major international actors, particularly China, in support of Pakistan's regional diplomatic initiative.

Furthermore, the reported nomination of J. D. Vance as a potential U.S. interlocutor with Iran, in place of Wittkopf and Kushner, is perceived by some analysts as a factor that may enhance the prospects for successful mediation. At present, the focal point of diplomatic engagement has increasingly shifted toward Iran; however, the collapse of this diplomatic center of gravity could potentially trigger a broader regional conflict of unprecedented scale<sup>xix</sup>.

Scholarly assessments remain divided regarding the implications of Pakistan's mediation efforts. While some researchers argue that successful mediation would significantly enhance Pakistan's international diplomatic standing, others emphasize that

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<sup>xvi</sup> Die Zeit. (2026, March 29). Pakistan kündigt Gespräche zwischen den USA und dem Iran an. (D. Zeit, Ed.) *Die Zeit*.

<sup>xvii</sup> Brüggemann, L. (2026, March 24). Pakistan will Friedensgespräche zwischen USA und Iran ausrichten – JD Vance als möglicher Vermittler? (B. Zeitung, Ed.) *Berliner Zeitung*.

<sup>xviii</sup> Davies, C. (2026). *How Pakistan won over Trump to become an unlikely mediator in the Iran war*. London: BBC.

<sup>xix</sup> Bin Javaid, O. (2026, March 29). Pakistan hosts four-nation bid to encourage US, Iran towards diplomacy. (A. English, Ed.) *Aljazeera English*.

failure could entail substantial political and strategic costs. In this context, certain analyses attribute potential shortcomings in Pakistan's mediation role to internal contradictions, particularly tensions arising from segments of the Shiite community within Pakistan who, reportedly influenced by the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader, oppose Islamabad's rapprochement with the United States.

Additionally, strained relations with neighboring states such as Afghanistan and India further complicate Pakistan's diplomatic positioning. The absence of formal diplomatic relations between Pakistan and Israel is also identified as a structural limitation that may constrain the effectiveness of Pakistani mediation in broader regional negotiations<sup>xx</sup>.

### **5.1.5 The Pakistani Mediation and the US-China Hegemony Struggle**

Pakistan's mediation efforts shall be interpreted within the broader context of the global struggle for hegemony between the United States and China. Beijing has sought to encourage Pakistan to concentrate primarily on managing the Pakistani–Afghan conflict in order to safeguard the security and continuity of the Chinese Silk Road initiative. However, through its mediation activities, Pakistan appeared to align more closely with the United States' strategic interests, a position that could be interpreted as diverging from China's regional priorities. Pakistan's mediation efforts were received with caution rather than endorsement by Beijing, which advised Islamabad to prioritize resolving tensions with its neighbor, Afghanistan. China's cautious stance reflects its awareness that Pakistan's mediation initiatives are taking place within a broader United States–led diplomatic framework. Consequently, Beijing has approached these developments with a degree of pragmatism and restraint. Pakistan's actions may have undermined China's security interests in Afghanistan, potentially compelling Beijing to recalibrate its regional strategy. China's unease stems from concerns regarding its long-term strategic and economic investments in the region, where it faces significant competition from the United States. Moreover, the recent rapprochement between the United States and Pakistan could weaken the strategic significance of the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, a development that has raised concerns in Beijing<sup>xxi</sup>.

In the context of the Beijing meeting between Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Pakistani Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, China outlined a five-point initiative that appeared to emphasize general diplomatic principles rather than concrete, action-oriented commitments. At the same time, Beijing has shown signs of unease regarding Field Marshal Asif Munir, who has recently received notable praise from United States President Donald Trump. The underlying reason for this perception is Pakistan's apparent neglect of Chinese interests in Afghanistan. The growing rapprochement between the United States under President Donald Trump and Pakistan has further prompted Beijing to express concerns and consider recalibrating its regional approach. This issue extends beyond Pakistan's mediation efforts in a specific conflict; rather, it is

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<sup>xx</sup> Sharma, S. (2026, March 30). Why Pakistan's ambitious bid to mediate in the US-Iran war could 'backfire'. (T. Independent, Ed.) *The Independent*.

<sup>xxi</sup> Previous Reference

rooted in China's long-term strategic and economic investments across the broader region. China has made substantial investments to expand its economic corridor through both Pakistan and Afghanistan, while also seeking to increase its economic footprint within Afghanistan. These efforts are aimed at leveraging Afghanistan's strategic geopolitical location as a critical gateway linking Central Asia, South Asia, and West Asia, a key component of China's broader connectivity ambitions under the Belt and Road Initiative. However, China remains concerned about the security situation in Afghanistan, which has become central to its wider regional vision and long-term strategic planning<sup>xxii</sup>. The recent Pakistani approach and mediation efforts were understood by Beijing as Pakistan is helping the United States. What supports this is the Pakistani targeting multiple locations, such as Bagram Airfield. China is worried that if the Pakistani enable the United States to get access to the Bagram air Base, it would be used against China. Pakistan is seeking to foment instability in Afghanistan by reinforcing tensions between Kabul and Kandahar to undermine the Taliban, which had had closer ties with New Delhi. The Pakistani military operation in Afghanistan is completely backed by the United States. We can understand that in the context of the rivalry between Washington and Beijing over hegemony. China seeks to avoid criticizing Pakistan severely in order not to lose it forever. As the systemic rivalry between the USA and China intensified and expanded, it would be very difficult for Islamabad to continue its balancing act between the two countries. The two tigers (Washington and Beijing) cannot live in the main mountain (Pakistan), and their interests will overlap in Pakistan, where Beijing is developing an economic and infrastructure footprint, and the USA has security interests. The Pakistani room for maneuver will be narrower as the competition between the two powers intensifies. For this reason, China is not satisfied with the Pakistani mediations<sup>xxiii</sup>.

Beijing seeks to encourage Pakistan to prioritize stability in Afghanistan in order to safeguard the substantial Chinese investments in the country, particularly those linked to the revitalization of the Silk Road initiative. This initiative constitutes a key component of the broader strategic competition between the United States and China in their contest for global influence and hegemonic positioning<sup>xxiv</sup>.

The volatile area of South Asia has become a proxy arena for the U.S.-Chinese rivalry. For this reason, China is attempting to damage the longstanding relationship between Pakistan and the USA. On the other side, the USA is seeking to lessen Pakistan's growing dependence on China. For this reason, Beijing is concerned about the recent rapprochement between the USA and Pakistan.

Pakistan is increasingly caught in the strategic competition between the two major powers, the United States and China. This geopolitical rivalry is not confined to Pakistan alone; rather, it extends across the broader region of South Asia, which is likely to experience significant political and strategic repercussions as the rivalry intensifies. Furthermore, Pakistan's recent mediation efforts in the conflict between the United States

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<sup>xxii</sup> Khurshid, I. (2026, April 7). Pakistan's Mediation Ambitions and China's Quiet Discontent. (PRF, Ed.) *PRF*.

<sup>xxiii</sup> Previous Reference

<sup>xxiv</sup> Adlakha, H. (2026, April 10). Expert Explains | View in China on Pakistan's mediation: Chance for 'global rebrand', but pressure-driven. (T. I. Express, Ed.) *The Indian Express*.

and Iran have highlighted its growing diplomatic role in regional politics. However, these developments have also raised the perception that Islamabad may be prioritizing its strategic relations with Washington. Pakistan currently finds itself in a situation in which maintaining a strategic balance between major powers has become increasingly difficult. In this context, it is important to consider the country's domestic conditions, particularly the economic challenges marked by rising inflation and financial instability. These economic pressures have compelled the government of Shehbaz Sharif to pursue closer relations with both major powers, China and the United States. However, this diplomatic approach has generated concerns in China, especially given that India—China's principal strategic rival in Asia—has already moved to strengthen its strategic partnership with the United States. Maintaining a neutral position is likely to become increasingly difficult for Pakistan in the coming years. On the one hand, the United States has expressed growing concern regarding the expanding economic and strategic investments made by China in Pakistan. On the other hand, China has also shown caution toward the mediation role undertaken by Islamabad in the recent tensions between the United States and Iran. At the same time, India has significantly strengthened its economic and military cooperation with the United States. In response to this evolving regional dynamic and its strategic competition with India, Pakistan has sought to pursue comparable forms of cooperation with Washington. It is Pakistan's sovereign right to develop diplomatic and strategic relations with various international actors. However, recent policy shifts in Pakistan have been viewed with suspicion by China and are often interpreted within the broader context of the global competition for hegemony. The emerging alignment between Pakistan and the United States could adversely affect the traditionally close relations between Pakistan and China, and it may potentially hinder the implementation of several projects associated with the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor. Furthermore, the situation has become increasingly complex as the two major powers—the United States and China—have intensified their rivalry over technological, economic, security, and ideological interests in Pakistan. Consequently, Pakistan may be required to reconsider aspects of its foreign policy and adopt new diplomatic strategies if it seeks to maintain a balanced position between these two great powers<sup>xxv</sup>.

In other words, Pakistan is seeking to find new tactics to develop mutual beneficial relationships with the two giants or the two superpowers. The main and most important reason behind this is that the rivalry between the USA and China is intensifying rapidly<sup>xxvi</sup>. The recent Pakistani mediation in the US-Iran conflict was clearly understood as an integral part of the increasing rivalry between the USA and China.

Some researchers have described the recent US-Pakistan closure as “alarming” or as “sudden”, because it raises concerns about the future of the China-Pakistan Corridor CPEC. Prioritizing the interests of the USA over those of China (resolving the conflict with Afghanistan for the safety of the Silk Road). The turning point came, as mentioned above, when Trump could end the Pakistan-India war in May 2025, when Islamabad supported Trump's candidacy for the Nobel Prize. This was followed by a booming in

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<sup>xxv</sup> Awan, S. (2026, April 21). Caught Between Giants: Pakistan in the US–China Competition. (T. D. Insight, Ed.)

<sup>xxvi</sup> Ali, S. M. (2020, December 1). The U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry and its Implications for Pakistan. (STIMSON, Ed.) *STIMSON*.

the trade exchange between the USA and Pakistan. The recent mediations, along with the above-mentioned trade interests, have alarmed China. The Chinese government glances at the recent Pakistani movements with anger and mistrust. We should not forget that Beijing accused Islamabad of escalating the situation in Afghanistan to facilitate the return of the US troops to Afghanistan, which would undermine the passage of the Chinese Silk Road through Afghanistan. China was usually seeking to extend CEPEC to Kabul and prevent the Americanizing of Pakistan. For this reason, the recent mediation efforts made by Pakistan had not been praised by China, which fears mediation<sup>xxvii</sup>.

The Pakistani mediation in the conflict between the USA and Iran rankled China, and this Pakistani step underscores a deeper churn in the geopolitics of West Asia. Islamabad's mediation undermines China's preference for a multipolar world. The mediation is merely a Pakistani step, and it is just a step of a broader systematic tactic followed by the Pakistani government to balance the relations with the two superpowers. Washington itself and its engagement with Islamabad are driven by expediency and not trust<sup>xxviii</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

Pakistan has the right to strengthen its economic and cultural ties with all countries around the globe. Islamabad gives priority to its economy, and it desires to deal with the severe inflation and the high unemployment rate by attracting foreign investments from different countries, including the two Superpowers the USA and China. In addition, Beijing has played a mediation role in the recent conflict between Washington and Tehran, depending on its historical ties to the two countries. At the same time, it should realize that these tactics plague other partners as China and Russia. The US under Donald Trump is seeking to strengthen its domination over the world, emphasizing the idea of the sole pole. Furthermore, Washington desires to escalate the stability in Afghanistan to find an excuse to return its military troops to Afghanistan. The US policymakers think that their military presence in Afghanistan would undermine the Chinese Silk Road initiative. Hence, Islamabad should start thinking of new methods and tactics to balance its relations with the two giants.

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<sup>xxvii</sup> Singh, A. G. (2026, April 22). The Future of China and Pakistan's 'Iron Friendship'. (O. R. Foundation, Ed.) *Observer Research Foundation*.

<sup>xxviii</sup> Lal, N. (2026, April 16). Why India is rankled by Pakistan playing mediator in US-Iran war. (S. C. Post, Ed.) *South China Morning Post*.

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### Conflict of Interest Statement

I, the author Eslam Said Elshenawy, acknowledge that I do not have any type of competing financial interests that may influence my writing this paper.

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