

Pakistan and the Palestine Issue: Emerging Geopolitical Paradoxes

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Abstract

Global or regional politics is examined in the context of geographical landscape in the present time. Geopolitical considerations are significant in policy-making process for both preponderant powers as well as smaller states. Nevertheless, in the matrix of core and periphery, the peripheral nations are propelled to align with the core states. Therefore, small states like Pakistan are challenged with multiple enigmas by international political and economic forces. Although up-keeping to Palestinian cause has always remained a cardinal feature of Pakistan's foreign policy but during the recent 'Gaza War' the pressure from international establishmentarian forces to ensure support for 'Abraham Accord' for the recognition of Israel compromised the strategic autonomy in the sphere of foreign policy. The government of Pakistan seems facing the issues of internal legitimacy, extended cooperation to accomplish this accord to gain foreign backing. This research epitomizes that why Pakistan's stance for Palestinians is reshaped to the acceptance of Abraham Accord? How patron-client relations contributed to align with the big powers? This qualitative research possibly comes to this conclusion that Pakistan despite her atomic power, vital geopolitical position and the heart of Muslim world did not develop her bargaining capacity in front of international forces.

Key Words

Pakistan, Geopolitical, Israel, Strategic autonomy, Paradoxes, Middle East, Palestinians.

Introduction

The term geopolitical was first coined by Swedish scholar Rudolf Kjellen in 1899 to magnify the role of physical features in shaping regional and global political strategies and external relations. This phenomenon prevailed in the international system and changed the parameters of worldwide politics. This new dimension of foreign policies became more pronounced as hegemonic powers established their dominance over different regions with the geopolitical prism. In this connection the trends of clientalism also emerged to align with the smaller states to seek competing interests of big powers. As compared to other regions, Middle East remained entangled with the cycle of violence due to combatant nationalist forces on both sides including Palestinian Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Hezbollah, and Popular Front for the Liberation in Palestine and Jewish groups in Israel. There had been multiple wars fought between Arab states and Israeli occupation forces since 1947 till present war of Gaza to deter each other's geopolitical apprehensions. Palestinian authorities

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perceived that Israel formed her illegitimate statehood over their homeland and continued the de-facto rule to achieve her expansionist designs of greater Israel. Over a period of time major powers intervened in the regional politics of Middle East to maintain deterrence against each other with the tactics of clientalism. Israel was patronized by Western Powers' mainly US while Arab states were supported by Russians. However, gradually the Arab leaders were neutralized under various accords³ or peace agreements⁴. Side by side military regimes were also bolstered to continue indirect intervention in the region. The trends of patron-client relations compromised strategic autonomy of the smaller nations in their foreign policy domain under the 'Cold War' and 'Post-Cold War' eras. Big powers sought this strategy to maintain their status-quo in various regions that also resulted in several regime change operations.

Objectives of Research

This study substantiates the following objectives:

- To expound the importance of geopolitical concomitants with regard to international politics.
- To examine the recent paradoxes of geopolitics in Middle East regarding Palestinian issue.
- To highlight the strategic restraints for Pakistan due to clientalism.

Methodological Significance of Research

This study focuses on recent developments during Gaza War' and provides a holistic review of the phenomenon of patron-client relations creating bounded rationality for smaller states. This qualitative study addresses why' and how' questions with non-numerical and observational tools. More expressively the literature review comprises an essential discussion to generate valid queries in accordance with the hypothetical underpinnings. The well-grounded argument about geopolitics and clientalism are potent due to relevant case study. The conceptual diversification of this study makes it authentic for generalization and different from traditional literary work. The amalgamation of geopolitical dynamics in Middle East and limited strategic choices for vulnerable states in the context of clientalism illustrates the prospects of this study. The central argument is logically constructed to unfold implicit realities. The organization of qualitative data reveals an authenticity of evidences and pertinent facts. The methodology is more interpretivist and opens avenues for future researchers.

³ The Camp David Accords, signed by President Jimmy Carter, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin in September 1978, established a framework for Arab recognition of Israel's right to exist, outlining the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the West Bank to pave the way for Palestinian statehood, and safeguarding Israel's security.

⁴ The two-state solution was the bedrock of the U.S.-backed peace process ushered in the 1993 Oslo Accords, signed by Yasser Arafat of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin.

Literature Review

(Sidaway, 2001) quotes Mackinder to trace the origin of geopolitical school of thought that shifted the focus on certain geographical pivots of history to highlight the significance of geography aligned with state supremacy for major powers. He perceived that world hegemonic power could be attained with the domination over heartland zones including Eastern and Central Europe during early 20th century due to their rich mineral resources and agricultural potential. Therefore various empires were set up in Europe like Germans under Hitler (1933-1945) occupied most of the central and Eastern European countries along with Western Europe. In a similar way Russia continued to penetrate in Eastern Europe during 'Cold War' as a countervailing force against US.

(Cahnman, 1943) explained that geopolitics comprises the connection between political events and the physical features of the earth. It provides tools to set the direction of political actions and spatial analysis of all developments. Geographical foundation of strategies by the international contenders compel them to extend their borders as practiced by colonial states in the past. Britishers used various stratagems like clientalism and cooptation to sustain their rule over colonies in Asia and Africa. (Ikenberry, 2014) epitomizes that geography has been a significant factor in shaping foreign policies by the major powers largely to promote their regional preponderance over resources and power-wielders. Like US continued to maintain her hegemony after WWII mainly to contain USSR in the communist camp and Iran in the Middle East. US engaged newly-emerging states in South Asia and Gulf Region through military alliances including SEATO⁵, CENTO⁶ or METO. These region-specific defense pacts provided US a global platform to exercise aggressive policies against her rivals.

(Mead, 2014) expounded that in the post-Cold War' era there was a growing tendency to perceive issues of security, politics, economy and national self-determination in terms of geopolitics. Unification of Germany and integration of former Warsaw-Pact states into NATO and EU over a period of time were witnessed as momentous geopolitical developments in Europe. Major power-contenders developed their global strategies with respect to geographical concomitants to achieve their regional strategic objectives. In this perspective Afghan-Pak Policy by US President Obama during 'War on Terror' in 2009 was of great concern. Under this stratagem US president made it clear that Al Qaeda terrorist elements were being operated from Pakistan in Afghanistan due to their geographical contiguity. Pakistan was also given \$1.5 billion for counter-terrorism. Similarly, a new group of states was designed incorporating Gulf States, Russia, China and India to align them against terrorism.

(Koch, 2017) explains the importance of regions due to their constructed nature, economic resources, cultural values and identity recognition. Regions have capacity for extensive collaboration among people through state structures. They develop their indigenous networks to

⁵ SEATO was the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization, a Cold War-era anti-communist defensive alliance formed in 1954 and officially disbanded in 1977.

⁶ CENTO or METO was a Cold War-era military alliance (1955-1979) between countries like Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and the UK.

enhance connectivity and cultural bonding. Like ASEAN⁷ states form a well-connected and homogenous region with immense trade volume and democratic solidarity. With the process of decolonization these regional states developed their capacity and resilience against external interventions. The formation of ASEAN provided a platform to all states for cultural and economic exchanges. However Middle Eastern⁸ region although rich in oil and gas reservoirs could not ensure peace and harmony. Despite their religious and linguistic commonalities Middle Eastern states could not contain foreign intrusions, non-democratic rule, ethnic and sectarian confrontation. Regime change in this region continued during the 'Cold War' that facilitated the rule of military dictators who served for the interests of major powers.

Crisis Group (2008) shed light on polarization among Palestinian political and resistant groups. Main leading group in terms of struggle against Israeli forces has been Hamas that always supported unconditional dialogue with Arab countries for the state of Palestinian people. They did not join PA (Palestinian Authorities) or any agreement with Arab countries to compromise Palestinian boundaries. Hamas was of the view that Israel must withdraw its forces and restore borders existed before 1967 according to 'Green Line' or 'Armistice Border 1949' that demarcated areas between Israel and Arab countries including Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. This geopolitical demarcation was violated by Israel during 1967 Six-Day War. After this war Israel occupied East Jerusalem, the West Bank of Jordan River, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights of Syria. Since then Israeli occupation forces continued to capture Palestinian territory, confining them into limited landmass. Israel perceived that 'Green Line' was not an international boundary therefore expanded her borders and included as many areas as she could be to enhance her tangible power and natural resources. As a matter of fact the Palestinian political and fighting groups remained organizationally divided that hindered to protect their geopolitical interests. Internal fragmentation assisted Israel's expansionist designs also obstructing the supply chain like transportation of food, industrial goods, gas and fuel to Palestinian population.

(Arosoaie, 2015) examined the nature of strategic interaction among leading political groups in Palestine. There was a general disposition that Hamas and Palestinian Authorities could not develop a reconciliatory mechanism to continue their political engagement. Mahmoud Abbas from Fatah political party served as president of Palestine during 2005-2010. However, Hamas kept on castigating PA for losing territorial and political command. Moreover during 2014 the coalition government was formed by PA but Hamas did not extend participation rather war between Israel and Hamas in 2014 created more intense situation and affected the efforts for peace process between Israel and PA. This war caused massive devastations, 2200 casualties of Palestinians and eleven thousand people were wounded. Mahmoud Abbas claimed that Hamas triggered conflict to

⁷ The ASEAN region refers to the countries of Southeast Asia that are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), a political and economic organization established in 1967 to promote regional peace, stability, and economic growth.

⁸ The Middle East is a geopolitical region encompassing the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, the Levant, and Turkey. The term came into widespread usage by Western European nations in the early 20th century

increase popular support from the indigenous population rather Hamas promoted this narrative that PA had no commitment to recover Palestinian land from US-backed Israeli forces.

(Doxsee, Palmer & McCabe, 2024) expounded that the 2023 war broke out in the backdrop of persistent violence and political uncertainties in Palestine. Israel had been facing resistance from Hamas since the very beginning. During this recent war Hamas made strategic attacks on Israeli defense system through missiles, small-scale armed perpetrators and insurgents. These enormous strikes inflicted unexpected collateral damages to Israel. This move was responded by Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu with more brutal and genocidal assaults on Palestinians in Gaza and West Bank. Infact, uncompromising nationalistic aspirations from both sides aggravated blatant conflicts. This recent uprising put multifarious geopolitical implications at regional and international levels. The Palestinian resistant forces and Israeli authorities both entangled into an unending battle. Hamas implicated Benjamin Netanyahu to expand its boundaries for executing 'greater Israel' and accomplish Abraham Accords (set of agreements to normalize diplomatic channels between Israel and Arab states).

(Ehsan, 2025) elucidates that several Arab states like Bahrain and United Arab Emirates endorsed US-backed 'Abraham Accords' to stop 'Gaza War' and initiate peace plan. In this perspective other Muslim countries like Turkey, Pakistan, Indonesia and Azerbaijan are also engaged for joint force to fight against insurgents in Palestine to maintain peace. Nevertheless, international community all over the world showed solidarity with Palestinians and condemned human rights violation. Various volunteers took responsibility and launched freedom flotilla to Gaza with the purpose of humanitarian assistance. Despite all these developments though Pakistan government expressed tacit support to Palestinian state but the participation in 'Abraham Accord' became controversial as various schools of thought raised questions on the validity of this peace process given by President Trump. It was witnessed that massive killings of Palestinian citizens continued in Gaza therefore, the prospects of this peace accord appeared quite bleak. On the other side the Arab countries pursuing their geo-economic interests pushed Pakistan to join this peace plan and send troops to Gaza for counter-terrorism. The question arises that who will guarantee to end oppression in Gaza and Pakistan will either take side of US-backed forces in Israel or protect Palestinian population from atrocities. Pakistan's official stance for 'Abraham Accord' seems to be determined by clientalism that refers to a broader standpoint in politics for extending patron-client relation between immensely powerful and weak states. This phenomenon is visibly found in global politics to provide personal benefits to certain parties or individuals to perpetuate their rule. Such parties or rulers manipulate public resources for their vested interests. The beneficiaries of clientalism cause elite capture and political maneuvering. Their approach turns out to be more discretionary rather than democratic.

(Hicken, 2011) elaborates that clientalistic practices promote non-representative forces in national politics. These trends also strengthen ethno-nationalistic tendencies. More polarization restrains transparent electoral process. Similarly media and judiciary are constrained for restricting opposing narratives. Patron-client relation is also characterized as instrumental friendship' where

relations depend upon strategic interests like various scholars perceived Pak-US relations as marriage of convenience during 1979-Afghan War'. These relations have vertical hierarchy from top to bottom perverting the international norms. Sovereignty and strategic autonomy of smaller states are compromised. Diplomatic vulnerabilities put more strain on cliental states like Pakistan due to bounded rationality.

In addition to that patron-client relation reciprocates both parties for their personal benefits. Now and then disequilibrium occurs when parties become dissatisfied due to power asymmetries and non-compliance on the part of client. Patron enforces the client to comply all terms and conditions but client gets deprived owing to less opportunities. Sometimes clients choose other options to change the status-quo. The dominance of patron also depends upon the nature of international system either tending to uni-polarity, bi-polarity or multi-polarity. In reality, clientalism has been an established attribute of global politics since colonization till present. Global powers inclined to keep hegemony over the developing states through such pressure tactics.

Research Questions

This study corroborates the following questions:

- Why are geopolitical concomitants significant in the context of shaping international politics?
- How do emerging geopolitical paradoxes in the Middle East, particularly concerning the Palestine issue, affect Pakistan's foreign policy and strategic interests?
- What have been the strategic constraints on Pakistan's foreign and security policy due to clientalism?

The Paradoxes of Ideological Drivers and Pragmatism in Pakistan

Pakistan is situated at the cross roads of three key regions; South Asia, Central Asia and West Asia along with its access to the Arabian Sea. Additionally, Pakistan shares borders with key regional powers China and India, middle powers such as Iran and strategically vital and conflict zones such as Afghanistan. Pakistan has an apparent role in the execution of projects like CPEC and Gwadar port which are meant to connect landlocked Central Asia to sea, to provide shorter trade routes to Western China towards West Asia and Africa, to diversify global trade, to uplift regional economic and industrial growth and in due course building an economic bloc. This geo-strategic positioning of Pakistan not only makes it quite relevant with energy and trade transit politics but also to the global security dynamics.

Pakistan's foreign policy since its inception is characterized by proceeding into different directions. The urge for Islamic solidarity, traditional rivalry with India and support to the right of self-determination to Kashmiris is primarily driven by ideological factors which makes religion an integral component of foreign policy considerations. However, the economic rationality, security compulsions in given geo-political settings and impulses to transform Pakistan into a modern and progressive nation in a globalized world suggest a different path for Pakistan where ideology is an

outdated parameter to prioritize national interests. The third trail reflects the domestic contestation of interests where Pakistan's armed forces seem most powerful state institution which informally mediates between the different stake holders and seeks political co-option while navigating the foreign policy of Pakistan. The security threat discernments of Pakistan's military, its conceptualization of Pakistan as a 'National Security State', its organizational interests and interfaces with key global powers added a clientalist approach in foreign policy. The frequent military rules and informal political control by military in Pakistan intertwined the notions of sustainable democracy (to mollify the idea of liberal democracy) and clientalism (to offer strategic relevance) to pacify the West. This fusion provides a hybrid system comprises of a civilian setup formally operating whereas military elite remains at the helm of affairs. For instance, apart from Pakistan diplomatic and principle standing with Palestine, in 1978 Pakistani military was profoundly involved in military action⁹ against Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO)'s belligerents and civilians in Jordan while causing deaths of many Palestinian (Remembering the Pakistani dictator accused of 'slaughtering' Palestinians, 2021).

Pakistan's geo-strategic position and external security interests largely shape its geo-politics which is entangled with clientalism. The geo-politics of Pakistan leads it towards political, diplomatic and strategic bargains with global key powers. In absence of a viable and productive economy, the prioritized security prerequisites of Pakistan, its traditional rivalry with India and challenges of militancy require external funding for military modernization and defense. The external funding reinforces patronage bargains and networks mostly with U.S., China, Saudi Arab and other Gulf states. This patronage often comes in the shape of Pakistan's participation in strategic projects, military assistance, subsidies, foreign aid, economic incentives and diplomatic support. This patronage is time and again reciprocated by offering favorable investment openings, access to security positions and contracts for extraction of natural and mineral resources of Pakistan.

⁹ It has been reported that Pakistan secretly moved an entire infantry regiment under the headship of Zia-ul-Haq (later became Pakistan's president after military coup & constitutional engineering) to Jordan during infamous 'Black September' (TheWeek., 2021). The Palestinian insurgent groups such as the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) backed by both Iraq & Syria attacked on Israel from Jordan. This developed concerns of King Hussein of Jordan who survived two assassination attempts, especially due to the presence of a significant Iraqi Army contingent in Jordan that was supposedly there to protect against Israel. Palestinian militant groups were also supported by It is estimated that approximately 20000-25000 Palestinian civilians were killed. See; Dissent Today. (October 18, 2023). <https://dissenttoday.net/featured/when-pakistans-brigadier-zia-ul-haq-led-military-offensive-killing-more-than-3000-palestinians/#:~:text=More-.When%20Pakistan's%20Brigadier%20Zia%20Dul%20Haq%20Led%20Military%20Offensive%20Killing,over%203%2C000%20Palestinians%20in%20Jordan>. Also see, an article on 50 years of 'Black September' by Bruce Riedel, a former CIA officer, 'Remembering a Triumph in Intelligence: Fifty Years after "Black September" in Jordan'. Studies in Intelligence Vol. 64, No. 2 (June 2020). <https://www.cia.gov/resources/csi/static/Black-September-Jordan.pdf>

Pakistan Foreign Policy towards Palestine-Israel Conflict over the Years

Pakistan's pro-Palestine policy was established by its founding father; Mohammad Ali Jinnah's principle standing on the issue. The undisputable support for Palestine is historical¹⁰ and it was largely result of a consensus shaped among Muslim leadership even before the existence of Pakistan. Jinnah as the president of the All India Muslim League (AIML), included the Palestine issue in every meeting and session of his party. Under the Jinnah's leadership, Pakistan was one of the thirteen countries who voted against the British plan of dividing Palestine in 1947. Jinnah also criticized the partition scheme while viewing it against the will of the Palestinian people. He expounded that Pakistan had no other way except for supporting Arabs to evade outrage as an implications of illegitimate division (Hooper, 2000). In May 1948, David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister sent a telegram to Jinnah to establish diplomatic relations with Pakistan however it was denied (Mehmood, 2018). Later the pro-Palestinian policy by Pakistan was guided by the Article 40 of Constitution of 1973 which directs to establish relations with Muslim countries to strengthen Islamic unity and emphasizes the settlement of international disputes by peaceful means.

The non-recognition of Israel is the prime feature of Pakistan's foreign policy towards the Palestine issue. Pakistan's non-recognition of territorial occupation of Palestinian land and historical injustice is not symbolic as it does not allow Pakistani Passport holders to travel Israel. This is officially implemented by printing a special statement on Pakistani passports which declares that 'this passport is valid for all countries of the world except Israel'. Over the years, Pakistan consistently advocated the 'two states solution' as Pakistan's stance on Palestine meant to bring peace in West Asia. Pakistan advocates that 'State of Palestine should be established on the basis of pre-1967 borders, with Al Quds Al-Sharif as its capital' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of Pakistan, 2023). Pakistan's support for Palestine is primarily built on a shared sense of Islamic identity, yearning for pan-Islamic unity, historical ideological standings, support to end of colonial rule, moral obligations of validating international law and human rights Pakistan's principle standing on Palestine issue often contradicted with its national security policies which led the country to align with Western bloc and especially the United States; substantially a key supporter of Israel. Pakistan with its pro-Western disposition always remained quite close to conservative regimes of West Asia while having a censorious approach towards Arab nationalism of Nassar of Egypt (Kumaraswamy, 2006). In the wake of War on Terror and prospects of getting 3 billion US dollar aid package, an informal departure from

¹⁰ In October, 1938, provincial assembly of Sindh showed a sense of solidarity with Palestine while condemning British policy of dividing the land. On August 26, 1938 to agitate against the repressive & unjust British policies, All-India Muslim Leagues' Council passed a resolution to commemorate 'Palestine Day' across United India. In similar way, in March 1940, while proceeding the historic session, Jinnah raised the Palestine issue & condemned the pro-Jewish British policy. For the detail of related events, see; Qaisar.S. (2018). Quaid-I-Azam Mohammad Ali Jinnah and Palestine Question. Journal of Historical Studies Vol. IV (2) (July-December) PP. 35-55. Also see; Qaisar.S.(2019). Jinnah and Palestine Question. Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan.Vol.56 (1). https://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/history/PDF-FILES/4_56_1_19.pdf

previous tough anti-Israel policy of Pakistan was indicated when Riaz Khokhar, Pakistan's Foreign Secretary in a press conference at Washington on June 23, 2003 explicated clearly that 'sooner or later Pakistan will have to recognize Israel'. On June 29, 2003 while in an interview to Pakistani media, President Musharraf also questioned the wisdom of Pakistan's Israel policy and suggested a potential shift. He asked for the initiation of domestic media debate on the rationality of considering the recognition of Israel and asserted that Pakistan doesn't have any direct conflict with Israel (Iqbal, 2006). He expounded that "I have been saying. 'Should we be more Catholic than the pope or more pious than the pope or more Palestinian than the Palestinians themselves?'" Musharraf said. "Is this the right attitude or should there be some change in it? There should be national consensus on it" (Kumaraswamy, 2006). This public but informal change in Pakistan's stance led to initiate the first ever high level meeting in Turkey between the foreign ministers of Pakistan (Khurshid Kasuri) and Israel (Silvan Shalom) in September 2005. President Musharraf justified the respective meeting while emphasizing on the need to incorporate rationality in Pakistan's policy in an interview with Newsweek on January 29, 2006. He informally endorsed the recognition of Israel while saying that "We are for the creation of a Palestinian homeland but we accept Israel's reality as a state. I feel we can contribute more strongly to this cause by talking to Israel" (Usher, 2006). Under the Musharraf regime, Pakistan also accepted the Israel's offer of financial aid and relief equipment through UN following the devastated earthquake in 2005 as part of international relief efforts (GulfNews, 2005). It would be unjust to claim that the informal connection were exclusively initiated under President Musharraf regime.

It seems that close military and security connections between US and Pakistan played an important role to shape an alternate stance of Pakistan towards Israel however it was not turned into an official policy due to persistent strong anti-Israel and partial anti-American public sentiments. Due to various phases of Islamization, portrayal of certain foreign policy decisions such as proxy war against Soviet Union as holy war (Jihad) and frequent representation of Pakistan as fortress of Islam in domestic politics by state elite to secure legitimacy of their rule lessened the prospects to formulate foreign policy from rational perspective. In Pakistani politics and society, pro-Palestinian emotions are profoundly entrenched with religious-cum-political parties and Islamist groups having ability to recurrently organize mass protests against Israeli atrocities in Gaza. This makes any effort to normalization of relations with Israel a highly complex matter that can aggravate substantial domestic repercussions to destabilize the government. (Kaura, 2020) Argues that the rapprochement between Pakistan and Israel is quite unlikely due to persistent ideological positioning of Pakistani state and widespread Islamic orientations of its people. Although Muslim countries of West Asia largely shifted their strategic focus from Palestine-Israel conflict to countering the Iranian threat in the region. In the recent past, signs of improvement in Israel's relations with some of the Arab states such as UAE, Bahrain and Saudi Arab also commenced a debate among the Pakistani elite though not very openly to consider the country's decades' old policy of non-recognition of Israel. This led to the questioning of ideological aspect of Pakistan foreign policy as pro-Israeli political voices emerged in Pakistan to formulate foreign policy on rational grounds. Additionally, Israel doesn't see Pakistan as a

direct threat or enemy as it looks at Iran (Anand, 2005). Pakistan also never threatened Israel and its opposition Jewish state confines to diplomatic condemnation in the context of formal support to Palestine. Secondly, the emergent closeness of India with Israel is also cited as a key reason by some of the Pakistani political elite to stress the need for normalization of relation with Israel. The advocates of normalization of relations with Israel are of the view that this would bring a pragmatic approach as Pakistan will not only be able to purchase advanced Israeli weapons but can also balance India by showing the gestures of warmth to Israel while containing a probable India-Israel's Islamo-phobic alignment against Pakistan (Kaura V. , 2020).

The endeavors of normalization of relations between Pakistan and Israel are not at all productive due to persistent suspicion among the Pakistani masses about the intentions of pro-Israeli voices as they are largely labelled as Western agents having Zionist agenda. These pro-Israeli advocates are either from elite class largely living abroad or politically unpopular figures generally associated informally with Pakistan's power 'Establishment'. For instance, Shama Junejo, a Pakistani researcher residing in London and known for her pro-Israeli stance was awarded Pakistan's highest civilian award in May 2024 for her indeterminate services in journalism under PML-N government. Later she was apparently included in Pakistan's delegation to United Nations' General Assembly in September 2025 and seated behind the Pakistan's Minister of Defense, Khawaja Asif (Brohi, 2025). Her alleged unauthorized inclusion brought a strong backlash on social media while creating a perception that PML-N government is secretly endorsing Israel. In response to public criticism, Minister of Defense distanced himself from her while explicating that she was not officially in the delegation list (Dawn, 2025). In a similar way, Asma Hameed; a member of ruling party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) delivered a speech in the parliament in 2018 while referring to a verse of Quran as a solution to Palestine issue and stressed for recognition of Israel. The rumors were spread that a resolution was about to present in the parliament to recognize Israel. These speculations were part of culture of traditional rivalry of government and opposition in Pakistan where religion related allegations can destroy the credibility of an elected government. Resultantly, doubts were raised about the intentions of PTI due to its alleged links to Jewish lobby as its key leader Imran Khan was previously married to a Jewish lady (Ali, 2018).

Geo-politics and Clientalism: Emergent Compulsions for Pakistan

Israel-Palestine conflict is prolonged issue and deeply engrained in geo-political dynamics of world politics. Historically, Pakistan's reliance on external patrons has determined the nature of its diplomatic posture, where alliance maintenance has been prioritized over ideological coherence. During the Cold War, Pakistan's alignment with the United States within security frameworks such as SEATO and CENTO fostered a clientalist orientation that subordinated broader foreign policy objectives to strategic dependency (Siddiqi, 2016). This alignment created long-lasting effects, which have framed Pakistan's relations with Middle Eastern politics and limited its ability to assume assertive stances on issues that could challenge relations with its patrons-usually on issues

related to Palestine. While Pakistan has consistently articulated rhetorical support for Palestinian self-determination, its diplomatic engagement has more often than not been cautious and reactive in relation to the constraint imposed by its external dependencies. This cautious and alert approach is reflected in several defining moments in Pakistani history, in which foreign policy decisions were more influenced by calculations of alliances than ideological fervor per se. For instance, consider the Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973, in which Pakistan offered diplomatic support as well as symbolic military assistance to the Arab countries, but clearly held back from an all-out conflict against Israel's principal ally, the United States, only in international censure (Rizvi, 2013). Even at times when pan-Islamic cohesion was at its height, Pakistan remained cautious in its policy responses to ensure its vital interests in its warm relations with Washington are not compromised, particularly in terms of its crucial assistance to it in areas of weapons and economic aid. A similar trend was repeated during the post-Cold War era and especially after Pakistan became a frontline state in the United States' "War on Terror." The reliance of Pakistan on U.S. military aid and diplomatic support increased after the incidents of September 11, 2001, making options for foreign policy even slimmer (Fair, 2014). As a result, during this period Pakistan avoided any leadership role within the OIC on Palestine, limiting actions to general statements reiterating support for a two-state solution. Public opinion was strongly in favor of stronger diplomatic and political advocacy, but this is indicative of the rising gap between state policy and societal sentiment. Clientalist constraints have also emerged within Pakistan's relations with the Gulf states, notably Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. Although these states have traditionally been supportive of Pakistan financially, their growing normalization of relations with Israel, particularly in the wake of the Abraham Accords, has presented new strategic dilemmas. Pakistan's low-key reaction to these developments underlines the dictates of economic dependence, not least because Pakistan relies on remittances from the Gulf, oil facilities, and financial bailouts. Far from articulating an independent stance or mobilizing Islamic solidarity against normalization, Pakistan pursued a policy of strategic silence, which underlined the ways in which economic clientalism circumscribes diplomatic autonomy. Furthermore, Pakistan's lack of official diplomatic ties with Israel which is frequently used as proof of its moral support for Palestine has not resulted in active policy involvement. Rather, this position serves primarily as a symbolic marker to make up for Pakistan's meager diplomatic or material commitment to the Palestinian cause. Scholars observe that client nations attempting to strike a compromise between ideological legitimacy at home and external dependency abroad frequently exhibit symbolic alignment without strategic follow-through (Lake, 2011). In this way, Pakistan's foreign policy paradox, ideological clarity coexisting with strategic paralysis is best illustrated by its Palestine policy. Economic fragility is another way that clientalism shows up. Pakistan's strategic flexibility has been further limited by its ongoing balance-of-payments problems and dependence on outside funding from organizations like the International Monetary Fund and bilateral donors (Rizvi, 2013). Overtly hostile positions against Israel or its major allies in this situation run the risk of diplomatic isolation or negative economic effects. As a result, rather than taking aggressive diplomatic or strategic actions, Pakistan's stance on Palestine has mostly remained symbolic, limited to multilateral forums and declarative

pronouncements. One of the main geopolitical paradoxes of Pakistan's foreign policy is the gap between ideological commitment and policy implementation. Pakistan has seldom turned this stance into persistent diplomatic leadership or strategic effort, despite constantly presenting the Palestinian cause as a moral, Islamic, and legal imperative. Rather, its involvement has mostly been limited to symbolic activities like voting patterns in the UN General Assembly, regular denunciations of Israeli policies, and verbal affirmations of a two-state solution in multilateral forums. Although these acts support Pakistan's ideological stance, they don't change the course of events or have an impact on larger regional dynamics. Pakistan's minimal participation in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is one glaring example of this dichotomy. Despite being one of the founding and powerful members of the OIC, Pakistan has rarely used its influence to set the agenda for the Palestine problem. During significant crises, such as the Israeli military operations in Gaza in 2008-09, 2014, and 2023, Pakistan did not mobilize collective diplomatic pressure or suggest tangible policy tools beyond joint communiqués and emergency meetings. This cautious strategy reflects Pakistan's unwillingness to question the geopolitical inclinations of important benefactors and regional allies and stands in stark contrast to its verbal emphasis on Islamic solidarity. Pakistan's circumspect bilateral diplomacy serves to further solidify the dichotomy. Pakistan has avoided the direct diplomatic consequences that could result from increased action, in contrast to nations like Turkey that have used both diplomatic engagement and public conflict to strengthen their position on Palestine. Pakistan did not pursue persistent coalition-building attempts to advance the Palestinian issue beyond symbolic advocacy, even during its temporary membership in the UN Security Council. This tactical caution highlights how clientelist reliance prevents Pakistan from taking on assertive or leadership-focused responsibilities that would incite hostility from influential friends. This symbolic approach is also maintained by domestic political factors. Rhetorical endorsement is a low-cost tactic for domestic legitimacy because the Palestinian issue enjoys broad public support across Pakistan's political and ideological spectrum. However, Pakistan's leadership frequently lacks the political capital and independence needed to turn this support into actual policy, such as diplomatic advocacy, financial aid, or strategic collaboration with Palestinian authority. Declaratory policy therefore acts as a stand-in for substantive involvement, enabling the state to preserve its ideological legitimacy without running the danger of external threats. In this regard, Pakistan's Palestine policy is a prime example of what dependency theorists refer to as "constrained agency" in hierarchical international systems, when weaker nations make moral commitments but lack the structural ability to carry them out on their own (Lake, 2011). The continuance of this pattern implies that Pakistan's larger foreign policy framework is intricately linked to the geopolitical dilemma surrounding Palestine, rather than being purely situational. Strategic restraint and ideological alignment continue to coexist, resulting in a foreign policy that is both operationally constrained and ethically expressive.

Contemporary Challenges of Strategic Autonomy

When considered collectively, the historical trends of clientalism, symbolic diplomacy, and limited involvement show that a recurring conflict between normative commitment and strategic

constraint shapes Pakistan's stance on the Palestinian question. Pakistan's ability to act independently has remained structurally limited, despite the country's repeated declarations of support for Palestinian self-determination as a matter of moral principle, Islamic solidarity, and international law. These limitations are ingrained in Pakistan's larger geopolitical stance as a security-dependent and economically weak state functioning within hierarchical international and regional institutions; they are not episodic or exclusively leadership-driven. According to this perspective, Pakistan's Palestine policy serves more as a place where conflicting demands domestic legitimacy, alliance management, and economic survival intersect than as a venue for independent foreign diplomacy. Declaratory activism combined with a lack of strategic initiative results in a pattern of foreign policy action. In addition to replicating reliance at the structural level, such behavior reinforces Pakistan's normative identity at the discursive level. In this way, the Palestinian question becomes representative of Pakistan's larger foreign policy conundrum: the desire for strategic autonomy coexisting with political and practical obstacles that prevent it from being realized. Crucially, throughout time, these limitations have changed rather than decreased. The roots of dependency have changed but not been eliminated by the shift from Cold War bipolarity to post-Cold War uni-polarity and now to an increasingly fractured multipolar order. While reliance on Western security alliances dictated past restraints, economic fragility, financial conditionality and regional realignments in the Middle East are increasingly the source of modern limits. These trends have further challenged Pakistan's capacity to combine ideological standing with strategic action, particularly as traditional backers of the Palestinian cause recalibrate their regional objectives.

Pakistan's ongoing economic vulnerability is one of the biggest issues faced by the country today. Pakistan's diplomatic leeway has been limited by frequent balance-of-payments crises and reliance on outside financial support, especially from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and bilateral donors (Rizvi, 2013). Adopting a combative or assertive stance toward Palestine in such a setting, particularly against Israel's main supporters, runs the potential of having negative political and economic effects. As a result, Pakistan's involvement has stayed limited to multilateral declarations and verbal support, perpetuating a cycle of symbolic diplomacy rather than strategic effort. The Middle East's changing political realignments present a second significant obstacle. The regional context in which Pakistan has traditionally structured its Palestine policy has changed as a result of the Abraham Accords, which normalized relations between Israel and numerous Arab states. Longstanding economic allies of Pakistan, like Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates, have shifted their regional objectives, prioritizing strategic collaboration with Israel over Islamic solidarity (Akbarzadeh & Connor, 2005). Given its reliance on Gulf remittances, oil facilities, and emergency financial help, Pakistan's subdued reaction to these developments demonstrates the pressures of economic clientalism. This calculated quiet highlights how Pakistan's reliance on outside forces prevents it from taking an independent or leadership-focused stance on Palestine. Pakistan's strategic calculations are further complicated by rivalry from great powers. Although Pakistan's external contacts have become more varied as a result of stronger ties with China, its autonomy over the Palestinian issue has not been significantly improved. Pakistan's capacity to

use this cooperation for aggressive Palestine diplomacy is limited by China's approach to Middle Eastern politics, which places more emphasis on regional stability and economic participation than ideological agreement (Small, 2015). Pakistan is nevertheless careful not to offend Western nations, especially the United States, whose economic and diplomatic clout continue to affect how the world responds to the Israel-Palestine dispute. Pakistan's preference for low-risk, consensus-driven stances over confrontational diplomacy is strengthened by this delicate balancing act. Strategic autonomy is also limited by domestic structural reasons. Pakistan's civil-military dynamics frequently marginalize normative or humanitarian considerations when formulating foreign policy in favor of security-centric and alliance-based decision-making (Fair, 2014). Although Pakistani public opinion is still overwhelmingly pro-Palestinian, institutional inertia and risk aversion rarely translate this feeling into long-term policy efforts. As a result, there is little substantive participation while domestic legitimacy is preserved by verbal agreement. These limitations have been further highlighted by the escalation in Gaza after 2023. Pakistan's official response mostly followed previous trends, denouncing Israeli activities, calling for a ceasefire, and appealing to international law through multilateral forums, despite massive local protests and increased public pressure. Although in line with Pakistan's declared values, this reaction did not deviate from its traditionally cautious stance, highlighting the continued existence of structural restrictions on strategic autonomy. All of these current issues point to Pakistan's limited agency on the Palestine issue as a result of long-standing structural dependencies rather than just a diplomatic decision. Pakistan's ability to operate independently is nevertheless limited by economic fragility, shifting regional alliances, and hierarchical international power relations.

Conclusion

This paper examines Pakistan's engagement with the Palestinian cause as a prism for explaining broader geopolitical paradoxes that constitute its foreign policy. While Pakistan has consistently espoused principled support for Palestinian self-determination rooted in international law, Islamic solidarity, and moral duty, this commitment has rarely translated into meaningful strategic or diplomatic leadership. The analysis indicates that this gap between ideology and practice is not incidental but structurally produced, reflecting deep-seated patterns of clientalism, economic vulnerability, and security dependence. Decades of Pakistan's foreign policy stance have been guided by unbalanced alliances, which prioritize the security of the regime and economic stability as opposed to the need for an independent foreign policy decision. Pakistan's policy towards Palestine has been conditioned by these factors, and what has been manifested is the trend of symbolic or vocal foreign policy, which advocates strong slogans and support for collective international policies, instead of actually taking proactive foreign policy initiatives. This trend has been manifested in different international eras, from the Cold War to the post-terrorism age and right up to the advent of the new multipolar international system. The contemporary geopolitical shifts have not resolved this paradox but have instead reconfigured it. Economic dependency, IMF conditionalities, evolving Middle Eastern alignments in the aftermath of normalization with Israel, and great-power competition has cumulatively constricted Pakistan's strategic space. Even

heightened regional crises, including the post-2023 escalation in Gaza, have failed to produce a substantive recalibration of Pakistan's policy, reinforcing the conclusion that structural limitations outweigh episodic political pressures or popular sentiment. The Palestinian issue thus lays bare a key dilemma of Pakistan foreign policy-the pursuit of strategic autonomy amid persistent external and internal resistance. Pakistan's continued recourse to declaratory support facilitates the pursuit of normative credibility both domestically and internationally, but also simultaneously reproduces dependence by eschewing policy decisions that have a bearing on existing power hierarchies. This paradox illustrates the limits of moral positioning in the absence of material capacity and institutional autonomy. Understanding Pakistan's position on Palestine therefore requires moving beyond the narratives of ideological commitment or diplomatic failure and toward a structural reading of foreign policy behavior. The findings would suggest that any meaningful shift toward greater strategic autonomy-on Palestine or other international issues-will depend less on rhetorical realignment than on addressing the underlying economic, institutional, and geopolitical dependencies shaping Pakistan's engagement with the international system. In that sense, the Palestinian issue remains not only a moral concern for Pakistan but also a revealing indicator of its place within an unequal global order.

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