



DAILY NEWSPAPER ANALYSIS

THE HINDU

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**Topic: GS2 - IR : India-Pakistan
relation in context of US and
China's interest in Subcontinent**



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India's shifting strategic concerns

Context:-

- The U.S. President Donald Trump's latest claim that India sought U.S. mediation in Kashmir gaffe has introduced another thorn in what is now clearly an unsettled India-U.S. relationship because it strikes at a vital interest: **India's territorial integrity**.
- But if we had been more attuned to international shifts, we would have noticed that **structural trends in South Asia** have been changing over the past several years.
- How Delhi leverages this changing international environment will determine the success of its overall policy.

Structural Trends in South Asia:-

- There have been **renewed patterns of Pakistan's ties with the U.S. and China**, with the latter reassuring Pakistan and, most importantly, the Army on their respective strategic commitments and bilateral partnerships.
- Historically, U.S. policymakers have always sought to restore the alliance with Pakistan whenever Islamabad's ties with China became stronger. **India has borne the brunt of this recurring geopolitical dynamic**.

- Much of Pakistan's contemporary leverage can also be traced to the **ongoing phase of the Afghan conflict**.
- Thus, the Pakistan perceives itself in **a position of strength where Washington, Beijing, and even Moscow** have recognised Pakistan's role in a future settlement on the conflict in Afghanistan.

Evolving Interest of Great Powers in Pakistan and Its Impact on India:-

- Both the U.S. and China have overlapping interests in regional stability and avoidance of a major subcontinental conflict.
- While each maintains deep ties with Pakistan for different reasons, it is unclear to what extent their longer term interests coincide with India, which seeks a **structural transformation in Pakistan's domestic politics and external behaviour**.
 - The U.S. and China appear content with, or probably prefer, **a Pakistan with a strong Rawalpindi, along with competent civilian governance structures and an elite with a wider world view**.
- A Pakistan that looks beyond South Asia could be a useful potential partner in burden sharing, ironically for both the U.S. and China.
 - For Washington, the Pakistan Army is an insurance card for persisting security challenges such as regime survival for U.S. client states in West Asia as well as for the containment of Iran.

- For China, a stable Pakistan can be a partner in the **Belt and Road initiative** and future continental industrial and energy corridors. As the writer **Andrew Small** underlines, Beijing's large economic investments "*come with some clear expectations about the choices that Pakistan's political and military leadership make about their country's future*".
- In sum, both the U.S. and China seek a strong, stable and secure Pakistan that **controls its destabilising behaviour** because that undermines their wider regional interests.
 - For the U.S., a revisionist Pakistan pulls India inward and away from potential India-U.S. cooperation on Asian geopolitics.
 - For China, it undermines its industrial and connectivity projects in Pakistan, while negatively impacting India-China ties.
- Hence, evolving interests of the great powers in South Asia might not necessarily portend an adverse geopolitical setting for India in the medium term.
- This is even more plausible if the widening comprehensive national power gap between a rising India and an unstable Pakistan make the latter's traditional role as a balancer or spoiler unattractive in the eyes of the great powers.

- As Pakistani scholar **Hussain Haqqani** predicts, “You can try to leverage your strategic location as much as you like, but there will come a time... when strategic concerns change.”

Way Ahead:-

- India’s policymakers should remain clear-eyed that neither country would be willing to expend much strategic capital in an ambitious policy to reorder the domestic scene or civil-military relations in Pakistan. In any case, Indian statecraft is essential to reorient perceptions of the great powers.
- Maintaining that India has the right and the capacity to adopt an active defence posture by blocking the flow of cross-border terror by proactive operations on the Line of Control (LoC) along with reserving the option for more ambitious punitive strikes in response to major terrorist attacks on Indian military targets, which would play an important part in shaping how third parties view Indian interests and thereby assume constructive roles in managing Pakistani behaviour.