



REVISITING THE IMPLICATIONS OF PAKISTAN'S COLD WAR ALIGNMENT ON ITS ISLAMIC AND POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT:

This research venture attempts to revisit the repercussions of Pakistan's alignment with the U.S. bloc during the reign of the Cold War against the spread of the former communist Soviet Union in the Asian region on its political landscape and Islamic identity. The also study seeks to explore the research gaps associated with Pakistan's role as a key player in the interplay of the Cold War that changed its political dynamics and shaped religious identity. The findings of the study suggest that Pakistan's role as a key player in the U.S. war against the spread of communism in the Asian region brought significant geopolitical and strategic changes coupled with shaping unprecedented religious and cultural identities. For instance, the emergence of religious extremism and hatred, sectarianism, and militancy resulted from the refugee influx from Afghanistan caused by the Cold War rivalry between the United States and the former Soviet Union on Afghan soil. Finally, the also fosters an understating of contemporary political and religious challenges to Pakistan by navigating the historical alignment of the country with the United States.

KEYWORDS: Cold War; Islam; Politics; Pakistan; Implications

INTRODUCTION:

This research enterprise attempts to examine the ramifications of the Post-War standoff between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union on the political landscape and Islamic system in Pakistan. The Post-War event – best known as the Cold War – starting from the mid-20th century to the

1990s between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union emerged as a watershed movement in the history of world politics till the demise of the former Soviet Union¹. The event made the world face severe repercussions as it brought radical global political and ideological changes in the landscape of geopolitics². Additionally, owing to its standing at the forks of the South Asian region, during the interplay of this epoch, Pakistan was no exception. Since Pakistan was a frontline nation in the U.S.-Soviet Post-War Standoff, the country faced a host of challenges ranging from the changes in political order to the Islamic identity of the nation³. The military alignment of the country with the United States coupled with military and economic assistance to counterbalance the influence of the Soviets in the region brought various political challenges for the next few decades⁴.

The changing geopolitical interplay had left lasting impacts on the Islamic identity of the nation. The anti-communist narratives as part of the alignment resulted in the formation of a conservative version of Islam leading to lasting impacts on the Islamic identity of the nation⁵. The

¹ R. J. McMahon, "United States Cold War Strategy in South Asia: Making a Military Commitment to Pakistan, 1947-1954," *The Journal of American History* 75, no. 3 (1988): 812-840.

² S. E. Cornell, "Geopolitics and Strategic Alignments in the Caucasus and Central Asia," *Perceptions: Journal of International Affairs* 4, no. 2 (1999): 22-34.

³ M. Memon "Reorientation of Pakistan's foreign policy after the Cold War," *Pakistan Horizon* 47, no. 02 (1987): 45-61.

⁴ S. K. Bragta, "Reassessing Pakistan's Geopolitical Orientation from the Post-Cold War Era to 9/11," *European Online Journal of Natural and Social Sciences* 11, no. 1 (2022): 122.

⁵ A. B. Mahmood, "Diplomatic Resurgence: The Revitalization of Pakistan-Russia Strategic Alignment" *International Journal of Kashmir Studies* 5, no. 1 (2023).

Afghan refugee influx in the country also fueled more fire by fostering militancy, terrorism, sectarianism, and the formation of radical jihadi groups. Later, the groups posed grave challenges to the internal stability and security dynamics and shaped a conservative Islamic identity that still hunts the true Islamic system in the country⁶

Renowned academicians such as Ayesha Jalal (1990) and Stephen Cohen (2004) widely traced Pakistan's Cold War options and its strategic position in the Cold War Alignment. In his magnum opus, "*The Idea of Pakistan*", (Cohen 2004) writes that the epoch of the Cold War in the 20th century was the defining moment of global politics and strategic realignments of states following the ideological division between the former Soviet Union and the United States⁷.

However, her indispensable work "*The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan Political Economy of Defense*", (Jalal 1990) provides a comprehensive view of Pakistan's position in the interplay of the Cold War chessboard and changing geopolitical order as having marked a remarkable impact on the identity of its political and Islamic landscape. The overwhelming financial and military support of the United States to the military regimes in Pakistan and the derailing the democratic rules had left the ropes of the country in the hands of military establishments resulting in democratic movements such as the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) and radical Islamization of the public

⁶ H. Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism: Allah, the Army, and America's War on Terror*, (New York: Routledge, 2015).

⁷ S. Cohen, *The idea of Pakistan*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

institutions⁸.

The results of the alignment, as discussed by Jalal changed public narratives concerning politics and Islamic identities and fostered an anti-communist agenda defiant to Islam leading to the orientation of Islam with conservative Islamic ideological identities. Therefore, Jalal concludes Pakistan's strategic necessity of coalition with the U.S. during the reign of the Cold War conceded the military to take over the civilian rule and merged Islamic identity with the strategic reflections. This study seeks to revisit the implications of Pakistan's post-war alignment with the United States on its religious identity and political environment. With the help of secondary sources, this study attempts to address the implications of academic debates and narratives.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Pakistan's Cold War alignment with the Western bloc and its ramifications for the political landscape and Islamic identity are widely investigated and discussed by various academicians that offer a dynamic overview of the political, ideological, and geoeconomic shifts in the world arena as well. The topic has remained a debate for decades among various scholars. The indispensable work of the following academicians and scholars is reviewed to broaden the scope of this research and address the research gaps:

Pakistan's Alignment with the Western Bloc: Scholarly Debates:

Authors such as Hussain (2016), Fair (2004), Waseem (2007) and Platteau (2011) provide a critical analysis of Pakistan's alliance with the West

⁸ A. Jalal, *The State of Martial Rule: The Origins of Pakistan's Political Economy of Defence*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

during the epoch of the Cold War with particular emphasis on the process of secularism and Islamization in the country. Authors such as Hussain (2012) illustrates that Islamic identity in Pakistan was reshaped owing to Pakistan's cooperation with the U.S. in its fight against the communist Soviets during the interplay of the Cold War⁹. However, the work of (Waseem 2007) elucidates how Pakistan instrumentalized Islam and produced religious rhetoric to facilitate and advance pro-western and anti-communist narratives¹⁰. The analysis (Platteau 2011) discusses the interplay of Pakistan's role in the Cold War¹¹. Moreover, Fair (2003) believes that the epoch reshaped unprecedented religious discourses such as anti-communist narratives resulting in the emergence Jihadi and conservative religious institutions in the country¹². Therefore, the cited work provides a deep analysis of how Islam was instrumentalized in Pakistan to back the pro-western policies leading to the emergence of distinctive interpretations and expressions of Islamic identity in the country.

Process of Islamization and Secularism: Scholarly Narratives:

Soon after the alignment of Pakistan with the West during the chessboard of Post-War, the process of Islamization and secularism have been the debates of scholarly podiums in the country. Authors such as Sunawar (2015) and Kaleemullah (2003) offer a comprehensive analysis of this

⁹ J. Husain, *Pakistan and a world in disorder: A grand strategy for the twenty-first century*. (New York: Springer, 2016).

M. Waseem, *Islam and the West: A Perspective from Pakistan. Identity¹⁰ Matters: Ethnic and Sectarian Conflict*, (New York: Berghahn, 2007).

¹¹ J. P. Platteau, "Political instrumentalization of Islam and the risk of obscurantist deadlock," *World Development* 39, no. 2 (2011): 243-260.

¹² C. C. Fair, "The counterterror coalitions: Cooperation with Pakistan and India," *Minnesota Historical Society* 141 (2004).

subject. They found two different narratives – Islamization and secularism – developed soon after the initiation of debates on Pakistan's alignment with the West. For Sunawar, scholars were divided into two approaches; for some, the process of secularism and elite fostered in the country because of its closeness with the United States and its allies during the epoch of the Cold War¹³. In response to this view, demands were made to promote the Islamization process to contain secularism in the country. However, others view that politicians and military dictators instrumentalized Islam and strengthened the Islamization process to legitimize their respective rules blurring the line between the chronicles of secularism and Islamization in the country¹⁴.

Shift in Pakistan's Geopolitical and Strategic Choices:

Academicians and research scholars have also analyzed Pakistan's ideological identity, self-perceptions, and geopolitical ramifications in its participation with superpowers like the U.S. during the event of the Cold War. Scholars such as Dupree (1997) and Naqvi (2005) examined Pakistan's alignment with the United States during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Dupree (1997) surveyed anti-communist narratives nurtured by the U.S.-backed Jihad in Pakistan against the forces of the Red Army in Afghanistan which resulted in geopolitical ramifications such as refugee influx, rise of terrorism and militancy, and

¹³ L. Sunawar, "US-Pakistan Relations during the Cold War," *The Journal of International Relations, Peace Studies, and Development* 1, no. 1 (2015): 06.

¹⁴S. A. Kaleemullah, "Re-evaluation of Alliance Politics: Relations between US and Pakistan in Military Eras," *International Journal of Human and Society* 3, no. 4 (2003): 06-32.

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pan-Islamic identity in the country¹⁵. According to Afzal (2022), therefore, the event intensified religious conservatism, distorted pluralism, and gave birth to a new religious thought in the country which still hunts the religious identity of the country¹⁶.

A Paradigm Shift in Islamic Moderation:

The interplay of the Cold War and Pakistan's war alignment with the Western bloc, according to the analysis of Mehmood (2021) and Hashmi (2007) had left lasting impacts on the religious movements and institutions in every corner of the country. For instance, in the words of Mehmood (2021) the rise of self-styled Jihadi groups, the influx of seminaries, and financial assistance to them were associated with the war alignment efforts of the United States to malign the influence of the former Soviet in Afghanistan¹⁷. The formation of new religious groups and institutions challenged already established religious institutions and respective movements. Hence, the radical changes in the political landscape and religious identity as stated by Hashmi (2007) had resulted in the distortion of a religiously harmonious environment and democratic norms in the country¹⁸.

¹⁵ L. Dupree, *Shadows of the Mountains: A History of Afghanistan*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

¹⁶ M. H. Afzal, "Islamization vs. Islamophobia: A New Historicist Reading of Cold War Politics in Contemporary Pakistani Anglophone Fiction," *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies* 22, no. 01 (2022): 257-274.

¹⁷ T. K. Mahmood, "Capitalizing on religious narratives: The reconstruction of militants' reality in Northern Pakistan," *Cogent Social Sciences* 07, no. 01 (2021): 12-20.

¹⁸ A. S. Hashmi, "Use of religion in violent conflicts by authoritarian regimes: Pakistan and Malaysia in comparative perspective," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies* 30, no. 4 (2007): 22.

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To sum up, the review of existing literature has provided insight into the repercussions of Pakistan's alignment with the West during the interplay of the Cold War on its political landscape and Islamic identity. However, by revisiting Pakistan's Cold War alignment with the United States against the geopolitical, geostrategic, and ideological rise of the former Soviet Union in Asia, the study seeks to foster an understanding that can prove fruitful in comprehending the ongoing political and religious-based identity crisis in the country.

MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY:

Research Method:

This research venture is descriptive in nature. The qualitative approach of the research is utilized to revisit the implications of Pakistan's alignment with the United States in the Cold War on its religious identity and political landscape. The use of secondary data is employed to analyze historical narratives and present academic debates on the topic.

Method of Data Collection:

Secondary Data Sources:

However, the research is conducted purely based on secondary data. The secondary sources include research journals, books, research articles, published surveys and interviews, news items, and data from archives. With the help of secondary data, the study reviewed existing literature on the topic that provided a rigorous understanding of the implications of Pakistan's alignment with the United States during the reign of the Cold War on its political and religious identity.

Method of Data Analysis:

Thematic Analysis:

The study incorporated the thematic analysis approach for the analysis and interpretation of secondary data. The set of key patterns, themes, and

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coding schemes were prepared to assemble and interpret the data into different sections that helped in developing an understanding of the war's repercussions for Pakistan's political and religious identity.

Ethical Considerations:

This research study is purely based on the analysis and interpretations of secondary sources of data. To preserve academic integrity, the research enterprise is produced with particular emphasis on the proper academic citations and scholarly references while reviewing, assembling, and interpreting the secondary sources to address the implications of Pakistan's alliance with the United States during the epoch of the Cold War on its religious and political identities.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

The study incorporated secondary data sources including research journals, published reviews and surveys, books, historical narratives, debates from archives, and scholarly debates. The investigation aimed to revisit the impacts of Pakistan's strategic alignment with the United States on its political environment and religious identity. Therefore, this research venture concluded the findings with the following dimensions:

RESEARCH DISCUSSIONS:

Ramifications for Islamic Identity:

The views of scholars such as Talhami (2004), Abbas (2015) and Gilani (2006) on the transformation of Islamic identity in Pakistan during the epoch of the Cold War provide a deep analysis to understanding this phenomenon. The political alignment of Pakistan with the Western bloc brought a significant shift in the Islamic identity of the country. The academicians such as Talhami profoundly addressed this phenomenon. According to his analysis, the moderate form of Islam was challenged and reshaped with a conservative and militant approach resulting in the

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expansion of militancy and sectarianism in the country¹⁹. Moreover, the academic review of Abbas shows that the radical religious changes in the country during the dictatorial rule in the 1980s sowed the seeds of exploitation of religious sentiments through Islamic institutions in the very corner of the country that shaped the future Islamic identity of the nation²⁰. The analysis of Gilani examines the rule of former President Zia-ul-Haq and his political cooperation with the United States that witnessed a massive movement for the Islamization of the country resulting in the replacement of moderate Islamic principles with radical and conservative elements impacting the educational, social, political, judicial, economic, and religious institutions of the country. The Islamization of the country's institutions with conventional Islamic identity had also steered the nation between two different ideological factions, the secular and conservative Islamic debates²¹. Therefore, the alignment of the country with the West as a counterbalanced approach against the influence of the former Soviet Union on Afghan soil negatively impacted the Islamic identity of the country.

Political Repercussions of the Alignment:

Scholars such as Memon (1994), Farooq (2016), and Baig (2018) have offered a dynamic analysis of the political ramifications in Pakistan caused by its geopolitical and strategic choices during the bipolar world order. The Post-War epoch witnessed paradigm shifts in the geopolitical, ideological, and geostrategic landscape globally. In the views of Memon,

¹⁹ G. H. Talhami, *Muslims, Islamists, and the Cold War. In Grand Strategy in the War Against Terrorism*, (Routledge, 2004).

Abbas, *ibid.*, 2015: 13.²⁰

²¹ T. Gilani, "US-Pakistan Relations: the Way Forward," *The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters* 36, no. 04 (2006): 4.

the world was divided among two ideological superpowers, the United States, and the former Soviet Union (Present day Russia). Memon further argues that the United States was left with the best strategic choice for Pakistan to maintain its geopolitical and geostrategic cooperation²². For Baig (2018), the history of alignment spectators the grave political ramifications for Pakistan²³. The flow of financial aid in the country strengthened the military institution's role in the country's political affairs. The influx of weapons and aid also reinforced the political power of the military leading to the emergence of several military coups and the replacement of civilian rule. The political control through the coups caused a disturbance in the democratic setup in the country.

Additionally, Farooq (2016) believes that the replacement of civilian rule with a dictatorial regime, the American influence on foreign policy decision-making, and political polarization are just a few mentions of the Post-War alignment of Pakistan. Further, he examined that the streets of the country witnessed the rise of democratic political movements such as the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), and ethnic movements at grassroots levels in Sindh. Moreover, the dictatorial period of former President Zia-ul-Haq and the process of Islamization of the nation were highly reprimanded in public spheres resulting in the expansion of feminist movements and a mixture of conventional and

²² M. Memon, "Reorientation of Pakistan's Foreign Policy after the Cold War," *Pakistan Horizon* 47, no. 2 (1994): 45-61.

²³ T. B. Baig, "US-Pakistan Relations in Retrospect: The Changing Geopolitical Landscape of South Asia," *Global Social Sciences Review* 3, no. 3 (2018): 1-14.

moderate Islamic identities in the country²⁴. Therefore, the geopolitical and geostrategic alignment of Pakistan with the United States had severe impacts on the political landscape of the country.

Contemporary Assessment:

The scholarly analysis of secondary sources of data offers insight into various consequences of the Cold War alignment of Pakistan with the United States. To comprehend the aftermaths of Pakistan's Cold War alignment in contemporary circumstances, the indispensable academic work of Rana (2013), Qanber (1996), and Ali (2023) is investigated and analyzed. The analysis of Rana (2013) suggests that political cooperation with the West fetched long-term consequences on the country's political and democratic setup, human rights, domestic stability, and Islamic identity²⁵. The view of Qanber (1996) elucidates that the end of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry on Afghan soil brought the spread of terrorism, militancy, and extremist groups, which presently hurt the domestic stability, internal security and political dynamics, and Islamic identity of the country. Since then, according to Qanber, mass murder owing to suicide bombings and sectarian schism, the reign of terror caused by the expansion of terrorist and extremist groups such as Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and Al-Qaeda have become common in different parts of the country²⁶. For Ali (2023), the process of radicalizing religious and educational institutions is

²⁴ T. Farooq, *US-Pakistan Relations: Pakistan's Strategic Choices in the 1990s*, (Routledge, 2016).

²⁵ M. A. Rana, *The militants' landscape: Pakistan's Islamist organizations and their impact on the body politics*, (In *Pakistan's Stability Paradox*: Routledge, 2013).

²⁶ H. Qanber, "USA in South Asia after Cold War: A Case Study of Pakistan," *South Asian Studies* 13, no. 1 (1996): 44-56.

yet to be revisited. The radicalization of religious seminaries, and educational institutions – particularly in Lahore, Karachi, and in tribal belts of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa – challenge the moderate Islamic environment and modern education system in the country²⁷. To sum up, the government needs to revisit policies concerning challenges faced by religious institutions as a result of Pakistan's post-world order policies.

RESEARCH FINDINGS:

This study is based on the analysis of secondary sources of data with particular emphasis on the review, investigation, and analysis of existing academic literature. With the help of scholarly narratives, this study has produced the following findings:

- 1) First, the study found that the geopolitical and geostrategic alignment of Pakistan with the United States to counter the spread of former communist Soviets in the Asia region had severely squeezed both – the political landscape as well as the moderate Islamic identity.
- 2) Second, in terms of consequences for Islamic identity, the study found that the moderate and inclusive Islamic identity of Islam was reshaped and gradually replaced with the conventional religious identity subsequently spreading religious and sectarian hatred, fostering religious extremism, and self-styled radical terrorist groups such as TTP, and the radicalization of religious and educational institutions. The entire process has long-term consequences for the religious identity in the country.
- 3) Third, the study found that the geopolitical alliance of Pakistan with

²⁷ S. Ali, "Analyzing the dynamics of the deadly embrace: a study of Pakistan-US relations from Cold War alliances to contemporary challenges," *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 7, no. 2 (2023): 173-182.

the United States during the epoch of the Cold War had left massive complications for its political and democratic environment. The reinforcement of military rule and a series of military coups spoiled the democratic norms and infused the direct and indirect political influence of the military. The increased interference of the military in the country's politics has intensified the regional conflicts with India on Kashmir and border skirmishes with the Afghan government.

- 4) Finally, the study concludes that understanding the historical political cooperations of Pakistan with global powers is a necessary part of the promotion of domestic stability, empowerment of civilian rule, and maintenance of a conducive and inclusive political, social, and religious affair in the future. Moreover, belittling historical challenges can also provide a plethora of lessons for the contemporary political and religious challenges faced by the country. Doing so can strengthen a balanced approach to maintaining diplomatic, geopolitical, and religious cooperation globally.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

To conclude, this research enterprise sheds light upon several consequences of Pakistan's geopolitical, and geostrategic alignment with the United States on its political environment and religious identity. The study is purely based on the qualitative analysis of secondary sources of data that include scholarly debates, research journals, academic work, books, archives, and published surveys and reports. With the investigation of academic literature, this study contributes to understanding the repercussions and complexities of Pakistan's historical strategic choices, and political alliances with major powers like the United States that still hunt its contemporary political and religious identities. This research

concludes with the illustration that Pakistan's change of political and strategic choices during the interplay of the Cold War gravely infused ramifications for its political as well as religious identity. Consequently, the reinforcement of dictatorial rule, and the rise of religious extremism, terrorism, and radicalization of religious institutions entrenched their place deeply in the very corner of the country. Therefore, the exploration of this study suggests that there is a need to understand the historical complexities to foster a stable political system and restore a moderate Islamic identity.



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