

Between Alliance and Abandonment: Pakistan–United States Military Relations, the Pressler Amendment, and Strategic Realignment in South Asia, 1990–2001

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Abstract

The 1990- 2001 period in Pakistan–United States relations is a key era that has been less studied than the Cold War alliance and the post-9/11 partnership. This study examines the bilateral military and strategic relationship during this period, focusing on the Pressler Amendment, the Brown Amendment, the military balance between India and Pakistan, Afghanistan and Kashmir, and the strategic realignment after 9/11. This study uses a qualitative historical-analytical design drawing on legislative records, official documents, political speeches and memoirs, contemporary reporting, and scholarly literature. To put the regional security environment in perspective, the study uses data on comparative military expenditure from SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute). The research results suggest that although Pressler's sanctions strongly affected Pakistan–U.S. military collaboration, they failed to produce the desired change in Pakistan's nuclear policy. Instead, the sanctions made Pakistanis feel strategically vulnerable and doubt America's commitment to security assistance. In 1995, the Brown Amendment loosened restrictions on importing military equipment that had applied before the embargo. It allowed some degree of "diplomatic re-engagement," but it did not restore the prior alliance relationship. At the regional level, the large gap between India's and Pakistan's military spending accentuated the conventional asymmetry in Pakistan's eyes. The study also indicates that bilateral cooperation was still hamstrung by issues of Afghanistan, Kashmir, nuclear proliferation, and civil–military relations. Thus, the post-9/11 realignment was strategic re-engagement driven by significantly altered international security dynamics, not a renewed, stable shared strategic partnership. The study contributes to the literature by recognizing, rather than dismissing, the 1990s as a single, insignificant period in Pakistan-U.S. relations, when it was actually a significant era preceding and leading up to the post-9/11 era. Travels by Suttow and Lavine sparked subsequent diplomatic maneuvers that collapsed after attempts to secure definitive answers from Islamabad on whether or not it possessed a nuclear weapon met with indifference. The visits by Suttow and Lavine led to other diplomatic moves, which imploded when Islamabad showed little interest in giving clear answers to queries on whether or not it had produced a nuclear weapon.

Keywords: Pakistan–United States Relations; Pressler Amendment; Brown Amendment; Military Relations; Nuclear Non-Proliferation; Strategic Realignment; South Asian Security India–Pakistan Rivalry; Afghanistan; Kashmir

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Introduction

Pakistan-U.S. relations have been a roller coaster of strategic partnership, political involvement, and bilateral tensions. Because of its geographical location, membership in the Western alliance system, and strategic necessity in the Afghan conflict against the Soviet Union, Pakistan emerged as a significant security partner for the United States (USA) during the Cold War. The end of the Cold War, however, prompted a new strategic assessment by Washington, and bilateral relations between the two states slowly devolved into crisis in the early 1990s (Cohen, 2004; Kux, 2001; Riedel, 2011). This policy shift was institutionalized in 1990 with the introduction of the Pressler Amendment. The amendment mandated yearly certification by the U.S. president that Pakistan did not have a nuclear explosive device before some types of U.S. aid would continue. Restrictions on military and economic aid were implemented when the needed certification wasn't issued. The eventual sanctions were a significant signal of the rupture of the defence alliance between the two nations and were one of the main tension points between the two countries in the 1990s (Pressler, 2017; United States Congress, 1995). One of the blatant impacts of the Pressler sanctions was the cancellation of the F-16 aircraft programme for Pakistan. Pakistan had already paid huge upfront sums for planes that were later not delivered because of the sanctions. The incident became a lasting illustration of souring military ties and added to Pakistani fears that the United States was an unstable security ally following the end of the Cold War (Kux, 2001; Pressler, 2017; United States Congress, 1995). The new U.S. policy aligned with the new international security scene. Washington saw Pakistan as a key ally in assisting the Afghan resistance during the Soviet–Afghan War. However, with the USSR's withdrawal, Pakistan's strategic importance diminished as the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons grew more significant. The subsequent revision of U.S. policy illustrates the imbalance in the relationship: U.S. strategic interests may shift suddenly, but Pakistan still had to contend with ongoing regional security issues, especially vis-à-vis India (Cohen, 2004; Kux, 2001; Riedel, 2011).

Thus, it is essential to consider the Pressler sanctions in the context of the general Indo-Pakistan security dilemma. Beyond its ties with Washington, Pakistan's conventional military balance with India, the status quo in Kashmir, and India's emerging military prowess also shaped its strategic calculations. From a regional-security perspective, these factors gave Pakistan an interest in retaining nuclear deterrence in the face of obstacles from international nuclear-control forums over nuclear proliferation (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Kapur, 2007; Sagan, 1996–1997). Sanctions also show that economic and diplomatic pressure can be less potent when the policy to be changed is tied to the targeted state's security. The sanctions literature suggests that sanctions are less likely to produce compliance if the target has a strong interest in the case or if compliance has more consequences than resistance (Pape 1997; Hufbauer et al. 2007). In Pakistan's case, nuclear capability was tied more to vulnerability perceptions, based on its rivalry with India, and was found to be most immune to external pressure (Kapur, 2007; Khan, 2012). In 1995, the Brown Amendment began to offer some relief from the restrictions of previous years.

The law allowed the sale of some embargoed military hardware and allowed a certain level of re-engagement between Washington and Islamabad on diplomatic and military fronts. But it did not fully resocialize the relationship between the two states, as bilateral participation became more conditional and transactional (Kux, 2001; United States Congress, 1995). The diplomatic initiatives of the Benazir Bhutto governments in the 1990s also need to be viewed in this context.

Bhutto's government sought to elevate relations with Washington through high-level diplomacy, democratic positioning, international engagement, and cooperation in combating terror. Some of these created opportunities for reengagement, but they didn't address the core issues of nuclear proliferation, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and the security establishment's involvement in foreign and security policy (Fair, 2014; Haqqani, 2005; Kux, 2001). Its hostile military environment further limited Pakistan's strategic options. Comparative data on military expenditures show that India spent considerably more on the military than Pakistan during the 90's. Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) data indicate India's military spending rose from about US\$20.6 billion in constant 2019 dollars in 1990 to over US\$31 billion in 2001, while Pakistan's military spending hovered around US\$4–5 billion for much of that timeframe (2021).

Although this gap does not prove a causal relationship between rising military spending and Pakistan's nuclear policy, it does provide strong contextual evidence for Pakistan's conventional vulnerability. Another point of contention was Afghanistan. Despite the Soviet withdrawal, the immediate military basis for Pakistan–U.S. cooperation lessened, but Afghanistan remained strategically important to Pakistan. Pakistan's security services viewed Afghan events as related to its security concerns in the region, even as Washington began to take up issues of militancy, instability and the presence of the Taliban. These competing priorities led to ongoing disagreement, even in the assumption of diplomatic relations between the two countries. (Coll, 2004, Rashid, 2000, Rubin, 2002). Kashmir also played an integral part in Pakistan's security policy and strained relations with Washington. The Kashmir issue was a fundamental national and strategic concern for Pakistan. At the same time, the United States was more interested in regional stability and in curbing the military escalation between India and Pakistan. Hence, Kashmir, nuclear deterrence, and conventional military asymmetry constrained Pakistan's ability to adapt regional security policies to U.S. pressure (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Fair, 2014; Kapur, 2007).

The Kargil conflict of 1999 marked an important test of Pakistan-U.S. relations. It showed the continued disconnect between Pakistan's military strategy and the Americans' desire for de-escalation and regional stability. The extent of diplomatic support from the United States during the crisis helped raise the pressure for a change of the LoC and for acceptance that the two nations had different strategic interests in South Asia; though there was some mutual economic activity in the 1990s, the strategic interests of the two countries were not the same (Kux, 2001; Riedel, 2011). The bilateral relations later became complicated by the coup in Pakistan in October 1999. Gen Pervez Musharraf's military rule brought change in the domestic political landscape in Pakistan, while Washington has been weighing considerations of democratic rule up against regional stability, nuclear containment, and Afghanistan. These competing priorities reflected the multidimensional relations between Pakistan and the United States at the end of the 1990s (Fair, 2014; Haqqani, 2005). The events of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks resulted in another fundamental change. Its geographical proximity, intelligence capabilities, logistical importance, and influence involving Afghan affairs propelled Pakistan into becoming a pivotal U.S. ally in the newborn War on Terror. Washington then eased some restraint and expanded political, economic, and security engagement with Islamabad (Riedel, 2011; Haqqani, 2013).

This post-9/11 metamorphosis raises an important analytical question about the nature of Pakistan–U.S. strategic cooperation. While relations grew closer after 2001, cooperation was less

based on a strategic foundation than it was during the Cold War. Cooperation was certainly linked to the containment of the Soviet Union and the Afghan war during the Cold War era; however, post-2001, when cooperation was fostered with the involvement of different actors, counterterrorism and the War on Terror have become the main determinants of bilateral cooperation (Haqqani, 2013; Riedel, 2011). This period (1990-2001) is therefore treated as a separate, recognizable phase in Pakistan-U.S. relations and as analytically important. By instead looking at this era as one of a bilateral descent, stemming from a combination of evolving U.S. strategic priorities, nuclear non-proliferation, Indian/Pakistani military imbalance, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Pakistani fears of alliance abandonment, the study concentrates on the decade of the 1990s as a time in which the aforementioned factors interacted, each playing an important role in shaping the bilateral relationship (Cohen, 2004; Kux, 2001; Snyder, 1997).

Research Gap

Research on Pakistan-U.S. relations has examined both the Cold War and post-9/11 eras in great detail. Key studies have examined military cooperation, nuclear proliferation, sanctions, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and Pakistan's domestic political institutions. Much less, however, has been given to the 90s to the early 2000s as a separate phase in which those factors converged and reinforced one another in changing the strategic relationship (Cohen, 2004; Haqqani, 2005; Kux, 2001; Riedel, 2011). The existing literature has also often studied these issues individually. Research on sanctions tends to focus on nonproliferation and coercive diplomacy, whereas analyses of security in the South Asian region have emphasized relations between India and Pakistan and deterrent theory. Moreover, Afghanistan studies tend to focus on militant networks and regional strategy. This study aims to integrate these strands and shed light on the interaction between changes in the security environment in Pakistan's region and U.S. strategic commitment in the 1990s (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Hufbauer et al., 2007; Kapur, 2007; Pape, 1997).

Contribution of the Study

The study contributes to the literature by treating 1990-2001 as a process of strategic restructuring, not just a period of bilateral deterioration. It argues that Pakistan's strategic significance to Washington diminished after the Cold War, despite the ongoing rivalry with India, thereby maintaining Pakistan's strong motivation for independent security policies. The so-called Pressler sanctions thus brought costs—material and diplomatic—without bringing the hoped-for changes in Pakistan's nuclear policy (Cohen, 2004; Kux, 2001; Pape, 1997). The study also suggests that the Brown Amendment was more a limited, conditional re-engagement than an indication of a return to the previous alliance. The Kargil crisis later showed that despite improved diplomatic contacts, significant strategic differences remained. Finally, the post-9/11 relationship is understood as strategic re-engagement in a new international security environment and not just a return to the Cold War alliance, as Kux (2001), Riedel (2011), and Snyder (1997) suggest. Thus, the central analytical argument of the study can be summarized as follows: the end of the Cold War led to a reduced strategic commitment of the United States with Pakistan; the Pressler sanctions reinforced Pakistani security perceptions and feelings of abandonment; the India-Pakistan security dilemma drew continued reliance on autonomous deterrence, while the Brown Amendment allowed for limited reengagement and, ultimately, the September 11 attacks created the foundations for a new strategic cooperation.

Research Objectives

The study has five objectives:

1. To look into the effects of the Pressler Amendment on military co-operation, military aid, and defense relations of Pakistan and the USA.
2. To examine the importance of the Brown Amendment and its contribution towards the revivification of Pakistan–U.S. military and economic relations to an extent.
3. To assess the diplomatic, Counter terrorism, democratic, and international engagement approach of the Benazir Bhutto governments towards enhancing Pakistan–U.S. relations.
4. To analyse the impact of the military balance between India and Pakistan on the evolutionary steps Islamabad took in its strategic security scenario, nuclear deterrence, Afghanistan–Kashmir policy, etc.
5. To explore the transition of Pakistan's relationship with the U.S. after 9/11 and evaluate to what extent these renewed ties were tilted towards strategic partnerships and to what extent it was consequent to the changing security environment.

Research Questions

1. What were the consequences of the Pressler Amendment on the relationship of military ties and defense of Pakistan with the USA after 1990?
2. To what extent did the Brown Amendment help improve military and economic ties between Pakistan and the USA?
3. What was the efficacy of the diplomatic efforts of the Benazir Bhutto administrations to strengthen Pakistan-USA relationships in the 90s?
4. What changes did it make in the military equation between India and Pakistan that, in turn, had an impact on Pakistan's nuclear deterrence and its approach to Afghanistan and Kashmir?
5. How did the "after 9/11" pivot become more of a 'strategic partnership' than a response to Pakistan's altered security interests and, vice versa, to pressure from the USA?

Review of Literature

The Historical Background of Pakistan – USA Relationships

The historical literature shows that Pakistan–U.S. ties have constantly wavered with the variations in the strategic interests of the two countries. In Kux's historical account, a pattern of engagement and estrangement emerged, marked by strong bilateral cooperation alongside bursts of estrangement shaped largely by U.S. strategic interests. In his study of Pakistan's political and military institutions, Cohen highlights the pivotal role of the military establishment not only in national security but also in foreign-policy decision-making. Haqqani's analysis also exposes the ties between Pakistan's military and religious, political, and militant groups. Riedel's article highlights a key structural imbalance in the bilateral relationship: the leverage versus dependence of the United States on Pakistan's support. In the same context, Fair's study of Pakistan's strategic culture focuses on the role of regional security and India to highlight Pakistan's resistance to external pressure. Taken together, this literature suggests that Pakistan-U.S. relations are not merely a conventional alliance. The partnership was lopsided and entailed differing threat perceptions and evolving false assumptions about security cooperation.

Major Strategic Developments in Pakistan-United States Relations, 1990-2001

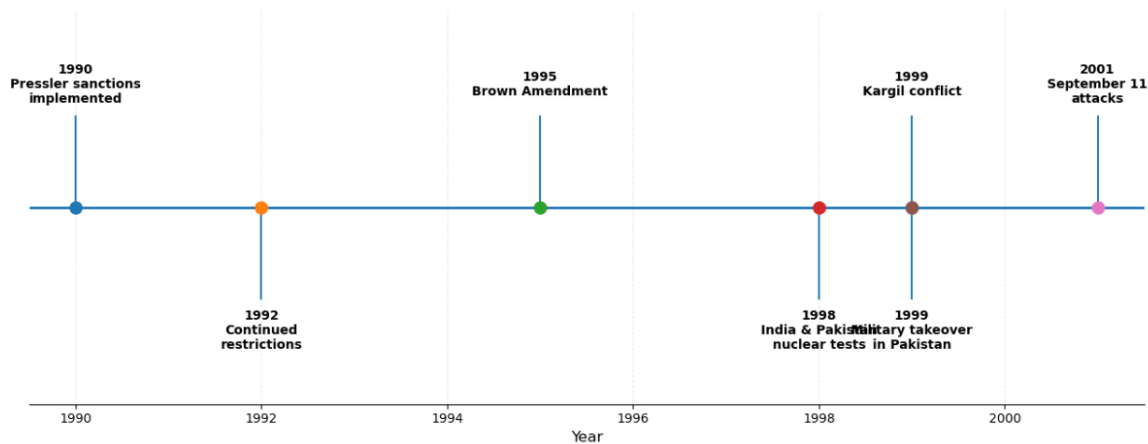


Figure 1. Timeline of major strategic and political developments shaping Pakistan–United States relations between 1990 and 2001, highlighting the transition from Pressler-era restrictions to limited re-engagement and post-9/11 strategic realignment.

The EU needs a more nuanced approach to coercive diplomacy, sanctions, and nuclear non-proliferation (Cohen, 2004; Fair, 2014; Haqqani, 2005; Kux, 2001; Riedel, 2011). The sanctions literature is a fundamental basis for assessing the Pressler Amendment. Hufbauer et al. outline conditions that affect sanctions effectiveness, such as the target's economic vulnerability, the political costs of compliance, and the clarity of the demands placed on the object of the sanctions. Pape says regulations often fail to work, to a nation's detriment, when what they seek to change is regarded as a key priority. In the case of Pakistan, it is especially relevant as there was strong linkage between perception of national security and the possession of nuclear capability. External pressure on the nuclear programme was thus not only an economic policy debate but also one Pakistani decision makers considered strategically fundamental. A further implication of Drexler's expectations of conflict literature is that sanctions are less likely to be effective if the target is anticipating future contact with the sender in the form of conflict. Hence, Drury's analysis of strategic partners and sanctions is also applicable, as sanctions may create domestic political opposition and lower cooperation levels. The Pressler case therefore offers an opportunity to consider whether sanctions against a strategic partner can lead to adherence when the sanctioned policy is considered crucial to the target's national security (Hufbauer et al., 2007; Kapur, 2007; Pape, 1997).

Alliance Abandonment and Patron–Client Relations

This study uses Snyder's alliance dilemma as its principal theory. In asymmetric alliances, the weaker partner can fear abandonment as the stronger party's interests evolve. With the fall of the Soviet threat, Washington's assessment of Pakistan shifted, and (crucially) a perception that this was so was created (Snyder, 1984, 1997). Walt's concept of balance of threat supports this argument: it focuses on threat, not just power. In Pakistan, the Soviet threat's transience did not end the security threat from India. As such, the United States would cut back on its regional engagement, while Pakistan would become a more thoroughgoing player in the regional security game. Morrow's work on asymmetric alliances is also relevant because a weaker state might

accept limitations on its autonomy in exchange for security. The less committed partner may seek other ways to reassure itself when its commitment decreases (Walt, 1987).

Security in the region, nuclear proliferation.

An additional analytic lens is regional security complexes. The India–Pakistan rivalry has strongly shaped South Asian security. Thus, Pakistan's nuclear policy must be considered within the context of India's military and strategic arsenal. Proliferation literature also distinguishes between security-motivated and "domestically motivated" accounts. However, Sagan stresses the importance of domestic institutions/organizational interests, whereas Waltz emphasizes international security pressures (Buzan & Wæver, 2003; Kapur, 2007). The stability-instability paradox is especially significant for the '90s, since nuclear deterrence can reduce the risk of full-spectrum conflict while increasing the risk of lower-intensity conflict and risk-taking. It is important to examine this dynamic in the context of the Kargil war that took place in 1999 (Sagan, 1996–1997; Sagan & Waltz, 2003).

Afghanistan and the Security Establishment

The Afghanistan dimension complicates the relation, as well. During the anti-Soviet war, the CIA and ISI worked closely together, and the close ties previously established at the institutional level did not go away when the Soviet Union withdrew. Coll, Rashid, and Rubin highlight the significance of security institutions in Afghanistan and how Afghan policy, militant networks, and Pakistan's regional strategy remain interconnected.

Claims about institutional autonomy and specific instances of intelligence activity need to be regarded with care, however, as their sources are retrospective historical accounts, memoirs, and secondary sources. These activities have therefore been considered part of the security environment, and it is not assumed that any particular policy action can be linked to a single institution (Coll, 2004; Rashid, 2000; Rubin, 2002).

Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, the study synthesizes three strands.

Alliance Abandonment

The alliance abandonment theory is one of the two theories that explains why, after the end of the Cold War, Pakistan's perception of the U.S. shifted. Mechanism of the central:

Over time, they began to perceive that they were being abandoned and diversified their security strategies because of the U.S.'s diminished commitment to its strategic interests.

Coercive Diplomacy

The sanctions program has been the subject of our earlier discussion and has made a difference in resulting in nuclear-policy outcomes, as the Pressler Amendment explains. The main argument is that sanctions fail when the target sees compliance as incompatible with core national security interests. Regional Security Complex Theory (RST) was a theory developed by Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen. According to Regional Security Complex Theory, Pakistan could not simply react

to U.S. sanctions by turning its back on its security doctrine. Pakistan remained caught in a long-term India–Pakistan rivalry. As a result, regional security concerns limited the possibilities for external coercion.

Integrated Analytical Model

The three perspectives are combined as follows:

Adapting to change in U.S. strategic priorities

↓

Pressler sanctions

↓

Reduced military cooperation

↓

Perceived strategic abandonment

↓

India–Pakistan military asymmetry

↓

More focus on self-deterrence.

↓

Continued Afghanistan/Kashmir policies

↓

Brown Amendment is an urgent re-engagement with shared values.

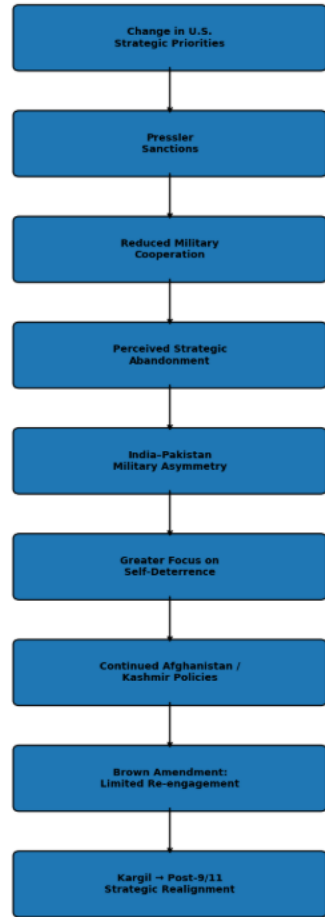
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Kargil and ongoing strategic divisions.

↓

Strategic realignment beyond 9/11

Integrated Analytical Model of Pakistan–United States Strategic Relations, 1990–2001



Integrated analytical model illustrating how changing U.S. strategic priorities, Pressler sanctions, perceived alliance abandonment, India–Pakistan military asymmetry, regional security concerns, limited re-engagement, and the post-9/11 security environment interacted to reshape Pakistan–United States relations.

Methodology

Research Design

The research design is historical-analytical and uses a qualitative approach. This design is suitable because the study mainly analyses the order of political and strategic unfolding across a specified set of historical events and the roles played by a number of state and institutional actors. Historical analysis allows focus on chronology, causal mechanisms, policy changes, and a combination of domestic and international factors.

Study Period

The study covers 1990–2001. The start of the period represents the start of Pressler sanctions, and the end of the period marks the strategic pivot in Pakistan–U.S. relations after 9/11.

Sources of Data

The study draws on:

- U.S. Congressional records; Legislative documents relating to the Pressler and Brown Amendments;
- official government statements;
- political leaders' speeches and writings;
- contemporary newspaper reporting;
- Scholarly books and journal articles;
- historical and policy analyses; and
- comparative military-expenditure data.

The quantitative part of military expenditure is based on SIPRI data. SIPRI provides consistent time series on military expenditure and states that the data comes from open sources and may be revised as improved historical information becomes available.

Analytical Approach

This is done in four stages of analysis:

1. Rebuilding the Pressler sanctions and their direct impact;
2. Review of the Brown Amendment and Limited Diplomatic Re-engagement;
3. Analysis of the local military scenario, especially at the Indo-Pak levels, and military expenditure;
4. Review of the Kargil and the events after 9/11.

Quantitative data are used primarily as an independent measure of military asymmetry, taking into account what they are really a measure of. SIPRI itself warns that expenditures measure input, not the output or effectiveness of militaries.

Data Limitations

Five caveats need to be noted. First, historical analysis depends heavily on English-language sources and will thus underestimate Urdu-language political texts. Second, hindsight bias might be present in memoirs and retrospective accounts. Third, military spending does not necessarily reflect military capability, as success depends on technology, training, readiness and preparedness, doctrine, geography, and so on.

Results

The most important break in Pakistan/U.S. military relations during the first few years of the investigation period occurred with the implementation of the Pressler Amendment in 1990. Because the amendment's required presidential certification was never given, the United States suspended assistance and restricted military cooperation with Pakistan. A prime focus of the battle was the F-16 programme. Congress had already revealed in its records that Pakistan had chipped \$658m in cash and used some \$200m from its credit lines on 28 F-16 jets which could not be delivered under the restrictions. The ramifications of the F-16 controversy extended beyond the planes. The episode spooked Pakistan into realizing that what had once been

considered one of its important strategic ties with the U.S. military could come to a halt because of a U.S. policy shift. This led to confusion about the level of U.S. security commitments. But the sanctions were not enough to make Pakistan give up its nuclear programme. This aligns with the sanctions literature, which highlights the challenges of coercion when the subject matter is perceived as related to national security.

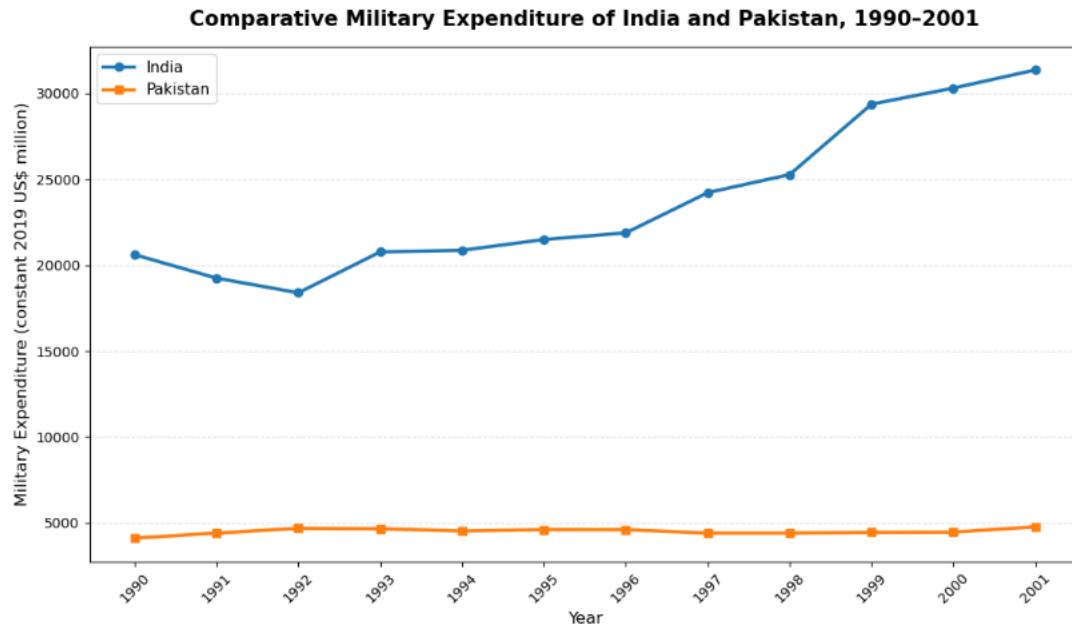


Figure 3. Trends in military expenditure in India and Pakistan from 1990 to 2001, showing the persistent and widening difference in absolute military spending between the two countries.

Does this evidence suggest a big disconnect between sanctions effectiveness in imposing costs and sanctions effectiveness in changing strategic behavior? The Pressler Amendment was an imposition of costs. Still, the evidence does not show that Pakistan acted in response to the amendment's primary intent, which was to make it 'more appealing for Pakistan to discontinue its nuclear course. The significance of the Brown Amendment and Limited Re-engagement is outlined. In 1995, U.S. policy shifted with the passage of the Brown Amendment. Congressional documents show the proposed bill would allow the immediate shipment of about \$368 million in already embargoed military gear, but would keep delivery of the 28 F-16s locked up. The equipment included military articles acquired before the sanctions took effect. The amendment thus cleared up part of the longstanding issue without in itself reestablishing normal military relations. However, the amendment's meaning is in its restrictive scope. It was not a complete change of the Pressler policy. Rather, one sense conveyed was that the current limitations were costing U.S. policy toward South Asia forever. The Brown Amendment was thus a form of transactional rather than alliance re-engagement.

Table 1 Major Strategic Developments between Pakistan and USA in the period 1990 to 2001

Year	Development	Significance
1990	Pressler sanctions implemented	Major interruption in U.S. military assistance
1991–1994	Continued restrictions	Bilateral military relationship remained constrained
1995	Brown Amendment	Limited release of previously embargoed equipment
1998	Nuclear tests by India and Pakistan	South Asian security environment became explicitly nuclear
1999	Kargil conflict	Major test of Pakistan–U.S. diplomatic relations
1999	Military takeover in Pakistan	Domestic political transition affected bilateral relations
2001	September 11 attacks	Major strategic realignment

Data compiled from the records of the U.S. Congress and historical literature used in this study. The Congressional Record records the Brown Amendment.

Military Expenditure and India–Pakistan Capability Gap

Understanding the regional military situation is important for gauging Pakistan's strategic conduct. The SIPRI series indicates that India's and Pakistan's military spending varied significantly and consistently during the 1990s.

Table 2 Mahima Shekhar (2004) compiled a study on Military Expenditure of India and Pakistan for the period 1990-2001.

Year	India	Pakistan	India/Pakistan ratio
1990	20,604	4,114	5.01
1991	19,239	4,405	4.37
1992	18,387	4,683	3.93
1993	20,767	4,659	4.46
1994	20,859	4,525	4.61
1995	21,485	4,604	4.67
1996	21,874	4,602	4.75
1997	24,214	4,407	5.50
1998	25,263	4,407	5.73
1999	29,360	4,450	6.60
2000	30,296	4,460	6.79
2001	31,351	4,771	6.57

Data: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (constant 2019 US\$). **Note:** The ratio of India/Pakistan is based upon the author's calculations. Military spending is an input measure, not a full measure of military capability.

The data clearly reveal a continuing spending asymmetry in the conventional sense. In 1990, India's spending rose to about five times Pakistan's expenditure, and in 2001, it was over six times Pakistan's expenditure. The gap increased particularly during the second half of the 1990s.

That's significant given that Pakistan's strategic issues and concerns couldn't be limited to the US. The nation remained in an unrelenting security rivalry with India. Thus, the withdrawal of U.S. military support came in a context where Pakistan already faced a perceived imbalance in the conventional realm.

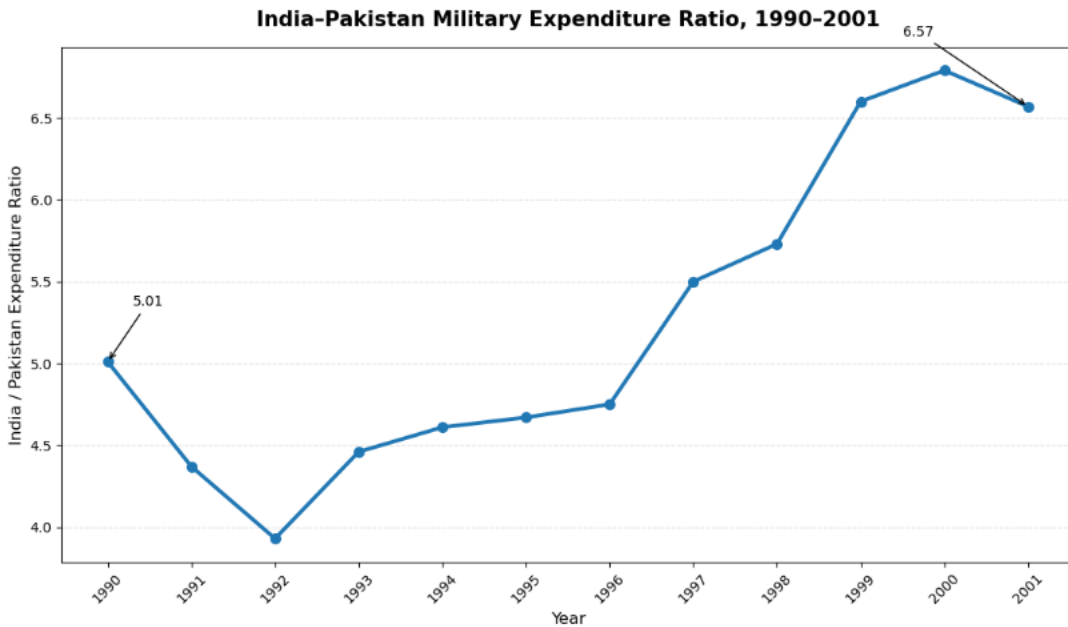


Figure 4. Changes in the ratio of Indian to Pakistani military expenditure between 1990 and 2001, indicating a persistent conventional military-spending asymmetry that became particularly pronounced during the late 1990s. Thus, the evidence points to two pressures shaping Pakistan's security calculations: one from the outside (Washington) and another from the inside (India). Refer to the section above on the trends in military expenditures. Economic costs of military spending are underestimated by absolute spending. In fact, throughout the nineties Pakistan was always spending a higher proportion of its economy on arms than India, according to SIPRI's historical estimates. For instance, according to SIPRI's historical military expenditure series, Pakistan's military expenditure stood at 5.7% of GDP, while India's in 1990 was 2.9% of GDP.

Table 3: Selected Military Expenditure Burden

Year	India (% of GDP)	Pakistan (% of GDP)
1990	2.9	5.7
1995	2.1	5.2
1998	2.1	4.2
2000	~3.1	~4.1
2001	~2.9	~4.0

Source: SIPRI historical military-expenditure data; figures are presented as selected benchmark observations.

Data selected as typical observations from a series of military-expenditure data provided by SIPRI.

A key difference in the comparison becomes clear. There was also a significant difference in absolute military expenditure, with India spending far more, but Pakistan had a heavier military burden relative to its economy. This disparity further strengthens the view that Pakistan had a capability shortage and was also resource constrained.

Benazir Bhutto Govts Diplomatic Strategy

The findings suggest that the Benazir Bhutto governments made several efforts to enhance Pakistan–U.S. relations.

Overall, four areas can be distinguished:

1. democratic legitimacy;
- 2) participation in peacekeeping missions in the international arena;
3. counterterrorism cooperation; and
4. direct presidential diplomacy.

The diplomatic line aimed to show that Pakistan was a valuable partner for the world, even though it had issues with nuclear policy. Key signs of limited re-engagement were U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry's 1995 visit to Islamabad and the revival of the Pakistan–U.S. Consultative Group. Pakistan also sought to highlight its cooperation in counter-terrorism. The extradition of Ramzi Yousef was one example of cooperation which was relevant to Washington's security concerns.

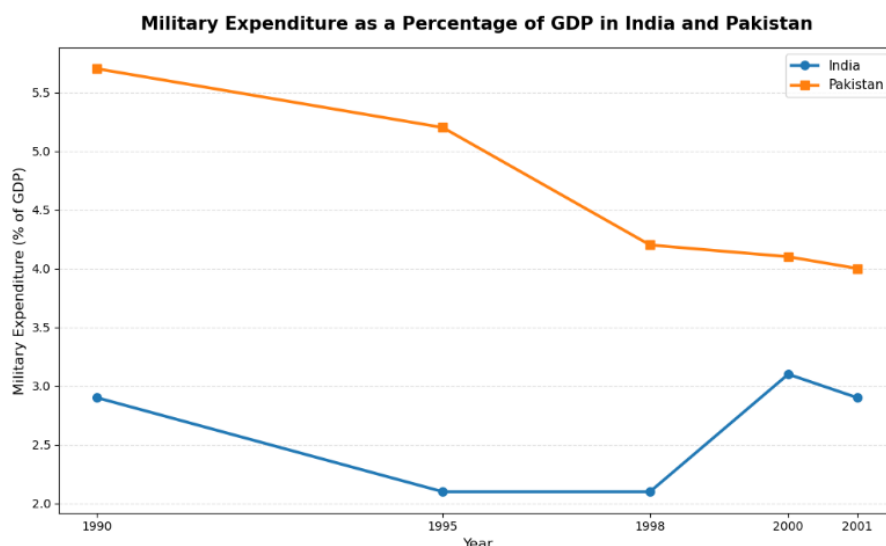


Figure 5. Military expenditure as a percentage of GDP in India and Pakistan for selected benchmark years, illustrating Pakistan's relatively higher military burden despite India's substantially greater absolute military expenditure.

But the diplomatic approach had its drawbacks. It might reshape discussions and lead to some policy adjustment, but it could not remove the main source of controversy: Pakistan's nuclear programme. Nor could civilian diplomacy completely resolve disagreements concerning Afghanistan and Kashmir.

Table 4: The key documents of diplomacy and the diplomacy results

Diplomatic instrument	Objective	Outcome
High-level presidential diplomacy	Improve bilateral relations	Increased political engagement
Democratic positioning	Present Pakistan as a moderate democratic partner	Improved diplomatic legitimacy
UN peacekeeping	Demonstrate international responsibility	Positive diplomatic value
Counterterrorism cooperation	Address U.S. security concerns	Provided areas of practical cooperation
Brown Amendment lobbying	Restore selected military cooperation	Partial success
Nuclear diplomacy	Reduce sanctions pressure	Fundamental disagreement remained

Note: Nuclear diplomacy to reduce sanctions pressure; fundamental disagreement remains. The authors' synthesis is based on a review of historical evidence in the study.

Afghanistan and Kashmir

Throughout the 1990s, the Afghanistan and Kashmir aspects continued to be the cornerstone of Pakistan's security policy. Pakistan's strategic interests in Afghanistan did not go away even at the end of the Soviet occupation. Instead, the country kept looking for a political environment in Kabul that it deemed conducive to its regional security interests. The Taliban further worsened relations between Pakistan and the U.S. Washington's perceptions of Afghanistan increasingly focused on the emergence of militant networks and the regional instability surrounding the country. At the same time, Pakistan's security circles continued to see changes in Afghanistan as strategically significant.

One major difference lay in Kashmir. Pakistan viewed Kashmir as an integral part of its national security, and U.S. policy increasingly stressed stability and avoided escalation in a region containing two nuclear-capable countries. These discrepancies illustrate Pakistan's inability to be viewed simply as a recipient of the U.S. pressure. Pakistani decision-makers were in a regional security environment that saw a direct linkage between Afghanistan and Kashmir and Pakistan's national security.

The Kargil Crisis and its implications in the region

The Kargil conflict in 1999 was a stark example of the growing disparity between Pakistan's and the United States' strategic goals. The USA took active steps to resolve the crisis and supported the restoration of the LOC. A key diplomatic turning point was President Bill Clinton's meeting with Nawaz Sharif on July 4, 1999, in Washington.

The Kargil episode proved that, despite the Brown Amendment, Pakistan-U.S. relations were not moving toward a stable strategic partnership. While the Pakistani army sought to create circumstances to change the situation on the LoC, Washington's priority was to prevent escalation between the two countries. This crisis also brought out the conflict between the military establishment and the civilian government of Pakistan. This episode was followed several months later by General Pervez Musharraf's military takeover in October 1999.

So Kargil brings together three strands of the study: the regional security rivalry, civil–military and Pakistan–U.S. strategic divergence.

Post-9/11 Strategic Realignment

Following the 9/11 attack, the world of international security has altered significantly.

Within no time, Pakistan emerged as a key U.S. ally in the fight against terror. General Pervez Musharraf pledged to provide Washington with highly visible assistance in intelligence, logistics, and counter-Al-Qaeda efforts. Pakistan also gained important economic and diplomatic advantages. Pakistan received regulatory ease and encouragement in the new strategic paradigm.

But the evidence suggests the new bond shouldn't really be called a return to the Cold War alliance. Cooperation is now strategy-driven. The Cold War period saw cooperation centred mainly on containing the Soviet Union. Cooperation was organized around 'counterterrorism' and the U.S.-led 'War on Terror' in the post-9/11 era. Thus, they established a rather transactional relationship. Cooperation benefited both, though their broader strategic interests did not fully align.

Discussion

Alliance Abandonment and Strategic Adaptation

The findings support the application of alliance-abandonment theory to understand Pakistan's reaction to the post-Cold War transition. During the Afghan war, Pakistan has been playing an important role in the U.S.'s strategic interests. With the demise of the Soviet threat, however, the strategic significance of the relationship waned from the American perspective. Nuclear arms proliferation thereafter became a much more salient issue. The stage was important from Pakistan's point of view. Poppy and Amla helped India win the match, and at the same time the country missed a vital source of military support in Pakistan.

This was no mere acquiescence to U.S. pressure. Pakistan looked for alternative means of ensuring its national security, such as developing its own regional policies and strengthening its nuclear deterrent. The results thus corroborate Snyder's hypothesis that abandonment can prompt strategic adaptation by weaker alliance partners.

The modalities of Coercive Diplomacy

The Pressler case illustrates the difference between coercion and compliance.

The sanctions had the potential for onerous consequences. They were not equally successful in getting the desired change in the nuclear policy. Part of this was the target's prestige. Pakistan's

nuclear programme has been significantly linked to its assessment of India's military power and the requirement for strategic deterrence. The sanctions thus challenged the policy. Escalating pressure may make it even more painful for Pakistan, while it also might reinforce perceptions of Pakistan's 'unreliable' nature. This fits with the existing literature on sanctions, which indicates that sanctions are less effective when they are perceived as challenges to national interests.

Military Asymmetry and Nuclear Deterrence

SIPRI data show that although military spending by both India and Pakistan fluctuated significantly over the study period, India's spending consistently outstripped Pakistan's. However, the expenditure gap alone cannot be directly linked to Pakistan's nuclear policy. But it provides strong contextual evidence.

Pakistan faced:

- a greater strength on the neighboring side militarily;
- continuing problems in Kashmir;
- a more limited ability to use certain U.S. military hardware;
- economic constraints; and
- lack of confidence in outside security assistance.

In this context, the importance of matching conventional asymmetry with nuclear deterrence increased over time. Thus, the point is not that the Pressler Amendment was solely responsible for the establishment of Pakistan's nuclear programme. Instead, sanctions reinforced the sense that Pakistan needed independent deterrence in the face of an existing security dilemma.

Limitations of Bhutto's diplomatic approach

The Bhutto governments had limited diplomatic achievements in their relationship with Washington, counterterrorism, and international co-operation. The best institutional evidence is the partial success of the Brown Amendment. Diplomacy, however, could not overcome underlying differences in views on nuclear proliferation and regional security. The restriction was thus not just diplomatic but structural. There were divergent views on nuclear capability, Afghanistan, and Kashmir by Pakistani and U.S. policymakers.

Afghanistan, Kashmir and institutional constraints

How a military walkout of Pakistan will affect Afghanistan and Kashmir is not something that civilian governments can decide on their own. These were areas where the security establishment had considerable influence. This also laid further ground for tension with Washington, as U.S. policymakers were dealing with Pakistanis of governments while at the same time they were facing policies which they could not control entirely. This institutional structure can help explain the finding that diplomatic improvement did not always result in full strategic convergence.

Kargil and the Limits of Strategic Convergence

Kargil is an important test of the argument.

One might expect more strategic convergence over regional security if the Brown Amendment had created a strategic relationship instead of a real one.

The Kargil crisis proved the converse. While de-escalation and restoration of the Line of Control was Washington's priority, the Pakistan military's agenda was more tactical. The crash thus made evident the capacity for limited cooperation to flourish amid growing strategic disunity.

Post-9/11 Re-engagement: Alliance or Transaction?

There was definitely a closer relationship after 9/11 than during much of the '90s. But its underpinning was very different from that of the Cold War relationship.

Pakistan was needed to cooperate in the following for the United States:

- intelligence operations;
- access and logistics;
- counterterrorism;
- duties related to Afghanistan; and
- regional security.

Pakistan, meanwhile, sought:

- economic assistance;
- diplomatic support;
- relief from sanctions;
- military cooperation; and

An international nod of approval to Musharraf's government. This interdependency resulted in cooperation, if not in the convergence of long-term strategic goals. A better understanding of the post-9/11 relationship is thus more aptly termed strategic re-engagement under new security conditions.

Theoretical Implications

The results have three important theoretical implications. First, as shown in the Pakistani case, alliance abandonment can induce the weaker parties to diversify their security strategies instead of simply doing what the stronger party wants. Second, the case highlights that sanctions against strategic partners have unintentional consequences. Yet sanctions can have material costs, and they can also affect the political and institutional ties that the sender might use to manipulate the target.

Third, regional security organizations can limit external coercion. Pakistan was part and parcel of a longstanding rivalry between the two countries – India and Pakistan. As a result, Washington was limited in its ability to change Pakistan's behavior at the strategic level because of security pressures that did not necessarily emanate from the bilateral relationship. That is why the

integrated interpretation is offered: the perception of lost U.S. commitment is explained by the term “abandonment,” coercive-diplomacy theory explains the limited effect of the sanctions, and regional security theory explains why Pakistan continued to prioritize its own security strategy over external pressures.

Policy Implications

There are several lessons for policies that can be taken from the historical evidence. First, compliance is less likely when sanctions target policies considered vital to national survival. Second, for long-term security ties, institutional procedures need to be established to manage disagreement. Crisis engagement can yield short-term cooperation without a real effort to address the conflict.

Third, Regional security issues must be integrated into nonproliferation policies. Understanding Pakistan's nuclear policy requires having an appreciation of India's military capability and the Kashmir issue, which is still not settled. In conclusion, spreading foreign-policy decision-making authority across multiple civil-service institutions could negatively affect civilian engagement. Lastly, if strategic cooperation is based on more than temporary convergence induced by an external shock, it is more likely to withstand the test of time after the crisis.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the study relies largely on English-language sources. Urdu-language political commentary and material from the Pakistani archives might add perspectives. Second, access to military and intelligence archives remains restricted. Some institutional decisions in this context therefore have to be 'rediscovered' through legal documents and interviews. Third, memoirs and first-person accounts may offer retrospective explanations/excuses and should be read alongside other evidence. Fourth, the level of military spending is an input measure, not a direct measure of military effectiveness. SIPRI strongly warns against interpreting military expenditure as a measure of military force. Finally, the study is a historical case study and therefore does not lend itself to formulating empirical relationships between sanctions and nuclear behavior that can be generalized elsewhere.

Future Research

Future research could extend this analysis in three directions. First, comparative research could examine the Pressler sanctions alongside sanctions imposed on other nuclear-capable powers, such as North Korea, Iran, and India. Second, a day-by-day reconstruction of decision-making in the 1990s could be more detailed if based on declassified U.S. State Department and intelligence documents, as well as Pakistani military documents and oral history.

Third, a quantitative, cross-national study could explore whether the impact of nuclear sanctions varies by the target state's external-threat motivation, external dependence, alliance patterns, and the presence of allied partners.

Conclusion

The years between 1990 and 2001 marked a fundamental change in Pakistan–United States relationship. It is neither a straightforward continuation of the Cold War alliance nor a

straightforward forerunner to the post-9/11 partnership. The Pressler Amendment was a first crack in the system. Following the Cold War, the United States took an ever greater interest in reducing the spread of atomic energy, but Pakistan remained thinking in terms of its nuclear programme in relation to the regional contest with India. The sanctions created severe material and diplomatic costs for Pakistan, mostly because of stalled transfers of military assistance and the uncalled-for F-16 programme. According to congressional records, Pakistan had already made significant dollar investments in aircraft.

But what the evidence suggests is that the core goal of the sanctions – of altering Pakistan's nuclear trajectory – was never realised. Rather, they helped foster the notion that United States security guarantees were not secure when its strategic goals shifted. The Brown Amendment was a partial reversion to the situation. The fact that it authorised about \$368 million of previously embargoed military equipment showed that Washington realised, through its own actions, that the price of absolute separation was too high. However, the amendment did not restore the military relationship of the 1980's. The military situation in the region underscored Pakistan's strategic concerns. Interestingly, SIPRI data indicate that India's military spending has consistently been many times greater than Pakistan's since the early 1990s and into the 2000s. India's expenditure in constant 2019 dollars was around USD 31.4 billion, while Pakistan's was USD 4.8 billion in 2001.

But that asymmetry alone is not evidence of the effect Pak nukes had on Pakistan's nuclear policies. It reveals, though, the security context in which Pakistani decision makers evaluated the attraction of strategic deterrence. Diplomatic work by the Benazir Bhutto governments had limited success. Overall, bilateral relations improved somewhat through contacts with Washington, international peacekeeping, democratic positioning, and cooperation on combating terrorism. But these steps could not overcome differences over nuclear proliferation, Afghanistan, and Kashmir.

This was again seen during the Kargil crisis, when there was no strategic convergence. The US and Pakistan took different approaches: the former focused on de-escalation and regional stability. At the same time, the latter was more willing to adopt a military approach to changing the situation at the LOC. The crisis consequently showed that bilateral collaboration alone did not necessarily reflect identical fundamental objectives in regional-security policy.

The September 11 attacks brought about another such dramatic turnaround. Pakistan once again turned into a major strategic partner of the US. But this relationship varied in its basis from the Cold War. The most significant factor behind cooperation was counterterrorism and the needs of the War on Terror after 2001. This study thus concludes that 1990-2001 was a time of strategic asymmetry, transactional cooperation, and unsettled security differences. Although the Pressler sanctions stalled the alliance, they did not eliminate Pakistan's security concerns. Engagement was partially restored through the Brown Amendment, which resumed ties, though it did not rebuild the previous partnership. Post-9/11 showed that strategic cooperation could be restored quickly when U.S. security priorities shifted.

In the Pakistani case, this shows the limits of coercive diplomacy: sanctions can carry costs without results if the target country sees the action as vital to its national security. Furthermore, when sanctions also erode the institutional ties that give the sender influence over recipient

behavior, they can make the sender less effective at influencing the target. The broader lesson for the Pakistan–U.S. relationship is that one-off convergence doesn't ensure a sustainable strategic partnership. It demands institutional structures that can handle conflicts over nuclear policy, regional security, Afghanistan, Kashmir, and civil–military relations. Without these mechanisms, policy during these co-operative periods may still be subject to shifts in strategic priorities.

The 1990s were thus not a decade of the lost middle ground between two alliances. It was a time of great change, when the very basis of the old Pakistan–U.S. partnership was challenged and broken apart, new strategic habits formed, and the contours of post-9/11 ties were, in some ways, unintentionally and subtly defined.

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