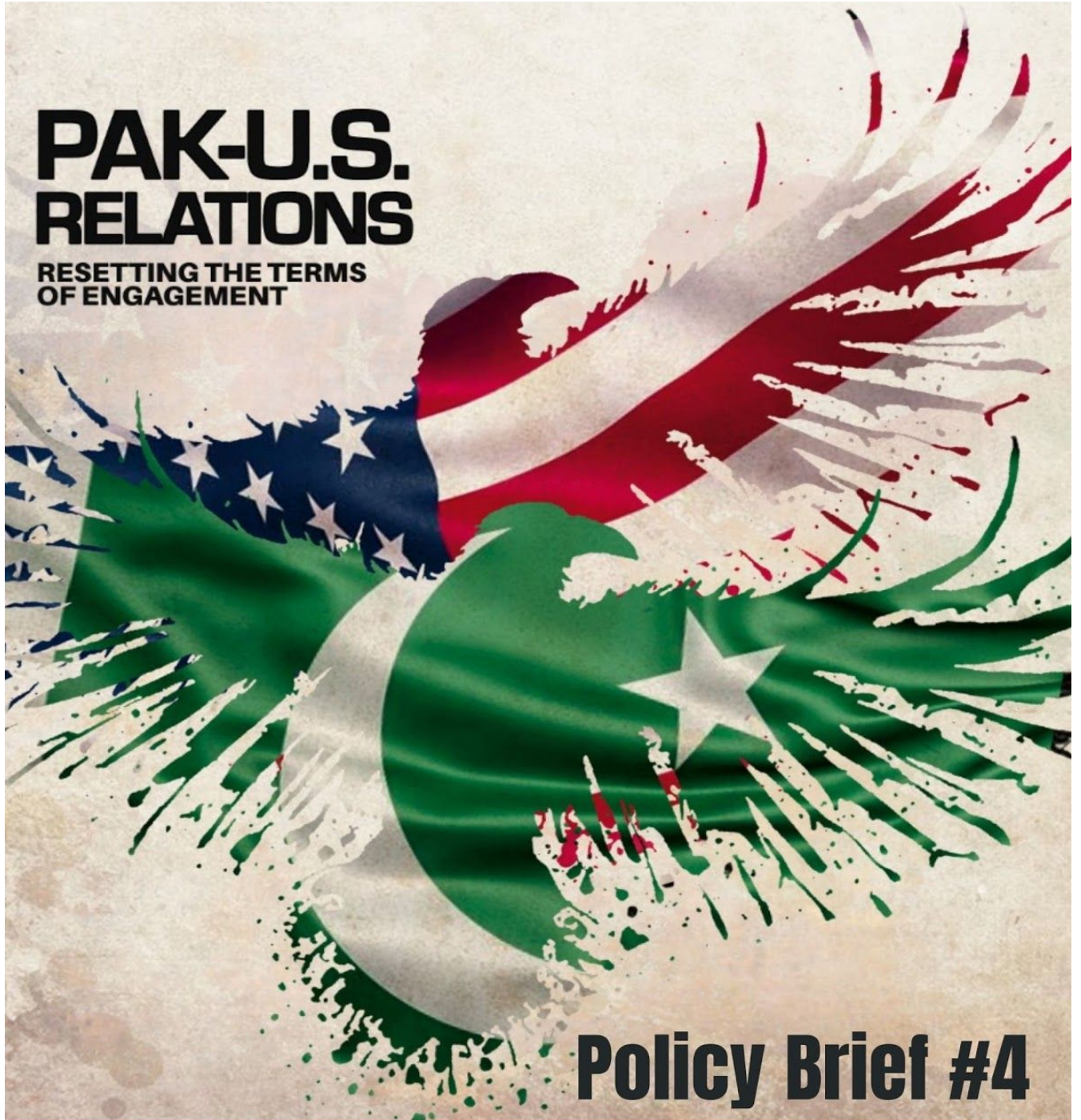


# PAK-U.S. RELATIONS

RESETTING THE TERMS  
OF ENGAGEMENT



## Policy Brief #4

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Pakistan's relationship with the U.S. is an extremely important one, which Pakistan has never taken for granted. Over a period of time, this relationship has evolved and has had its ups and downs. Historically, this relationship has been a relationship of [Aid & Sanctions](#). There is a history of grievances on both sides where both sides have felt misunderstood by the other either for their motivations or intentions. And this has been irrespective of which party has been in power, Democrats or Republicans.

Pakistan-U.S. relationship has evolved beyond the 'leadership variable' and is based on their mutual national security interests interspersed with geo-political drivers in the region where the U.S. has great political and strategic stakes. There are areas in Pak-U.S. relations where **convergences** exist and there are areas where **divergences** can damage medium to long-term relations if left unaddressed.

Following are the areas of **convergences** where Pakistan and the U.S. (irrespective of the ruling party type) will continue to work together to achieve same objectives:

1. Political stability in Afghanistan and support for intra-Afghan dialogue

2. Economic Stability in Pakistan
3. Counter-terrorism and intelligence sharing
4. Peace and stability in broader South Asia
5. U.S. role in Indo-Pak crisis management
6. Democracy & human rights
7. Defense Cooperation

Following are the areas in which Pak-U.S. **divergences** exist and much work needs to be done with the incoming U.S. administration. On Pakistan's part, it needs to communicate clearly and unambiguously to the U.S. as to what it wants and how can U.S. deliver:

**First**, lack of sensitivity from the U.S. with respect to Pakistan's threat perceptions vis-a-vis India. If Pakistan-U.S. relations have one perennial problem then it is the lack of U.S. understanding of Pakistan's threat perceptions which needs course correction.

An important area in this regard is the Indo-U.S. defence partnership where lack of sensitivity about Pakistan's threat perception is the most obvious.

**When the U.S. sells or facilitates sales of offensive armaments to India with full knowledge that India is procuring them to use it either against Pakistan or China, then Pakistan has a problem with it.** This U.S. behavior took precedence in the past when in 1965, both countries used U.S. supplied weapons against each other provided to them under the Mutual Assistance Program (MAP), the Mutual Defense Assistance Act. At least in 1965, there was parity in supply to both India and Pakistan so both were embargoed for the misuse of U.S. supplied weapons. **Pakistan must make the U.S. understand that it cannot talk of peace and stability in the region while feeding the very sources of that instability by arming India with offensive armaments and capability.** The Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) and other Indo-U.S. defence & logistics agreements are also a case in point which continue to be a constant feed for reinforcing the security dilemma in the region.

**Second,** there has been lack of acknowledgement for Pakistan's counter-terrorism efforts and the sacrifices made by both Pakistan's soldiers and citizens since 2001. That acknowledgement needs to come and

it need not come at a price. There is a recent resurgence in terrorist attacks on Pakistani soil by terrorists hiding in Afghanistan, who have made a pact to damage the state of Pakistan and is funded by India. In a recent [press briefing](#), Pakistan has provided incontrovertible evidence on Indian terror financing to anti-Pakistan groups operating from Afghanistan and Balochistan. Pakistan should have a very strong expectation from the U.S. to acknowledge state-sponsored terrorism against Pakistan carried out by R&AW affiliates who fund terror activities inside Pakistan and are provided safe havens in Afghanistan and India. **Talk on terrorism cannot be a one-way street where Pakistan is cornered and asked to 'do more'.**

**Third** area of divergence between Pakistan and the U.S. is on CPEC and the broader 'China in Pakistan' question. Pakistan will have to strike a fine balance between the two camps: U.S. and China, which now have clearly emerged as two camps and a change in administration (under Biden) will not change the nature of Sino-U.S. rivalry. However, it is also not like the Cold War, so Pakistan does not need to choose a side since the binaries are no longer in play and the Biden administration will also not

push Pakistan to choose one over the other. China too will have no problem in Pakistan remaining neutral while supporting China where it needs support and that is the art of balancing that Pakistan must display. **Between Pakistan and the U.S. ministerial level exchanges should take place to address U.S. concerns about CPEC, with a focus on inviting corporate America to invest in SEZs in the CPEC project.**

Last but not the least, the **fourth** area of divergence with the Biden-led administration will be on the safety and security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons program. Over a period of years, solo positive statements from the U.S. have come out encouraging Pakistan's safety and security protocols but there has been a lack of display in the overall confidence in Pakistan's strategic custodial arrangements. If non-proliferation is high on the Biden administration's agenda, then rest assured, this fourth agenda item will gain prominence in bilateral conversations and for that Pakistan must have its talking points ready.

## **Going Forward**

There are three broad areas in which there are mutual expectations that would set the tone for the future of Pak-U.S. relations in the next four years:

1. Afghanistan
2. Navigating U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry
3. Bilateral Pak-U.S. Conversations

**First** is Afghanistan and within that, the future of the intra-Afghan peace process. Pakistan has gone to extraordinary lengths to bring the relevant stakeholders to the negotiating table, which resulted in the U.S. recognition of the Taliban as a political entity with which they signed a historic agreement on Feb 29, 2020.

Pakistan's efforts for peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan started in 2009 scoping U.S. commitment in Afghanistan, airstrikes and peace negotiations. It was also the year when the Afghan government had explored the potential for negotiations with the Taliban leadership council of Mullah Muhammad Omar and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, with support

of the Pakistani government. **Pakistan must not let the incoming Biden administration forget the critical role Pakistan has played in shaping whatever successes U.S. claims in Afghanistan today. And should the intra-Afghan peace process falter, Pakistan should not be scapegoated for it.**

**Second** is China and the U.S. While maintaining the balancing act, Pakistan should try and move away from being seen through the lens of the Sino-Pak prism, akin to the Af-Pak prism, which the U.S. ultimately developed for Pakistan. That Af-Pak framework of reference did not serve the purpose then and the Sino-Pak prism will also not serve Pakistan any good to be seen by the U.S. in that binary. So Pakistan needs to distance itself from being bracketed in with China or be only seen through that calculus. China has always supported Pakistan's relationship with the U.S. In fact, a positive relationship between Pakistan and the U.S. is beneficial for China because it wants least resistance to CPEC/BRI in the region by extra-regional forces like the U.S. Therefore, Pakistan not taking clear sides would be understandable by China.

If in future, there is Sino-US rapprochement, Pakistan will ideally be in a position to bring both parties together, like it did when they first stepped out of the closet in the 1970s.

**Third**, Pakistan needs to chart out what the bilateral Pak-U.S. conversation will be about with the incoming Biden administration.

Five key areas in which the dialogue can be proposed to be resumed on priority include:

1. Energy
2. Security, Strategic Stability and Non-proliferation
3. Defence Consultative Group
4. Economic, Finance and Trade
5. Education, Science and Technology

Another important area within such conversation is the US role in facilitating Pakistan's commercial ties with neighbors to facilitate Pakistan's regional integration. Pakistan must convey to the U.S. that CPEC is not a zero-sum project for Pakistan and that it wants more than a mere working relationship with the U.S. via U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC) or the USAID projects. **Geo-politics will be the driver of Pak-U.S. relations and Pakistan cannot be denied its rightful place in U.S. geo-political/strategic calculus.**