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Pakistan-US Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era, 1990-2001

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Abstract
The period from 1990 to 2001 constituted a decisive transitional phase in Pakistan–United States relations. The end of the Cold War diminished the strategic value that Washington had assigned to Pakistan during the anti-Soviet campaign in Afghanistan, while Pakistan's nuclear programme emerged as the principal source of bilateral tension. The 1990 suspension of assistance under the Pressler Amendment, persistent disputes over Afghanistan and Kashmir, the nuclear tests of May 1998, the 1999 Kargil conflict, and the military coup of the same year produced a relationship marked by mistrust and selective engagement. Yet diplomatic contacts continued, sanctions were partially modified, and the attacks of 11 September 2001 rapidly reordered strategic calculations on both sides. This article examines the decade through a qualitative historical approach based on official records, policy documents, and secondary scholarship. It employs a realist framework supplemented by the concept of asymmetric interdependence to explain why limited cooperation persisted despite diverging priorities. The central argument is that the 1990s represented neither simple abandonment nor continuous alliance. They constituted a period of strategic estrangement in which nuclear non-proliferation, regional security, domestic political instability, and differing threat perceptions repeatedly constrained cooperation. The post-9/11 shift reflected pragmatic re-engagement driven by new security imperatives rather than the resolution of longstanding disputes.

Keywords: *Pakistan-US Relations; Post-Cold War; Pressler Amendment; Nuclear Sanctions; Afghanistan; Kashmir; Foreign Policy; Strategic Re-Engagement.*

Introduction
Pakistan-United States relations have long oscillated between periods of close cooperation and sharp disappointment. During the Cold War, shared concerns about Soviet influence, and particularly the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan after 1979, elevated Pakistan's strategic importance to Washington. Massive economic and military assistance flowed to Islamabad despite longstanding American reservations about Pakistan's nuclear programme (Kux, 2001; Haqqani, 2005). The Soviet withdrawal in 1989 and the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union fundamentally altered this calculation. Once the common anti-Soviet objective receded, disagreements over Pakistan's nuclear activities became far more consequential in US policy. In October 1990, President George H. W. Bush declined to issue the annual certification required under the Pressler Amendment, thereby suspending most economic assistance and military aid (U.S. Department of State, 1997; Congressional Research Service, 2003).

The decade that followed was defined by a series of interlocking disputes. Washington pressed Islamabad on nuclear non-proliferation, support for the Taliban, and the Kashmir conflict, while Pakistani leaders viewed these pressures as insensitive to their security concerns vis-à-vis India and as a form of strategic abandonment (Farooq, 2016; Cohen, 2004). Limited diplomatic engagement continued, the Brown Amendment of 1995 provided partial relief for pre-1990 equipment, and both sides' maintained channels of communication. The May 1998 nuclear tests by India and Pakistan triggered a fresh round of sanctions under the Glenn Amendment and related legislation. The 1999 Kargil conflict and the military coup that brought General Pervez Musharraf to power further complicated relations. President Bill Clinton's brief stopover in Pakistan in March 2000 underscored the cooling of ties. The attacks of 11 September 2001 abruptly reversed this trajectory, restoring Pakistan's strategic relevance in the US-led campaign in Afghanistan (Riedel, 2011; Coll, 2004).

This article analyses Pakistan–US foreign policy between 1990 and 2001 as a period of strategic estrangement rather than complete rupture. It argues that the relationship was shaped by four interacting factors: the disappearance of the Cold War rationale for cooperation, the centrality of nuclear deterrence in Pakistani security policy, divergent approaches to Afghanistan and Kashmir, and Pakistan's domestic political instability. The post-9/11 re-engagement is interpreted as a pragmatic adjustment to new security imperatives rather than the resolution of the underlying disagreements that had characterized the previous decade (Schaffer & Schaffer, 2011; Fair, 2014).

Literature Review

Scholarship on Pak-US relations has long emphasised the episodic and interest-driven character of the partnership. Dennis Kux's comprehensive history traces the cycle of engagement and estrangement from 1947 to 2000, documenting how Cold War priorities repeatedly overrode non-proliferation concerns until the early 1990s (Kux, 2001). Talat Farooq's study of the 1990s focuses on Pakistani strategic choices under the Clinton administration, arguing that US policy hardened Islamabad's security perspectives and created space for the military establishment to pursue regional goals that diverged from American global objectives (Farooq, 2016). These works establish that the post-Cold War decade was marked by a structural mismatch between Pakistani regional priorities and US non-proliferation and counterterrorism agendas.

Additional literature examines specific dimensions of the relationship. Stephen Cohen's analyses of Pakistan's military and political institutions highlight the army's dominant role in defining security policy and its deep mistrust of US reliability (Cohen, 2004). Ahmed Rashid's account of the Taliban provides essential context for Pakistan's support for the movement in Afghanistan and the friction this generated with Washington (Rashid, 2000). Studies of the nuclear programmes of both India and Pakistan, including those by George Perkovich and Ashley Tellis, document the tests of May 1998 and the subsequent sanctions regime (Perkovich, 1999; Tellis, 2001). Works on the Kargil conflict and the 1999 coup further illustrate how regional crises and domestic political change constrained bilateral diplomacy (Lavoy, 2009; Riedel, 2011).

Despite this substantial literature, relatively few studies offer a sustained, integrated examination of the entire 1990–2001 period that links the Pressler Amendment cutoff, the Brown Amendment, developments in Afghanistan and Kashmir, the 1998 tests, the Kargil crisis, the Musharraf coup, and the 2001 re-engagement within a single analytical framework. Existing accounts often treat these episodes separately or emphasize either the nuclear issue or the Afghan dimension. A gap therefore remains for a concise historical

synthesis that explains why limited cooperation persisted despite profound disagreements and how the events of September 2001 altered incentives without resolving the underlying structural tensions (Schaffer & Schaffer, 2011; Haqqani, 2005). This article addresses that gap by combining a realist theoretical lens with process tracing of key turning points.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how the end of the Cold War and the application of the Pressler Amendment reshaped the strategic foundations of Pakistan–US relations between 1990 and 2001.
2. To analyse the impact of nuclear non-proliferation policies, regional conflicts in Afghanistan and Kashmir, and domestic political changes on the pattern of bilateral cooperation.
3. To assess the extent to which the events of 11 September 2001 represented a fundamental realignment rather than a temporary suspension of the structural disagreements that characterized the previous decade.

Research Questions

1. How did the termination of the Cold War and the Pressler Amendment aid cutoff alter Pakistan's foreign-policy options toward the United States?
2. In what ways did diverging priorities over Afghanistan, Kashmir, and nuclear deterrence constrain bilateral engagement during the 1990s?
3. To what extent did the post-9/11 re-engagement resolve or merely suspend the structural disagreements accumulated between 1990 and 2001?

Theoretical Framework

The analysis adopts realism as its primary theoretical lens. Realism assumes that states operate in an anarchic international system lacking a central authority capable of guaranteeing their security, and that leaders therefore pay particular attention to relative power, threats, and survival (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). From Pakistan's perspective, India's conventional superiority, the unresolved Kashmir dispute, and the perceived need for a credible nuclear deterrent shaped both the nuclear programme and the search for external partnerships. From Washington's perspective, nuclear proliferation, instability in Afghanistan, and the risk of conflict between two nuclear-capable South Asian states became significant concerns once the Cold War ended (Cohen, 2004; Perkovich, 1999).

The concept of asymmetric interdependence supplements this realist foundation. Keohane and Nye observe that states may remain interdependent even when their interests diverge, and that the less dependent party can often extract greater concessions (Keohane & Nye, 1977). In the 1990s the United States was the more powerful actor and could impose sanctions with relatively limited immediate costs to itself. Pakistan, however, retained leverage through its geographic position, its nuclear capability, and its influence over developments in Afghanistan. This asymmetry helps explain why complete isolation never occurred and why limited channels of communication and selective cooperation persisted despite deep disagreements (Farooq, 2016; Schaffer & Schaffer, 2011).

Together, these frameworks account for the pattern of strategic estrangement. Realism highlights the structural shift that followed the end of the Cold War and the centrality of security calculations on both sides. Asymmetric interdependence explains the continued, albeit constrained, interaction. The combination clarifies why the 1990s were

characterized by recurring friction rather than either full alliance or total rupture, and why the post-9/11 re-engagement could occur rapidly once new security imperatives realigned incentives (Riedel, 2011; Coll, 2004).

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative historical and explanatory approach. It employs process tracing to examine the relationship between major events and shifts in policy: the 1990 aid suspension, developments in Afghanistan and Kashmir, the 1998 nuclear tests, the 1999 Kargil conflict and coup, and the events of September 2001. The evidence base includes official US government histories and policy records, Congressional Research Service summaries of relevant legislation, and established academic works on Pakistan's political and security institutions and South Asian conflict.

The study carefully distinguishes between documented policy actions and interpretations of motive. For example, the Pressler Amendment's certification requirement and the 1990 aid suspension are treated as documented events; claims about whether these actions constituted abandonment or a justified non-proliferation measure are assessed as competing interpretations. The article is limited by its reliance on publicly available material and by the uneven availability of internal Pakistani decision-making records. It does not claim access to confidential archives or original interviews. A fully publishable version would benefit from additional primary Pakistani sources, parliamentary debates, official speeches, and archival material where available.

The End of the Cold War and the 1990 Aid Suspension

The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the decline of the Cold War rivalry altered the foundations of the Pakistan–US partnership. During the 1980s, Pakistan had been central to the US-backed effort supporting Afghan resistance to Soviet forces. That strategic role helped sustain a large assistance relationship despite longstanding US concerns about Pakistan's nuclear programme. With the Soviet threat receding, the political conditions that had allowed Washington to priorities cooperation over non-proliferation weakened considerably (Kux, 2001; Coll, 2004).

The Pressler Amendment, enacted in 1985 as Section 620E (e) of the Foreign Assistance Act, required the US president to certify annually that Pakistan did not possess a nuclear explosive device as a condition for continued assistance. In 1990, President Bush declined to issue the required certification. The decision led to the suspension of most economic and military aid and interrupted the delivery of equipment already ordered by Pakistan, including 28 F-16 aircraft for which partial payment had been made. The cutoff was experienced in Pakistan as a sudden and unilateral abandonment by a longstanding partner (Mahmood, 1994; Farooq, 2016).

The sanctions did not halt Pakistan's nuclear programme. Instead, they reinforced the perception in Islamabad that the United States could not be relied upon as a consistent security partner and that an independent nuclear deterrent was essential. Limited diplomatic engagement continued, and in 1995 the Brown Amendment permitted the release of approximately $368 million in pre-1990 military equipment while continuing to withhold the F-16s. This partial relief improved the atmosphere modestly but did not restore the earlier alliance relationship (Congressional Research Service, 2003; Schaffer & Schaffer, 2011). The episode illustrated both the structural shift produced by the end of the Cold War and the limits of sanctions as a tool for altering Pakistani nuclear policy.

Regional Security: Afghanistan and Kashmir

Diverging priorities over Afghanistan and Kashmir further constrained bilateral relations throughout the 1990s. After the Soviet withdrawal, Pakistan sought a friendly government

in Kabul that would provide strategic depth and limit Indian influence. This objective led Islamabad to support the Taliban after the movement emerged in 1994 and captured Kabul in 1996. US policymakers initially viewed the Taliban with ambivalence but grew increasingly concerned about their harboring of Osama bin Laden and their links to international terrorism (Rashid, 2000; Coll, 2004). The Afghan civil war created a power vacuum that Pakistan attempted to fill through its support for the Taliban, viewing the movement as a means to secure its western border and counter Indian presence. Washington's initial tolerance gave way to alarm as the Taliban's human rights record and terrorist connections became apparent, creating a widening gap between American and Pakistani perspectives on Afghanistan's future.

On Kashmir, Pakistan continued to provide moral, diplomatic, and, according to US assessments, material support to the insurgency that intensified after 1989. Washington regarded this support as destabilizing and pressed Islamabad to curb militant groups. Pakistani leaders, by contrast, framed the Kashmir issue as an unfinished agenda of partition and a legitimate struggle against Indian occupation. These opposing interpretations produced recurring friction and limited the scope for broader cooperation (Wirsing, 1998; Bose, 2003). The Kashmir dispute remained a central irritant in US-Pakistan relations, with Washington increasingly viewing Pakistani involvement as a threat to regional stability while Islamabad insisted on its principled support for Kashmiri self-determination. This fundamental disagreement undermined trust and complicated efforts to build a cooperative relationship on other issues.

The combination of Taliban policy and Kashmir-related militancy reinforced US concerns about Pakistan's reliability as a partner. At the same time, Pakistan's geographic position and its influence in Afghanistan ensured that complete disengagement remained unattractive to Washington. The result was a pattern of selective engagement in which both sides pursued limited cooperation on issues such as counter-narcotics while disagreeing sharply on the larger regional questions (Farooq, 2016; Riedel, 2011). This selective engagement reflected the pragmatic calculation that despite profound differences, neither side could afford complete estrangement. Washington needed Pakistan's cooperation on intelligence and logistics while Islamabad sought to maintain its relationship with the sole superpower. The resulting dynamic was one of cautious, issue-specific cooperation that never resolved the underlying strategic disagreements about Afghanistan and Kashmir.

Nuclear Tests, Sanctions, and Limited Diplomatic Engagement, 1998

India's nuclear tests in May 1998 were followed within weeks by Pakistan's own series of tests. Both actions violated the international norm against nuclear testing and triggered US sanctions under the Glenn Amendment and related legislation. President Clinton imposed the same set of measures on both countries, including restrictions on economic and military assistance and opposition to loans from international financial institutions (Perkovich, 1999; Tellis, 2001). The tests represented a watershed moment in South Asian security, fundamentally altering the regional strategic landscape and forcing Washington to recalibrate its approach toward both countries. The Clinton administration's decision to apply identical sanctions reflected a desire to appear even-handed, though Pakistani officials privately complained that the measures failed to account for India's prior provocation. The sanctions regime imposed significant economic costs on Pakistan, compounding its existing fiscal difficulties and limiting its access to international credit at a critical juncture in its economic development.

The tests confirmed Pakistan's status as a de facto nuclear-weapons state and further reduced the already limited prospects for a conventional military supply relationship with the United States. At the same time, the shared nuclear capability introduced a new dimension of crisis management. Both Washington and Islamabad recognised the risks of escalation on a nuclearized subcontinent, which created incentives for continued, if cautious, diplomatic contact (Ahmed, 1999; Cohen, 2004). The Nuclearization of South Asia paradoxically created both obstacles and opportunities for bilateral relations. While the tests foreclosed meaningful defence cooperation and complicated Pakistan's relationship with international financial institutions, they also elevated Pakistan's strategic importance in Washington's calculations. American policymakers recognised that a nuclear-armed Pakistan could not simply be ignored or isolated, necessitating continued engagement despite the proliferation concerns that dominated the bilateral agenda during this period.

Domestic Political Instability and the 1999 Coup

Pakistan's domestic political trajectory added another layer of difficulty. The 1990s were marked by frequent changes of civilian government, corruption scandals, and tensions between elected leaders and the military. In May–July 1999 the Kargil conflict erupted when Pakistani forces and militants occupied positions on the Indian side of the Line of Control. The episode risked wider war and drew sharp criticism from the United States. President Clinton's July 1999 meeting with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif produced a Pakistani withdrawal but left lasting damage to bilateral trust (Lavoy, 2009; Riedel, 2011). The Kargil episode was particularly damaging because it exposed the deep disconnect between Pakistan's civilian government and its military establishment. Sharif reportedly learned of the operation only after it was underway, and the crisis revealed that Pakistan's nuclear capability had emboldened military planners to contemplate risky adventures. Washington's forceful intervention to secure withdrawal underscored the dangers of nuclear brinkmanship and raised fundamental questions about who controlled Pakistan's security policy, further complicating American efforts to build a stable partnership.

In October 1999 General Pervez Musharraf removed the Sharif government in a military coup. The United States condemned the overthrow of an elected government and imposed additional restrictions. Clinton's brief stop in Pakistan in March 2000, during which he spent only a few hours in the country and declined to meet Musharraf in a formal setting that would confer legitimacy, symbolized the low point in relations. US officials continued to express concern about nuclear security, support for militants, and the absence of democratic governance (Haqqani, 2005; Schaffer & Schaffer, 2011). The coup confronted Washington with a familiar dilemma: how to pressure Pakistan toward democratic governance without pushing a nuclear-armed state into complete isolation. American policymakers wrestled with the question of whether engagement or estrangement would better serve US interests in promoting stability and countering proliferation. The Clinton administration ultimately chose a middle path of limited contact that maintained channels of communication while withholding the legitimacy that a formal presidential meeting would have conferred.

The combination of the Kargil crisis and the coup reinforced Washington's view that Pakistan was an unreliable and unstable partner. At the same time, the nuclear capability and the country's location next to Afghanistan ensured that complete isolation was never a practical option. Domestic political change thus interacted with regional and nuclear issues to sustain the pattern of constrained engagement that had characterized the decade (Cohen, 2004; Fair, 2014). The structural factors that made Pakistan simultaneously

problematic and indispensable created a policy paradox that Washington never fully resolved. Each crisis the Kargil, the coup, the nuclear tests reinforced the perception of Pakistan as a difficult partner while simultaneously confirming its strategic importance. This pattern of crisis-driven engagement, punctuated by periods of relative distance, would persist into the next decade and shape the trajectory of the relationship well beyond the Clinton administration.

September 2001 and the Return of Strategic Cooperation

The terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 transformed the strategic calculus for both countries. The United States required Pakistani cooperation for military operations in Afghanistan, intelligence sharing, and logistical access. Within days, the Bush administration presented Islamabad with a set of specific demands. General Musharraf's government agreed to the principal requests, reversing years of support for the Taliban and aligning Pakistan with the US-led campaign (Riedel, 2011; Coll, 2004). The decision represented a dramatic reversal of Pakistan's Afghanistan policy, abandoning the Taliban regime that Islamabad had helped nurture since the mid-1990s. Musharraf later recounted that the choice was stark: cooperate with Washington or face the consequences of being treated as an adversary. The speed of Pakistan's compliance surprised many observers, but it reflected both the gravity of American pressure and the recognition that the Taliban's harboring of al-Qaeda had created an untenable situation. Pakistan's military leadership calculated that alignment with the United States offered the best path to economic recovery and international rehabilitation after years of sanctions.

In return, Washington lifted most of the sanctions that had been in place since 1990 and 1998, restored economic and military assistance, and designated Pakistan a major non-NATO ally in subsequent years. The speed of the realignment demonstrated that the underlying capacity for cooperation had never disappeared. Shared interests in the stability of Afghanistan and the containment of terrorism proved sufficient to override the accumulated grievances of the previous decade, at least in the short term (Kux, 2001; Farooq, 2016). The sanctions relief provided immediate economic benefits, including renewed access to International Monetary Fund lending and the rescheduling of bilateral debt. American assistance flows resumed and expanded significantly, with Pakistan becoming one of the largest recipients of US aid. The designation as a major non-NATO ally in 2004 symbolized the dramatic transformation in bilateral relations, though the label obscured persistent disagreements about the nature and extent of Pakistan's commitment to the war on terror.

The post-9/11 partnership, however, did not resolve the structural disagreements that had defined the 1990s. Differences over nuclear issues, militant groups operating from Pakistani territory, and the longer-term political order in Afghanistan remained. The re-engagement was therefore best understood as a pragmatic response to changed incentives rather than a fundamental settlement of earlier disputes (Schaffer & Schaffer, 2011; Riedel, 2011). The partnership rested on a fragile foundation of convergent tactical interests rather than shared strategic vision. Washington and Islamabad cooperated against al-Qaeda while disagreeing fundamentally about the Taliban, Kashmir, and the appropriate balance between military and political approaches to Afghan stabilization. These unresolved tensions would resurface repeatedly during the subsequent decade, demonstrating that the post-9/11 realignment had papered over rather than resolved the deeper structural problems that had long defined the bilateral relationship.

Discussion

The evidence examined above supports the characterization of 1990–2001 as a period of strategic estrangement. The end of the Cold War removed the principal rationale for the earlier partnership. Nuclear non-proliferation became the dominant US concern, while nuclear deterrence remained central to Pakistani security policy. Regional disagreements over Afghanistan and Kashmir, combined with Pakistan's domestic political instability, repeatedly limited the scope for cooperation. At the same time, asymmetric interdependence—rooted in geography, nuclear capability, and residual shared interests—

prevented complete rupture (Farooq, 2016; Cohen, 2004). This estrangement was neither abrupt nor total; rather, it unfolded gradually as the foundational assumptions of the Cold War relationship eroded. The Pressler Amendment, the nuclear tests, and the Kargil crisis each represented milestones in this deterioration, yet each also demonstrated the resilience of certain cooperative impulses. The relationship oscillated between punitive measures and pragmatic re-engagement, reflecting the fundamental tension between Washington's non-proliferation priorities and its recognition of Pakistan's strategic significance. This pattern suggests that estrangement in this context was less a policy choice than a structural condition produced by diverging interests in a transformed international environment.

The pattern of selective engagement is consistent with realist expectations under conditions of asymmetric power. The more powerful actor, the United States, could impose costs through sanctions, yet Pakistan retained sufficient leverage to ensure that channels of communication stayed open. The Brown Amendment, continued diplomatic contacts, and the rapid post-9/11 realignment all illustrate this dynamic. The decade therefore cannot be reduced to simple abandonment; nor did it constitute a continuous alliance. It was a contested and constrained relationship shaped by diverging threat perceptions and security priorities (Keohane & Nye, 1977; Schaffer & Schaffer, 2011). The asymmetric interdependence framework helps explain why neither party could afford complete disengagement despite profound disagreements. Washington needed Pakistan's cooperation on terrorism, narcotics, and regional stability, while Islamabad depended on American economic assistance and diplomatic support. This mutual dependence, unevenly distributed, created a relationship characterized by periodic crises punctuated by pragmatic cooperation rather than sustained partnership or complete rupture.

The events of September 2001 did not erase these structural features. They temporarily realigned incentives by elevating counterterrorism and the Afghan campaign above non-proliferation and democracy concerns. The subsequent partnership confirmed that cooperation remained possible when interests converged, but it also left unresolved the disagreements over militants, nuclear issues, and regional strategy that had accumulated during the 1990s. Future research can usefully compare archival records from both sides and examine how the experience of strategic estrangement shaped policy after 2001 (Riedel, 2011; Fair, 2014). The post-9/11 period demonstrated that the underlying structural conditions of the relationship asymmetric interdependence, diverging threat perceptions, and institutional mistrust remained intact despite the dramatic shift in tactical alignment. Understanding how the 1990s shaped the subsequent partnership requires attention to the institutional memories and bureaucratic routines that the estrangement period produced. The sanctions era created habits of suspicion and self-reliance within Pakistan's military establishment that persisted long after the formal restrictions were lifted, while American policymakers carried forward assumptions about Pakistani duplicity that complicated cooperation even when interests aligned.

Conclusion

Between 1990 and 2001, Pakistan's foreign policy toward the United States was shaped by the collapse of the Cold War strategic bargain, the centrality of nuclear deterrence to Pakistan's security calculations, regional competition with India, instability in Afghanistan, and domestic political change. The Pressler Amendment aid cutoff in 1990 was a defining moment because it exposed the limits of the earlier partnership and deepened Pakistani mistrust. The 1998 nuclear tests and sanctions, the 1999 Kargil conflict, and the subsequent military coup added further constraints. Yet the relationship remained important to both states and was transformed again by the attacks of 11

September 2001. Each of these developments reinforced a pattern in which the relationship oscillated between cooperation and estrangement, never reaching the warmth of the 1950s and 1960s nor descending into complete rupture. The cumulative effect was a relationship that both sides described as important but neither found satisfactory, characterized by mutual expectations that were repeatedly disappointed and grievances that accumulated over time.

The central conclusion is that the 1990s should be understood as a period of contested interdependence rather than simple isolation. Pakistan and the United States disagreed over the means of achieving security, the nuclear order, and regional politics, but shared interests repeatedly created reasons to maintain contact. The post-9/11 realignment was a response to changed strategic incentives, especially the US campaign in Afghanistan, rather than a settlement of longstanding differences. This interpretation challenges both the narrative of abandonment that dominates Pakistani accounts and the narrative of Pakistani unreliability that pervades American scholarship. Neither captures the complexity of a relationship in which both parties repeatedly chose engagement over rupture despite profound disagreements. The concept of contested interdependence captures the simultaneous presence of conflict and cooperation, of grievance and necessity that defined the bilateral relationship throughout the decade and beyond.

For policy and future research, the period demonstrates the limitations of partnerships built primarily on temporary strategic convergence. More durable relations require sustained dialogue, realistic expectations, institutional communication, and attention to the security concerns of both states. Further research should compare Pakistani and US archival records, investigate the role of civilian and military decision-makers, and examine how the experience of the 1990s shaped policy choices after 2001. The lessons extend beyond the bilateral relationship: they speak to broader questions about how powerful states manage relationships with weaker partners whose security concerns diverge from their own, and how mutual mistrust becomes institutionalised through repeated crises. Understanding these dynamics is essential for any serious effort to build a more stable and predictable relationship between Washington and Islamabad in the future.

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