Vietnam-Pakistan Relations in a Changing Regional Strategic Environment: Pakistan's East Asia Vision

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Abstract

This article reviews the development of relations between Vietnam and Pakistan from the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1972. It studies the evolution of bilateral cooperation over the past five decades in the political, economic and diplomatic arenas, while examining the impacts of regional geopolitical dynamics. The article claims that the relationship has been growing slowly but is still confined by the geopolitical rivalry among the major powers, particularly between the US, China and India. It argues that Pakistan's East Asia Vision has encouraged more strategic convergence with Vietnam, but this has not yet led to meaningful bilateral collaboration due to institutional restrictions and divergent strategic agendas. These problems notwithstanding, there is still much possibility for continued development of the connection. The article concludes by stating that a more successful implementation of Pakistan's East Asia Vision and a balanced approach towards India and the stability of relations with the major powers will be an essential factor in taking forward Vietnam-Pakistan cooperation in an increasingly competitive regional strategic environment.

Keywords: Vietnam, Pakistan, South Asia, Southeast Asia, India, China, the US, East Asia Vision

Introduction

Vietnam and Pakistan have maintained a longstanding diplomatic relationship dating back to 8 November 1972. They share a history of being closely connected. The East-West divide has shaped Pakistan's history since the establishment of the country in August 1947. The country faced conflicts with neighbouring India in 1965 and 1971, which led to the establishment of an independent Bangladesh in March 1971. Pakistan shuttered its diplomatic presence in Vietnam in 1980, breaking off Pakistan-Vietnam relations in the 1970s. This occurred during a period when the US ally wielded considerable influence, and there was strong opposition to Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, while Vietnam

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was fighting for its national liberation. Vietnam-Pakistan relations were influenced by foreign pressures during this period, especially the involvement of big countries such as the US, Russia, and China.

Vietnam-Pakistan relations have seen major advances and developments since the end of the Cold War and into the early 2000s. This was demonstrated by Pakistan's reopening of its embassy in Hanoi in October 2000 and Vietnam's reopening of its embassy in Islamabad and its commercial office in Karachi in November 2005. High-level visits have contributed substantially to boosting the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Vietnam. Pakistan's president Pervez Musharraf paid a visit to Vietnam in May 2001. This was followed by Vietnamese president Tran Duc Luong's visit to Pakistan in March 2004.[1] A notable visit took place in March 2012, when former prime minister Nguyen Tan Dzung visited Pakistan. Although the two countries have made attempts to improve their economic and military relations, certain impediments remain, hindering more comprehensive and efficient cooperation. Pakistan sees Vietnam as an important part of its strategic outlook for East Asia. Vietnam always attaches importance to its relationship with Pakistan, an important partner in South Asia.

Vietnam-Pakistan relations have been affected by political instability in Pakistan and the US war against terrorism in Afghanistan. These relations are also influenced by internal and external factors, including Pakistan's relations with China and India and the US-China competition in South Asia.[2] Pakistan's moves to deepen ties with East Asia are shaped by the actions of big powers, while Pakistan considers Vietnam a key part of its East Asia Vision. Vietnam's ties with China, India and the US also influence Vietnam's ties with Pakistan. The internal situation in Pakistan is also unstable and poses a serious obstacle to the formulation of a consistent policy to improve relations with Southeast Asian countries. This is particularly evident in the absence of robust networks to foster substantial collaboration between Pakistan and ASEAN countries.

The shifting dynamics in the Indo-Pacific are likely to affect Vietnam-Pakistan ties, which are also shaped by several internal and external variables. These variables are, nonetheless, predicted to play a constructive role in boosting bilateral collaboration. As the strategic

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[1] VNS, '50 years of Friendship, Amity, and Cooperation,' Vietnam News, November 10, 2022, https://vietnamnews.vn/opinion/1392907/50-years-of-friendship-amity-and-cooperation.html

[2] Faizal Yahya, 'Pakistan, SAARC and ASEAN Relations,' *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2004), pp. 346-375.

conflict among China, the US, and India intensifies, enhancing Vietnam-Pakistan relations can offer many opportunities for cooperation amid the US-China and India-China rivalries in South Asia. Regarding the benefits of cooperation, Pakistan can integrate successfully into Southeast Asia and Vietnam can improve its linkages with South Asia through cooperation mechanisms. This will boost the economic, investment and tourism links between the two countries. Opportunities exist for both sides to work together to maximize gains, build deeper bilateral ties, and contribute to peace and prosperity in the South Asian region.

Vietnam in Pakistan's foreign policy

During the Cold War

Since the foundation of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1947, it's foreign policy has been geared towards supporting universally acknowledged norms in the conduct of diplomatic relations. This involves respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations, avoiding interference in others' internal affairs, and advocating for non-aggression and peaceful dispute resolution.[3] Pakistan's foreign policy is rooted in the emphasis laid by the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, on the promotion of honesty and justice in international affairs. He wanted to create peace and prosperity for all nations everywhere. He also placed immense value on providing material and spiritual support to marginalized and oppressed populations worldwide while upholding the principles enshrined in the United Nations Charter.[4] These views on Pakistan's foreign policy highlight the country's historical opposition to the US war in Vietnam.

Vietnam and Pakistan enjoy ties based on goodwill and mutual confidence. Pakistan was a member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). Its position on the US-sponsored Vietnam War during the Cold War was one of pragmatism, not opportunism. Pakistan saw SEATO as an instrument to fight against communism in Southeast Asia, even though it is opposed to the suppression of nationalist movements there. In 1954, Pakistan signed the 'Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement' with the US but did not support the US military

[3] Pakistan MOFA, 'Foreign Policy,' Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) https://mofa.gov.pk/foreign-policy

[4] Mirza Tauseef, 'Quaid's Vision of Foreign Policy,' *Riphah*, 15 April 2013, https://iportal.riphah.edu.pk/newspaper/quaids-vision-of-foreign-policy/

actions in Vietnam between 1965 and 1975.[5] After receiving Western support, India found itself in a position of influence following the India-Pakistan war in 1965. As a result, Pakistan sought to strengthen its ties with China while critiquing US policies in Vietnam. In 1964, Pakistan's president Ayub Khan stressed that Pakistan would not intervene in a conflict between China and America in Northern Vietnam.[6] In the 1960s–early 1970s, the Pakistani public expressed its support for Vietnam's resistance against the French and, later, the Americans during the Vietnam War by organizing demonstrations and rallies in Pakistan.[7]

Pakistan's stance did not sit well with US president Lyndon Johnson's administration, which sought to take action against the country. Washington declined Pakistan's request for a loan to enhance the Dhaka airport. The White House also postponed president Ayub Khan's scheduled visit to the US in May 1965 as a form of protest.[8] The US also urged the World Bank (WB) to delay the meeting to discuss aid to Pakistan. Nonetheless, Pakistan's government did not comply and even considered denying the US request to extend its military base lease at Badaber.[9] Pakistan's position on US policy in Vietnam is evident in numerous statements. During his visit to China in 1965, president Ayub Khan expressed his belief that it was crucial to prevent the Vietnam War from escalating into another world war. He emphasized that the issue could be resolved peacefully through discussion and dialogue.[10] Indeed, Pakistan stands in solidarity with the Vietnamese people's resistance against US military action and consistently highlights their right to autonomy in shaping their future, free from external interference.

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[5] Ahmad Rashid Malik, 'Pakistan's Vision East Asia: Pursuing Economic Diplomacy in the Age Of Globalisation in East Asia and Beyond,' *IPRI Paper* 11 (2006), https://ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Paper11.pdf

[6] George J. Lerski, 'The Foreign Policy of Ayub Khan,' *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1974), pp. 255-273.

[7] Faizal Yahya, 'Pakistan, SAARC and ASEAN Relations,' *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2004), pp. 346-375.

[8] Muhammad Iqbal and Samia Khalid, 'Pakistan's Relations with the United States During Ayub Khan's Period,' *Pakistaniaat: A Journal of Pakistan Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2011), pp. 13-24.

[9] Dennis Kux, 'State of US-Pakistan Relationship,' *Pakistan Horizon*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (2012), pp. 21-27.

[10] Wilson Centre, Record of Conversation between Premier Zhou Enlai and the President of Pakistan Ayub Khan, April 2, 1965, https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/record-conversation-between-premier-zhou-enlai-and-president-pakistan-ayub-khan

Pakistan declined the US proposal to contribute its symbolic military force to the US armed forces in South Vietnam.[11]

In the early 1970s, the US recognized Pakistan's potential to serve as a mediator in relations among the US, China, and Vietnam. Pakistan's position cultivated a positive relationship with Hanoi. This perspective was similarly expressed in the Joint Communiqué signed by Pakistan and Japan in 1970. The communiqué emphasized the importance of resolving conflicts in Indochina through peaceful means while upholding the people's right to self-determination and freedom from external interference.[12] To some extent, SEATO members began to disengage from the organization in the early 1970s. Neither Pakistan nor France supported the US intervention in Vietnam, and both nations distanced themselves from the organization during this period. In 1973, Pakistan chose to withdraw from SEATO due to the organization's inability to provide support in its ongoing conflict with India.[13]

With the conclusion of the Vietnam War in 1975, the main reason for SEATO's continued existence disappeared. As a result, SEATO officially disbanded in 1977. However, Washington still views Pakistan as a bridge for normalizing US-China relations. Pakistan's position towards the US and China led the Nixon administration to exploit Pakistan's role as an intermediary during the early stages of US-China relations in the 1970s. Pakistan played an important role in facilitating Henry Kissinger's secret trip to Beijing in 1971, which eventually led to Nixon's momentous visit to China the following year.[14] The relationship between Pakistan and Vietnam is based on mutual respect. It has also helped the two countries improve their relationship throughout the years, notably after the Vietnam War ended.

After the Cold War

Pakistan's foreign policy changed dramatically after the end of the Cold War. There are several factors influencing Islamabad's new approach, among them the presence of international terrorism. The events of September 11, 2001, increased awareness of the expanding threat of terrorism in the Middle East and South Asia, thrusting it into the

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[11] Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, *Pakistan and the Alliances*, Vol. 3 (1969), Pakistan People's Party.

[12] 'Pakistan-Japan Joint Communiqué signed at Islamabad on 23 August 1970,' *Dawn*, 23 August 1970.

[13] 'Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO), 1954,' Office of the Historian, US Department of State, https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/seato

[14] Hafeez Malik (ed.), *Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1987), p. 165.

international limelight. The re-emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, a country which shares a border with Pakistan, has raised concerns about ethnicity, religion, cross-border security and radical Islam. In general, Pakistan's foreign policy is governed by several key considerations. First, the presence of the Taliban government in Afghanistan affects the western border. Second, the long-standing dispute with India regarding the eastern border, especially the Kashmir dispute, is a huge problem. Thirdly, China-Pakistan ties and the development of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are key issues. The effects of Gwadar port on the economies of the Gulf states and what this means for Pakistan are also part of the larger foreign policy picture.

Pakistan has been an active pursuer of closer relations with China in the post-Cold War period. High-level delegations regularly visit each other, resulting in the signing of numerous important agreements. China and Pakistan have a strong relationship and a history of strong economic, military, and technical cooperation. They have a close alliance and have supported each other. The continued tension between the US and China has made Pakistan's position extremely difficult. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has led to the formation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and Pakistan has been active in various cooperation frameworks and initiatives proposed by China. The initiative includes a number of projects worth a total of $62 billion, focusing on infrastructure development, energy, economic zones, and development of Gwadar port. China considers its friendship with Pakistan as reliable and as strong as iron.[15] It is often described as an 'all-weather strategic cooperative partnership' that has developed and taken root in the hearts of the two countries. The Chinese affectionately call their Pakistani friends 'iron brothers.' Pakistanis, for their part, frequently characterize the Pakistan-China relationship as uniquely strong and enduring.[16]

During the post-Cold War era, Vietnam became an important actor in East Asia's strategic landscape. In October 2003, Pakistan introduced a strategy to strengthen economic and strategic ties with East Asia. This initiative by Pakistan was implemented in response to India's announcement of its Look East policy, which aimed to improve relations with south-east Asian countries. The changing dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region motivated Pakistan's announcement of the East Asian

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[15] Eram Ashraf, 'China-Pakistan Relations, Gender and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor,' in *China, Pakistan and the Belt and Road Initiative* (London: Routledge, 2024), p. 115.

[16] Li Qingyan, 'China-Pakistan "Iron Brotherhood": 70 Years Hand in Hand,' *The Diplomatic Insight Magazine*, Vol. 4, No. 5-6 (2021), https://www.ciis.org.cn/english/commentaries/202109/t20210908_8122.html

vision. This includes the growing US presence, which seeks to limit China's influence and has even raised concerns about potential conflicts in the region.[17] US involvement in Afghanistan after the events of September 11, 2001, was part of the 'US war on terrorism.' From Pakistan's perspective, there is a noticeable shift of influence from Eurasia to the Asia-Pacific region. In simple terms, Pakistan's East Asia vision policy aims to build strong, mutually beneficial relationships with East Asian countries across trade, business, investment, technology transfer, and regional and global economic cooperation.[18] Pakistan's relationship with Vietnam is crucial diplomatically as Vietnam is a full member of ASEAN and backs Pakistan's bid for full dialogue partner status in the organization.

During that period, Pakistan recognized the importance of ASEAN as a leading regional organization with ten members and a GDP of around $1.8 billion in 2011.[19] Pakistan appreciates the significance of the ASEAN region and its potential for future collaboration. Therefore, it is looking to enhance its engagement in the ASEAN framework. Pakistan has been an SDP (Sectoral Dialogue Partner) of ASEAN since 1997 in the fields of trade, investment, industry, environment, human resource development, research and technology, medicines and tourism.[20] Pakistan became a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in 2004. It joined the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) later and the ASEAN-Pakistan Joint Declaration on anti-terrorism cooperation came in 2005. In 1999, Pakistan applied for 'Full Dialogue Partnership' (FDP) status with ASEAN. The request is pending approval, as ASEAN has put the establishment of FDPs on hold until the procedures are negotiated and agreed upon. In February 1999, Pakistan's relations with ASEAN were institutionalized with the setting up of the ASEAN-Pakistan Joint Sectoral Cooperation Committee (APJSCC). In March 2019, the two sides agreed to increase cooperation on counterterrorism, violent extremism and transnational crime. In 2022, Pakistan and ASEAN cemented their status as important trading partners, with trade reaching $11 billion.

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[17] Muhammad Shafiq, 'Emerging Trends in Geo-politics of Asia Pacific Region,' *Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI) Journal*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (2014), p.96.

[18] Ibid.

[19] ASEAN Secretariat, 'Investing in ASEAN,' ASEAN Main Portal (2013), https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/images/2012/news/documents/ASEAN%20Insert%202013%20Lores.pdf

[20] Amna Ejaz Rafi, 'Entry of ASEAN's New Dialogue Partners: Status of Pakistan's Request,' Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI), February 2022, https://ipripak.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Policy-Brief-Entry-of-ASEAN-New-Dialogue-Partners-Status-of-Pakistan-Request.pdf

Pakistan's exports to ASEAN countries total $3 billion, while imports total $8.8 billion. Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, the Philippines and Indonesia – five ASEAN countries – account for most of Pakistan's commerce.[21]

Current status of Pakistan-Vietnam relations

Diplomacy

Following the establishment of diplomatic relations on 8 November 1972, the bilateral relationship between the two countries has evolved into a new phase characterized by friendship and cooperation aimed at mutual development. Pakistan and Vietnam share mutual respect for their political institutions and are actively working to enhance their economic and trade cooperation. In October 2000, Pakistan established a new embassy in Hanoi and designated a permanent ambassador. Vietnam reopened its embassy in Islamabad in December 2005 and established a commercial office in Karachi in November 2005. Throughout the years, both nations have engaged in multiple exchanges of high-level delegations. Vietnam endorsed Pakistan's candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council for the 2002-2003 term. Pakistan supported Vietnam's pursuit of non-permanent membership on the United Nations Security Council for the 2008-2009 term and endorsed Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2006. Vietnam expressed its support for Pakistan's re-election to the United Nations Human Rights Council for the 2008-2011 term.[22]

Pakistan attaches great importance to Vietnam's stable political environment and active economic policies. The Vietnamese market offers considerable opportunities for Pakistani enterprises to strengthen bilateral economic and trade ties. In March 2004, president Tran Duc Luong visited Pakistan and was warmly received by the then-Pakistani prime minister, Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali. The two sides signed a number of agreements, including the declaration on Vietnam-Pakistan relations, the Agreement for Avoidance of Double Taxation, the Agreement on Science and Technology Cooperation, the Agreement on Cooperation between the two Foreign Ministries and the Agreement on Cooperation with the two State Banks. Both sides decided to form the

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[21] 'The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN),' Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2023), https://mofa.gov.pk/asean-asean-regional-forum

[22] Minh Hung, 'Tang Cuong Giao Luu Van Hoa, Xay Dung Moi Quan He Huu Nghi Va Hop Tac Viet Nam-Pakistan,' (Strengthen Cultural Exchanges, Build Friendship and Cooperation Between Vietnam and Pakistan), *Quoc hoi Viet Nam*, January 18, 2022, https://quochoi.vn/tintuc/pages/tin-hoat-dong-cua-quoc-hoi.aspx

Pakistan-Vietnam Business Forum to promote trade and business ties. There is a proposal to waive visa requirements for citizens holding diplomatic and official passports in both countries. The agreements offer a full legal basis for future interactions between the countries.

High-level delegations were exchanged between both parties to enhance bilateral relations. Several visits occurred on the Vietnamese side. Notable events include the visit of Pakistan's president Pervez Musharraf to Vietnam in May 2001; president Tran Duc Luong's official visit to Pakistan in 2004; Deputy Foreign Minister Le Cong Phung's visit to Pakistan in 2002; and Deputy Minister of Trade Do Nhu Dinh's delegation in 2002. In 2003, Bui Ba Bong, Deputy Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development, led a delegation. In 2004, Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade, Le Duong Quang, led a delegation. In 2010, Le Duong Quang headed the delegation at the second Joint Committee meeting held in Islamabad, Pakistan. In 2001, Musarab, Head of the Executive Agency of Pakistan, visited Vietnam. Waqar Masood Khan, Deputy Minister of Economy of Pakistan, paid a visit and held discussions with the Vietnam-Pakistan Joint Committee. The Chairman of the Pakistan Senate Foreign Relations Committee visited Vietnam in 2008.

August 2011, Tariq Iqbal Puri, Chief Executive of the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP), visited Vietnam and met with the Joint Trade Subcommittee of both nations.[23] Furthermore, the two sides have established a legislative framework through several agreements aimed at fostering collaboration between the countries. These include: Trade Agreement (2001), Agreement for the Avoidance of Double Taxation (2004), Framework Agreement on Scientific and Technological Cooperation (2004), MOU on Consultation between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs (2004), MOU on the establishment of the Vietnam-Pakistan Joint Committee, MOU between the State Bank of Vietnam and the State Bank of Pakistan (2004), Agreement on Fisheries and Aquaculture Cooperation (2006) and Agreement on Visa Exemption for Holders of Diplomatic and Official Passports (2007).

President Tran Dai Quang of Vietnam met Pakistani prime minister Nawaz Sharif on the sidelines of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation in Beijing in May 2017. He said at the meeting that Vietnam highly appreciated its friendly and constructive relations with Pakistan. He expressed hope that both sides would enhance practical cooperation, boost exchanges and contacts, and carry out

[23] Quynh Chi, 'More Business Opportunities with Pakistani Enterprises,' *Vietnam Business Forum* (2011), https://vccinews.com/prode/23858/.html

delegation exchanges at all levels to celebrate the 45th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between the two nations (November 8, 1972 - November 8, 2017). President Tran Dai Quang called for the two sides to continue to value and enhance the effectiveness of their bilateral cooperation mechanisms, to boost negotiations, and to sign cooperation agreements in the fields of culture, sports, and tourism. The aim is to establish a positive legal framework that would encourage cooperation in the fields of tourism, aviation and sea transport. President Tran Dai Quang believes in the great potential of cooperation between the two countries in many fields. He called on both sides to work hard to elevate their cooperative relations. Therefore, both sides should strengthen high-level dialogues and interdepartmental, inter-sectoral, and inter-economic initiatives and contacts to tap each other's unique capabilities and achieve a trade turnover of $1 billion by 2020.

The president urged the two countries to increase their collaboration in international forums, pool their efforts to prevent and combat cross-border crimes and expedite the conclusion of their mutual legal assistance agreements. Pakistan's prime minister Nawaz Sharif highlighted Vietnam's importance as a partner in the region. He pointed to the existing procedures between the two countries and said he wanted to strengthen bilateral ties. The Pakistani government respects Vietnam's remarkable development achievements and the strong potential for cooperation between the two countries. Progress depends on enhancing cooperation, notably in the areas of economy and trade.[24] In 2021, the Vietnam-Pakistan Parliamentary Friendship Group was created with eight members, all National Assembly delegates from various provinces and towns of Vietnam. The group intends to encourage collaboration between the two countries in areas of mutual expertise and to foster exchanges of high-level delegations.[25]

Trade

Two-way trade cooperation has yielded numerous advantages. Pakistan ranks as Vietnam's second-largest export market in South Asia, after India. Vietnam also exports a number of goods to Pakistan, such as tea,

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[24] TTXVN, 'Chu Tich Nuoc Gap Thu Tuong Pakistan, Tong Thu Ky Dang Dan Chu Tu Do Nhat Ban,' (The President Met with the Prime Minister of Pakistan and Secretary General of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan), *Bao Chinh Phu*, May 14, 2017, https://baochinhphu.vn/chu-tich-nuoc-gap-thu-tuong-pakistan-tong-thu-ky-dang-dan-chu-tu-do-nhat-ban-102221002.htm

[25] Minh Hung, 'Dai Su Pakistan Samina Mehtab: Viet Nam La Hinh Mau Trong Phat Trien Kinh Te,' (Pakistani Ambassador Samina Mehtab: Vietnam is a Model in Economic Development), *Quoc Hoi*, June 28, 2022, https://quochoi.vn/pages/tim-kiem.aspx

seafood, pepper, rubber, textiles, machinery and equipment. In contrast, Pakistan supplies raw materials to Vietnam such as fabric, cotton, textiles, shoe leather, yarn, modern medicines, animal feed, and other raw materials. Statistical data show that Pakistan's trade volume increased from $54 million in 2005 to over $390 million in 2012, $700 million in 2017, and over $794 million in 2021.[26]

The anticipated trend of rising trade between the two countries from 2018 to 2022 continues. It is projected to reach $904 million in 2022, reflecting a 13 per cent increase over 2021. Regarding the textile and garment sector, Pakistan has been importing a significant amount, approximately $81 million, from Vietnam. On the other hand, Pakistan exported nearly $56 million in textile products to Vietnam in 2021-2022. These exports include cotton, cotton yarn, and fabric. Pakistan imported almost $77 million in yarn from Vietnam and exported nearly $100 million in fabric, textiles, footwear, wool, and cotton products to Vietnam. The textiles, garments, and footwear sectors alone have reached a remarkable $71 billion, with fabrics and garments accounting for $44 billion and leather and footwear contributing $27 billion.[27] In 2021, Pakistan ranked 48th among 149 countries and territories investing in Vietnam, with $33 million in investments in the textile, medical, and healthcare industries.[28]

Vietnam imported $1.7 billion worth of leather products in 2022, with Pakistan's share in the export market being barely 1.5 per cent. Vietnam's pharmaceutical imports are estimated at $3.3 billion, whereas Pakistan's share in pharmaceutical exports is just 0.25 per cent. The volume of stainless steel surgical items imported by Vietnam is $638 million, and Pakistan's exports account for just 0.18 per cent of this total.[29] The volume of trade between the two countries amounted to around $700 million in 2023. Vietnam exported $386 million in goods to Pakistan, including tea, peppers, textile fibres, iron and steel, rubber, technological products and mobile phones. Meanwhile, Pakistan's exports

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[26] 'Pakistan, Vietnam Enjoy Outstanding Cooperation in Trade, Technology: Envoy,' *Associated Press of Pakistan,* November 9, 2022, https://www.app.com.pk/national/pakistan-vietnam-enjoy-outstanding-cooperation-in-trade-technology-envoy/

[27] Cam Anh, 'Con Nhieu Du Dia Hop Tac Giua Doanh Nghiep Viet Nam-Pakistan,' (There is Still Much Room for Cooperation between Vietnamese and Pakistani Businesses), *Dien Dan Doanh Nghiep*, 6 April 2023, https://diendandoanhnghiep.vn/con-nhieu-du-dia-hop-tac-giua-doanh-nghiep-viet-nam-pakistan-241945.html

[28] 'Pakistan-Vietnam trade volume to cross US$1 billion soon: Nguyen Thi,' *The Regional Times of Sindh*, 3 December 2022.

[29] Ibid.

to Vietnam are over $300 million. Exports were mainly raw materials for animal feed, pharmaceuticals, cotton, a variety of textiles, textile and garment materials, and leather and footwear.[30]

In March 2012, when former prime minister Nguyen Tan Dzung visited Pakistan, both parties agreed to strengthen their relations, focusing on expanding trade, economics, and defence cooperation. In March 2012, during the second Nuclear Security Summit in Seoul, South Korea, Pakistan's prime minister Gilani stated that Vietnam holds a distinctive and important role in Pakistan's strategic vision for East Asia. He highlighted that Pakistan values its relations with Vietnam.[31] The President of Pakistan, Arif Alvi, expected both sides to work together to improve trade and commerce ties with Vietnam, as Pakistan offers substantial investment opportunities, and the Vietnamese business community should take advantage of the country's favourable investment climate.[32]

In 2018, both parties agreed to enhance the Joint Trade Subcommittee to propose adaptable, practical strategies to achieve the $1 billion turnover goal by 2020. They also aimed to intensify the exchange of business delegations to maximize investment and business opportunities. Pakistan expressed its appreciation for the inclusion of traditional Vietnamese products such as tea, pepper, and basa fish. The two parties further agreed to focus on advancing other prospective sectors, including agriculture, culture, sports and tourism, connectivity, information and communication, academic exchange, and people-to-people exchange. Pakistan has planned to export kinnow oranges, mangoes, and meat to Vietnam. Both parties concurred that the fifth session of the Joint Trade Committee would be held in Hanoi, Vietnam, in 2018.[33]

Vietnam and Pakistan are experiencing rapid economic growth in Asia and have abundant human resources, so the potential for cooperation in trade and industry is significant. The government has tasked the Ministry of Industry and Trade to oversee the coordination between the Vietnam-Pakistan Joint Committee and the Vietnam-Pakistan Joint

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[30] Cam Anh, 'Thuc Day Hop Tac Thuong Mai Viet Nam – Pakistan,' (Promote Vietnam - Pakistan Trade Cooperation), *Dien Dan Doanh Nghiep*, June 7, 2024, https://diendandoanhnghiep.vn/thuc-day-hop-tac-thuong-mai-viet-nam-pakistan-264580.html

[31] 'Pakistan, Vietnam to expand trade, defence ties,' *The Balochistan Times*, 28 March 2012.

[32] 'President calls for improving Pakistan-Vietnam trade relations,' *The Nation*, 2021.

[33] 'Pakistan, Vietnam agree to remove trade barriers. Imran Ali Kundi,' *The Nation*, 6 October 2017.

Trade Subcommittee. Pakistan has shown strong interest in strengthening its collaboration with Vietnam in the fields of economics, commerce, industry, and investment. Pakistan can provide highly skilled teachers, information technology technicians and medical experts to many countries throughout the world.

Security-defence and multilateral cooperation

Defence-security cooperation between Vietnam and Pakistan is a notable success. Both parties have agreed to actively promote the exchange of delegations, training programmes, and sharing experience in rescue and relief operations. The Vietnamese delegation recommended accelerating negotiations and finalizing the Memorandum of Understanding on crime prevention and combat between Vietnam's Ministry of Public Security and Pakistan's Ministry of Interior. The two nations share numerous interests in collaborating to address non-conventional security threats, such as anti-terrorism. They seek to consult, exchange information, coordinate efforts and provide mutual assistance in international and regional forums.

They aim to enhance the exchange of delegations among law enforcement agencies, particularly in specialized areas such as combating, investigating, and apprehending perpetrators of transnational crimes, drug trafficking, terrorism, and the use of advanced technology for criminal activities, as well as international economic crimes. These objectives will be pursued through the channels of cooperation established by Interpol. The Vietnamese Ministry of Public Security and the Pakistani Ministry of Interior have executed a Memorandum of Understanding to enhance collaboration in crime prevention and enforcement. They have concluded an Extradition Agreement and a Transfer of Sentenced Persons Agreement. Their goal is to combine efforts to ensure the security and safety of citizens living, studying, or working abroad.

Besides bilateral cooperation, Vietnam and Pakistan also enhanced their multilateral relations by actively supporting each other at international forums on regional and global issues of mutual concern. They also support each other's candidatures to UN bodies, including the Human Rights Council, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), the Security Council, and the UNESCO Executive Council. Pakistan supports Vietnam's candidature for non-permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council, accession to the World Trade Organization and cooperation with ASEAN to ensure peace and stability in the region. Vietnam also supported Pakistan's re-election to the UN Human Rights

Council (2008-2011) as a way of promoting greater cooperation with ASEAN under the 'East Asia Vision' policy framework.

Vietnam and Pakistan consider peace and stability as preconditions for cooperation and development. Pakistan supports the efforts of the two sides for the maintenance of peace, stability, security and maritime safety in the South China Sea. The two countries have been working closely to consolidate their partnership and protect peace, stability, cooperation and development in Asia. Pakistan supports all parties to the South China Sea dispute in their pursuit of peace, stability, security and maritime safety. It underlines the importance of the pacific settlement of conflicts without resorting to force or the threat of it. Pakistan welcomes the commitment of the parties to respect the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC) and the established principles of international law. It also calls on the parties to cooperate and accelerate the agreement on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC).

Cultural cooperation

Vietnamese officials frequently participate in capacity-building training courses offered by the Pakistani government. These courses are offered by the Pakistan Diplomatic Academy, Pakistan Railway Academy, and the Pakistan National Institute of Banking and Finance. In July 2023, Venerable Thich Duc Thien and a group of representatives attended the International Workshop: 'Cultural Diplomacy: Serving Gandhara Civilization and Buddhist Heritage in Pakistan,' organized by the Pakistan government. While Vietnamese individuals often associate Pakistan with being a Muslim nation, however, historical records show that Pakistan has a Buddhist heritage and is considered the birthplace of Buddhist education. An important global Buddhist event was attended by President Arif Alvi of Pakistan; Dr Ramesh Kumar Vankwani, Minister and State Secretary, Special Envoy to the Prime Minister of Pakistan on Gandhara Heritage Development, as well as numerous Buddhist delegates and cultural heritage researchers from Vietnam, Malaysia, Thailand, Nepal, Korea, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and China. During the conference's opening ceremony, President Arif Alvi stressed the importance of recognizing the role of cultural diplomacy in fostering dialogue between civilizations.[34]

[34] Tri Trung, Tuan Nguyen, 'Dai Dien Phat Giao Viet Nam Tham Du Hoi Thao Di San Phat Giao Gandhara Tai Pakistan,' Representative of Vietnamese Buddhism Attended the Gandhara Buddhist Heritage Conference in Pakistan], *Dai Bieu Nhan Dan*, 14 July 2023, https://daibieunhandan.vn/van-hoa/dai-dien-

The Pakistan embassy in Vietnam has initiated a range of socio-cultural cooperation projects to promote academic, expert, and cultural exchanges between Pakistan and Vietnam. The embassy organizes numerous training courses and certifications for Vietnamese students and officials. It also supports Vietnamese cultural activities in traditional fields such as performing arts, audiovisual arts, and literature.[35] Additionally, Vietnam has assisted Pakistani individuals affected by floods in their country. Vietnam's aid to Pakistan during the 2010 floods marked a pivotal moment in their bilateral relations. In 2010, the Vietnamese government provided immediate assistance worth $50,000 to Pakistani flood victims in north-west Pakistan. The floods caused the loss of 1,500 lives and the destruction of nearly one million houses. This humanitarian aid was given in response to a request from the Pakistan government.[36] In January 2023, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Do Hung Viet presented a $100,000 monetary contribution from the Vietnamese government to Pakistan. This support aimed to help with recovery and alleviate the damage caused by the 2022 floods.[37]

Challenges and prospects

East Asia Vision

In light of India's transition from the Look East Policy to the Act East strategy within the Asia-Pacific context, Pakistan should advance its East Asia Vision policy to enhance its position and influence. Pakistan should develop a well-considered plan to actively advance its East Asia Vision and improve its integration into ASEAN. Strengthening ties with Vietnam will enable Pakistan to engage more extensively and comprehensively in ASEAN collaboration frameworks. ASEAN currently functions as a vital hub for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. With an impressive economic strength of approximately $3,000 billion and a substantial market size of around 650 million people, this region offers

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[35] Duong Thanh Hang, 'Achievements and prospects in Vietnam - Pakistan relations,' *Political Theory*, 27 December 27 2023, http://lyluanchinhtri.vn/home/en/index.php/international-issues/item/1235-achievements-and-prospects-in-vietnam-pakistan-relations.html

[36] VOV, 'Vietnam Joins Int'l Efforts to Assist Pakistani Flood Victims,' *The Voice of Vietnam* (*VOV)*, 8 August 2010, https://english.vov.vn/en/politics/vietnam-joins-intl-efforts-to-assist-pakistani-flood-victims-224484.vov

[37] 'Vietnam hands over USD100,000 to Pakistan's efforts in flood recovery,' *The Communist Party of Vietnam*, 10 January 2023, https://en.dangcongsan.vn/international-cooperation/vietnam-hands-over-usd100-000-to-pakistan-s-efforts-in-flood-recovery-602493.html

enormous potential as a market for Pakistan. However, the trade volume between ASEAN and Pakistan remains at just $7 billion, far below what is possible within the region. Additionally, Pakistan presents significant market potential for many ASEAN countries, with a GDP of around $300 billion and a population of 230 million. Pakistan's East Asia Vision Strategy aims to enhance economic and strategic connectivity with East Asia.

Despite Pakistan's longstanding proposal for an East Asia Vision, its implementation appears significantly ineffective. Pakistan's integration into this region remains relatively limited, particularly in its cooperation with ASEAN. In 2014, Pakistan received only a modest $81 million in investment from ASEAN. Pakistan should leverage the potential of its expatriate community and local businesses to attract investment in the country. Pakistan views the establishment of a strong business community in this region, which has a Pakistani population exceeding 2.3 million, as a valuable asset. It has entered into Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with China, Malaysia, and Indonesia in East Asia. The other countries are presently involved in consultations or negotiation processes.[38] To improve integration, Pakistan should actively pursue multiple cooperation agreements within the regional cooperation framework. This will generate additional opportunities and potential to boost economic development. Despite lengthy negotiations, Pakistan has not yet gained full dialogue membership in ASEAN nor secured membership in APEC. In fact, Pakistan's leadership has rarely visited south-east and north-east Asia over the past ten years, apart from its important ally, China.

In particular, Pakistan must respond to strategic developments in the region as it pursues the East Asia Vision, especially as nations develop plans for the Indo-Pacific. Located strategically in central South Asia, and sharing borders with Afghanistan and China, Pakistan is a key transit route for trade between East Asia, South Asia, the Middle East and Europe. This initiative will be advantageous to Pakistan as a result. It needs to recalibrate its policy under great power strategic competition. Historically, Pakistan’s foreign policy has been mostly dictated by the four major players, namely the US, China, India and Russia. This has serious ramifications for the implementation of the long-standing East Asia Initiative and Pakistan's relations with Vietnam. With the US-China competition heating up, Pakistan has to recalibrate its approach to managing its ties with both Washington and Beijing. Pakistan’s geographical location allows it to leverage CPEC and its geopolitical

[38] ‘Free Trade Agreements,’ Asia Regional Integration Centre, 2024, https://aric.adb.org/fta-country

position to increase its prestige and attract investment from East Asian countries, ultimately boosting its economic development.

Pakistan sees China as a key regional strategic partner. This alliance is long-standing since the Cold War and is more than competition or opposition to India. This has prompted Pakistan to vigorously pursue major economic cooperation with China, to back its regional initiatives and to rank it as a major ally, ahead of the US. Pakistan's foreign policy has evolved to include the East Asia Vision. It also shows that the Indian factor has a significant impact on Pakistan's foreign policy toward the US and China. Pakistan's progress is dependent on creating a peaceful environment in the region. Therefore, Pakistan needs to find ways to settle the conflicts with India and build bilateral relations based on cooperation, equality, and mutual benefit. Despite strong diplomatic relations with China and the US, Pakistan's integration into South and Southeast Asia is limited. It needs to play an active role in regional cooperation frameworks and enhance its influence on regional and global issues to realize its East Asia Vision. Cooperation and reconciliation between Pakistan and India will be required to strengthen collaborative mechanisms in South Asia.

Evolving ties

Apart from these achievements, Vietnam-Pakistan relations from 2002 to 2022 faced certain challenges: diplomatic ties across various sectors remained limited, and there were few high-level visits. Several meetings between senior officials were cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The current state of economic, trade, and investment cooperation fails to fully represent the potential of each country. There remains a limited understanding between the businesses of the two nations concerning each other's markets and business cultures, while logistics costs continue to be elevated. Additionally, the absence of direct flights hampers connectivity. Import duties on some Vietnamese goods entering Pakistan remain significantly high. Furthermore, as a Muslim country, Pakistan enforces cultural and religious restrictions; thus, products like food and tea imported from Vietnam must have a *Halal* certificate issued by the Pakistan government.

The relationship between Vietnam and Pakistan has a longstanding tradition, consistently fostered by the leaders and citizens of both nations, and has experienced numerous significant milestones across various domains. The two countries regularly lend each other support on a range of issues, including at regional and international forums. The relationship between Vietnam and Pakistan is very important for maintaining peace in the region and around the world amid an

unpredictable global situation. But the dynamics of this relationship are also influenced by major world powers like the US, China, and India. These factors have influenced Pakistan-Vietnam bilateral relations since the Cold War and continue to shape this relationship at present. Pakistan is closely watching the foreign policy of Vietnam and is worried about the strengthening ties between India and Vietnam, which could pose a threat to the relations between Pakistan and Vietnam. In this context, Pakistan's long-standing relationship with China is important. China, which has close relations with Pakistan, has a fraught relationship with Vietnam over border and territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Pakistan faces a serious challenge in the strengthening of diplomatic ties between Vietnam and India, a regional rival. In order to deal with this, Pakistan developed the 'East Asia Vision Strategy' to keep a balanced relationship with Vietnam.[39]

After a thorough examination of the successes and failures recorded during the 2002-2022 period, it can be concluded that the cooperative alliance between the two countries is full of promise and ready to be strengthened and deepened. Pakistan is executing the 'East Asia Vision' policy to enhance its relations with Southeast Asian nations. Currently, Pakistan and Vietnam must focus on strengthening cooperation across various fields, including facilitating the exchange of high-level delegations to build mutual political trust. Both parties should also enter into cooperation agreements, participate in exchanges and discussions on global and regional issues, and establish frameworks for dialogue and mutual consultation to promote understanding and expand collaboration. They collaborate at international and regional forums to advance political cooperation within ASEAN. Since 2017, both countries have engaged in efforts to create a mutually beneficial trade agreement, referred to as the Preferential Trade Agreement (PTA), which is anticipated to develop into a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). If successful, a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) would further enhance bilateral trade relations. Pakistan is also negotiating a second-phase Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with China. If this effort succeeds, it will be an important step forward for Pakistan's textile sector. Pakistan applies a 3.5 per cent tariff on yarn, whereas Bangladesh and ASEAN nations (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, the Philippines, Vietnam, and others) enjoy a tax exemption on yarn. Tariffs on various Pakistani textile products range from four to nine per cent, while ASEAN countries impose a 0 per cent tariff on the same products. The realignment of tariff rates in the second phase of the Free Trade

[39] Ahmad Rashid Malik, 'Pakistan Falls Behind in East Asia,' *The Diplomat*, 23 April 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2016/04/pakistan-falls-behind-in-east-asia/

Agreement (FTA) will boost opportunities for Pakistan's textile and garment exports to China.[40]

Regarding economic cooperation, bilateral trade turnover remains relatively small despite the longstanding relationship between the two parties. Numerous untapped opportunities for trade collaboration remain, and the relationship's true extent is not fully reflected. Currently, Pakistan's share of Vietnam's exports is less than 1 per cent of Vietnam's total imports. Pakistan accounts for 3.9 per cent of Vietnam's exports to South Asia, down two percentage points, and 5 per cent of Vietnam's imports from South Asia, up one percentage point.[41] The pharmaceutical industry offers a promising opportunity for collaboration between Pakistan and Vietnam. Based on calculations, Pakistan's pharmaceutical sector was valued at around $3.2 billion in 2019. It can grow to be a $4 billion market. Pakistan's total exports in 2019 were $218 million. By the end of 2022, Vietnam imported approximately $9.4 billion worth of drugs, including $6.7 billion worth of raw materials and $2.7 billion worth of finished drugs. Vietnam's pharmaceutical exports are estimated at $1.1 billion, mostly in finished drugs.[42] Pakistan's current ranking for investment in Vietnam is 48th out of 149 countries and territories. Pakistani investors have made modest investments of approximately $33 million in Vietnam's textile, medicine, and healthcare sectors. This figure is considerably smaller than Vietnam's foreign direct investment, which amounted to $20 billion in 2021.[43]

The two sides should work together to promote collaboration in the tourism sector. Both countries still have a tourism sector that is underutilized and needs to be more focused. Pakistan has great potential for tourism. To increase the number of tourists, both sides should expedite the launch of direct flights between Vietnam and Pakistan, connect travel firms, and intensify efforts to attract investment for

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[40] Shabbir Kazmi, 'Pakistan Textile Sector Key Beneficiary of Government Focus,' *Pakistan & Gulf Economist*, Vol. 37, No. 48, (2018), pp. 15-17.

[41] Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VCCI), 'Bao Cao Xuat Nhap Khau Viet Nam Nam 2023,' (Vietnam import and export report in 2023), Centre for WTO and International Trade, https://wtocenter.vn/file/19294/bao-cao-xuat-nhap-khau-viet-nam-nam-2023.pdf

[42] GMP, 'Tong Quan Nganh Duoc Pham Viet Nam Va Huong Phat Trien Cho Cac Doanh Nghiep Duoc Pham,' (Overview of Vietnam's Pharmaceutical Industry and Development Direction for Pharmaceutical Businesses), GMP, 16 January 2024, https://gmp.com.vn/tong-quan-nganh-duoc-pham-viet-nam-2023-va-huong-phat-trien-cho-cac-doanh-nghiep-duoc-pham-n.html

[43] 'Pak-Vietnam Trade Volume to Cross $1bn Level Soon',' *Business Recorder*, 2022, https://www.brecorder.com/news/40308786/eid-ul-adhapm-shehbaz-president-zardari-urge-nation-to-reaffirm-commitment-to-values-of-sacrifice

economic and tourism development. It is also important to promote tourism destinations that are closely tied to the cultural ties between the two countries. Vietnam's tourists are drawn to Pakistan for its rich Buddhist culture of the Gandhara region. Gandhara tourism highlights the shared Buddhist heritage and can appeal to Vietnamese tourists. Pakistan's National Assembly has recently proposed implementing the Gandhara Corridor Project, which aims to connect Pakistan with countries such as Vietnam, which has a significant Buddhist population. This initiative is vital for building regional connections, fostering harmony among different religions, and encouraging cultural tourism between Pakistan and its neighbours.[44]

Conclusion

The evolution of Pakistan-Vietnam relations spans a significant period, beginning in the Cold War and culminating in the establishment of diplomatic ties in November 1972. Fundamentally, this relationship is maintained through camaraderie and collaboration. Pakistan supported the Vietnamese people's revolutionary and national liberation movement during the Cold War. Pakistan-Vietnam relations continued to thrive after the Cold War ended, as Vietnam played an important role in Pakistan's strategic vision for East Asia. Pakistan aims to promote cooperation with East Asia while recognizing ASEAN's crucial role. However, the effectiveness of cooperation between Pakistan and Vietnam remains limited, particularly in trade and investment volumes.

Major global powers, including the US, China, and India, primarily influence Pakistan's foreign policy. These influences affect Pakistan-Vietnam relations, given shared interests in Pakistan's dealings with key nations. Pakistan strengthens regional cooperation with China, viewing it as a strategic partner. It is also a non-Nato ally of the US, with a close relationship grounded in mutual security and shared military interests worldwide. Their strategic rivalry influences Pakistan's relations with both the US and China. One of Pakistan's objectives is to address India's role as a neighbouring and influential South Asian country. Meanwhile, Vietnam has established strategic partnerships with the US, China, and India. So their dealings have a big bearing on the Pakistan-Vietnam relationship.

The Indo-Pacific region is in a state of flux, with great potential for growth in Pakistan-Vietnam relations. There is great potential to increase trade, investment, tourism, and scientific and technical

[44] 'Vietnam hails Gandhara Corridor project for cultural tourism promotion,' *The Frontier Star*, 25 April 2024.

cooperation between the two countries. Enhanced cooperation with ASEAN as part of the East Asia Vision will help in developing Pakistan-Vietnam relations. But this vision requires targeted solutions and strategic initiatives to garner support from countries in the region. Additionally, Pakistan needs to work on internal political stability, adopt effective strategies to address macroeconomic challenges, and learn from comprehensive reforms and successful economic growth models from other countries. The ASEAN countries want to boost their own economies and speed up the integration process in the region. In the end, Pakistan requires a foreign policy that prioritizes strategic autonomy and improved relations with India to foster a peaceful and stable environment for development.