

The Early Cold War and Pakistan: Us Relation During the Liaquat Ali Khan Era (1947-1951)

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ABSTRACT

This paper looks at how Pakistan's relationship with the United States took shape during the leadership of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan (1947–1951), a time when both Pakistan's foreign policy and the global Cold War landscape were just beginning to form. After gaining independence, Pakistan faced serious challenges—political uncertainty, economic strain, and growing security concerns. These pressures pushed its leaders to reach out to the wider world in search of support and recognition. Liaquat Ali Khan aimed to strike a careful balance between the country's Islamic identity and the need for practical, strategic ties—especially with Western powers. Pakistan was eager to secure military and financial help, particularly to counter the perceived threat from India. However, the United States remained cautious. This is a qualitative study which utilizes historical approach to explore Pakistan's foreign policy approach during Liaquat's regime. The research uses thematic analysis to identify recurring ideas, messages, and themes in the available materials. The study finds that Liaquat's 1950 visit to the U.S. was a major diplomatic step, signaling Pakistan's tilt toward the West, but it didn't bring significant immediate benefits. This early phase of the relationship was more about testing the waters than forming a strong alliance. Still, these first efforts set the stage for deeper ties in the future, shaped by a complex mix of ideals, regional rivalries, security concerns, and global politics.

Key Words: Cold War, Strategic Ties, Political Uncertainty, Regional Rivalries, Global Politics, Liaquat's Regime, The U1. I. S.

Introduction

The relationship between the United States and Pakistan has been a complex journey, shaped by changing global dynamics, regional tensions, and mutual strategic interests. Since Pakistan's independence in 1947, the two countries have shared moments of strong partnership and deep mistrust, influenced by Cold War politics, military alliances, counterterrorism cooperation, and economic support. In the early years, the U.S. saw Pakistan as an important ally in its global effort to contain communism. This led to close military and economic cooperation, particularly in the 1950s when Pakistan joined U.S.-led military alliances like the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). These partnerships provided Pakistan with financial aid

and military support but also strained its relationship with the Soviet Union, which in turn strengthened its ties with India. Despite this early alliance, tensions arose during the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1965 and 1971. Pakistan expected unwavering U.S. support, but Washington's cautious response left Pakistan feeling abandoned. The situation worsened in 1971 when the creation of Bangladesh further damaged Pakistan's trust in its American ally.

In the 1980s, the relationship improved as Pakistan became a key player in the U.S. effort to counter the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Billions of dollars in military and economic aid flowed into Pakistan, which served as a base for Afghan resistance fighters (the Mujahideen). However, after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, U.S. interest in Pakistan declined, and relations cooled once again. The 9/11 attacks marked another major shift in U.S.-Pakistan ties. Pakistan became a crucial ally in the War on Terror, receiving significant military and economic aid in exchange for its cooperation against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. However, allegations that elements within Pakistan's security establishment were supporting militant groups created tensions. Trust between the two nations hit a low point in 2011 when a U.S. operation killed Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan, raising questions about Islamabad's role in counterterrorism efforts. Beyond security concerns, economic and trade relations have played a key role in shaping U.S.-Pakistan ties. The U.S. has been one of Pakistan's major sources of foreign aid, investment, and development assistance. Initiatives like the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act allocated billions in civilian aid to support Pakistan's infrastructure, education, and governance. However, security issues have often overshadowed these economic efforts (McMahon, 1965).

In recent years, the relationship has evolved further as global alliances shift. While Pakistan maintains its security ties with the U.S., it has also deepened its economic and strategic relationship with China, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). This growing partnership with China has raised concerns in Washington, especially regarding Pakistan's position on regional security issues, including Afghanistan after the U.S. withdrawal in 2021. Ultimately, U.S.-Pakistan relations have been a mix of cooperation and mistrust. While military and economic ties have strengthened their partnership at times, differences over regional policies and security concerns have caused significant challenges. Moving forward, both countries will need to navigate their strategic interests carefully, balancing security, economic partnerships, and regional stability (Cohen, 2004).

The early phase of U.S.-Pakistan relations, particularly under Pakistan's first Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan (1947-1951), was shaped by a complex mix of expectations, strategic considerations, and diplomatic hurdles. While both nations aimed to develop a strong and beneficial partnership, their differing geopolitical interests and priorities led to misunderstandings and frustrations, influencing the trajectory of their future alliance. This period played a defining role in shaping Pakistan's foreign policy direction and long-term strategic alignment with the

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United States. However, several challenges hindered the formation of a deeper and more sustainable relationship. The key issues that characterized this era of U.S.-Pakistan relations are detailed below. As a newly independent nation, Pakistan faced economic instability, security threats, and diplomatic hurdles. Liaquat Ali Khan sought U.S. assistance to address these pressing concerns. Conversely, the United States viewed Pakistan within the broader context of Cold War geopolitics, focusing on containing Soviet influence rather than addressing Pakistan's immediate concerns.

Objective of the Study

- To Explore how did Pakistan, under Liaquat Ali Khan, shape its foreign policy as a new nation on the global stage.
- To find out why did Pakistan choose the United States over the Soviet Union during the Cold War.
- To investigate why did the U.S. favor India despite Pakistan's push for closer ties during the Cold War.

Key Research Questions

- What key factors influenced Pakistan's foreign policy during Liaquat Ali Khan's tenure? Why did Pakistan decide to side with the U.S. instead of the Soviet Union?

Research Methodology

This study takes a qualitative, historical approach to explore the early phase of Pakistan's diplomatic relationship with the United States, focusing on the period between 1947 and 1951. It aims to understand the intentions behind key decisions, their outcomes, and how they shaped Pakistan's long-term foreign policy under the leadership of Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan. The analysis involves revisiting important events, treaties, speeches, and state actions from this formative era. Speeches and public statements made by Liaquat Ali Khan. Official documents from Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Declassified diplomatic messages and letters from U.S. archives. Newspaper coverage from the time, such as *Dawn* and *The New York Times*. Records and documentation from Liaquat Ali Khan's 1950 state visit to the U.S. Books by respected scholars, including "*Magnificent Delusions*" by Husain Haqqani and "*The Cold War on the Periphery*" by Robert McMahon. Academic journal articles dealing with Cold War politics and diplomacy. Biographies and historical texts discussing Liaquat Ali Khan's leadership. University-level theses and dissertations on related topics. The research uses thematic analysis to identify recurring ideas, messages, and themes in the available materials. These findings are placed within the larger context of global Cold War politics, and comparisons are drawn with other newly

independent countries to understand Pakistan's diplomatic strategy. In addition, official speeches and government records are carefully examined to uncover the underlying principles behind Pakistan's early alignment with the U.S.

Discussion and Analysis

Strategic Beginnings: Pakistan's Initial Foreign Policy Direction Right after gaining independence in 1947, Pakistan found itself facing enormous challenges. The country was politically fragile, economically underdeveloped, and insecure especially given the tense relationship with its neighbor, India. In this context, Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan recognized the urgency of forging strong foreign ties that could help stabilize the new nation. With the world splitting into Western and Soviet blocs during the Cold War, Pakistan's leadership felt that aligning with the West offered more practical benefits and better reflected their vision for the country (Qureshi, 1965).

Liaquat Ali Khan's diplomatic efforts were driven by pressing needs: financial aid, military security, and international recognition. The United States, rapidly asserting itself as a global power after World War II, seemed like a natural partner. Pakistan's location bordering the Soviet Union and in proximity to China added to its appeal in the eyes of American policymakers wary of communist expansion. At the same time, Pakistan wanted to project itself as a progressive, modern Islamic republic. Building ties with Western democracies helped reinforce that narrative and potentially opened doors for developmental assistance. However, this approach wasn't universally embraced at home. There were heated debates over what kind of global role Pakistan should play and whether Western alignment was the right choice for a country rooted in Islamic identity (Rizvi, 1993) (Burke & Ziring, 1990).

These early foreign policy steps, taken under Liaquat's leadership, set a pattern that would influence Pakistan's diplomatic path for decades. The decision to prioritize strategic partnerships, particularly with the United States, became a defining aspect of Pakistan's external relations (Kux, 2001).

Liaquat's 1950 Visit to the U.S: Significance and Impact

In 1950, Liaquat Ali Khan made history by becoming the first Pakistani leader to visit the United States. This trip wasn't just ceremonial it was a calculated diplomatic effort aimed at strengthening ties with Washington and seeking both economic and military support. President Truman's warm reception highlighted America's growing interest in Pakistan as a potential partner in South Asia. During his visit, Liaquat engaged in substantive talks with

U.S. officials. He stressed Pakistan's strategic importance as a potential barrier against Soviet influence and pitched the country as a reliable ally. In addition to government meetings, Liaquat took part in public events and

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interviews, aiming to introduce Pakistan to the American public as a stable and democratic Muslim nation (Rizvi, 2004) (Gauhar, 1996).

Although the visit didn't immediately result in large aid packages or treaties, it had symbolic and political value. It made Pakistan's alignment with the U.S. more visible and laid the groundwork for future cooperation. However, not everyone back home was convinced. Critics in Pakistan worried that this alignment might limit the country's diplomatic options or compromise its independence especially in relation to the Soviet Union. Still, Liaquat's U.S. visit marked a turning point. It was a bold move that placed Pakistan firmly in the Western diplomatic orbit and shaped the tone of its international relations for years to come (Khan, 2005) (Gauhar, 1996).

The Role of Domestic Politics in Shaping Foreign Relations

To truly understand the direction of Pakistan's foreign policy under Liaquat Ali Khan, it's important to consider what was happening within the country. In its formative years, Pakistan was dealing with political uncertainty, a weak economy, and the enormous challenge of unifying a diverse and newly partitioned population. These internal struggles meant that foreign support wasn't a luxury it was a necessity (Jalal, 1995).

The push to align with the United States stemmed partly from the belief that such a relationship would bring much-needed aid and security. It also helped the government project an image of strength and modernity on the world stage. Presenting Pakistan as a progressive Islamic republic appealed to both domestic aspirations and international allies (Ali, 2009).

However, this Western-leaning stance stirred controversy within Pakistan. Religious groups wanted stronger connections with fellow Muslim countries, while some political leaders and thinkers feared that getting too close to the U.S. might erode Pakistan's sovereignty or betray its founding principles (Haqqani, 2005). Liaquat's government had to walk a tightrope: satisfying domestic audiences while navigating global pressures. The diversity of views within the country shaped and sometimes complicated its foreign policy choices (Sayeed, 1967).

Obstacles and Disappointments in U.S.-Pakistan Ties

While the early enthusiasm in U.S.-Pakistan relations was evident, it didn't take long for cracks to appear. One major issue was the mismatch in expectations. Pakistan needed robust economic and military aid to stabilize its foundations, but the U.S. was cautious, keeping its strategic priorities broad and its commitments limited especially given its deeper interest in maintaining balanced relations with India. A key example of this disconnect was Pakistan's appeal for American support in resolving the Kashmir issue. Washington remained largely neutral,

unwilling to upset its ties with New Delhi. Later, when Pakistan offered to help the

U.S. during the Korean War, it attached conditions mainly involving Kashmir that the Americans were unwilling to meet (Burke, 1973) (Kux, 2001).

This lack of responsiveness created frustration within Pakistan. Many leaders began to question whether the U.S. partnership was truly reciprocal. The perception that America was favoring India over Pakistan further strained relations and raised doubts about the long-term benefits of the alliance. These early challenges made it clear that even seemingly close alliances come with limits. For Pakistan, relying heavily on one superpower proved to be more complicated than initially expected (Haqqani, 2005) (Rizvi, 2004).

Long-Term Consequences of Liaquat Ali Khan's Foreign Policy

Liaquat Ali Khan's foreign policy left a legacy that would shape Pakistan's international posture for decades. By choosing to align with the U.S. early on, he set a precedent for future governments to pursue strategic partnerships with Western powers to secure economic, military, and diplomatic support. This approach eventually led Pakistan into formal alliances like SEATO and CENTO—Cold War-era blocs aimed at containing communism. While these alliances brought certain benefits, such as military aid and training, they also dragged Pakistan into global ideological conflicts that sometimes clashed with its own regional interests (Sayeed, 1967) (Gauhar, 1996).

Domestically, the emphasis on foreign alliances contributed to centralizing power, particularly in the hands of the military and civil bureaucracy. Over time, this reduced the role of elected institutions in foreign policy decision-making, paving the way for the military to play a larger role in Pakistan's politics. In hindsight, Liaquat's choices were rooted in the realities of a fragile new state trying to survive in a divided world. But those early decisions created patterns—both in international alignments and internal governance—that continue to influence Pakistan's path even today (Kux, 2001) (Rizvi, 1993).

Foundations of Pakistan's Foreign Policy Ideological Basis and National Interest

Pakistan's foreign policy is shaped by a combination of ideological imperatives and national interests, reflecting its unique historical context and geopolitical realities. In the years right after its birth in 1947, Pakistan wasn't just trying to find its place on the world map it was also figuring out what kind of nation it wanted to be. As a new Islamic republic, its foreign policy reflected more than just politics and security; it was deeply rooted in a sense of identity and purpose. Pakistan saw itself not just as a country for Muslims in South Asia, but as a voice for Muslims everywhere, especially in a world rapidly dividing between East and West during the Cold War.

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Guided by leaders like Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan leaned into its Islamic identity when engaging with the world. It reached out to other Muslim countries, supported struggles against colonial rule in the Islamic world, and built strong bonds with newly independent nations across the Middle East and North Africa. This spirit of solidarity was clearly seen in Pakistan's active role in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and its long-standing support for the Palestinian cause. At the same time, Pakistan had to be practical. While it held tightly to its ideals of Islamic unity, it also needed allies in a tense global environment. This led to stronger ties with Western powers, particularly the United States. Even so, its ideological beliefs never faded into the background; they remained central to how Pakistan saw itself and how it wanted to be seen by others. This early mix of identity-driven diplomacy and strategic thinking set the tone for Pakistan's role in international affairs.

Islamic Identity vs. Communism

Pakistan's leaders, especially Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan, were uneasy with the Soviet Union's atheistic communist ideology. For a state born in the name of Islam, the USSR's anti-religion policies clashed sharply with the values on which Pakistan had been founded. It wasn't just a political difference; it felt personal and moral. Even though Pakistan was still figuring out its democratic system, Liaquat admired democratic principles. He saw greater promise in the Western model: governments chosen by the people, room for religious freedom, and space for private enterprise. Compared to the rigid, state-controlled approach of the Soviet Union, the Western world seemed like a better fit. Pakistan's early leadership also cared about how the country was seen globally. They wanted Pakistan to be known not just as a new state, but as a progressive, responsible, and modern Muslim country. Building ties with the United States, in particular, was seen as a way to send that message loud and clear (McMahon, 1994).

A Need for Security, Especially from India

When Pakistan emerged as an independent country in 1947, it faced a world full of uncertainty. The country was born out of a painful partition, and from the very beginning, its foreign policy had to deal with urgent and serious challenges. Although Islamic values shaped Pakistan's identity, what really drove its early decisions on the global stage were basic, pressing needs: how to survive, stay secure, and be recognized as a legitimate nation. Survival wasn't just a political term; it was a real, everyday struggle. The country was dealing with the aftermath of mass migrations, horrific violence, and a sudden lack of resources and administrative systems. Everything was new, and nothing was easy. Pakistan didn't have strong institutions or enough funds to run a stable government. That's why its leaders had no choice but to look beyond borders for help. Security was another immediate concern, especially with the Kashmir conflict.

erupting so soon after independence. Relations with India became tense very quickly, and the possibility of war made Pakistan feel vulnerable. To protect itself, the country began seeking military partnerships that could help build its defense system. Much of Pakistan's early diplomacy was focused on finding allies who could offer that kind of support.

At the same time, Pakistan knew that just being independent wasn't enough it had to prove itself to the world. Joining the United Nations was an important first step, but Pakistan also needed to form strong relationships with other nations and show that it was ready to play a responsible role on the global stage. Diplomacy became a tool not just for politics, but for building Pakistan's image and credibility. On the economic front, things were just as tough. Pakistan inherited a weak economy, with limited industries and a heavy reliance on agriculture. Without external support, it was nearly impossible to fund development, improve infrastructure, or even meet basic needs. So, the country turned to international lenders and donors—especially the United States and global financial institutions for loans, investment, and aid. During the Cold War, Pakistan found itself leaning toward the Western bloc. This wasn't so much about shared values as it was about necessity. The West, particularly the U.S., could offer what Pakistan needed most military training, weapons, and financial support. Joining alliances like SEATO and CENTO wasn't a sign of ideological alignment, but a move to secure national stability and strength. Even as Pakistan stood by Muslim nations and supported causes like Palestine, it didn't let religious identity control all of its foreign relations. National interest came first. While ties with Muslim countries like Iran and Turkey were important, Pakistan also built key partnerships with non-Muslim powers like the U.S. and Eventually China, All in The Interest of Security and Development.

Military strength remained a central part of Pakistan's foreign policy. With India seen as a constant threat, there was always a push to modernize the armed forces. Pakistan used its international relationships to gain access to weapons and defense training, ensuring it could protect itself and its sovereignty. Geography, too, gave Pakistan an edge. Sitting at a crossroads between South Asia, the Middle East, and Central Asia, the country had strategic importance something that global powers, especially during the Cold War, didn't ignore. This allowed Pakistan to negotiate from a position of some strength, using its location to attract economic and security support. In the end, Pakistan's early foreign policy was shaped far more by real-world needs than by idealism. The country's leaders focused on keeping the nation safe, building its reputation, and laying the groundwork for future stability and growth. Those goals defined the direction of Pakistan's diplomacy in its early years and continue to influence its global role today.

Key Figures behind Pakistan's Early Foreign Policy

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In the early years after independence, Pakistan's foreign policy didn't just emerge from official documents or high-level meetings. It was shaped by real people leaders, diplomats, soldiers, and even journalists—each bringing their own ideas, worries, and hopes for the new nation. Together, they carved out Pakistan's place on the global stage, especially as the country began building its relationship with the United States (Qureshi, 1965).

Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan: The Statesman with a Vision

As Pakistan's first Prime Minister, Liaquat Ali Khan carried the enormous responsibility of guiding a fragile, young country. Having worked closely with Muhammad Ali Jinnah, he wasn't just a politician—he was a builder of Pakistan's foundations. Liaquat understood that in a world divided by the Cold War, Pakistan couldn't afford to stay isolated. His decision in 1950 to visit the United States before the Soviet Union was more than symbolic—it sent a clear message about Pakistan's preferred direction. For Liaquat, foreign policy wasn't just about global politics; it was about survival, dignity, and the promise of development for his people (Sattar, 2010).

The Foreign Office and Diplomats: Voices of Pakistan Abroad

In its early days, Pakistan's foreign office was small but full of ambition. Many of the diplomats had been trained under British rule, giving them a solid grasp of how international diplomacy worked. Sir Zafarullah Khan, the country's first Foreign Minister, stood out as a key voice. He wasn't just a skilled lawyer and diplomat—he passionately defended Pakistan's position on Kashmir at the United Nations and worked tirelessly to build trust with Western nations. For Zafarullah, representing Pakistan on the world stage was both a duty and a matter of personal pride (Sattar, 2010).

The Military: Security and Strategy Take Shape

Although the military wasn't yet the powerful political player it would later become, it already had a strong say in matters of national defense. With tensions rising between Pakistan and India especially over Kashmir—the armed forces were keen to find a strong ally. The United States, with its military technology and financial strength, seemed like a natural partner. While the generals weren't sitting at the negotiating table, their concerns about defense and security were increasingly shaping the direction of foreign policy from behind the scenes (Sattar, 2010).

The Governor-General and Civil Bureaucracy

Even as the Prime Minister took center stage, the Governor-General's office and top civil servants played quiet but important roles. People like Iskander Mirza who would later rise to become President were deeply involved in state matters, drawing from their colonial-era training and conservative political instincts. These bureaucrats tended to favor order, stability, and pragmatic alliances. To them, aligning with the West felt safer and more consistent with their vision of a modern Pakistan, especially compared to the ideological uncertainties of Soviet-style communism. In the beginning, most foreign policy decisions were made by the elite. But that didn't mean ordinary Pakistanis weren't paying attention. Liaquat Ali Khan's trip to the U.S. became a topic of discussion in newspapers and town halls alike. Some people welcomed the move as a sign that Pakistan was stepping confidently onto the world stage. Others wondered if the country should stay neutral in the Cold War. Slowly but surely, foreign policy was becoming something the public cared about—and that shift would only grow stronger in the years to come (Sattar, 2010).

Role of the Military and Intelligence Agencies

In the early days of Pakistan's independence, the military and intelligence services were expected to guard the borders not guide the country's diplomacy. But as Pakistan found itself surrounded by complex regional dynamics and caught in the grip of Cold War tensions, these institutions began to play a much bigger role than anyone had originally imagined (Sattar, 2010).

The Emergence of —Military Diplomacy

The military wasn't calling the shots in foreign policy at least not at first. But behind closed doors, it was becoming harder to ignore their input. Senior officers began sitting in on strategic discussions, advising on defense treaties and weighing in on regional threats. By the mid-1950s, they were openly in favor of a Western alliance, particularly with the United States. Their preference made sense. Joining U.S.-led defense alliances like SEATO and CENTO came with benefits: military funding, modern equipment, and international training programs. These weren't just symbolic alliances they were practical tools for a military trying to keep pace with regional threats (Burke and Ziring, 1990).

ISI: From Observer to Operator

Around the same time, the intelligence community was quietly expanding its influence. The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), created in 1948 to streamline military intelligence across the armed forces, began evolving rapidly. As the Cold War deepened, ISI's job grew far beyond traditional intelligence gathering. It began monitoring not just India, but also political developments at home, activities of foreign diplomats, and shifting trends across South Asia and the

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Middle East. Over time, ISI became a key player—not just behind enemy lines, but behind closed doors in Islamabad. It wasn't long before ISI emerged as one of the most powerful institutions in the country, helping to shape how Pakistan viewed not only its enemies, but its allies as well—including the U.S. and countries across the Muslim world (Burke and Ziring, 1990).

Power Tilts behind the Curtain

As the military and intelligence agencies grew more seasoned and assertive, the balance of power between civilian leaders and the armed forces began to shift. Leaders like Liaquat Ali Khan still stood as the public face of Pakistan's diplomacy but the real momentum was increasingly coming from the military brass. By the late 1950s, this shift became much more visible. The military wasn't just influencing foreign policy it was beginning to shape it directly. This change laid the groundwork for Pakistan's first military takeover and sparked a civil-military imbalance that would shape the country's politics and foreign relations for decades to come (Shah, 2012).

Influence of Domestic Politics

When Pakistan came into being in 1947, its foreign policy wasn't just shaped by global trends or ideological alignments it was forged in the heat of domestic urgency. Every decision made on the international stage had roots in what was happening at home: political infighting, economic struggles, identity debates, and the overwhelming task of building a country from scratch.

A Country Born in Chaos

Pakistan's independence was as traumatic as it was historic. Partition uprooted millions, drained resources, and left a newly carved-out state scrambling to survive. There were barely any institutions in place, and the basic machinery of governance had to be built from the ground up. In this climate, foreign policy wasn't a luxury it was a lifeline. Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan and his colleagues weren't just thinking about long-term ideology; they were looking for immediate support. The U.S., fresh from World War II and rising as a global powerhouse, looked like the kind of partner Pakistan desperately needed. Liaquat and his government found themselves constantly trying to strike a balance. On one side, there were ideals: building a democratic state rooted in Islamic values. On the other, there were hard realities economic instability, a hostile neighbor in India, and the need for international recognition and security. So when Pakistan tilted toward the U.S., it wasn't purely out of ideological alignment. It was a strategic move, driven by the hope of gaining financial aid, military hardware, and a place at the global table (Kux, 2001).

More Voices Join the Conversation

Even though most foreign policy decisions came from the top, they didn't go unnoticed. Political parties, journalists, and even everyday citizens began to weigh in. When Liaquat visited the United States in 1950, it sparked a lively national debate. Some saw the trip as a bold leap into modern diplomacy, a sign that Pakistan was ready to take its place in the world. Others worried that the country was leaning too heavily toward the West, perhaps at the cost of its independence or Islamic identity. Either way, it was clear that foreign policy was no longer a backroom affair it had entered the public arena. Pakistan was also grappling with deep ideological divides. Religious groups wanted stronger ties with fellow Muslim nations. Secular thinkers and Western-educated elites leaned toward liberal democracies and market economies. These opposing visions didn't just shape domestic politics they spilled into how Pakistan approached its global alliances (Kux, 2001).

Unsteady Politics, Centralized Decisions

The early years weren't marked by political stability. Governments changed often, institutions were weak, and there was a lot of behind-the-scenes wrangling among civil servants. In that uncertain environment, the military and bureaucracy seen as more stable and disciplined—started playing a bigger role in steering foreign affairs. As time went on, foreign policy became more centralized, often handled by a handful of officials, with limited input from parliament or the public. It was a sign of things to come: the growing dominance of unelected institutions in shaping Pakistan's external relations. Ultimately, Pakistan's early tilt toward the U.S. wasn't just about Cold War politics or choosing sides in an ideological battle. It was about survival, identity, and finding a path forward in a turbulent time. Understanding these domestic pressures helps make sense of the decisions taken in those formative years—and sheds light on why they continue to echo through Pakistan's foreign relations even today (Kux, 2001).

Conclusion

In the early years after independence, Pakistan's foreign policy under Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan was shaped by a mix of urgency, careful strategy, and a strong desire to be recognized on the world stage. As the Cold War tensions divided the globe into opposing blocs, Pakistan sought to assert itself as a new, sovereign nation but one that was not isolated. Choosing to lean toward the United States, even without immediate rewards, turned out to be a defining decision that influenced the direction of Pakistan's foreign relations for decades to come (Burke & Ziring, 1990; Haqqani, 2005).

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Many scholars agree that Pakistan's choices at the time were driven by its fragile economy, growing security concerns—especially in relation to India—and the larger ideological divide between the capitalist and communist worlds. Liaquat Ali Khan is often credited with navigating these challenges with a practical and measured approach, trying to satisfy domestic expectations while steering Pakistan toward a Western-friendly foreign policy, all the while keeping lines of communication open with other global powers (Ali, 1980; Rizvi, 2004).

But to fully understand why Pakistan looked westward, we need to consider what was happening at home. The country was dealing with political instability, weak institutions, and major economic challenges. These internal pressures made external support not just desirable—but necessary. In this sense, Pakistan's alignment with the U.S. was less about choosing sides in a global rivalry and more about survival and nation-building. Liaquat's 1950 trip to the United States became a powerful symbol of this shift. It demonstrated Pakistan's commitment to engaging with the Western bloc, guided by both shared political ideals and strategic needs. Yet the visit also highlighted the reality that, despite Pakistan's enthusiasm, the relationship with the U.S. was unequal—especially when it came to unresolved issues like Kashmir, where American support fell short of expectations (McMahon, 1994; Schaffer, 2002) (Talbot, 1998; Sattar, 2010).

In the end, Liaquat Ali Khan's foreign policy choices laid the foundation for how Pakistan would engage with the world in the years ahead. His vision—shaped by the challenges of his time—set a pattern of seeking strategic alliances, particularly with the United States, as a means to ensure security and development. While these efforts didn't solve all of Pakistan's problems, they shaped the country's diplomatic habits and internal power structures in ways that are still visible today. His tenure remains a pivotal chapter in the story of Pakistan–U.S. relations, offering key insights into how global and domestic forces have long intertwined in shaping the country's foreign policy path (Rizvi, 2004; Sattar, 2010).

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