



Research Article

Pakistan from Rogue State to Failed State: Implications for South Asian Security

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ABSTRACT



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Pakistan's nuclear capability and its strategic location in South Asia have always been of great global interest. Long considered a "rogue state," for its support for militant organisations, nuclear brinkmanship, and anti-status quo policies, recent developments hint at a disturbing transition to state failure. The collapse of democratic institutions, economic decline and growing insurgent dominance in a number of places in the world herald an impending collapse of state capacity. This paper gives an in-depth analysis of Pakistan's transformation from a rogue to failed state, highlighting its internal issues and regional implications. The analysis examines the security implications for South Asia, in particular India, Afghanistan, China and multilateral institutions and provides practical recommendations for policymakers at the regional and global levels.

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1. Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan was created in 1947 as a homeland for the Muslims of South Asia. This country has a complex and tumultuous history that includes military coups, religious extremism, regional conflicts and economic instability. Once considered a key strategic partner during the Cold War and later in the U.S.-led Global War on Terror, Pakistan is now viewed more and more as a source of regional instability. Pakistan has been labelled as a "rogue state" for its involvement in clandestine nuclear proliferation (Cirincione, Wolfsthal & Rajkumar, 2005), sponsorship of non-state militant organisations (Riedel, 2011) and non-compliance with international norms. There is a growing trend in recent times which is quite disturbing: Pakistan is showing signs of becoming a failed state, with internal fragmentation, economic decline, rising extremism and a decline in the ability of the state to function (Rotberg, 2002).

The differentiation between a rogue state and a failed state is crucial. Rogue states may pursue aggressive foreign policies and act outside the norms of international behaviour. Failed states lack the ability to enforce laws, secure borders, provide services, or maintain legitimate governance. The continuing dependence on IMF bailouts in Pakistan, along with political instability and the emergence of militant outfits like the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), is indicative of a serious governance crisis. The civil disturbances in Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and urban collapses in Karachi and Lahore suggest a decreasing level of control by the state over its territory (Grare, 2013).

The military exercises enormous influence over Pakistan's civilian institutions. The Pakistan Army has disrupted the

democratic process either through direct rule or political manipulation and has promoted policies that favour strategic depth through the backing of proxies in India and Afghanistan (Fair, 2014). The Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) has been accused of supporting terrorist elements while accepting international assistance for counterterrorism programs, a contradiction that has undermined trust among international partners (Riedel, 2011).

Internal dysfunctions have external consequences. Terrorist networks based in Pakistan have constantly sought to target India and destabilise Afghanistan, and have had transnational jihadist links (Byman, 2005). This will not only increase instability in the region but also the chances of a confrontation between the nuclear-armed rivals, India and Pakistan. The abrogation of Article 370 by India and continuous border conflicts have increased worries about escalation because of the absence of diplomatic engagement or crisis management strategies (Pant & Joshi, 2020).

Furthermore, Pakistan's strategic location and nuclear capability make its internal problems more complicated. Unlike failed states such as Somalia or Syria, a collapse in Pakistan could result in the loss of control over nuclear assets, significant population displacement, and the emergence of ungoverned areas that could foster a resurgence of global jihadist movements. The risks include major global stakeholders. China has invested heavily in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and faces security threats to its assets and citizens in Pakistan (Small, 2015). The United States continues to express concerns about nuclear security and counterterrorism.

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The development of Pakistan from a rogue state to a failed state and the implications of this transition for South Asian security are discussed in this paper. The analysis will focus on the internal political, economic and security dynamics that contribute to Pakistan's decline, evaluate the regional security threats that emanate from its instability and analyse international responses. This study aims to contribute policy recommendations for domestic reform, regional cooperation and global engagement to manage the consequences and foster a pathway towards stabilisation.

The study is based on qualitative and analytical methodology based on theoretical and empirical approaches in the discipline of international relations. It argues that Pakistan's decline is not a sudden development but the result of decades of militarised politics, economic mismanagement and ideological radicalisation. The fallout from this decline will be felt beyond Pakistan's borders, imperilling regional security, economic links and the strategic balance in South Asia.

2. Conceptual Clarifications: Rogue State vs. Failed State

To understand clearly the transformation of Pakistan, it is necessary to understand clearly two important concepts, rogue state and failed state. While often used interchangeably in the political arena, these concepts reflect different traits.

The term "rogue state" was created within the framework of post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy, to identify regimes perceived as posing a threat to global security. The term rogue state characterises a state that persistently violates international laws, promotes terrorism, produces weapons of mass destruction, and destabilises the global order (Litwak, 2000). This perception was fuelled significantly by Pakistan's support of militant groups in Afghanistan and Kashmir and the exposure of its clandestine nuclear proliferation network in the early 2000s (Kapur, 2017). In recent years, however, Pakistan has moved beyond the status of a mere rogue state to one that increasingly displays characteristics of a failed state. The indicators of failure, political instability, economic collapse, rampant corruption, sectarian violence and the erosion of institutional authority have become alarmingly prominent (The Fund for Peace, 2024).

The concept of failed state is used in international relations to denote a state that is unable to provide basic security, law and order, or to maintain legitimacy (Rotberg, 2003). Pakistan's chronic economic crises, dependence on external bailouts, internal insurgencies, and civil-military imbalance reflect systemic decay (Hussain, 2023). Pakistan has nuclear weapons and a potent military, but its institutions are weak, its economy is fragile and its governance is increasingly dysfunctional. The rise of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and revival of extremist groups in its border regions point to the weakening hold of the central state (Rafiq, 2022). The continuing economic collapse of Pakistan, the rise of insurgencies, the collapse of judicial legitimacy and the local control of non-state actors in places like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, all point to an evolution towards state failure.

Rogue states are dangerous because of what they do. Failed states are dangerous because of what they cannot do. Pakistan now straddles both categories; a nuclear-armed country incapable of ensuring internal cohesion or peace.

3. Historical Evolution: From Strategic Asset to Rogue State

Pakistan's transformation from a strategic partner of the West during the Cold War to a "rogue state" in the early twenty-first century has its roots in a complex interplay of ideology, geopolitics and militarised nationalism. The development of its political and strategic identity reflects a gradual shift from the goals of state

building to revisionist and security-oriented policies which have consistently destabilised the region.

3. 1. Early Strategic Orientation (1947–1971)

From the outset Pakistan's foreign and security policy was driven by a sense of profound insecurity vis-à-vis India and the need to secure its territorial and ideological integrity. The loss of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in 1971 was a defining moment that worsened the military's dominance in politics and created the perception that survival was through external alliances and internal militarisation (Fair, 2014). In the formative decades Pakistan joined alliances such as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) to get military and economic help (Haqqani, 2018). This alignment made Pakistan a strategic asset for the United States in containing the Soviet influence and thus laid the basis for a security dependent state structure.

3. 2. Islamisation and the Afghan Jihad (1977–1989)

Pakistan experienced an Islamisation under General Zia-ul-Haq, which changed the political and ideological nature of the country. Zia's regime promoted a religious-nationalist identity, using Islam as a domestic legitimising force and as a foreign policy tool (Byman, 2005). And when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, it once again gave Pakistan strategic importance. Backed by the U.S. and Saudi support, Pakistan became the main channel for arming and training Afghan mujahideen, establishing Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) as a central player in regional geopolitics (Cirincione, Wolfsthal, & Rajkumar, 2005). But this era also laid down militant networks and extremist ideas, which would later destabilise Pakistan itself.

3. 3. The 1990s: Nuclearisation and Sponsorship of Militancy

The end of the Cold War and the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan marked the beginning of Pakistan's transition from a strategic partner to a rogue state. In 1990, after U.S. sanctions were imposed under the Pressler Amendment, Pakistan was left diplomatically isolated because of its secret nuclear program (Clary, 2019). Despite the sanctions, Pakistan continued its pursuit for nuclear weapons capability, culminating in the successful tests of May 1998 (Kapur, 2017). Simultaneously, the ISI's support for insurgent groups in Kashmir, including Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, earned international condemnation (Byman, 2005). The 1999 Kargil conflict, launched by the Pakistani military without the consent of civilians, further revealed the army's adventurism and disregard for international norms (Fair, 2014). These developments further cemented the international reputation of Pakistan as a reckless, revisionist state willing to use non-state actors and nuclear brinkmanship to pursue its strategic aims.

3. 4. The Post-9/11 Paradox: Ally and Adversary

Pakistan became a key ally in the United States-led "War on Terror" following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. President Pervez Musharraf's regime promised to cooperate against Al-Qaeda and Taliban in return for billions in U.S. aid (Haqqani, 2018). However, Pakistan also had covert ties with militant groups at the same time in order to maintain its influence in Afghanistan, a policy also known as "selective counterterrorism" (Rafiq, 2022). This duality put strains on relations with Washington and cemented Pakistan's reputation as a two-faced actor - a rogue ally rather than a true partner. The Pakistani credibility was further undermined by the 2011 discovery of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad, which signalled the state's complicity in harbouring terrorist leaders (Pant & Joshi, 2020).

3. 5. The 21st Century: Isolation and Internal Contradictions

In the 2010s, Pakistan's ongoing support for militant proxies and nuclear proliferation scandals involving A.Q. Khan reinforced its image as a rogue state in the international narrative (Cirincione et al., 2005). There were nominal democratic transitions, but the military continued to dominate policy making and the state's external behaviour remained shaped by hostility toward India and strategic dependence on China (Pant & Joshi, 2020). Internationally, Pakistan was increasingly isolated, and it appeared on the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) "grey list" for its inadequate counter-terrorism financing measures. Internally, growing extremism and weakening governance began to erode the very state structure the military sought to defend, setting the stage for its gradual slide toward state failure.

In short, Pakistan's historical trajectory from a Western 'strategic asset' to a 'rogue state' is a continuum of policies based on insecurity, militarisation and ideological manipulation. Militancy and nuclear brinkmanship in the pursuit of short-term geopolitical gains led to its international standing and domestic stability weakening. This trajectory provided the basis for the crisis of legitimacy, governance, and cohesion that characterises Pakistan's contemporary condition as a fragile, near-failed state.

4. Transition Toward State Failure

Pakistan's status as a rogue state came from its violation of international standards, but its current predicament is a reflection of a much deeper and more dangerous evolution: the decline of state capacity, institutional legitimacy, and economic stability. For the last two decades, Pakistan has slowly shifted from external adventurism to internal disintegration, a trend that corresponds to the hallmarks of state failure as defined in modern political theory (Rotberg, 2003). The breakdown of governance, repeated economic crises, insurgencies and the decline of public trust all indicate that Pakistan now exhibits many of the signs of a failed state.

4. 1. Political Instability and Civil-Military Imbalance

One of the most striking indicators of Pakistan's state fragility is its chronic political instability and the entrenched dominance of the military establishment. Since its creation, the Pakistan military has acted as the ultimate arbiter of national policy, intervening directly through coups or indirectly through political manipulation (Fair, 2014). Repeated undermining of civilian governments has resulted in weak institutional development and a lack of democratic continuity. The 2022 ousting of Prime Minister Imran Khan by a no-confidence vote and the subsequent political persecution and polarisation are indicative of the fragile state of civilian authority in Pakistan (Hussain, 2023). The military's continued interference in policymaking has eroded public confidence in democratic processes and created a governance vacuum that extremist and populist movements have increasingly exploited.

The military's predominance has also distorted national priorities, with expenditure on security prioritised over socio-economic development. This imbalance has fostered a rent-seeking state model, with Pakistan's elites dependent on external aid and security alliances to sustain the regime rather than to develop self-reliant institutions (Haqqani, 2018). This means that governance has become reactive and transactional, crisis-driven rather than reform-driven.

4. 2. Economic Fragility and Dependence on External Bailouts

Economically, Pakistan is a classic case of dependency and structural failure. Chronic fiscal deficits, unsustainable debt and dependence on foreign loans have made the economy a perpetual crisis. In 2023, Pakistan narrowly avoided sovereign default by securing yet another International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout,

the 23rd such programme since independence (International Monetary Fund [IMF], 2023). Inflation exceeded 35%, the rupee hit record lows, and industrial output stagnated (World Bank, 2024). The country's economic policies have continued to be held hostage to short-term political interests and patronage networks, with little focus on structural reform.

The continuing economic malaise reflects what scholars have called the "fragility trap," where governance weakness and economic decline feed into each other (Rotberg, 2003). Corruption, tax evasion and elite capture further undermine fiscal stability, and the state's inability to deliver welfare services feeds popular discontent. Also, the overreliance on remittances and the dependence on Chinese financing through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have further amplified Pakistan's external vulnerabilities (Pant & Joshi, 2020). The result is a debt-driven economy incapable of sustaining long term growth or ensuring social stability.

4. 3. Internal Security Crisis and Rise of Extremism

The most alarming dimension of Pakistan's state fragility is the proliferation of internal security threats. The re-emergence of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), recurrent terrorist attacks, and sectarian violence illustrate the state's loss of monopoly over violence (Rafiq, 2022). Decades of state-sponsored militancy during the Afghan Jihad and Kashmir insurgency have now come full circle, as many militant networks have turned inward. The tribal areas and Balochistan remain hotbeds of insurgency, while Karachi and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have witnessed recurring waves of terror attacks. These developments signify what analysts describe as "blowback," the unintended consequences of Pakistan's proxy warfare strategy (Byman, 2005).

Militant ideologies continue to thrive despite counter-terrorism operations like Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad due to weak governance, poor policing, and socio-economic disenfranchisement. The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2021 has emboldened extremist factions in Pakistan, weakening border security and fuelling Pashtun nationalism (Hussain, 2023). The state's failure to break these networks reflects its waning coercive capacity and crumbling legitimacy.

4. 4. Social Fragmentation and Governance Collapse

Pakistan's fragility is compounded by deep-seated social divisions along ethnic, linguistic and sectarian lines. Ethnic minorities, such as the Baloch and Pashtuns, continue to be marginalised, and sectarian violence between Sunni and Shia groups has intensified, causing a fracture in national cohesion (Haqqani, 2018). Corruption and politicisation plague governance institutions, especially the judiciary, police and bureaucracy. The lack of effective local governance structures, especially in rural and peripheral areas, exacerbates inequality (The Fund for Peace, 2024). Public services have gone downhill, which has led to a general sense of disillusionment with the state.

Radical ideologies have also penetrated the education system and media landscape, creating an environment in which intolerance and radical narratives can thrive. According to the 2024 Fragile States Index, Pakistan is one of the most fragile states in the world, with high scores in group grievance, fictionalised elites, and security apparatus failure.

4. 5. Structural Decline and Loss of Legitimacy

Ultimately Pakistan's slide into failure is not just institutional but existential. The state's civilian and military ruling elite have failed to forge a legitimate social contract with the people. Instead, the state functions as an extractive apparatus for the elite, while the rest of the population is plagued by poverty, inflation and insecurity. Failed states, according to Rotberg (2003), are characterised by the erosion of legitimacy and the inability to

provide collective goods; Pakistan's contemporary condition is consistent with this description.

What started as a condition of external insecurity has turned into one of internal disintegration. The crisis of Pakistan is not cyclical, but structural: the continued dominance of the military, economic insolvency and social polarisation. Without systemic reform and a redefinition of civil-military relations, Pakistan will continue to move along the trajectory of a failed or collapsing state with profound challenges for the stability of South Asia.

5. Implications for South Asian Security

Pakistan's slow slide from a rogue state to a failed state has grave implications for the stability and strategic balance of South Asia. Pakistan, the only nuclear-armed Muslim-majority state in the region, is internally fragile and poses a range of multi-faceted threats, from terrorism and cross-border militancy to economic disruption and nuclear insecurity. The implications of Pakistan's decline are not confined to its borders; they extend to the regional security architecture and complicate the policies of neighbouring countries and global powers as well.

5. 1. Cross-Border Terrorism and Regional Instability

One of the most immediate consequences of Pakistan's fragility is the continued existence of cross-border terrorism. Groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Haqqani Network, long-time favourites of Pakistan's security establishment, continue to operate with relative impunity, threatening not only India but also Afghanistan and Iran (Byman, 2005). Internal weakening of the state allows these groups to exploit porous borders and governance vacuums and contributes to regional instability.

For India, instability in Pakistan means greater security threats along the Line of Control (LoC) and in Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan-based groups continue to incite military crises between the two nuclear neighbours, as evidenced by the 2016 Uri and 2019 Pulwama attacks (Clary, 2019). Such incidents increase the risk of miscalculation and escalation given the doctrinal asymmetry between India's conventional superiority and Pakistan's reliance on tactical nuclear deterrence (Kapur, 2017).

The return of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan in 2021 has further complicated the regional picture. Pakistan welcomed the Taliban victory as a strategic win but the resurgence of the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) demonstrates the erosion of Islamabad's control over militant networks (Rafiq, 2022). The porous Durand Line has become a conduit for arms, drugs and insurgents, adding to the regionalisation of instability.

5. 2. Nuclear Security and Proliferation Risks

Pakistan's nuclear arsenal remains a significant worry for regional and global security. The military's firm control over the nuclear command structure is challenged by rising internal volatility, which brings into question the long-term viability of its stewardship (Cirincione, Wolfsthal, & Rajkumar, 2005). Potential vulnerabilities in nuclear governance and materials protection can be created by extremist infiltration, political polarisation and economic collapse.

Indeed, Pakistan's nuclear posture is inextricably linked with its identity as a revisionist state aspiring for parity with India as argued by Fair (2014). Thus it has also grown its nuclear arsenal despite fiscal insolvency. The continued development of tactical nuclear weapons and delivery systems is destabilising deterrence dynamics and increasing the risks of accidental or unauthorised use. For the international community, a failed nuclear state is a strategic nightmare and raises the stakes for the need for external monitoring and cooperative security mechanisms.

5. 3. Economic and Human Security Spillovers

Pakistan's economic decline has ripple effects for the broader South Asian region. As the fifth most populous country, its fiscal instability threatens regional trade and connectivity projects, such as the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). A bankrupt Pakistan diminishes the possibility of regional economic integration and exacerbates the asymmetries in the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which is already politically paralysed (Pant & Joshi, 2020).

Furthermore, state failure often produces large-scale humanitarian consequences. Economic collapse and governance breakdown can lead to refugee outflows, cross-border smuggling, and transnational crime, all of which strain neighbouring states. In border regions such as Balochistan and Sindh, rising unemployment and political repression could fuel migration toward Iran and India, triggering new waves of socio-political tension (Haqqani, 2018). Climate-induced disasters, such as the devastating 2022 floods, have further exposed Pakistan's governance deficits, reinforcing the link between environmental insecurity and regional destabilisation (World Bank, 2024).

5. 4. Geopolitical Repercussions and Great Power Competition

The downward slide of Pakistan has redrawn the map of geopolitics in South Asia. The increasing reliance of Islamabad on Beijing for economic and military assistance has enhanced China's influence in the region through projects such as CPEC and military fusion of nuclear capability, extremist networks and economic collapse makes Pakistan not only a national crisis but a regional security threat. Unless internal reforms are coupled with cooperative regional frameworks, the stability of South Asia will continue to be held hostage by Pakistan's state failure.

6. International Responses and Policy Options

Pakistan's transformation from a strategically vital but rogue player to a potential failed state has forced the global community to re-calibrate its policies. Major powers, notably the United States, China and India, have taken different approaches based on their own strategic interests as multilateral institutions continue to deal with Pakistan's economic and governance crises. Understanding these responses is critical for assessing both the limits and potential for stabilising Pakistan and reducing its regional impact.

6. 1. The United States: From Strategic Patronage to Conditional Engagement

For much of the Cold War and the early War on Terror, Washington considered Pakistan an indispensable ally. The U.S. provided extensive military and financial support, wanting Islamabad to cooperate against Soviet expansion, Afghanistan, and terrorism post-9/11 (Byman, 2005). Yet, the duality of Pakistan's military establishment, backing extremist networks while getting American aid, engendered mounting exasperation in Washington (Fair, 2014).

U.S. policy in recent years has moved from patronage to conditional engagement. The Trump and Biden administrations reduced military assistance and improved oversight of economic aid, connecting it to adherence to counter-terrorism and nuclear security (Kapur, 2017). Today, U.S. concerns are primarily about preventing a Pakistani collapse that would threaten world security, especially with regard to nuclear material and terrorism. But a complete withdrawal is unlikely, because instability in Pakistan would threaten U.S. interests in Afghanistan and the wider Indo-Pacific (Haqqani, 2018).

Strategically, Washington's growing partnership with New Delhi under the "QUAD", i.e., Quadrilateral Security Dialogue,

further complicates U.S.-Pakistan relations. Despite ongoing U.S. engagement with Islamabad, the strategic tilt toward India indicates a long-term realignment in the region (Pant & Joshi, 2020).

6. 2. China: Strategic Entrenchment through CPEC

China has become Pakistan's main external benefactor, economically and militarily. This deepening strategic partnership is highlighted by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). China's investment in infrastructure, energy and logistics is aimed at securing its access to the Arabian Sea and stabilising Pakistan as a regional partner (Rafiq, 2022).

However, China's engagement is not purely altruistic. Beijing's strategic goal is to contain India and counter U.S. influence in South Asia. In this sense, while the CPEC has provided Pakistan with vital economic lifelines, it has also increased Islamabad's dependence on Beijing, creating a quasi-client relationship (Pant & Joshi, 2020).

Security challenges, such as attacks on Chinese nationals by Baloch insurgents, have exposed the fragility of this partnership. In turn, China has quietly urged Pakistan's military to improve internal security and protect Chinese investments (World Bank, 2024). But Beijing is cautious, preferring economic leverage over direct political interference.

6. 3. India: Strategic Containment and Diplomatic Isolation

India has pursued a policy of strategic containment, rather than engagement, towards Pakistan's decline. In the wake of repeated instances of cross-border terrorism, New Delhi has endeavoured to diplomatically isolate Islamabad in regional and international forums. India's participation in coalitions such as the QUAD and its strengthening defence ties with the U.S., Japan and Australia are part of a broader attempt to address the risks posed by Pakistan's instability (Pant & Joshi, 2020).

However, India is very vulnerable to Pakistan's internal strife. The prospect of militant spillovers, refugee flows and nuclear insecurity requires vigilance and crisis management mechanisms. Despite the suspension of direct dialogue, India remains active in advocating for Pakistan's accountability in international forums, including the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), where Islamabad has been on the hot seat for terror financing (Clary, 2019).

India's strategy ultimately is a two-fold one, to deter Pakistan's aggression, while protecting itself from the fallout of its failure. But the absence of sustained diplomatic engagement also constrains the prospects for crisis prevention and regional stability.

6. 4. Multilateral and Institutional Responses

International financial institutions (IFIs) such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have repeatedly come forward to save Pakistan's economy from collapsing. The IMF's 2023 bailout package alleviated some of the pain but did little to address the structural weaknesses that derive from corruption, tax evasion, and the military's hold on the economy (World Bank, 2024).

At the same time, global security institutions have failed to respond effectively to the complex crisis in Pakistan. The United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has been mostly reactive, responding to Pakistan through counter-terrorism resolutions. The Indo-Pak hostility has paralysed regional frameworks such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), creating a vacuum for non-regional actors such as China and the US to exert influence (Pant & Joshi, 2020).

Limited success in compelling Islamabad to reform can be exemplified by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF)'s grey-listing of Pakistan between 2018 and 2022. Pakistan took some financial regulatory steps to get off the list but its networks of extremism and illicit financing remain intact (Haqqani, 2018).

6. 5. Policy Options for Stabilisation

With so many actors and constraints, a coordinated international approach is essential. Three broad policy recommendations are apparent:

1. Conditional Assistance and Accountability: International aid should be contingent on verifiable reforms in governance and counter-terrorism, so that resources benefit civilian institutions and not the military elite (Fair, 2014).

2. Regional Security Dialogue: Reviving regional confidence-building measures, possibly under SAARC or a new Indo-Pacific framework, could reduce escalation risks and encourage cooperative crisis management.

3. Nuclear Safeguards and Oversight: Continued engagement through mechanisms such as the Nuclear Security Summit and bilateral transparency measures between India and Pakistan can reduce the likelihood of accidental nuclear escalation (Cirincione, Wolfsthal, & Rajkumar, 2005).

A realistic international policy should combine deterrence with engagement, isolating the destabilising elements inside Pakistan and encouraging reform in the country's civilian institutions.

7. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

Pakistan's evolution from a rogue state to a potentially failed state is a result of a complex interplay of internal dysfunction and external manipulation. Pakistan was once seen as a strategic linchpin in regional and global politics. But Pakistan's militarised governance, sponsorship of non-state actors and chronic economic mismanagement have eroded its legitimacy and institutional capacity. The convergence of political instability, extremist violence and fiscal insolvency now threatens not just Pakistan's survival as a state but also the stability of the broader South Asian region.

7. 1. Summary of Findings

The analysis indicates Pakistan's decline has been self-inflicted and externally facilitated. It became a rogue state due to the continuous control of the military over civilian institutions and the use of proxy warfare as a foreign policy tool (Fair, 2014; Byman, 2005). Over time, this strategy undermined state coherence, deepened sectarian rifts and alienated significant international partners.

At the same time, external actors, including the United States and China have also played a role in creating Pakistan's structural dependency through strategic indulgence and transactional engagement (Pant & Joshi, 2020). The outcome is a fragile state, highly dependent on external assistance, without fiscal independence or internal legitimacy. The problem is further compounded by a growing Islamist radicalisation in the polity of Pakistan that limits reformist impulses and perpetuates instability (Haqqani, 2018).

Pakistan's instability now poses multi-dimensional risks to South Asia:

- Security: Regional peace is undermined by ongoing cross-border terrorism, the risk of nuclear escalation and the spread of extremism (Clary, 2019).
- Economic: Fiscal insolvency disrupts trade and connectivity, weakening regional integration (World Bank, 2024)

- Geopolitical: The country's dependence on China perpetuates bipolarity and circumscribes cooperative frameworks in South Asia (Pant & Joshi, 2020).

Thus, Pakistan's trajectory is not an isolated national failure but a regional security crisis with global implications.

7. 2. Policy Recommendations

To reverse this decline and prevent the state from collapsing, Pakistan and the international community need to adopt a multidimensional approach based on governance reform, regional cooperation, and strategic restraint.

a. Strengthening Civilian Governance

There is a need to rebalance civil-military relations. Pakistan's political class needs to reassert control over national policy formulation, especially in the area of foreign and security affairs. Strengthening the institutions of the judiciary, parliament and electoral processes can increase accountability and decrease the military's political monopoly (Fair, 2014).

b. Economic Stabilisation and Structural Reform

Economic diversification and fiscal discipline will be key for sustainable recovery. The government should concentrate on tax reform, reduce defence spending and attract foreign investment by establishing a transparent regulatory environment. International financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank should make aid contingent on measurable progress in governance and anti-corruption (World Bank, 2024).

c. Counter-Extremism and Internal Security

A credible counter-extremism policy would require the dismantling of the infrastructure of jihadist groups and reforms of madrasa education systems that propagate militant ideologies (Byman, 2005). The security apparatus of Pakistan needs to upgrade from a selective counter-terrorism approach to a comprehensive de-radicalisation approach with a focus on education and economic opportunities for vulnerable youth.

d. Nuclear Security and Strategic Stability

Pakistan's nuclear stewardship must be reinforced through international engagement. Confidence-building measures with India, such as renewed dialogue on the Agreement on the Prohibition of Attack against Nuclear Facilities, can reduce escalation risks (Cirincione, Wolfsthal, & Rajkumar, 2005). Multilateral platforms, including the "IAEA", ("International Atomic Energy Agency), should continue providing technical assistance to strengthen Pakistan's nuclear command and control systems.

e. Regional Cooperation and Dialogue

Revitalising SAARC or creating new minilateral groupings focused on economic and security cooperation could address shared regional challenges. Confidence-building initiatives between India and Pakistan, particularly in trade, disaster management, and public health, could serve as low-risk avenues for gradual engagement (Pant & Joshi, 2020).

f. International Coordination

Global powers should refrain from engaging in zero-sum competition in Pakistan. The United States and China, despite their strategic rivalry, have a mutual interest in ensuring the stability of Pakistan. Coordinated engagement, focused on economic recovery, counter-terrorism, and nuclear security, presents a practical approach for convergence (Rafiq, 2022).

7. 3. Final Reflection

Pakistan's journey from a rogue to a failing state is not yet irreversible. Its history demonstrates resilience amid crises, but

resilience without reform risks perpetual stagnation. The international community must recognise that isolating Pakistan could accelerate its decline, while unconditional support merely perpetuates dysfunction.

A balanced approach anchored in conditional assistance, regional integration, and internal reform, offers the only sustainable pathway forward. Ultimately, stabilising Pakistan is not merely a national imperative but a prerequisite for lasting peace and prosperity in South Asia.

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