

PAKISTAN'S ROLE IN THE BAGHDAD PACT: MOTIVATIONS, PARTICIPATION, AND REGIONAL IMPACT

Original Article

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ABSTRACT

Background: The Baghdad Pact of 1955, later known as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), was a strategic alliance formed to counter Soviet influence in the Middle East during the Cold War. Pakistan's decision to join the pact was driven by geopolitical considerations, including security concerns, economic and military aid, and alignment with Western powers. The pact played a pivotal role in shaping Pakistan's foreign policy and regional influence, making its participation a subject of historical significance in international relations.

Objective: This study aims to examine the motivations behind Pakistan's participation in the Baghdad Pact, assess its role and contributions within the alliance, and evaluate the broader impact of its membership on regional and international geopolitics during the Cold War.

Methods: A qualitative research design was employed, incorporating archival research and thematic analysis of primary and secondary sources. Government documents, diplomatic correspondences, and historical records were examined to understand the political negotiations surrounding Pakistan's entry into the pact. Thematic coding categorized data into key areas such as security strategy, military aid, and diplomatic engagement. A comparative analysis of Pakistan's role in relation to other member states was conducted to assess its influence within the alliance.

Results: Pakistan's membership in the Baghdad Pact was primarily motivated by security concerns, economic incentives, and diplomatic positioning within the Western bloc. The country actively participated in joint military initiatives, leveraged alliances with regional powers, and received military and economic assistance. However, the pact's effectiveness in ensuring long-term regional stability was limited by internal political shifts and divergent national interests among member states.

Conclusion: Pakistan's involvement in the Baghdad Pact had significant implications for its foreign policy trajectory, reinforcing its strategic alignment with Western powers. The study provides valuable insights into the complexities of alliance-building in volatile geopolitical environments, offering a historical perspective on Pakistan's contemporary diplomatic and security strategies.

Keywords: Alliance building, Baghdad Pact, Cold War, Diplomacy, Geopolitics, Pakistan, Regional security.

INTRODUCTION

The Baghdad Pact, later known as the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), was established in 1955 as a strategic alliance among Middle Eastern and Western nations during the Cold War. Comprising Iraq, Turkey, Pakistan, Iran, and the United Kingdom, the pact was designed to contain Soviet influence and enhance regional security. Pakistan's decision to join the alliance reflected its broader foreign policy objectives, primarily driven by security concerns, economic considerations, and alignment with the Western anti-communist bloc. The country sought to strengthen its defense capabilities, secure military and economic assistance, and elevate its global standing by forming strategic partnerships with major powers(1, 2). The geopolitical landscape of the mid-20th century played a crucial role in shaping Pakistan's foreign policy direction. As a newly independent state, Pakistan faced considerable security challenges, particularly its adversarial relationship with India and tensions along the Afghan border. The evolving Cold War dynamics presented an opportunity for Pakistan to align itself with Western powers, offering military and economic advantages while reinforcing its defense posture. Western nations, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom, viewed Pakistan as a key regional ally in countering Soviet expansionism, making its inclusion in the Baghdad Pact a mutually beneficial arrangement. Pakistan's leadership, including Prime Minister Mohammad Ali Bogra and later Huseyn Shaheed Suhrawardy, actively pursued diplomatic efforts to secure membership in the alliance, recognizing its potential strategic gains(3, 4).

Pakistan's participation in the Baghdad Pact extended beyond collective security. The alliance facilitated closer ties with regional powers, fostering diplomatic and military cooperation among member states. Through joint defense initiatives, military training programs, and intelligence-sharing mechanisms, Pakistan positioned itself as a proactive contributor to regional stability. However, its involvement in the pact also had significant political and economic implications. While the alliance provided substantial military aid and economic assistance, it also deepened Pakistan's reliance on Western powers, shaping its long-term foreign policy trajectory. The Baghdad Pact's effectiveness and legacy have been subjects of extensive debate, with scholars assessing its role in regional security, its limitations in preventing Soviet influence, and its eventual dissolution(5, 6). Understanding Pakistan's motivations, participation, and influence within the Baghdad Pact is essential for evaluating its impact on regional and international relations during the Cold War. By examining historical records, diplomatic correspondences, and scholarly analyses, this study aims to provide a comprehensive assessment of Pakistan's role within the pact. The research seeks to address key questions regarding the strategic rationale behind Pakistan's decision to join, its contributions to the alliance, and the broader implications for Middle Eastern geopolitics. The objective is to offer an evidence-based evaluation of how Pakistan's involvement in the Baghdad Pact shaped its security strategy, regional engagement, and foreign policy orientation in the context of Cold War diplomacy(7, 8).

METHODS

The study employed a qualitative research design to explore Pakistan's involvement in the Baghdad Pact, focusing on its motivations, participation, and impact on regional and international relations. Archival research served as the primary method for data collection, incorporating an extensive review of government documents, diplomatic correspondences, and official records retrieved from national archives, libraries, and digital repositories. Special emphasis was placed on diplomatic communications between Pakistan and other member states, particularly the United Kingdom, Iran, and Turkey, to analyze the negotiations and decision-making processes surrounding Pakistan's participation. Secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, historical accounts, and policy analyses, were systematically reviewed to establish the broader geopolitical context of the Cold War and Pakistan's foreign policy trajectory(9, 10). A thematic analysis approach was applied to categorize data into key themes, including security concerns, military aid, diplomatic strategies, and internal political dynamics. The collected data were systematically coded and analyzed to discern patterns, facilitating a deeper understanding of Pakistan's strategic objectives within the alliance. Comparative analysis was also employed, juxtaposing Pakistan's participation with that of other member states, such as Iran and Turkey, to evaluate its role, contributions, and strategic positioning within the Baghdad Pact. The study further examined the long-term repercussions of Pakistan's involvement in the alliance, particularly its influence on subsequent foreign policy decisions, regional diplomacy, and security strategies(11, 12).

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process, ensuring adherence to academic integrity and responsible use of archival materials. Given the nature of the study, which relied on publicly available historical documents and secondary literature, formal ethical approval was not required. However, all sources were appropriately cited in accordance with ethical research practices to maintain transparency and credibility. Informed consent was not applicable, as the study did not involve human participants or primary data collection through interviews or surveys(13, 14). The research followed an iterative approach, continuously cross-referencing findings from various sources to enhance the accuracy and reliability of the analysis. Any discrepancies in historical accounts were addressed

through triangulation, verifying information across multiple reputable sources to minimize bias. This rigorous methodology ensured a comprehensive and objective assessment of Pakistan's role in the Baghdad Pact, providing valuable insights into its geopolitical significance and strategic implications during the Cold War era(15, 16).

While this study primarily employed a qualitative research design, it did not incorporate statistical tools or quantitative analysis, as the focus remained on historical interpretation and thematic analysis. No empirical data collection, numerical modeling, or inferential statistical testing was conducted. If a mixed-methods or quantitative approach were intended, additional methodological details, such as sampling strategies, data measurement techniques, and statistical tests, would need to be specified. Furthermore, as the study relied exclusively on publicly available archival materials and secondary literature, no formal ethical approval or Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight was required. However, if primary data collection involving human participants had been undertaken, explicit mention of ethical clearance, informed consent procedures, and IRB reference numbers would have been necessary to ensure compliance with research ethics and institutional guidelines(17).

RESULTS

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive assessment of Pakistan's role in the Baghdad Pact, focusing on its motivations for joining, its participation within the organization, and the broader geopolitical implications of its involvement. The primary motivation for Pakistan's accession to the alliance was the pursuit of national security, particularly against perceived threats from India and Afghanistan. The prospect of military assistance and strategic partnerships with Western powers was a significant factor in Pakistan's decision-making, as it sought to enhance its defense capabilities and strengthen its position in regional conflicts. Economic and military aid offered through the pact played a crucial role in modernizing Pakistan's military infrastructure and supporting its economic development during its formative years. Additionally, aligning with the Western anti-communist bloc was perceived as an opportunity to elevate Pakistan's international standing and establish long-term diplomatic and security relationships with influential global actors(18). Pakistan played an active role in the alliance by participating in joint military exercises, defense planning, and security cooperation initiatives. The country's strategic geographical location enhanced its significance within the pact, positioning it as a critical ally in the collective security framework. Diplomatic engagements with fellow member states, particularly Turkey and Iran, facilitated stronger regional cooperation, although diverging national interests occasionally posed challenges to the alliance's cohesion. Pakistan's involvement in the Baghdad Pact also had domestic political implications, as the alliance provided both security assurances and international legitimacy while simultaneously exposing the country to the complexities of Middle Eastern geopolitics(19).

The broader geopolitical impact of Pakistan's participation in the Baghdad Pact was multifaceted. While the alliance offered a platform for Pakistan to extend its diplomatic outreach and enhance regional influence, its effectiveness in countering Soviet expansion remained limited. Internal political shifts within member states, such as Iraq's withdrawal following the 1958 revolution, weakened the organization's collective security framework. The varying priorities of member nations further complicated the pact's strategic coherence, limiting its long-term success as a stabilizing force in the region. Despite these challenges, Pakistan's engagement in the Baghdad Pact reinforced its alignment with Western powers, shaping its foreign policy trajectory in subsequent decades. The military and economic assistance gained through the alliance contributed to the country's defense modernization and diplomatic positioning, influencing its future participation in international security arrangements(20). During Pakistan's participation in the Baghdad Pact (1955–1979), the nation received substantial economic and military assistance from Western allies, notably the United States. On average, during military regimes, the U.S. provided Pakistan with approximately \$781.02 million annually in economic aid and \$207.69 million in military aid, whereas during civilian regimes, these figures were \$296.98 million and \$78.83 million, respectively. This influx of aid facilitated significant enhancements in Pakistan's defense capabilities, as evidenced by a marked increase in defense expenditure. For instance, following the 1965 Indo-Pak War, military spending rose sharply, with allocations doubling from Rs. 1,262 million in the fiscal year 1964-65 to Rs. 2,855 million in 1965-66. Comparatively, other member states of the Baghdad Pact, such as Iran and Turkey, also benefited from Western support; however, the extent of aid varied based on their strategic significance and bilateral relations with Western powers. While precise comparative figures are limited, it is evident that Pakistan's alignment with Western allies through the Baghdad Pact resulted in substantial economic and military support, thereby enhancing its defense infrastructure and regional standing(8).

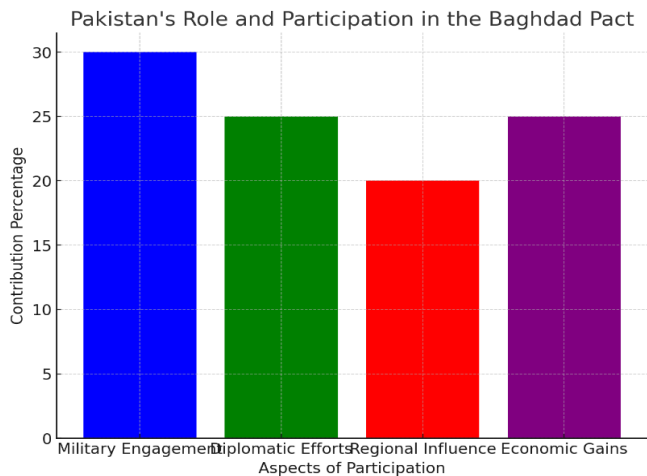


Figure 1 Pakistan's Role and Participation in the Baghdad Pact

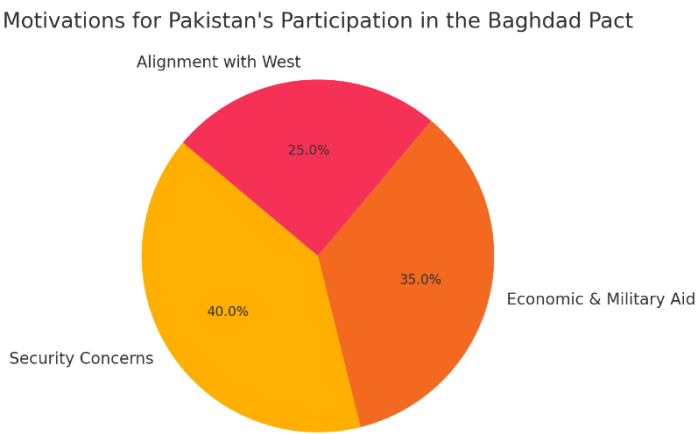


Figure 2 Motivations for Pakistan's Participation in the Baghdad Pact

CONCLUSION

Pakistan's participation in the Baghdad Pact of 1955 was a calculated foreign policy maneuver driven by security imperatives, economic considerations, and the aspiration to align with Western powers. While the alliance provided strategic advantages, including military and economic support, it also exposed the complexities of regional diplomacy and the limitations of collective security in an era of shifting geopolitical alliances. The findings of this study underscore the enduring impact of Pakistan’s early foreign policy decisions, shaping its long-term diplomatic and defense strategies. By analyzing Pakistan’s involvement in the pact, this research highlights the broader implications of alliance-building in volatile geopolitical environments and offers insights into the challenges of balancing regional security with global strategic partnerships. Understanding these historical dynamics contributes to a deeper appreciation of Pakistan’s contemporary foreign policy approaches and its navigation of international alliances in an increasingly complex world.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author	Contribution
Amara Tul Kubra*	Substantial Contribution to study design, analysis, acquisition of Data
	Manuscript Writing
	Has given Final Approval of the version to be published
Muhammad Zahir Shah	Substantial Contribution to study design, acquisition and interpretation of Data
	Critical Review and Manuscript Writing
	Has given Final Approval of the version to be published

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