New Geo-Political Realities in South Asia

What is the issue?

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- Mr.Trump’s open criticism of Pakistan is indicative of clear signs of U.S. recalibrating its ties with its long term alley.
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- While India sees these developments positively, there is a need for a calibrated caution as implications there are far reaching implications.
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What is the context?

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- Islamabad has this far been a non-NATO U.S. ally and is also a traditional friend of China in the region.
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- But the U.S. is clearly loosing out on the gains it intended to make in Afganistan and is also ceding space to an aggressive China in the region.
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- In this backdrop, U.S. is pushing for a seemingly radical shift in its Pakistan policy, which is bound to have significant fallouts for the entire South Asia.
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- While some vouch that this assertion would give U.S. more leverage in the region, others aruge call it an empty threat that will be eventually soft pedeled.
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How has Pakistan reacted?

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- The US has called for tightening the noose around the Haqquani Network and Taliban, but such action has serious internal political challenges in

Pakistan.
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- Notably, general elections are scheduled for next year in Pakistan, and caving into U.S. demands would have grave implications for the civilian government.
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- Hence, the Pakistani government is now voicing angst against US and has even threatened to suspend military and intelligence cooperation with Washington.
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- Significantly, American aid and reimbursements for Pakistan have been declining over the past several years, which has already diluted U.S.'s clout.
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- While Pakistan has been already been moving steadily towards China from the American camp, the current events are expected to speeden this.
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What are the larger implications?

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- Some perceive these as early indications of for a new brewing cold war which will see the emergence of an anti-U.S "China-Pakistan-Russia axis".
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- While India will certainly be tempted towards the U.S. fold, the role of Iran, which is hostile to the US but has cordial ties with India will be interesting.
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- Also, India's presently increasing pro-US tilt is speculated as the beginning of the end for the special Indo-Russian ties of more than 5 decades.
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- The U.S. pole is likely to have India and most NATO allies on board.
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- But the rise of China and current pace of US withdrawal might push many countries to hedge their bets safely.
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- While the only U.S. ally that has immense influence in Pakistan is Saudi Arabia, it remains to be seen on how effective it will be put to use.
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What are the implications for India?

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- Trump’s anti-pak rhetoric inherently runs the risk of even derailing India’s present indirect influence in Pakistan through U.S. in terror related aspects.
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- Also, the strengthening of China-Pakistan ties, without the balancing effect of the U.S. in the region, could push India further to the wall.
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- Hence, the best bet for India would be to deal with Washington without closing its doors to Moscow or Beijing, which requires great diplomatic acumen.
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- Such a crucial choice would also need to factor in economic relations, defence partnerships, and most of all geographic realities.
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- Importantly, it needs to be realised that a sharper geopolitical competition in the region could adversely impact the overall stability in the region.
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- Consequently, infrastructure development, market access, regional organisations, and regional conflict resolution mechanisms would suffer.
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Source: The Hindu

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