

## Sharif Flipping Pakistan's US and China Relations: New Leader Moving Closer to US and Further from China

By [Salman Rafi Sheikh](#)

Asia-Pacific Research, June 15, 2022

[Asia Times](#) 24 May 2022

Region: [China](#), [South Asia](#), [USA](#)

Theme: [Politics](#)

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the "Translate Website" drop down menu on the top banner of our home page (Desktop version).

To receive Global Research's Daily Newsletter (selected articles), [click here](#).

Visit and follow us on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#). Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

\*\*\*

*In the run-up to Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's April ouster in a parliamentary no-confidence motion, the elected leader explosively claimed that the United States was orchestrating a "foreign conspiracy" to drive him from power.*

Those claims were rejected by the political opposition that toppled Khan and elevated **Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif** as well as the military top brass that previously backed the cricket star turned politician in what many saw as a civil-military hybrid regime.

Washington also denied the conspiracy allegations, which Khan claimed were the upshot of his refusal to allow the US access to Pakistan military bases after its withdrawal from Afghanistan. Khan was also notably in Moscow for talks with Vladimir Putin the same day Russian tanks rolled across the Ukrainian border.

So when Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) spy chief **Lieutenant General Nadeem Anjum** met this month in Washington with top officials including **National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan** and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) director **William Burns**, some observers wondered if the US is indeed starting to have its way again in Pakistan.

According to Pakistani diplomatic sources, Anjum's visit focused on Afghanistan's security situation under nine months of Taliban rule, including in regard to the emergence of new, low-scale anti-Taliban armed resistance led by Ahmad Masoud's National Resistance Front and a host of other groups.



ISI's Lieutenant General Nadeem Anjum and US CIA head William Burns reportedly see eye-to-eye on Afghanistan. Image: Screengrab / NDTV

Those same sources say Anjum's top-level visit consolidated a new "Pak-US convergence" around Afghanistan – a merging of interests driven in part by Pakistan's own deteriorating ties with the Taliban over its unwillingness to contain the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an insurgent group also known as the "Pakistan Taliban" that has recently ramped up attacks on Pakistani security forces from Afghan soil.

Anjum was in Washington just days before new Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's visit on May 17, where he met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and attended a food security conference organized in response to the chaos and inflation Russia's invasion of Ukraine has wrought on global grain markets.

The Bilawal-Blinken meeting, where Afghanistan also reportedly dominated the agenda, marked a more symbolic show of warming US-Pakistan relations in the wake of Khan's departure. It also raised new hope in Islamabad that Washington will lend its support to a new International Monetary Fund (IMF) financial package to avoid a national default.

Pakistan's flagging ties with China, which has made major investments in the country via the \$60 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a key plank of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has provided the US a diplomatic opening for re-engagement, the same Pakistani diplomatic sources say.

Bilateral relations have foundered largely over the CPEC, with Pakistan repeatedly asking Beijing to no avail for restructured terms on infrastructure-related loans, and China raising concerns about insurgent attacks on its nationals and in-country interests, including in restive Balochistan province where it holds a 40-year lease on the port at Gwadar.

Relations reportedly hit a new low when three Chinese tutors attached to a Beijing-sponsored Confucius Institute at Karachi University were killed in a suicide bomb attack on April 26. China has since withdrawn its nationals from all Confucius Institutes across the country due to security concerns.

“Chinese confidence in Pakistan’s security system’s ability to protect their citizens and their projects is seriously shaken,” said Pakistan **Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed**, chairman of the Senate’s Defense Committee, after the Karachi attack. “It has caused serious concern and understandable indignation in China.

“More so, the pattern of attacks is so recurring and it’s clear the Pakistani promises of ‘foolproof security’ are mere words, not matched by countermeasures on the ground,” he told local media. Mushahid recently led a Pakistani delegation to the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan to address China’s growing security concerns.



China has withdrawn all of its staff from Confucius Institutes in Pakistan in reaction to rising attacks on its nationals. Image: Twitter

Tensions with top investor China come as Pakistan’s economy teeters towards collapse. On May 17, the Pakistani rupee hit an all-time low of 196 to the US dollar due to fast-falling foreign exchange reserves and big debts due to international lenders including Chinese financial institutions who refuse to reschedule the credits.

Recently snubbed by Pakistan’s traditional benefactors in Saudi Arabia and China, Sharif’s government is looking again to the US-influenced IMF for financial succor.

In one of his first acts in office, Sharif sent **Finance Minister Miftah Ismail** – who holds a PhD degree in public finance from the University of Pennsylvania – to Washington to revive Pakistan’s IMF program.

Miftah not only revived the IMF program, which stalled due to Khan’s refusal to meet its terms on fuel and other market-distorting subsidies, but also convinced the fund to expand its lending from \$6 billion to \$8 billion.

“The IMF program is crucial since we are not expecting any more help from the Chinese or the Saudis at the moment,” said a Pakistani diplomat who requested anonymity.

Significantly, Pakistan’s top brass are also reportedly supportive of improved ties with the

US, its long-time partner until relations cratered over the Afghanistan war.

That's in part because the Pakistan military, which backed the Khan regime for years and is now also being blamed for pushing the economy to the brink of bankruptcy, recognizes a US-backed IMF bailout is the likely the only way to avoid collapse.

That pro-US signal was loud and clear in early April when Chief of the Army Staff **General Qamar Javed Bajwa** said in an early April speech delivered at a security conference in Islamabad that Pakistan's ties with the US were "long and excellent."

Bajwa reminded his audience that the "best equipment" possessed by the Pakistan military comes from the US, spelled not China, and that Pakistan's largest export market is the US, likewise not China.

"Pakistan – including the Pakistan military – has multiple reasons to rebuild its ties with the US," the Pakistani diplomatic source said.

For the US, Pakistan's troubled ties with the Taliban, its rising tensions with Beijing and its acute need for IMF financial assistance present a sudden and unique opportunity to recalibrate ties with Islamabad and develop a new, mutually beneficial strategy vis-a-vis the Taliban.

With the emergence of a low-scale armed resistance against the Taliban in Afghanistan by fighters – namely Ahmad Masoud and Amrullah Saleh – with past strong ties to the West, Pakistan could serve as a conduit for extending direct support to these resistance groups in hopes of destabilizing the Taliban.

As Bilawal stressed in an interview with US media, Pakistan has been pressing the Afghan Taliban to eliminate the TTP – which seeks to overthrow Pakistan's secular government and establish an Islamic emirate as the Taliban has in Kabul – with no meaningful progress made so far.

Pakistan's and China's interests in Afghanistan diverge on the point.

Unlike the US, China supports the Taliban's exclusive dominance in Afghanistan. That's largely because its leadership has vowed not to allow the anti-China, Uighur-led East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) to launch attacks on Chinese interests in Afghanistan and across the border in Xinjiang, China – where Beijing holds one million-plus Uighurs in so-called "vocational camps" some rights groups see as a campaign of "genocide."

While the Taliban has assured Beijing it will contain ETIM, the militant group in Kabul has made no such assurances to Islamabad on the TTP. Instead, the Taliban acted as an intermediary in brokering a short-lived ceasefire between Khan's government and the TTP.

With China's interests increasingly aligned with a strong and stable Taliban, and with Pakistan's ties with Beijing stressed and strained, it is logical for Sharif's new government to look towards the US to bolster its security and save its economy as it teeters on the brink on both fronts.

\*

Note to readers: Please click the share buttons above or below. Follow us on Instagram,

Twitter and Facebook. Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

*Featured image: New Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has the opportunity to reset Pakistan's foreign relations. Image: Screengrab / NTV*

The original source of this article is [Asia Times](#)  
Copyright © [Salman Rafi Sheikh](#), [Asia Times](#), 2022

---

**[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)**

**[Become a Member of Global Research](#)**

Articles by: **[Salman Rafi Sheikh](#)**

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). Asia-Pacific Research will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. Asia-Pacific Research grants permission to cross-post Asia-Pacific Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Asia-Pacific Research article. For publication of Asia-Pacific Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [editors@asia-pacificresearch.com](mailto:editors@asia-pacificresearch.com)

[www.asia-pacificresearch.com](http://www.asia-pacificresearch.com) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [editors@asia-pacificresearch.com](mailto:editors@asia-pacificresearch.com)