

Current Affairs 2024

Q. No. 2

The creation of more provinces is a persistent demand from some circles in Pakistan. How do you see the creation of more provinces in Pakistan; as beneficial or harmful for the people? Explain your views with solid justification.

1. Introduction

- The demand for new provinces stems from administrative, political, economic and regional grievances.
- New provinces can improve governance and representation, but only if created through **constitutional consensus and objective administrative criteria**.

2. New provinces can bring government closer to the people and improve representation

2.1 Smaller provinces can reduce administrative distance between citizens and provincial institutions.

2.2 Underdeveloped regions can receive greater political attention and dedicated development planning.

2.3 South Punjab and Hazara demonstrate demands for stronger regional representation.

2.4 Smaller administrative units can improve monitoring of public services and development expenditure.

2.5 New provinces can reduce excessive concentration of political and administrative power within existing provincial capitals.

3. Creating provinces without proper planning can generate new political and administrative problems

3.1 Provincial demands can acquire ethnic, linguistic and territorial dimensions.

3.2 Division of water, assets, employees, revenues and infrastructure can produce new disputes.

3.3 Establishing capitals, secretariats and bureaucratic structures can impose substantial costs.

3.4 Political elites may exploit provincial demands for electoral mobilisation and patronage.

3.5 New provinces cannot automatically solve corruption, weak institutions or poor service delivery.

4. Pakistan's constitutional framework requires consensus before provincial restructuring

4.1 Article 239 provides the constitutional mechanism for amendments affecting provincial boundaries.

- 4.2 A province whose boundaries are affected must approve the relevant constitutional amendment through its Provincial Assembly.
- 4.3 The South Punjab debate demonstrates both popular demand and disagreement over implementation.
- 4.4 Any restructuring must address representation, NFC distribution, assets and administrative transition.

5. New provinces should be created where objective governance needs justify them

- 5.1 An independent commission should assess population, geography, revenue and administrative viability.
- 5.2 The federation should establish a transparent formula for distribution of resources among new and existing provinces.
- 5.3 Local governments should simultaneously be strengthened to ensure decentralisation within provinces.
- 5.4 Provincial creation should be based on broad political and public consensus rather than electoral calculations.

6. Conclusion

New provinces are **potentially beneficial rather than inherently harmful**, provided they are created through constitutional consensus, administrative feasibility and equitable resource-sharing.

Q. No. 3

Discuss Pakistan's historic role in ECO and under the framework of regional integration; what are the future prospects of ECO for Pakistan?

1. Introduction

The Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) provides Pakistan with a platform for economic cooperation and connectivity with **Türkiye, Iran and the Central Asian republics**.

2. Pakistan has played a foundational role in the evolution of ECO

- 2.1 Pakistan, Iran and Türkiye established the **Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) in 1964**.
- 2.2 RCD was transformed into the **Economic Cooperation Organization in 1985**.
- 2.3 ECO expanded in 1992 to include seven new members from Central Asia and Afghanistan.
- 2.4 Pakistan has hosted ECO summits and supported its institutional development.

2.5 Pakistan's geographical position gives it potential importance as a bridge between Central Asia, South Asia and the Arabian Sea.

3. ECO offers Pakistan opportunities for trade, transit and energy connectivity

- 3.1 Pakistan can provide Central Asian states access to Karachi and Gwadar ports.
- 3.2 Road and rail connectivity can link Pakistan with Afghanistan and Central Asia.
- 3.3 ECO can facilitate energy cooperation and electricity connectivity.
- 3.4 Regional trade can expand Pakistan's export markets beyond traditional destinations.
- 3.5 Tourism, agriculture, logistics and digital connectivity offer additional areas of cooperation.

4. ECO's regional integration potential remains constrained by structural and political barriers

- 4.1 Intra-ECO trade remains below its considerable potential.
- 4.2 Weak transport infrastructure and customs procedures increase transaction costs.
- 4.3 Instability in Afghanistan disrupts Pakistan-Central Asia connectivity.
- 4.4 Political tensions and protectionist policies restrict regional commerce.
- 4.5 Overlapping regional organisations can dilute institutional focus and implementation.

5. Pakistan can convert ECO membership into a stronger instrument of economic diplomacy

- 5.1 Integrate ECO connectivity projects with CPEC and Pakistan's port infrastructure.
- 5.2 Improve customs digitisation and cross-border trade facilitation.
- 5.3 Pursue rail and road links with Central Asia through Afghanistan.
- 5.4 Promote regional energy, food-security and industrial cooperation.
- 5.5 Encourage private-sector participation and business-to-business connectivity.

6. Conclusion

ECO can become strategically valuable for Pakistan if it evolves from a largely **institutional cooperation framework into an implementation-oriented platform for trade, transit, energy and regional connectivity.**

Q. No. 4

Critically evaluate US-Pakistan relations under the Joe Biden Administration vis-à-vis the US Indo-Pacific strategy.

1. Introduction

Under Joe Biden, US-Pakistan relations moved away from the traditional security-centred partnership, while Washington increasingly prioritised **China, India and the Indo-Pacific**.

2. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan reduced Pakistan's traditional strategic importance

2.1 The completion of US military withdrawal in 2021 reduced Washington's dependence on Pakistan for Afghan operations.

2.2 Counterterrorism remained an area of limited security cooperation.

2.3 Biden administration engagement increasingly focused on diplomacy rather than a large security partnership.

2.4 Pakistan sought to shift the relationship towards trade, investment, climate and economic cooperation.

3. The Indo-Pacific strategy has elevated India as a major US strategic partner

3.1 Washington views India as an important counterweight to China's growing influence.

3.2 Defence, intelligence and technological cooperation between India and the US has expanded.

3.3 India participates in the **Quad** alongside the US, Japan and Australia.

3.4 The Indo-Pacific framework has consequently reduced Pakistan's relative strategic importance in US planning.

4. Pakistan-US relations nevertheless retain areas of strategic convergence

4.1 Pakistan remains relevant to regional counterterrorism and Afghan stability.

4.2 Nuclear security and strategic stability remain important areas of US engagement.

4.3 Pakistan is a significant market with potential for bilateral trade and investment.

4.4 Climate change and development provide opportunities for cooperation beyond security.

5. Pakistan should recalibrate relations with Washington without compromising its strategic partnership with China

5.1 Replace aid dependence with trade, investment, technology and market access.

5.2 Maintain constructive security dialogue with the US.

5.3 Avoid becoming an arena for US-China strategic competition.

5.4 Strengthen relations with China while simultaneously expanding ties with the US, EU, Gulf and Central Asian states.

5.5 Pursue an issue-based foreign policy centred on Pakistan's national interests.

6. Conclusion

The Biden era demonstrated that Pakistan-US relations are **no longer primarily defined by Afghanistan**, while the Indo-Pacific has strengthened the US-India partnership; Pakistan therefore needs strategic autonomy and economic diplomacy.

Q. No. 5

Saudi Arabia and Iran both have significant place in Pakistan's foreign policy. How can Pakistan maintain friendly relations with both, especially after China's mediation?

1. Introduction

Pakistan's relationship with Saudi Arabia and Iran is shaped by **geography, religion, security, trade, energy, diaspora and regional geopolitics**. The Saudi-Iran rapprochement facilitated by China in 2023 creates additional diplomatic space for Pakistan.

2. Saudi Arabia remains strategically important to Pakistan

- 2.1 Saudi Arabia hosts a large Pakistani diaspora and is a major source of remittances.
- 2.2 Defence and security cooperation has historically remained significant.
- 2.3 Saudi financial support has helped Pakistan during periods of external-payment pressure.
- 2.4 Hajj and religious ties provide a strong people-to-people dimension.

3. Iran is indispensable to Pakistan because of geography and border security

- 3.1 Pakistan shares a long border with Iran, making stable bilateral relations essential.
- 3.2 Border security and counterterrorism require continuous cooperation.
- 3.3 Border trade can benefit communities on both sides.
- 3.4 Energy cooperation offers potential despite sanctions-related constraints.
- 3.5 Peaceful relations with Iran are particularly important for stability in Balochistan.

4. China's mediation has created an opportunity for Pakistan to pursue balanced relations

- 4.1 The **2023 China-brokered Saudi-Iran rapprochement** reduced tensions between the two regional powers.
- 4.2 Pakistan no longer faces the same pressure to navigate an intensely polarised Saudi-Iranian rivalry.
- 4.3 Islamabad can encourage regional dialogue rather than choosing sides.
- 4.4 Improved Saudi-Iranian relations can create opportunities for wider regional economic cooperation.

5. Pakistan should pursue a policy of equidistance and issue-based engagement

- 5.1 Avoid becoming part of Saudi-Iranian geopolitical competition.
- 5.2 Deepen Saudi investment, labour and economic cooperation.

- 5.3 Strengthen border management and legitimate trade with Iran.
- 5.4 Avoid sectarian polarisation within Pakistan.
- 5.5 Support diplomatic initiatives that reduce regional confrontation.

6. Conclusion

Pakistan's best strategy is **friendly relations with both, strategic neutrality and economic engagement**, using the Saudi-Iran détente as an opportunity for regional cooperation rather than rivalry.

Q. No. 6

Palestine conflict is a long-standing one on the United Nations table. Discuss its recent escalation since October 2023 and critically assess the big powers' reaction.

1. Introduction

The **7 October 2023 Hamas attack** and Israel's subsequent military campaign in Gaza transformed the Palestinian question into an acute humanitarian, diplomatic and geopolitical crisis.

2. The conflict escalated into a major humanitarian and regional crisis after October 2023

- 2.1 Hamas's attack on Israel resulted in the killing and capture of Israeli civilians and soldiers.
- 2.2 Israel launched a large-scale military operation in Gaza.
- 2.3 Extensive destruction, displacement and civilian casualties created a severe humanitarian crisis.
- 2.4 The conflict expanded regional tensions involving Lebanon, Yemen, Iran and other actors.
- 2.5 The crisis revived international debate over occupation, Palestinian statehood and the two-state solution.

3. The United States strongly supported Israel while also attempting to manage humanitarian consequences

- 3.1 Washington recognised Israel's right to defend itself following the October 7 attack.
- 3.2 The US provided substantial diplomatic and military support to Israel.
- 3.3 It simultaneously called for humanitarian assistance and civilian protection.
- 3.4 Repeated US positions at the UN exposed tensions between alliance commitments and international humanitarian concerns.
- 3.5 The US continued to support a negotiated two-state solution in principle.

4. Other major powers adopted different approaches to the conflict

4.1 China emphasised an immediate ceasefire, humanitarian relief and Palestinian statehood.

4.2 Russia strongly criticised Israeli military operations and US policy while seeking a larger diplomatic role.

4.3 European states remained divided over military support, recognition of Palestine and the appropriate response.

4.4 The UN repeatedly attempted to secure ceasefire and humanitarian measures amid Security Council divisions.

4.5 The differing responses exposed the geopolitical limitations of the existing international system.

5. A durable solution requires addressing both immediate humanitarian needs and the political roots of the conflict

5.1 Civilians must receive unhindered humanitarian assistance and protection.

5.2 Hostages must be released and violations of international humanitarian law investigated.

5.3 Palestinian political self-determination and statehood must be addressed.

5.4 Any settlement must also provide credible security guarantees for Israel.

5.5 Pakistan should continue diplomatic, humanitarian and multilateral support for Palestinian rights.

6. Conclusion

The post-October 2023 crisis has exposed the **limits of great-power consensus and the weaknesses of the UN system**, making sustained diplomacy and a credible political settlement essential.

Q. No. 7

Evaluate the implications of Ukraine War for Russia-Europe energy relations.

1. Introduction

The Ukraine War fundamentally transformed Russia-Europe energy relations from a model of **deep interdependence into one of strategic confrontation and diversification**.

2. Europe-Russia energy interdependence became a geopolitical vulnerability

2.1 European economies had relied heavily on Russian natural gas and oil before the war.

2.2 Russia's reduction of gas supplies and European sanctions disrupted the established energy relationship.

2.3 Energy became an instrument of geopolitical pressure.

2.4 European energy prices and economic uncertainty increased significantly during the crisis.

3. Europe has accelerated diversification away from Russian energy

3.1 European states increased imports of liquefied natural gas from alternative suppliers.

3.2 Norway and other suppliers gained greater importance in European energy security.

3.3 Europe accelerated investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency and electrification.

3.4 Strategic gas storage and energy-security mechanisms became more important.

3.5 The EU's long-term objective shifted towards reducing dependence on Russian fossil fuels.

4. Russia has redirected its energy strategy towards Asian markets

4.1 China has become increasingly important to Russian energy exports.

4.2 India and other Asian markets have also increased their significance.

4.3 Russia is seeking alternative pipelines, shipping routes and payment mechanisms.

4.4 However, replacing the European market entirely is difficult because infrastructure and market structures differ.

5. The war is creating a new European energy order with long-term geopolitical consequences

5.1 Energy security is now treated as an integral component of national security.

5.2 Europe is likely to maintain greater diversification even if political tensions eventually decline.

5.3 Russia faces the long-term challenge of losing a lucrative and geographically convenient market.

5.4 The crisis has accelerated Europe's transition towards renewable and low-carbon energy.

5.5 Future Russia-Europe energy relations are likely to remain limited and politically conditioned.

6. Conclusion

The Ukraine War has **irreversibly weakened the traditional Russia-Europe energy partnership**, accelerating European diversification and pushing Russia towards Asian markets.

Q. No. 8 — Short Notes

(a) Prospects of Regional Integration in South Asia

1. Introduction

South Asia possesses strong geographical, cultural and economic complementarities, yet remains one of the world's least integrated regions.

2. Factors favouring integration

- Shared geography and historical links.
- Large regional consumer markets.
- Complementary agricultural and industrial economies.
- Potential for regional energy and transport connectivity.
- SAARC provides an existing institutional framework.

3. Major obstacles

- Pakistan-India political tensions.
- Security concerns and terrorism.
- Protectionism and non-tariff barriers.
- Weak transport and energy connectivity.
- Lack of political trust.

4. Future opportunities

- Revitalising SAARC.
- Cross-border energy and electricity trade.
- Regional transport corridors.
- Digital and financial connectivity.
- Tourism and people-to-people exchanges.

5. Conclusion

South Asian integration is economically rational but **politically constrained**; confidence-building and incremental economic cooperation offer the most realistic path forward.

(b) The UN Efforts for Nuclear Non-Proliferation

1. Introduction

The UN-led non-proliferation architecture seeks to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons while promoting peaceful nuclear technology.

2. Major mechanisms

2.1 The **Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT)** establishes the central global framework.

2.2 The **IAEA safeguards system** monitors peaceful nuclear activities.

2.3 UN Security Council Resolution 1540 requires states to prevent non-state actors from acquiring WMD capabilities.

2.4 UN sanctions have been used against states violating non-proliferation obligations.

3. Major challenges

- North Korea's nuclear programme.
- Nuclear arsenals of major powers.
- India, Pakistan and Israel remain outside the NPT.
- Great-power rivalry weakens consensus.
- Disputes over the unequal obligations imposed by the existing nuclear order.

4. Way forward

- Strengthen IAEA safeguards.
- Advance nuclear disarmament under NPT Article VI.
- Develop regional confidence-building mechanisms.
- Improve export controls and nuclear security.
- Pursue universal and non-discriminatory arms-control arrangements.

5. Conclusion

The UN remains indispensable to nuclear non-proliferation, but its effectiveness depends upon **equal application of rules, credible verification and simultaneous progress towards nuclear disarmament.**

(c) Climate Change and the Big Powers' Role

1. Introduction

Climate change is a global collective-action problem, but major powers bear disproportionate responsibility because of their historical emissions, economic capacity and technological influence.

2. Big powers shape global climate governance

2.1 The US remains a major source of emissions and a critical provider of climate finance and technology.

2.2 China is the world's largest annual greenhouse-gas emitter while also leading in renewable-energy manufacturing.

2.3 The European Union has adopted comparatively ambitious climate regulations and targets.

2.4 Russia remains significant because of its fossil-fuel economy and role in global energy markets.

3. Developing countries face disproportionate climate consequences

3.1 Countries such as Pakistan contribute relatively little to global emissions but face severe climate vulnerability.

3.2 Floods, droughts, heatwaves and food insecurity threaten development gains.

3.3 Developing countries require climate finance, technology transfer and adaptation support.

3.4 The issue of **Loss and Damage** has therefore become central to climate diplomacy.

4. Big powers must move from commitments towards implementation

- Fulfil climate-finance commitments.
- Accelerate renewable-energy transition.
- Support adaptation in vulnerable countries.
- Transfer affordable green technologies.
- Strengthen implementation of the Paris Agreement.

5. Conclusion

The climate crisis cannot be solved without major-power cooperation; **their financial, technological and diplomatic choices will largely determine whether global climate commitments become meaningful action.**