



Pakistan can optimize its Eurasian balancing act through PAKAFUZ

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CommandEleven is a research organization focused on Pakistan's national security aspects and enhancing global understanding and collaboration opportunities for the nation.

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Pakistan's geo-economic [grand strategy](#) aims to position the South Asian state as a pivotal node in Eurasia's ever-expanding connectivity network. CPEC is functionally being expanded into Afghanistan and Central Asia through last February's agreement to build a Pakistan-Afghanistan-Uzbekistan (PAKAFUZ) railway, the work on which has [recently resumed](#) after a few months' pause following the Taliban's return to power in August. The successful completion of this project will also serve to further enhance Pakistan's [rapidly evolving relations](#) with Russia by making it a crucial component of that country's [Greater Eurasian Partnership](#), particularly with respect to fulfilling its [complementary vision](#) of Central Asia-South Asia connectivity.

These PAKAFUZ-related outcomes will greatly accelerate the emerging Multipolar World Order (which is increasingly appearing to be "[bi-multipolar](#)"), but they [mustn't occur at the expense](#) of Pakistani-American relations, which regrettably remain complicated. Unlike the Trump Administration, the Biden one took Pakistan for granted and even tried to trick it into unwittingly falling for an [anti-Chinese provocation](#) by inviting it to December's so-called "Summit for Democracy", a trap which that country's leadership wisely avoided at the last minute. Pakistan must continue trying to "normalize" its relations with the US, though of course without sacrificing its sovereign national interests. It's here where PAKAFUZ can also come into play.

Last July's announcement of the "[New Quad](#)" between the US and the three PAKAFUZ countries creates the possibility of a rapprochement between these two if America has the political will to do so. Pakistan serves as this project's anchor state and could accordingly become the basis of American economic operations aimed at engaging with Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics per the vision set out in the US' own "[Strategy for Central Asia 2019-2025](#)". This would be a mutually beneficial and non-hostile way for the US to try to balance Russian and Chinese influence there. American companies can rely on PAKAFUZ to export their Pakistani-produced wares to those countries, which could gradually be leveraged to reduce their economic dependence on their Great Power neighbors.

One of the stumbling blocs to this pragmatic vision remains the US' continued economic and political pressure on the Taliban. If Pakistan can pioneer a series of mutual compromises between them aimed at "normalizing" their relations in practice, then it can improve the chances of courting the US' Afghan- and Central Asian-directed investment through PAKAFUZ as was earlier explained. Along the same lines, Pakistan should also explore the viability of mediating the improvement of Turkish-Taliban ties too following [reports](#) that Ankara and Islamabad aren't exactly seeing eye-to-eye in that country like some had previously predicted that they would. Not only is Turkey among Pakistan's top partners, but it too serves a valuable connectivity purpose for the South Asian state's grand strategy of Eurasian balancing.

To explain, PAKAFUZ (which can be conceptualized as the northern expansion of CPEC, or N-CPEC+) can also connect to Turkey via the Afghan-originating [Lapis Lazuli Corridor](#) (LLC), which crosses through Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and can then reach its West Asian destination through the newly created [Zangezur Corridor](#) shortcut. The simultaneous expansion of Pakistan's PAKAFUZ-based continental connectivity plans to Central Asia via that project's traditional route and the South Caucasus and West Asia (Turkey) through its

LLC branch corridor will significantly bolster that country's long-term economic position in an [increasingly multipolar Eurasia](#). The pros and cons of mediating the improvement of Turkish-Taliban ties to that end must therefore be seriously considered by the Pakistani leadership.

Bearing in mind Pakistan's newly directed northern geo-economic outreaches through PAKAFUZ, it's crucial for the country to consolidate its position in the [Economic Cooperation Organization](#) (ECO) that has mostly remained symbolic till the fast-moving events in Afghanistan over the summer completely revolutionized the strategic situation. Islamabad should see to it that this bloc's functional importance becomes commensurate with its individual countries' strategic importance in this evolving context. This can be greatly aided by making PAKAFUZ and its LLC branch corridor the connectivity centerpieces of the ECO's future development policy. Doing so will collectively improve their influence and end up being mutually beneficial with time.

Generally speaking, everything that's thus far been proposed is aimed at optimizing Pakistan's Eurasian balancing act across the coming year. The country must remain committed to its PAKAFUZ-driven geo-economic engagement with Central Asia and more broadly the South Caucasus and West Asia as well through that project's LLC branch corridor. Islamabad should pursue equally excellent economic relations with China, [Russia](#), and the US by leveraging its unique geostrategic connectivity potential in order to avoid being considered a partisan playing in the ongoing New Cold War. PAKAFUZ is indisputably the only platform through which Pakistan's newly promulgated grand strategy can be fulfilled, which should also see the country leveraging it all to become one of the ECO's leaders too.

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