

# Shifting Stands: US-Pakistan Relations Post Afghanistan- Withdrawal

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## Shifting Stands: US-Pakistan Relations Post Afghanistan-Withdrawal

### Overview:

US-Pakistan relations have gone through many twists and turns in the last few years. Therefore, G5iO conducted a discourse analysis on key Twitter accounts of US-based think tanks, policy experts, and media sources to understand, analyze and deconstruct the shifting discourses on Pakistan over the last year. Our aim was to see which topics received the most attention in US-led discourses related to Pakistan and how these discourses have evolved over the past year.

### Methodology:

In order to analyze US discourses on Pakistan, we looked at the Twitter data of 3 prominent US think tanks, 3 major media sources, and 6 policy experts via the latest Twitter API.

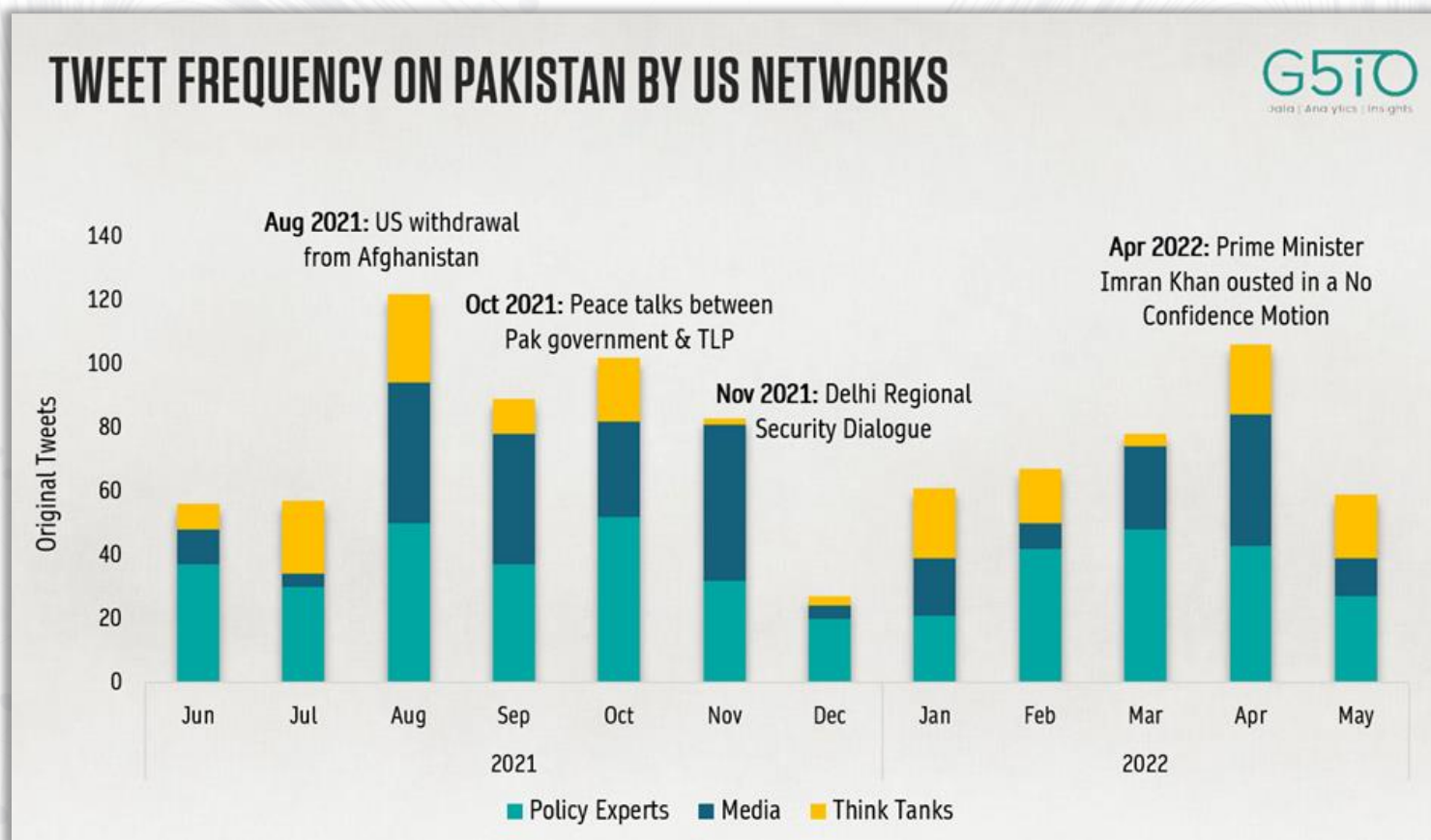
Out of the 195,264 tweets scraped, we filtered 5085 tweets directly related to Pakistan from 1st June 2021 to 31st May 2022. We then further categorized these tweets related to Pakistan into critical issues affecting the Pakistan-US relationship, i.e., Afghanistan, terrorism, nuclear (issues), China, India, Civ-Mil, and politics.

Data Point: Selected Twitter Accounts			G5iO Analytics & Projections
POLICY EXPERTS	THINK TANKS	MEDIA	
Michael Kugelman	Hudson Institute	Guardian	
Jeff M. Smith	Stimson Center	NY Times	
Christopher Clary	USIP	War On The Rocks	
Brahma Chellaney			
Paul Staniland			
Elizabeth Threlkeld			

## Frequency of Pakistan-Related Tweets:

Mapping the data related to Pakistan, we witnessed a surge in activity in August 2021 owing to the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. In October 2021, the main focus of US accounts was on the TLP's protests that continued for a month. The last few months of 2021 saw a reduced focus on Pakistan by US accounts due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

April 2022 saw another surge in the frequency of tweets by all actors as the political unrest heightened due to Prime Minister Imran Khan's ousting via a no-confidence vote.

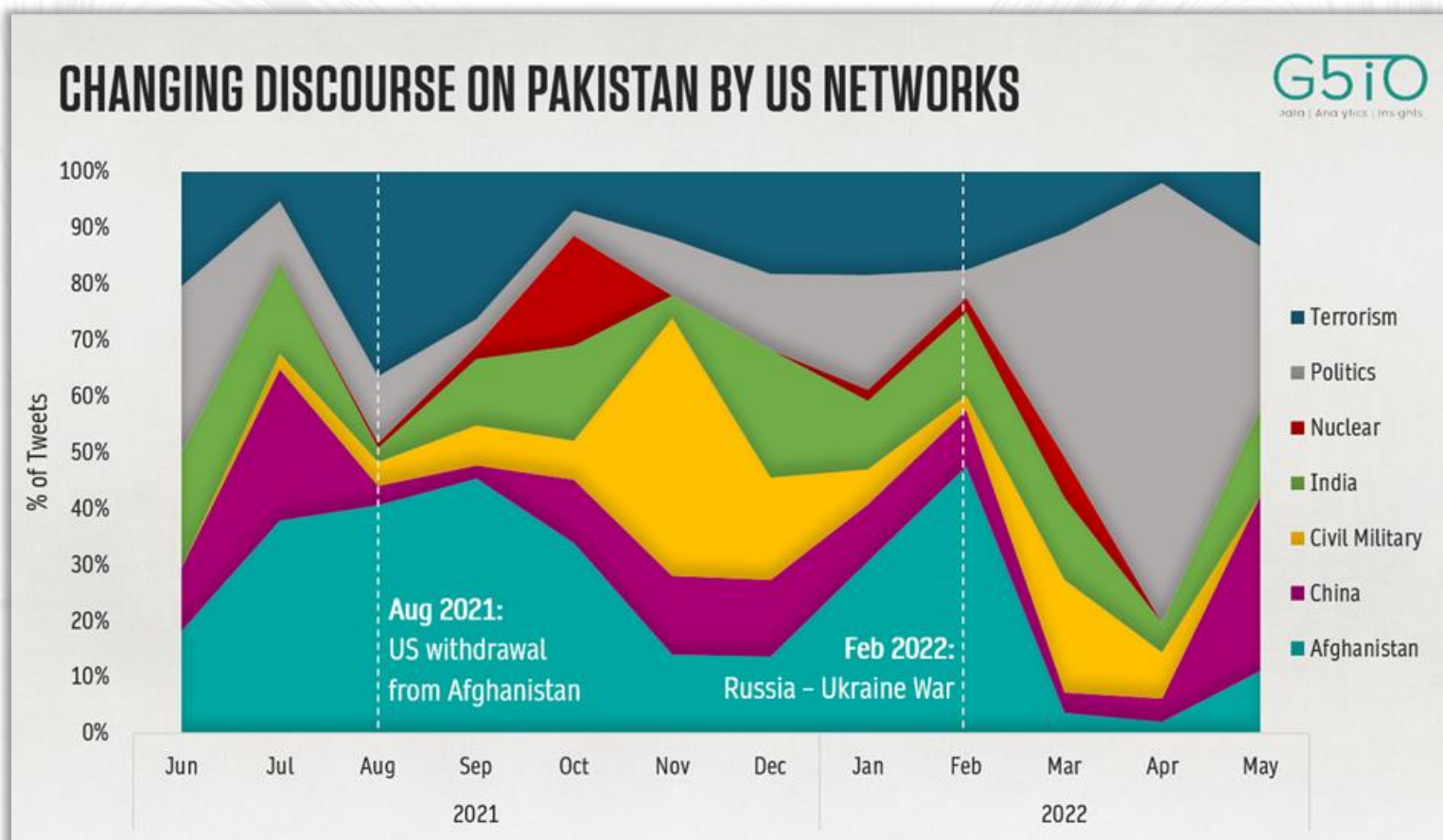




## Discourse Analysis by Categories:

As the US withdrew from Afghanistan, the discourse on Pakistan shifted from being Afghan-centric towards Pakistan's domestic politics. Moreover, there was a surge in nuclear-related discourse in October 2021, which coincided with Dr. AQ Khan's death anniversary.

The US accounts also covered Pakistan government talks with the TTP in May '22. China was also mentioned with respect to CPEC's security and Russia regarding warming ties with Pakistan.

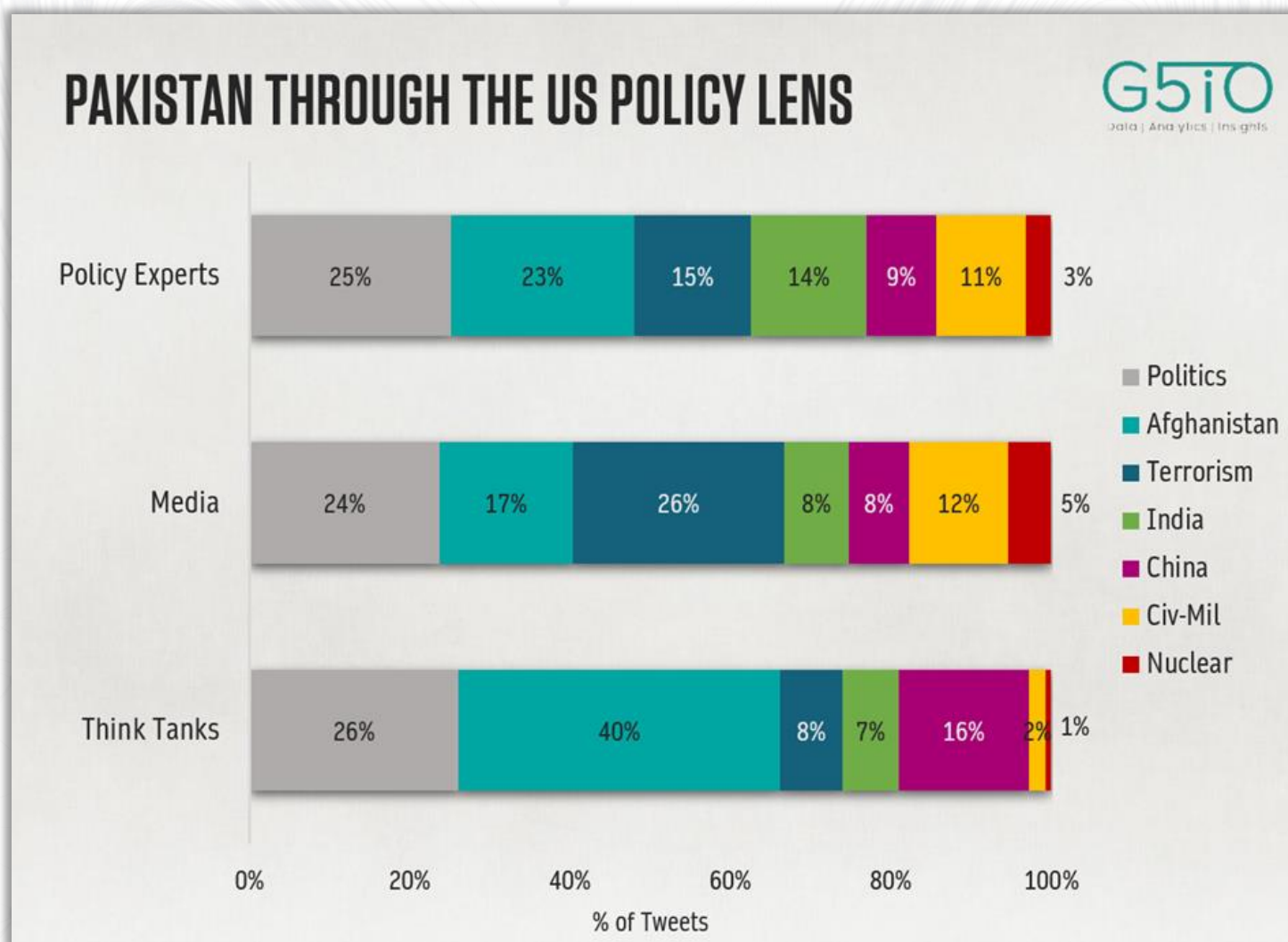


*The dotted lines mark key inflection points in terms of narrative focus*

### Discourse Analysis by Actors:

Policy experts were the most vocal on selected key issues, focusing on Afghanistan, Pakistani politics, terrorism, and China. They also spoke the most about the Civil-Military relations in Pakistan while commenting on Pakistan and India's ongoing tensions.

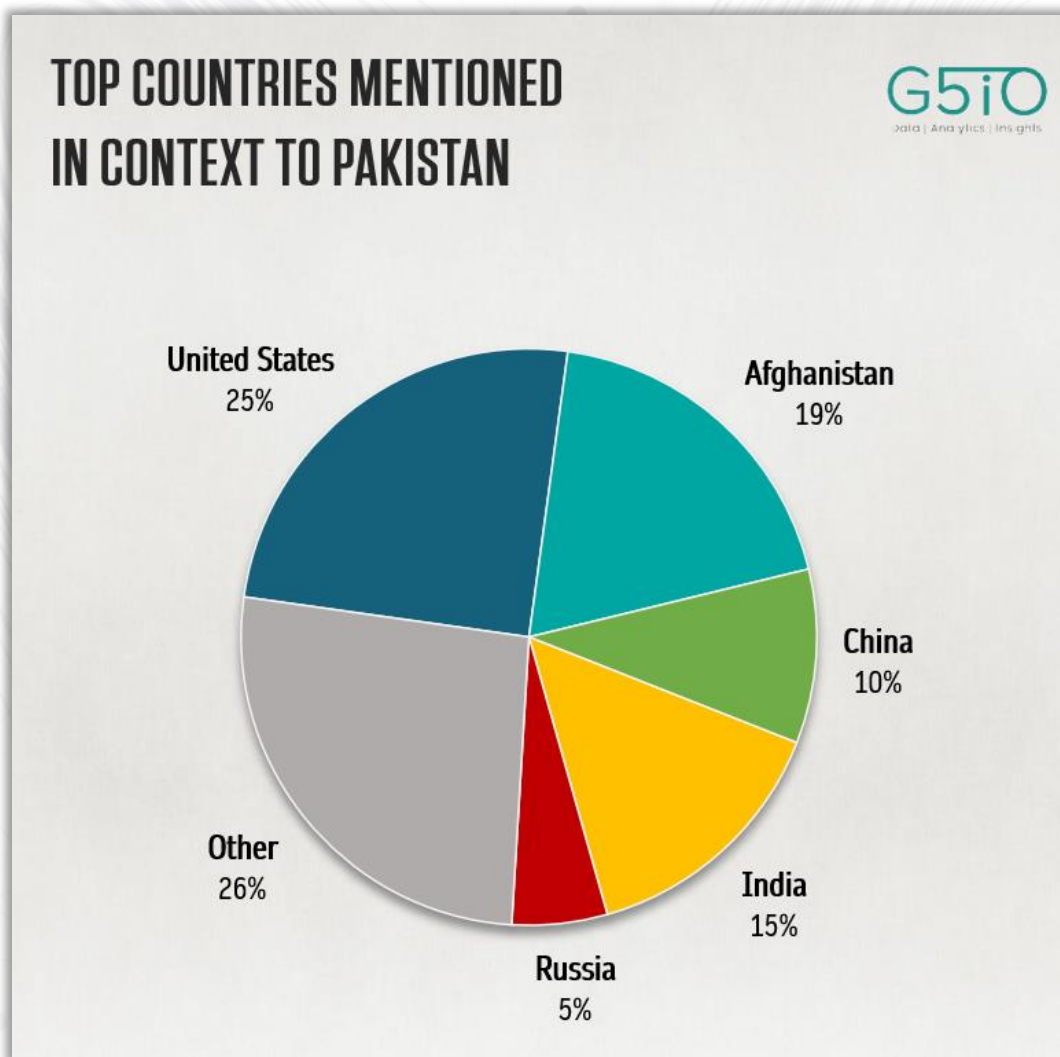
Major Media outlets focused equally on Pakistani politics and terrorism-related discourse, with a relatively lesser focus on Afghanistan concerning Pakistan, while having the highest contribution to the nuclear-related discourse. The think tanks mainly focused on Afghanistan and China, along with politics.



## Top Mentioned Countries alongside Pakistan

After the US, Afghanistan was the top mentioned country by US accounts regarding Pakistan-related discourses, owing to Pakistan's critical role in the US-Afghan crisis and US withdrawal. India was mentioned regarding nuclear discord between the two countries and increasing tensions on LOC.

Russia and China were also mentioned, displaying US concerns over Pakistan's friendly relations with Russia and China. However, our analysis shows that US accounts predominantly focused on Pakistan through the lens of the Afghan war and the withdrawal of US forces.





## Narratives Based on Tweet Contents:

The following word cloud shows that Afghanistan was the center stage for US accounts related to Pakistan. The word "Taliban" has primarily been used in the context of US withdrawal from Afghanistan and their subsequent takeover of Kabul. On the other hand, words like "TLP," "TTP," "KHAN," and "PTI" shows the increasing focus of US accounts on Pakistan's domestic issues after US withdrawal from Afghanistan. China has also been mentioned mainly concerning CPEC and in the context of Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy.





## Conclusion

Overall, the following insights can be derived from our study:

- The discourse by US actors related to Pakistan had started shifting from a focus on Afghanistan and terrorism, more towards Pakistani domestic politics since October, two months after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.
- The frequency of Political and Civ-Mil discourses was highest during the period of uncertainty, following the ouster of Prime Minister Imran Khan in April '22
- Pakistan-China-related discussions by the US have also increased in frequency since then, bringing to attention the US Indo-Pacific strategy following a brief lull earlier this year

## Authors



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