

An Appraisal of Pak-US Relations

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Abstract

Pakistan is an important regional player for United States as it helped US in war against the Soviet and in fighting the War against Terrorism. No one can deny the fact that Pakistan depend heavily on the aid given to it by the US. The relations between both the countries remain important for a long time. However, relations between both the countries become fraught and mistrust exists between both the countries regarding certain issues. This paper is based on a brief appraisal of the relationship between the two countries, why they are important for each other and what are their interests in the region.

Keywords: Regional player, appraisal, war, mistrust.

Introduction

Pakistan established its diplomatic relations with the United States in 1947, soon after its inception. At that time Pakistan needed financial support for the development of its infrastructure and advancement of its military forces. By becoming an ally of the United States, Pakistan could provide a foot hold for the US in the region against the Soviets, whereas, on the contrary at that time the US was more occupied in the post war reconstruction in Western Europe and Japan. During the initial years of independence, due to the Kashmir issue with India, Pakistan joined the US led alliances, namely South Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1954 and 1955 respectively.

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During the period of President *Ayub Khan* "Pakistan had become America's most allied ally in Asia".¹ The US surveillance flights over the Soviet Union from Peshawar (*Bada Ber*) Airport are a proof that the relations between the two countries grew and become stronger.² But the ill-fated Pakistan India War of 1965 brought to reality the even-handedness of United States while dealing with Indo-Pak disputes.³ During the 1970s election, when power was not transferred to the newly elected government of General *Agha Mohammad Yahya Khan*, the Eastern part of Pakistan broke down and the state of *Bangladesh* came into being.

In May, 1974 when India secretly did an underground nuclear test, this forced Pakistan to seek a nuclear weapons program to match India's capabilities, which became a major cause of concern for the United States and sanctions were placed on Pakistan.⁴ With the beginning of Soviet War in Afghanistan in 1979, the policy of United States changed towards Pakistan. After that Pakistan was provided with massive aid, military weapons and ammunition.⁵ But with the Soviets retreating from Afghanistan, the US interests diverted towards India and the sanctions on Pakistan were revived.⁶ The US Congress adopted the Pressler Amendment in the late 1980s in order to ban military and economic aid to Pakistan, until and unless Pakistan was able to proof that the aid was not being used to develop its nuclear weapon program. The US administration initially welcomed the Taliban government established in Afghanistan with the help of Pakistan in 1996, but later opposed the Taliban regime.⁷ In 1998 the nuclear and missile program of Pakistan resulted in international sanctions from the international community, which put further pressure on the already weak politic economy of Pakistan.⁸

The historical event of September 11, 2001 changed the future of the world. Shortly, after the horrific incident the Bush administration unfolds its war plans for Afghanistan and presented Pakistan with a clear ultimatum to take the side of America or go against it.⁹ The military operation named Operation Enduring Freedom commenced on October 7, 2001. Pakistan reluctantly supported America in the Global

War on Terror on three conditions. Firstly, the Northern Alliance, the only militia that had successfully countered the Taliban would not take control of Kabul. Secondly, the United States will help Pakistan in resolving the Kashmir issue. Thirdly, the nuclear assets of Pakistan will remain intact. The US officials at that time assured Pakistan that it will fulfill these demands. But within a few years of Pakistan's decision, the US failed to honor all the three promises. In return of the support Islamabad was rewarded handsomely in the form of aid, diplomatic isolation of the country was ended and debts were reduced, but Pakistan's strategic interests were greatly degraded by the global war on terror. On one side Pakistan received handsome amount of Aid from United States and on the other the large number of influx of Afghan refugees into Pakistan destabilized the economy of Pakistan.

The incidents of 2011 also proved fatal for the countries. The news of controversial killing of Osama Bin Laden by US Naval forces inside the territory of Pakistan came as a shock for whole of the world. Pakistan's credibility suffered a serious blow for not knowing that the most sought after terrorist was present inside its territory and its military and intelligence services come under severe criticism for unable to detect and intercept a foreign military operation inside its territory. The relations further got deteriorated when NATO forces air assault 24 Pakistani soldiers in November 2011. Resultantly, Pakistan closed its border crossings for the NATO supplies in Afghanistan. These developments lead to fuel bilateral distrust and acrimony on major policies concern are very difficult to resolve because they are related to Pakistan's security issues.

Geo-Strategic Importance of Pakistan in the World

One cannot deny the geostrategic importance of Pakistan. Pakistan is located at the crossroads of Middle East, Central Asia, South East Asia, Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf. This Geographical proximity makes it strategically a very important state in the region as well as in the world. Pakistan is located at such a place where it provides the shortest route

to China and Central Asia Republics (CARS) for trade.¹⁰ Pakistan's location in the middle of India and China, the two economic giants of the world, holds huge chances of becoming a trade and economic hub in the world. The *Gawadar* port of Pakistan is located on the narrow opening of the Persian Gulf which is the world's busiest oil supplying corridor is a cause of concern for Indian region ambitions. If any conflict arises with India in the future, Pakistan can block the Indian supply of oil from the Persian Gulf. Moreover, it is located at the centre of Russia, China and India, the important nuclear states of the world. The nuclear weapon capability of Pakistan along with its population makes it an influential and prospering state in the world.

US Strategic Interests in the Region

After the Twin Tower incident, the main objective of US was to root out the militant network in Afghanistan. In the US eyes militant and political Islam was a threat to the western system.¹¹ The main priority of US at that time was to defeat terrorism and violent form of political Islam. But the US is now suffering from fatigue after fighting the longest war in its history. The US is now hesitant in deploying ground troops in Syria. Moreover, it has also decided to withdraw its troops from Iraq and Afghanistan due to worsening situation in these states.¹² Without achieving anything concrete it has decided to end the war in Iraq.

One cannot deny the geographical and geo-strategic construct of Asia Pacific Region. It consists of 20 economies of the world with a total GDP of \$67 trillion. Six of world's top economies are present in this region. China the world's second largest economy is investing heavily in the region through its CPEC and OBOR projects. The US wants to dominate the Asia Pacific Region mainly because of two reasons. Firstly it wants to control the region through its power in order to counter the rising trend of China in the region.¹³ Secondly, Asia Pacific is rich in natural resources plus US manufacturing industry can flourish greatly in the region.¹⁴ Because of this reason the US is struggling to make new alliances and want to dominate the sea lanes and trade

corridors of the region. In US eyes Asia is of high economic and geo-strategic value, but it sees China as a country which poses threat to its interests. So the top most priority of US policy makers is the containment of China.¹⁵ As India is seen as rival of China, so the US wants to enhance the military, diplomatic and economic stature of India. Moreover, US is shifting its focus from Middle East to Asia Pacific through its Pivot to Asia policy in which it is allocating its diplomatic and military resources in Asia Pacific.¹⁶ Great powers always see new rising powers as a threat to their influence. So for US, rising China and a resurgent Russia pose biggest threat. For US Pakistan's nuclear program is also a cause of great concern. By placing sanctions on Pakistan, the US tried to prevent Pakistan from acquiring nuclear weapon capability, but failed.¹⁷ According to some think tanks in order to maintain its influence and presence in the region US wants a divided and unstable South Asia because the US defense and military hardware industry will flourish. While some think tanks are of the opinion that US wants stability and peace in the region as it will provide economic opportunities for US businesses and industry for investment.

The US also wants to maintain its hegemony in the world by controlling the natural resources in Middle East and Central Asia. The invasion of Iraq and military deployments and bases in the Middle East were a clear proof of this thing, after terrible defeat in Iraq and Afghanistan, the military bases still exist in the region.¹⁸

Pakistan Strategic Interests in the Region

Since its inception, Pakistan is constantly facing a Geo-strategic dilemma because of its important location.¹⁹ Its participation in the Afghan War and the war on terror has resulted in various predicaments. Pakistan formed an alliance with US to achieve certain objectives. Firstly, it wanted to avoid a two front war senior. In its size and economy Pakistan is a small country when compared with India. Because of its hostile neighborhood, Pakistan needed to maintain friendly relations with the best so that it could help it in times of war.²⁰ Pakistan wants to have peaceful relations

with India, but unfortunately without the resolution of Kashmir dispute this is not possible. Pakistan should also try to seek and maintain friendly relations with Afghanistan and Iran governments. Pakistan enjoys strong strategic ties with China. China is an all weather friend of Pakistan both countries have common interest in the region. Pakistan depends heavily on Chinese military and economic assistance. China and Pakistan became closer and strengthened their defense and economic relations after the end of cold war.²¹ China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project is an example of the close relation between the two countries. The hostile attitude of India, forced Pakistan to seek nuclear weapons. Kashmir dispute between the two countries led to three major wars. Especially, relations between the two countries deteriorated drastically after the dismemberment of East Pakistan in 1971.²² The nuclear tests of India in 1974 forced Pakistan to seek nuclear weapons. India is continuously modernizing its armed forces which are a big threat to Pakistan's existence. The hostile attitude of India is the main reason which forced Pakistan to develop close relations with the US and get benefit from the US military technology from time to time. The relationship between US and Pakistan is of transactional nature which keeps on changing according to the needs of US. The 1971 war forced Pakistan to think that nuclear weapons could only guarantee its territorial integrity against a powerful neighbor. Pakistan achieved self-sufficiency in the defense industry when US placed sanctions on it. This also happened that the Pakistani leaders by forgetting the national interest wanted to secure personal relationships with the leaders of US. This resulted in sowing the seeds of anti-Americanism in the masses. All this have resulted in miss interest between the Governments of both the countries.²³ Pakistan with the help of CIA trained and armed some people during the Soviet-Afghan war but when Pakistan was forced to join the War on Terror after the 9/11 incident, the internal security situation of the country came under serious threat. Terrorism in the country increased drastically and defeating the militants and non state actors become the foremost priority of Pakistani

Government. Pakistan Foreign policy always remains India centric.²⁴ For Pakistan Indian military is an existential threat. Pakistan always wanted to resist Indian supremacy and Global dominance.²⁵ The main objective of a state is to achieve highest level of economic prosperity and development. The economic goal of the Government is to project Pakistan's economy as source of enterprise and innovation. The condition of Pakistan's economy is gradually improving but due to poor governance the External debt is rising.

Issues between Pakistan and US

1. Pakistan China growing relations and friendship is a bone of contention for the US. The Chinese influence is increasing day by day in the region. US tilt towards India and the deployment of its forces is a clear indication that the US want to contain China. Pakistan cannot become a part of this US plan as it is the strategic partner of China.
2. Unstable situation of Afghanistan is a continuous dilemma for Pakistan. The efforts of Pakistan to hold talks with *Taliban* could not yield desired results.²⁶ Reason was the presence of US forces in Afghanistan which fuels insurgency and the withdraw of US troops have spillover effect on Pakistan.²⁷ Some of the Afghan National Army wants to destabilized Pakistan's tribal areas and Balochistan. So both the US and Pakistan are not on the same ground concerning Afghanistan situation.
3. India's hegemonic ambitions are big threat to the national security of Pakistan. If some Western country supports India in its nuclear programme, it can become a serious threat to the existence of Pakistan. Pakistan is greatly concerned with the increasing US cooperation with India in defense related fields.

Pakistan's Future Policy Trends

The new US policy place Pakistan in the secondary position to that of India but Pakistan will not become unimportant for the US in the coming years;

Pakistan should further strengthen its strategic partnership with China in economic and defense related fields. In this regards CPEC and development of *Gawader* is an important project which will bring new vistas of economic development and growth in the country. Iran, Afghanistan and India will also get benefit from this project.

2. Pakistan should also improve its trade relations with Iran in a way that Saudi Arabia will not get irritated by it.²⁸ In this regards Pakistan should complete its Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline project.

Pakistan should also improve its relations with the Gulf States. It can play an important role in bridging the gap between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Pakistan should also re-evaluate its ties with Russia and explore the possibilities of establishing joint defense and energy projects and transfer of technology projects.²⁹ Russian companies should be asked to invest in Pakistan in energy projects.

Pakistan should re-evaluate its policy towards Afghanistan. In order to establish a durable relationship, it should invest in energy and economic related fields in Afghanistan.

Pakistan should not economically rely on US as it is more inclined towards India.

Conclusion

Pakistan's crucial geographical location makes it the pivot around which matters of trade, security, politics and economy revolve. This key location of Pakistan will help it in influencing the security, trade and commerce, ideology and social state of its surrounding regions in the coming years. The US-Pakistan relations need a dialogue. Both the countries should redefine their relations and should work together to attain a larger goal i.e. to root out the menace of terrorism from the region. No one can deny the fact that Pakistan has always wanted peace, stability and prosperity in the region. This was the reason that it always stayed pragmatic about peace talks with its neighboring states. Pakistan always wants peace and stability in Afghanistan

because stability in Afghanistan is deeply linked to the peace and stability in Pakistan. But in this struggle Pakistan was always denied and left alone by the US and had been under persistent diplomatic and military pressure. Pakistan should maintain a pragmatic relation with US based on reciprocity and should not compromise on its core policy objectives. It should also re-evaluate its relations with India, Iran and Russia.

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