

## **Pakistan's Geo-Political and Strategic Compulsions**

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### **Abstract**

*South Asia has "Seven countries" (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and Maldives). It is spread over a total area of more than four million square kilometers. Population of South Asia is one of the highest, which stands at about 1.2 billion. It is located between East Asia and Central Asia in the middle part of the Indian Ocean. South Asia by virtue of its geopolitical and geostrategic importance has been the area of power struggle between power players like United States, Russia, China and India. Pakistan and Bangladesh are also important countries of the region, but due to conflicting interests of the major power players, they are sometimes fine balancing their relations to adjust their national and regional interests, which at times make it a conflicting pattern of interstate relationship. The end of cold war, disintegration of USSR and fall of communism as ideology has diminished the risk and chances of a global war. However, there has been no easing out of tension in international situation or solution of regional conflicts. The uni-polar global environments are getting increasingly prone to coercion through diplomatic and economic manipulation. Unfortunately, in the recent past there has been increasing animosity of US led western world to the Islamic world. Most of the time unjustified due to the follies of misguided elements amongst the Muslims. The global geopolitical and geostrategic environments are rapidly changing. Emergence of uni-polar world with USA as the only super power, paradigm shift in importance of geo-economics, geo-strategy, dominating role of hard core non state actors, negative perception about philosophy of Islam, nuclear non-proliferation and many other issues has necessitated a re-definition of inter-state relations. The World has emerged as uni-polar but role of regional power centers has increased manifold. The expanding role and assertiveness exhibited by China, Russia, Japan, India, Germany and regional groups like ASEAN and European Union, is fairly evident and effective.*

**Keywords:** geo-political, geo-strategic, interests, compulsions, challenges

### **Introduction**

Pakistan's geographical position creates special perils and problems. She stands athwart Russia's easiest access to these warm water ports which would allow the Soviet fleet to dominate the Arabian Sea,

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Indian Ocean and Persian Gulf. With the growing oil crisis, no western power can ignore the reality of this threat. The pulls and pressures, compulsions and constraints to which Pakistan has been subjected right from its inception, are numerous and varied, persistent and forceful. They are both internal and external. Some, like its present geographical location and the former two wings of the country, were inherent and built in. Others are the result of the sins of omission and commission of its rulers and people. An attempt will be made in this paper to locate and analyze the more important of these and to trace how they have affected in the past and might yet affect the destiny of Pakistan.

There can be no escape from reality, say the realists. Pakistan's reality is based on its geo-political and strategic compulsions which include not only its peculiar geography and location, but also its politics and economy, its institutions, power elites and pressure groups; its masses and classes; its history, culture and ideology; its regions and provinces; as also its neighbors, friends and enemies— in brief, its national policy and politics its international relations. The South Asian Strategic space remains dominated by India and Pakistan. The hostility between these two countries has over-weighed all efforts to joint regional approach towards economic progress in the region. This situation is unlikely to improve at least in the short term, as both have strong military machine, nuclear weapons and highly conflicting national interests. The two countries pledge in Lahore Declaration of 1999 to make special efforts for resolving their outstanding disputes including Kashmir peacefully was extremely welcome step. But immediately after that open military conflict in Kargil diminished all the hopes and both the countries continue their open hostilities. Though strategically and economically Asia remains dominated and influenced by four major world powers US, Japan, China and Russia, yet as India and Pakistan retain a pivotal position due to their large size, geography and strategic location in ever changing strategic and economic environment, a strong and stable Pakistan has special significance for the future of south, southwest and Central Asia. India on the other side exploits her strength of political stability, bigger consumer market, better diplomatic maneuverability and wish to act as the policeman of the region. She considers Pakistan as stumbling block in her rise to status of regional power, therefore, continues her policy of de-stabilizing Pakistan. Pakistan also perceives India as major rival in her external even internal security calculus. Besides being heavy weight militarily, the nuclear explosions by both the rivals have brought the

region onto the threshold of nuclear war. International World, though remains concerned about Indo-Pak conflict prone environments, yet due to the overall inclination of the interests of the global and regional powers towards India, the internal and external security of Pakistan remain threatened. Though since Independence, Pakistan remained in conflict/ disastrous situation mainly due to conflicting interests of global power players and hegemonic designs of India, yet present security and economic environments of Pakistan, particularly Indo-US Nexus and security situation in Afghanistan have put Pakistan in very difficult situation.

#### *Geostrategic Importance of Asia*

Each continent has its own distinct features. Similarly Asia has its own many special features, which makes it more dominating and important. The first is its vast size that stands at 17,256,000 square miles' covering one third mass of land surface of the globe. This is the major feature which defines Asia as the biggest Continent. The huge complex of mountain chains with intervening plateau and basins occupying the whole core of the continent are certainly unique, which makes it further distinguished. Boundary between Europe and Asia follows the Ural River to the Caspian, finally along a line from the Caspian to the Black Sea. Asia is essentially a continent of contrast. It has the highest Mountain peaks, the peak of Everest and K 2 — and the lowest point in the Dead Sea. Its total population stood at 3, 400, 000, 000 2 by the end of year 2010. The average population density is 156 people per square mile. Continent is divided into well defined sub parts, out of which Indo-Pak subcontinent is often talked about (Pant, 2007).

#### *Strategic Features of Asia*

Asia is blessed with a huge landmass, surrounded by seas and inhabited by billions of people. Following are the strategic features of Asia. It is surrounded by 38 littoral countries. It contains important sea lanes, houses tremendous natural resources. In fact, for International links through Sea Lanes, Indian Ocean holds pivotal position. Number of littoral states has tremendous chance of regional economic cooperation. Since around 80 to 90% of total world trade is regulated through sea-lanes in Indian Ocean, therefore the importance of these sea-lanes gets pronounced (Ziauddin, 2015).

*Geostrategic and Geopolitical Realities of South Asia*

Geopolitics of a country/region determines its history based on geography. It also affects the country's foreign policy and her national interests. Ideology and socio-political systems of a country may change but a state must retain its territorial Identity. The security of a state against external threats determines her frontier policy. Frontiers borders determine issues of war and peace amongst neighbors, but selection of neighbors is never by choice. South Asia's geostrategic environment is highly complicated and problematic due to its location, which is described as the 'Fulcrum' of Asia. South Asia is a region where the Central Asian States, China, Gulf States, South East Asian states meet. The politics of this region is characterized by several intra-regional conflicts based on difference in ideology, conflicting national objectives, territorial disputes and political rivalries. The superpower of USA and other power centre have also direct or indirect interest in the region and its politics. While formulating national and foreign policies, South Asian states have to take into account the geostrategic realities and intra-regional discontinuities as well as the policy objectives of the superpower and major power centre towards the region (Jalal, 2012).

The recent global changes like end of bipolarity and emergence of a uni-polar world have adversely affected the geo-strategy of the region. The recent Gulf War and War in Afghanistan has clearly brought in the new dimensions of policy of global dominance being pursued by the USA. This development along with perceived Indo-US nexus when viewed with reference to India's hegemonic designs and her desire to become the policeman of the region, further complicates existing problems for the smaller South Asian states. Furthermore, as the situation in Afghanistan still remains fluid, it adds to existing uncertainties. Settlement of Afghan crisis has become very critical for the achievement of regional stability. In fact economic advantages from CARs cannot be accrued without establishing land link with these states, through peaceful and stable Afghanistan. Improvements of relations of Pakistan, Iran and Turkey will play important role to achieve the objectives of ECO/Developing Eight (D8) in a wholesome manner. Pakistan will have to play her cards very carefully to pursue her national aims/objectives linked with Afghanistan, Central Asian Republics, Iran, Turkey, Middle East and India. Existing regional/global changes have many implications for South, West and Central Asia, a region dominated by Muslim world. Positive impact may be described as renewal of desire for cohesion and unity of Muslim world (Singh, 1997).

*Geostrategic Importance of Pakistan in South Asia*

Pakistan is geo-strategically more important than other South Asian States, Pakistan is a bridge between South Asia, South West Asia and Central Asia. Iran and CARs are rich in energy resources while India and China are energy thirsty, so they need access to these states. Pakistan provides direct land route to Iran and to CARs through Afghanistan. IPI and APTTA are evidence of geo strategic importance of Pakistan. Pakistan also provides cheaper route to India for IPI line project. India, however, can trade with Iran through other routes also but those are more expensive. India and Afghanistan wants trade along Chaman to Wagha border through Pakistan, which acts as bridge between Afghanistan and India (Rogers, 1994).Importance of geostrategic location of Pakistan sometimes had created problems for Pakistan. During cold war, Soviets captured Afghanistan with desire to reach warm water through strategic location of Pakistan. United States used Pakistan's location as front line state in her proxy war against USSR. Now in global war on terror (GWOT), Pakistan is paying heavy cost because of her border with Afghanistan. USA is again using Pakistan to suffer as front line state against GWOT. US interests in the region is to contain rising power of China, stop nuclear ambition of Iran, fight terrorist/terrorism in Afghanistan, and develop India as counterweight to China and to benefit from the huge consumer market of India. Security politics and business interests are two main objectives of US in the region. While Pakistan is playing a front line role in war against terrorism and by utilizing Pakistan's strategic location, US is achieving its objectives of security politics to retain status of sole super power by containing rising power of China (Tennakoon, 2012).

To achieve economic interest USA is attempting to dominate in the Middle East and Central Asia, because these are rich in oil and gas resources. She is using Pakistan's strategic location for the purpose. Saudi Arabia is important Muslim oil rich country of Middle East. She has both the geostrategic as well as geopolitical interest in Pakistan. Saudi Arabia considers Pakistan a strategic balance against Iran. The United States and Saudi Arabia place heavy reliance for any military action against Iran. Pakistan lies in close proximity of oil/gas rich Central Asian Republics. CARs are landlocked states and need outlet for export of their energy resources and a transit route for trade and commerce. Pakistan can provide them route for trade with other states, so for Afghanistan and CARs Pakistan's geostrategic location is very important for trade purposes. Pakistan's strategic location is also crucial for China because Pakistan strategic location can provide her transit trade route for

Western Asia, energy corridor to import oil from CARs and Gulf, naval facilities on the Arabian Sea coast to protect its energy supply line from the Middle East. Pakistan and China are cooperating in economic areas like Saindak project and project of Gwadar Port despite heavy pressure on Pakistan from USA for presence of China in Pakistan while for China Pakistan's strategic location has importance to enhance its economic growth (Tennakoon , 2012).

#### *Characteristics of Central Asia*

Central Asia is characterized by a dual geopolitical feature i.e. as a hinterland and a geostrategic mainland of Eurasia. Region is totally landlocked. Being old part of Soviet Union, all routes are having their convergence towards Moscow. Post independence these republics are in a process of exploring and establishing new land, Sea and Air routes to outside world. New routes are considered important for the region's future survival and prosperity. Hundred years old Great Game between Russian Czars and British was aimed at blocking each other's further expansion, but the new Great Game of today is being played for the access to the wealth of CARs. The game unlike in the past is not restricted to only two powers but is free for all. Major players, besides players of old Great Game include USA, China, India and Pakistan (Schofield, 2003).

1. The Mightier of the World – U.S.A, China, Russia and South Asia US is sole super power; therefore, her vital interest is to retain its status of uni polar super power. China is rising power, which aims at attaining its rightful status. Russia has potentials to re-surge. India has huge market with ambition to rise as regional/ global power. Central Asian States hold energy reserves which are needed by all power players of the world. Though, Iran, even after Islamic revolution, is still struggling, yet, she aims to dominate the Gulf as a regional power. Despite being war tom, Afghanistan retains vital/critical space for power politics in the region, particularly for flow of energy from Central Asian States to international world. Pakistan being neighbor of Afghanistan, Iran and India, possessing warm water ports and routes of energy transportation to India and China, retains extremely important strategic location. Indo-US nexus, US Pakistan partnership in war against terrorism, Sino-Indian economic competition as well as territorial disputes, and Pakistan-China all weather friendship further complicates handling of security/diplomatic issues in the region. Overall, South Asia being centre of power politics, will determine future outlook of the world, therefore, its analysis is extremely important. In the same context,

it is important to discuss potentials, strengths and weaknesses of Power Players like USA, China and Russia and their relations with Pakistan and Afghanistan to determine their impact on the security politics of the region. However, it is also important to analyze possible opportunities offered and challenges posed by these power players to regional countries especially to Pakistan (Ziauddin, 2015).

#### *Pakistan - a fulcrum of the Region*

In ancient history of subcontinent, area which is now occupied by Pakistan was home to some of the earliest human settlements, area of one of the oldest civilizations and area where two of the world's major religions, Hinduism and Buddhism, were practiced. The modern state of Pakistan was born out of the partition of the Indian sub-continent in 1947. Young state faced both domestic political upheavals and regional confrontations, fought first war in less than one year of its independence. It was created to meet the demands of Muslims. Originally, it was made up of two parts, the East wing and the West wing. The East wing (Present day Bangladesh) is on the Bay of Bengal bordering India and Burma. The West wing (Present day Pakistan) stretches from the Himalayas down to the Arabian Sea.

- The break-up into two wings came in 1971 after bloody war between East Pakistan and West Pakistan. War was a result of Indian instigated insurgency, which ultimately was concluded with full fledged Indian aggression.
- The disputed territory of Kashmir has been the cause for two of the three India-Pakistan wars in 1948 and 1965. There was yet another limited war of Kargil, which was fought in 1999 under nuclear overhang (Ziauddin, 2015).

#### *Continuing Political Instability and Military interventions*

Unfortunately since independence, Pakistan lacked political stability. There have been many military interventions. Civilian politics particularly in the last few decades has been characterized by corruption, inefficiency and confrontations between various institutions. Alternating rule of civilian and military governments has not helped to establish political stability. Pakistan came under military rule in 1958, 1969, 1977 and in October 1999. In fact, Military interventions have been necessitated due to political turmoil and people of Pakistan have welcomed these interventions.

But this also could not provide solution to our political problems. The last military leader General Pervez Musharraf, pledged to revive the country's standing, but confronted huge economic challenges as well as an increasing polarization between Muslim conservatives and modern secular.

Under domestic and international pressure, General Musharraf relinquished his army post in November 2007, and re-introduced democratic rule. Unfortunately, in the aftermath of Lawyers' Movement, his supporters were defeated by the opposition Pakistan People's Party and former PM Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League, in parliamentary elections of February 2008. The two parties Pakistan People's Party and Pakistan Muslim League (N) formed a coalition government and an impeachment process was launched against General Musharraf, who resigned in August 2008. The Pakistan Muslim League soon went into opposition, leaving the Pakistan People's Party to govern in coalition with smaller parties.

Country has gone for elections on 11 May 2013. New government of PML (N) has been formed. Mr. Nawaz Sharif has been elected as Prime Minister. In these elections Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf has emerged as a new factor. PTI has been able to form government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Pakistan People's Party, although routed at federal level, has been able to form government in Sindh. In Baluchistan, nationalists have been given a chance to form government.

#### *Border Tension, Terrorism and Security Perspective*

Pakistan's role on the world stage emerged after the 9/11 attacks on World Trade Centre in New York. US decided to attack Taliban ruled Afghanistan. Pakistan dropped support for the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and emerged as the front-line state in the fight against terrorism.' She became a key ally of Washington in GWOT and was declared as US non NATO Ally. Pakistan employed over 1, 20,000 active soldiers to maintain control over the restive tribal regions along the Afghan border, where Taliban-linked militants became firmly entrenched. Pakistani forces constantly remained under pressure and were partially successful. These terrorists/ extremists have expanded attacks from their stronghold FATA in entire country. IED and suicidal attacks have been largely employed as an effective instrument by the terrorist. Attack on GHQ in 2010 and on other high level targets like Mehran Base was major success



of terrorists. Since 2009, Pakistan Armed Forces have successfully flushed out Taliban from Swat and FATA especially from South Waziristan. North Waziristan still remains violent and hostile. There is uneasy and fragile situation in rest of the Tribal areas. Pakistan repeatedly denied US and Afghan allegations that senior Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders were present in border region of FATA. Mantra of "do more" by US and Taliban Shura in Quetta is often heard." Pakistan's ISI, a prestigious intelligence service, is often blamed that it has links with militant groups operating against the Afghan government. Due to these suspicions and mistrust, operation against Al-Qaeda Chief Osama Bin-Laden in May 2011 by US marines in Abbottabad, was kept secret from Pakistan government which brought the relations with the US to breaking point.

Tensions with India over disputed territory of Kashmir have resurfaced regularly ever since the partitions of the sub-continent and the two nuclear-armed powers have on numerous occasions been on the brink of war. Kashmir has become flashpoint of nuclear conflagration, if issue is not resolved through peaceful dialogues. India has always shown her high-handedness and as such composite dialogues launched under international pressure could not succeed. India has accused Pakistan of failing to cooperate adequately over the investigation about extremist attacks in Mumbai and suspended composite dialogue. Though in May 2012, both countries again agreed to resume contacts yet relations remain strained and solution of core issues like Kashmir and Siachen is not in sight.

### **Conclusion**

The geo-strategic, Ideological and geo-political compulsions of Pakistan are many, varied, complex and forceful. But they are clear-cut. So are the enemy designs. Realism demands that they be accepted whole-heartedly- to determine Pakistan's strategy for survival. This will help to shed the romantic lure of the exotic and alien, neighbor and distant, alike. And to encourage self-reliance and austerity which may be the key notes of our future national policy. Pakistan is an indivisible unit and an undeniable unity. Just as Pakistan was created by the indomitable and invincible will of its people, its inherent and essential, independent unity can also be sustained by this very national spirit and will to free and unfettered survival and progress. Ethnographic, linguistic, demographic and cultural maps, charts and data, apart from geo-political and historical facts, proved and established this unity. But as Toynbee

has warned time and again, geographically the unity is vulnerable from outside. That is the reality and that, the challenge. It is for the planners and people of Pakistan to be ever wary and vigilant, as exemplars and men of action, in order to secure national independence, integrity and interest.

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