US-Pakistan Relationship in GWOT: An Offensive Realist Explanation

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Abstract

Theory of offensive realism propounded by John J. Mearsheimer deals with great powers' behavior in international system. It argues that great powers fear one another and, therefore, struggle to augment their relative power. As "power maximizers," they seek to achieve "hegemony" in international system, Resultantly, the fate of other states is largely determined by the conduct of great powers in world politics. Since the end of World War II, the US has evidently demonstrated an offensive realist conduct in world politics. While during the cold war era, it competed with the Soviet Union for global hegemony, it became an unrivaled world's dominant power in postcold war era. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US Global War on Terror (GWOT) was certainly guided by an offensive realist approach. Accordingly, US-Pakistan post-9/11 relationship in the context of GWOT is characterized by the former's hegemonic approach, particularly when their respective interests diverge. This study attempts to explain the US-Pakistan relationship in GWOT from an offensive realist perspective, arguing that Pakistan joined the USled war against terrorism under duress and, despite its extensive contribution, the US has coercively been demanding that the country should "Do More."

Keywords: US, Pakistan, 9/11, GWOT, Afghanistan, Offensive Realism, Do More

Introduction

Soviet Union's military defeat in Afghanistan in 1988 and its subsequent disintegration in 1991 marked the end of cold war era. Consequently, world's bipolar political system was replaced by unipolar system with the US as the sole super power. This metamorphic political change in the world political system left the US in a global hegemonic role. Though the Soviet communist threat had ceased, the US kept approximately hundred thousand soldiers in Europe as well as in Northeast Asia. It also

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had hundreds of military bases across the globe. Furthermore, the US possessed a huge stockpile of nuclear weapons and remained the only country with global power projection capabilities. The US world dominance, both military and political, had almost become unchallengeable. No power in world history had ever dominated world political system as did the US in post-cold war era.¹

Following the 9/11 incident, the US foreign policy underwent a significant transformation in the course of its Global War on Terror (GWOT). It embarked upon a "neo-imperial" course to dominate the world.² According to G. John Ikenberry, an acknowledged US foreign policy expert, President George W. Bush wanted to perpetuate a unipolar world where the US would remain without a "peer competitor." The US pursued the agenda of an empire—a "world hegemon." The neoconservatives in the Bush administration pushed a world agenda that actually predated 9/11 and aimed at ensuring "American global supremacy." Neoconservatives believed in the aggressive use of armed forces in pursuit of "global hegemony." This paper explains the US coercive behavior towards Pakistan in relation to war against terrorism in the above-explained context.

Framework of Analysis

The theory that best explains the US foreign policy behavior towards Pakistan in the context of GWOT is offensive realism, expounded by John J. Mearsheimer in his famous book "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics" in 2001. According to Mearsheimer, the key objective of his theory is to explain "the recurrent patterns of behavior of great powers" in international political system. The theorist starts with the assertion that great powers seek to dictate international political system according to their interests and values. They fear one another and, therefore, struggle to "maximize their relative power."

Being "power maximizers," the ultimate objective of great powers is to achieve "hegemony" in international system. In this process, they engage in security competition among themselves. Mearsheimer argues that great powers strive for "hegemony" because "strength ensures safety and greatest strength is the greatest insurance of safety." Clash between great powers is inevitable as they compete for "comparative advantage" in international politics. This means that "conflict and war" are the perennial features of international politics. Status quo great powers are not found in international political system. They are constantly engaged in changing the current distribution of power in their favor, if possible, at a "reasonable cost." They, without

any exception, cherish revisionist designs. In Mearsheimer's words, "great powers are primed for offense." The conduct of great powers in international system decides the "fate of all states"—big or small.

Political scientists and historians generally agree that, in the post-war period, the US gained power and influence as an empire and behaved as a hegemon—a predominant military and economic actor in the world political system. Japanese air raid on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 brought the US into world politics as a proactive and leading actor. The 9/11 incident enhanced the dynamics of that role. In the aftermath of 9/11, President George W. Bush started using American military forces to pursue "imperial ambitions." He sought to expand "an empire of oppression" and Pax Americana much like Pax Romana. In case of Pakistan, the intense US pressure coerced the country to toe the US line in GWOT. In other words, Pakistan's decision to join the US-led war on terror resulted from the latter's hegemonic foreign policy behavior, which can suitably be understood with offensive realist theory.

9/11 Tragedy and the US Existential Threat to Pakistan

Just after 9/11 attacks, while addressing the American people, President Bush declared in unequivocal terms that "we will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them." ¹⁰ He wrote to the UN Security Council that the US administration had "compelling information" that al-Qaeda assisted by Afghanistan's Taliban regime had a "central role" in 9/11 attacks. 11 On refusal to hand over Osama bin Laden to Washington, the US administration decided to take military action against Taliban regime. The 9/11 as an unusual politico-humanitarian incident attracted broad support of international community. The NATO allies declared their support to the US on September 12. The Central Asian states along with Azerbaijan and the Russian Federation also offered their support to the US. 12 The US formed a large "coalition of the willing" wherein almost twenty countries across the world contributed soldiers to the US-led military invasion of Afghanistan. On September 12, both the UN General Assembly and Security Council condemned the 9/11 terrorist attacks and asked the world body to bring the culprits to justice.

Pakistani military ruler Pervez Musharraf condemned the 9/11 terrorist attacks but that was not sufficient for the US. The Bush administration held Osama bin Laden as master mind behind these attacks and he was being sheltered by Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Being an erstwhile supporter of Taliban regime, Pakistan was "bound to face painful choices" in the impending crisis. On September 20, 2001, in

a highly charged environment, President George W. Bush declared that "any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime." The president also declared that the US would give Pakistan a "chance" to cooperate. In addition, the US National Security Council concluded in a meeting that if Pakistan refused to help the US, "it too would be at risk."

On September 12, Colin Powell made a telephonic call to President Pervez Musharraf telling him that "you are either with us or against us." Later, Musharraf wrote in his memoir that it was a "blatant ultimatum" to Pakistan. In pursuance of coercive diplomacy, the US deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage met with Pakistani Ambassador Maleeha Lodhi and ISI Chief General Mahmood Ahmed in Washington. He emphatically told them that there was "no grey area." Armitage threatened General Mahmood Ahmed that if Pakistan wrongly decided and chose al-Qaeda and Taliban, it must understand that it would be bombarded "back to the Stone Age." Pakistan felt an immense pressure from the US. Understandably, the US as a great power was certainly "to react violently, like a wounded bear" wrote Musharraf in his book "In the Line of Fire." Finally, under this duress, General Musharraf decided to stand by the US. Washington made seven demands on Pakistan and Islamabad accepted all. 18

The US demands required Pakistan to stop all support to al-Qaeda and Bin Ladin; give bases to the US for military and intelligence operations against al-Qaeda; provide the US and her allies territorial access to perform military operations in Afghanistan; share necessary intelligence information; cut fuel supplies and recruits to the Taliban regime; break off diplomatic relations with the Taliban if they continue to harbor al-Qaeda. Washington coerced Pakistan to get into line with the US expectations. In such an aggressive environment, Pakistan was left with no choice but to comply with the US demands. The country faced the threat of total annihilation if chose wrongly. Thus, Pakistan ultimately succumbed to the US pressure accepting Washington's all the seven demands.

Pakistan Joined GWOT under Duress

Pakistan's geographical proximity with Afghanistan, past experiences relating to Afghanistan and close relationship with the Taliban regime were the factors which accounted for indispensability of its role in the US-led military campaign in Afghanistan. In retrospect, Pakistan had played the role of a "frontline state" in resistance movement against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. After the Soviet defeat,

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the US renounced engagement with both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan, however, did not disengage itself from post-Soviet civil war in Afghanistan in the 1990s. Not only did it support Taliban's ascendancy to power but also extended diplomatic recognition to the Taliban regime. Due to its engagement in Afghanistan's internal turmoil since 1989, Pakistan's role in the US-led GWOT was deemed crucial. According to Daniel S. Murkey, this role was a prerequisite for successful military operation against al-Qaeda network, particularly in the Af-Pak border region.²⁰

Immediately after 9/11, the Bush administration coerced Pakistan into cooperation against al-Qaeda and Taliban regime in Afghanistan. President Musharraf had already decided that if he refused to cooperate with Washington, it could "endanger Pakistan's integrity.....strategic assets and the cause of Kashmir... a worst situation for us." He emphasized that India, in return for its services to the US, was poised to influence the US to declare Pakistan a terrorist state and establish an anti-Pakistan regime in Kabul. It is important to underline that India had already offered cooperation to the US in GWOT and wanted to implicate Pakistan on account of traditional hostility.

Most important commonality among multiple reasons which drove Pakistan toward alliance with the US in GWOT was Washington's offensive pressure. Pakistan had to accept either US demands for cooperation or face possible backlash from Washington. It could be bracketed with the Taliban regime and could possibly be targeted militarily. Pakistan also felt threatened by the impending "Indo-US nexus" against terrorism in the region. It was already under much criticism for patronizing and recognizing Taliban regime.

Pakistan's nuclear assets and Kashmir freedom movement were also at risk. The independence movement in Kashmir was under threat of being declared a terrorist movement. In the 1990s, Washington had already put Pakistan on the watch list of "terrorist states." General Musharraf wanted to avert the Indian efforts to get Pakistan declared a state sponsoring terrorism. If Pakistan had refused cooperation with the US, it would most likely have been declared a terrorist state with dreadful consequences. In short, the US coercive diplomacy compelled Pakistan to appraise the comparative cost of cooperation and noncompliance. In the words of famous "realist" Greek historian Thucydides, "the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept."

Pakistan's Contribution in GWOT

Since 9/11, Pakistan has been playing the role of a "frontline" state in GWOT. For Operation Enduring Freedom, it extended a wide-ranging support to NATO-led forces operating in Afghanistan. It provided facilities of air bases for this operation. The bases included Zhob, Pasni, Dalbandin, Shamsi, Kohat, and Jacobabad.²⁴ Notably, Pakistan allowed the use of two land routes for supplies to NATO forces in Afghanistan, and this meant that nearly 80% of the non-lethal supplies such as food, fuel and clothes for international forces went through the country. In addition, under the US pressure, Musharraf regime took a firm action against al-Qaeda and Taliban supporters in Pakistan.

A report of the US Central Command (CENTCOM) noted that Pakistan provided five air bases for the US-led operations in Afghanistan. Pakistan navy provided landing facilities at the Pasni base. In total, during US military operations in Afghanistan, Pakistan facilitated the transfer of 330 vehicles, 8000 Marines and over 1350 tons of equipment from beach to Pasni and then to Kandhar. Furthermore, about 58000 air strikes against targets in Afghanistan were launched from Pakistani soil. Marine Corps Gazette, citing a US official source, wrote that nearly each warrior entered Afghanistan through Pakistan. Entered Pakistan.

In his memoir, General Musharraf wrote that Pakistan provided protection to US forces and ships in the Indian Ocean. For this purpose, the country deployed a 35000-strong military force. In addition to Frontier Corps, Pakistan deployed about eighty battalions of armed forces on its western border with Afghanistan. The purpose of this deployment was to hunt down the al-Qaeda and Taliban fugitives infiltrating FATA in an attempt to escape war in Afghanistan. It is important to observe that in the midst of Pakistan's tensions with India in 2002, a large number of al-Qaeda and Taliban terrorists got an opportunity to cross into North and South Waziristan and settle there.

These fugitives subsequently started targeting Pakistan's armed forces. Consequently, Pakistan moved its military forces into FATA to launch military operations against these terrorists/fugitives hiding in the border region. From 2004 onwards, Pakistan conducted a number of military operations, particularly Rah-e-Haq, Rah-e-Rast, Rah-e-Nijaat, and Zarb-e-Azab, in Swat, South and North Waziristan and elsewhere to flush out terrorist elements. As a fallout, these operations put Pakistan into an odd situation of "undeclared war" against the rebel tribesmen. Terrorism in Pakistan necessarily took place as the spillover of the US-led GWOT in Afghanistan and Pakistan's participation in it. In war against terrorism on its soil, Pakistan has suffered a large number of casualties, more than any

other country in the world including the US.²⁹ The Atlantic Council of the US has acknowledged that Pakistan has suffered more casualties than did the total number of all the coalition forces in Afghanistan.

In its commitment to fight against terrorism, Pakistan took strong action against foreign militants like Uzbeks, Chechens and Arabs. ISI and CIA conducted joint operations and captured dangerous al-Qaeda terrorists, particularly in 2002 and 2003. Pakistani forces killed about 270 terrorists, wounded 600 and arrested more than 700. According to Christine Fair, Pakistan's military killed about 150 foreign terrorists in South Waziristan in March 2007 alone. Moreover, Pakistan's three security agencies, viz. Maritime Security Agency, Pakistan Coast Guard and Pakistan navy, conducted joint military operations to capture al-Qaeda elements in the Gulf States. As a result of this pivotal role, al-Qaeda's operational capability in Pakistan weakened too much. This record on Pakistan's performance against terrorism falsifies the accusation that it remained "a safe haven" for international terrorists.

Bruce Riedel, a former CIA official, wrote that Pakistan played a central role in the US-led GWOT. He further wrote that it captured formidable al-Qaeda outfits in large numbers. In fact, Pakistan captured more al-Qaeda terrorists than anyone else did in the world. He further wrote that ISI became most important partner of CIA against al-Qaeda and Taliban.³² Even before the 9/11 incident, Musharraf's military regime had undertaken certain important measures to curb militancy, extremism and terrorism in Pakistan. Sectarianism and extremism were then on the rise in the country. Musharraf regime promulgated anti-terrorism act in Pakistan in August 2001.

Consequently, certain extremist organizations, notably Sipah-e-Muhammad, Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, Sipah-e-Sihaba and Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Fiqah-e-Jafferia, were outlawed in Pakistan. By 2001, Pakistan had established about 40 anti-terrorism courts. In January 2002, Musharraf issued Anti-Terrorism Ordinance as an amendment to the 1997 Anti-Terrorism Act. Later, in January 2005, another anti- terrorism act was enforced in the country. Along with significant legislative measures for improvement in anti-terrorism laws, Pakistan adopted its first ever National Internal Security Policy in 2014 to check terrorism and militancy in multiple ways, including cooperation with other states. In fact, Pakistan has been pursuing an intensive anti-terrorism campaign and it remains a continuing process.

A deeper look into Pakistan's efforts to counter domestic terrorism shows an impressive record. In 2003, there existed approximately thirteen thousand madrassas (religious schools) within the

sovereign territory of Pakistan. Many madrassas taught "radical Islamic" curricula and served as the breeding grounds for terrorists. Musharraf regime did its best to bring these institutions under state control. For the first time in the history of Pakistan, madrassas were registered and their curricula was revised and modernized. Under madrassa reforms introduced by Musharraf regime, 9300 madrassas were registered and modernized. Some unruly madrassas were even raided by the law enforcement agencies. Many foreign students, whose stay in Pakistan was illegal, were instantly expelled.³³ To counter extremism, the hate spreading magazines were also banned.

Apart from the US, Pakistan also shared vital intelligence with some other countries, helping them in counter-terrorism on their respective soils. For instance, in August 2006, it helped Britain in saving a civilian aircraft from terrorist activity amid flight by timely sharing intelligence. In the GWOT, the country not only followed the UN counter-terrorism parameters, but it also became an active supporter of the OIC convention on combating terrorism around the globe. Besides, it ratified the SAARC convention on terrorism. It also signed bilateral agreements and MoUs with five nations of the world. It played central role in eliminating terrorist networks such as al-Qaeda, Al-Ghuraba, Anthrax, Anglo-Pakistani Group (UK based), and Jandullah.³⁴

Musharraf regime extended complete cooperation to the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee in enforcing UN resolutions 1373 (2001) and 1624 (2005). It adopted Anti-Money-Laundering Bill in 2005. Pakistan established a Terrorist Financing Investigation Unit and Computer Forensic laboratory under FIA. It set up a Counter-Terrorism Cell, through which its intelligence agencies have been closely cooperating with the US intelligence agencies to check terrorist activity across the globe. ³⁵

Christine Fair, in her book "The Counter terror Coalitions," has written that the US officials in the Pentagon, State Department and the US Central Command mostly appreciated Islamabad for extending extensive cooperation to the US in GWOT. Fair has written that "Pakistan has provided more support, captured more terrorists, and committed more troops than any other nation in the Global Counterterrorism Force."

Conclusion

US approach vis-à-vis Pakistan concerning GWOT is typical of a great power behavior defined in terms of offensive realism. After 9/11, Washington exercised coercive tactics to push Pakistan into the role of

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frontline state in war against terrorism. It intimidated the country to bomb "back to the stone age" if it did not cooperate in the GWOT. Despite Pakistan's impressive contribution in GWOT, the US has hardly expressed appreciation for the country. Rather, it has been accusing Pakistan of complicity and double standards as well as coercing to "Do More." The US has often forced Pakistan to do more like a hegemon, without paying due regard to the country's national and regional interests. In fact, the US approach towards Pakistan has always been tactical, transactional and hegemonic, defined in terms of the US interests and conditions. In the cold war era, the US-Pakistan relations were devoid of a political and socio-economic foundation and characterized by diverging expectations. Pakistan's major motive behind establishing closer relationship with the US was to secure much-needed economic assistance as well as military equipment and diplomatic support to counter the Indian threat. On the other hand, the US looked at Pakistan in terms of its utility for forming anti-Communist alliances, launching a proxy war against Soviet intervention in Afghanistan and dealing with China.

After 9/11, the US forced Pakistan into a clientelistic relationship which soon turned problematic due to underlying strategic differences. Consequently, the US has mostly been expressing hegemonic dissatisfaction and distrust towards Pakistan despite its significant role in war against terrorism. A number of factors account for the US-Pakistan disjuncture over conflict in Afghanistan. First, the US approach to conflict resolution in Afghanistan clashes with Pakistan's interest. While the US mostly pursues a military solution to the Afghan conflict, Pakistan advocates a negotiated solution aimed at formation of a broadbased Afghan government, including pro-Pakistan Pashtun groups. Pakistan-Afghanistan relations are mainly characterized by hostility and mistrust on account of Afghan irredentist claims over Pakistani Pashtun areas and refusal to recognize Duran Line as international border. This compels Pakistan to seek a friendly regime in Afghanistan. Second, the US ever-growing strategic relationship with India in post-9/11 era and support for Dehli's greater role and presence in Afghanistan turn out to be the most important strategic divergence in US-Pakistan relations. Nothing more than the Indian hostility has determined Pakistan's regional and international policies since its existence. Therefore, in view of its apprehensions vis-à-vis India over geopolitical encirclement and hegemonic designs, the most difficult situation for Pakistan to reconcile with, is New Dehli's influential presence in Afghanistan.

The underlying strategic divergence prompts the US to follow an instrumental and hegemonic approach towards Pakistan. In this regard, Washington remains impervious to Pakistan's interests incongruous to its own but provides transactional military and economic assistance in return for the latter's services. On accomplishment of interests vis-à-vis Pakistan, the US tends not only to discard the country but also to punish it with sanctions. Consequently, Pakistan remains the "most sanctioned ally" as well as the "most bullied ally" of the US. The US engagement with Pakistan in the 1980s in the context of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was followed by economic sanctions and diplomatic estrangement in the 1990s. In post-9/11 period, the US-Pakistan relationship is again marked by the same pattern. After withstanding numerous strained episodes under Bush and Obama administrations, the US-Pakistan relationship in GWOT is once more on the way towards diplomatic estrangement and economic sanctions under Trump administration. Under his Afghan policy, President Trump has blatantly blamed Pakistan for providing sanctuaries to militants fighting in Afghanistan, whereas appreciating India's role as constructive. In addition, the US has suspended \$2 billion in security assistance to Pakistan and sought to place it on the watch-list of terrorist financing countries through Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

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