

## PAK–US Relations: Victim of Divergence of Interests

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### Abstract

*Pak-US relations are defined with frequent ups and down in roller coaster motion from engagements to estrangement with shifting priorities of US. Pakistan, Once the most allied ally in 50s, turned in to most sanctioned ally of the United States in 90s. The discord in bilateral relations was transformed in to cooperation by 9/11 terrorists attack on US and Pakistan is listed as key ally in the War against terror in Afghanistan. Since the commencement of War against Terror in Afghanistan the pattern of inter states relation has taken turns with every major event and the changing tones of the last few years indicates that the sky over Pakistan once again seems to be overcast. The rhetoric of “do more” and suspension of all kind of military and economic aid is replica of the past. The backlash of War in Afghanistan appeared with bangs in Pakistan threatening its peace and stability on one hand and polarizing its socio-political fiber of the society on the other. Soon Pakistan’s army was left alone by US and the NATO in its operation against the safe heavens of terrorists alongside Durand line with disregard to all of its human and economic cost, suffered as non-NATO ally. Pakistan’s importance has once again being signified on the wake of US current strategy of Withdrawal of its forces and successful culmination of Afghan peace process. Pakistan needs to play its card as bargaining chip to seek US weight in resolving its economic, security and Kashmir related issue in befitting manner.*

**Keywords:** US-Pak relations, Divergent of interests, War Against Terror, Engagements, and Estrangements

### Introduction

Islamic Republic of Pakistan and the United States of America have a long-standing cyclical history of bilateral relations, spread over seven decades of close partnership and sharp frictions. The roller-coaster trajectory of these relations moved along alternating episodes of ups and down reflecting engagement and estrangement in global and regional geopolitics (Baloch, 2017). The punctuated history of intense engagement and distinct estrangement was directly proportionate to the degree of convergent or divergent of their

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interest on a particular issue of international or regional importance. The frequently shifting history along axes of convergence and divergence of interests brought Pakistan, the “most allied ally” of 50s, to a “most sanctioned ally” in 90s (Ibid), The frequent drifts in the warmth of their bilateral relations were due to their differences over issues of regional conflict such as; Indian occupation of Kashmir, denuclearization of South Asia, democracy promotion, and Pakistan’s looking towards East for its security concerns. The continuum of relations speckled from one extreme of completely ignorance or discord, as in 1971, to the transformation of other extreme of cooperation and friendliness, as was evident at the times of; Cold War, Soviet’s invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 or during the War on Terrorism (WoT) in post 9/11 era (Baloch, 2017; Kronstadt, 2009).

Pak-US relations of close cooperation have blossomed during the spells of international tensions and Pakistan was regarded as America’s most allied ally. Relations between the two worsened during the environments of détente and relegating Pakistan to the position of the “most sanctioned ally” (Khan, 2006). Pakistan facilitated US in nurturing of her bilateral relations with China and it was Pakistan’s struggle in Afghanistan against Soviets that resulted in to triumph of the free world. Culmination of cold war turned bipolar world in to unipolar, allowing Washington to dominate global balance of power in her favor. Instead of rewarding for her decisive role of front line state in the triumph, US left Pakistan unattended with the load of Afghan refugees and menace of Kalashnikovs culture, soon turning it in to most sanctioned ally. The US state behavior of Post 90s period reflected that Pakistan has lost its significance to US interests and India has elevated to a most favored ally.

The WoT against the presumed perpetrators of 9/11 brought back Pakistan to reclaim its geo-strategic position relevance for American interests. Pakistan’s contributions, as a “non-NATO ally” in the WoT including; provision of intelligence and logistics support to the America led forces in Afghanistan, annihilation of Al-Qaida, quarantining Taliban resistance, were appreciated by the Washington–revamping the bilateral relations once again towards an skyward trajectory. The prolonged resistance in Afghanistan with

ever increasing body bags; and mounting pressure of economic and political cost of the war frustrated the American's Administration negatively affected the warmth and love in the bilateral relationship. Both sides began to condemn each other's strategy in the War on Terror. Pakistan was accused of sheltering Quetta Shura of Afghan Taliban and US was alleged for giving leverage to the hiding of Pakistani Taliban. This mistrust worsened the already checkered relations in the last few years with the Trump's entry in to the White house. The US internal politics demands fulfilment of the Republicans election promise of Americans withdrawal from Afghanistan before the next term election campaign. This necessity has compelled the American administration to acknowledge Pakistan's role in peace development in Afghanistan. This realization has architected the Imran Khan's recent meeting with the President Donald Trump, on July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2019, thereby reviving the warmth in bilateral relations with renewed impetus. Without denying the importance of recent engagement, there seems to be conflicting interests of both sides which caused delay in concluding war on one hand, and brought US and its non-NATO ally at a distance apart.

The paper aims to offer an insight into the ups and downs, during the post 9/11 WoT in Afghanistan, in the relations of disenchanted allies. The paper would help to ascertain the national interests of both countries and evaluate the degree of their divergence or otherwise that became the pretexts for changing mood in American foreign policy towards Pakistan. The main focus of the paper is to investigate that there exist commonalties of interests of both allies in post-9/11 war against terrorism or otherwise.

### **History of Bilateral Relations: Pre-9/11 Overview**

The United States is one of the first few nations that established bilateral relations with Pakistan soon after the independence of the former on 20<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1947 when the United States and erstwhile USSR were engaged in a Cold War and global politics was predominately defined by bipolar world order (Ali, et.al., 2013). Pak-US relations were commenced when US diplomat Paul Alling visited Karachi and soon after reciprocally Liaqat Ali Khan, the first Prime Minister of Pakistan visited America in 1950 (Ibid). Pak-

US relations were predominantly indebted to the geo-strategic – geo-political need of the former and position and security need of the Pakistan. Pakistan's strategic location obliged it the title of fulcrum of Asia" connecting the oil-rich Arabian Peninsula and the oil hungry East Asia, alongside geo-economically and geo-politically volatile Indian Ocean. Pakistan's geographic positioning at the crossroad of South, South East, South West and Central Asia. American policy of containment of Truman figured Pakistan as a strategic fit bulwark to check the expansionist Soviet Union. Liaquat Ali Khan visit to America tagged Pakistan with American's Allie status in the cold war politics became an integral part of Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement (1954), CEATO and SENTO; and a future launching pad for the US strategic forces for the defense of oil rich Persian Gulf (Khan, 2010). In reaction to this Soviet Union signed a defense pact with India and openly stood with its new partner in every heavy odd against Pakistan.

Pakistan, until the disintegration of Soviet Union, confronted with the grave geo-political and geo-security realities in the most troublesome region, and acted as an anvil between the interests of two super powers (Mahmud, 1919). However, in return, these pacts facilitated Pakistan to receive military and economic aid from the US. Pakistan Army, Air Force and Navy were significantly upgraded with tanks, artillery guns, jet fighters, radars, air defense system, and ships for naval fleet. US military aid under policy of containment was aimed at strengthening defense network against any venture related to communism expansion. This aid latently helped Pakistan to make up its deficiencies and transformed its armed forces in to a modern fighting machine capable of withstanding any aggression from India. However, Pakistan was disillusioned when US poured in lavish aid to India, during Indo-Sino War and this act of US highly perturbed Pakistan to look towards China and Soviet Union for her own security from India. Pakistan felt betrayed from its ally, when during the 1965 war US put an embargo on supply of arms and ammunition on Pakistan, whereas, Soviet Union continued military supplies to India.

The decade of 60s till mid 70s witnessed relations amongst the two allies lacking warmth and meaningful engagements. US failed to come to the expectations of Pakistan, when

needed, in safeguarding her national frontiers from frequent Indian aggressions of 1965 and disintegration of 1971. Indifferent attitude of the US towards Pakistan's security at the time of need drifted Pakistan away from US and brought closer to China. It was Soviets invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and Pakistan's challenge to that occupation which attracted US to join her old ally having commonality of interest in emerging scenario.

The Soviet embroils in Afghanistan and Pakistan's determined resolve to challenge seemed an opportunity for US to take the long drawn containment to its logical end and Pakistan once again became the front line state. Once again, economic and military aid started flowing in and Pakistan host of 3.5 million Afghan refugees and transit camp for supply of arms and ammunition to Afghans resistance groups. The solid collaboration of the two countries evolved around commonalities of interests compelled Soviets to withdraw from Afghanistan. The Soviets could not sustain the shock of their failure and disintegrated. The triumph marked not only the end of cold war but tagged US as a unipolar power of the globe. Pakistan, with the end of Cold War, once again lost its relevance to American interests and Pakistanis felt quarantined by their "old friend" and "ally". Instead of reward, the diverging interests slapped Pakistan with Pressler Amendment, withholding all forms of economic and military aid and suspending military supplies. The most favored ally was once again abandoned and turned in to most sanctioned ally; India acquiring status of "natural ally". Pakistan was left alone to clear the debris of war in Afghanistan and bilateral frictions continued to worsen further in to estrangement.

### **Post 9/11 Scenario**

The 9/11 created another opening for marry up again between the old allies. The dictate of "either be with us or against us" (Beard, 2001; Musharraf, 2006) was the reaffirmation of Kennedy's Administration's post-Cuban Missile crisis proclamation that "no legal issue arises if the United States responds any challenge to its power, position and prestige" (Acheson, 1963; Chomsky, 2010). On the 4<sup>th</sup> day after 9/11 America through

her Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage handed over a “non-negotiable” list of demands seeking affirmation from Pakistan. The demands list imply; Pakistan to publically condemn the terrorist act, and provide Intelligence support and territorial access inside and over space for US military and intelligence operation against Al Qaida. Pakistan to stop supply of recruitment, fuel and diplomatic support to Taliban (Krause, 2004; Sattar, 2007).

The post 9/11 situation presented new security environment recognizing terrorism as a new global threat and acceleration in Indian’s campaign of charging Pakistan as sponsor of both Taliban and Kashmiri “terrorists.” This campaign focused on portraying Pakistan as an apt target than a partner in the U.S.-led war on terrorism (Nayak, 2002). This all impelled Pakistan for re-alignment of its relation with US. Pakistan opted for paradigm shift in its foreign policy as a front line state towards its two neighbors India and Afghanistan (Yasmeen, 2003). Pakistan was quick enough to disown the Taliban and alter its national course on Kashmir policy (Ibid). Pakistan withdrew its support from freedom movement in Kashmir, and declare some of the echelons of the freedom movement as terrorist organization, banning their operation at its soil.

### **Pakistan’s Interests**

Pakistan found itself in a catch-22s in its reluctant decision of joining US War against terror against Taliban to whom it nurtured to power. Pakistan had a little choice to continue its overt support to Taliban on the face of UN Security Council unequivocally condemnation of terrorism and national need of maintaining regional balance of power. Pakistan’s decision to side with America was motivated by the objective of pursuing four key Pakistani interests: the country’s security, economic growth, and the need to safeguard its “strategic nuclear and missile assets,” and the Kashmir cause (Address by the President..., 2001). The renewal of new alliance with US would help Pakistan to reinforce its security and dilute Washington’s growing bond with India. It was assumed that Pakistan’s active role in war on terrorism would dispose international community to accept Pakistan’s depiction of Kashmir conflict as a self-determination issue and reject

the Indian's portrayal of Kashmir as a terrorism problem equating it with extension of Al Qaida (Nayak, 2002).

Economic growth of the country would be on right trajectory because of renewal of international aid flows to Pakistan. On joining WoT Pakistan believed to have safeguarded its "strategic nuclear and missile assets, end of nuclear and democracy sanctions that Pakistan was facing since its nuclear explosion and Musharraf's military takeover from October 1999. Kashmir cause. On political front, the U.S. Administration was expected to provide legitimacy to Musharraf's regime like previous engagements did for General Ayub Khan and Genral Zia ul Haq. Pakistan gained some thing in all of her expectations however, the hope of having a say in Afghanistan's political governance and peaceful resolution of Kashmir from the American war against terrorism remained illusions.

### **US Interests**

Though the covertly American invasion of Afghanistan was aimed around extremely broad objectives, but the overtly declared aims were to dismantle al-Qaeda, and to deny it a safe base of operations in Afghanistan by removing the Taliban from power. Despite having unprecedented collection of military might on its disposal, America found Pakistan's concurrence critical in routing out of Al Qaeda and Taliban presence from Afghanistan. US adopted multi-pronged approach towards Pakistan. Mixing coercive policy with financially coated carrot on one hand and overplaying the threat to Pakistan's own security on the other while keeping Indo-Pak ensure that Pakistan's pulls in check (Yusuf, 2009). Over US the years concentration of Al Qaida ruminants and their supporting Pakistani Taliban added a fresh dimension in US mandate because of Washington's apprehension that state breakdown of nuclear-armed country could have a catastrophic for global security. Indian threat on its East and internally developing Taliban compelled Pakistan to look inwardly and regard its own well-being as a priority security concern (Ibid). The deviation in Pakistan's security concern implied that the US should institute an incentive structure with increasing payoffs for Pakistan to focus its

energies in realigning with US goals and objectives. The ‘carrots’ that US used for Pakistan included; “the promise of extensive state-building support, adoption of a policy that would prod India to resolve outstanding Indo-Pak issues, and assuaging Pakistan’s concerns in terms of a hostile post-Taliban Afghanistan” (Ibid,19).

### **Divergence & Estrangements**

The infamous threat initiated by Richard Armitage of bombing Pakistan ‘back to the stone age’ and “either with us or against us” syndrome succeeded in coercing Pakistan to budge its response in renewing its alliance in America’s War on Terror. But soon with the rising public sentiments against America, and Jihadies backlash in Pakistan multiplied in to the political and social cost for Pakistan (Cohen, 2007). The carrot policy included economic support of reimbursing Pakistan cost for fighting against terrorism and covertly legitimizing Musharraf’s rule and undermining democratic forces (Ibid). The short sighted approach of supporting dictator was not holistic in outlook thereby resulted in to the loss of America’s image amongst the people of Pakistan.

The air and ground attacks targeting Afghanistan based resistance groups sought safe sanctuaries in Pakistan side of the borders and unleashed their provoked retaliation in Pakistan’s heartland. Soon Swat, Malakand, Bajour, Mehsmand, Khyber, Waziristan and other parts of the FATA were infested with rouge militants groups making Pakistan social and administrative life untenable for the state and its people. Pakistan has to launch a full-fledged military operation in Swat, Bajour, Mehsmand followed by operation in Khyber Agency, Kurum and South Waziristan and evicted militants from their hideouts and rehabilitated millions of displaced civilians back in their homes. The desired military cooperation, needed in ceiling the border to block the routs for fleeing terrorists in to Afghanistan, was found non-existent from Afghanistan and coalition forces led by US. The lingering and halfhearted cooperation amongst US and Pakistan forces helped various terrorists groups to regroup and consolidate in North Waziristan. Pakistan succeeded in cleaning up the area from militants and bursting their sleepers and hideouts without any tangible support from the Coalition forces from Afghanistan.

The Afghanistan government and US encouragement and invitation to India for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan was fearing signal for Pakistan that Pakistan is being encircled by India. This US-Afghan-Indian nexus failed in moderating Pakistan's behavior, rather contributed in increasing Pakistan's obsession about the forthcoming siege from the west. The differences between the US-Pak start adding in to trust deficit between the two allies which was further widened by American's use of drones strikes targets within Pakistani territory. With the increasing allegations of "playing double game" on Pakistan led to collapse of intelligence sharing mechanism between the allies and rise in the frequency of drone attacks in Pakistani territory. The avoiding Pakistan and acting alone approach brought in very negative fallout on Pakistan against US resulting in closure of NATO supply line through Pakistan with number of intervals. The Obama's troop surge policy aiming to push Afghan Taliban into Pakistan signaled Islamabad as trade-off stability in Pakistan with US success in Afghanistan (Weaver, 2009). This act reflected Pakistan that US is part of the problem rather than the solution.

Soon Pakistan found itself at a paradoxical position, facing Taliban fugitives concentrated alongside the Pakistani side of the Durand Line and threatening its state sovereignty and territorial integrity. Pakistan understood the gravity of threat and found no choice but to fight a war against the militants in Swat and FATA on its own. Other than the Al Qaida, principal threat for the US has been 'Afghan Taliban' Whereas, Pakistan on the other hand regarded TTP and its associates as her core opponent. Instead of stabilizing Indo-Pak relationship and addressing Pakistani insecurities, Pakistan perceived US approach increasingly pro-India. US also found reluctant in prodding India on a solution to Kashmir and India's Baloch separation movement (Fair, 2009). Extending leverage to India in Afghanistan's reconstruction role and Northern Alliance with major share in Afghan Government added in to Pakistan's suspicions further. The widening divergence in Pak-US interests has gradually strained their bilateral trust and deterioration in the military-to-military cooperation.

In the waning years of the Obama administration Pakistani aid was withheld on the accusation of providing safe haven to Haqqani network and Pak-US relation worsened to lowest ebb. The decreased of U.S. military aid to Pakistan by 60 percent, between 2010 and August 2017, could not bend Pakistan away from its leaning. Failure in getting military solution even after spending trillion dollars in 17 years of war with over 4000 deaths and 20000 casualties (US Department of Labor, 2018) frustrated America over defeat in Afghanistan. America should take the path of dialogue instead of using military might in Afghanistan,” frustration and that the United States should pursue dialogue with Afghanistan’s insurgents rather than military force The stumbling block between the Pak-US cooperation in War against terror erupted with the President Trump’s statement (Donald Trump, 2018, Jan 1) and suspended all forms of military and security related assistance:

“The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan”.

Instead of soul-searching the real causes of their failure, against Taliban, despite marshalling, 140000 NATO plus 250000 Afghan troops laced with latest weaponry and fighting vehicles, US Administration of all times tried to make Pakistan a scapegoat for their failure (Imran Khan Tweet, 2018, Nov 19). Instead of acknowledging and appreciating sacrifices of Pakistan in men and material, American Administration has always been pushing Pakistan for “Do more” that irked Pakistani people. The President Trump’s Tweet dated November 19, 2018, was indicative of slumbering and unapologetic thankless imperialistic mentality’

“ ..We no longer pay Pakistan the \$Billions because they would take our money and do nothing for us, Bin Laden being a prime example, Afghanistan being another. They were just one of many countries that take from the United

States without giving anything in return. That's  
ENDING!" (Donald Trump Tweet, 2018, Nov 19).

The US forgot that despite no involvement of any Pakistani in 9/11, Pakistan stood with America with full heart and mind, in the War against terror, instead blamed for provision of "safe haven to terrorists" and giving U.S. "nothing but lies & deceit". Pakistan felt injured and insult on Trump's sham assertions that overlooked the historic cost Pakistan paid in term of human and economic losses in the American War. The degree of Pakistan's sincere commitment can be judged from the cost Pakistan paid during the war. The War drastically effected Pakistan as a state and society, sacrifices unparalleled to any member of the alliance. The cost included (Imran Khan Tweet, 2018, Nov 19):

- a. 75,000 casualties, & over \$123 Billion lost to economy against the US "aid" of \$20 billion in total
- b. The War devastated Pakistani tribal areas, displacing internally millions of uprooted people from their homes and polarizing social fabrics of the society in to "for and against" of the war alliance.
- c. Pakistan continued provision of free lines of communication on ground & air c (GLOCs/ALOCs).

The demeaning comments from Trump for its Non-NATO ally helped poise Pakistan realign its status regionally and internationally and to recalibrate its image in synchronization with its national interests. In a softening attempt to mitigate demeaning effect of Trump's remarks, some quarters in Washington recognized Pakistan's legitimate interests in Afghanistan. Soon Pakistan found itself under pressure with the looming threat of its inclusion on the Financial Action Task Force's blacklist, stagnating exports, shrinking foreign reserve, rising deficit, with badly needed IMF bailout package worth US\$6 billion. Pakistan had many options to ride out US generated pressures with the help of Russia, China, Saudi Arabia and others. China has proven to be Pakistan's steadfast ally and Russia is always looking to undercut US interests in South and Central Asia.

Similarly, Saudis and Gulf countries must also be forthcoming to hedge Iranian interests in the region.

Pakistan's once again felt that US is turning its back in Afghan conflict, as it did before on meeting her interests in early 60s and late 80s. Whereas, latent interests also include; stable control over Pakistan's nuclear weapons and dissuading it from nuclear proliferation and preventing Indo-US war. However, the manifest interest of the US is to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan without any stigma of retreat and before Trump's second term election in 2020. Pakistan is critical for ground and air supply route for NATO forces, besides market and access for Afghan trade. Furthermore, America wanted Pakistan to take irretrievable steps against alleged terrorist groups especially Hafiz Saeed allegedly responsible for Mumbai attacks. It was the bargaining price the US was demanding in exchange to help bailout Pakistan's wallowing economy. PM Imran Khan's hurriedly planned visit to Washington in July 2019 set the grounds for rapprochement, ended five years of estrangement and kindled hopes of reopening of US aid for Pakistan's facilitation in Afghanistan peace deal.

### **Conclusion**

The unique geo-strategic location of Pakistan has always been critical for US interests since cold war and beyond 9/11. Pakistan has always volunteered to be frontline to fight jeopardy to US interests in containment of Soviet communism or the US war against terrorism. The US triumph over Soviet Union, and today's hold over Afghanistan by US was possible due to the intelligence and logistic support extended by Pakistan. . In return Pakistan has been getting marginal US support in modernizing its defense potential and improving economy. However, Pakistan found herself alone when safeguarding her frontiers against Indian aggressions or struggling to prevent her dismemberment in 1971. The frequent breakups among both allies reflects flimsy nature of relations between two unequal partners. Pakistan's strategic relevance faded every time when the US interest is fulfilled and every separation put Pakistan under much more political, economic and diplomatic pressure than before. Pakistan still hold decisive position to help US

withdrawal from Afghanistan to peaceful conclusion. Once the US withdrawal from Afghanistan is successfully completed as envisioned by the Washington, the Pakistan security and nuclear capability is likely to be on stake again. Hence, “smooth culmination of Afghan peace process” is the bargaining chip with Pakistan to conclude the current phase of its engagement in Pakistan favour. Pakistan’s any future decision of joining any war alliance must be with fair weather allies who doesn’t demean Pakistan at any stage, and focused on the good of its people and making the country-a self-reliant. Pakistan’s future economic development plan shall not become hostage to war motivated foreign aid.

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