
PAK–US Relations: Paradoxes & Enigmas during War on Terror

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Abstract

Pakistan –USA relations with the punctuated history of over seventy years roller-coaster motion have passed through phases of intense engagement to era of sanctions and betrayal during the Cold war, followed by spells of distrust, suspicions, and discord during the War against Terror. The intensity of close relations of the 50s and 60s shifted from one extreme to that of complete ignorance in the 70s, followed by urgent marrying up during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and turning in to a most sanctioned Ally after soviet withdrawal. 9/11 served as another anchorage once again for the two old allies; however the warmness of relations remained frequently affected by numerous vexatious irritants thereby eroding mutual trust and War results. The discord in bilateral relations was transformed into cooperation by the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US and Pakistan is listed as a key ally in the war against Afghanistan. Since the commencement of the War against Terror in Afghanistan, the pattern of interstates relations has taken turns with every major event and the changing tones of the last few years indicated that the sky over Pakistan once again seems to be overcast. The rhetoric of "do more" and suspension of all kinds of military and economic aid was a true 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 fibre of the society on the other. Soon Pakistan's army was left alone by the US and the NATO in its operation against the safe havens of terrorists alongside Durand line with disregard to all of its human and economic cost, suffered as a non-NATO ally. Pakistan's role in the fulfilment of USA interests in Afghanistan is once again signified in the wake of US Withdrawal forces and culmination of promising peace process in Afghanistan. The situation is once against ripe for Pakistan to pursue the USA's objectives and in return seek USA's support in resolving its economic, security, and Kashmir.

Keywords: Pak-America Relations, Vexatious Irritants, War against Terror, National Interests, Afghan Peace Process.

Introduction

Pak-USA relations have a long-standing cyclical history of bilateral relations, spread over seven decades of close partnership, and moving along a coaster trajectory with frequent episodes of ups and downs reflecting engagement and estrangement in global and regional geopolitics (Baloch, 2006). The punctuated history of intense engagement and distinct estrangement was directly proportionate to the degree of convergent or divergent of their 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 the 50s, to a "most sanctioned ally" in the 90s (Soherwordi,2011). 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 the East for its security concerns. The continuum of relations speckled from one extreme of complete ignorance or discord, as in 1971, to the transformation of another 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, 2006; Soherwordi, 2011).

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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, p.151). Pakistan facilitated the US in nurturing her bilateral relations with China and it was Pakistan's struggle in Afghanistan against the Soviets that resulted in the triumph of the free world. The culmination of the cold war turned the bipolar world into unipolar, allowing Washington to dominate the global balance of power in her favor. Instead of rewarding for her decisive role of front line state in the triumph, the US left Pakistan unattended with a load of Afghan refugees and menace of Kalashnikovs culture, soon turning it into the most sanctioned ally. The US state behavior of the Post 90s period reflected that Pakistan has lost its significance to US interests and India has elevated to a most favored ally (Baloch, 2006).

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; absolute over flight rights, provision of intelligence and logistics support to the America led forces in Afghanistan, the annihilation of Al-Qaida, prevent all shipment to Afghanistan to quarantining Taliban resistance, were appreciated by the Washington –revamping the bilateral relations once again towards a skyward trajectory (Sattar, 2016, p.272). 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 (Rooh ul Amin et.al, 2020). Pakistan was accused of sheltering Quetta Shura of the Afghan Taliban and the 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 Trump's entry into 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 (Tariq et.al., 2020). This realization has architected Imran Khan's recent meeting with President Donald Trump, on July 21st, 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 a delay in concluding war on one hand and brought the US and its non-NATO ally at a distance apart.

The paper aims to investigate factors causing ups and downs in Pak-USA relations; during the post 9/11 WoT in Afghanistan-turning long-tested allies into disenchanting allies. The paper surveys the eighteen years of war diary of both allies to identify the irritants that served in dispelling their mutual trust and cooperation amongst both allies.

Brief Over View of History of Bilateral Relations

The United States is one of the first few nations that established bilateral relations with Pakistan soon after its independence, on 20th Oct, 1947. The United States and erstwhile USSR were at that time bitterly 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 (Baloch, 2006). Pak-US relations were predominantly indebted to the geo-strategic – geo-political need of the former and the position and security needs of 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 geopolitically 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. Liaqat 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, & Jehangir, 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 the Soviet Union, was confronted with the grave geopolitical and geo-security realities in the most troublesome region and acted as an anvil between the interests of two superpowers (Mahmud, 1991). However, Pakistan was disillusioned when the US

poured in lavish aid to India, during Indo-Sino War and this act of the US highly perturbed Pakistan to look towards China and the Soviet Union for her security from India. Pakistan felt betrayed by its ally, when during the 1965 war the US put an embargo on the supply of arms and ammunition on Pakistan, whereas, the Soviet Union continued military supplies to India.

The decade of the 60s till the 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. The Indifferent attitude of the US towards Pakistan's security at the time of need drifted Pakistan away from the US and brought closer to China. It was the Soviets' invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and Pakistan's challenge to that occupation which attracted the US to join her old ally having a commonality of interest in emerging scenarios (Sattar, 2016).

The Soviet embroils in Afghanistan and Pakistan's determined resolve to challenge seemed an opportunity for the 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 the 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 the cold war but tagged the US as a unipolar power of the globe. Pakistan, with the end of the 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 the Pressler Amendment, withholding all forms of economic and military aid and suspending military supplies (Haqani, 2013). The most favored ally was once again abandoned and turned into the most sanctioned ally; India acquiring the status of "natural ally". Pakistan was left alone to clear the debris of war in Afghanistan and bilateral frictions continued to worsen further into estrangement (Baloch, 2006)

Marrying Up of Old Allies in War against Terror:

The alleged Al Qaida's attack on Twin Tower on 9/11 created another opening for marrying up again between the old ally in response to the dictate of "either be with us or against us" (Beard, 2001; Musharaf, 2006). The dictate was a 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" (Chomsky and David, 2010). On the 4th 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 should stop supply of recruitment, fuel, and diplomatic support to the Taliban (Baloch, 2006; Krause, 2004; Sattar, 2016).

The post 9/11 situation presented a 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 the US. Pakistan opted for a paradigm shift in its foreign policy as a front-line state towards its two neighbors India and Afghanistan (Yasmin, 2003). Pakistan was quick enough to disown the Taliban and alter its national course on Kashmir policy. Pakistan withdrew its support from the freedom movement in Kashmir, and declares some of the echelons of the freedom movement as a terrorist organization, banning their operation on its soil (Sattar, 2016; Musharaf, 2006).

Pakistan's Interests in Joining War against Terror

Pakistan found itself in a catch-22 in its reluctant decision of joining the US War against terror against the Taliban to whom it nurtured to power. Pakistan had a little choice to continue its covert support to the Taliban in the face of the UN Security Council unequivocally condemnation of terrorism and the 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 (Gupta, 2002). The renewal of a new alliance with the 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 the war on terrorism would dispose of the 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 an extension of Al Qaida (Nayak, 2002).

The economic growth of the country would be on the right trajectory because of the 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 its nuclear explosion and Musharraf's military takeover from October 1999. Kashmir cause, on the political front, the U.S. Administration was expected to provide legitimacy to Musharraf's regime like previous engagements did for General Ayub Khan and General Zia ul Haq (Haqqani, 2013). Pakistan gained something 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 Objectives of War against Terror

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 an unprecedented collection of military might at its disposal, America found Pakistan's concurrence critical in routing out of Al Qaeda and Taliban presence from Afghanistan. US adopted a 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 (Moeed, 2009). Over the US the years' concentration of Al Qaida ruminants and their supporting Pakistani Taliban added a fresh dimension in the 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 well-being as a priority security concern (Moeed, 2009). 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 on realigning with US goals and objectives. The 'carrots' that the 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"(Moeed, 2009)

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. The carrot policy included economic support of reimbursing Pakistan cost for fighting against terrorism and covertly legitimizing Musharraf's rule and undermining democratic forces (Baloch, 2006; Baloch 2008; Sattar, 20016).

The air and ground attacks targeting Afghanistan based resistance groups sought safe sanctuaries in Pakistan side of the borders and unleashed retaliated terror in Pakistan's heartland. Soon Swat, Malakand, Bajour, Mohmand, 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, Mehmmand 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 (Rooh ul Amin et al., 2020). The desired military cooperation, needed in the ceiling the border to block the routes for fleeing terrorists into Afghanistan, was found non-existent from Afghanistan and coalition forces led by the US. The lingering and halfhearted cooperation amongst US and Pakistan forces helped various terrorists groups to regroup and consolidate in North Waziristan (Rooh ul Amin et al., 2020). 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 feared signal for Pakistan that Pakistan is being encircled by India (Baloch, 2009). This US-Afghan-Indian nexus failed in moderating Pakistan's behavior, rather contributed to increasing Pakistan's obsession with the forthcoming siege from the west (Baloch & Abbass, 2008). The avoiding Pakistan and acting alone approach brought in a very negative fallout on Pakistan against the US resulting in the closure of NATO supply line through Pakistan with several intervals. Obama's troop surge policy aiming to push the Afghan Taliban into

Pakistan signalled Islamabad as trade-off stability in Pakistan with US success in Afghanistan (Weaver, 2009). This act reflected in Pakistan that the US is part of the problem rather than the solution.

Soon Pakistan found itself in 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 the 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, the 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 the Indo-Pak relationship and addressing Pakistani insecurities, Pakistan perceived the US approach increasingly pro-India. US also found reluctant to prodding India on a solution to Kashmir and India's Baloch separation movement (Christine, 2009). Extending leverage to India in Afghanistan's reconstruction role and Northern Alliance with major share in the 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 haven to Haqqani network and Pak-US relation worsened to lowest ebb. The decrease 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 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 the War against terror erupted with the President Trump's statement and suspended all forms of military and security-related assistance (Trump, 2018):

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

“..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!”

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 the provision of "safe haven to terrorists" and giving U.S. “nothing but lies & deceit”. (Baloch & Niazi, 2009), Pakistan felt injured and insulted by Trump's sham assertions that overlooked the historic cost Pakistan paid in terms of human and economic losses in the American War. The degree of Pakistan's sincere commitment can be judged by the cost Pakistan paid during the war. The War drastically affected Pakistan as a state and society, sacrifices unparalleled to any member of the alliance. The cost included (Khan, 2018)

- a. 75,000 casualties, & over \$123 Billion lost to the economy against the US "aid" of \$20 billion in total

^{*} As of July 27, 2018, there have been 2,372 U.S. military plus 1720 civilian contractor deaths and over 20320 casualties.^{*} Source: "U.S. Department of Labor - Office of Workers' Compensation Programs (OWCP) - Division of Longshore and Harbor Workers' Compensation (DLHWC) -". www.dol.gov. Retrieved 2018-07-28

- b. The War devastated Pakistani tribal areas, displacing internally millions of uprooted people from their homes and polarizing social fabrics of the society into "for and against" of the war alliance.
- c. Pakistan continued provision of free lines of communication on ground & air (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 the 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 the US is turning its back in the Afghan conflict, as it did before on meeting her interests in the 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 the 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

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 the Soviet Union and today's hold over Afghanistan by the 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 reflect the flimsy nature of relations between two unequal partners. Pakistan's strategic relevance faded whenever the US interest is fulfilled and every separation put Pakistan under much more political, economic, and diplomatic pressure than before. Pakistan still holds a decisive position to help US withdrawal from Afghanistan to a peaceful conclusion. Once the US withdrawal from Afghanistan is completed as envisioned by Washington, Pakistan security and nuclear capability are likely to be at stake again. The "smooth culmination of Afghan peace process" is like a bargaining chip with Pakistan to conclude the current phase of its engagement in Pakistan favor. Pakistan's any future decision of joining any war alliance must be with fair-weather allies who don'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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