

## **Divergence and Convergence of Interests after 9/11: Pakistan-US Cooperation in Perspective of Afghanistan**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Pakistan-U.S. relations witnessed a roller coaster relationship in post-9/11 scenario. U.S. was seeking cooperation against ousting anti-American terrorists from Afghanistan and it was not possible without Pakistan-U.S. marriage of convenience. This triangular relationship developed Pakistan's image as a policy receiver whereas, American image as policy setter. In this tangled relationship the atmosphere of mistrust remained paramount from each side because of multiple factors. This paper takes a critical review of the involved factors by bifurcating those into divergence and convergence of interests specifically from Pakistan and American viewpoints. Though Pakistan endeavored to cooperate beyond its natural constraints, but the constant trust-deficit and lack of appreciation from the U.S. side made this cooperation a liability for Pakistan, because Pakistan remained an uninclined partner since the revisit of the relationship which was not bilateral, but triangular in nature.

**Keywords:** Pakistan-U.S. Relations, Trust-Deficit, Afghanistan, 9/11, Triangular Relations

### **Introduction**

The catastrophic incident of 9/11 appeared to be a darkest day in the American history (Wittkopf, et. al. 2007). The leadership of al Qaeda and Taliban government in Afghanistan became center of concern for the world. For the Bush administration, the intervention in Afghanistan was an exceptional objective and in this context cooperation from Pakistan became integral (Mintz & DeRouen, 2010). Pakistan was put under acute pressure (Ziehan, 2010). And then Chief Executive of Pakistan General Pervaiz Musharraf offered unconditional support even though Pakistan was a reluctant partner in this cooperation (Islam, 2012). The Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) was initiated in Afghanistan to root out the Taliban regime. And America lifted all the imposed sanctions on Pakistan to seek its cooperation (Kronstadt, 2015).

Pakistan-U.S. and Afghanistan relations can be dated back to the Cold War period when Pakistan played a role of proxy during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Though history is evident that even during that period, there was no

logical convergence of interests; because for America, it was more to be an ideological war, but for Pakistan it was fought on strategic grounds. In the wake of 9/11 incident, the need of Pakistan was felt again, this time relatively more open than a proxy, because of its geostrategic location and Pakistan's position to influence Taliban (Fair, 2009) And essentially for the tangible supply route to landlocked Afghanistan (Rashid, 2008). In return Pakistan received economic incentives in terms of billions of dollars and assistance under the Coalition Support Fund (CSF).

Since then, Pakistan faced acute criticism both at political and public level, along with the internal and external security compulsions (Khan, 2009). The nuclear arsenals of Pakistan also remained under debates and its nuclear program was seen with suspicions (Riedel, 2011). On the contrary, Pakistan faced a wave of militancy and revival of pro-Taliban groups (Markey, 2013). But the U.S. objectives could have never been achieved in Afghanistan without Pakistan's cooperation (Cohen, 2004). And to seek this cooperation the U.S. even declined the anti-American sentiments in Pakistan (Hilali, 2012).

To seek Pakistan's assistance was not free from suspicions; the Indian factor, nuclear program, the democratic turmoil, insurgency in tribal areas and economic vulnerability persisted to be the key concerns for the U.S. policy makers (Falkernath, 2005). Pakistan was asked to cut its ties with al Qaeda, to launch military operations, to disconnect the recruitment process for Afghanistan and to assist America with the intelligence support (Khattak, 2011). In this perspective, the top priority of the policy makers was to ensure peace in Afghanistan through the nation and state-building (Cohen, 2004). Over the succeeding years, the U.S. strategy did not remain consistent, and most significantly received a major shift in 2011 (International Crisis Group, 2013). Meanwhile, Pakistan-U.S. relations were at the low ebb after the capture of Osama Bin Laden and the Salala incident.

### **Pakistan-U.S. Cooperation and Divergence of Interests**

Though Pakistan offered full assistance, but some indigenous perils in form of leadership behaviour, domestic environment, political environment, socio-economic culture, regional setting, and global environment remained prevalent to sharp the contrast of priorities. These priorities and insecurities can be previewed in terms of divergence and convergence of interests and this may be the reason that although being the historical partners both the countries; Pakistan and America remained unsuccessful to achieve their desired goals in Afghanistan (Khan, 2011). Pakistan-U.S. relations can be viewed through a transactional approach and transformational approach and believing the fact that after U.S. engagement in Afghanistan the transformational approach got momentum and Pakistan started searching for alternates like China and Russia (Mirza & Mushtaq, 2019).

## **Trust Deficit**

Pakistan-U.S. alliance is an odd alliance because of the insecurities at each side (Khan, 2011). Specifically, in Pakistan the general perception prevails that somewhere America has remained the driving force behind all the militancy and extremism in Pakistan; and to some extent, this interpretation and anti-American sentiments can be justified on logical grounds because Washington proved to be a “fickle friend” with fluctuation in attitudes (Riedel, 2011). This insecurity led to divergence of interests because Pakistan sought the U.S. endeavors in Afghanistan as an occupational agenda to occupy Pakistan's nuclear capabilities and the acceptance of Indian regional hegemony under the U.S. patronage (Shafqat, 2009). Furthermore, the continuous chanting of “Do more” resulted in lack of motivation from Pakistani side and anti-American sentiments (Hilali, 2012; Lodhi, 2009). The continuous pressure was put from Afghanistan side on Pakistan and U.S. to speed up the peace process by taking all the factions of Afghan society (Rashid, 2012). President Ghani accused Pakistan of providing shelter to the terrorist groups, especially the Taliban and Haqqani network. But the general consensus prevails that the preferential treatment between “good” and “bad” Taliban delayed the peace efforts (Shah, 2016).

## **Drone Attacks**

The sphere of U.S. drone strikes kept on stretching over time and this was a major point of divergence because it created wrath among Pakistani society living in those areas and left them with the psychological trauma. Drone strikes were mainly to target Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Al Qaeda, and Haqqani network (Shah, 2018). Drone strikes by and large remained successful in eliminating these threats (International Crisis Group, 2013). But there was another logical confusion in these strikes on the plea that this drone strategy violated Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity along with the public hatred (Jones & Fair, 2010). This was a clear demarcation of the vulnerabilities of the Taliban in comparison to the robust U.S. military and intelligence capabilities. The killing of many top leaders also knocked over the truncated Afghan peace process and equally affected the Pakistan-U.S. viewpoint over the Taliban issue (Shah, 2016).

## **Divergent Security Patterns**

Pakistan-U.S. relations in perspective of Afghanistan can also be viewed from the divergent security patterns (Cohen, 2004). This triangular relation was more transactional in nature (Mirza & Mushtaq, 2019). Since Pakistan did not prioritize those threats which were the security concerns for Washington like Taliban and their hideouts in Pakistan from where they were operating and devising plans to counter the U.S. and the coalition forces in Afghanistan. Pakistan received blames

not to be the serious partner on the grounds of its persistent supportive relations with Afghan insurgents and anti-India militant groups operating from Pakistani territory (Kronstadt, 2015). Pakistan's military was lacking in capacity of terms and forces which pushed Pakistan to follow a discriminatory approach to deal with the groups and to counter only those groups who were challenging the Pakistani state while the rest were either considered as assets of the of Pakistan or had mixed strategies to deal with (Jones & Fair, 2010). Islamabad always considered Afghanistan as a potential client state (Abbas, 2010). Hence, Pakistan, America and Afghanistan had a divergent outlook from a security perspective on the following actors:

- India
- Afghanistan
- China

## **India**

Pakistan and India are hostile neighbors since the inception and remained in the zero-sum position (Javaid, 2014). This insecurity from the eastern border compelled Pakistan to divert attention from the western border (Hussain, 2005). For the U.S. India never remained a threat, but Pakistan has always been treated as a matter of expediency (Hasnat 2011). And for this very reason, all the U.S. administrations took Pakistan as a problem maker and India as a solution maker (Pant, 2012). The nuclear stance of both the regional states also remained a perpetual security threat to the U.S., this concern was more tilted towards Pakistan and U.S.-India civilian nuclear deal further added the fuel to the fire (Tabassum, 2012). In realistic terms, America has logical justifications to prove this stance, since Pakistan has religious orientation, jihadist culture and sympathy with al Qaeda, and such a state with nuclear posture would be a nightmare for America (Riedel, 2011). On the contrary, similar set of concerns kept growing in Pakistan on the plea that U.S.-India strengthening ties compel Pakistan to revisit its ties with Washington (Zia, 2018). Thus, by and large, this double game of U.S. continued to be a pressing factor to keep Pakistan more focused on its own security considerations, and reluctant to comply with the strategic interests of the U.S. and NATO.

## **Afghanistan**

The longest U.S. led war in Afghanistan deteriorated the security situation at the both sides of the border (Khan, 2011). For Pakistan, Taliban and Afghanistan appeared to be a strategic depth since the inception (Yusuf, 2009). Though in the initial years after 9/11, General Musharraf offered cooperation and intelligence assistance to the Washington, but at times, he also felt reluctant to cooperate because of the strategic depth and did not want to face the wrath of Pashtun neighbors (Riedel, 2011). And for this very reason, Pakistani military was blamed

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to have indifferent approach towards Pashtun nationalists who could come to power again in Kabul (Nawaz, 2010). But, in subsequent years, the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan also created ripple effects in the tribal areas of Pakistan in form of religious radicalization (Qazi, 2011). But the prime intention was based on logical grounds as the presence of the Taliban regime had strategic benefit for Pakistan in pursuance of the Kashmir strategy (Shukla, 2011). And history is evident that Kashmir cause was badly affected after 9/11 (Hilali, 2012).

## **China**

The robust relations between Pakistan and China have been viewed with speculations in Washington. China has been taken as a competitor from the U.S. side, but a counterweight to India from Pakistani perspective (Zia, 2018). To some extent, China and Pakistan have reciprocal interests and benefits to achieve, but the growing influence of China in the region and involvement in Afghanistan created unrest in the West (Ali, 2018). Although China appeared to be reluctant to pursue interventionist foreign policy like America (Hass, 2019). But despite all the anticipated convergence of interests with Pakistan, it had some divergent interests in terms of Taliban presence in Afghanistan because China could have been threatened in its western part by the same group (Riedel, 2011). Hence, putting all the divergence of interests aside, the peace process in Afghanistan remained the top concern for the global and regional actors and to serve this purpose the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG) was established comprising Pakistan, America, Afghanistan, and China. But all the involved actors had their own individual objectives to achieve so it would be unrealistic to put unilateral blame on Pakistan.

## **Pakistan U. S. Cooperation and Convergence of Interests**

Pakistan's participation was a prerequisite for America to meet the desired ends in Afghanistan (Islam, 2012) Pakistan became a front-line state with genuine reservations (Hilali, 2012). The intelligence cooperation was offered along with access to the granting landing rights and blanket over-flight; intelligence cooperation with immigration data, territorial access; halting diplomatic support for the Taliban and al-Qaeda, and finally end of supplies to Taliban, but despite all the efforts it remained a constant concern for America that more institutionalized cooperation could lead to trust-building and long-term relationships between Pakistan and U.S. (Shafqat, 2009). Pakistan-U.S. efforts to foster peace in Afghanistan also have some convergence of interests as explained follows.

## **Pakistan's Military Launched Operations**

The sympathetic feelings with the Afghan Taliban started taking place in Pakistan, and the culmination of the scene was observed in the form of extremist attack on Lal Masjid (Riedel, 2011). Thus how, the Afghan war entered into the soil of Pakistan and it appeared to be the high time for Musharraf government to deter the indigenous security threats. The recognition of administrative reforms for the socio-economic uplift of the backward tribal areas became inevitable (Nawaz & De Borchgrave, 2009). Even though Pakistan's military lacked logistic capacity to fight against both internal Taliban and the Afghan Taliban; the military continued its efforts to safeguard eastern and western border (Nawaz, 2010). In the wake of U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, many Afghan militants fled from volatile Afghanistan to seek a safe place in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA). This burdened Pakistan with the refugee crisis (Riedel, 2011). Furthermore, these mujahideen were provided sanctuary by the local Pashtuns (Siddique, 2011). The cross-border infiltration led to security risks and Pakistan launched following military operations (Khalid & Roy, 2016):

- Operation Zalzala (Earthquake) Jan 2008
- Operation Sirat-e-Mustaqeem (Right Path) June 2008
- Operation Sher Dil (Lionheart) September 2008
- Operation Rah-e-Haq-III (January 2009):
- Operation Sher Dil: Battle for Bajaur (September 2009)
- Operation Rah-e-Rast (May 2009):
- Operation Rah-e-Nijat (2009-2010):
- Operation Koh-e-Sufaid (White Mountain) July 2011

All the results of the military operations were further consolidated after inculcation of FATA into the mainstream by introducing a constitutional package (International Crisis Group, 2013). Because history is evident that this place proved to be a safe haven for the extremist activities (Siddique, 2011).

## **Capture of Osama Bin Laden**

Osama Bin Laden provided a dynamic leadership to al Qaeda, which appeared to be a global terrorist movement (Riedel, 2011). The dramatic capture of Osama Bin Laden in 2011 was considered to be the end of bilateral relationship because of killing of Osama Bin Laden, Salala incident and Raymond David case and resultantly, Pakistan blocked the passage of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) supplies into Afghanistan, therefore, America had to manage an alternate route to Central Asia and for seven months, this route was used until the route was reopened (Markey, 2013). Pakistan also demanded U.S. to vacate Shamsi base, and it was vacated in December 2011 (International Crisis Group, 2013). In 2011 the American navy SEAL commandos captured Osama bin Laden in his compound in the Pakistani city of Abbottabad which created apprehensions in Washington and made Pakistan's cooperation dubious. But Pakistan also assisted

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valuable contribution to assist America in terms of Blackwater company which was later known as Xe Services in 2009 and Academi in 2011 was a private military company. This company was working for the CIA and Joint Special Operation Command (JSOC) and the Pakistani government on a subcontract with an Islamabad-based security firm to assist U.S. Blackwater operatives in counter-terrorism operations including house raid and border interceptions, in the North-West Frontier Province, elsewhere in Pakistan and Afghanistan. All this was not possible without the cooperation of Pakistan.

### **Pakistan's Role in Peace Talks**

The intra-Afghan peace process became the priority for U.S. policymakers and Pakistan played a dynamic contribution (Zia, 2018). Obama administration was devoted to speed up the reconciliation process in Afghanistan while repeatedly asking Pakistan to deny terrorists the safest place to operate. The Quadrilateral Coordination Group met several times after 2016, but the Taliban refused to participate in the peace talks on account of their concerns regarding the removal of the Taliban from the United Nations blacklist, the release of detainees from Afghan prison, and withdrawal of U.S. led foreign troops from Afghanistan (Shah, 2016). Further, the peace talks collapsed when the Taliban launched their spring offensive.

### **Registration of Afghan Refugees**

Pakistan also hosted influx of Afghan refugee's despite of the economic compulsions (Riedel, 2011). In subsequent years, Pakistan had to face the consequences of this support for the Afghans and resultantly, the tribal areas of Pakistan were filled up with the Afghan Taliban and they had sanctuaries there for the longest time which in return gave impetus to the rise of Pakistani Taliban (Siddique, 2011). The Afghan refugees in Pakistan appeared to be a security peril and with the growing time, it became inevitable to consolidate the issue of Afghan repatriation (Khalid, 2018). This issue was put under delays for a long time. This was a major development in terms of Pakistan-U.S. efforts to initiate peace process in Afghanistan in addition to secure Pakistan from the refugee crisis. Because according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) data statistics, Pakistan was the largest refugee-hosting nation to provide assistance and accommodation to Afghan refugees (UNHCR, 2020). Pakistan spent hundreds of billions of dollars on hosting Afghan refugee's despite of the economic vulnerabilities.

## **Pakistan-Afghanistan Border Management**

The porous border with Afghanistan also posed security compulsions for Pakistan (Khalid, 2018). Moreover, this delicate border also proved to be source of other illegal activities, and to dismantle this threat Pakistan and Afghanistan also entered into structural arrangements along with Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) (Khokhar, 2018). In order to establish a constructive relationship, it was a mandatory to enhance the border management cooperation with Afghanistan to curb the militant cross border movement (International Crisis Group, 2013). And this required bilateral arrangement both at Islamabad and Kabul (Riedel, 2011). The proper fencing at borders, surveillance, radars, check posts, 750 border forts, and searchlights for night patrolling remained top priorities to stop all the illegal movement and penetrations. In this context, a visible decline in human and drug trafficking was observed after the introduction of the National Action Plan (NAP) and the border management system across the Pakistan-Afghan border (ISPR, 2018).

## **Intelligence Cooperation**

Pakistan became the significant partner of the Washington to dismantle al Qaeda and also kept ties with the Taliban and other jihadist groups. This cooperation with suspicions made Pakistan's role dubious (Riedel, 2011). The drone strikes were supervised by the Central Intelligence Agency's Counter-Terrorism Center (CTC) and these strikes were kept unaccountable except CIA (Rashid, 2012). The sinuous cooperation between CIA and Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) had been observed throughout the U.S. engagement in Afghanistan (Riedel, 2011). Though ISI offered cooperation to the CIA to dismantle Al Qaeda, but also carried on its own agenda in Kashmir and Afghanistan.

## **Conclusion**

Pakistan-U.S. relations in perspective of Afghanistan witnessed divergent crossroads because of the contrast of national interests and desired goals. The U.S. had more broader objectives to achieve in those; eradication of terrorism, dismantlement of Al Qaeda, peace and rehabilitation in Afghanistan remained at priority list. On the contrary, Pakistan's interests were indigenous and regional in those India appeared to be a paramount factor. Furthermore, the atmosphere of insecurity can be observed at both sides of the immediate neighbors i.e., Pakistan and Afghanistan and in this case even America is not an exemption. Pakistan was accused of harboring terrorism, despite of the countless efforts which produced a trust deficit between Pak-U.S. relations. Pakistan has its own security compulsions and it has genuine concerns against India. This presiding threat perception gives impetus to Pakistan to make allies with the robust partners either in the form of America or China. Pakistan needs a reliable and strategic partner for its national



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security and to maintain strategic balance in the region. The significant reason of American presence in the region remained Afghanistan, Taliban, and Haqqani network, but for Pakistan it was indigenous and parochial. From the Pakistani perspective, the carrot and stick approach from Washington is considered to be the main obstacle to meet the desired ends and from American perspective the dubious role of Pakistan has been the major constraint to make this triangular relation more like a topsy-turvy.

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