

U.S. President Trump Policies towards South Asia with Particular Reference to Afghanistan, India and Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

President Donald Trump's announcement of revision of policies towards South Asia in August 2017 gave a new strategy for Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. This policy has resemblance with that of Obama in many spheres but deviates from Obama's as well, especially in the case of India. South Asia is now in the position of constant change, and this flux is getting complexed by Trump's policy. Trump's approach towards Islamabad is skeptical and harsh, and his idea of broader role must be played by New Delhi in the matters of Afghanistan is very much concerning, and more precisely threatening for the national interest of Islamabad. It seems that Donald Trump's practical policy application has been different from the one he had verbally conveyed. This paper thoroughly describes every aspect of the policy of Trump towards South Asia in the light of his speech made regarding South Asia. It has also description that why South Asia is important to America, and how the policy of Trump could not be favorable for the region and can create a further increased divide into this least integrated region.

Key Words: Trump, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan

Introduction

Donald Trump's presidency began on January 20, 2017. He succeeded Obama and became the 45th President of the superpower United States of America. After taking the charge of the office, he delivered a speech on August 21 that was merely about the future of relations between U.S. and the South Asian countries. Trump's South Asian foreign policy's primary focus was on three countries that included Afghanistan on the top of the list along with India and Pakistan (Alizada, 2018). His speech clearly depicted his insecurities towards Pakistan and he conveyed his message to Pakistan that it should stop working as a safe haven for the terrorist groups functioning in the region. He clearly said that Pakistan had a lot to gain by helping U.S. destroying the terrorists. On the other hand, he had so much to lose by supporting those Taliban. He claimed that America had been giving billions and billions of dollars to Pakistan for the purpose to destroy the Taliban but at the same time Pakistan had been giving shelter to them. It won't be tolerated anymore (Hafeez, 2018).

Muhammad Owais

If Pakistan wanted to be in the good books of America, it had to do the demonstration of the commitment to peace, civilization and order. In regard to Afghanistan, his policy depicted a shift from his predecessors'. He urged that the strength of U.S. military should be increased in Afghanistan to end the war against terrorism that had long been carried out.(Mirza, 2018). Furthermore, he said that there would be no more making of a democratic state by U.S. military in Afghanistan and Afghan people would decide the future of the country themselves. He declared that the U.S. and Afghanistan would go hand in hand against their common enemy 'the terrorist and the terrorism' that had long been causing damage to this region and U.S. (Ayres, 2018).

The Republican President further said that he would prove himself as a problem solver and made his interests regarding Pakistan and Afghanistan clear that nuclear weapons and material of destruction must be prevented from going into the hands of the so called terrorists and those who were being the source of chaos and violation. He declared that the approach of U.S. from now onwards would not be time-based, as in he would not declare that when, where and how he would order the military to attack on the militants. According to him, this was counterproductive to tell about the plans before the execution.(Momin, 2017). For a successful outcome, he urged its cabinet and the army to combine all the factors like political, economic, military and diplomatic in combating against any kind of threat to U.S.

U.S. support whether it would be in the form of training, economic or military, to Afghan government and Afghan military, was ensured by Trump as they would be confronted by the Taliban in the battle field. U.S would be a friend to Afghanistan and not a dictator anymore. But the Afghan Government would have to carry his fair share of military, political and economic burden.(Khan & Pasha, 2017). While talking about the strategic relations of U.S. with India, he proposed a friendly policy for India. He stated India as a prominent economic and security partner of U.S in the region and also one of the largest democracies in the world. The one thing that was astonishing for the global public was that Trump welcomed India to interrupt on a deeper level into the matter of Afghanistan and asked for India's economic assistance for the development. In return, Trump promised India to pursue the shared goal of establishing peace and security in the region of South Asia and on a broader level the Indo-Pacific region.

Foreign policy towards South Asia (Obama v/s Trump)

If we contrast the foreign policy of Trump and his predecessors towards South Asia, it has not much difference. There's a notable and considerable level of continuity. Like Obama's, Trump's policy was first defensive and later on became offensive. The areas of focus of Trump are as same as the areas of Obama were. Striking similarity is seen prominently in India's case at the first place. (Kugelman, 2018). Trump has been successful in continuation of strengthening the ties with New Delhi that Obama had left off. Narendra Modi, the prime minister of

*U.S. President Trump Policies towards South Asia with Particular Reference to
Afghanistan, India and Pakistan*

India had a very warm first meeting with Trump which resulted in deeper integration for the strengthening of defense system, national security and economic spheres for both the countries.(Jones, 2017),There were two main reasons for the strengthening of these relations in both eras of Trump and Obama; one for the eradication of the terrorism in the region and the other reason was to stand against China's rise in the region as well as on the global level. In the case of Afghanistan, Trumps policy was not exact copy of Obama's policy. Obama didn't believe to increase the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan but Trump did.(Ali, 2017).

Trump also abolished the trend of working in time frames and pre-disclosure of the strategic plans. Furthermore, unlike Obama, Trump encouraged India's involvement into Afghanistan's matter. But besides this all, the core goal of both the Presidents was same that was to clear the land of Afghanistan from the evil entities like the Taliban and make it a peaceful place so that there would remain no threat to America's security. Both the Presidents wanted to compel the insurgents to leave the field of battle, end the war and settle the matter by negotiations with Kabul, for which Obama had to face failure during U.S. 2010 and 2011 troop surge. For Pakistan, Trump had different views as compared to Obama. Over the course of time, Trump had been more coercive towards Pakistan and compelled Pakistan to crack down all the militant groups and network that have been attacking on the American troops in Afghanistan including the Taliban and Haqqani network. He threatened Pakistan to impose sanctions other than freezing aid, also threatened it to revoke the NATO non-ally status of Pakistan, if Pakistan keeps on supporting those networks. This was the same thing done by Obama in 2011, after the discovery of much wanted Taliban Osama Bin Laden from within the territory of Pakistan.

Importance of South Asia for U.S.

South Asia has always proven to be a golden bird not only for U.S. but also for other major hegemonic powers in the world. The importance of this region of the world has immensely increased in the 21st century due to various reasons including the rapid growth of Indian economy, the strengthening of Islamic militant groups in the Muslim and neighboring countries of Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the prolonged strategic rivalry between the prominent country of the region India and China. According to the writer as well as an expert for the South Asian studies, South Asia has a population of about 1.6 billion people (Kugelman B. M., 2016). and this has almost made up the 27 percent of the world's total human population. Hence, this large number of population can never be ignored and is definitely important no matter what the circumstances actually are. If we continue counting the factors, one big factor behind the fact why U.S. craves for the region is that it is the region from where China and Russia have direct land linkages.(Mehmood, 2017). During the cold war, U.S. used the land of Afghanistan to combat communism and to destruct the Soviet Union. And the U.S. troops are still present

Muhammad Owais

there as they got a new reason to fight against and that was ‘the Taliban’ that proved to be a major threat to America’s hegemony. In both the events, America has blindly supported the Afghan government economically, politically and diplomatically just to be successful and they actually got success. Afghanistan, therefore has served as a buffer zone to America.

Furthermore, India is another golden bird for U.S. these days because India is going to be most populous country of the world by the coming years and its economy is increasing almost 7 to 9 percent by every passing year. Moreover, India is the only country that will help America make the growing kingdom of China to fall. It seems that the region has become bipolar, having alliance of America and India at one side, and alliance of Pakistan and China on the other side. (George, 2017). India is wanted by America to balance China’s influence and also due to the Indian Ocean. India is Indian Ocean box seat and has the most control over it. Indian Ocean has pathways to oil rich countries of the Gulf and is a large source of energy production. This the reason why Obama focused on the aim of implanting almost 60 percent of the naval force in the region. The One Belt and One Road initiative taken by China is also threatening for America and India, and they both do not want it to get done because it would cast the influence of China on Asia, Europe and Africa through a complex network of land pathways and could make it a hegemonic power stronger than America.(Chaudhry, 2014). And if it happens so, India would be in loss because it does not have good terms with China but China has good terms with India’s biggest rival Pakistan. OBOR and CPEC like projects are developing the region particularly Pakistan which is not being digested by both America and India.

Trump’s policy towards India

India and U.S. have been enjoying friendly bilateral relations since the era of Donald Trump has started. In New Delhi, at the Raisina Dialogue, Trump addressed the crowd and his address showed a sunshine of optimism to Indians. (SHARMA, 2019). His negative and skeptical approach towards Pakistan, a harsh and rough policy towards the Great China, thoughts on the making of Indo-Pacific open and free, the offers he made for the transfer of technology from America to India, along with the offers for the economic, diplomatic and political strengthening of India made diplomats and general public clear regarding U.S. policy towards India that was going to be soft and friendly. The fact behind this soft corner for India is that Trump has the biggest aim of balancing the hegemonic power of China in the region of Indo-Pacific.(JAISHANKAR, 2017). India, its government and public also wants this. According to a research, 75 percent of Indians think that U.S. is the most important country that could help and go along well with India in different global issues. Favorable language of Trump for New Delhi is also depicted when he gave a consistent description of region of ‘Indo-Pacific’ rather than ‘Asia-Pacific’and Pacific Command was given another name of INDOPACOM. This all was according to the wishes of Indian government and

*U.S. President Trump Policies towards South Asia with Particular Reference to
Afghanistan, India and Pakistan*

public, and it did not end here. Trump immensely criticized China's One Belt One Road project (JAMES, 2016). which mirrored concerns of India and both explained their wish to have strong security alliances with countries like Australia, Japan, and Vietnam. Teaming up of four 'like-minded' democracies named India, U.S., Australia and Japan happened when they came up with the idea of the revival of Quadrilateral Security Dialogue shortly termed as QUAD. (Panagariya, 2017).

This alliance would have its direct influence and impact on the waterways of Indian Ocean, Pacific Ocean and the seas of China that are much disputed named as South and East China Seas. This revival of dialogue was made at Manila, when Trump was on the official visit to South and East Asia. Official diplomats from the four countries gathered there and decided that they all would stand against the rising power of China and would try to suppress it by hook or by crook. This was a tactic and strategy of Donald Trump to have its influence in the region after stepping back from the trade agreement named as Trans-Pacific Partnership Trade Agreement and the abandoning of the practice of former president Barack Obama's pivot to Asia.(Shehriyar, 2018).The strengthening of U.S. India ties made ways for the technology development in India and therefore the administration of Trump government made India capable of buying defense technology that didn't need license. This happened under the Strategic Trade Authorization 1 and it gave the status of third Asian country having this technology after South Korea and Japan. The annual summoning of U.S. Indian CEO Forum was also ensured in the visit by Trump through which defense training of Indian military would be done by the army of America. (Jayoti, 2018). This would be an annual tri service defense activity that will allow Indian army to be more efficient and learn new fighting skills. Moreover, many combined projects for Industrial security were also launched. Meanwhile, the withdrawal of aid worth 300 million dollars given by U.S. administration to Pakistan due to Trump's claim that Pakistan was still providing shelter to terrorists also was very favorable in India's regard. (Panagariya, PAK-U.S. RELATIONS, 2017). Historical background tells us that India was at very good terms with Russia and Pakistan was at good terms with America. But then, America's blessings started getting showered on India as American administration saw their benefit in strengthening the ties with India. Donald Trump's Strategy for Afghanistan and South Asia (SASA) made clear the Indian role would be broader in Afghanistan and Pakistan's role would be lesser. (Beckham, 2018). This will prove beneficial for India because India do not want the radical Islam to be spread all over the region and hence want to destroy the Islamists of the region which are predominantly residing in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

If we see the image through the prism of practicality, everything comes with a cost, especially when it's the case of having strong bonding with America. In return of all the favors, India has to break ties with Iran which is a great supplier for crude oil and gas to India as America has imposed sanctions on Iran and those

Muhammad Owais

countries who have ties with Iran. Furthermore, a waiver for CAATSA sanctions is seek by government of Modi, for which otherwise an air defense system named S-400 could have bought by India from Russia. India's eligibility is being observed by America for Generalized System of Preferences Program, which decides what sort of products would enter premises of America. (Fontaine, 2019). But overall analysis made is that BJP and other parties feel over the moon by the friendship of India and the U.S. and same sentiments are being observed from American side.

Trump's policy towards Afghanistan

Afghanistan is an Islamic country member of America in its efforts for diminishing the militancy in the region and in fact in the whole world. It is a well-known fact that the development of Afghanistan in terms of politics and governance as well as economic development is directly proportion to the amount of pressure the American administration could put on the Taliban regime to stop their activities. (Hussain, 2018). Donald Trump's policy for South Asia and Afghanistan was whole-heartedly welcomed by the Afghan nation and government because after the policy announcement, they were of the idea that through this kind of support of America in which the military of Afghanistan would get modernize, Afghanistan would get able to win the long before started war against the Taliban and there would be peaceful resolution of the matter. Trump allowed his commanders to implant whatever number of American forces they want to get implanted in the areas of Afghanistan.

Along with this flexibility, he proposed the idea of 'reconcile or die' to the Taliban and other Islamic militant groups through which he conveyed that if those groups would not sit with Americans and Afghan government on the table of negotiation and would not go for the idea of peaceful settlement, they would have to die and their all hubs and habitats would be destroyed simply by drone attacks. (huang, 2019). Trump showed his intentions that Afghan government should be able to stabilize its country without external support of any kind, and should be capable of protecting the nation. If we talk on the practical level, Trump's administration really has fulfilled its promises made and has taken the bold step of getting on the negotiation table with the Taliban and Haqqani Network members. (Qadeer, 2018). This great initiative of peace talks compelled the Taliban to have a look upon their policy of stubbornness and made them realize that it is them who want to stay in the war and not the other way round. President of Afghanistan, Ashraf Ghani joined hands with U.S. and offered a peace treaty to the Taliban and later on presented a ceasefire which was to be signed in between the government and the Taliban. This all peace movement was carried out by the Afghan peace marchers and the officials of the Conference for peace by the Ulema. This was positively reciprocated by the Taliban, and hence an example was set that everything is possible if handed peacefully and ethically. This practice and momentum is needed to be followed by all countries so that there could be no war,

*U.S. President Trump Policies towards South Asia with Particular Reference to
Afghanistan, India and Pakistan*

and the needs of the people of country and international community including regional actors could be fulfilled.

Some analysts claim that this policy of Trump for Afghanistan is a mere tactic to silently cut America off from the 17 years old war, and that too for his personal means, till the next upcoming elections. According to this analysis, Trump in the disguise of a peace making diplomat, is up to giving Afghanistan into the hands of Taliban.(marston, 2018). They say that Afghan government acts as ‘puppet’ for the American government. The Taliban could have made a deal with Trump Administration that they would not attack U.S. and in return U.S. has to take its troops back. Though, Trump suggested in his speech that the number of troops should be increased and there should be gradual removal of U.S. troops from the Afghan land, his actual aim is the instant removal of the troop creating a vacancy for the Taliban to take over Afghanistan. This was the same strategy implemented by Henry Kissinger in the case of Vietnam. (Andrews, 2018). Trump seems to be following Kissinger’s footsteps. In 2017, Donald Trump made the statement that number of forces is to be increased in Afghanistan and in 2018, he suddenly made the statement that 14,000 American troops should be shrink to the half and troops should be called back from Syria too. The reason given by Trump for this uplift from his commitment was that Russia was destroyed by the acts we are making right now. Russia had lost all its power and divided by becoming Russia from USSR. This lame reason left every historian, geographer, and regional expert into shock. This might be due to the reason that America could have got to level of low budget.

Before the 2018 statement, the one-year performance of Trump and its consequences came out to be not so effective but in fact, the consequences were worse. The Taliban became more stubborn by increase of U.S. troops and they seized the Afghan provinces named as Ghazni and Farah. The lifting of Obama’s era air bombing restriction resulted in the killing of innocent Afghan people by air striking and drones attack. NATO forces were increased in number in Obama’s era to fight in Afghanistan but in the era of Trump, the troops from countries who have signed NATO became lesser in number as Italy and Turkey decreased the number of their troops. This all had made one thing clear that Trump’s views are outrageous and in real world, he is not being able to fulfil what he has promised to.

Trump’s policy towards Pakistan

Pakistan is a country which has always faced ebbs and flows in regard to its terms with the America. At one time, Pakistan has enjoyed the status of most-allied country with the U.S. and at other times, the bond has got so weaken that it almost turned out to be a bond of hostility. But most of the times, America had manipulated Pakistan in spite of the fact that Pakistan had worked for America’s interest by side-corning its own national interests. Pakistan, since its independence, have been proving itself to be a good friend to America. Initially,

Muhammad Owais

Pakistan signed CENTO and SEATO treaties with America for its security concerns and it proved beneficial for America in containing communism. (Javed, 2015) Later on, Pakistan became a mediator for making the terms better between America and China. After the attack of 9/11, Pakistan's support to America in war against terrorism was a hallmark of their strong bilateral bond. In 2003, Pakistan was given a special status of non-NATO ally of America. But this friendship has started getting to face downfall since when the 45th president of America Donald Trump has taken the charge. Trump is so outrageous that whenever he makes a statement regarding Pakistan, the relationship gets few steps backwards.

The South Asia's environment is getting changed day by day, by the rapid economic growth of India and Pakistan's growth and development as Pakistan is now the prominent hub of economic corridor initiated by China which is connecting Central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, Russia, and Iran. But Trump and his administration along with India are strictly opposing the China's OBOR initiative and as Pakistan is its partner, U.S. had warned Islamabad and asked to consider its foreign policy especially policy for Washington. (Ayres, 2018)

Trump has clearly blamed Pakistan for the instability in the region and has never avoided to talk trash about Pakistan because now, to stronger the ties with Pakistan is not in America's favor anymore. The U.S. neither has patience nor has resources for supporting Pakistan. Trump has declared his policy of 'America First' in his election campaign as well as during the announcement of National Security Strategy. Instead of bonding with Pakistan, U.S. administration and Trump find it more beneficial to bond with India as its economic growth and power on Indian Ocean is going to give huge advantage to America, especially in balancing China's rising influence in the region. Besides all this, the fact that rivalry between forever enemies India and Pakistan is likely to be increased by the acts and statements of Trump. (Fontaine, 2019)

Pakistan used to enjoy many favors made by America for being its non-NATO ally. Pakistan got almost 18.8-billion-dollar economic aid and 14.4-billion-dollar military aid under the shadow of this non-NATO ally status. This status was given under Control Act of Arms Export and it was declared by the U.S. State Department that Pakistan is not subjected to suspension of military assistance and this was done under the Act of Protection of members of American Service. It was committed by the American government that Pakistan would be provided with all kinds of technology and weapon with priority delivery. Later on, this all got changed as soon as Trump came. In fact, Pakistan had to face the suspension of aid of worth \$300 million. (George, 2017) This is the reason why Pakistan's people do not like Trump and they have a sense of distrust and insecurity regarding that person. The reason to this might also be that nation of Pakistan have understood the game that America is manipulative country that uses other states as an object, like in time of need American administration strengthen bonds with that particular state, and as soon as America gets its aim fulfilled, it throws the respective country and commitment and promises made earlier to the country into the trash box.

*U.S. President Trump Policies towards South Asia with Particular Reference to
Afghanistan, India and Pakistan*

Conclusion

This research paper concluded that in near future, for the stability of the region, Pakistan along with other states of region like Afghanistan and India have to make compromises if they really want to see a prosperous South Asia. Pakistan should take out ways to resolve the issue of Durand Line. Countries of the region should understand that role of China is very much vital for the settlement of the matters of Afghanistan. America should too make efforts to bring peace not only in Afghanistan but also in the whole region because it is the one of the highly populated regions of the world, and therefore, is vital for the economic and social growth of whole world. But these suggestions would not make any difference if they would not get serious consideration by the countries of the region. The strategy of Trump, right now, is directly or indirectly bifurcating the region. Bipolar region could never workout as it didn't during the cold war and eventually the results were drastic. Pro Indian policy is the true depiction that America for its own national interest, would never let the peaceful settlement of Kashmir issue happen. America should stop manipulating Pakistan and all other countries for its own personal or national interest. Strategic convergence should be the base for any new relationship between two states in the future and peace should be ensured in every part of the region.

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Muhammad Owais

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