



THE EVOLUTION OF ROLLER COASTER RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract

The relationship between the US and Pakistan has always been defined by the shifts in international system in terms of major events. Pakistan has always been dependent on the United States for economic, military, and technological support due to its strategic arms race with India, which is a regional power in South Asia. The United States, on the other hand, was interested in keeping security relationship with Pakistan in order to reduce the influence of the Soviet Union in the region. India has historically been closer ally of the Soviet due to the socialist leaning of its ruling party; The Congress. It had always resisted strategic relationship with Washington, which had provided an opportunity to Islamabad to get maximum benefit from the United States' policy of containment in South Asia. Islamabad became the frontline ally of the US in its policy of containment during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. The Afghan crisis period during the Cold War was the only phase when the bilateral relationship had reached the level of strategic one. The United States had given significant military and economic assistance to Pakistan and Islamabad had also immensely assisted the Afghan Mujahideen against the Soviet Union. This strategic relationship did not continue after the Afghan war and was followed by a period of negligence, economic and military sanctions and political indifference.

This paper specifically discusses the trend in the bilateral relationship since the beginning and identifies the major factors that have kept the relationship roller coaster. This paper contains seven sections by discussing the nature of relationship in different decades since its establishment in 1947. The first phase was the period establishing the relationship, which was aimed at the containment of Soviet influence in the region. The second decade was defined by the emergence of political differences and direction of the two countries on major issues. The third decade is considered the period of miscommunication and disappointments. The fourth was reached the desired level when their strategic interests aligned in Afghanistan. It again was followed by the period of sanctions and indifferences because of the emergence of New World Order, when the United States decided to focus on non-traditional issues like terrorism, nuclear proliferation, human rights and democracy. The final phase was the period after the event of 9/11, when Pakistan was faced with the option of either with us or against us. The primary factor in the bilateral relationship was the nature of international system, which kept influencing the bilateral relationship. It shows that they are transactional partners, which is highly dependent upon the nature of international system, not strategic one, which is above the influence of changes in the system.

Key Words: Strategic partnership, allied ally, Washington, Pakistan, international system.



1. INTRODUCTION:

The Neo-liberal World Order that has come into existence at the end of the Second World War with the establishment of plethora of international institutions in order to regulate affairs between states has been overwhelmingly dominated by the western powers, especially the United States of America. At the superficial level, it seems like an order that has been regulating affairs between states on the basis of meritocracy, rule of law and justice, but when they are observed and studied in detail, it reveals that they promote a specific kind of political, economic and security agendas that are promoting the interests of the United States. This paper specifically looks into the cases that how international system dominated by various institutions like the IMF, the World Bank, The Asian Development Bank and Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, which have been used by the United States of America against Pakistan as tool of foreign policy to achieve its security and political objectives. This raises a bigger question on the credibility of the International Organizations, institutions and regimes to promote international agenda for the betterment of member states in order to reduce economic disparities resolve political disputes and eliminate poverty. Once an image of these institutions has been established as tool of the United States foreign policy, it will be profoundly difficult for them implement their agendas in developing countries. This paper analyses how the above mentioned images has been established in case of IMF bailout packages to Pakistan. There is a common perception in Pakistan that IMF is not driving by structural reforms to reduce inflations, control trade deficit and eliminate current account deficit, but promotes the United States political agenda against specific regimes in Pakistan (Abbasi, 2019).

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This paper specifically discusses the trend in the bilateral relationship since the beginning and identifies the major factors that have kept the relationship roller coaster. This paper contains seven sections by discussing the nature of relationship in different decades since its establishment in 1947. The first phase was the period establishing the relationship, which was aimed at the containment of Soviet influence in the region. The second decade was defined by the emergence of political differences and direction of the two countries on major issues. The third decade is considered the period of miscommunication and disappointments. The fourth was reached the desired level when their strategic interests aligned in Afghanistan. It again was followed by the period of sanctions and indifferences because of the emergence of New World Order, when the United States decided to focus on non-traditional issues like terrorism, nuclear proliferation, human rights and democracy. The final phase was the period after the event of 9/11, when Pakistan was faced with the option of either with us or against us. The primary factor in the bilateral relationship was the nature of international system, which kept influencing the bilateral relationship. It shows that they are transactional partners, which is highly dependent upon the nature of international system, not strategic one, which is above the influence of changes in the system.



2. THE INCEPTION OF BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP:

Pakistan started facing massive economic and security challenges after independence. The rivalry with India on major issues like millions of refugees, transfer of financial assets and the accession of Kashmir did not allow Pakistan to start as normal nation state to focus on nation building and economic development. These issues forced Islamabad to turn into a security state to ensure the survival and territorial integrity of the country against India, which was a bigger and powerful country. These developments were taking place at the background of the Cold War between the United States and Soviet Union that had divided the world into two ideological blocks. India had the option of pursuing an independent foreign policy, because there was not any major threat to the survival and security of the country. Pakistan, on the other hand, did not have the luxury of time and option of independent foreign policy due to its security and economic challenges (America, 2017). Therefore, it opted to become part of the western block in order to address its economic and military challenges. This was the beginning of roller coaster relationship between the two countries. The bilateral relationship has always been dependent over the nature of international system. It goes to the peak where the United States starts treating Pakistan as strategic ally by giving it economic and military assistance without any condition and then goes back to the bottom and put numerous sanctions. Sometimes, it has been treated as Israel, the other time like Iran.

3. THE BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP FROM 1947-1960:

One of the major characteristic of this period was the lack of political differences between Islamabad and Washington. They both agreed on the major challenges in the International system. This relationship started with the official visit of Pakistan's first Prime Minister Liaquat Ali Khan to Washington in May 1950. Ideally Pakistan should have aligned itself with the Soviet Union due to its geo-graphical proximity and cordial relationship with China; which was a close ally of Moscow. However, Islamabad decided to continue the British legacy of special relationship with Washington. It did not only establish cordial relation with the United States, but also committed to various security pacts in order to contain the spread of communism in the region. In the first phase, the security establishment orchestrated crackdowns against Marxist and Communists political parties in the country by arresting their leaders and banning social political parties under the charges of conspiracy against the country. These developments were for two purposes; first to eliminate Indian Congress sympathizers influence from the domestic politics, because there were strong associations between them before partition. Secondly, it wanted to ensure the Washington of its anti-communist credential as an ally (Hasnat, 2011).

Soon Pakistan signed the Mutual Defense Agreement with the United States and also became a part of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) with capitalist states on the wish of the USA. It became closest ally of Washington in Asia, which ensured the flow of military and financial assistance. It started favoring and supporting the US' stance during the Korean crisis, Japanese Peace Treaty, and Suez Canal crisis. The relations between the two states reached the next level when the US' President, Eisenhower, officially visited Pakistan in December 1959, to discuss matters of mutual interests. Hence, this initial era was cordial for both states and they enjoyed good relations (Cheema, 2021).

4. The Emergence of Political Cleavages in 1960-1970:

The political cleavages between the two countries started emerging in 1960s. It started with U-2 incident in 1958, when the US U-2; a spy plane, took a flight from Pakistani Badabber airbase, Peshawar, without confirming the real nature of the plane. The plane during its mission was shot down by the Soviet Union and threatened the US in general and Pakistan in particular. Soviet Union warned Pakistan of severe consequences by permitting US activities in the region (Ahmed, 2004). The second challenge was the United States military assistance to India in Indo-Sino War in 1962, when the Kennedy Administration decided to favor and supply arms to New-Delhi, which disturbed the balance of power in the region. As a result, Pakistan started cordial relationship with China (Jaffrelot, 2016). The disappointment exacerbated in 1965, when India attacked Pakistan and the

US put arms embargo on both of them, which badly affected Islamabad, because of its close relation with Washington.

5. THE PERIOD OF MISCOMMUNICATION AND MISUNDERSTANDING (1970-1980):

1970s was the period of instability and miscommunication between Pakistan and the United States. President Nixon decision to open diplomatic relation with People's Republic of China (PRC) had provided an opportunity to Pakistan to use its good office to facilitate rapprochement between them. The US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, used the visit of Pakistan as pretext to manage its secret visit to China in July 1971. Pakistan's president General Yahya Khan played good offices in the rapprochement of US-China relationships. But US-Pakistan relations forerunning the 1971 war were categorized by meager communication and misunderstanding. The Nixon government was confused to help the state in the East Pakistan crisis or not to interfere in internal affairs of the state. In this situation, the US claimed to send the Seventh Fleet to the Bay of Bengal to threaten India, but the Seventh fleet patrolling in the Indian Ocean never arrived (Hasnat, 2011).

During the Zulfikar Ali Bhutto period, Pakistan had realized that unilateral dependence on the United States against India was not safe option. Therefore, it started establishing cordial relationship with Soviet Union and Strategic relationship with China (Afridi, 2011). Prime Minister Zulfikar Bhutto also started implementing many socialist ideas domestically. The Indian nuclear blast in 1974 created another security threat to the survival of Pakistan immediately after the East Pakistan debacle. Bhutto announced to development of nuclear weapons even eating grass against the agenda of the US. The announcement of Bhutto to build nuclear weapon even if the nation had to eat grass created further political differences with the United States. This period was characterized as phase of misunderstanding and miscommunication between Islamabad and Washington (Baxter, 1991).

6. PAKISTAN AS FRONTLINE ALLY OF THE US (1980-1990):

In 1977, the Bhutto government was overthrown by General Zia in military Coup D'état. The former PM Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was given capital punishment in fake case. General Zia-ul-Haq started completely controlling every component of the state and embarked upon a journey to Islamize the society. He did not only put political workers in prison, but also implemented strict restriction on media and civil society in the country. General Zia's period has been considered as black one in the history of Pakistan. The Carter administration in the United States did not favor Zia's draconian domestic policies against the political workers and civil society. He rather established cordial relationship with India as the only democracy in the region. The Carter administration was pro-democracy and established relations on the basis of democracy. However, the situation changed immediately in December 1979 after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as today Russia invasion of Ukraine altered the dynamics of relations among states (Baxter, 1991).

The event of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan had provided an opportunity to Pakistan to establish strategic relationship with the United States, which had been desired from the beginning (Baxter, 1991). Pakistan always wanted the United States to treat it as during the Afghan war on the basis of its willingness to cooperate with the United States to any extend. It had been a dream objective of Pakistan's foreign policy to establish strategic relationship with the United States, China and Saudi Arabia. Soon US assured Pakistan's that its Sovereignty, territorial integrity and security could not be compromised at any cost (KHAN, 2013). The Iranian revolution, on the other hand, deprived the United States from a strategic partner in the region, therefore, it did not have any other option except Pakistan for strategic maneuvering against the Soviet in Afghanistan. The US started providing economic and military aid to counter Soviet aggression in the region. The US President Carter convinced congress to pass legislations to allow military and economic aid to Pakistan to defend itself. Whereas, General Zia refused President Carter offer of \$400 million by calling it "peanuts" and considered it insufficient to ensure the state's security (Hasnat, 2011). When President Reagan became President, he immediately announced \$3.2 billion package of military and economic assistance for Pakistan for a period of 6 years, which was provided another package of \$4 billion in 1986. The US also detached many legislative constraints for providing aid to states with



nuclear program (Butt, 2019). In this period they experienced cordial relations though out the 1980s.

7. THE NEW WORLD ORDER AND NON-TRADITIONAL THREATS 1990-2000:

At the end of the Cold War and after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the relationship between Pakistan and the United States totally changed from the one in 1980s. A new World Order came into existence. The United States started focusing on non-traditional threats like nuclear proliferation, terrorism, ethnic violence, democracy and human rights. On these issues, there were major differences between Islamabad and Washington. Pakistan expected the United States to ignore its performance on the above mentioned issues as they were ignored during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The United States could not give the same wavers as during the 1980s due to change in priorities from containment of the Communism to other non-traditional security challenges. Pakistan became the victim of various amendments passed by the US Congress in late 1980s, which were related to non-traditional issues. Islamabad, on the other hand, expected the United States to pay back in term of policy support due to its sacrifices and unequivocal support during the Afghan War. In 1990, military and economic assistance were stopped under the Pressler Amendment on the issue of the nuclear program. Moreover, the delivery of F-16 was also cancelled for which the Pakistan had already paid \$6.18 million (Kronstadt, 2012).

The final straw that broke the camel back was nuclear explosion in May 1998. On 13 May 1998, India conducted its nuclear test and claimed itself as a nuclear power state. This situation disturbed the balance of power of the region and start endangering the security of the state. In order to balance Indian threat and bring nuclear parity in the region, Pakistan also conducted nuclear test on 28th May, 1998 against the United States' strong insistence, which triggered a number of sever economic and military sanctions under the Glenn Amendment. Germany, Japan, and Canada combined with the USA cut off bilateral aid to New Delhi and Islamabad (Kux, 2001). Nuclear tests were subsequently followed by Kargil Crisis, when some guerrilla fighters along with Pakistani army occupied the Kargil top, which could have cut off the connection between India and Kashmir. The Kargil occupation started war between India and Pakistan under the umbrella of nuclear weapons, which was the nightmare of the world leaders. They were on the edge of using nuclear war heads against each other. The intervention from the United States eventually defused the tension between India and Pakistan and forced the latter to unconditionally withdraw forces from the Kargil top, which inflicted high casualties on the Pakistani army. This episode was latter used by General Musharraf to impose Martial Law and overthrew two third majority regime of Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif. In the New World Order (NWO), Pakistan was turning into a headache for the policy makers in the United States and was, therefore, under different layer of sanctions related to terrorism, nuclear proliferation, human rights, democracy and protection of minorities (Muhammad Asif Malik, 2014).

8. PAKISTAN AS MOST ALLIED ALLY 2001-2020:

The incident of 9/11 (September 11, 2001), the terrorist attacks on the United States by Al-Qaeda shocked the whole world and brought fundamental changes in world politics. The US President, George Bush, announced a global "war on terrorism" against Al-Qaeda and other extremist groups. Moreover, the US demanded the mastermind of 9/11 Osama Bin Laden from Afghanistan but the Taliban government refused to do so. The Taliban rejection resulted in US and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) invasion of Afghanistan. The Pak-US relations deteriorated due to Pakistan's close relations with the Taliban. However, Pakistan was given the only options that "are you with us or against us". As a result, President Musharraf announced full support for the US against the Taliban in Afghanistan and also got a non-NATO ally status (Muhammad Subtain, 2016). After the tragedy of 9/11, Pakistan's economic situation started improving; the value of Pakistani currency improved, average remittances also increased and a considerable decrease was also seen in fiscal deficit at GDP. The new wave of aids and loans started to Pakistan from the USA, World Bank, IMF, and Western governments. The Musharraf's era experienced good relations with USA.



There were three demands of the United States in the post 9/11 period; elimination of the Al-Qaeda, prevention of cross border terrorism in Kashmir and stability in Afghanistan. These were major policy demands from Islamabad, which did not match with the national security interest of Pakistan. Islamabad on principle agreed with Washington to support on all three issues, but always calculated the risk on ground. This created trust deficit between them and the latter started accusing the former of double standard and hypocrisy. Pakistani establishment believed it did not disagree with Washington, but always sequence operations against each group according to its schedule. On the subject of Al-Qaeda, the support was unequivocal and wholehearted, which even created insurgency in FATA (Kronstadt, 2012).

Pakistan's military operations against Al-Qaeda are major reason behind the creation of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), which still carries terrorist attacks inside the country. Islamabad also ceased support to the different insurgent groups in Kashmir and the level of violence came down dramatically after the reduction of support. Many insurgent group members joined TTP against the Pakistan state for its policy shift on the issue of Kashmir. There were differences on the subject of the Afghan Taliban. Pakistan resisted military operations against them because of tremendous pressure due to the TTP and always suggested political compromise between the Taliban and the Afghan government. Islamabad did more for Washington than any other period since the establishment of the relationship, but it did not finish on a winning vote due to policy differences between the two parties. They should have better sorted out their differences and understood each other limitations in the war against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda. The Washington current policy of containment towards Pakistan and deep strategic relationship with New Delhi would not serve the interest of either country (Hasnat, 2011).

In this period, there were three administrations in the United States; The Bush Administration, the Obama Administration and the Trump Administration. All three of them had diametrically different policies from each other towards Pakistan. The Bush administration started the war against terrorism after the incident of 9/11. He successfully occupied Afghanistan and Iraq without any major resistance in the beginning. One of the primary demands of the Bush administration was the elimination of the Al-Qaeda in tribal areas and toppling of the Taliban government in Kabul. These two demands had immense repercussions on Pakistan's internal stability and foreign policy in the region. The military operations against Al-Qaeda started a waves of suicide attacks in the last two decades, killed thousands of civilian and security personnel, raised insurgency in FATA and Swat, displaced millions of people in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, crippled economy of the country, profoundly damaged industrialization and trade, immensely disturbed law and order and engaged Pakistani troops in tribal areas for two decades, which has been bleeding the economy, society and security. On the external front, an anti-Pakistan regime was restored in Kabul, which immediately established cordial relationship with India and started interfering in Pakistan's internal politics. Pakistan suffered massively in this period and paid a huge price for supporting the United States against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. In return, it was given some economic and military assistance, but there was no comparison between the damages and compensation to the security and economy of Pakistan in this period. It was a forced strategic shift to move against the extremist elements, which were closed ally of the establishment in the previous two decades in Kashmir and Afghanistan. The United States, on the other hand, killed or captured top leadership of the Al-Qaeda, establish a stable government in Afghanistan and sublet the war against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in FATA to Pakistan by accommodating its expenses in the form of coalition support fund. In the meanwhile, it shifted its focus to Middle East by occupying Iraq, which turned out to be a nightmare for it, because there was not any Pakistan who could have shared its burden in Iraq by closing border and killing the insurgents on the other side (Jaffrelot, 2016).

The Obama administration had altogether different policy than the Bush administration and started focusing on the Afghan Taliban and stability of Afghanistan. The Taliban started an insurgency in Afghanistan in 2007 and 2008. They took confidence from the Iraqi's resistance to the US occupation. They also started suicide attacks, spectacular attacks and multi-pronged attacks. The Haqqani network was particularly lethal in suicide and spectacular attacks in Kabul and surrounding

areas. The United States started pressuring Pakistan for military operations in North and South Waziristans against the Taliban and Haqqani network. In this period, Zardari government did number of massive military operations in Swat, South Waziristan, Bajor and Khyber agencies. The US also increased drone strikes multiple times in tribal areas. The entire FATA turned into a battle ground between the Pakistani Taliban; which were the product of military operation against Al-Qaeda, and the security forces. Pakistan's army had to shift several fighting and strikes arms from the eastern border with India to Swat and FATA against the Taliban. The bilateral relationship between Islamabad and Washington further deteriorated instead of improvement and trust deficit further increased due to suspicions that Pakistan did not target the right people who were involved in insurgency in Afghanistan. On other hand, the bilateral relationship between the United States and India move from the transactional to strategic one due to alignment of national interest on major issues. India started emerging as pillar of the US policy in South Asia and Indian Pacific (Kronstadt, 2012).

The third administration of President Trump, as on other domestic issues, had totally different position on the issue of the Pakistani and the Afghan Taliban, and Al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda problem was finished. Osama Bin Laden was dead. Its capacity to attack the United States was diminished. The Trump administration did not view the TTP as problem of the United States. He considered it as the Pakistan's problem, which basically started from military operations in FATA. It refused to pay coalition support fund for the military activities or post operation rehabilitation in tribal areas. On the Afghan Taliban and Afghanistan, the Trump administration opened back channel discussion to reach a political agreement in Afghanistan. He wanted to focus the United States on strategic struggle against China, economy at home and strategic arms race for the hegemony of world politics. Pakistan supported the Trump policy of political settlement in Afghanistan with the Taliban, but it was not the primary actor in the negotiation between them. Finally, an agreement was made between them and the United States eventually withdrew from Kabul, which fell to the Taliban in August 2021. The clock for the Taliban returned to period before September 11, 2001. It has conquered the entire country without any resistance in period of one month and the Afghan Army collapsed as house of cards. The relationship between Pakistan and the United States returned to the Pre-9/11 period. The only difference is the level of distrust and political differences have increased to the unimaginable level. There is not any possibility of friendship between them in the foreseeable future (Cheema, 2021).

9. CONCLUSION:

The nature of bilateral relationship between Pakistan and the United States has always been dependent upon the structure of international system. United States, being the hegemonic power in the world, has the option of engagement and dis-engagement from Pakistan, which has made the relationship roller coaster. One of the primary reasons for the rollercoaster nature of relationship is its dimension. The bilateral relationship is security centric. It had greater scope during the Cold War, when Pakistan had clear policy on the subject of Communism and containment of Soviet Union. India, which was the other major country, was relatively neutral in the bilateral struggle between Washington and Moscow. In the new emerging international system that is characterized by struggle between China and the United States in Asia, the emergence of India as regional power, the strategic partnership between New-Delhi and Washington, the emergence of Russia as military power, the rise of pro-China countries in a separate block, there are bleak chances of friendly relationship between Pakistan and the United States in the foreseeable future. The differences and distrust will increase between them, which could lead to sanctions and negligence on the part of the United States and closeness of Islamabad with Beijing on the Pakistani side. The pro-American identity of Pakistan has vanished and a new Pro-China identity will emerge, which would not be a good sign for bilateral relationship with the United States instead of massive infrastructure for friendly relationship.

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