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Military leaders from Pakistan, Afghanistan and the U.S.

PAK - U.S. Relations Post U.S. / ISAF Forces Draw Down from Afghanistan

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Henry John's words, a century and half old, still guide state-to-state relations. Undeniably, Pakistan-U.S. relations have been transactional with each criticizing the other for not fulfilling the requirements of the transactions. Such feelings are not likely to fade in the immediate future. In the long term it will depend on peace and stability in Afghanistan, particularly after the U.S. draw down. The prevailing situation between Pakistan and the U.S. points towards a challenging future.

The Past: The Beginning of Pakistan – U.S. Relations

Post WW-II, the U.S. emerged as one of the stronger global powers. The U.S. strategic interests were containment of the then USSR and communism. Promotion of capitalism and democracy were the main objectives. To counter Soviet threats, the U.S. promoted and formed global alliances. Proxy wars and struggle for influence through alliances and partnerships were key features of the cold war period. In the post-cold war era the U.S. interests focused on global peace and stability, avoidance of the spread nuclear weapons and Weapon of Mass Destruction (WMD), capitalism and free trade. The 9/11 attacks led the U.S. to spearhead the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) with active engagement commencing in Afghanistan. Over a decade of war, the U.S. forces draw down from Afghanistan is planned later this

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year. Currently, the U.S. policy makers are focusing on South Asia and the Pacific. This could be the starting point of pursuance of competing interests between the U.S. and China.

Since Pakistan's independence in 1947, territorial integrity, political and economic stability have been the main concerns. Pakistan's security concerns have always been India centric. With unresolved Kashmir issues and a checkered history, these concerns have not subsided. The Indian nuclear programme introduced another dimension to Pakistani security calculus. Consequently, Pakistan pursued its own programme to address the imbalance. Pakistan interests in Afghanistan, discussed later, were earlier termed to be aimed at gaining strategic depth. Pakistan saw support to Afghan mujahedeen as a check to the Soviet spread of communism and the so called Soviet effort to reach warm waters. Beside traditional security concerns, the current Pakistan internal law and order situation has added another dimension to country's security issues and outlook. Pakistan was created based on religious ideology. The identity debate regarding the country being a religious or a liberal democratic state is not yet fully settled. The separation of mosque and state remains a central question. The religious parties have so far have not been voted into power; however, they wield significant power. The fundamentalist groups are a threat to the government's stability at every turn. The Kashmir issue has also been central to the rise of such tendencies. These factors make the situation unique to western democracies. The freedom of speech on religious issues is a sensitive topic and even mere words such as "Crusade" or "Enduring Justice" evokes negative reactions.

Post-independence, the Pakistani leadership approached the relationship with the U.S. with high expectations and hopes but with few institutional arrangements to study the U.S. decision-making process to achieve this goal. The civilian leadership earlier on had lost control over the security issues due to lack of experience and constant domestic political wrangling. The U.S. sees Pakistan's military to be more influential, and over the course of Pakistan history had no apprehension about working with military rulers.¹ This has been the feature of Pakistan-U.S. relations. Most Pakistani allege that the U.S. pursuance of its strategic interests has overshadowed Pakistan's concerns. They also do not believe in the sincerity of the U.S. assertion that the civilian leadership in Pakistan needs to have oversight of the military. The limits and bounds of the relations have not been properly spelled out. For example, the leasing of an airbase in Peshawar and the stationing of drones on Pakistani soil have been kept secret. The Pakistani leadership even keeps their routine dealings with the U.S secret.² This dependence of Pakistani leadership on the U.S. goodwill makes them vulnerable. The U.S. policy makers on their part often use this power to their advantage.

The Present: Current Pakistan – U.S. Relations

Due to the on-off nature of relations with the U.S., there is a strong perception in Pakistan that the U.S. can embrace anyone when needed and discard him when its interests dictate. The U.S. government seems to be aware of this perception and would like to remain engaged. In the immediate time frame, it would serve the U.S. to have a peaceful and less expensive withdrawal from Afghanistan. In the long term, it would enhance the U.S. reputation as a reliable ally. However, if Afghanistan emerges in turmoil, the situation would change. It would be hard for the U.S. to accept that the reasons for an unsuccessful outcome could be other than Pakistani support to select Afghan groups. History and international politics are generally supportive of such trend.

Pakistan's joining of cold war SEATO³ and CENTO⁴ alliances, provision of an air base to the U.S.⁵, support to the Afghan freedom fighters⁶ to resist USSR in Afghanistan and alliance against Global War on Terror (GWOT) as result of the tragic event of 9/11 are the highs points of the relations. However, the on-off relations have not been smooth and huge trust deficit exists between the two states.

Presently, U.S.-Pakistan relations are marred by a number of concerns marking the lows in the relationship. Pakistan's adoption of a pro-U.S./Western policy was aimed at alleviating its India centric security concerns and to seek economic assistance.⁷ Ceding of East Pakistan,⁸ Pakistan nuclear weapons⁹ and proliferation concerns, Pakistan's alleged support to select Afghan groups and drone attacks are the major low points filled with crises such as the Osama Bin Laden (OBL) raid, the Salala and Raymond Davis incidents, and the NATO supply line closure and sanctions¹⁰ imposition among many others.

Pakistan cannot expect to benefit from a trust marred relationship with the sole super power. Pakistan's prevailing domestic difficulties call for prudence. Pakistan is unlikely to get any huge aid favours like in the past, but it still needs to have good relations with the U.S. The U.S. tax payer may not be willing to do so in the future partly because of the mistrust and misspending of aid and partly due to domestic pressure.

Pakistan faces difficult internal law and order and economic situations. It would take some time to improve. The past and current Pakistani governments are unlikely to subscribe to the idea that their actions and policies had contributed to it. It can be expected that each new government would keep blaming the past government and external forces to include following pro-U.S. policies and sanctions.¹¹

Many consider Pakistan's strategic approach towards achievement of its goals to be flawed. It is generally believed that the military and military security concerns guide the national agenda. Links with select Taliban groups and networks do not lend credibility to the plausible deniability argument. At the same time the U.S. strategy also has been fluctuating over the years. Grouping Afghanistan and adjacent Pakistani tribal areas into a single "Af-Pak" strategy, back and forth with Pakistan, an early announcement of withdrawal from Afghanistan, a surge, and continuous tolerance of corruption in Afghanistan have not helped advance the U.S. cause.

Interestingly, the three highs discussed earlier in U.S.-Pakistan relations have been centered on Afghanistan.¹² The source of recent mistrust is also largely due to situation in Afghanistan. Pakistan has the longest border and close religious links with Afghanistan. Afghan Pashtoons consider themselves as the core of Afghanistan and almost two-third of the Pashtoons live in Pakistan. Pakistan desires a situation in Afghanistan which respects the boundary between the two countries. Pakistan subscribes to a power sharing and proportionate representation mechanism between the Pashtoons and the non-Pashtoon populations of Afghanistan. With the rise of the Pakistani Taliban creating insurgency like situation in the northern part of Pakistan, Pakistan supports a bilateral agreement between the U.S. and Afghanistan. Some analysts in Pakistan also believe that the present Afghan government and army is not likely to be a stabilizing force for long, especially after the U.S. draw down. They base their argument on the economic (finances to support the existing military and other infrastructure) and prevailing political situation. The victorious presidential candidate's skills and accommodation of Taliban would largely determine the scale and scope of possible resistance and political stability. It is believed that the ethnic fault lines would be predominantly exploited by various groups challenging the government of Afghanistan. Some analysts in Pakistan believe that Pakistan needs strong allies in Afghanistan to counter other regional players influence in Afghanistan.

The Pakistani ISI has shot to fame in the U.S. in recent years, mostly for the wrong reasons. The CIA has been at the center of conspiracy rumors among Pakistanis since assassination of the country's first PM,¹³ allegedly for the refusal to provide an air base to the U.S. President Zia's death is also shrouded in mystery. Bhutto, who was hanged by Zia, alleged before the Court that he was being punished for pursuing the nuclear programme. The U.S. killing of Pakistani Taliban leaders, who were willing to enter into negotiations with Pakistani authorities, has also not gone well with the Pakistanis

including the current civilian government. The Raymond Davis, Dr Shakil Afridi, and Osama Bin Laden (OBL) episodes and U.S. assertion that the “Haqqani Network is a veritable arm of Pakistan Inter-Services Intelligence Agency”¹⁴ are issues that run tangentially to the publically announced claims of intelligence/ information sharing or ally on GWOT. The rebirth of a long-term partnership between the two countries has not evolved as the former Secretary Powell had hoped for.

U.S. drone attacks have become a contentious issue. Pakistan considers them counterproductive, against its sovereignty, and against international laws. The killing of innocent civilians also raises human rights issues. The U.S asserts that actually the terrorist groups operating with impunity in Pakistan’s tribal areas are violating the sovereignty of Pakistan. With regard to OBL, the majority of Pakistanis do not resent his killing. However, the conduct of the operation has cast the civilian government and military leadership in an awkward position. Complacency or ignorance both reflect on the military negatively. Pakistan’s inability to detect the incoming raid has raised question about the competence of the armed forces.¹⁵ The killing of twenty-four military personnel on the Pak-Afghan border¹⁶ along with above factors is fuelling high anti-U.S. sentiments.

Some U.S. policy makers believe that Pakistan is following a policy to keep the U.S engaged in Afghanistan. It is suggested that it makes Pakistan relevant and helps the country’s economy. They are also not happy with Pakistan’s shady handling of assistance. Pakistan, having lost over forty-thousand civilian / military personnel and significant economic losses, complains of non-acknowledgement of its sacrifices by the U.S. Pakistan support to select Taliban networks is also a contentious issue. U.S authorities have repeatedly accused Pakistan of duplicity. Pakistan is accused of undermining its neighbour’s security by turning a blind eye to select terrorist groups. To U.S authorities, it seems inconceivable that OBL could have lived that long without support from the inside. Some of the leaked documents portray Pakistan as being an untrustworthy ally. Former U.S. Defense Secretary Gates suggested in his recent book that doing business with Pakistan was not to his liking but he had to defend the country as part of the U.S policy. The U.S. administration believes that till the time it remains involved in Afghanistan it would need Pakistan. This makes the working extremely complex.

Regional Relationships

Pakistan –U.S. relations are also greatly affected by the two countries relations with other regional and extra regional countries. Pakistan was a prime channel for the U.S. efforts to reconcile with China.¹⁷ Pakistan places great emphasis on its relations with China. The Sino-U.S. competition is likely to intensify in future. Occasionally, the nuclear cooperation between the two countries has raised eyebrows in the U.S. citing violation of the Nuclear Supply Group guidelines. Pakistan has also been accused of providing China access to U.S. technologies¹⁸. China may want Pakistan to play a balancing role against India. China supports a political settlement in Afghanistan instead of a religious group victory. At present, U.S and Chinese interests have not taken a sharp competing nature as far as Pakistan is concerned.

With unresolved Kashmir issues and a history of wars, Pakistan and India have always approached each other with suspicion. India considers Pakistan to be harbouring terrorism across the border, particularly in the Indian held Kashmir. Pakistan alleges that India is supporting anti-Pakistan elements. On this count, U.S silence on the large number of Indian consulates in Afghanistan is also seen with suspicion by the Pakistanis. As unrealistic and strange as it may sound, the U.S-India strategic partnership is seen as a challenge to Pakistan’s relations with the U.S. Not much hope can be attached on normalization of relations between India and Pakistan, at least in the near future. The Indian-Afghan strategic agreement indicates the Afghan tilts towards India. India, mindful of its capacity and Pakistani

concerns, is avoiding active military presence in Afghanistan; however, it has linked Iran's Chah Bahr port to Afghanistan to reduce Afghanistan's dependence on Pakistan. Pakistan does not see the heavy Indian presence in Afghanistan favourably.

U.S. policy makers also have concerns over the Pakistani nuclear programme. They believe that Pakistan's weapons stockpile is growing, has a history of conflicts with India, a presence of extremist elements, and a trans-terrorist network. However, Pakistanis feel uneasy with these concerns. The U.S. nuclear cooperation agreement with India is considered preferential in favour of India. Similar apprehensions are voiced against Israel as well. In this backdrop, the U.S. presence in Afghanistan is also seen as a threat to the country's strategic assets.

Pakistan and Iranian bi-lateral relations are affected by their relations with other regional and international players. Post USSR withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iran supported the Taliban and Northern Alliance respectively. Iran promotes the Shia sect; however, Pakistan sees this unfavourably, partly because it affects the religious sects' harmony in Pakistan and partly because of its good relations with Saudi Arabia. Pakistan supports Iran's nuclear programme for peaceful and energy purpose only. However, Iran puts Pakistan in the U.S camp and thus limits cooperation. Iran also has cordial relations with India. The U.S. sanctions also affect Pakistan-Iran cooperation. Pakistan has shown an inability to undertake its part of the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline as the international financial organizations under U.S. pressure are not likely to fund the project.¹⁹

Saudi Arabian policy towards Afghanistan has been shaped by its relations with Pakistan, the U.S., Iran, and promotion of Sunnis. Saudi Arabia provided substantial funding to Afghan Mujahedeen during their resistance. Since then, it has cultivated good relations with few of the Afghan groups. It also wishes to counter Iranian influence in Afghanistan. Riyadh's interests lie in a broad based Afghan government where the pro-Iran groups are not over represented. Al-Qaida leadership and the majority of its activist come from the Arabian Peninsula and have known anti-Kingdom views; therefore, it seems that Saudi interests are to keep the group isolated in the Pakistan/ Afghan region.

The Future: A Way Forward

The most important factor in future Pakistan-U.S. relations is probably the misunderstood mutual strategic interests. Pakistan security concerns have always been India centric whereas the U.S. necessarily does not share that perception. The U.S. concerns about Pakistan's nuclear programme add another dimension to the divergence. Pakistan desires a stable and pro-Pakistani, mostly Pashtoon, dominated government in Afghanistan. A large Indian presence in Afghanistan also raises concerns in Pakistan. The U.S. desires a terrorist haven free, pro-U.S., and democratic Afghanistan. Pakistan, owing to its geography, status among Muslim countries, population and proximity to the Middle East consider [believe] that the U.S. needs Pakistan. However, U.S. policy makers do not share this perception. Represented on a Venn diagram, the common area between the strategic interests of the two countries is likely to be much smaller than what each country propagates. Neither country's strategic calculus can be changed easily; therefore, an honest, transparent, and realistic review would help in bridging the trust deficit.

Equally applicable to every other nation, the future of U.S.-Pakistan relations lies in greater understanding of each other at political and economic levels. A re-evaluation and redefinition of relations based on pragmatism, realities and transparency is needed. The review should also consider how the erratic go-no go (some terming it as burden of history) can be addressed. The on and off interaction indicate that the minimum requirement would be long term engagement.

Diplomatic relations between the two countries should be based on realistic understanding and accommodation of each other's strategic interests. The U.S. should not force Pakistan to change its strategic calculus whereas Pakistan has to recognize the global interests of the U.S. Pakistan needs to realistically re-assess its strategic interests in Afghanistan and preferential treatment of various groups. Pakistan also needs to advance its relations with the U.S., divorced from Indian centrality. The incompatibilities need to be identified and the commonalities, even if limited, be used for long term relations.

Reconciliation and adjustment in Afghanistan is what U.S., Pakistan and the world at large need. Having said this, future U.S. and Pakistan relations need to be based on issues of mutual interest, free of Afghanistan related factors. U.S. leadership places demands on and exact actions from a country which they do not trust; however, their Pakistani counterparts want economic benefits while dealing with the U.S. and publically capitalize on anti-U.S. sentiments. The U.S. drone attacks may be a tactical success but many agree that it is a strategic error. Respect for Pakistan's sovereignty should serve as the starting point.

¹ *General Ayub Khan did the first military takeover in 1958 and the last one was by General Pervez Musharraf in 1999 who remained in power until 2007. The U.S worked smoothly with all four Pakistan military rulers namely Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan, Zia Ul Haq and Musharraf*

² *Documents from WikiLeaks reveals the Pakistan's PM hypocrisy on drone strikes where in public he opposed it but in private communicated to the U.S. authorities that he is not bothered as far as right targets were selected, however he would protest in the national assembly which would be for the public consumption.*

³ *The Southeast Asia Collective Defense Treaty, or Manila Pact, was signed on 8 September 1954 in Manila. Australia, France, New Zealand, Pakistan Philippines, Thailand, UK and the U.S were member of the organization.*

⁴ *The Central Treaty Organization was formed in 1955. Iran, Iraq, Pakistan, Turkey and UK were its members. The U.S joined the military committee of the alliance in 1958. It was dissolved in 1979.*

⁵ *Peshawar Air Station (Badaber) was a CIA – USAF listening post from 1958 until January 7, 1970, when the facility was formally closed. The air base used for spying on the USSR became a source of international and domestic controversy when a U.S spy plane was shot down by the Soviet Union threatening Pakistan of serious consequences.*

⁶ *Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates also funded the Mujahidden during the resistance.*

⁷ *Pakistan and U.S relations are sixty-seven years old as U.S established diplomatic ties with Pakistan barely two months after its independence in 1947.*

⁸ *Now Bangladesh*

⁹ *Pakistan maintain that its nuclear programme is a response to what it called 'nuclear threat and blackmailing' by India. Pakistani PM Bhutto, the architect of Pakistan nuclear programme, said that, 'We (Pakistanis) should develop nuclear weapons even if we have to eat grass.'*

¹⁰ *The sanctions were further tightened when India and Pakistan detonated nuclear weapons in 1998. Further sanctions were imposed on Pakistan due the 1999 military takeover Sanctions imposed under U.S. National Endowment for Democracy bill of 1983.*

¹¹ *The U.S is the biggest aid donor of Pakistan, yet more than seventy percent of Pakistanis do not look favourably towards the U.S. Similarly the U.S public places Pakistan among the five least favourite countries.*

¹² *Cold war alliance, support to mujahedeen post USSR invasion of Afghanistan and the GWOT.*

¹³ *An Afghan national assassinated PM Liaquat Ali Khan in 1951.*

¹⁴ *US Admiral Mike Mullen*

¹⁵ *Recently former U.S. ambassador to Pakistan Camron Munter has expressed such feelings in an interview to CFR radio interview.*

¹⁶ *On November 26, 2011, Twenty-four (24) Pakistani soldiers including two officers were killed in an aerial attack on Pakistani positions on Pak-Afghan border.*

¹⁷ *From Henry Kissinger memoir White House Years.*

¹⁸ *Sometimes reference is made by U.S mainstream media citing provision of parts of missiles fired by U.S against OBL in Afghanistan falling on Pakistani soil and access to helicopter parts that had met accident during the OBL operation.*

¹⁹ *Pakistan Finance Minister interview to local media persons on 17 Jan 2014.*