

## **Convergence and Divergence of Interests of Regional Players (Pakistan & India) and the US Security Policy in South Asia**

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### **Abstract:**

*South Asia has remained an important region in the foreign policy calculus of the US soon after the independence of Pakistan and India. The Cold War politics has been one of the main focus of US foreign policy agenda and after the disintegration of USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republic), this region regained its importance in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks. The US started Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan to eliminate terrorists and their safe heavens. Pakistan and India are two important regional players in the security dynamics of South Asia and both are considered as traditional enemies. Pakistan and India have fought 3 major wars and many battles due to their bilateral issues. In this scenario, the US engagement in this region represents a unique scenario in which the US wants to get support from Pakistan for counterterrorism in Afghanistan and at the same time the US endeavours to develop strong relations with India to counter the hegemony of Chinese influence in this region. The present article represents a kaleidoscopic view of the historical engagement of the US in the South Asian region to explore the contemporary trends of power politics of this region.*

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, War against Terrorism, 9/11 attacks, US Security Policy.

### **I. Introduction**

South Asia comprises of 8 states i.e., Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. Two states India and Pakistan are significant due to their geostrategic and geopolitical dimensions. The traditional rivalry between India and Pakistan makes South Asia a conflict-prone region. Geostrategic importance of subcontinent is eminent from the fact that even before independence this region was important for Russia and UK for colonial expansion. This area was colonized by the UK after the War of Independence of 1857 till 1947. In 1947 Pakistan and India gained their independence. Soon after independence, the superpowers i.e., the US and the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republic) engaged in a competition to get their influence in the region (Barnds, 1973). The Cold War rivalry of the USA and the USSR resulted in the inclusion of Pakistan in the US bloc. Pakistan joined SEATO (South East Asian Treaty Organisation) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organization) in 1954 and 1955

respectively and remained as a satellite state of the US (Sunawar & Coutto, 2015). The U-2 aircraft crisis in 1960 made Pakistan as a frontline state of US bloc and as a result faced the consequences of the USSR's rage in the form of Veto on Kashmir issue in which Pakistan and India were the two parties (Waqar & Parveen, 2016). Pakistan tried to bridge the gulf between China and the US by facilitating President Nixon's visit to China in 1972 (Afridi, 2015).

India developed a 'nonalignment policy' during the Cold War era and thus prudently saved herself from the rage of any superpower. The border clash of India with China also proved the fact in which both the states i.e., the US and the USSR offered their support to India (Hilali, 2006). Russia-Afghan war 1979 is considered as the golden era of the US and Pakistan relations in which the US provided extensive military support to Pakistan. Pakistan was the fourth largest recipient of the US military assistance in 1985 and gained the second position in 1987 (Ali, 2009). The USA is also blamed to ignore the progress of atomic programme of Pakistan during the Afghan wartime and it is believed that Pakistan developed its major atomic infrastructure at that time. The disintegration of USSR changed the US priorities in this region and heydays of Pakistan-US relations were over. In 1990 Pressler amendments were imposed on Pakistan and Pakistan-US relations were on their lowest ebb (Mahmood, 1994). The end of the Cold War changed the global political landscape for US policy makers. The prime issue in South Asia after the Cold War was nuclear proliferation (Anwar, 2013). In 1998 India tested the nuclear devices and Pakistan followed the suit. Pakistan and India have many conflicting issues among which Kashmir conflict is a major bone of contention between the two states. Both the states did not join NPT (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) and the possibility of a war between them depicts a gloomy picture of the regional politics. The Kargil issue witnessed a horrible scene when the two atomic states were on the verge of war, but the US involvement diffused the tension.

The incidence of 9/11 changed the dimensions of global politics. The US was attacked by a series of acts of terrorism and it changed the security strategies of the US. The incidence of 9/11 affected the regional security dynamics of South Asia directly. As stated by Teresita Schaffer, this attack changed the US policy upside down, and it has brought Pakistan as the center-stage while holding the US-Indian agenda temporarily (Schaffer, 2018). National security strategy of 2002 stated that US-Pakistan relations bolstered by Pakistan choice to join the War on Terror. The US started the War on Terror to eliminate Al-Qaida and Pakistan gained importance due to its unique geostrategic position. Even India offered to provide support to the US anti-terrorism campaign, but the US decided to make Pakistan as a non-NATO ally due to its geographical continuity with Afghanistan and political, religious ethnic affiliations of tribal people of Pakistan with people in Afghanistan (Guihong, 2003). President Musharraf, the President of Pakistan at that time, ordered to provide logistic support to the US and assumed that it will help Pakistan to remove Pakistan's political isolation, to gain help in Kashmir issue and to mitigate Pakistan's atomic issues. The US assured India that Pak-US ties will not affect the US-India relations (Yamin, 2015). The most important challenge regarding security strategy of South Asia after 9/11 was to maintain the balancing relations between Pakistan and India while fulfilling the aims of War on Terror (Khan, 2014).

The present study will highlight the challenges of security in South Asia and it will try to chalk out the possible strategies to overcome the hurdles to attain a durable

peace in this conflict prone region. The Indo-Pak rivalry and the ongoing War on Terror represent a unique scenario in which a win-win situation is hard to achieve, and this study will analyze the security triangle between Pakistan, the USA and India to comprehend the regional balance in the power equation of South Asia.

## **II. Pakistan, the Frontline State**

The 9/11 attacks affected Pakistan the most as it shares its borders with Afghanistan from where the threats emerged for the US security. Pakistan became the frontline state in the War on Terror and actively participated in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan (Kayani, 2011). Pakistan gained a significant position as it was the only country in South Asia that accepted Taliban government in Afghanistan (Riedel, 2013). In his book 'In the Line of Fire', General Pervez Musharraf stated that Pakistan's decision to support the USA was due to the fear of isolation from the global community in case of noncompliance (Musharraf, 2006). In his speech, President Musharraf stated that it was in the best interest of Pakistan to join the US-led War on Terror. It would help in economic restoration, to protect strategic assets and to secure the Kashmir cause (Fair, 2012). It was the third time in the history that Pakistan became the most associated ally of the US in South Asia after the Cold War engagement and the Afghan Jihad against the Soviet Union (Baloch, 2006).

The US national security strategy report in 2011 indicated that it was not the only goal of the US to kill Osama bin Laden and his death did not eradicate Al-Qaida from the surface of the earth. The main target of the Al-Qaida is the US and its interests on the globe. Although the US had achieved many victories over Al-Qaida, yet Al-Qaida posed significant threats to the strategic interests of the US. Al-Qaida has safe-haven in Afghanistan and the adjacent bordering areas of Pakistan. The US security strategic report of 2011 also indicated that the strong bilateral relations between Pakistan and the USA are necessary for a successful Afghan policy of the US. The penetration of ISIS in the region of South Asia is a significant challenge to counterterrorism efforts (The White House, 2011). Some of the Pakistani scholars are apprehensive about the non-recognition of Pakistani sacrifices by the US. (Amin & Naseer, 2013). Pakistan is always asked to 'do more' which makes Pakistan annoying as sacrifices given by Pakistan army, civilian and law enforcement agencies are more than the combined casualties of NATO forces operating in Afghanistan (Mattis, 2018). Pakistan was not happy over the speedy development of US-India relations as it seems to be against Pakistan's interests in this region (Pramanik, 2015). Some of the scholars argued that Pakistan was neglected at the time of Indo-US nuclear deal and many other agreements of economic and military cooperation of India with the US made Pakistan to feel like a neglected partner in this region (Bukhari, 2015).

The relation between Pakistan and the US remained turbulent, complex and unstable. According to Jaffrelot (2016), Pak-US relations historically has "followed a clientelistic pattern", having no ideological, societal, or economic affinity. Pakistan played the role of American broker in the South Asian region to contain communism and supported the Global War on Terrorism. In turn, the client state 'Pakistan' demanded money and arms to counter India's overwhelming hegemony. However, the client was gradually disqualified after the 9/11 traumatic incident due to its persistence over supporting Islamic militancy. The closer ties of America with India and the dependency of Pakistan on China in economic and strategic terms exposed Pakistan to

disqualification. Intensified drone strikes in Pakistan during the Obama regime has led to countless civilian causality and caused instability in Pakistan. The crucial component of Obama's South Asia strategy was to develop more cordial relations with India. For this purpose, the Indo-US relations were extended to East and Southeast Asia outside the compass of South Asia during Obama's presidency. President Donald Trump's policies regarding South Asia and Afghanistan have ruled out speculations about the withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan. The burden of the fiasco in Afghanistan was again fallen on Pakistan and Trump rejected to pay formal military aid to Pakistan worth of \$350 million (Mahmood, 2017). President Trump used stiff tone about Pakistan and said that they will no longer stay quiet about "Pakistan's safe-havens for terrorist organizations, the Taliban and other groups that pose a threat to the region and beyond" (Tourangbam et al., 2017). Trump further emphasized on improving relations with India in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region and appreciated the Indian contributions in stabilizing Afghanistan. According to Trump, the 'hasty withdrawal' would produce a gap which would immediately be filled by terrorist organizations as in the case of ISIS occupation of Iraq after the mistaken withdrew of the US troops (Trump, 2017).

### **III. Expanded Partnership with India**

The complexities of strategic needs have compelled the US to establish a prolong partnership with India. The US has admitted the rising regional status of India in South Asia. The enhancing collaboration of the US with India can be judged by the fact that the development and the food aid to India were 170 million dollars in 2000 which is almost 45 times more than that of Pakistan (Lum, 2002). As far as the Kashmir issue between Pakistan and India is concerned, the US has adopted the policy which is considered to be against Pakistan's interests as admiration of LOC (Line of Control) and endorsing both Pakistan and India to directly negotiate between each other are seen as a policy which is indirectly supporting Indian interests (Mahmud, 2005). The Kashmiri people are not considered to a party of dispute and such an opinion is more supportive to India than to Pakistan (Pattanaik, 2008). The US support to India is due to the fact that expanding the Indian commercial market and its economic growth are the attractive aspects that can be explored further. The blossoming information technology market of India is very important for the US business community while a fragile and unstable economy of Pakistan presents poor safety conditions for foreign investors.

The presence of significant number of Indian community living in the US also exerts pressure on the Congress in Indian favor while Pakistani community is less active in this regard (Ahmad, 2016) The rising influence of China and Russia in Central and South East Asia compelled the US to balance them by establishing its strategic alliance with India. The USA chose India as a strategic partner to counterweight China in this region (Hussain, 2017). Due to its growing economic and geostrategic potential, the Cold War alliance of US and Pakistan was over and changing dynamics of global powers witnessed a new strategic partnership of the US with India (Burgess, 2015). Although Pakistan joined the US bloc in the Cold War era during the Indo-Chinese war, the US ambassador Chester Bowles offered military aid to India in 1962 (Reddy, 1997). Thus, the US policy even at that time was not anti-Indian or pro-Pakistan but the US tried to maximize its interests by engaging both India and Pakistan at the same time (Kapur & Ganguly, 2007). The importance of India in South Asia for the US policy is evident from the fact that the USA sent a study mission to the subcontinent in 1993. Stephen Cohen, Emily Mac Farquhar and General John Wickman along with various other related persons

published their report in 1994. It was stated that the end of the Cold War changed the ideological and geostrategic factors that earlier shaped the US policy toward South Asia (Kumar, 2006). Recommendation of the report indicated the facts that relations with India are sine-qua-non-in the changing global dynamics of the region (Naqvi, 2010). The US relations with Pakistan are mainly focused on non-proliferation efforts and terrorism and counterterrorism along with the promotion of democratic culture in Pakistan while the US-Indian relations are important for countering Chinese influence in the region as mentioned in the report (Wisner, 2003).

The task force explained the US-policy towards South Asia and indicated that India should be granted as a state of 'friendly' country in export certification to enhance export benefits. The task force indicated that US-Pak relations had been enhanced since 9/11 but the interests of both states coincide only partially. The contradictory opinion about freedom fighters, militants in Kashmir and unwillingness of Pakistan to operate against Haqqani Network is still a hurdle between Pak-US cooperative relations (Akhtar, 2012). The two major problems that can alter the power equation in South Asia are the Kashmir issue and threat of nuclear confrontation (Shakoor, 1998). Although the US diplomats are active in engaging both India and Pakistan to maintain peace in South Asia yet the traditional rivalry between both states could easily instigate crisis any time (Rizvi & Ejaz, 2016).

The visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to the US in 2005 opened new vistas of relations between the US and India. The 'Next Step Strategic Partnership' and 'new roadmap' of bilateral relations further strengthened the Indo-US partnership. The two significant contracts that were signed at that visit were high tech military item sale and a civilian nuclear deal with India (Ejaz, 2012). It was a landmark agreement as a non-NTP (Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty) signatory state offered nuclear cooperation to a non-NTP state. The US government got the deal approved by IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency), the NSG (Nuclear Supply Group) and finally by Congress in 2008 (Naqvi, 2010). Despite repeated appeals, Pakistan was not granted approval for such a deal. To extend the Indo-US collaboration, the US President Obama visited India in 2010.

War on terrorism made Pakistan as a front-line ally of the US which complicated the Indo-US relations. Donald Rumsfeld, the US secretary of defense, stated that the renewed policy and relations with Pakistan would not mean that India could be ignored (Guihong, 2003). India protested that the US had been ignoring the cross-border terrorism based in or sponsored by Pakistan. Moreover, India has considered Pakistan as a part of the problem and not a part of the solution in the issue of terrorism. Indian point of view was that Pakistan has made a dual policy against the militants. India is of the view that Pakistan is overlooking the militants who are working against India. The US has banned Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish e Muhammad in this scenario, but it did not satisfy all the Indian concerns. India demanded to ban all the militant organizations who were involved in major attacks in India like October 11, 2001, in Srinagar, December 13, 2001, at parliament house in New Delhi (Gupta et al., 2009). India threatened to go on war against Pakistan in the summer of 2002 (Nayak&Krepon, 2011). The US intervention mitigated the tensions between the two states as according to the US, this would weaken the anti-terrorism policy (Khan, 2014).

George Perkovich stated that “Kashmir issue is more important than Al-Qaida” (Perkovich, 2002). New Delhi has also cautioned the US that it has given more attention to counter-terrorism issue in subcontinent after September 11 while the strategic partnership has reduced gradually which is alarming (Jabeen, 2014). The US put more focus on it and now the joint defense collaboration with India has improved and nuclear deal along with defense pact with India has shifted the earlier stance of ignoring bilateral ties (Das, 2012). The disagreement between India and the US over Pakistan, Kashmir issue and terrorism will not become a hurdle in attaining the long-term common interest of military collaboration and democratic values between India and the US. As ambassador Blackwill stated, “It is difficult to think easily of countries other than India and the United States that currently face to the same striking degree all three of these intense challenges simultaneously: advancing Asian stability based on democratic values; confronting daily the threat of international terror; and slowing the further proliferation of WMD” (Blackwill, 2002).

It is a fact that the US has more influence on the region of South Asia than anytime earlier in history due to the event of 9/11. The US assistance to rebuild Pakistan and at the same time collaboration with India to fulfill the political, economic, military and diplomatic objectives is a complex situation to tackle for attaining its aims in the region (Pakistan Policy Working Group, 2008).

#### **IV. Regional Dynamic and the US Role in Current Scenario**

Whether or not the US strategy has achieved its objective in the region of South Asia presents a complicated scenario. The US efforts to de-escalate the Indo-Pak rivalry seems to be successful but it has not eradicated the conflicts and problems between the India and Pakistan which exist since their inception on the map of the world (Chakma, 2012). The Kashmir movement has developed into a new wave which may lead to Indian aggression against Pakistan as Pakistan supports the Kashmir freedom movement. The ‘Cold Start Doctrine’ has aggravated the situation between the two states (Khan & Khalid, 2018). It was developed by the Indian army chief, General Padmanabhan and was implemented by General Deepak Kapoor who stated that chance of limited war still exists between the two states under a ‘nuclear overhang’. General Kapoor further agreed that “South Asia is one of the epicenters of conflict and instability” (Kapoor, 2009).

The security of nuclear weapon was another important dimension in forming the policy of the US regarding South Asia after the start of the counterterrorism campaign in this region. The fear that the terrorists may acquire nuclear weapon was of great concern for the US policymakers as Pakistan and India were nuclear states in South Asia. One of the most important issues in South Asia is the Kashmir dispute between Pakistan and India. The US policymakers have a great challenge i.e., to resolve the Kashmir dispute in South Asia that seems to be a long-lasting dispute between India and Pakistan (Guihong, 2003).

In an attempt to gain the full support of Pakistan and Indian regarding counter-terrorism, the US policymakers uplifted the sanctions imposed on both states due to nuclear experiments (Mustafa, 2016). The US government provided 624.5 million dollars of aid to Pakistan and 164.3 million dollars to India through economic support fund. (Guihong, 2003) The US adopted a balanced approach towards Pakistan and India by

opting a partnership with Pakistan and strategic relationships with New Delhi. Critics argue that the relations between Pakistan and India with the USA were not balanced in a real sense (Farooq et al., 2018). The US-Pakistan partnership was uni-dimensional and marked with many disagreements. The War on Terror approach of Pakistan and the USA has many contradictory goals. The US-India strategic relationship was, however, based on shared interests even though established gradually with the pace of time (Bajwa, 2013). Without resolving the existing conflicts in this region, there are chances of wars, radical extremism and territorial disputes which will lead to preemptive strikes under 'Cold Start Doctrine'. Indian ambition to become a regional hegemon is always blocked by Pakistan which always tried to make a conventional balance of power (Shankar & Paul, 2016).

China factor is another important dimension of this scenario. Zhang Guihong stated that the US-Japan coalition in East Asia is suspicious for Chinese interests and the new US-India coalition will be against China in South Asia. Strong US India relations may lead towards the US hegemony on the Indian Ocean which is against the Chinese interests. Guihong (2003) stated "The emergence of India – coupled with the decline of Pakistan since the late 1990s and the sea change after 9/11 - launched South Asia on the Chinese leadership's agenda. Regional balance and stability in South Asia and Pakistan's healthy development are two major interests for China". China is a rising global power and Chinese ambitions to be as a superpower collides with the US interests. The US involvement in the Indian Ocean has increased the Chinese fear of encirclement. The Indian aggression on Kashmir presents another side of a story where anti-India movement is going on whereas in many states India is facing active rebellion. The gigantic population living in miserable poverty is another stumbling block for India to become a regional hegemon as almost 450 million people are living on less than 1.25 dollar a day (Naqvi, 2010). Therefore, despite the US changing pattern of relations with India to make it as a global and regional hegemon, there are many unquantifiable issues to deter its strategies.

A peaceful Afghanistan will present a stable regional position and a decrease in tension in the way to regional security. The US inclusive strategy towards Pakistan regarding Afghanistan issue will be necessary to counterterrorism efforts in this region. Indian and Iranian involvement in Afghanistan further complicates the regional security situation. Afghanistan has a weak government which further exacerbates the security situation. Peace in Afghanistan can become a catalyst for peace in the South Asian region (Idrees, 2016).

## **V. Conclusion**

The incident of 9/11 changed the dimension of global politics. The attacks on the world trade center and the Pentagon changed the US foreign policy orientation towards South Asia. The changing patterns of security dynamics can be seen in the shifting of alliances in the South Asian Region. The historical rivalry between China and India in economic, political and geostrategic aspects along with border disputes makes this region more fragile in the security scenario. The spread of radical Islam, weak democracy and fragile economy make Pakistan more vulnerable to militancy and terrorism. Indo-Pak rivalry, Afghan conundrum and the Chinese growing power present a complex web from where there is apparently no way out for the US policymakers. Peace in this region can only be achieved by resolving all the core issues between India and

Pakistan as this is linked with the overall regional security scenario. The removal of the trust deficit between the regional states can trigger peace efforts and it will help in resolving the key issues in this region. Pakistan's security concerns are linked with India and Indian expanding tentacles in Afghanistan. Addressing all the genuine issues of Pakistan will certainly facilitate the peace process. Indian concerns regarding militancy against Pakistan should be taken into consideration. Kashmir issue is the core issue between the two states and a viable solution of Kashmir can only guarantee long lasting peace in this region. Afghanistan presents a complex security situation and counterterrorism efforts can only be successful if the regional players are on the same side.

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