

DONALD TRUMP'S POLICY AND POSTURE TOWARDS PAKISTAN: THE EMERGING DYNAMICS AND DRIVERS OF THE BILATERAL TIES

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ABSTRACT

Arguably, the growing estrangement between Pakistan and US predates President Donald Trump. Due to the divergent interests in Afghanistan and the region, the bilateral ties were already cracking under the chronic stress of mutual distrust and renewed acrimony between Washington and Islamabad. However, the unexpected election of Donald Trump as the US president further widened the gulf between the two countries with long history of transactional ties perennially vulnerable to disruption and discord due to periodic convergence and divergence of national interests. With his signature Twitter-borne diplomacy, Trump sought to tighten the screw on Pakistan by harping more vociferously and vigorously 'on do more' mantra than ever before. Today, the US has begun to view Pakistan from the Indian lens in order to appease New Delhi viewed as a critical strategic partner in her quest to contain China. The Indo-US deepening partnership has potentially tangible ramifications for the fragile strategic balance in South Asia. This scholarly endeavor seeks to dissect the dynamics and examines the drivers of the evolving shift in the US policy towards Pakistan-with unknown and unwarranted repercussions for the fragile regional peace and security.

Keywords: Pak-US Relations, New US Afghan Strategy, Donald Trum.

INTRODUCTION

Under the Trump administration, Pak-US relations deteriorated and continued to slide downwards. Since the security imperatives and interests have been at the heart of Pak-US ties, it is pertinent to point out at the outset that the unfolding dynamics and drivers of the bilateral relations can be seen from the theoretical perspective of realism that provides better insight into the security-centric interstate ties between the two countries. The US perceives Pakistan as the part of the problem in the region especially in Afghanistan. The US growing appeasement of India has further compounded Pak-US ties that are vital for the regional peace and stability. The Pakistani strategic planners were unable to anticipate the changed US strategic priorities and their implications for Pakistan that have been in the works since the turn of the century. The net result is that our policy planners are caught by surprise due to abrupt and increasingly hostile US behaviour towards Pakistan, as part of the problem, rather than solution for regional stability.

Donald Trump's rhetoric against Pakistan has generated much debate inside and outside the country. There are multiple causative factors responsible for the worsening Pak-US ties characterized as transactional and security-centric vulnerable to divergence. However, what is

under-debated and overlooked is the growing influence of India on the US policy and posture towards Pakistan. Understanding the Indo-US deepening strategic partnership is key to figure out the factors behind the recently growing American antagonism towards Pakistan.

The architecture of international relations has been going through slow but steady changes suggestive of growing multi-polarity symbolized by the phenomenal economic rise of China and resurgence of Russia as a historical balancer in the region and beyond. The centre of economic gravity has been drifting towards the east from the West. The Economic and strategic partnerships are going through realignment as China continues to expand its economic and strategic footprint that is being checkmated by the US in tandem with India. It is this overriding strategic concern of the US that provides a more logical explanation for its seemingly hostile posture towards Pakistan. America's policy to checkmate Beijing and Islamabad's deepening strategic and geo-economic alignment put Pakistan and the US on divergent paths. It is India that is emerging as a natural partner for the US in the latter's quest to counter China. India's nexus with the US has also come to influence America's policy towards Pakistan. The divergent national interests and trust-deficit between Pakistan and the US was long overdue and is not the by-product of Trump's impulsive behavior. Pakistan's alleged support of the Afghan Taliban or Haqqanis is also peripheral to America's grand strategy. Islamabad was unable to foresee the fallout of US strategic countermeasures against China with implications for Pakistan in the long run.

With significant cuts in aid to Pakistan, the President Donald Trump has adopted tough tone and tenor vis-à-vis Islamabad. The Trump administration has been accusing Pakistan for its covert support to various "anti-US militant outfits" (Malik, 2018), i.e. Afghan Taliban, Quetta Shura and the Haqqani network. Pakistan is also apprehensive of the US strategies and policies in Afghanistan since its invasion. The US policy to counter Beijing and Islamabad's deepening strategic and geo-economic alignment with China, put the US and Pakistan on the divergent paths.

With his electoral slogan "Make America Great Again" (Trump, 2016), Donald Trump became the US President on 20th January 2017. The promise of change and revival of the US economy were the key driving factors behind the Trump's unexpected electoral victory. Inevitably, the question also arises for Pakistan as to which strategic reorientation of US policy can be expected and how to tackle it. What needs to be clarified is whether there is any fundamental change in US policy towards Pakistan under Donald Trump, and which actors and interests play a role in formulating Trump's strategic approach towards Islamabad, and how these changing US policies have been viewed and countered by Pakistan, or what conclusions can be drawn from the developing situation in the view of the nascent Afghan peace process under way to find a way out of the Afghan crisis? To critically analyze Pakistan-US relations under the Trump administration, these questions are supposed to be aptly addressed by this research article.

The Tone and Tenor of Pak-US Ties under Donald Trump

The administration of Obama had various strategic objectives in Afghanistan. The most important one was to curb the threat of terrorism flowing from the country. A second important objective was the state-building and capacity-building of the Afghan security forces in order to scale down the direct military engagement of the US troops on the ground. To some extent the Obama administration was successful to degrade the threat of terrorism decimating most of the upper echelons of al-Qaeda leadership on the both sides of the Durand line-with the full military and intelligence cooperation of Islamabad. However, his administration was unable to completely eliminate the menace of terror and its ideological, human and material infrastructure from the Afghan soil, as his administration's tactical focus was on counter-terrorism without addressing the root causes of terrorism and extremism. In Afghanistan, both counterterrorism

and counter-extremism are intricately intertwined. Thus, Afghanistan remains a safe haven for extremist/insurgent groups like Taliban. With footprint in the 70% of the country, Taliban remains a formidable force in Afghanistan by controlling territory in Nangarhar province, has close connection with al-Qaeda, and other extremist groups i.e. Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP), the Haqqani Network. The TTA has conducted attacks both in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Sharif, 2018).

The presence of Taliban, al-Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan, and their continued attacks on US troops, compelled the Obama administration to put its withdrawal plan from Afghanistan on the backburner. He failed to fulfill his promise of complete withdrawal of all-American troops by the end of his tenure. In July 2016 Obama made commitment of the US forces withdrawal by the end of the year and announced that around 8000 US soldiers would remain in Afghanistan under NATO-led mission. The failure to turn the rising tide of rampant Taliban insurgency raised the specter of the return of the Taliban in the absence of the US boots on the ground as Afghan forces remained and remain far from being a capable of shouldering the security responsibilities without US military active military support especially air cover. To cover up its own military failure, the Americans began to accuse Pakistan of aiding and sponsoring the insurgency in the war-ravaged country. The bilateral relations between Pakistan and US were tense on the issue of Afghanistan when Donald Trump took charge as the newly elected president of United States (Wickett, 2017, 45-46).

Donald Trump's Evolving Policy and Posture

During his presidential debates, Donald Trump did not spell out his specific policy towards Pakistan. Few members of his administration like James Mattis secretary of defense and Michael Flynn national security advisor have considerable experience and insight into the peculiar dynamics of the region. During an interview to *Fox News*, Trump (being a presidential candidate) on 28th April 2016, replied to a question, "I would stay in Afghanistan. It's probably the one place we should have gone in the Middle East because it's adjacent and right next to Pakistan which has nuclear weapons" (*Fox News*, April 29, 2016). Back in October 2015, Trump told *CNN* that, the US entry into Afghanistan was a huge mistake because the American troops have been militarily bogged down there. Later on, he distanced himself from his statement and asserted, "I never said that...Afghanistan is next to Pakistan, it's an entry in. You have to be careful with the nuclear weapons. It's all about the nuclear weapons. By the way, without the nukes, it's a whole different ballgame" (LoBianco, 2015).

During an interview to the *Hindustan Times* in October 2016, just before his speech to the Indo-Americans Trump said that he would play a role of mediator between Pakistan and India for the resolution of Kashmir imbroglio, he stated: "If it was necessary I would do that. If we could get India and Pakistan getting along, I would be honored to do that. That would be a tremendous achievement". He added "I think if they wanted me to, I would love to be a mediator or arbitrator." Pakistan has always sought the mediation of international community for the amicable resolution of the Kashmir conundrum. On other hand, the third-party mediation has always been opposed by India. The Presidential candidate Barak Obama in 2008, also wished to play a mediatory role in the settlement of the long-festered Kashmir problem between Pakistan and India. it raised eyebrows in India. Since then, he never highlighted the issue not to antagonize Indian leadership (Raj, 2016). On 30th November 2016, in a telephonic conversation Trump told Nawaz Sharif: "Your Country is amazing with tremendous opportunities. Pakistanis are one of the most intelligent people. I am ready and willing to play any role that you want me to play to address and find solutions to the outstanding problems." During the conversation Nawaz invited Donald Trump to visit Pakistan. Trump replied: "he would love to come to a fantastic country, fantastic place of fantastic people" (Government of Pakistan, November 30, 2016). But when Trump assumed the office, he toughened his position

towards Pakistan by repeating the mantra of ‘do more’ and censuring Pakistan for its alleged support to pervasive insurgency in Afghanistan. The US disenchantment with Pakistan was reflected by the policy paper of the Hudson Institute, forwarded to the US president as a future action plan vis-à-vis Pakistan. The policy paper recommended adoption of tougher measures against Pakistan:

1. Enforcing conditions and reducing military aid and reimbursement to Pakistan
2. Stepping up drone strikes and targeting terrorist sanctuaries in Pakistan
3. Diplomatic isolation of Pakistan
4. Suspension of Pakistan non-NATO ally status and designating it as a state sponsor terrorism if it fails to crackdown on the Afghan Taliban and Haqqani network
5. Engagement with civilian leadership rather than military top brass
6. Sanctioning Pakistani officials of ISI and military with travel ban, for their support to militants (Haqqani, 2017, 9-10).

The Trump administration seems to have adopted some recommendations of the policy paper. For instance, the US has cut aid to Pakistan, stepped up the frequency of drone strikes and tried to diplomatically isolate Islamabad. The other elements of this policy papers are under the consideration of Trump administration. Interestingly, one of the co-author of this policy paper, is Husain Haqqani, who remained Pakistan ambassador to US for almost three and half years. The recommendations of the policy paper seem to have been acted upon by Trump administration. The drone strikes subsequently witnessed unannounced surge in Pakistan, and Trump himself threatened Islamabad with punitive unilateral action which created fear and terror not only among the officials of Pakistan but also in general public.

The Unveiled US strategy for Afghanistan/South Asia

In his address to the American people on 21st August 2017, Trump has announced his strategy for the region of South Asia and Afghanistan. Reportedly, there around twenty terror outfits operating on the both sides of the Durand line. Trump administration alleges :“Pakistan often gives safe haven to agents of chaos, violence, and terror” .He unveiled new approach towards Islamabad by asserting : “we can no longer be silent about Pakistan safe havens for terrorist organizations like the Taliban, and other groups that pose threat to the region and beyond.” He added: “Pakistan has much to gain from partnering with our effort in Afghanistan. It has much to lose by continuing to harbor criminals and terrorists.” Pertinently, the Trump administration also acknowledged Pakistan’s man and material sacrifices in the war against terrorism, and further added that the US have been paying billion dollars to Pakistan but at the same time Islamabad is sheltering terrorist the US is up against. He outlined US national security interests and urged Pakistan to “stop the resurgence of safe havens that enable terrorist to threaten America” and “we must prevent nuclear weapons and materials from falling into the hands of terrorists and being used against us” (Trump, August 21, 2017).

A day after Trump’s strongly worded warning to Pakistan, top official of his administration the secretary of State Rex Tillerson and NSC (National Security Council) spokesman Michael Anton subsequently mounted pressure on Pakistan for fulfilling Trump’s demand as well as warned Islamabad of grave consequence if demands were not met. Rex Tillerson in a press briefing stated: “we have some leverage that’s been discussed in terms of the amount of aid and military assistance we give them, their status as a non-NATO alliance partner. All of that can be put on the table” (Department of State, August 22, 2017). Spokesman of National Security Council (NSC) Michael Anton told reporter that the US president Trump “has put Pakistan on notice” (Abbasi, August 23, 2017). While addressing the UN General Assembly, the former Prime Minister of Pakistan Shahid Khaqqan Abbasi, did not criticize Trump’s new strategy but insisted that Pakistan would not be scapegoat in the war against terrorism in Afghanistan. He maintained that Pakistan had rendered immense sacrifices and

suffered most of all in GWOT, and it's a matter of concern for us to be "blamed for the military or political stalemate in Afghanistan. We are not prepared to be anyone's scapegoat." He clarified to world community that the so-called "safe haven" are not located in Pakistan, but in the Taliban controlled areas of Afghanistan (Abbasi, September 22, 2017).

The Trump strategy on South Asia/Afghanistan and allegations against Pakistan invited considerable reaction from Islamabad. On August 23, 2017 Pakistani senators including Raza Rabbani and Farhatullah Babar strongly denounced Trump's speech and zero-sum blame-game against Pakistan. On August 24, in the NSC (National Security Council) emergency meeting, the allegation of Trump was rejected, and NSC stated that the US should stop making Pakistan a scapegoat for its mistakes and failures in Afghanistan. Both houses of the parliament, the Senate and National Assembly unanimously rejected Trump's accusations against Pakistan and reaffirmed their commitment to the sustained engagement with the Trump administration on bilateral issues on the basis of the principles of reciprocity, mutual trust and respect. The Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi on August 22, commended Pakistan's contribution in GWOT and called upon the world community to recognize the pivotal role of Pakistan and great sacrifices in the war on terror (Siddiqui, August 22, 2017). The following day, the Saudi Prince during his meeting with Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, acknowledged Pakistan's efforts in counter terrorism (*Arabs News*, August 24, 2017). On August 24, the Russian envoy to Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov criticized the Trump strategy and stated that Pakistan role plays an important role in the negotiation process, and putting too much pressure on Islamabad might destabilize the regional security situation and would have negative consequence for Afghanistan (*The Nation*, August 24, 2017). Foreign Minister's spokesperson of Iran Bahram Qassemi also criticized the Trump's new strategy, "the US condemns other states for what is the result of its own wrong and inappropriate policies in the years in the region, particularly in Afghanistan". He added, "the regional states enjoy a high capacity to cooperate in fight against terrorism and restore stability and security to the region, and there is no need of US destabilizing strategies which lead to the spread of terrorism" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iran, August 25, 2017). Pakistan has always rejected such accusations of the US that has failed in the war on terror in Afghanistan because of its own blunders and wrong policies.. Such sorry state of affairs between Pakistan and the US is the outcome of growing divergence in the national interests of both countries.

The Afghan state writ is eroding as insurgents occupied 14pc of Afghanistan districts in January 2018, while 29pc were contested and 56pc were with the government. Now the writ has further shrunk with insurgents gaining more territorial control. The US and most of pro-American global community are striving to achieve the strategic objectives of Washington in Afghanistan, which are not just the peace, reconstruction and stability of Afghanistan as propagated in the international media. The US and NATO troops have killed and maimed the hundreds and thousands of Afghan civilians who view the US presence as occupation of their country. Pakistan wants to have a peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan with good neighbor ties. Islamabad views growing Indian economic and diplomatic footprint as a security threat to its national security affected by the Indian encirclement with connivance of Afghanistan.

The vicious anti-Pakistan propaganda campaign launched by the US and echoed by India and pro-US western world portrays Islamabad as the mother of all evil in Afghanistan projected as victim to Pakistani meddling in the internal affairs. Thus, the ceaseless Afghan insurgency continues to weigh heavily on Pak-US bilateral ties. The Presence of US/NATO forces in Afghanistan continues to fuel insurgency as it is used as a primary justification for insurgency in the country where US and NATO forces are seen as occupying forces by public and insurgents. There is opposition to the US/NATO presence as Afghan senators have also called for the cancellation of Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) between Afghanistan and the US, and the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) signed between Afghanistan and NATO.

Continued US/NATO mil presence in Afghanistan is seen with suspicion by regional country that view the US military footprint in Afghanistan as strategic hedge against rising China and resurgent Russia.

Turning the Financial Tap off

During the Obama administration, the US provided sufficient aid as reimbursement to Pakistan for its role in war against terrorism. Drastic changes have been brought about by the Trump administration in its aid and assistance policy towards Pakistan due to his administration's concern over Pakistan's alleged double-game and support to the Afghan insurgency. Husain Haqqani during an interview said, "Their support makes hardliners in Pakistan believe they are too important to the U.S., and they can do anything they please. The U.S. support doesn't change behavior in Pakistan" (Haqqani, May 10, 2016). He also forwarded his recommendation to the Trump administration for imposing aid conditionality's on Pakistan without cutting ties, "The U.S. can and must better leverage U.S. military aid to encourage tougher policies against terrorists operating from within Pakistan" (Haqqani and Curtis 2017, 11). It was also debated in the US Congress that "Islamabad's costs-benefit calculus without imposing costs was always a fool's errand." The Trump administration's disillusion with Pakistan has been marked by the sharp aid cuts over the years. The US military reimbursement to Pakistan in the war on terror dropped from \$2.6 billion in the year 2013 to \$1.6 in 2015 and further declining to \$350 million in 2018 (U.S. House of Representative, 2018, 4).

In July 2017, the Trump administration suspended \$300 million reimbursement to Pakistan citing that the country had failed in eliminating the Haqqani Network. Adam Stump, the spokesman of Pentagon stated that "The funds could not be released to the Government of Pakistan at this time because the secretary could not certify that Pakistan has taken sufficient action against the Haqqani Network" (Mcleary, 2017). While rejecting the assessment of the annual report on terrorism of the State Department the Foreign Office Spokesperson, Nafees Zakaria asserted, "We have taken indiscriminate and all out action against terrorists" (Yousaf, 2017). In the following month, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson warned Pakistan that there would be substantial cut in the US fund if Islamabad failed to comply with the Trump strategy and policy on Afghanistan. Earlier in 2016, the US congress had already choked the sale of F-16 to Pakistan and accused Islamabad of its alleged support to Taliban and the Haqqani Network (Mcleary, 2017).

On 30th August 2017, the Trump administration has asked the Congress to impose conditionality on the coalition support fund of \$255 million dollars to Pakistan that Islamabad would not receive the amount unless and until it cracked down on the terrorist network inside its territory, as demanded by the US. Being dissatisfied by the Pakistani efforts in the war against militant groups, Trump has used aid as his foreign policy instrument to dissuade Pakistan from running counter to the US strategic objectives in Afghanistan and the region. The spokesman of Pentagon, Lt. Col. Michael Andrews stated that funds of \$400 million in counterterrorism to Pakistan for the year 2017 were still frozen and the administration has not yet decided. While another \$600 million payment to Pakistan for two years were no longer available to Islamabad. Aizaz Ahmad Choudhry, Pakistan Ambassador to US told, "The Coalition Support Fund is an obligation the United States has, and it is for the United States to fulfill that obligation". He added "It is reimbursement of the expenses. It's not an aid package." With regard to the US accusation of safe haven for militants, Aizaz said, "You're looking for safe havens in Pakistan, they're actually in Afghanistan" (Tamkin, 2017). On 2nd January 2018, the US permanent representative to United Nations, Nikki Haley confirmed the Trump decision of withholding aid to Pakistan, said "The administration is withholding \$255m in assistance to Pakistan. There are clear reasons for this. Pakistan has played a double game for year" (Iqbal, January 3, 2018). In response to Nikki Haley's allegations, Pakistan ambassador to UN

Maleeha Lodhi stated that “We have contributed and sacrificed the most in GWOT and carried out the largest and successful counter-terrorism operation anywhere in the world.” She added “the US spokespersons should not shift the blame for their own mistakes and failures onto others” (Haider, 2018). Subsequently the US announced the suspension of its all security assistance to Pakistan. The suspension of funds to Pakistan was the Trump administration arm-twisting tactics against Islamabad for not doing enough to eliminate the threat of militants and Haqqani network on its soil- an accusation consistently rejected by Pakistan.

The US Arbitrary Actions and the Implications for the Bilateral Relations

The US has adopted the policy of targeting militants by using Predator drone in Pakistan too. The Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV) commonly known as drone, has been considered the most effective weapon against Al-Qaeda and militants. Drones are operated by intelligence officers and private contractors. The secret targeted killing program is conducted by CIA and controls its fleet of drone from its headquartering in Virginia, with the assistance of pilots near hidden airfields in South Asia (United Nations, , May 28, 2010, 7). A UK based organization; the Bureau of Investigative Journalism examined that in Pakistan thousands of people have been killed by drone strikes since 2004. There were total 430 drone strikes in Pakistan, 51 under Bush, 373 under Obama, and only 6 under the Trump administration, with 4026 persons killed including 969 civilian and 207 children. Majority of the drone victims have been identified as terrorists/militants. “Hundreds of civilians have also perished, including women and Children” (The Bureau of Investigative Journalism). The frequency of drone strikes in Pakistan has been decreased towards the end of Obama regime, but once again has been stepped up under the Trump administration, that has unilaterally authorized increased drone strikes inside Pakistan. The number of drone strikes during the Trump era, increased from three strikes in 2016, to eight in 2017 and four in 2018, till March 15. Pakistani officials condemned the drone strikes under the Trump administration, as the violation of its country's sovereignty. On 23rd January 2108, the ministry of foreign affairs noted, “Pakistan has continued to emphasize the importance of actionable intelligence- sharing so that appropriate action is taken against terrorists by our forces within our territory”. Pakistan considers the US unilateral actions detrimental to bilateral ties and cooperation in the fight against terror. While the Pakistani military spokesman stated that “There are no organized militant sanctuaries inside Pakistan anymore and the US must stop drone strikes in Pakistan” (Syed, 2018; Masood, (2018).

The Trump administration's drone strikes policy on Pakistan is the clear infringement of the sovereignty of Pakistan and violation of international conventions. The Pakistani authorities have been voicing their resentment to the US authorities through formal and informal diplomatic channels. The drone strikes target militant as well as civilian including women and children who die as collateral damage. The Pakistani officials and expert claim that these drone strikes are counter-productive and causes serious challenges for Pakistan security forces fighting a complex war against terrorists in the Af-Pak region. The collateral damage is hardening anti-US, and anti-Islamabad sentiment in Pakistani society, killing terrorists as well as civilian is akin to fighting terrorism with terrorism. To put pressure on Islamabad and to legitimize the unilateral attacks on the Pakistani soil, a U.S. House of Representatives report of February 2018 noted: “Nation-states are obligated to ensure that their territory is not being used to launch attacks on other countries. That is their sovereign responsibility—not something they are entitled to receive compensation for.”

Pakistan is fighting not its own but the American war that was imposed on Islamabad in 2001. It has not received any aid from the US as claimed by Trump in his tweet, but it has received the compensation and reimbursement for the expense of its military operations conducted only in support of the US. The report further noted that “If Pakistan is incapable of or unwilling to exercise sovereignty over its territory and prevent cross-border attacks, it should

not be surprised when others take action to defend themselves.” It added, “if Pakistan continues to refuse to take action against militant groups operating inside its borders, the U.S. must be prepared to increase the frequency and lethality of drone strikes”. The implementation of such type of policy towards Pakistan is really surprising. The US house of representative has ignored the very basic principle of international law that its country itself violated the sovereignty of Afghanistan as well as Pakistan, by invading Afghanistan and its drone strikes inside Pakistan, which are the clear violations of the international laws. It blames Pakistan for cross-border attacks on the US occupation troops in Afghanistan. The report tried to legitimize the drone strikes on Pakistan, and warned that if cross-border infiltration continued and Pakistan was not doing enough to control militant groups, the number of US drone strikes would be increased (U.S. House of Representative, 2018, 7-9).¹ Thus drone attacks on Pakistan by the US are a clear violation of the UN Charter, the Geneva Conventions, and the Rome Status of International Criminal Court. The drone strikes inside Pakistan’s tribal belt have been regarded as the violation of its country sovereignty. The killing of innocent civilians leads to the escalation in insurgency, extremism and suicide attacks against military and civilian in Pakistan (Rabbi, 2014, 51).² The perpetuation of drone attacks on Pakistan under Trump administration will continue to block the prospects of any rapprochement in the strained Pak-US relations down the road.

Donald Trump’s Twitter Diplomacy: ‘No more!’

Donald Trump has weaponized twitter against Pakistan in order to influence the behavior of Islamabad to his advantage. He accused Islamabad of providing safe haven to terrorists and threatened with cut in aid. He stated: “The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!” (Trump’s Tweet, January 1, 2018).³

To examine the accusations and dire warnings of US president in addition to Pakistan’s response and future course of action, the NSC (National Security Commission) meeting was held by the Pakistani PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi on 2nd January 2018. The NSC meeting concluded with expression of deep disappointment over Trump’s unfriendly statement. It said, “completely incomprehensible as they contradicted facts manifestly, struck with great insensitivity at the trust between two nations built over generations”. Further it was added that it has “negated the decades of sacrifices made by the Pakistani nation – a nation that has contributed so significantly to regional and global security and peace.” The NSC meeting highlighted that since 2001, the counter terrorism campaign of Pakistan remained “a bulwark” against the expansion of terrorism with its own meagre resources that cost not only its economy but also thousands of lives and “could not be trivialized so heartlessly by pushing all of it behind monetary values- and that too an imagined one.” The NSC committee concluded that regardless of Trump “unwarranted allegation” on Islamabad would not act in “haste”. Pakistan would continue its constructive role in the Afghan peace process and unwavering commitment to regional stability (Government of Pakistan, January 2, 2018).⁴

The stance of the NSC was endorsed by the Federal Cabinet of Pakistan that viewed the American leadership’s statements unhelpful to Pak-US bilateral ties. The US policy makers have been failed to win the war on terror in Afghanistan and thus it blames Pakistan for its failure, stated by the foreign minister of Pakistan Khawaja Asif in his Urdu tweet: “The US launched 57,800 attacks on Afghanistan from airbases on our soil. You used our ports and roads to transport your weapons and ammunition” (*The Nation*, January 4, 2018). The politicians of Pakistan also protested against Trump statement. The Defence Minister, Khuram Dastagir while defending his country sovereignty pledged: “Pakistan as an anti-terror ally has given free to US: land & air communication, military bases & Intel cooperation that decimated

Al-Qaeda over last 16 years, but they have given us nothing but invectives & mistrust. They overlook cross-border safe havens of terrorists who murder Pakistanis” (Pak Minister Defence Tweet, 1 January 2018). The foreign Office of Pakistan, also summoned David Hale, the US ambassador in Islamabad, to lodge protest against Trump's irresponsible statement (*The News*, January 2, 2018).

The Rise of Indian Diaspora in the US Power Corridors and the Repercussions for Pak-US relations

Unlike Pakistan, Indian diaspora of around 2 million (Indians/US citizens of Indian origin) in the US, is highly organized and mobilized to further India interests by influencing US policy towards India and Pakistan. The new generation of the people of Indian origin have been able to carve a niche in the US and risen to the higher echelons the US government. In the Trump administration, the following key positions are being held by them including Nikki Haley-Nimrata Randhawa (the US Ambassador to the United Nations), Krishna Raj Urs (US Ambassador to Peru), Manisha Singh (Assistant Secretary of State for Economic Affairs), Neil Chatterjee (Member of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission), Raj Shah (White House Principal Deputy Secretary), Ajit Varadaraj Pai (Chairman of the Federal Communication Commission), Vishal Amin IPEC coordinator, Seema Verma (Administrator of the center for Medicare and Medicaid Services), and Neomi Rao (administrator of OIRA).

The current trump administration, officials of Indian origin occupies top advisory positions being used to undermine Pakistan's interests. The US appeasement of India through the nuclear deal and other offers of cutting-edge mil technology are not the development taking place in vacuum. These developments are driven by the US desire to enhance Indian mil and diplomatic profile to bring it at par with China. In 2019, the US President signed a law seeking to deepen America's engagement in the Indo-Pacific area, fortifying the multi-dimensional ties with India and lambasting Chinese behavior that allegedly “undermine” the so-called rules-based global system. The Act reinforces the US strategic commitment to Defence Technology and Trade Initiative 2012; the New Framework for the 2005 US-India Defence Relationship, the 2015 Joint Strategic Vision for the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region, and 2017 Joint Statement on Prosperity Through Partnership (*Economic Times*, January 1, 2019). Seen in this perspective, Indo-US ties are directly and indirectly turning out to be detrimental to Pak interests in the region and beyond (Khan, 2016, 37-61). Pakistan's strategic planners should have factored in the initiation of the US Asia -pacific policy and subsequent warming of Indo-US relations. The growing Sino-US rivalry is a major driving force behind the deepening strategic partnership between Indian and US.

The revised US grand strategy identifies China as the challenger to its regional and global predominance in the long run. It is this American quest to contain China that explains the growing American tilt towards India that is viewed as a strategic hedge against China. Thus, the US appeasement of India has far-reaching impact on the US policy and posture towards Pak. The enhanced Indian partnership with US has begun to exert influence on the US behavior to Pakistan. The issue of Haqqani network/Taliban is peripheral to US strategic agenda in Asia pacific where the cold war between the US and China is heating up as it is manifesting itself into debilitating trade war. It is this big powers' power struggle that is inducing change in the US long-term policy towards Pakistan. Islamabad has begun to feel the heat generated by the deepening Indian alignment with the US Asian strategic agenda in Asia. Washington wants to prop up India as the regional counter to China. However, Pakistan continues to resist and checkmate Indian pipe dream of regional hegemony. From the US perspective, India cannot shift its strategic focus on China in the face of Pakistan. Thus, Pakistan needs to be subdued in order to enable India to challenge China as the US regional pawn.

The Current Trajectory of Pak-US Relations

The relations between Pakistan and US were strained further when a Paris based global body, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) placed Pakistan on grey list in June 2018, arguing that Islamabad's measures were inadequate to curb money laundering and terrorism financing. The role of the US in the FATF decision has been highlighted by the Foreign Minister of Pakistan Qureshi "US had placed Pakistan in the grey list of Financial Action Task Force and consequently, its relationship with Islamabad was not that great" (*Dawn*, March 11, 2019). Pakistan was given twenty-seven-point agenda by FATF to be implemented by September 2019. to meet the requirements of the first review in February 2019, Pakistan took all five actions as prescribed by FATF. India seems to play a spoiler role pushing the FATF to force Islamabad for further action against eight organizations including Lashkar Taiba, Jaish Mohammad, Falah-e-Insaneyat Foundation and Jamat-ud-Dawa. Before removing Pakistan from the grey list, there will be two other reviews of FATF in May and September 2019 (*The Express Tribune*, February 15, 2019). To ensure the review process remains unbiased and fair, the Finance Minister of Pakistan, Asad Umar has wrote to the president of FATF to remove India from the co-chair of the APG-Asia Pacific Group and urged to appoint some other member instead of India. He wrote, "India's animosity towards Pakistan is well known and the recent violation of Pakistan's airspace and dropping of bombs inside Pakistani territory is another manifestation of India's hostile attitude" (*The Express Tribune*, March 12, 2019).

After placing Pakistan on the grey list of FATF, the relationship between Pakistan and US were in crisis. Fortunately, Islamabad's role in the peace dialogue between the US and the Taliban has provided a window of opportunity for both the countries to converge and improve their uneasy relationship. During his official trip to Pakistan on September 5, 2018 the US Secretary of State Mike met the Prime Minister Imran Khan, Shah Mehmood Qureshi, other civil and military leadership, Pompeo said that he was hopeful of the opportunity to reset the strained relationship between the US and Pakistan. The US Department of State noted that during his meetings "Pompeo emphasized the important role Pakistan could play in bringing about a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan and conveyed the need for Pakistan to take sustained and decisive measures against terrorists and militants threatening regional peace and stability" (U.S. Department of State, September 5, 2018).

Recently, the foreign minister of Pakistan Qureshi said that the relationship between Pakistan and the United States converged on important points and both countries tried to reset the bilateral ties critical to peaceful resolution of the Afghan war. Answering a question about US aid he said "We are a nation, not beggars. The outcome of bilateral relations should not merely be dependent upon money. We will approach with our vision. We don't need aid, but we want regional peace. Our regional outreach is an example of that." The Foreign minister statement was issued after a day when the Taliban and the US agreed to carry on with the diplomatic engagement to end the war in Afghanistan (*Pakistan Today*, January 27, 2019).

Post-Pulwama Scenario and Pak-US Ties

In order to appease New Delhi, the American policy and posture have been unambiguously pro-India and prejudiced against Pakistan. John Bolton, the U.S. national security adviser, was quick to blame Pakistan without even any preliminary investigation and any incontrovertible evidences. He tweeted, "I express condolence to NSA Doval yesterday for the reprehensible terrorist attack on India. Pakistan must crack down on JeM and all terrorists operating from its territory. Countries should uphold UNSC responsibilities to deny safe haven and support for terrorists" (Bolton, February 16, 2019). John Bolton was quick to endorse the so-called Indian preemptive strikes in Pakistan by terming the Indian air bombing as "India's right to self-defense." In addition, the US unequivocal support to India was reflected by NSA John Bolton during a recent meeting with Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale. India and the United States

sought “tangible and irreversible action” by Pakistan against terrorist outfits “Met with Indian FS Gokhale to advance progress on the US-India strategic partnership & our shared vision for the Indo-Pacific, as well as reiterate that the US stands shoulder-to-shoulder with India in the fight against terrorism,” Bolton further said in a tweet (India, March 14, 2019). In its bid to woo India as regional strategic hedge against China, the US continues to cultivate New Delhi at the cost of its ties with Islamabad that is apprehensive of the growing Indo-US nexus threatening to upset the fragile strategic equation in the region that found itself on the verge of nuclear Armageddon during the recent military escalation.

Recent Thaw in the Bilateral Ties

Donald Trump has been very critical of the US military misadventure in Afghanistan. Pulling out of the Afghanistan was one of his key electoral pledges to his electorate. With next presidential election in view, Trump has stepped up his efforts to achieve a peace deal with the Taliban. Any negotiated settlement in Afghanistan is unviable without active cooperation of Pakistan that is being coerced and courted by Trump in his efforts for a foreign policy victory needed for political mileage at home. Thus, the Presidential quest for a foreign policy feat and Pakistan's growing economic woes coupled with looming sword of FATF has pushed both the sides to a point of convergence on Afghan imbroglio. In order to iron out the difference and solidify the thaw in the tie, the Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan made his three-day maiden visit to America in July 2019. The visit came amid the ongoing Afghan peace dialogue facilitated by Islamabad. The Pakistani Premier received warm welcome by the US President who was appreciative of Islamabad and even offered his good office for mediation on Kashmir in return for Pakistan's constructive role in helping America cut a peace deal in Afghanistan (Hashim, July 25, 2019). Earlier, Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) agreed on a bailout deal of \$6 billion for the country with ailing economy (*Dawn*, March 12, 2019). Given the US influence in the Bretton Woods financial institutions, the bailout package for Pakistan, would have been impossible without the green signal from Washington. Furthermore, the ‘reset’ in the bilateral relations received an impetus when both the leaders met again on sidelines of 74th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2019. Imran Khan said, “Stability in Afghanistan means stability in Pakistan.” He also took up the recent Indian repression in the Indian-occupied Kashmir in the wake of its annexation by India, with Donald Trump who expressed his desire to mediate if asked by both the countries (*Gulf News*, 23th September, 2019). . Recently, the Pakistani PM embarked on shuttle diplomacy in order to diffuse tension between Iran and Saud Arabia. Imran Khan claims to enjoy the endorsement of Donald Trump, for his role as a ‘go-between’ in the volatile region (*CNN*, October 16, 2019). The above-mentioned positive developments are suggestive of the shared realization that complete breakdown in the bilateral ties is detrimental to national interests of both the countries.

CONCLUSION

Donald Trump's policies towards Pakistan are reflective of the marked departure from the policy of restraints exercised by his predecessors by intensifying multi-pronged pressure on Islamabad. More precisely, aid cuts, suspension of military cooperation and direct threats of surgical strikes are some of the policy devices being proactively employed by the US in dealing with Pakistan. Islamabad views the concerted US pressure as detrimental to the cooperative and cordial Pak-US ties. Donald Trump wants paradigm shift in Pakistani regional policies and posture in tune with the American objectives. His accusation of the alleged sanctuaries and covert nexus with the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network will continue to widen the gulf between the two countries with unenviable track record of acrimony and mutual distrust. The Pakistani policy planners need to reconfigure the country's strategic priorities and foreign

policy options in accordance with the demands of the changed global security and geo-economic milieu. In the fast changing regional and global geopolitical and geo-economic landscape, the bilateral ties between Pakistan and the US are likely to deteriorate with severe implications for regional peace and security. Pakistan is apprehensive that the mounting US pressure in conjunction with Indo-Afghan hostile behavior, is aimed at paving the way for absolute Indian regional hegemony. The recent provocative and irresponsible statement of the Indian army chief questioning the credibility of Pakistan's nuclear deterrence needs to be viewed in the perspective of the growing estrangement between the US and Pakistan. It aims to put Pak under increasing strategic squeeze so that Pakistan military and economic resources are overstretched beyond the point of sustainability. Thus, India has been capitalizing on the growing US arm-twisting of Pakistan.

The US and NATO need to spend more on development and governance rather than military approach that has failed to bring peace and stability in the war-ravaged country as reflected by the growing insurgency. It is in the best interest of Pakistan to work with the US for the conclusive peace dialogue and mainstreaming of the insurgents that is the only pragmatic and viable remedy to the long-running Afghan conflict. The ongoing peace dialogue between the Taliban and the US, has created greater space for convergence and cooperation under Donald Trump who is looking for semblance of triumphant exit from Afghan quagmire by reaching a peace deal with the Afghan Taliban. Both Pakistan and the US are at the crossroads of their ties. The ongoing peace dialogue for the durable peace in the war-torn Afghanistan, has opened up new avenues for greater cooperation between the two countries with long history of diplomatic confrontation punctuated by transient cooperation guided by transactional approach. Both the countries are confronted by two choices-either walk into the uncharted territory of escalating bellicosity with unknown repercussions or reorient and repair the fractured ties by anchoring the bilateral relations into cooperation with win-win situation for the both. Thus, the successful Afghan peace dialogue has potential not only to revive peace in the country but also salvage the Pak-US ties if the window of opportunity is not missed.

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