

Diplomatic Shift: A Study of Pakistan-US Relations during the Donald Trump Era

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Abstract

The study focuses on the complex dynamics of US-Pakistan relations during the Trump administration, particularly in the context of Afghanistan and regional geopolitics. Beginning with coercive diplomacy and evolving into cooperative efforts, the relationship between the United States and Pakistan has been pivotal in shaping South Asian geopolitics. This research explores the shifts in US foreign policy towards Pakistan post-Afghanistan withdrawal, examining the impacts on regional security, the significance of Trump's engagements with Pakistan and the broader implications for South Asian geopolitics. By employing qualitative content analysis of published sources and expert interviews, the study aims to unravel the multifaceted reasons behind the fluctuating US-Pakistan relations, offering insights into the strategic alignments with nations like China and India that influence regional dynamics.

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Introduction

The US-Pakistan relationship declined and remained in decline under the Trump presidency. It is important to note at the outset that the dynamics and drivers of the bilateral relations can be seen from the theoretical perspective of realism, which offers better insight into the security-centric interstate ties between the two countries. This is because security imperatives and interests have always been at the core of ties between Pakistan and the United States. Pakistan is seen by the US as a contributing factor to the issues in the area, particularly in Afghanistan. The deteriorating US-Indian appeasement has exacerbated ties between Pakistan and the US, which are essential for maintaining peace and security in the region. The strategic strategists in Pakistan did not anticipate the revised US strategic aims and their ramifications for Pakistan that have been in the works since the turn of the century. Overall, the sudden

and more antagonistic US stance toward Pakistan has taken our policy planners off guard and made them see Pakistan as a problem rather than a solution for maintaining regional security. The remarkable economic ascent of China and Russia's revival as a historical balancer in the region and beyond are two symbols of the developing multipolarity that has been suggested by the slow but persistent changes in the architecture of international relations. The economic center of gravity has been shifting from the west to the east. As China continues to extend its economic and strategic footprint, which the US and India are coordinating to checkmate, the economic and strategic ties are realigning. The US seems hostility towards Pakistan can be better explained by looking at this underlying strategic interest. Pakistan and the US are now traveling in different directions because of America's strategy to stifle Beijing and Islamabad's growing strategic and geoeconomic alliance. India is starting to show itself as the US's ideal ally in its struggle against China. The US's strategy towards Pakistan is now influenced by India's relationship with the US. Trump's impetuous actions are not the cause of Pakistan and the US's long-overdue trust gap or conflicting national interests. The supposed backing that Pakistan gives the Afghan Taliban is also incidental to the larger picture of US policy. The long-term consequences of US strategic countermeasures against China that may have affected Pakistan were not anticipated by Islamabad.

President Donald Trump has taken a harsh stance against Islamabad by drastically cutting funds to Pakistan. Pakistan has been under fire from the Trump administration for allegedly providing covert assistance to a number of "anti-US militant outfits" (Malik, 2018), including the Haqqani network, Quetta Shura and the Afghan Taliban. The US's tactics and actions in Afghanistan since the invasion have also caused Pakistan to be uneasy. The US and Pakistan are on different courses as a result of the US goal to thwart Beijing's and Islamabad's growing strategic and geoeconomic convergence with China. Donald Trump was elected president of the United States on January 20, 2017, using the campaign slogan "Make America Great Again" (Trump, 2016). The main causes of Trump's surprising election win were his promises of reform and a recovery of the US economy. Pakistan must naturally wonder which strategic realignment of US strategy is to be expected and how to respond to it.

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

In Afghanistan, the Obama administration has a number of different strategic goals. Reducing the threat of terrorists leaving the nation was the most crucial. In order to reduce the direct military participation of US soldiers on the ground, a secondary goal was to strengthen the status and capabilities of the Afghan security forces. With Islamabad's complete military and intelligence assistance, the Obama administration was able to reduce the threat of terrorism to some extent by eliminating the majority of the top al-Qaeda leadership on both sides of the Durand line. However, because of his administration's tactical concentration on counterterrorism rather than tackling the underlying causes of terrorism and extremism, the threat of terror and its intellectual, human and material infrastructure could not be entirely eradicated from Afghan soil. Counterterrorism and counter-extremism are closely related concepts in Afghanistan. Thus, terrorist and extremist organizations like the Taliban continue to find sanctuary in Afghanistan. With a presence throughout 70% of the nation, the Taliban is still a powerful force in Afghanistan. They are in charge of Nangarhar province and have tight ties with al-Qaeda as well as other extremist organizations like the Haqqani Network and Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP). The TTA has launched strikes in Pakistan and Afghanistan (Sharif, 2018).

The Obama administration was forced to postpone its departure strategy from Afghanistan due to the continuing attacks on US forces by the Taliban, al-Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan. By the conclusion of his term, he had not succeeded in completing the departure of all American soldiers. Obama declared in July 2016 that the US will withdraw its forces from Afghanistan by the end of the year and that about 8,000 US soldiers would continue to serve there as part of a NATO-led operation. The inability of the US military to put boots on the ground to stem the growing tide of the Taliban insurgency raised the possibility that the Taliban would resurface because Afghan forces were and still are far from being able to handle security duties in the absence of US military support, particularly air cover. The Americans started accusing Pakistan of supporting and instigating the insurgency in the war-torn nation in order to hide their own military defeat. After Donald Trump was elected president of the United States, the two countries' bilateral ties on the Afghan problem were strained (Wickett, 2017, 45-46).

Donald Trump's Evolving Policy and Posture

In the presidential debates, Donald Trump refrained from elaborating on his particular approach to Pakistan. Few members of his cabinet have as much expertise and understanding of the unique dynamics of the area as national security advisor Michael Flynn and secretary of defense James Mattis. On April 28, 2016, Trump, then a presidential contender, responded to a question in an interview with Fox News by saying, "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). Trump said to CNN back in October 2015 that the US forces' military defeat in Afghanistan proved to be a grave error in the country's invasion. Subsequently, he clarified his remarks and claimed, "I never said that. Afghanistan is an entryway, located adjacent to Pakistan. When handling nuclear weapons, you must exercise caution. The nuclear weapons are the focus. By the way, things are quite different in the absence of nuclear weapons (LoBianco, 2015).

In October 2016, shortly before he gave a speech to the Indo-Americans, Trump declared in an interview with the *Hindustan Times* that he would act as a mediator between Pakistan and India to find a solution to the Kashmir dispute. It would be an honor for me to help India and Pakistan get along. That would be an amazing accomplishment. "I think I would love to be a mediator or arbitrator, if they wanted me to", he continued. Pakistan has consistently looked to the international community to mediate a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir dispute. However, India has always resisted third-party mediation. In 2008, Barak Obama, who was running for president, expressed a desire to mediate a resolution to the long-running conflict between Pakistan and India over Kashmir. It caused some in India to scoff. He never brought up the subject again after then in order to avoid upsetting Indian leadership (Raj, 2016).

During a phone call with Nawaz Sharif on November 30, 2016, Trump said, "Your Country is amazing with tremendous opportunities". Among the most intellectual people are those from Pakistan. In order to address and resolve the unresolved issues, I am prepared and willing to take on any position you assign me. Nawaz extended an invitation to Donald Trump to visit Pakistan during their talk. Trump retorted, "He would love to visit a wonderful nation, wonderful location and wonderful people" (Government of Pakistan, November 30, 2016). However, as soon as Trump took office, he hardened his stance toward Pakistan by criticizing the country for allegedly supporting the widespread insurgency in Afghanistan and reiterating the "do more" slogan. The Hudson Institute policy document, which was sent to the US

president as a future action plan toward Pakistan, expressed the US dissatisfaction with that country. The policy document suggested taking more severe action 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).

Some of the policy paper's suggestions appear to have been implemented by the Trump administration. For example, the US has increased the frequency of drone operations, reduced funding to Pakistan and attempted to isolate Islamabad diplomatically. The Trump administration is now debating the remaining components of these policy documents. It is interesting to note that Husain Haqqani, the former ambassador of Pakistan to the United States for over three and a half years, is one of the co-authors of this policy document. The Trump administration appears to have implemented the policy paper's suggestions. Following the drone operations, there was an unexpected increase in violence in Pakistan. Trump even threatened Islamabad with punishing unilateral action, which terrified Pakistani leaders as well as the general people.

The Unveiled US strategy for Afghanistan/South Asia

Trump unveiled his plans for the South Asian and Afghan regions in his speech to the American people on August 21, 2017. About twenty terror groups are said to be active on both sides of the Durand line. "Pakistan often gives safe haven to agents of chaos, violence and terror", the Trump administration claims. "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 declared, announcing his new strategy toward Islamabad. "Pakistan has much to gain from partnering with our effort in Afghanistan", the speaker continued. It stands to lose a great deal if it keeps harboring terrorists and criminals. Importantly, the Trump administration also recognized Pakistan's human and material efforts in the fight against terrorism and it went on to say that although the US has been giving billions of dollars to Pakistan, Islamabad is providing sanctuary to terrorists that the US is fighting. In his statement, Obama underlined the interests of US national security and encouraged Pakistan to "avoid nuclear weapons and materials falling into the hands of terrorists and being used against us" as well as "stop the resurgence of safe havens that enable terrorist to threaten America" (Trump, August 21, 2017).

Trump's top aide, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and National Security Council spokesperson Michael Anton increased pressure on Pakistan the day after the president's strongly worded warning to that country. Anton also threatened Islamabad with dire consequences if the demands were not met. "We have some leverage that has been discussed in terms of the amount of aid and military assistance we give them, their status as a non-NATO alliance partner", said Rex Tillerson at a press briefing. You may put everything on the table (Department of State, August 22, 2017). President Trump "has put Pakistan on notice", according to National Security Council (NSC) spokesperson Michael Anton, who spoke with reporters (Abbasi, August 23, 2017). Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, the former prime minister of Pakistan, stated

that Pakistan will not be used as a scapegoat in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan, even if he did not condemn Trump's new approach when speaking at the UN General Assembly. He insisted that Pakistan should not be "blamed for the military or political stalemate in Afghanistan", as we had suffered the most during GWOT and made enormous sacrifices. We are not ready to serve as a scapegoat for anyone. He made it clear to the international community that the so-called "safe haven" is actually in the parts of Afghanistan under Taliban control, not Pakistan (Abbasi, September 22, 2017).

Islamabad reacted strongly to the Trump administration's policies on South Asia and Afghanistan as well as the accusations made against Pakistan. Senators from Pakistan, such as Farhatullah Babar and Raza Rabbani, harshly condemned Trump's remarks and zero-sum blame game against Pakistan on August 23, 2017. The claim made by Trump was refuted on August 24 at the emergency meeting of the National Security Council (NSC), which also said that Pakistan should no longer be used as a scapegoat by the US for its errors and shortcomings in Afghanistan. The Senate and National Assembly, both houses of parliament, overwhelmingly rejected Trump's charges against Pakistan and reaffirmed their commitment to continuing to work with the Trump administration on bilateral issues based on the values of respect, reciprocity and mutual trust. On August 22, the Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi praised Pakistan for its participation in GWOT and urged the international community to acknowledge Pakistan's crucial role and significant sacrifices made in the fight against terrorism (Siddiqui, August 22, 2017). The Saudi Prince recognized Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts the next day when he met with Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi (Arabs News, August 24, 2017). On August 24, Russia's envoy to Afghanistan, Zamir Kabulov, denounced the Trump strategy and said that Pakistan is crucial to the negotiation process and that applying undue pressure to Islamabad could worsen the security situation in the region and have detrimental effects on Afghanistan (*The Nation*, August 24, 2017).

Bahram Qassemi, the Iranian Foreign Minister's spokesperson, also attacked Trump's new approach, saying, "The US condemns other states for what is the result of its own wrong and inappropriate policies in the region, particularly in Afghanistan". He went on, "There is no need for US destabilizing strategies which lead to the spread of terrorism, as the regional states enjoy a high capacity to cooperate in the fight against terrorism and restore stability and security to the region". (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Iran, August 25, 2017). Pakistan has consistently refuted claims made by the US that it lost the war on terror in Afghanistan because of its own mistakes and incorrect policies. Growing differences in the national interests of both Pakistan and the US have resulted in this unfortunate condition of things.

In January 2018, militants controlled 14% of Afghanistan's districts, while the government had control of 56% of the remaining districts. This indicates a weakening of the Afghan state's authority. Now that militants have increased geographical control, the writ has further contracted. The US and the majority of the pro-American world community are working to accomplish Washington's strategic goals in Afghanistan, which go beyond the country's supposed peace, stability and rebuilding as reported by the media worldwide. Thousands of Afghan citizens who see the US presence as an occupation of their nation have been murdered or severely injured by US and NATO forces. Pakistan aspires to have a wealthy, peaceful and neighborly Afghanistan. Islamabad sees the expanding political and economic sphere of influence of India as a security risk to its own country, exacerbated by India's entanglement with Afghanistan's help. The US-led, viciously anti-Pakistan propaganda effort, which is also supported by India and the pro-US western world, presents Islamabad as the source of all evil in Afghanistan and blames

Pakistani intervention in the country's internal affairs for the problem. As a result, the ongoing insurgency in Afghanistan continues to negatively affect bilateral relations between Pakistan and the United States. Because the people and insurgents view US and NATO soldiers as occupying forces, their presence in Afghanistan serves as a major justification for the insurgency, which is still being fueled by these forces. The Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) between Afghanistan and the US and the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) inked between Afghanistan and NATO have both been asked for to be canceled by Afghan senators, indicating resistance to the US/NATO presence. Countries in the area perceive the US military presence in Afghanistan as a strategic deterrent against China's ascent and Russia's comeback and they are suspicious of the US and NATO's continued presence there.

Turning the Financial Tap off

In exchange for Pakistan's participation in the fight against terrorism, the US gave Pakistan enough aid under the Obama administration. The Trump administration's aid and assistance policy towards Pakistan has undergone significant revisions because of its worries about Pakistan's purported double-dealing and backing for the Afghan insurgency. In an interview, Husain Haqqani stated, "Hardliners in Pakistan feel they are too important to the U.S. and can do anything they want because of their support. The assistance of the US does not alter Pakistani conduct (Haqqani, May 10, 2016). The U.S. can and must better leverage U.S. military aid to encourage tougher policies against terrorists operating from within Pakistan, he advised the Trump administration, adding that conditionality on aid could be imposed on Pakistan without severing relations (Haqqani and Curtis 2017, 11). The argument that "Islamabad's costs-benefit calculus without imposing costs was always a fool's errand" was also discussed in the US Congress. The significant funding reductions over the years have been indicative of the Trump administration's disenchantment with Pakistan. In the fight against terrorism, Pakistan received payment from the US military for \$2.6 billion in 2013, \$1.6 billion in 2015 and \$350 million in 2018 (U.S. House of Representative, 2018, 4).

The Trump administration withheld \$300 million in aid from Pakistan in July 2017, claiming the nation has been unable to destroy the Haqqani Network. According to Pentagon spokesperson Adam Stump, "The secretary could not certify that Pakistan has taken sufficient action against the Haqqani Network", which is why the monies could not be provided to the Government of Pakistan at this time (Mcleary, 2017). "We have taken indiscriminate and all out action against terrorists", Foreign Office Spokesperson Nafees Zakaria declared, dismissing the State Department's evaluation of its yearly report on terrorism (Yousaf, 2017). The following month, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson forewarned Pakistan that failure on Islamabad's part to adhere to Trump's plan and policy for Afghanistan will result in a significant reduction in US funding. The US Congress had previously blocked Pakistan's purchase of F-16s earlier in 2016 and charged Islamabad of providing covert support to the Taliban and the Haqqani Network (Mcleary, 2017). On August 30, 2017, the Trump administration requested that Congress place conditions on Pakistan's \$255 million coalition support fund, stating that Islamabad would not be eligible to receive the money until it took decisive action against the terrorist network operating within its borders, as the US had demanded. Trump has using assistance as a tool for foreign policy to discourage Pakistan from acting against US strategic goals in Afghanistan and the surrounding area because he is not pleased with Pakistan's efforts in the fight against extremist organizations. According to Pentagon spokesperson Lt. Col. Michael Andrews, the administration has not yet made a decision and \$400 million in counterterrorism funding for Pakistan in 2017 is still blocked. Islamabad was no longer able to receive another \$600 million

payment to Pakistan for a two-year period. “The Coalition Support Fund is an obligation the United States has and it is for the United States to fulfill that obligation”, stated Aizaz Ahmad Choudhry, Pakistan’s ambassador to the United States. “It is reimbursement of the expenses”, he continued. It is not a bundle of help. “You’re looking for safe havens in Pakistan, they’re actually in Afghanistan”, Aizaz remarked in response to the US claim that Pakistan serves as a haven for extremists (Tamkin, 2017).

The US permanent representative to the UN, Nikki Haley, said on January 2, 2018, that the Trump administration has decided to withhold \$255 million in aid from Pakistan. There are obvious explanations for this. For the last year, Pakistan has engaged in a double game (Iqbal, January 3, 2018). In reaction to Nikki Haley’s accusations, Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan’s ambassador to the UN, said, “We have carried out the largest and successful counter-terrorism operation anywhere in the world and contributed and sacrificed the most in GWOT”. “US spokespersons shouldn’t place the blame for their own errors and failures on others”, she continued (Haider, 2018). The US then said that it would no longer be providing Pakistan with full security support. The Trump administration used arm-twisting methods to suspend funding to Pakistan, accusing the country of not doing enough to combat the danger posed by extremists and the Haqqani network on its soil an allegation that Pakistan has constantly denied.

The US Arbitrary Actions and the Implications for the Bilateral Relations

The US has also decided to use Predator drones in Pakistan to attack extremists. Drones, also known as unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs, are seen to be the most effective weapon against terrorists and Al-Qaeda. Private contractors and intelligence agents fly drones. The CIA runs a covert targeted assassination operation, managing its drone fleet from its headquarters in Virginia with pilots assisting approximately covert airfields in South Asia (United Nations, May 28, 2010, 7). The Bureau of Investigative Journalism, a UK-based group, looked into the hundreds of deaths caused by drone attacks in Pakistan since 2004. There were 430 drone strikes in Pakistan in total -- 51 under the Bush administration, 373 during the Obama administration and just 6 during the Trump administration—resulting in 4026 fatalities, including 969 civilians and 207 children. Terrorists and other militants have been recognized as the majority of the drone casualties. “Hundreds of civilians, including women and children, have also died”, according to The Bureau of Investigative Journalism. Drone attacks within Pakistan have dropped in frequency at the conclusion of the Obama administration, but have resumed under the Trump administration after the latter unilaterally approved a rise in drone strikes inside Pakistan.

Drone strikes rose from three in 2016 to eight in 2017 and four in 2018 till March 15 during the Trump administration. Pakistani authorities denounced the Trump administration’s drone operations as an infringement on their nation’s sovereignty. “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”, the ministry of foreign affairs stated on January 23, 2018. Pakistan believes that the US’s unilateral actions have a negative impact on bilateral relations and collaboration in the counterterrorism effort. However, a spokesperson for the Pakistani military declared, “the US must stop drone strikes in Pakistan and there are no organized militant sanctuaries inside Pakistan anymore” (Syed, 2018; Masood, (2018).

Pakistan’s sovereignty has been blatantly violated and international agreements broken by the Trump administration’s strategy of drone strikes. Through official and informal diplomatic channels, Pakistani officials have been expressing their dissatisfaction towards US authorities. Drone attacks target both

civilians and militants, killing women and children as unintentional casualties. According to Pakistani authorities and experts, these drone operations are ineffective and pose significant difficulties for the country's security forces, who are engaged in a difficult conflict with terrorists in the Afghan-Pak area. Because of executing terrorists together with civilians, Pakistani society is becoming more hostile to the US and Islamabad. It is like combating terrorism with terrorism. The U.S. House of Representatives reported in February 2018 "Nation-states are obligated to ensure that their territory is not being used to launch attacks on other countries" in an attempt to increase pressure on Islamabad and to justify the unilateral assaults on Pakistani land. They are not entitled to compensate for that; it is their sovereign obligation.

Pakistan is fighting the American war that was thrust upon Islamabad in 2001, not its own. Trump claimed in his tweet that it had gotten help from the US, but in reality, it had received payment and reimbursement for the costs incurred by its military actions, which were limited to supporting the US. "Pakistan should not be surprised when others take action to defend themselves if it is incapable of or unwilling to exercise sovereignty over its territory and prevent cross-border attacks", the study continued. "The U.S. must be determined to increase the frequency and lethality of drone strikes if Pakistan continues to refuse to take action against militant groups operating inside its borders", the statement said. It is somewhat unexpected that Pakistan is the target of such policies.

By invading Afghanistan and carrying out drone attacks within Pakistan, the US House of Representatives has flagrantly broken international law and breached the sovereignty of both countries. This is a very basic tenet of international law that the US House of Representatives has chosen to disregard. Cross-border assaults on the US occupying forces in Afghanistan are attributed to Pakistan. The study attempted to justify US drone operations in Pakistan and threatened to escalate them if cross-border infiltration persisted and Pakistan did not take sufficient action to rein in extremist organizations (U.S. House of Representative, 2018, 7-9). The United Nations Charter, the Geneva Conventions and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court are all obviously broken by the US drone assaults on Pakistan. Drone attacks inside Pakistan's tribal region are thought to be a breach of national sovereignty. The murder of defenseless people fuels extremism, insurgency and suicide assaults on Pakistani military and civilian targets (Rabbi, 2014, 51).² Future hopes for a reconciliation in the tense US-Pakistan ties will be thwarted by the Trump administration's continued drone assaults on Pakistan.

Donald Trump's Twitter Diplomacy: 'No more'

To his benefit, Donald Trump has turned Twitter into a weapon against Pakistan in an effort to sway Islamabad's actions. He warned to sever aid if Islamabad continued to give terrorists a safe harbor. He declared, "The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, believing our leaders to be fools. They have given us nothing but lies and deceit". They provide refuge to the militants we track down in Afghanistan, but with limited assistance. Not even again! (Trump's Tweet, January 1, 2018).

Pakistani PM Shahid Khaqan Abbasi called a meeting of the National Security Commission (NSC) on January 2, 2018, to discuss the US president's charges and grave threats, Pakistan's reaction and next steps. The NSC meeting ended with a statement expressing extreme displeasure at Trump's hostile remarks. "Totally inexplicable as they blatantly contradicted facts, struck with great insensitivity at the trust between two nations built over generations", the statement read. It has, meanwhile, "negated the

decades of sacrifices made by the Pakistani nation - a nation that has contributed so significantly to regional and global security and peace”, according to the addition. During the NSC meeting, it was emphasized that Pakistan’s counterterrorism campaign, which has been waged since 2001, has been “a bulwark” against the spread of terrorism using its limited resources, which have cost thousands of lives in addition to their economic costs. The campaign “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 it would not respond in “haste” Trump “unwarranted allegation” against Islamabad. Pakistan will remain steadfast in its commitment to regional stability and play a positive role in the peace process in Afghanistan (Government of Pakistan, January 2, 2018).

The Federal Cabinet of Pakistan, which considered the remarks made by the US leadership to be detrimental to bilateral relations between Pakistan and the US, supported the NSC’s position. The foreign minister of Pakistan, Khawaja Asif, tweeted in Urdu, “The US launched 57,800 attacks on Afghanistan from airbases on our soil”, blaming Pakistan for the US policy makers’ inability to prevail in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan. You transported your guns and ammo across our highways and ports (The Nation, January 4, 2018). Pakistani lawmakers also demonstrated against Trump’s remarks. “Pakistan as an anti-terrorist 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”, Defense Minister Khuram Dastagir said, defending his nation’s sovereignty. They ignore terrorists’ safe havens beyond borders where they kill Pakistanis. (Pak Minster Defence Tweet, January 1, 2018). Additionally, the US ambassador in Islamabad, David Hale, was called by the Pakistani Foreign Office to express disapproval of Trump’s careless remarks (*The News*, January 2, 2018).

The Growing Indian Population in the US Power Corridors and Its Impact on US-Pakistan Relations in contrast to Pakistan, the approximately 2 million Indian Americans who are U.S. citizens of Indian descent who live abroad are extremely well-organized and motivated to support India’s interests by influencing US policy toward both India and Pakistan. The younger generation of Indian Americans has succeeded in making a name for themselves in the US and moving up the government hierarchy.

Under the current Trump administration, officials of Indian descent holding prominent advisory posts are undermining Pakistan’s interests. The US’s efforts to pacify India through the nuclear agreement and other pledges of cutting-edge military hardware are not happening in a vacuum. The US wants to raise India’s military and diplomatic profile to match China’s, which is what is driving these changes. The US President signed a bill in 2019 that aims to strengthen US involvement in the Indo-Pacific region, bolstering the multifaceted relationship with India and denouncing Chinese actions that purport to “undermine” the so-called rules-based global order. The New Framework for the 2005 US-India Defense Relationship, the 2015 Joint Strategic Vision for the Indo-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region, the 2017 Joint Statement on Prosperity through Partnership and the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative 2012 all receive reinforcement from the Act (Economic Times, January 1, 2019). When seen from this angle, Pakistan’s interests in the area and beyond are being negatively impacted by Indo-US relations, both directly and indirectly (Khan, 2016, 37-61).

Pakistan’s strategists need to have taken into account the US’s Asia-Pacific policy’s inception and the ensuing improvement in Indo-US ties. One of the main forces behind the strengthening strategic alliance between the US and India is the rising rivalry between China and the US. China is seen as the long-term rival to US supremacy in the region and the world in the updated grand plan. The United States’ increasing

inclination towards India, which is seen as a tactical buffer against China, can be explained by its efforts to restrict China. Therefore, US policy and stance toward Pakistan are greatly impacted by US appeasement of India. The US's actions toward Pakistan are starting to be influenced by India's strengthened cooperation with the US. The Haqqani network and Taliban problem is not central to US strategic objectives in the Asia-Pacific region, where the US-China cold war is intensifying and becoming more evident in the form of a crippling trade war. The US's long-term strategy toward Pakistan is changing because of this contest for dominance amongst the major countries. Islamabad is starting to feel the heat from India's growing support for the US Asian strategic agenda in the region. As a regional counterweight to China, Washington seeks to support India. Pakistan, on the other hand, is still defying India's absurd ambition of regional hegemony. From the US vantage point, India is unable to change its strategic orientation toward China in light of Pakistan. Therefore, Pakistan must be brought under control so that India, the US's regional puppet, may fight China. The Present Course of Relations between Pakistan and the United States.

The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), a worldwide organization with its headquarters in Paris, put Pakistan on a "grey list" in June 2018, alleging that Islamabad's efforts to stop money laundering and the funding of terrorism were insufficient, further straining ties between the US and Pakistan. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Qureshi has emphasized the US's participation in the FATF judgment. "Pakistan's relationship with Islamabad was not that great as a result of the US placing it on the Financial Action Task Force's grey list" (Dawn, March 11, 2019). The FATF gave Pakistan a 27-point agenda that needed to be implemented by September 2019. Pakistan completed all five of the FATF-mandated activities in order to comply with the requirements of the first review, which was completed in February 2019. India appears to be acting as a spoiler by pressuring the FATF to compel Islamabad to take additional action against eight groups, including Jamat-ud-Dawa, Lashkar Taiba, Jaish Mohammad and Falah-e-Insaneyat Foundation. There will be two more FATF evaluations in May and September 2019 before Pakistan is taken off the grey list (The Express Tribune, February 15, 2019).

In order to maintain impartiality and equity in the review process, Pakistan's Finance Minister, Asad Umar, has written to the FATF president requesting that India be removed from its position as co-chair of the Asia Pacific Group and encouraging the appointment of another member in India's place. "India's hostility towards Pakistan is well-known and the recent bombings inside Pakistani territory and violations of Pakistan's airspace are further manifestations of India's hostile attitude", the author said (The Express Tribune, March 12, 2019).

The US-Pakistan relationship was in disarray after the FATF put Pakistan on its gray list. Thankfully, Islamabad's involvement in the peace negotiations between the United States and the Taliban has created a window of opportunity for both nations to come together and strengthen their tense relationship. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with Shah Mehmood Qureshi, Prime Minister Imran Khan and senior military and civilian leaders during his official visit to Pakistan on September 5, 2018. Pompeo expressed optimism about the chance to mend the strained ties between the US and Pakistan. According to the US Department of State, Pompeo "transmitted the need for Pakistan to take sustained and decisive measures against terrorists and militants threatening regional peace and stability" and "emphasized the important role Pakistan could play in bringing about a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan" during his meetings (U.S. Department of State, September 5, 2018).

Recent remarks by Pakistan's foreign minister, Qureshi, indicated that the US-Pakistan relationship had reached a number of key milestones and that both nations had attempted to rebuild the bilateral connections that were essential to a peaceful end to the Afghan conflict. "We are a nation, not beggars", he remarked in response to a query concerning US aid. Bilateral ties should have more to offer than just financial considerations. We will come bearing our vision. We desire regional peace but do not require help. One illustration of that is our outreach in the region. Following the day when the US and the Taliban decided to continue their diplomatic efforts to end the war in Afghanistan, the foreign minister released a statement (Pakistan Today, January 27, 2019).

Post-Pulwama Scenario and Pak-US Ties

The American stance and policies have been clearly biased against Pakistan and pro-Indian in order to placate New Delhi. U.S. National Security Advisor John Bolton was fast to point the finger at Pakistan without conducting even a preliminary inquiry or providing any unquestionable proof. "I express condolences to NSA Doval for the reprehensible terrorist attack on India yesterday", he tweeted. Jihadist groups like JeM and others that operate out of Pakistan must be taken seriously. States should fulfill their obligations under the UNSC to prevent terrorists from receiving sanctuary or support (Bolton, February 16, 2019). John Bolton quickly said that the Indian airstrikes in Pakistan were "India's right to self-defense" and hence supported the so-called preemptive actions. Furthermore, NSA John Bolton conveyed to Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale at a recent meeting the United States' unwavering support for India. India and the US wanted Pakistan to take "tangible and irreversible action" against terrorist groups. In a tweet on March 14, 2019, Bolton said, "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". The US continues to foster its relationship with New Delhi at the expense of its relations with Islamabad in an attempt to court India as a strategic buffer against China in the region. Islamabad fears that the growing Indo-US nexus could upset the delicate strategic balance in the region, which was on the verge of nuclear Armageddon during the most recent military escalation.

Recent Defrost in the Bilateral Ties

With regard to the US military's misadventure in Afghanistan, Donald Trump has been quite critical. One of his main election promises to his supporters was to leave Afghanistan. With the approaching election of the next president, Trump has increased his attempts to reach a peace agreement with the Taliban. Without Pakistan's proactive cooperation which Trump is actively courting and pressuring in an attempt to get the foreign policy win he needs to gain domestic political capital—a negotiated settlement in Afghanistan is not feasible. As a result, the President's pursuit of a foreign policy coup, Pakistan's escalating economic problems and the approaching FATF sword have forced all parties to agree on the Afghan dilemma.

Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan paid his historic three-day visit to the United States in July 2019 to resolve differences and cement the thaw in the connection. The visit took place in the midst of Islamabad-facilitated continuing talks for peace in Afghanistan. The US President gave the Pakistani Premier a hearty welcome, expressing gratitude to Islamabad and even offering to use his good offices to mediate the issue of Kashmir in exchange for Pakistan's helpful assistance in assisting the US in negotiating a peace agreement in Afghanistan (Hashim, July 25, 2019).

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Dawn (March 12, 2019) previously agreed upon a \$6 billion bailout plan for Pakistan's failing economy. Without Washington's approval, the rescue plan for Pakistan would not have been conceivable given US power in the Bretton Woods financial institutions. Additionally, the "reset" in the two countries' ties gained momentum in September 2019 when the presidents reconnected on the fringes of the 74th UN General Assembly. "Stability in Afghanistan means stability in Pakistan", declared Imran Khan. He also discussed Donald Trump's declaration that he would be willing to mediate if both nations requested him to, in light of the recent crackdown by India in Indian-occupied Kashmir following that region's annexation (Gulf News, September 23, 2019). The prime minister of Pakistan has started using shuttle diplomacy to ease tensions between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Donald Trump is said to have endorsed Imran Khan because of his ability to act as a "go-between" in the unstable area (CNN, October 16, 2019). The good developments listed above indicate that both nations have realized that a total collapse of bilateral ties would be damaging to their respective national interests.

Conclusion

The US is using a number of aggressive policy tools to deal with Pakistan, including direct threats of surgical strikes, suspension of military cooperation and assistance cuts. Islamabad sees the coordinated US pressure as harmful to the friendly and cooperative relations between Pakistan and the US. Donald Trump wants Pakistan's regional policies and stance to change fundamentally in order to better align with American goals. His charges on the purported safe havens and hidden connections to the Haqqani network and the Afghan Taliban would only deepen the chasm that already exists between the two nations, who have an enviable history of hostility and mistrust. Pakistani policy planners must reorganize the nation's foreign policy alternatives and strategic goals to meet the demands of the evolving geopolitical and global security landscape. The geopolitical and geoeconomic landscapes of the region and the world are rapidly shifting and this might have severe ramifications for regional peace and security if the bilateral ties between Pakistan and the US worsen. Pakistan fears that increasing US pressure combined with hostile actions by Afghanistan and India is intended to create conditions for complete Indian regional hegemony. It is important to consider the widening rift between the US and Pakistan while analyzing the recent aggressive and reckless remarks made by the Indian army commander, who cast doubt on Pakistan's ability to repel nuclear threats. The objective is to subject Pakistan to a growing degree of strategic pressure, therefore putting the country's military and economic capacities beyond their sustainable limits. India has so profited from the increasing pressure of Pakistan by the US.

In order to restore peace and stability to the war-torn nation, as seen by the escalating insurgency, the US and NATO should invest more in development and governance. The only practical and sustainable solution to the protracted Afghan conflict is for Pakistan to collaborate with the US on the final peace negotiations and the mainstreaming of the rebels. With the Taliban and the US in peace talks, there is now more room for collaboration and convergence under Donald Trump, who wants to negotiate a peace agreement with the Afghan Taliban and appear to be making a victorious exit from the country's crisis. The Pakistan relations and U.S. are at a turning point. With a lengthy history of diplomatic conflict interspersed with temporary collaboration driven by transactional approach, the continuing peace talks for a lasting peace in the war-torn nation of Afghanistan have created fresh opportunities for further cooperation between the two nations. Both nations must decide whether to forge on into new terrain of rising bellicosity with unknowable consequences or turn around and mend the shattered relationships by

reorienting bilateral relations toward cooperation with mutual benefit. Thus, if the window of opportunity is not missed, the successful Afghan peace conference has the ability to save not just the country's peace but also the relationship between Pakistan and the United States.

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