

Post-9/11 US Policies and South Asia

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Abstract

The administration in the US has made up its mind with regard to rectifying its policies towards the South Asian region. The extremist forces, having established their credentials as a global risk, remain a serious threat to global peace and stability. The Obama administration is especially concentrating on the South Asian region, keeping in mind its colossal strategic significance. Recently, Washington executed her new policy on the issue of how to handle the Taliban in Afghanistan. The US has also persuaded India and Pakistan, two central regional stakeholders, about her benefits in Afghanistan. The US has to understand the interests of both Pakistan and India, two nuclear antagonistic neighbours in the region, when it comes to resolving the Afghanistan issue. Pakistan is anxious about her relative strategic depth, the unsettled Kashmir issue and oppressive Indian objectives. In addition to all this, the US administration has accepted the responsibility, before the international community, of dealing with the challenges of extremist forces in the South Asian region.

Keywords: US, South Asia, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, strategic

US Options in South Asia

The South Asian region enjoys great geopolitical and geostrategic significance. Various issues like terrorism, expansion of terrorist networks, the notorious unresolved Kashmir dispute, which has become a nuclear flashpoint, and the Afghan crisis have further increased the significance of the region. The post-9/11 global situation has also added extensively to the importance of the region, particularly for the US. America's tense relations with Iran on the nuclear issue, and the latter's support for anti-Israel terrorist groups is another essential factor in driving the Obama administration's exceptional attention on the region. Iran is one of the main regional actors, with an importance in the Caspian region that the US cannot deny. Both China and Russia have approved talks with Iran on her nuclear program. In Afghanistan's case, the US policy makers have perceived that the Karzai administration has been unsuccessful in safeguarding American strategic and

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economic interests, and have supported the idea of reconciliation with the Taliban. The Doha negotiation episode affirms this move. Increasing Indo-US ties are linked with economic growth and energy needs. It is an acknowledged reality that the US pressed India not to take part in the IPI pipeline project and consequently signed a civil nuclear deal (123 Agreement) with Delhi in obvious breach of international laws on nuclear proliferation. The strengthening of Indo-US ties are evidently aimed at obstructing China's might in the region.

Moreover, the US is also concerned about the existence of two nuclear antagonistic neighbors – India and Pakistan – in the region who continue to be at loggerheads over the unresolved Kashmir issue. Pakistan has shown a supple stance in resolving the issue and had come up with different suggestions during the Musharraf regime. India, on the other hand, has always remained unresponsive to any effort aimed at resolving the issue. Many publications have convinced international policy makers that Kashmir is the root cause of terrorism and extremism. The former President of Pakistan, Musharraf, tried his best in persuading the international community on the fact that peace in South Asia and the Middle East was not viable without solving the long standing Kashmir and Palestine issues. The US strategy in South Asia is based on engagement and estrangement factors (Baloch, 2006). The Indian government was initially supposed to be a 'strategic competitor' during George Bush Senior's reign, but afterwards it was considered a 'strategic partner'. This new approach is concluded in a key American policy maker's testimony before a Senate Committee, which reads,

“As we work to advance fundamental US interests in South Asia, we want our engagement to reflect the totality of our interests. It must be broad and complete. One core interest cannot be pursued to the exclusion of other key objectives. Some commentators have incorrectly argued that expanding US economic objectives in South Asia should or will undercut our efforts to advance other key interests, such as non-proliferation or human rights. Others mistakenly believe our relationship with one country must come at the expense of another. The record I have described above amply demonstrates this is not the case. Our bilateral relationships need to be based on a realistic assessment of each other's interests, recognising that it is normal and healthy for sovereign states to differ in some areas while agreeing in others. Expanding mutual interests will give us the incentives to overcome

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differences and build on areas of convergence. Expanding relationships and deeper engagement with the countries of South Asia are now a reality” (Source: <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/raphael.htm>).

Richard Boucher, the then Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs, remarked,

“Building a key strategic partnership with India has been a key foreign policy priority for this administration and frankly for the previous administration, just as I would expect it to be a major priority for the next administration. President Bush and Prime Minister Singh signed the joint statement in July of 2005 that said the successful transformation of the US-India relationship will have a positive and decisive influence on the future international system as it evolves in the new century. That remark is very obviously true and that’s a foundation of what we are doing. We have supported, with the help of the American people and Congress, much more strong economic links with India, and we have talked about that -- investment, opening up new sectors and a lot of back and forth. And one of the things I was surprised to learn when I was in India last month -- the numbers aren’t completely clear yet, but it appears that the flow of Indian investment into the United States is almost as big as the flow of American investment into India these days and Indian investors are actually creating jobs in the United States at an expanding rate. And that is good for us as well as for India” (US Department of State, Source: <http://2001-2009.state.gov/p/sca/rls/rm/2008/110204.htm>).

Security Challenges in South Asia

As a strategic partner, Washington ruled out all policy parameters regarding the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in terms of the civil nuclear agreement, called the 123 Agreement (Klug, 2008). It was declared that several other strategic agreements between the two countries are also in the pipeline. On the other hand, Washington adding insult to injury called Pakistan an irresponsible state in connection with her role in the alleged Nuclear Proliferation in Libya, Iraq and North Korea. The former US Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage said, “We have questions about Pakistan, which

are well known and of which you are equally aware” (Sattar, 2013). A diplomatic expressive note was elaborated in favour of New Delhi, which said, “Washington intended to work closely with the Indian government to promote common interests in Asia and beyond” (Talbot, 2004). Past memories were recalled when both states signed the Kicklighter Proposals of 1991, as well as due to the developments regarding common defence consultative groups, combined naval exercise (1992), and agreed minutes on defence relations (1995). In the context of these historic agreements, high level diplomatic talks came to a conclusion when both signed a 10-year Defence Framework Agreement (June 2005), the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) and the Logistics Support Agreement (LGA) (Khuranna, 2008). The purpose of these developments was to acquire a comprehensive understanding on both sides to meet common interests. In April 2007, the US Commander Admiral Tim Keating stated his government’s willingness to ‘aggressively’ pursue expanding military-to-military relations with India (Mukherjee & Rumsfeld, 2005). It is a recognised fact that the US arm sales to India have greatly increased. India received the US military assistance under International Military Education and Training (IMET) Programme at maximum level except during the year 2006-07 (Souza, 2008). Political observers viewed the 123 Agreement as an absolute take off in terms of relations between both states. This agreement changed the global environment and crossed established limits in the pursuit of common interests. The discussion regarding the 123 Agreement was initiated in the Indian Parliament on the issue of whether Delhi should give up Nehruism or not.

The Communist Party of India strongly condemned the Indian stance over the 123 Agreement and expressed worries about India’s future status as a member of NAM. The then Indian Prime Minister defended the deal by saying it would not have an effect on India’s sovereignty, and that the said agreement would instead expand political, economic, security and logistical relations between the two states. New Delhi is not bound to take instructions from Washington in matters relating to foreign policy. Washington favoured India, which disturbed regional stability and the balance of power within the region.

Pakistan cast a doubtful glance at the new US-India strategic partnership and expressed its apprehension that such developments would result in a nuclear arms race between the two antagonistic states. Pakistan will keep up nuclear deterrence and will avoid adopting an aggressive tone. Not only did the US-India nuclear deal concern the South Asian regional power balance, it also laid transparent America’s double standards regarding the NPT (Baruah, 2007). India received strategic control and more concessions in increasing her nuclear capabilities. The US forcefully backed the Indian government’s stand over her nuclear program, while at the same time America vigorously

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confronted Iran over her quest for nuclear capability and passed a resolution in Congress in 2000 that “authorised sanctions against state entities and individuals that aided Iranian efforts to develop or acquire missile technology or weapons of mass destruction” (Katzman, 2003). It seems hypocritical that India supported Iran’s access to nuclear technology for civil nuclear purposes only. India at that time was interested in the IPI pipeline project, which evidently was an obstruction in promoting stronger relations between the US and India. It was due to later developments that India decided to opt out of this project. Due to growing American pressure and the apprehensions of relying on Pakistan for her energy needs, coupled with the US civil nuclear deal, India decided to distance herself from the IPI gas pipeline project.

The US has highlighted the so-called issue of democracy in Iran and it also has unofficially sponsored financial findings on regime change in Iran, but these efforts failed to produce satisfactory results. Iran’s supreme leader Ali Khomeini has an influential voice in the Iranian government. Recently, the moderate Iranian candidate for President, Hassan Rouhani, came out victorious against the rigid conservative clergy in Iran. His political victory has been treated as a victory of moderate thinking over radical Islamists. Observers have calculated that this is undoubtedly an opportune moment for a shift in Iran; however, power remains under the control of Khomeini. It is expected that the new political leadership in Iran will opt for negotiations as a method to deal with matters of conflict. Iranian political observers argued that the Iranian nuclear program dilemma could not be understood unless economic sanctions were uplifted.

Kashmir

The presence of two nuclear states in the South Asian region is a worrying condition for the US. The Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan is thus a Damocles’ sword and is widely recognised as a nuclear flashpoint. Whenever efforts were made by Washington to sort out a possible solution for Kashmir, India rejected all negotiations and peaceful dialogues. The US policy makers had acknowledged Kashmir as a serious threat in the region because both states have nuclear weapons. During the Musharraf regime, Kashmir was highlighted and Pakistan munificently showed a supple attitude. The demilitarisation logic was proposed by Pakistan for the promotion of meaningful dialogue. On the other hand, the Indian government’s response was not positive; in fact, it was rather discouraging. The first time, Pakistan-India Kashmir talks were sabotaged when the Kargil adventure came about. The second time, the Agra Summit had been intentionally failed to produce a positive outcome. The Kargil episode was perceived as a simple violation of the international law of intervention. The then US President Bill Clinton was

approached by the Indian government to pressurize Pakistan to withdraw from the occupied location. Nawaz Sharif, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, was informed regarding the possibility of a 'limited strike' or 'limited war' against Pakistan (Bidwi, 2002). India had effectively convinced the international community regarding a possible international intervention against Pakistan. Finally, Nawaz Sharif had to withdraw from Kargil to avert diplomatic isolation. A few months later, both states tested nuclear missile technologies, which changed the conventional war status. Pakistan had demined India's nuclear No-First use policy and had defined a policy outline that the option of nuclear weapons would be used only when Pakistan's sovereignty would be at stake (Hagerty & Sumit, n.d.)

Kofi Annan, the former UN General Secretary, while addressing an international forum said that Kashmir was the root cause of all disturbances in the South Asia region. The Indian Prime Minister said, "Those who speak of underlying or root causes of terrorism offer alibis for the terrorists and absolve them of responsibilities for their heinous actions, such as the September 11 attacks on the US or the December 13 attack on our Parliament," (Rajghatta, 2002). The US policy makers argue that there is a less chance of resolving the Kashmir problem since it has become ever so difficult to now reach a win-win situation. Three parties are directly involved -- India, Pakistan and the Kashmiris. Independent observers calculate that making concrete commitments is not possible because the involved parties cannot afford or compromise less than a 'win-win-game'. Side by side, the US preferred 'stick' and 'carrot' policy in Kashmir dispute. Issues are discussed to a certain believed in 'peace' in South Asia particularly and in 'Asia' generally. Engagement with both states is pursued interest by the US policy makers.

Afghanistan

Generally, the US policy makers do not seek to leave Afghanistan in a chaotic situation rife with confusion and ethnic and tribal violence, as the country had experienced in the past, but they are likewise perceptive towards their economic and strategic interests, which cannot be ignored (Ottoway, 1989). The US' historical policy of extending concessions to Pakistan in matters of policies related to the Taliban is based on her economic and strategic interests during those particular periods. Ahmad Rashid, a Pakistani expert on Afghanistan and Taliban, said,

"Between 1994 and 1996 the USA supported the Taliban politically through its allies Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, essentially because Washington viewed the Taliban as anti-Iranian, anti-Shia and pro-western. The

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US conveniently ignored the Taliban's own Islamic fundamentalist agenda, its suppression of women and the concentration they created in Central Asia largely because Washington was not interested in the larger picture. From 1995 to 1997, US support was even more driven because at the time the USA had no strategic plan towards accessing Central Asian energy resources, and pipelines could be built without resolutions to regional civil wars" (Rashid, 2000).

He further added,

"The Clinton administration was clearly sympathetic to the Taliban as they were in line with Washington's Anti-Iran policy and were important for the success of any southern pipeline from Central Asia that would avoid Iran. The US Congress had authorised a covert \$20 million budget for the CIA to destabilise Iran. Tehran had accused Washington of funnelling some of these funds to the Taliban, a charge that was always denied by Washington" (Rashid, 2000).

It has been reported that Pakistan's political and military leadership have played the role of a vital bridge between the US and the Afghan Taliban. This development was not acceptable for the Indian government. John Kerry visited New Delhi and discussed all related areas with the Indian leadership. The Indian government has remained steadfast on not allowing its economic and strategic interests to be compromised. It was expected that John Kerry would deliver in between line message to India but the latter focused on rejection of this theory. The 2014 US withdrawal from Afghanistan has serious challenges and has complicated realities. The Karzai administration blamed Washington for dispersed security matters. Karzai also alleged that Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan had generated serious threats in the region. It is impossible for Kabul to consolidate any peace process which has no legitimacy. In Doha, the Afghan Taliban were forced to acknowledge its regime in Afghanistan and fully denied the Karzai government. On the contrary, the Taliban delegation argued that the Karzai government had no legitimacy in Afghanistan. They argued that since Karzai was only in power due to the US support, an alliance with the Karzai government was of no consequence. A dramatic change in the US policy matters has provided legitimacy to the Afghan Taliban, whose constant struggle has curtailed the role of the Karzai administration in Afghanistan. It is also reported that the US administration further acknowledged the role of Pakistan in approaching the

Afghan Taliban leadership. The second important development concerns Iran. Unlike George Bush, President Obama intentionally focused on developing a mechanism for fruitful discussions.

US Policy: Realignment in South Asia

International relations experts argue that the US strategic policies are the outcome of its realignment with other global powers like Russia, India and China in South Asia. In order to protect maximum benefits and more powerful strategic achievements, the US focused on the strategic challenges and issues pertaining to security. Afghanistan issue is one of the most important issues with reference to security. It has been observed that the US President George W. Bush (S) had redefined US policy interests and expressed a new shift in strategic design. A pre-emptive strike policy was favoured and enacted by George Bush (J) in an effort to counter the rising menace of terrorism. Walter Russell Mead said, "The US grand strategy has not changed much in 200 years" (Carter, 2006). Likewise, John Lewis Gaddis argued, "Bush's grand strategy is consistent with the broad sweep of precedents" (Carter, 2006). Contrary to the aforementioned experts, Barry Buzan argued, "Bush has burned the stored assets of US goodwill" (Washington Post, 2005).

A few observers pointed out that the US policy makers' shift in the region is in response to new and changed geo-political realities. In the past, the US had held up the Taliban in Afghanistan with the imminent purpose of countering Russian and Chinese power, but that policy collapsed and backfired when the Taliban were found to be involved in activities that were detrimental to the US economic and strategic interests. The US successfully garnered diplomatic and political support from India, Russia and China on issues of common interest like the War on Terror. There are several plans for railway lines connecting Turkey to Pakistan and Iran, and pipelines running west over high mountain ranges into western China or to the port of Gwadar, Pakistan, on the Arabian Sea coast.

“Our top foreign policy goals in South Asia reflect the administration's global priorities reducing tensions and helping to resolve conflicts peacefully. No one takes lightly the dangers inherent in relations between India and Pakistan. They fought three wars between 1948 and 1972, and are still bitter rivals. Inflexible policies and attitudes on both sides aggravate serious tensions. These tensions are enhanced by the possession of a nuclear weapons capability by both countries. The Kashmir dispute polarises the relationship between the

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two nations. We are continuing efforts to persuade them to begin a serious attempt to resolve this dispute. This must involve sustained, direct discussions between senior Indian and Pakistani officials. It requires the credible engagement of all the people of Jammu and Kashmir and the cessation of human rights abuses by security forces and militants. It also requires the end of outside assistance to the militancy against the Indian government. The United States has offered to assist with this process, if India and Pakistan so request. We have no preferred outcome. But we recognise that a resolution is long overdue and essential for the long term stability of the region as a whole.”¹

It is an undeniable fact that the US policy towards India is ‘China-centric’. Vis-à-vis India, the US should aim to rapidly complete the transformation in Indo-US relations that has been underway since the final years of the Clinton administration, and which received dramatic substantive impetus in the first term of President George W. Bush, in order to permanently entrench India in the ranks of America’s friends and allies. With the changes that have occurred both globally and in India since the end of the Cold War, a close bilateral relationship that is based on the strong congruence of interests, values, and inter-societal ties, is in fact possible for the first time in the history of the two states.² China’s economic and strategic interests in the South Asian region and related policies are closely watched by India and Japan. Both these states are allied with the US. It is a known fact that growing Chinese economic position and its strategic ties with neighbouring states had escalated US-India nexus to move towards new trends. Their expanding cooperation and growing relations should be treated as a ‘key global power’ in containing China. The US political observers look at China as a strategic challenger. The US has in the past showed its preference towards India being a regional power against China. The US agreed to provide “8-Rayteon Co-Long-Range” weapon locating radars to India. The Radar System, worth \$146 million, is designed to pinpoint an enemy’s long-range mortars, artillery and rocket launches (Dawn, 2002). Besides this, the US had approved the sale of Israel’s Phalcon Airline, technically approached as an ‘Early Warning System’, worth \$1.2 billion, to India (Ahmad, 2005). The American CIA officials have viewed India as the most maintain balance of power between war and peace and between chaos and order and still lead to reshape the future politics of South Asia Region (The Hindustan Times, 2005). Both the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice and the Defence Secretary, Rumsfeld argued, “An unbridled China is not in US interests, and by bolstering India, the US can contain China and arrest the growth of Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean and Chinese penetration

of Myanmar” (Source: www.saag.org/papers4/paper303.html). The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace had submitted a report to the House Committee on International Relations dated June 15, 2004, which reflected political and strategic recommendations for the US policy makers.

First, it was clear that India’s military and economic strength needs to be fully reinforced to better compete with China’s rising dominance in Asia. Second, in the process of strengthening relations, the US Deputy Secretary of State, Strobe Talbott talked with Jaswant and Manmohan Singh and focused on ‘strategic engagement’ with India. The former US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice visited New Delhi and commented, “President Bush very much values to enhance the relationship between the US and India, the fact that we are becoming in many ways important global as well as regional partners” (Burns, 2007). During the Musharraf regime, former Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri talked on Indo-US interests,

“I believe the government’s reaction over this issue did not cover the feelings of the people and these statements were however rhetorical and not sufficient to match the gravity of the situation. Pakistan should convey its serious concern to the US as she has a non-NATO ally status. The US should guarantee that her move to strengthen India should in no way upset the power balance in the region.” Nicholas Burns, the Assistant Secretary of State, visited New Delhi in June 2005 and said the US had developed a strategic partnership with India as she was a rising democratic power in the world and a trusted friendly country (Burns, 2007).

Conclusion

Critical incidents in the South Asian region have generated a considerable amount of attention for policy makers in Washington. Various factors like terrorism, nuclear proliferation, Iran’s nuclear program, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan and its future consequences are Washington’s paramount policy matters. The US policy makers have some questions and ambiguities, which have to be analytically examined and then fully implemented. In Afghanistan’s case, Washington opened a window for the Taliban. Recently, a US policy makers’ delegation held dialogue with the Taliban leadership. Two-fold parameters have been realised that the minus-Afghan Taliban formula cannot introduce peace and stability in Afghanistan. All stakeholders must be approached for talks in order to a possible solution.

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The US has some restraints on policy matters with regards to dealing with Iran. It has been reported that Iran will be convinced to never enrich uranium in excess of 20%, and will also be convinced to follow counter terrorism dialogue within the region. The US diplomats have been given tasks to identify those factors that could be addressed on both sides to facilitate strategic options. The US policy makers have had to focus on new opportunities. Recently, newly-elected Iranian President Hassan Rouhani stated that a new team would be selected to talk on the nuclear issue with the US, the European Union and P5+1 member states. In the present scenario, Iran has serious domestic pressure on economic reforms, inflation and new trading policy matters. The western media has projected that Iran's involvement in Syria through Hizbullah has serious reservations for Iran. Iran's support to the Assad regime has challenged the US authority, providing political and financial support to the Syrian rebellion forces. The Israeli lobby in America focused on President Obama to opt military option against Iran to undermine its support for the militant groups e.g. Hamas and Hizbullah.

The United States has competing interests in Asia. The US strategy in view of Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran has dimensions of multilateral political and military cooperation. With these regional realities, the US is moving in Asian regional affairs timely and to attempt a unified policy in attaining maximum regional influence.

Notes

1. US Department of State: 95/03/2007 (Testimony) r. Raphael on US Policy towards South Asia Bureau For South Asian Affairs statement by Robin Raphael Assistant Secretary Of State For South Asian Affairs Before The Senate Foreign Relations Committee On Near Eastern And South Asian Affairs march 7, 1995.
2. The United States and South Asia Ashley j. Tellis testimony June 14, 2005: The House Committee on International Relations.

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