

## **Indo-US Nexus to Isolate Pakistan: Options and Responses**

**Ashfaq Ahmad Malik and Dr. Nazir Hussain**

### **Abstract**

India-Pakistan conflict is one of the most complicated and protracted conflicts in modern time, clouded by historical, ideological, religious, and political sentimentality. Beyond these, the diplomatic uncertainty between the two countries has proven to be capable of being transnational and international. Following the Indo-US strategic alliance, there is a growing perception that New Delhi is increasingly demonstrating and deepening its hegemonic designs in South Asia and beyond. Under the BJP government, such hegemonic proclivity has exacerbated the mistrust and the gulf of understanding between New Delhi and Islamabad. With the blessing of Washington, the BJP government has changed the dynamic of the mistrust. To this end, the paper addresses the current dynamics twofold. The first part of the paper looks at Modi's effort geared at isolating Pakistan, the second discusses the mutual effort of Modi and Trump to politically and diplomatically ostracise Pakistan within the comity of nations. The last part of the paper discusses the three ways Pakistan should respond to the individual and combine efforts of Modi and Trump.

**Keywords:** Isolation, Strategic Partnership, Indian Hegemony, South Asia, CPEC

### **Introduction**

In the last seven decades, India-Pakistan relation is far from being a harmonious co-existence; the ties between the two nuclear powers is rather punctuated by mutual distrust, complications, and clouded by historical, ideological, religious, and political sentimentality. India-Pakistan conflict has proven to be uncontrollable by time and space; but capable to morph into a transnational and internationalized conflict. The protraction of the conflict obviously makes the two parties vulnerable to the interference of reference. (Ramsbotam, 2011) Arguably, it is not untrue that the incessant involvement of the US in the region has kept the animosity between India and Pakistan animated and peace a remote accomplishment.

Scholars working on South Asia agreed to the notion that Washington's policy towards the region lacks consistency. The oscillation in US relations with the main players does not only exploit the fragility of relations in the region, (Guihong, 2003) it equally engenders the protraction of animosity amongst these players considerably. (Kux, 2001) While Pakistan-US relations enjoyed certain degree of goodwill and cooperation during the Cold War, it was not the same for India. However, following the end of the Cold War, Indo-US relations opened a new chapter, the beginning of a new dawn that became perilous for Pakistan. Although for an interval of few years,

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Pakistan-US relations enjoyed strategic cooperation due to the US military involvement in Afghanistan. As the US romances Pakistan for its strategic interest on the one hand, it was concurrently crafting a strategic imbalance of power through the India-US strategic partnership (Jaspal, 2007).

The growing ties between New Delhi and Washington has raised the regional and international profile of India to an extent that New Delhi considers itself to be exceptional and should ceased to be hyphenated with smaller countries in the region. The vast spectrum of cooperation between the US and India accords the latter an unprecedented latitude and leverage. The dividends of the Indo-US partnership is not limited to the benefits India gets from Washington, in addition, over the years; India has been treated kindly by countries that consider India as a strong and exceptional partner of Washington (Moore, 2013).

### **Modi's Approach in Isolating Pakistan**

The foreign policy of any country is always a combination of many factors, though domineering, and pragmatic leaders often subscribe to the singularity and unitary actor theory of foreign policy. The idea that the bearing and final decision of foreign policy is ultimately decided by the leader, remains discursive in foreign policy analysis. The role of leadership trait, perception, psychology and religious inclination is by no mean less important. This is true for Prime Minister Modi, whose personality has long been controversial even before his premiership. (Prakash 2015) Since becoming the PM, Modi has attempted to portray India as a cosmopolitan and worth embracing country, (Prasad, 2017) but the same leader has never ceased to remain provocative (Zaman, 2015) or promoting a charged neighbourhood particularly against Pakistan. (Tremblay, 2015) The Indian prime minister has maintained a broad terrorism campaign against Pakistan, though not without the blessing of Washington, which equally walks same line of canvass. The repeated labelling of Pakistan as terrorism sponsoring state and the use of same metaphor sabotages Pakistan's effort in Kashmir. The controversial Uri attack in Kashmir triggered Modi's determination to isolate Pakistan; "Let the terrorists make no mistake, India will never forget . . . we will leave no stone unturned to isolate Pakistan in the world." (Keohane, 2016) Modi described, "Pakistan the mother ship of terrorism" the cancelation of the SARRC summit, the localized and charged heat against Pakistani artistes; closer ties and visit to Afghanistan, (India's Modi inaugurates...) the sixth Heart of Asia ministerial conference in Amritsar, where both India and Afghanistan lashed out at Pakistan, (Ghani Modi lashes at...) the Bangladesh visit, (Roy, 2015) and the concurrent visit to many Arab states, (Panda, 2015) the red carpet reception and promises to the Arab nations were all geared at what Modi considered in isolating Pakistan internationally. New Delhi excluded Pakistan amongst all SAARC countries to take benefit of India's National Knowledge Network (NKN), meant for "sharing scientific databases and remote access to advanced research facilities." (Sharma, 2018)

## **Indo-US Nexus to Isolate Pakistan: Options and Responses**

Despite the concerted efforts of Modi to globally isolate Pakistan, its worth dissecting whether or not that has been fruitful. On the part of Washington, India might have scored numerous goals and promoted linking Pakistan with terrorism, but does this resonates with the rest of the world? Interestingly, Pakistan has behaved more maturely, it has come to the realization to better employ and use what it has to its best advantage. The strategic position of Pakistan in the region is carefully instrumentalized. The unprecedented Sino-Pakistan economic corridor cooperation defeats the whole Indian mantra. The strategic development has turned out unexpectedly envious (Kumar, 2017). While it may be hard to suggest that Modi's foreign policy of isolating Pakistan failed, yet it is equally hard to say no damage was done to Pakistan. However, from the Pakistani standpoint, the unprecedented support and the show of goodwill Islamabad received during Pakistan Day celebration (2017) begged any argument that Modi's policy was outright positive. The participation of China, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, South Africa, UAE were highly publicized. (Hussain, 2017) Meanwhile, the failure of the Chinese government to succumb to Modi's label (mother of terrorism) during the BRICS summit at Goa was unforthcoming for India. The support for Pakistan by the Russian ambassador to India, (Ibid) the renewed Pakistan-Russia relations, (Zaafir, 2016) Moscow's support for CPEC, despite India's reservation is all-daunting for New Delhi. (Russia's support irks...)

### **US-India Relations under Trump and Modi**

On June 27, 2017, Modi added to his profile as the first world leader being hosted by President Trump for dinner at the White House. The meeting accorded President Trump to reiterate his campaign pledge as making India a true associate of the White House. "And that is now exactly what you have -- a true friend." For Trump, Indo-US partnership has "never been stronger, has never been better" (Bromance as Trump and Modi...) and his administration hopes to augment the partnership. The first meeting of Modi with Trump was anticipated to change the course of India-US relationship that had persisted over the past decade.

Washington has worked tremendously to promote the 'Indian exceptionalism' narrative in many areas and the recent Trump's National Security Strategy (NSS), which portrays India as a leading power, country worthy of opportunity, country promoting Washington's interest, constituting no threat or competition. (Joshi, 2017) Under the Trump administration, cooperation with India on fighting terrorism and lumping Pakistan with terrorism has been a commonplace. During his visit to the US, Modi was equally reported to have exploited the Trump's administration campaign against terrorism, by accentuating pressure than ever before on Pakistan for allegedly harbouring terrorist groups. This assertion matches up the mantra of Trump since taking over and more importantly how it was spelt out in the NSS report. India will definitely exploit that passage of the NSS to further irritate, accuse, and blame Pakistan for cross border terrorism, without accepting its own historical role (division

of united Pakistan, interference in Baluchistan and Kashmir) (Khan, 2015) in cross border terrorism across the region, (India using Afghan soil...) particularly in Pakistan, a view that was reaffirmed by Maleeha Lodhi, Pakistan's representative to the UN during the 72nd United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) 2017 (Dagia, 2017).

Following the official release of the NSS, President Trump's tweets, which have become the signature of his presidency fired yet another offensive at Pakistan, claiming that Islamabad has for years received US fund to combat terrorism, but instead "do nothing" and taken Washington and its leadership as fools, "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!" (Hadid, 2018) It bewilders any serious observer of South Asian geopolitics to see how the Americans are choosy and selective enunciating their foreign policy.

Following the explosive tweet of President Trump that attacked Pakistan, diplomatic rattling between the two countries has not ceased. Cutting defence aid for Pakistan further lowered the already strained relations. While diplomats and policymakers weigh the consequence, Richard Olson, former US ambassador to Pakistan argues "there's some suggestion that we have all of the cards in our hands" instead "But we don't. The leverage is strong on the Pakistan side as well and arguably stronger than our side." (Pakistan's ace poker...) Hence the insinuation that Pakistan could block its airspace against the US, which will seriously undermine the US troops in Afghanistan. Even though Washington is said to be preparing for alternative costly route should Pakistan take the tough step.

## **Pakistan's Options and Responses**

### **Neutralizing Indian Hegemony in the Region**

The question that comes to mind is whether or not India is truly a hegemon in the region. If the answer is affirmative, then as a hegemon it might be somewhat difficult to gang up against a hegemon. (Taylor, 2000) However, can the influence of a hegemon be neutralised, the possibility of that seems feasible and plausible, but requires a pragmatic and concerted effort. Neutralising India's influence in the region would require Pakistan to begin an effort within. Pakistan needs to learn from the US and China, both countries became powerful world players not because of their military might, but because they adopted long term strategy that shielded them from entanglement in conflict and trouble, whilst building their countries' domestic capacity and strength. This is an essential factor for Pakistan to overhaul its defence tainted and Cold War swayed foreign policy.

## **Indo-US Nexus to Isolate Pakistan: Options and Responses**

Pakistan must develop a national cohesion, be it between the civil and military establishment, or among the provinces, or the integration of minds and building national consensus and cohesion. The differences among the provinces need to be patched up, the gap of inequality and perceived marginalised should be bridged. Doing that would deprive any external entity to exploit the polarity and divide within Pakistan as the case of Baluchistan is increasingly making headline be it the United State, India, or Switzerland. (Imtiaz, 2012; Siddiqui, 2017) The grievances of all and sundry must be address mutually.

The Chinese started with the development of their local industries, the latter was made functional to an extent of producing qualitatively and massively well for local consumption and that latter morphed into surplus production, leading China into an export-oriented nation. Pakistan should not be an exemption in this regard. Having huge population and sizeable youth population; the human resource is readily available for utility, it only depend on how the resource is utilised. Pakistan's competitiveness begins with an educated urban citizenry, lucrative and industrious enough to participate in economic development. The abundant natural resources buried all across the regions of Pakistan does not make any sense, by simply saying "Pakistan is having that amount of resource in the world" but without utility. The essence of any resource rest on its utility, hence it behaves Pakistani government to adopt a more progress utilitarian ideology, policy and approach in combating Indian sway in the region. An educated and diligent population is an asset for any state to use as weapon of defence and attack. Hence, challenging India's influence in the region is not mere housing hundreds of missiles, but that can be achieved through institutional development.

Furthermore, rebranding of Pakistan is yet another measure that should be taken seriously. The Indian lobby in the region and around the world is undoubtedly deep. Indian academics are contributing hugely to how India is seen around the world. Indian academics have never ceased to paint their country as the rising star and economic giant that must be reckoned with even though the huge economic dislocation (Mohan, 2011) and conspicuous hunger remains daunting in India (Banik, 2016) The active role of the Indian academics fronting the cause of India within and beyond the region is remarkable. (Sharma, 2017) The level of publication by these academics and portrayal of India as one of the citadels of knowledge in the region cannot be understated. Indian academics have instrumental shaped how India is perceived in terms of its regional clout. Pakistan as a nation has never been short of world class academics, whose sagacity can help in rebranding Pakistan, by changing the untrue narratives that have longed weighed the country down. The battle against India's hegemonic influence must not necessarily be fought on the level of nuclear deterrence, but on the theatre of ideas. Pakistani academics should wear a proactive approach that is not mere defensive but forceful enough to reengineer the way the country is poised within the region. Secondly, the academics should also become

more active in policy and decision making; hence policies that end up as jeopardy for Pakistan should be well examined through an integrative effort of policymakers and the academic industry.

Economic growth and pragmatic industrial and trade policy is yet another scale for measuring the status of a country and how well it can compete internationally. There is no mistaking of the connection between economic growth and a vibrant working class and enterprising youth force. The possibility of challenging India and neutralising its economic hegemony is to restructure Pakistan's economy with utilitarian approach. Alluding to the observation of Jean Francois Cautain, the EU ambassador to Pakistan, the industrial growth and development of Pakistan depend on the best utility of her burgeoning youth population. Pakistan needs to learn from the EU by adequately providing quality education which includes technical training geared at economic development for the growing youth population. For Pakistan to stand at par economic-wise with any nations "the solution is in technical and vocational education and training and Pakistan could learn from the experiences of the EU" (Sheikh, 2018).

The global economy is increasingly changing and nations around the world are grabbing their share from the redistribution of the globalized economy. George Friedman classification of P16, as the newly emerging economies points to the role these economies are playing. They redefine their importance and project the niche they hold in global political economy. (Friedman, 2013) Pakistan is not mentioned amongst the P16, but Bangladesh, a neighbouring country comes prominent. This former part of United Pakistan is dubbed as the second largest garment exporter in the world, following China. According to the World Bank report on International Trade Statistics, Bangladesh's global market share is estimated around 5.1 percent (\$503 billion). (Mirdha, 2016) This is a lesson Pakistan can learn and adopt. Bangladesh faces as much political and economic problems, maybe more than Pakistan, yet its propensity to thrive against all odds is remarkable. Invariably, Pakistan needs refocusing on its textile industry; formidable economy is no less a tool to challenge India.

Under the Modi's administration, India's Look East is morphed into India's Act East Policy, a policy which is aimed to establishing the strategic connection between the Northeast and Southeast Asia respectively. Over the years, Prime Minister Modi visited the Southeast region lobbied for their military, strategic and economic cooperation with India. According to Jaishankar the Act East policy is "self-interest, needed to become more integrated into Northeast and Southeast Asia." (Jaishankar 2014) Like India, Pakistan equally having historical and cultural ties with countries in that region. It is Pakistan's interest to underscore the shared values. Countries like Malaysia and Indonesia are vivid examples. Meanwhile, Pakistan can also offer its facilitation to the Philippine in terms of counterterrorism. There is much other nations

## **Indo-US Nexus to Isolate Pakistan: Options and Responses**

can learn from Pakistan's rich experience as enunciated by the EU ambassador to Pakistan.

Summarily, Pakistan cannot reach the height of self-actualisation if it failed to disengage from the India centric approach to regional and global issues. While it appears that Pakistan is making all effort to survival and avoid the subjugation of India, it also appears that Pakistan continues to live within the shadow of India's game scheme. The bottom line is that Islamabad should be able to make decisions without being influenced from the government in New Delhi. Pakistan needs to realise that it is a sovereign state that has right to live independently and chart its path in global politics.

### **Blocking Indian Membership in NSG**

Either Pakistan or China has reasons for being resentful of Indian membership in the NSG. Irrespective of their positions, objection to Indian membership of NSG should not and cannot be understood in insolation; it is much connected to the Indo-US nuclear deal. China has been very clear with the deal, its reservation of India-NSG membership is an extension of dismay over the nuclear deal; therefore, it is worth placing the Pakistani and Chinese views of the nuclear deal and India-NSG membership in perspective.

China does not simply object to India's membership of NSG, it has unequivocal being tough on the special waiver status India enjoys in the NSG. For China, the privilege of the Indo-US deal should not be extended into the NSG, thus whatever New Delhi enjoys with the NSG is unjustifiable on many grounds. If India a non-signatory of NPT can be granted such status, same should be true for Pakistan (non-signatory of NPT), United States and countries that supports India can only prove their sense of equality, justice, and responsible if such support is extended to Pakistan. In as much as India and Pakistan are on same footing, then the candidature of Pakistan for NSG should be welcomed (Samanta, 2011). By employing the narrative of exceptionalism for India, such narrative is as true for Pakistan as India. Energy need of the latter is counted as what makes it exceptional candidate of the NSG. If that is true, then Pakistan faces chronic energy crisis that India, and therefore Beijing "believes that expansion of NSG should be able to maintain authority and effectiveness of the group and take into full consideration the actual condition of candidate countries, and a final decision should be made through consultation with all States" (Krishnan, 2011).

In addition to China's objection, Pakistan's concern over India's NSG membership is equally noticeable and have revolve more around the fear, in event that India becomes a member; its membership can be misused against Pakistan inclusion into same group. The non-proliferation credential of India is another important factor to be considered when examining Pakistan's position and opposition to India-NSG membership. Along

with India, Pakistan is also striving to get membership of NSG, but Pakistan does not possess the support of US, though China has continuously thrown its support behind Pakistan's claim that if India gets the membership of NSG then Pakistan should also be granted membership under the same criteria used for the non-NPT member; India.

Apart from this, Indian nuclear deal with the US has been a propagator of nuclear proliferation and arms race rather than the promotion of non-proliferation objectives. This deal between the US and India and the idea of proving India with membership of NSG would add to the risk and possible demise of the nuclear non-proliferation regime. (Meier, 2006) India is not at all concerned about the non-proliferation issue as it had not taken any initiative to restrict the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and has also rejected more than seven proposals by Pakistan to keep a check on the nuclear activities of both states. Pakistan has also suggested deals that would allow bilateral or multilateral inspection to the nuclear facilities of both state, but India has completely ignored them. (Sial, 2016) With such a mind-set, Pakistan believes that Indian membership of the NSG will further exacerbate the existing tense nuclear imbroglio between the two countries.

### **Countering the US influence in South Asia**

As the quarter of the 21st century rolls in, the world has witnessed multiple events and nuances in global politics and that will not cease to occur. Pakistan's policymakers cannot pretend not to understand this dynamics, especially when its traditional ally, the US is equally refining its strategic interest the world over. The type of the Cold War foreign policy is seemingly not tenable any longer, even though lesson can be learnt from it, but to adamantly clinch to such would produce little or no expected result amidst a rapidly changing global politics.

To counter the US and by extension Indian influence in South Asia defensive and cowed foreign policy must be overhauled. Pakistan is potentially a strong nation and has what it takes to be on the frontline in global politics. It is endowed with abundant natural and human resources, a nuclear power, a formidable military institution of world class, a striving democracy, an established and industrious diaspora, a military force that immensely contribute to global peace missions, home to IT genius, a lucrative and sophisticated military industry. In as much as Pakistan cannot afford to isolate itself from regional and global politics, hence the imperative reason for result-oriented bilateralism and multilateralism.

**Bilateralism:** A cemented Pakistan-China relations is viable enough to water down the US influence in the region. In the post-World War-II era, relationship between the two countries started on a track that has now become one of the most celebrated friendships between nations. The Sino-Pakistan relation has been a generous partnership, so much more for China's economic and strategic aid and Beijing's keen



## **Indo-US Nexus to Isolate Pakistan: Options and Responses**

interest in Pakistan's territorial and geographical integrity. China stood beside Pakistan firmly during the Osama episode played by the Americans and supported Islamabad's territorial integrity. (Dasgupta, 2011) During that episode, the Americans tried to represent Pakistan as a nation harbouring terrorist, an effort geared at defamation of Pakistan. However, the Chinese displayed an excellent diplomatic behaviour by emphasising that the incident does not have any importance in the international domain and instead of playing the blame and labelling game, Islamabad should be rather supported for all brunt of extremism it has experienced. Deductively, Pakistan should learn to utilize its relations with China in the best of its interests, given China's sway over the US, Washington has come to the realisation that China is an important global player and its strategic interest with Pakistan is something delicate. While it is not easy to downgrade the diplomatic clout, it is also not easy to undermine Pakistan, particularly when it intersects with Beijing's interest.

**Multilateralism:** In addition to bilateral cooperation, Pakistan should promote a serious multilateral venture and ties amongst the regional players, namely China, Russia, Iran and Turkey, even Afghanistan and India in the long run. Regional tension, conflict, and war have historically underpinned the relevance of Washington in South Asia. A peaceful and stable South Asia, punctuated by balance of power will facilitate harmonious climate than chaos. Through a multilateral cooperation, a balance of power and cooperation can be ensured within the South Asia and the larger West Asia. The likes of SCO and ECO are important counter balancing institutions against the US influence in the region. Pakistan along with China and Russia can sway event that will limit Washington's influence; India alone cannot gang up against other regional players.

For Pakistan, multilateral cooperation is an imminent and exigent necessity. The pressure of India at the regional level and that of Washington puts Islamabad on its toes. Multilateral cooperation of Pakistan-China-Russia would bring prosperity to Pakistan, help to dampen the climate of pressure and subsequently mitigate against Washington overbearing disposition towards Islamabad. The sign is well written on the wall, and Islamabad needs no procrastination to cement the bourgeois relations. China's commitment towards Pakistan is glaringly established, Beijing was one of the countries that hurriedly rejected the US insinuation of Pakistan over support of terrorism. In the event of a larger multilateral organisation consisting of China-Russia-Pakistan-Iran-Turkey, collective solidarity would be the tool to match external intimidation or harassment. For instance, China and Russia have thrown their support behind Pakistan following Trump's tweet.

### **Conclusion**

The sway of Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) a radical Hindu nationalist on Modi's BJP government has brought India to the verge of being committed to

**Ashfaq Ahmad Malik and Dr. Nazir Hussain**

Hindutva; a nationalist tendency that equates religion with nation. Modi has become a fire splitter against Pakistan, threatening to further disintegrate Pakistan; making a reminiscence of how much India contributed to the disintegration of United Pakistan in 1971. Hence rather than to accommodate, Pakistan should be rather isolated. Such thinking among Indian policy is further incentivised by the growing Indo-US partnership. The Trump administration shares certain anti-Pakistan sentiment with India and that has weaponised Prime Modi to grow wild to tarnishing the image of Pakistan with a clear objective of isolating Islamabad internationally. Despite all the effort of New Delhi, Islamabad believes Modi's ploys are all fruitless given the achievements Pakistan has made over the years. The possibility and success of Indo-US ploy to isolate Pakistan will be measured on Pakistan political cohesion and will. Though isolating Pakistan will have its own implications, given the strategic importance of Islamabad in the region.

## Indo-US Nexus to Isolate Pakistan: Options and Responses

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