

Intensive US Engagement for Enhanced Role in South Asia

Umbreen Javaid

University of the Punjab, Lahore

ABSTRACT

Since the end of Cold War, US has acquired deeper engagement with South Asia, especially India. Overt leaning of US towards India since 1990's was not entirely unexpected, India being the largest and most stable country in South Asia has always been more charming to the super power. There had always been potentials for deeper relations both being large democracies and even larger economies. In the New World Order, United States has emerged as the leader and its alignment with any state will definitely make a difference in the concerned region. It seems that United States will be dealing Pakistan and India differently. Interests and objectives of the United States in South Asia region seem to change with changing situations or circumstances. Any visible tilt of the United States in South Asia towards either India or Pakistan will definitely affect the stability of the region. In sum, for US, India is now a partner in strategy and Pakistan a partner in exigency. According to the United States policy of enhanced engagement in South Asia, US will keep a close strategic relationship with India, but at present US also has to ensure an intense and rather longish partnership with Pakistan as well. That certainly carries a promise of a stable South Asia under an enhanced engagement and influence of U.S.A.

KEY WORDS: Cold War, USA Foreign Policy, South Asia, Strategic Partnership

South Asia, a highly sensitive and strategic region has acquired significance throughout the world in present times. This region has acquired immense importance not only for the United States but also for the entire world. South Asia is a highly volatile zone, ridden with terrorism and housing the nuclear flash point Kashmir. India and Pakistan have a history of enmity and have indulged frequently in arms race. Their nuclearisation coupled with the latest events happening around South Asia, has further heightened the significance of the region, especially for United States, making this region a focal point of American foreign policy.

A new era of Indo-US relations has begun after the end of Cold War. America has always been lenient towards India, being most attractive as far as its size, system and society is concerned. Their world view, nature of economies and types of political structures bring much in common to forge a lasting strategic

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partnership between USA and India and for the foreseeable future, they shall be close allies. Nevertheless, for US with its sprawling interests in Central Asia and in other states around Pakistan, the exigencies may not be over in near future.

With the passage of time, US interests in this region have varied. It tends to deviate in favor wherever its interests are more profound. This has made the presence of US in the region more critical. As the leader of New World Order, alignment of any country with US is ostensibly significant.

Background

The Cold War era emerged at the end of the IInd World War with two antagonist blocks. The competition between US and USSR had affected the rest of the world as well. South Asia, too, suffered the effects of this war. Pakistan and India chose the opposite blocks. Pakistan became an ally of US and India that of USSR.

At the end of the Cold War, US adopted a foreign policy, precisely that of the sole Super Power in the world. The position of India and Pakistan became a prominent issue in the US foreign policy, as far as South Asian affairs were concerned. There exist two schools of thought in the US as far as this choice is concerned. According to the traditional view, Pakistan has got eminence while other viewpoint supports India. Behind the second viewpoint Islamic fundamentalism and China are the motivating factors to drift US towards India rather than Pakistan.

This led to the new era of Indo-US relations. “The United States visibly displayed its marked indifference towards Pakistan and moved closer to India. United States is supporting India, out of all proportions to enable it to play the role of a regional surrogate” (Jan, 1993: 130-131). US turned towards India decisively in the year 2000, after the visit of Mr. Vajpayee to Washington. This tilt was visible both in policy and practice. There were many factors responsible for this, for instance Talibanization of the region, nuclearisation of both India and Pakistan, and Islamic fundamentalism. In this scenario, US assessed all possibilities and it chose India as its permanent ally in its global agenda. America tried its level best to profess neutrality in its policy but practically it remained away from Pakistan.

Bilateral Ties

Pakistan - USA

“There have been twists and turns. The relationship has been characterized, at different times, by indifference, friendship, intimacy and downright hostility. However, the remarkable thing is not its checkered history which probably is a common feature of most of the bilateral relationships but the fact that even during the worst times, the two countries have managed to sustain a working relationship”

(Khan, 1990: 7). For three decades of the Cold War, Pakistan served as the centre piece of US policy in the region and remained its most allied ally (Azmi, 1994: 132). Despite the alignment during Cold War period Pakistan has been given cold shoulder at many times by US but very strangely, every time US has to come back to Pakistan and not only a come back but US has given Pakistan a status of frontline state with a bundle of aid package.

In 1979, USSR invasion in Afghanistan was such an incident which engaged two countries for a decade but surprisingly enough, an anti-Pakistan lobby remained busy in US Congress throughout this period. Pressler amendment in 1985 is one such example. In 1990, Bush Sr. suspended aid for Pakistan. It was a clear-cut corollary of USSR withdrawal from Afghanistan but US administration highlighted nuclearisation as a motivating factor behind this decision.

Pakistan-US relations were embroiled with sanctions and criticism, when nuclear explosions were made in 1998. Again, in this sorry state of affairs, the tragedy of 9/11 took place and US had to make Pakistan its frontline state in war on terrorism. Pakistan's geo-strategic location brought it at the center of the world power politics.

Pakistan was given key role as a front line state in the war on terrorism and again started receiving aid and debt right-offs (Sattar, 2007: 247). Pakistan was also given Non-NATO Ally status by the United States (Sheikh, 2001: 191). "The history of Pakistan's relations with the US has been a chequered one. American connection has constituted a fundamental factor in Pakistan's foreign policy for the greater part of its existence" (Kizilbash, 1988: 156).

India-USA

Though India had remained an ally of Soviet Union in Cold War era, yet due to its geographical size, very large population, market potential and increased global presence, India has remained favorite of US and USA has always been wooing India covertly and overtly. "The India factor has always played a decisive and crucial role in the formulation of US policy in this region" (Azmi, 2001:237). India and United States, two largest democracies at present share ideology and objectives (Khanna, 1995: 43). President Clinton paid a week long visit to India in March 2000, signaling major foreign policy change and by June 2001, USA had taken considerable measures to enhance relations with India which included joint military exercises also (Malik, 2008:160-161). There is an obvious agreement of both India and US over the global issue of terrorism. In this context, India is quite successful in convincing US that Pakistan must be pressurized to stop cross border infiltration in Indian held Kashmir. Rapidly increasing power of China is another concern of US. It aspires wishes to contain the growing influence of China by assisting and facilitating India.

US Intensive Engagement in South Asia

Following are the main factors that have brought intensive engagement of USA in South Asia.

- **Nuclear Proliferation**

Nuclear non-proliferation has been a corner-stone of American foreign policy and this policy has somewhat engaged US in South Asian affairs. Although India was nuclearized decades before Pakistan but this region came under limelight when both countries went for nuclear explosions in 1998. Since then, South Asia has become the nuclear flash point. In this scenario, enmity of India and Pakistan and the continuing unresolved issues of these countries have raised the worries of US in this region. US is acting as an observer of nuclear advancement of both India and Pakistan.

In a statement on November 12, 1998, US Deputy Secretary, Strobe Talbot presented following three concerns of US government:

1. Preventing an escalation of nuclear and missile competition in the region;
2. Strengthening global non-proliferation regime;
3. Promoting a dialogue between India and Pakistan on long-term improvement of their relations, including on the subjection of Kashmir (Jain, 2007: 434).

A number of factors after the end of Cold War have brought urgency in USA towards nuclear non-proliferation in South Asia. These include the concern that export of nuclear capability is not transferred to others and also India and Pakistan have had number of wars and any future war may become nuclear (Malhotra, 1995: 20). As the nuclear rivalry between Pakistan and India have an impact far beyond the region, averting a nuclear holocaust in South Asia has become a key US policy goal, that will keep US engaged here in future (Kux, 2001: 367).

- **Burning Issue of Kashmir**

“South Asia provides the regional context for one of the world’s most intractable international disputes, the India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir. Two countries have fought major wars over Kashmir in 1947-1948 and 1956, as well as a limited war there in 1999” (Hagerty, 2006: 6). Kashmir is the bone of contention between two antagonistic nuclear states. It is infact the root cause of the many other problems in the region. It is rightly said that no lasting peace can be attained without resolving this issue. By realizing its importance, US is now showing its interest in the problem.

Kargil crisis of 1999 was sufficient to make US realize that after the acquisition of nuclear capability by both India and Pakistan, its involvement in the region has become inevitable and crucial too. That was the first point to be worried as far as explosiveness of South Asia was concerned. US reluctantly is trying to

bring India and Pakistan for discussions and negotiations for settlement of all bilateral issues between them.

US is playing the role of facilitator rather than mediator. It is widely understood that the prolonged issue of Kashmir is one of the reasons of extremism in the region. This extremism has further developed into terrorism throughout the world. US administration is convinced that Kashmir is a sensitive, complicated and sentimental issue which requires special parameters. Satisfaction of both countries along with the people of Kashmir is necessary for logical settlement of the problem.

- **Economic Investment**

Since the times India has opened-up its economy in 1991, US has become a major investor. Logically America needs smooth and favorable environment for its heavy investments. This environment can only be achieved through peace between India and Pakistan and it is nearly impossible without active involvement of America in the conflicting bilateral issues. Economic protection of big market of India along with a free market is crucial US agenda. To safeguard the interests of American people, especially in the service sector and joint industrial ventures, has compelled US to strive for perpetual interaction among three governments of US, India and Pakistan.

- **Terrorism**

America has long term interests and strategy in the region. First, it produced Jihadis to contain USSR. Now these Jihadis are well trained and capable enough to threaten the peace of the region. America has first hand knowledge of the origin and potency of these militants, residing in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Now the economic and political future of US depends upon the success of its policy in Afghanistan, as it is the only gate way towards Central Asian states. This project is nearly impossible without help and support of India and Pakistan. Safe passage into Central Asian States depends on a balanced and pragmatic foreign policy of US for both India and Pakistan.

Dilemma of Weightage to Pakistan and India

In the modern world, the only yard stick that determines the effectiveness of foreign relations, is democracy and large market interests. In these two aspects, India is far more advanced than Pakistan.

Pakistan is in a precarious situation today largely because of its internal problems and instability. Sectarian, ethnic and provincial conflicts are common and terrorist activity; corruption and crime are rising in number. Pakistan has weak internal security which is damaging its international repute. In India, the situation is quite opposite, it is more stable internally, developing economically and is

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therefore viewed as politically, economically and strategically possessing, precisely what is necessary for the stability of South Asia, in the eyes of US.

Pakistan and India have to accommodate each other for sustainable peace which will lead to uplift the social, economic and political conditions of the region. They will have to create a euphoric environment. Of course Pakistan has strengthened its defense, under all circumstances in order to maintain minimum deterrence with India. With immense happenings around Pakistan, there is a dire need for strong and competent defense capabilities. India will always pressurize Pakistan through US diplomatic channels for the satisfaction of its own demands. At present, it wants US to control the cross border terrorism and crack down Islamic fundamentalist elements in Pakistan.

A dangerous opinion which is gaining currency in Pakistan is that US is now cementing its relations with India at the cost of Pakistan. It has started speaking the language of India. When in January 2010, Robert Gates visited Delhi and declared that another attack like Mumbai will invite the wrath of India, in fact tantamount to endorse the cold doctrine of India which certainly carries very grave implications for the region.

India has used the adverse climate created world over due to the wider belief that tribal areas of Pakistan are a central point of the terrorist activities across the globe. It has seriously damaged Pakistan's agricultural economy by building dam and other hydro electricity generation centers at river Chenab and Jhelum. India has done this by challenging and eroding Pakistan's genuine interests in Kashmir. It has maligned Pakistan so much on the issue of cross border terrorism and equated the liberation movement with terrorism so craftily that the world led by USA is not prepared to listen to the genuine concern of Pakistan about the violation, committed by India with respect to Indus Basin Treaty and other pacts. India has built an almost impenetrable smoke screen over Kashmir and its relations with Pakistan and it seems that it has totally made the US blind.

When Indian Chief of Army staff talked of his capability of taking on both Pakistan and China, he infact was seeking a role for India beyond its size and its borders. And USA has too willingly obliged India which is establishing dozens of consulates in Afghanistan and doubling and tripling its armed forces in that country. USA looks like giving India greater space to override and contain China. This makes Pakistan morally afraid of the real American intentions in the area.

Pakistan gets further disturbed when India uses Afghan soil under the occupation of USA, in order to create disturbance in Balochistan and to infiltrate in tribal areas of Pakistan through pro-India segment of Taliban, called Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan who receives Indian funds and armament in abundance. The conditions that are imposed by American aid bills and IMF on a beleaguered and embelted Pakistan shakes the trust and the very foundation of friendship of Pakistan. On the other hand, when seen in the back drop of a possible respite and an actual offer to that effect by certain groups of Taliban, in case Pakistan abolishes its partnership with US in the war against terror, the stakes for Pakistan

of siding with US, inspite of its obvious tilt towards and patronage of Indian polity, get even higher.

Therefore, it appears that US is on the course of losing its old ally wittingly or unwittingly. The turning point seems to be fast approaching where Pakistan has to decide whether it can sacrifice its national interests like stable and friendly Afghanistan, uninterrupted supply of river waters from Indian held Kashmir, its traditional moral and principled support for the right of self determination for the Kashmiris and respect for its sovereignty on all of its parts like FATA ad Balochistan. USA needs to give it a deeper thought whether India alone can safeguard its interest in the region and guarantee:

- a) Elimination of terrorism in Afghanistan
- b) Safe trade routes to Central Asia
- c) Non proliferation of nuclear weapons
- d) Containment of Iranian influence
- e) Containment of China on its Western side
- f) Above all, the eradication of Al-Qaeda and its supporters from tribal areas, straddling across Pak-Afghan border.
- g) Security of its massive investment in India. The moment of truth is staring all three major players in the face. India must realize that it may isolate Pakistan internationally but it has to play a friendly tie for a peaceful and stable South Asia which would ensure a safe journey of progress for its burgeoning economy. If it would mix too much belligerence with its economic stature, it is likely to get negative dividends.

Conclusion

In short, India is now a partner in strategy and Pakistan a partner in necessity. Both India and US have same world view, nature of economies and types of political structures which result in much commonality to devise a lasting strategic partnership. In future politics, they may be close allies. At the same place, US interests cannot completely cease regarding Pakistan. US will be in need of Pakistan to strengthen its influence in the countries around Pakistan. With more internal and external security, an improved economy and a stable political system, Pakistan will be in a position which will not be much affected by a focus of the US towards India in South Asia.

India should understand that it can not assure the responsibility for whole South Asia, all by itself. It cannot do it alone. It requires a friendly disposition from Pakistan to promote its national interests in the region which would be best served on the principle of peaceful and respectful coexistence for both countries.

In these times of cooperation, foreign policy of Pakistan needs to be re-oriented (Khan, 1972: 128). Pakistan's badly bruised economy and society and

with festering wounds of many kinds has to fix a new medicine; a new recipe for peaceful co-existence in accordance with time honored and well established good neighborly practice all around it. USA has to maintain the delicate balance in its relationship with India and Pakistan to regain, retain and maintain the saintly role it does and can play between the two neighbors.

According to the United States policy of enhanced engagement in South Asia, US will keep a close strategic relationship with India but at present, US also has to ensure an intense and rather longish partnership with Pakistan as well.

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Biographical Note

Dr. Umbreen Javaid is Chairperson & Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, University of the Punjab, Lahore.