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Pakistan Foreign Policy Choices in Post 9/11 Period: Options and Challenges

Abstract

The traverse of international politics took a significant and dramatic shift in post 9/11 period. Due to strategic and pivotal location, Pakistan became a front-line ally in war against terrorism. In order to balance its US centric policy, Pakistan explored foreign policy choices that posed certain challenges for the country as well. This paper examined new policy options as explored by Pakistan in form of Sino-Pak relations and overarching umbrella of golden ring in Eurasian region. The researcher has used qualitative research design and rational choice theory to connect the dots of the study. Since the new options for Pakistan accord with certain challenges, the paper intends to comprehend them in an inter-twined scheme of study.

Keywords

Pakistan foreign policy choices, post 9/11 period, golden ring of security and sino-pak relations.

Introduction

Comity of sovereign states pursue the national interests by developing relations with each other. Earliest contacts among the human societies gave rise to the process of external relations. Foreign policy is the collection of actions of states towards each other to promote and safeguard the national interests.(Akbar, 2011). It is a perplexed process involving various actors at national, regional and international level. According to Morgenthau, “There is a set of thought and one law for nations while dealing with each other, and that is national interest.”(Khalil, 2020). Broadly, the states devise foreign policy to ensure territorial integrity and economic prosperity. Besides these goals, few states also protect their ideological foundations. (Hussain, 2012).

Security paradigm holds pivotal position in sphere of foreign policy. As security refers to the absence of various threats to the states, the leaders formulate policies after comprehending the perceived and real threats to their states.(Cheema, 2004). Economic and military factors serve as fundamental instruments to ensure effectiveness of foreign policy. According to Robert McNamara, “Security is development and there is no development without security.”(Akbar, 2011). This proposition affirms the vitality of economic resources to cement the position of states at international level. The power fulcrum accentuates various responses of the states. Quaid-e-Azam remarked that weakness and vulnerability of small states invite aggression. (Dawn, 2013). As a result, the relevance of both the factors cannot be undermined in context of foreign policy. In addition, the strategic location of states often enhances the significance of some countries. Foreign policy always takes place in penumbra of layers of environmental settings. The international setting sets in to motion certain wibes for the regional and domestic facets to shape and reshape the policies of the states at highest level. In 2001, the incident of 9/11 brought paradigm shift at international level. This upheaval introduced new trends in foreign policy of US towards South Asia. (Khaliq, 2017). The policy of dehyphenation propounded by Clinton became volatile with certain innovations by proceeding administrations. In this entire changing dimension of the international environment, Pakistan became a central state for US national interests and ambitions to be achieved in Afghanistan. (Sunawar, 2015).

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Since its inception, Pakistan has been prone to crisis and opportunities to stamp its position at regional and international level. Paul Kennedy has rightly remarked that Pakistan is an influential and pivotal state whose evolution is determinant not for regional stability only, but for the global constellation.(Akbar, 2011). Right from the outset, Pakistan had pursued a foreign policy of co-existence, and peaceful settlement of conflicts. Quaid-e-azam, the father of the nation set three broad objectives for the country; preservation of ideological identity, territorial integrity and economic prosperity.(Rizvi, 2004). The overarching principle of peaceful co-existence has been engulfed with varying situations for the last 7 decades. As regards the Pak-US ties, both the countries have experienced three different phases; the cold war era, the post-cold war period and post 9/11 phase. (Javeed, 2015).

The fiasco of 9/11 occurred in US, but it had stipulated major shifts in foreign policy choices for Pakistan. Four terrorist attacks in US on September 11, 2001, penetrated in to the fabrics of world major powers for a new opening for 21st century. These attacks took lives of more than 3000 people and injured around 8000 citizens. (Stanzel, 2018). This dreadful incident took the US administration by surprise which accentuated new moves for resurrection and restoration of their position as a superpower at world stage. This cognizance at global level besieged Pakistan to act as non-NATO ally to fulfil the US agenda in South Asia.(Khan, 2016). The government of Pakistan had been grabbed by the military general, Pervaiz Musharraf in 1999. The dictatorial regime submitted before the demands of US to provide two naval bases, 3 airports and use of air space to facilitate the US led operation in Afghanistan. (Sunawar, 2015). Pakistan had to find last resort of its national goals in global agenda of US. As remarked by Musharraf that it was inevitable for Pakistan to employ new foreign policy choice in 2001 to avoid direct attack on Pakistan by US led forces in South Asia. The post 9/11 period confronted Pakistan with new foreign policy choices. It had to tread through certain crisis having opportunities for preservation of national goals. In first decade of the century, Pakistan remained closely connected to US for refuge at international level.(Ahmad, 2018). However, as the time passed, Pakistan started exploring its choices in foreign policy by reaching to new avenues of cooperation. In this respect, the policy shift towards China in particular and Golden ring for security in general provided tinge to the foreign policy of Pakistan. The golden ring comprising of Pakistan, China, Iran, Turkey and Russia has emerged as a new powerful and influential group since 2016.(Irina, 2020). Pakistan has opted for new avenues to strike balance of power in South Asia and to secure multi-prompt front in foreign policy to safeguard its national interests.

This research paper intends to analyse Pakistan foreign policy choices in post 9/11 period. It would explore that what are the options for Pakistan in post 9/11 scenario and what are the challenges for Pakistan in this time period. In order to explore these research questions, the researcher has applied rational choice theory. This theory would serve as the theoretical framework to understand that how a country's foreign policy choices adopts varying paths to comprehend options and challenges.

Theoretical framework

Rational choice theory has been extensively employed in Political science to analyse foreign policies of states. In 1940's, the works of Von Neumann and Morgenstern signified the application of rational choice theory to assess the decisions of states on parameters of cost-benefit analysis.(fedderson, 2004). The researcher has employed rational actor model to unearth the foreign policy choices of Pakistan since 9/11 incident. In words of Allison, "Rational actor model refers to the decisions of the leaders taken under certain environmental settings to opt for the optimal or maximum utility ridden output."(Fedderson, 2004). In rational actor framework, the decisions of the states are bifurcated to understand the perceptions, beliefs, thoughts and idiosyncrasies of leaders, global cum domestic environment and bureaucratic edifice. In order to frame the theory for the research work at hand, three assumptions of rational actor model propounded by Allison are entailed. Firstly, the rational actor must take the purposive decision. Secondly, the leader or the actor should not be affected by the social and psychological factors. Thirdly, the leader must select the most productive option for his or her country. An important point in this respect relates to the subjectivity of rationality. (Hechter, 1997). The decision's rationality is analysed in purview of the prevailing circumstances. There is no objective reality or rationality under rational actor theory.

In the aftermath of 9/11 incident, President of Pakistan, General Musharraf could not refuse the demand by US for support in war against terrorism. As stated earlier, US had been hit severely by four terrorist attacks on September 11, in this context the western world had reached to one voice which was to fight the terrorists in all parts of the world. (Talbot, 2009). In such circumstances, president of Pakistan had little choice to weigh the options. He took the rational decision as per the prevalent conditions. Gradually, the situation transformed as the US faced upheavals

to achieve the desired target. The ever increasing demands of the US towards Pakistan and clubbing of Pakistan with Afghanistan became disturbing for the leaders. (Iqbal, 2018). Subsequently, the Pakistan government started exploring new avenues for cooperation to secure the borders and to fulfil the needs of country. As a result, the rational choice theory explained the shift in foreign policy choice of Pakistan towards China, Turkey, Iran and Russia. This golden ring for security turned up as a new strong front for Pakistan to secure its national goals.(Irina, 2020). However, Pakistan has been facing challenges due to a void in Pak-US ties over the last few years. Hence, the theory explains the foreign policy choices for Pakistan in post 9/11 incident along with options and challenges.

Research design

Qualitative research design has been used in this study. The nature of research questions and central argument determines the use of appropriate research design. The qualitative method reflects the understanding of social phenomenon and problems on the basis of meanings and beliefs of people.(Creswell, 2007). This research design is often subjective as compared to the objectivity of quantitative method. During the qualitative research design, the arguments may change and adopt new dimension depending upon the responses of the respondents or the writings of the authors which are consulted during the study. (Manen, 1990). Qualitative design highlights the social justice agenda. Since the topic of this research work extracts a variety of perspectives regarding foreign policy choices in post 9/11 period, the qualitative design serves the purpose of the methodology for the paper.

Prelude to the study

The father of the nation and first Governor General, Quaid-e-azam enunciated foreign policy guidelines for Pakistan through two speeches delivered on radio. He declared that Pakistan's foreign policy would be a symbol of peace and co-existence. Ideological preservation, territorial integrity and economic prosperity would serve as the core objectives of the foreign policy. (Rizvi, 2004). Along with it, brotherly relations with Muslim countries would stand as integral aspect of the external policy. Right after the independence, Pakistan had to secure its frontiers from perennial threat from India. Besides this, the country had to develop relations to provide impetus and caution to the economic fragility of the country. (Hussain, 2018).

The initial phase was characterized as the phase of exploration and friendship with all. In 1950's, the leaders joined hands with the capitalist block, hence, the stance of non-alignment was denounced. The goals of the nation remained identical for subsequent years.(Khan and Ahmad, 2015). However, the scope and strategies of the attainment of the goals varied during different phases. Pakistan remained in harmony with US till the disintegration of former USSR. The decade of 1990's was characterized by sanctions upon Pakistan by US due to nuclear program. This era was followed by a major shift in foreign policy choices owing to the disastrous incident of 9/11 in 2001 in US.(Khaliq, 2017).

Theatre of 9/11 incident and Pakistan's choices

The morning of Tuesday, 9/11, 2001 proved catastrophic for American citizens. The series of four coordinated terrorist attacks besieged the US administration. The hijacking of planes by 19 terrorists caused deadliest repercussions on the soil of US (Rafiq, 2017). These attacks took lives of 2750 people in New York, 184 in Pentagon and 40 in Pennsylvania. The fire-fighters and law enforcement agencies faced the immense troublesome conditions to control the damage. In the meanwhile, 343 fire-fighters and 72 security personals lost their lives as well Sugunakararaju, 2016). These attacks caused damage to property and infrastructure of around \$10 billion. Federal bureau of investigation 'FBI' launched the biggest investigation in the history of US. More than half of the employees of FBI worked on this investigation (small, 2015). Within few days, the bureau identified Alqaeda as the main culprit behind the attacks. The nationalities of 19 terrorists were released; 15 belonged to Saudi Arabia, 2 were from Egypt, 1 from United Arab Emirates and 1 from Lebanon. (Jacque, 2009). Initially, Osama Bin Laden denied his involvement in the attacks. However, he accepted the responsibility of attacks in 2004 (Sunawar, 2015). The US administration launched a global campaign against the terrorism. In its aftermath, the US attacked Afghanistan to eradicate terrorist elements harbouring in Afghanistan. The US security agencies suspected that Taliban has been harbouring terrorists from Alqaeda who were involved in 9/11 incident (Jalil, 2018).

As aforesaid, Pakistan is a pivotal state whose evolution would determine the future of global politics as well. The strategic location placed Pakistan in the thick of things regarding future policy of US to combat the terrorism. The attack on Afghanistan would not have been possible without the logistic support of Pakistan. The US administration established contacts with government of Pakistan and conveyed its demand to extract support of Pakistan. Colin Powell, then the secretary of state presented a charter of seven demands before the government of Pakistan. (Lim, 2015). General Musharraf, who was then in control of the ship of Pakistan assured full commitment by accepting all the demands to support US. Keeping the tenets of the rational choice theory, General Musharraf took the rational decision to safeguard the national interests of the country. The subsequent documents revealed that Americans warned Pakistan of serious consequences in case of refusal in war against terrorism (Talbot, 2009). The global environment shaped in such a way that President Bush enunciated a discrete policy in which the world was given two options, either to support US or to be considered in the opposite camp (Makhdoom, 2018). In such circumstances, when the entire world was opting for unified policy against terrorism and having a long border with Afghanistan, it was not amicable for Pakistan to take the opposite traverse. The rationality of the decision reflected so far as the flow of donations and funds had been considered in proceeding years. Pakistan offered its air and naval bases for the American troops. Land routes were allowed for logistic supply for the American troops stationed in Afghanistan.

The annual average aid since 2002 has been \$2.3 till 2013. However, it got reduced for the next few years. Pakistan received amount of \$10 billion in the category of the economic support fund for the betterment of the infrastructure of the country in connection to the deterioration due to the dangers of the terrorism (Munir, 2018). This financial aid from US provided impetus and caution to the economy of Pakistan which grew at the annual rate of 6% approximately till 2007 (Hussain, 2012). However, the inconsistency in policy of US administration towards Pakistan resulted in variant responses from its front-line ally in the war against terrorism. The increase in drone attacks and cross border infiltration from Afghanistan perturbed Pakistan on account of territorial integrity. The power transformation in US and Pakistan both inflicted a shift in policy towards each other. The Obama administration started pondering upon ways to evacuate its forces from deep battle ground of Afghanistan which has seemingly no conclusive end to the operation launched way back in 2001 by Bush administration (Ahmad, 2015). In the meanwhile, Pakistan had begun brain storming on new avenues of cooperation in the South Asian region to secure more value from the foreign policy choices. The expression of US towards Pakistan had took new postures which yielded less benefit for the front-line ally in this perplexed battle field.

US has pursued a diversified policy towards South Asia since the cold war. This region was perceived and considered as a unified actor for containment of the former USSR during cold war. However, this logic of intensified relations of US and USSR got replaced with Clinton's prism of dehyphenation in which the major powers of south Asia were viewed separately. Pakistan and India were given independent space in policy fulcrum of US (Irina, 2020). The scheme of things of terrorism staged in Afghanistan brought major shift in US approach. In 2009, the Obama Administration created the unified island of Af-Pak in the midst of dehyphenation of South Asia. This variation from the previous doctrine of Clinton created restlessness among the ranks of Pakistan. While India was given civil-nuclear deal, The Non-NATO ally got meagre financial aid for its collaboration since 2001. At the same time, India had ample space to chance its arm in Afghanistan to manipulate things accordingly. Such scenario depicts that India is a friend but not an ally, Pakistan is an ally, but not friend, and Afghanistan is Everyone's problem. (ahmad, 2019). It was unacceptable for a country like Pakistan to be grouped with Afghanistan in South Asia in war against terrorism. Marginalization for Pakistan tempted it to explore new avenues for alliances to gain strength at regional and global level. Af-Pak policy of Obama administration consisted of initiatives to include moderate elements of Taliban to diffuse the tensions in Afghanistan. Along with it, the structural changes were brought in to play by building state institutions and infrastructure so that moderate elements could be included in main stream (Khaver, 2019).

In 2017, Trump administration announced new national security policy regarding South Asia. The themes of the policy included measures to curtail terrorists in Afghanistan and elevating India as a major actor in South Asia. President Trump threatened Pakistan of serious consequences if it did not comply with demands of US. He blamed Pakistan for harbouring terrorists in safe heavens. Trump stated that US would cut all sorts of financial aid to Pakistan for providing safe pockets to terrorists. In this context, Trump announced on social media that US has suspended \$255 million to Pakistan because it has betrayed US in its commitments in war against terrorism. Such aggression on part of US forced Pakistan to consider other options as well in foreign policy. (Dawn news, 2018).

Options and challenges for Pakistan in post 9/11 period

In purview of the rational choice theory, Pakistan had entered in to negotiations with China regarding China Pakistan Economic corridor CPEC under the penumbra of One Belt One Road initiative to connect across continents. The Zardari Regime showed resilience to the cold postures of US and tilted towards China and other regional powers. (Iqbal, 2018). Rational choice theory explains the intent of Pakistan to explore new horizons of mutual fronts to extract meaningful output.

Global edifice took novel trends in post 9/11 scenario. Pakistan became an instrumental country due to its geo-political and geo-strategic location. Though Pakistan remained in US camp for a decade or so after the incident. Yet, rational choices compelled the leaders to explore other options to ensure territorial sovereignty and economic prosperity. According to Fazal-Ur-Rehman, Both the countries have shared mutual views on fundamentals concerning their countries (Arshad, 2015). To accelerate the level of cooperation, a friendship treaty was signed between Pakistan and China in 2005. In the words of Suleman Bashir, Pakistani ambassador to China, “the most important aspect of the treaty was the clear and the categorical assurances by China to defend Pakistan’s sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence (Khalil, 2018). The treaty set in to motion the defence as well as economic endeavours of both countries. Furthermore, Navies of both countries conducted mutual maritime search-drill to embody mutual strength of the navies of Pakistan and China. This exercise by Chinese navy was the first such activity with any country (Jawad, 2013). In order to strengthen the defence of Pakistan, China started production of J.F. 17 Thunder. Pakistan also purchased F.J-10 aircraft from China which is the latest technological weapon in Chinese military arsenal. China. South Asia expert Stephen Cohen describes China as pursuing a classic balance of power by supporting Pakistan in a relationship that mirrors the one between the U.S. and Israel. (Cohen, 2001). Their close partnership in SCO serves their interests by dividing India into two-front theatre in the event of war with either country. (Irina, 2020).

Allison states that a rational leader always takes the consistent purposive decision to benefit his group or country (Sato, 2013). Likewise, Pakistan pursued a long term agenda by concluding China-Pakistan economic corridor CPEC. Though the work on this flagship began after the treaty of friendship in 2005, but the formal conclusion of the pact took place in 2015 (Khan, 2017). Gwader port, which is situated in gwader District of Baluchistan serves as the corner stone of this flagship project. Gwader port is present at the Strait of Hormuz which is the central trade route and connects the Persian gulf and other region with Pakistan and China (Latif, 2018). Along with its benefit for China in form of short trade route, Gwader port also rationalizes the Indian factor in the region. India has exhibited its intentions to disturb Karachi port, on the contrary, Gwader port is 470 KM away from Karachi coastal line which protects it from Indian assault (Khaver, 2019). In 2014, the president and prime minister of Pakistan visited China to finalize the details of the corridor. As per the details of the project, China promised an investment of \$62 billion which roughly equates to one-fifth of Pakistan’s economy (Iqbal, 2018). This project included three proposed routes; the eastern route, western and central route. These routes were categorized under short term, medium term and long term goals. The city of Kashgar had been connected via Gwader port. Along with benefits for the economy of Pakistan, China has been facilitated with shortened trade route via Gwader (Mahar, 2015). The CPEC investment has been planned in areas of road infrastructure, railways, special economic zones, energy and many other fields. This mega project solidifies the rationality based decisions on part of the government of Pakistan.

As the western forces showed glimpse to DE securitize Afghanistan for amicable solution, the changing dynamics of the region gave rise to new partnerships and alliances. Russian president, Putin highlighted the formation of “Greater Eurasian partnership” in 2015. This biggest continent, yet unexplored mounts to huge potential for economic growth for a new ring of states known as the golden ring (Khalil and Zulfikar, 2020). Russian author Andrew Kyrnbok called the ring of Russia, Turkey, Iran, China and Pakistan as golden ring of security at the heart of Asia. In this ring, Russia is the north polar, Pakistan the southern polar, China Eastern and Iran the Western polar (Irina, 2020). This golden ring tantamount to 17% of the GDP of the world. The presence of rising China and resurgence of Russia offers potential threat for the hegemony of US in this region. Pakistan has resorted to take refuge from this new alignment for its national goals. The cost benefit calculation of rational choice model provides

solidification for its tilt towards China, Russia, Iran and Turkey. In the meanwhile, Pakistan has been treading on the path to complete projects began under One belt One road. The CPEC has been formally signed between China in 2015 during the government of Nawaz Sharif having projects of approximately \$62 billion. These projects would bring new life in economy of Pakistan (Iqbal, 2018). However, these options have been engulfed with new challenges emerging from US designs who is persistently pursuing its hegemonic endeavour in the region.

The alignment or cooperation of these states has been casting immense baring on the minds of US administration. The policies of Trump administration included intensified pressures on Moscow, Islamabad, Beijing and Tehran. This new wave of pressure by the US is becoming catalyst for the enhanced partnership among these states. The bilateral and quadrangular ties are becoming better with circumstantial factors (Shabir, 2018). This golden ring includes other regional forums to add value for Pakistan. Besides CPEC, Pakistan is also improving its ties with Russia. According to the experts, both the countries are trying to cover the lost ground in the past. The bilateral ties are becoming conducive for both the states. Pakistan's initiative of 2010 to formulate golden ring of economic block 'GREB' has been carried by other states as well (Kamefev, 2018). The importance of GREB multiplies due to presence of other initiatives by these five states of this ring. The partnership of Eurasian economic union (EAEU), Shanghai cooperation organization (SCO) and Association for south East Asian Nations (ASEAN). This regionalism has attracted attention of the entire world due to its breadth and width to impact the global orbit (Zulfikar, 2020). However, the Indian factor has been becoming a concern due to support of US for the regional control. India has been penetrating in Afghanistan to secure its role in post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan. At the same time, India is creating tensions with China as well to cause fragility for this new alignment in Asia.

As delineated above, Pakistan exhibited strong urge to explore new avenues for cooperation to ensure the territorial integrity, economic prosperity and ideological identity. Rational choice theory divulges the contours of foreign policy choices for Pakistan. Multiple forums were extracted under which the sanity prevailed as per the principles of rational choice theory (Khaver, 2019). Situational factors play a crucial role to determine the ultimate rationality of the leaders (Hechter, 1997). This very principle reflected to a large extent the engagements of Pakistan in second decade of 21st century.

In the aftermath of the initiative of GREB taken in 2010, the ring consisting of five states; Russia, turkey, Iran, China and Pakistan around central Asia and Afghanistan continued to stamp its authority at world stage. In this context, the golden ring economic forum was formed in 2015 (GREF, 2015). Furthermore, a seminar was conducted in Islamabad on April 30, 2019 in Institute of parliamentary services to cement the projects under this ring. These five states constitute for more than 30% of the human as well as natural resources in this world (Irina, 2020). The primacy of this ring is self-explanatory due to its strategic location and depth of the resources. This ring is influential for regional and global peace. As a result, the focus of the diplomatic core of the states, defence quarters, economists, Political scientists and think tanks world over became amply crystal clear. While sharing his views on the recent "sustainable positive trend" in different spheres of the Russia-Pakistan interaction (people-to-people contact, business-to-business ties, economic and cultural relations), the Trade Representative of Russian circles in Pakistan, Y. Kozlov underlined the importance "to expand such humanitarian and economic cooperation on a wider range. So from this standpoint the activity in the frameworks of the Golden Ring Economic Forum is appreciable."(Escobar, 2019). On the other hand, the Acting Ambassador of China in Pakistan Zhao Lijian while also supporting GREB initiative as "an innovative idea", still views it more as a long term project which complements the narrative of these five states (Sookdeo, 2020).

In addition, the BRI and CPEC supplement the endeavour of golden ring for Pakistan. Another conference was planned to be conducted in Moscow in 2020, but could not be materialized due to Pandemic of COVID-19. The industrialists and businessmen from all five states had to participate in the conference (Ahmad, 2020). Yes, this concept of GREB seems appealing and promising, but it requires immense zeal and preparation on part of all five states. The fact that this regional ring has numerous opponents to curtail the affectivity of the ring.

Pakistan foreign policy choices in post 9/11 period experienced twists and turns. Initially, Pakistan Remained in US camp right after the Afghan invasion by US in 2001. As per the tenets of the rational choice theory, that was pertinent and inevitable for Islamabad to pursue its interests in harmony with US grand design of south Asia. Gradually, the regional and situational factors accentuated shift in foreign policy choices for Pakistan. Variation in

US posture and their revisit of the securitization of Afghan region urged Pakistan as well to identify new avenues for mutual harmony. Especially, hyphenation of Af-Pak policy in to one tier triggered a change on part of the policy makers in Pakistan.(Kamenev, 2018). This narrow lens for Pakistan forced it to have a new surge in the region. Rational choice theory is always purposive and objective to opt for the optimal option. Zardari regime negotiated CPEC and reached to Iran and Russia as well. Subsequently, Turkey was also considered an important component in this region. Despite all challenges to the golden ring, all the five states have mutual benefit from the group. Russia wants to have alternatives in the sphere of energy. It's over dependence upon European supply would be supplemented through new horizons in central Asia. The revival of old silk route and CPEC have been beneficial for Russian federation as well (GREF, 2020). Along with it, Iran has been made part of CPEC which will bring this country on board with other countries in the region. Pakistan and Russia signed a document to clear the old standing mutual financial claims for further investments and projects. On December 2, 2019, this mutual agreement was signed under which Pakistan paid of previous debt of 93.5 Million to Russia to open a new window of investment by Russian federation in Pakistan (Khalil and Zulfikar, 2020). The fundamental factor to closely tie up these countries is the mutual harmony of interests. The connectivity between Central Asia and South Asia enables the golden ring to extract a variety of resources for prosperity and development in coming years.

In purview of the above discussion, there are notable and ostensible challenges pertaining to the new alignments in Eurasia. The end of cold war created a new opening for geo-economic and geo-political configurations among major and strategically placed states (Dhaka, 2014). The world transformed from bipolar to unipolar and multipolar international system (Escobar, 2019). Keeping in view the principles of rational model, Pakistan joined hands with hegemonic leader of unipolar world in 2001. Pakistan considered itself protected under the auspices of US for a decade or so before reaching to new horizons at regional level. As the US started pursuing a constant blame game towards Pakistan for more efforts, Pakistan felt degraded and demoralized. President Trump's claims of financial support to Pakistan in an undiplomatic manner further separated the strategic ways of both the countries (Hussain, 2019). Though Pakistan had good ties with China during first decade of 21st century, yet it was sedate due to US influence. In this respect, The US policy to hyphenate Pakistan with Afghanistan proved detrimental and catalyst for other options. Af-Pak policy of Obama administration put an end to the US former policy of dehyphenation of South Asia. At the same time, US was preparing to grant civil-Nuclear deal to India to cement its friend in Asia (Irina, 2020).

Pakistan has always pursued a policy to become strategically relevant at regional level and to secure its National objectives. This pursuit has witnessed a new alignment with China and Russia under the golden ring of security. The new focus on Eurasia with alignment of Pakistan, Russia, China, Iran and turkey has put US and the west pondering to counter balance this formulation in Eurasia. The potential of this region with five countries accounts for 17% of the global GDP and 30% of the world's natural resources along with human resource (Sookdeo, 2019 and Zulfikar, 2020). The ring of these states is full of security threats. The Afghanistan region and Easter Turkestan pose regional threats for the ring. The Indian factor which is backed by US presents another threat for the alignment in general and Pakistan in specific. Pakistan's strategic depth in Afghanistan and India desire for the role has been a cause of disturbance for Pakistan. Kashmir as an old standing nuclear flash point flame up the situation (Ramay, 2018). Pakistan-China closeness under CPEC is full of security threats due to route and grand designs of US and India in the region. As a result, Pakistan as deputed special security division for the protection of the route of CPEC (Perveen, 2015).

Weak and developing states have to align with major alliances to secure themselves from seeming threats. Likewise, Pakistan despite its pivotal strategic location has to face the music due to an alignment with and inclusion in golden ring. The rising China and Resurgent Russia are new competitors for the US. The new security policy of US includes Russia and China as new competitors instead of partners (Khan, 2016). Chinese border tension over Ladakh with India, Russian intervention in Ukraine, Chinese maritime hostility towards US, Iran-Saudi Arabia cold blood and on-going Afghanistan peace process poses challenges for Pakistan as well.(Khalil, 2020). Pakistan's strategic bilateralism with China and reapproachment towards Russia places it in the midst of grand designs of US, Russia and China. However, the long term gain from CPEC and highly resourceful golden ring would serve as a bedrock for development of Pakistan. These alignments may be summarized by the tenets of the rational choice theory with purposive decision making for optimal foreign policy choice for the country.

Conclusion

Pakistan's foreign policy has always been a reflection of self-abnegation. Situational factors seemed to drive the foreign policy choices. Rational choice theory is a comprehensive fabric of ideas to analyse myriad happenings at global and national level. This theoretical framework comprehends a variety of aspects affecting the final decision undertaken by the leaders. In 1940's, this theory got extensively employed in Political science to have a gage of the decisions. According to Allison, rationality is always subjective and purposive. Though these two concepts may sound binary opposition to each other, yet, the consistency of purposiveness of the leader holds perennial position for this theory. In post 9/11 period, Pakistan had to face changing global and regional situations that influenced a great deal to determine its external expression. In this respect, the initial phase revolved around the alignment with US which seemed rational as per the tenets of the rational choice theory. However, as the time passed, new players emerged along with changing dynamics of the global and regional environment. Pakistan's deepening ties with China in form of CPEC provided another option for the country. In the meanwhile, the formation of golden ring of Russia, Iran, Turkey, China and Pakistan presented a new option to chance its arms in the field of international politics. This golden ring covers the Eurasian region with new alignments and horizons of cooperation. Consisting of 17% of global GDP and 30% of world's total natural cum human resources, this ring offers new potential for world powers along with challenges. Pakistan being a strong strategic member of this ring has lot to gain from this constellation and face the music of US and other western states due to their own stakes.

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