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Representation of the United States through Political Cartoons of Pakistan: Pre & Post 9/11 Image Construction

Abstract

The interests of the United States in the geo-strategic position of Pakistan always determine the realist stance behind the fluctuating nature of the U.S.-Pakistan Relations. Based on this interest oriented relationship, the image construction of the United States has always been one of the significant areas of political cartoons in Pakistan because political cartoon is considered as a rebellious medium to raise voice against absurd realities but its importance is always overlooked in Pakistan. Thus, this paper aims to examine political cartoons published in mainstream English newspapers of Pakistan (The News, the Nation and the Dawn) from January 1991 to March 2013 in five political regimes including four democratic and one military rule. This paper intends to comprehend that how political cartoons remained powerful in representing the images of the United States during pre-9/11 and post 9/11 decades with different internal issues, foreign conflicts and political scenarios. The Barthes's model of semiotic analysis is applied to analyze the political cartoons to examine the 'love-hate syndrome' of Pakistan-US relations before and in the aftermath of 9/11.

Introduction

Contemporary discourses on international and political communication assume that media messages construct the images of any country and its people across the world. The enduring revolution in communication studies has been reinforcing the image of international politics. Media is the key medium to gather the information regarding international affairs and foreign relations with the other nations and societies in the world. Several studies have been recognized the influence of the media in building, promoting and strengthening the images of other countries under the umbrella of international and political relations. Therefore, the images of any country do not only reflect personal experiences but also with the media which play its significant role in building the opinion regarding a particular country. Media construct the beliefs that which type of affairs, strategies and images a country has with other countries (Albritton & Manheim, 1983, 1985; Brewer, Graf & Willnat, 2003; Evens, 2005; Giffard & Rivenburgh, 2000; Manheim &

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Albritton, 1984; McNelly & Izcaray, 1986; Mughees-uddin, 1997; Perry, 1987; Rusi, 1988; Saleem 2008, 2010; Shabir, Ali & Iqbal, 2011).

According to Khan and Safdar (2010), it has been assumed that media is comparatively free in democratic political regimes. Therefore, media owners and practitioners are relatively independent to represent the foreign images but in military regimes and international crisis, media messages and the producers need to follow the foreign policies of the respective regimes (Bennet, 1993). Similarly, popular discourses also observe that media build the foreign images to strengthen and reinforce the tactics of twists and turns of foreign policies based upon political, diplomatic, military, economic, religious, historic and cultural international friends and foes (Hanan, 2005; Khan & Safdar, 2010). In such situations, media messages are usually constructed to form the image of the enemy states as a threat (Ashfaq, 2014). Image representation is not only bound to specific foreign policies of the respective governments but also depended upon the assessment of previous friendly foreign relationships and alliances, conflicts and clashes, enmities and invasions, geographical powers and limitations in terms of politics, economy, culture and military.

Focusing the political cartooning, it has always been argued that political cartoonists are rebellious. The witty nature of their medium allows them to be free thinkers who do not need to follow any tagline or foreign policy. Political cartoon is considered as a laughing matter that is why political cartoonists are not supposed to work to set a foreign agenda or toe the line of action adapted by the respective government (Ashfaq, 2014). Political cartoons are assumed to represent the public voices. Political cartoon is not a simple and witty illustration or drawing rather it involves a complex mechanism involving different influencing factors and using different signs, symbols and an array of rhetorical and metaphorical figures to create expression, sentiment and incite reaction. By bringing all these components together, cartoonist can describe events, criticize the targets, convey a desired message and mold or reinforce the public opinion. Therefore, it is significant to examine the image construction of United States in political cartooning based upon the assessments of alliances and hostilities, enmities and friendships. This paper highlights that how political cartoonists as ideally assumed free thinkers form the image of the United States in political cartoons in pre 9/11 and post 9/11.

2.0. Theoretical Framework, Research Design & Methodology

According to Akande (2002), “semiotic refers to the tradition of scholarship in which the meaning, experience and knowledge is communicated through signs and symbols” (p. 32). It is a methodical and theoretical scholarship of meanings that involves two forms i.e. a field of study in itself and as methodological approach to analyze the signifying system (Tsakona, 2009).

Political cartooning is a genre of communication that conveys meanings through metaphors and visual depictions (Kennedy, 1993; Moris, 1993; Refaie, 2003). Cartoons create meanings by utilizing different signs and symbols (Abraham, 2009; Lee & Goguen, 2003). Therefore, this research follows the qualitative approach to investigate the depiction of the United States through political cartoons of Pakistani mainstream English newspapers because according to Eko

(2007), qualitative approach is a “useful tool for the study of political cartoons and other visual texts. It enables researchers to discover, compare and contrast” (p.226) “relevant situations, settings, styles, images, meanings and nuances” (Altheide, 1987, p.8). Therefore, Semiotic analysis is applied in this study. For this purpose, the highly circulated English newspapers of Pakistan *The News*, *the Nation* and *Dawn* are selected from January 1991 to March 2013. These newspapers are not only selected on the basis of their circulation but they are also popular among masses for their cartoons drawn by renowned Pakistani cartoonists Shahtoon (*The News*), Khalid Hussein (*The News*), Maxim (*the Nation*), and Feica (*Dawn*) (Nukta e Nazar, 2009).

This time period includes four democratic regimes of two biggest political parties of the decades Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) and Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and one military regime of Pervaiz Musharaf. After the end of the Cold war, the world shifted its political discourse in to unipolar system of power and the United States became the super power. After the Cold War, Pakistan lost its geographical and strategic importance for the United State that made the United States closer to the Pakistan’s historical rival India but right after 9/11, Pakistan became the hot spot again for the United States to enter in Afghanistan. Therefore, the Pakistan-US inconsistent and unsettled relations after Cold War and after 9/11, nuclear issue, Pakistan’s democratic and military governments and their policies towards the US, the insecure situation in Pakistan due to the US war against terrorism and Al-Qaeda factor are the key features that made these two decades very significant in the history of Pakistan for its foreign policies especially towards the United States.

To investigate the formation of image of the United States, the purposive sampling technique is used to selected political cartoons from three selected newspapers in these two decades. Only those political cartoons were selected that depict both countries Pakistan and the United States in any form (characters, politicians, symbols, signs, flags and captions etc.) with special reference to Pakistan-US relations. Collectively 321 political cartoons in all three selected newspapers were found that met the set criteria. The analysis began with an identification of the issues and themes in the political cartoons. This identification followed for analysis that evolved from the work of Ronald Bathes. The messages coined in the political cartoons were analysed in the terms of denotative and connotative cultural, historical and symbolic perceptions by employing the Barthes’ notion of signification by identifying and interpretation the themes, characters and level of significations.

3.0. Findings & Discussion

While examining the political cartoons, it was observed that Pakistani political cartoonists did not toe the line of Pakistani political regimes and their foreign policies. Rather they dominantly criticized the United States, its policies and relations towards Pakistan but also Pakistani governments whether they are democratic or military. Though the intensity of criticism varied from situation to situation and political regime to political regime yet the element of negativity was pre-dominant in all selected political regimes. It was found that anti-Americanism was strongly projected in all political cartoons via symbolic language. Due to the

differences in the issues, circumstances, strategies and relations of Pre 9/11 and Post 9/11, the themes and the symbols varied.

Focusing on the nature of international relations and new world order, Pakistan-U.S. relations and the formation of the image of the United States in Pakistani political discourse is separated into two decades during the selected time period (January 1991-March 2013) regardless to political regimes in Pakistan that are

Decade I: Post Cold War/ Pre 9/11 (January 1991- September 2001)

Decade II Post 9/11 (September 2001-March 2013)

The following issues pre-dominantly occupied the decade-I:

1. Nuclear non-proliferation
2. The US stance in Kashmir issue
3. The US relations with Pakistan and India

While in the decade-II, the entire political cartooning of Pakistan revolved around the following issues

1. Pakistan’s support to the US in war against terrorism
2. Drone attacks and peoples’ sufferings
3. Pakistani politicians’ alliances with the US
4. The US support to military dictator in Pakistan
5. The US bilateral relations with India and Pakistan

Table 1.0

An Overview of Similarities and Differences in Image Construction of the United States in Political Cartoons of Pakistan (1991-2013)

Political Regimes	Total Political Cartoons	Representation of the United States’ Image	The Images of Pakistan in terms of Pakistan-US relations
1. Pakistan Muslim League (PML N) (1991-1993)	14	Hegemonic power & nuclear black mailer Unfair state with double Standards	Weak, poor, powerless but determined, hardworking and power resistant
2. Pakistan People Party (PPP) (1993-1996)	16	Hegemonic power & nuclear black mailer Untrustworthy & Hypocrite state Indecisive and self centered Mediator	Neutral depiction as a Prime Minister initiating dialogues with the US on Brown amendment and Kashmir conflict

3. Pakistan Muslim League (PML N) (1997-1999)	35	Hegemonic power & nuclear black mailer Unfair state with double standards	Weak , powerless and poor yet determined, motivated, independent and decisive
4. Military rule of General Pervez Musharraf (1999-2008)	177	Hegemonic and dominating power Unfair state with double standards Untrustworthy and unreliable Hypocrite and liar state Indecisive and self-centered mediator Friendly with undemocratic elements Dangerous as predator	Pro-American military rule, weak, dependent, powerless, poor, helpless, coward, self-centered and greedy.
5. Pakistan People Party (PPP) (2008-2013)	79	Obama as Bush follower Hegemonic and dominating Power Unfair state with double standards Untrustworthy and unreliable Hypocrite and liar Dangerous as predator	Weak, shallow, indecisive, helpless, poor, dependent and coward.

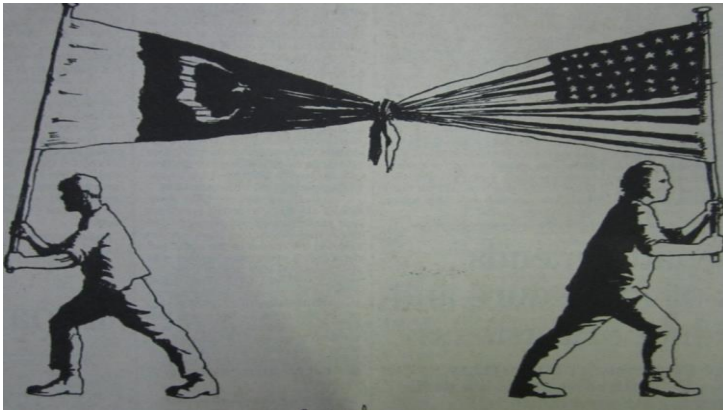
It was found that while portraying all these issues in political cartoons of Pakistan with reference to the U.S. images, though the patterns of negativity remained constant yet the difference in symbolic interactions, drawings of metaphorical situations and selection of signs and idiomatic expressions in both decades existed. Some differences and similarities are summarized in the table 1.0 followed by a detailed discussion.

3.1. Pre 9/11 (January 1991-September 2001) & Depiction of the United States in Political Cartooning

This decade refers to the two democratic regimes of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML (N)), one democratic regime of Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) and the beginning of the military regime of General Pervez Musharraf. On the other side, in the United States, President George H. W. Bush and President Bill Clinton’s foreign policies set the worlds’ political and media discourse during the whole decade.

3.1.1. Democratic Political Regime of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML N) (1991-1993) and the Representation of the US in Political Cartooning

It was observed that during this regime, collectively 14 political cartoons were sketched in the selected mainstream English newspapers of Pakistan where *the Nation* published 9 and *The News* published 5 political cartoons to construct the image of the United States. It was found that all the political cartoonists in the selected Pakistani newspapers unanimously focused on deteriorating the Pakistan-US relation because the Cold War was just over. Most of the cartoons portrayed the United States as ‘hegemonic power with double faced attitude and unfair standards’. One of the prototypical examples of the representation of plummeted Pak-US relations is the cartoon of Shahtoon (Sample C1) in which two men are depicted holding up Pakistani flag and the US flag respectively. Both flags are tied with a knot but both men are going in opposite direction and stretching the respective flag to the opposite side. The knot is a sign of making something very close. Therefore, ‘the knot tied with Pakistan and the US flag’ refers to the Pakistan-US close ties during the Cold War. “The men going towards opposite direction with the flags” refers to the period of the post -Cold War when the US imposed sanctions on Pakistan that made Pakistan to face economic crisis. Opposite direction is a symbol of getting far that would release the knot too. Thus, ‘taking flags far from each other’ denotes to the distances created between Pakistan and the US that plummeted the Pakistan-US relationships.



Sample C1. Published on July 06, 1992 (*The News*)

While summing up the first regime of PML (N), political cartoonists, in the beginning, followed the foreign policies and national political agendas while constructing the image of the US as long as the government took stand against its pressures but later on, the political cartoonists did not follow the submissive policies of the government and just reinforced the anti-Americanism with consistent negative patterns including ‘hegemonic power’ and ‘unfair state with double standards’.

3.1.2. Democratic Political Regime of Pakistan People Party (PPP) (1993-1996) and Depiction of the United States in Political Cartooning

It was observed that during the selected second democratic political regime of Pakistan, collectively 16 political cartoons were made on Pakistan-US relations in selected newspapers where 5 political cartoons published in the *Nation*, 6 in the *News* and 5 in *Dawn*. It was found that political cartoonists portrayed the mix picture of the United States with positive and negative stances interestingly. Though Pakistan was still in the list of embargo under Pressler amendment yet the change in the depiction was clearly seen. Initially like previous regime, political cartoonists depicted the United States and Bill Clinton's administration as 'nuclear black mailer' and 'hegemonic power' which was pressurizing Pakistan to drop its nuclear program and repeated almost the same kind of themes and stances.



Sample C2. Published on December 5, 1993 (*Dawn*)

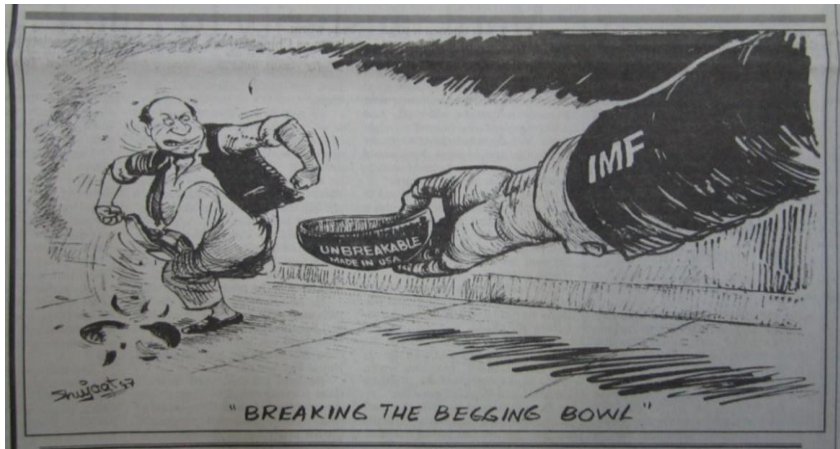
One of the several examples is Sample C2 where Benazir Bhutto is walking on a rope while holding up a stick labeled as "N-Plan". From the corner, Bill Clinton with smiling face and carrying a big pencil labeled as "US aid" with paper in his one hand and a pouch of "\$" in his other hand, is pointing out towards the stick and saying to Benazir Bhutto that " drop that and I'll give you this". Benazir Bhutto, who is already in a very tough situation, is looking at the pouch of dollars. She looks a bit worried. 'Walking on the rope' denotes to the challenge to keep walking while carrying the stick of nuclear plan. This challenge refers to the economic crisis that Pakistan was facing due to economic and military sanctions by the US which was followed by IMF and World Bank as well and they can restore the aid if Benazir will drop the nuclear plan The image of the US was constructed as hegemonic nuclear blackmailer who was monopolizing the economic resources for halting the nuclear program of Pakistan.

While summing up this regime, political cartooning reinforced that political cartoons again followed the foreign policy of Pakistan as long as the US was fair in its dealings with Pakistan but when the US disappointed Pakistan again by its misgivings and deception, political cartoonists again.

3.1.3. Democratic Political Regime of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML N) (1997-1999) and Portrayal of the United States in Political Cartooning

During the second premiership of PML (N) (1997-1999), it was found that collectively 35 political cartoons were made in Pakistan where 12 political cartoons published in *the Nation*, 16 in *the News* and 7 in *Dawn*. Political cartoonists again repeated the same consistent patterns of negative representation of the US image as it was projected in the first phase of the government of PML (N) (1991-1993).

This political regime was one of the most confrontational phases regarding Pakistan's nuclear program because Pakistan finally conducted its nuclear tests on May 28, 1998 against the will of the US administration. Therefore, 11 political cartoons in Pakistan revolved around the nuclear tests of Pakistan and its aftermaths. It was noticed that the depiction of the United States and Pakistani administration was not so different from the first phase of the PML (N) but the themes, and situations were different because of the different issues. One of the representative examples of this regime is the political cartoon made by Shahtoon in the *News* (Sample C3) where Nawaz Sharif is breaking a begging bowl while there is a man whose only arm and hand was visible. His coat's sleeve is labeled as "IMF". This hand is carrying a begging bowl labeled as "unbreakable made in USA". This cartoon was published when Nawaz Sharif was going to take oath for his new government in Pakistan in 1997 for his 2nd term government. During his election campaigns, he was raising the slogans that he would break the begging bowl. Bagging bowl is a symbol of poverty, dependency and begging but 'breaking bagging bowl' is a symbol of 'being independent', 'decision of not to beg', 'to be self-reliant' and 'rich who does need to beg'.



Sample C3. Published on February 22, 1997 (*The News*)

While summing up, this was observed that political cartoonists strongly projected anti-Americanism by using the consistent patterns of the US image as 'hegemon', 'dominant', and 'authoritative' by using different signs and symbols because of the US unacceptable pressure on Pakistan to abandon its nuclear tests and to sign

on CTBT. On the other hand, the political cartoonists depicted Nawaz Sharif as weak but motivated and determined to be self-reliant. As far as Kargil war and Kashmir issue was concerned, the US was strongly portrayed as 'unfair state with double standards'.

5.2. Post 9/11 & Representation of the US in Political Regimes of Pakistan during 1999-2013

This decade refers to the representation of the US image in one military rule of General Pervez Musharraf and one democratic regime of Pakistan People's Party (PPP). On the other side in the United States, President George W. Bush and President Barack Obama's foreign policies set the world's political and media discourse during the whole decade.

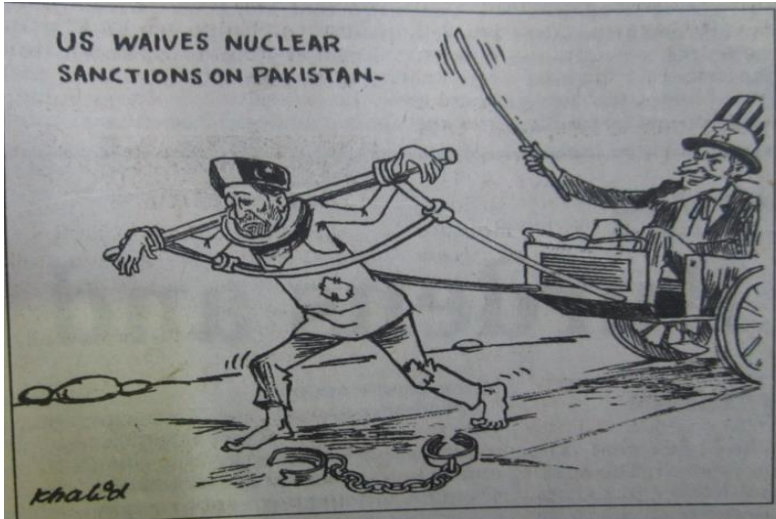
3.2.1. The United States versus Military Regime in Pakistan (1999-2008), Bush-Musharraf Alliance, Post 9/11 and Political Cartooning

It was found that during this regime, political cartoonists of Pakistan made 177 political cartoons collectively. 74 political cartoons were published in the *Nation*, 77 in *The News* and 26 in *Dawn*. Unlike the previous democratic regimes, this regime was unique for the US image and Pakistan-US relations because of the incidence of 9/11 attacks and the military dictatorship in Pakistan. The incidence of 9/11 emphasized the hard choices and pragmatic approach of the US towards Pakistan and its military dictatorship.

History illustrated that military regime in Pakistan has always benefited from the US while the democratic and elected governments are either ignored or usually subjected to the sanctions (Samad, 2011). So, it was observed that the major focus of political cartoonists in all the newspapers was either to highlight Bush-Musharraf alliance or to criticize Pervez Musharraf for serving the US interests as a 'pro-American leader of Pakistan'. So, this regime was particularly seen as 'interest specific' in political cartoons of Pakistan while portraying of Pak-US relations and the depiction of the US images. The cartoonists portrayed the US administration commonly as 'strong supporter of military dictators, monarchs and antidemocratic -elements', 'powerful', 'hegemonic', 'self-centered', 'interest-specific', 'fair weather friend', 'untrustworthy', 'un-reliable', 'hypocrite', 'double faced', 'unfair with double standards' and 'ruthless' but on the other hand, President General Pervez Musharraf and his government was depicted as 'dependent', and 'serving interests of the US under its umbrella'.

The political cartooning about Pakistan-US relations, military regime, last days of Clinton's presidency and Bush's taking charge revolved around the regular images of 'unfairness', double standards', 'hypocrisy' and 'untrustworthiness' until the incident of 9/11 happened. After this, the entire metaphorical and symbolic creation of political cartoonists was focused on Pervez Musharraf's moves towards the US and the strategies of Bush administration. Initially, the US was criticized as 'hegemonic and dominant state' because of its immediate demands from Pakistan to either support or get prepared to be bombed while General Musharraf was portrayed as a 'burden bearer' because of the US threats. For instance, this image was represented in a political cartoon where the United States is putting the burden and weight on Pakistan's shoulder. For instance, in the cartoon (Sample C4),

Uncle Sam is sitting on a donkey cart and holding a stick in his hand to drive the donkey. But in the place of donkey, the Pakistani man is tied up and he is pulling the donkey cart. In the place of donkey, the Pakistani man in the donkey cart refers to the US intentions because the donkey is symbol of pulling the weight. So Pakistan was supposed to pull the weight of the US on the basis of war against terrorism. 'Tired and sad Pakistani in vey shabby condition' denotes to the bad economic situation in Pakistan due to economic and military sanctions and internal political instability issues.



Sample C4. Published on September 27, 2001 (*The News*)



Sample C5. Published on September 13, 2007 (*The Nation*)

Similarly, Maxim used the metaphor of ‘chess player’ for Uncle Sam and ‘chess piece’ for late Benazir Bhutto and Pervez Musharraf (Sample C 5). Chess is a metaphor of power and giving the dodge to others to win. Under the light of international relations, chess is a metaphor of how other governments formulate wiser strategies and employing winning tactics when dealing with both friend and foe (Blough. 2013). This cartoon was published when the increasing level of resentment in Pakistan forced the US to breathe new life in the military rule of Musharraf by dealing with Benazir Bhutto for reconciliation.

To put into the nutshell, the period of 2001-2008 was completely dominated by critical images of the US and Pakistani military government. This was the period when Pakistani political cartoons were more personality oriented than the issue oriented because the entire political cartooning completely rejected the Bush-Musharraf alliance and the US support to military rule in Pakistan, the US war against terrorism. The images of ‘strategic depth’ and ‘interest specific ‘process of the Pak-US relations during military regime of General Pervez Musharraf was mainly highlighted. Political cartoons again did not follow the foreign policies of military rule in Pakistan that also rejected the assumption of different political communication scholars who argue that during military regime and international crisis, media messages follow the foreign policies of the country. Though the Bush- Musharraf love affair was at the peak during this period but political cartoons overwhelmingly criticized both presidents regardless the policies and close ties of the both governments.

3.2.2. Democratic Political Regime of Pakistan People’s Party (PPP) (2008-March 2013) and the US Representation in Political Cartooning

It was found that during this regime (2008-2013); collectively 79 political cartoons were published. Total 35 political cartoons published in the *Nation*, 32 in the *The News* and 12 in *Dawn*. This regime was unique for Pakistani media discourse including political cartoons because one of the longest military regimes of General Pervez Musharraf in Pakistan was ended in 2008 and the administration of George W. Bush was also ended who initiated the war against terrorism and seized the democratic process in Pakistan due to its alliance in war. Therefore, with the end of Bush administration, the story of Bush-Musharraf alliance also ended.

The most important phenomenon of this regime was the presidency of Barack Obama, the first African American Black President. Initially, the whole political cartooning was revolved around the expectations with Barack Obama and its new policies towards the world especially the Muslims states and Pakistan. Pakistani political cartoonists still remained critical and represented the negative images of the US by taking the stance that ‘Pakistan should not live in fool’s paradise’ (Sample C6) because the expectations of Pakistan from Barack Obama would never be fulfilled and he would also follow the policies of his predecessors.



Sample C6. Published on November 7, 2008 (*The Nation*)

While summing up this regime, political cartoonists reinforced only anti-Americanism in political cartoonists against the foreign policies of the government. They not only depicted the US wrong policies but also criticized Pakistani government. Political cartoonists depicted the US as ‘evil’ whoever the president is. On the other hand, they represented Pakistani government as very ‘helpless’, ‘shallow’, indecisive’ and ‘weak’ in front of the US.

4.0. Conclusion

This study attempted to examine the power of political cartoons in constructing the images of the United States through the interaction of signs and symbols. While constructing the image of the United States through political cartoons, it was found that they overwhelmingly reinforced the anti-Americanism in all political regimes regardless the political and foreign relations that Pakistan had with the United States. It was found that the political cartoonists remained constant and critical not only in the disharmonious periods of Pakistan-US relationships before 9/11 in the first three selected democratic political regimes but also in the period of close alliance in war against terrorism under the military rule after 9/11.

All the political cartoonists in Pakistan unanimously constructed the image of the US as ‘interest specific state’ which does what suits its interests, relations and friendships. That is why it was depicted that it is fair for the United States to be unfair in the rules and regulations that can be different for the United States itself and for others. Political cartoonists maintained the stance in all political regimes that there is no eternal friend of the United States rather it changes its allies, friends and partnerships with the circumstances. It was highly projected that the United States can easily deceive, cheat, betray and mislead their allies and friends according to the situations and needs of its aims and goals. That is why, it was predominantly projected in almost all political regimes of Pakistan that the United States is only a ‘fair weather friend’ in ‘Pakistan-US love- hate syndrome’. This nature built the image of the United States as ‘untrustworthy and hypocrite state’ that is not to be trusted.

It was further concluded that after the Cold War and before 9/11, the depiction was more on issue specific in all three democratic regimes of former Prime Minister, Late Benazir Bhutto (former Chairperson of PPP) and Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif (Chairman of PML (N) but after 9/11, besides issue specific depiction, personality oriented 'friendship series of 'Bush-Musharraf' and 'Zardari-Obama' was also represented in political cartoons of Pakistan. Before military rule in Pakistan, almost all political cartoons in all political regimes though depicted Pakistani political governments as weak, poor and powerless yet self-reliant, pressure resistant, motivated and hardworking who tried to resist the US pressures and took stand in front of the hegemonic position of the US. On the contrary, after 9/11, the US emerged as 'unilateralist aggressive superpower' in the world. In all the political cartoons of Pakistan, the US was more frequently depicted than ever before 9/11 and Pakistan was depicted more weak, dependent, indecisive and powerless in front of the powerful, hegemonic and resourceful United State than ever before.

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