

## **Pak US Relations: Allies under Compulsion?**

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### **Abstract**

Pakistan US relations are fundamental to the 'War against Terrorism'. The history of their bilateral relations is full of getting very close and then drifting apart. They strongly disagree on most issues but then situations arise that bring them together. Pakistan saw its interests in Afghanistan best served through Taliban, however, US after 1998 and especially after 9/11 considered them as the biggest threat. Pakistan due to its geography was vital to US strategy in Afghanistan. US is also very important for Pakistan economically and also as a supplier of weapons. So, despite divergences they have been compelled to be allies.

**Key Words:** Pakistan, United States, Allies, Afghanistan, Terrorism, Security, Comprehensive Security, Counter Terrorism, Taliban, TTP, 9/11, Strategic, Conventional Conflict, Al-Qaeda

September 11, 2001 (now referred to as 9/11) added new aspects to international system having a bearing on Interstate Relations. This incident had direct effect on the US global security policy in the days to come. Osama bin Laden and his organization Al-Qaeda were directly blamed by the United States for the 9/11 attacks. The President of the United States termed these attacks as an act of war and pledged that the organization and its leaders responsible for these attacks would be taken to task for attacking the USA. Meanwhile Islamabad started sensing the crises because of its geographical proximity with Afghanistan and being the supporter of the Taliban, Pakistan felt compelled to make tough decisions in the new security situation.

This study is an analytical overview of Pakistan US relations. It focuses on the post 9/11 relations strongly based in the history of their bilateral relations, with some changes brought by 9/11. The study breaks these relations in the pre and post 9/11 eras. It brings out the compulsions on both sides to remain allies despite many divergences in interests and objectives.

### **Pak-US Relations before 9/11**

In South Asia despite the ever emerging global concept of comprehensive security, interstate conflicts and the traditional concerns of military security still

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remain an important phenomenon. The unsettled issue of Kashmir and other disputes between Pakistan and India remain a major threat of conventional or non-conventional conflict between the two (Moni, 2012). Therefore the relationship with the United States remains the determining factor for Pakistan in its power equation with India.

Both Pakistan and the US had to depend on each other for their own strategic, political and security reasons. Since Pakistan's independence India due to its military and economic dominance was the main security concern for Pakistan. To balance those threats Pakistan was compelled to search for foreign defense cooperation (Sattar, 2007: 40). The United States was the only potential source of military and economic assistance for Pakistan (Sattar, 2007). Pakistan's security policy has always been India centric and the convergence of security interests between Pakistan and USA was natural as India was a close strategic ally of the former USSR during the cold war. United States had begun to recognize the value of Pakistan's geographical location as early as 1949, when the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (JCSC) said that Pakistan is useful for military or non-military operations against the Soviet Union and is a base for strategic US forces for the defense of oil rich Middle Eastern region (Arif, 1984:70-78).

Pak-US security relations revolve around three important aspects i.e. Political, economic and military relations. However, for Pakistan all these aspects are underwritten by the Indian threat perception (Saleem, 14, July.2011). Babani Sen Gupta writes in his book that along with the threat perceptions from India, the geo-strategic environment has also caused a serious security problems for Pakistan, since it is situated in the region described as the fulcrum of Asia (Gupta, 1970: 178-240). That is why Pakistan while devising its security policy always has to consider the posture of the super power i.e. the USA towards this region. Moreover Pakistan always needed and was supported economically and militarily by the United States which helped Pakistan in maintaining its defensive posture vis-à-vis India. On the other hand the US needed Pakistan as part of its security arrangement against the spread of communism during the cold war. Though United States has always been a stronger and bigger power in this equation of security relations between Pakistan and the US but still there existed some level of co-dependency between the two states. The US and Pakistan remained engaged with each other through various security alliances since 1950's for the purpose of enhancing their respective national security. The security pacts between the powerful and weak nations are usually the result of the threats perceived by the prospective partners to their national security. Usually in times of extreme international emergencies or wars to be fought against common enemy

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convergences may be achieved between the powerful and weaker partners through the alliances. Still divergences occur regarding the tactics adopted for the said purpose. Whatever the intentions of the powerful state may be, the ultimate shape of an alliance between the powerful and weak state is that of the dominance of the big power over the weak state (Hasnat, Pelinka, Anton: 35-36). Christopher Gelpi suggests that the weaker states may compromise on its foreign policy autonomy for the security they expect from the powerful ally. To compensate for such security, the smaller states let the powerful ally to have control over some aspects of their foreign or domestic policies considered important by the powerful ally for its own security interests. The powerful states will always use the alliances to influence and shape the behaviors of weaker allies (Gelpi, 1999: 107-139). This has always been the case between Pakistan and the US.

In the 1980's Pakistan was respected in the world arena for its struggle against Soviet occupation in Afghanistan. Towards the end of the decade of 1980's the trend was reversed. Pakistan's nuclear program became the irritating element in its relations with the west and in particular with the United States. The apprehensions about Pakistan sponsoring terrorism resurfaced. Since Pakistan was the first state to recognize the Taliban regime thus it was internationally perceived to be the creation of Pakistan (Rashid, 2000). Pakistan faced tough economic sanctions after 1998 nuclear tests, whereas Kargil episode also projected Pakistan as an 'irresponsible' state. General Musharraf (Army) coup and the overthrow of an elected government in October 1999, subjected Pakistan more to the democracy related sanctions.

On the eve of 9/11 Pakistan was facing an increasing diplomatic isolation. One of the main reasons of this growing isolation was the USA's conspicuous tilt towards India in the post-cold war regional and international politics. During the cold war era Pakistan had been the US's ally against Soviet Union whereas India was a close ally of the Soviet Union. With the disintegration of Soviet Union Pakistan while losing its strategic importance was relegated to the list of rogue states from that of a front line ally of the USA (Khan, 2012: 48-49).

From the US point of view, there are two interpretations of the concept of security, including positive and negative ones. The realists support a negative interpretation, when security means the absence of direct physical threat against the country and its citizen from an external enemy. The negative interpretation of security is the basis of the traditional approach to security. The positive approach to the concept of security put one step forward, and adds the citizen welfare to the concept of security of the state. Positive

interpretation dominated during the period between the end of the Cold War and the events of 9/11. The events of 9/11 changed the nature of security and its interpretations, especially for the United States. The security of a state (The US) was threatened this time not by another country, which was the basis of the negative approach, but by a new enemy called 'Terrorism'. Terrorism targeted inside territorial borders of a state. Therefore in the security of the United States, combination of both positive and negative interpretations on the concept of security can be traced in the post 9/11 period. The presence of a threat such as terrorists and rogue states were interpreted according to the negative approach to national security, while the positive approach was employed in stabilizing and democratizing the potential states that harbor terrorism.(Yusof, Soltani, 2012 ). Pak-US security relations in the post 9/11 era also oscillate between the negative and positive approaches to the concept of security. The security approach which is only dependent on military is inadequate to deal with the nature of threats to the security of South Asia in the post 9/11 situation. Therefore it is now imperative to consider the nonmilitary threats and security concerns also.

Since the security dynamics of South Asia have changed, the external players have started adding new dimensions to the existing security issues. Pakistan again became significant in the regional security interests of the United States. Pakistanis had to re orient Pakistan's security policy, Pakistan could no longer preserve its strategic position in Afghanistan at the cost of its relations with Washington, but to support the US intervention to hunt down Al-Qaeda and Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. The US action just across Pakistan's western borders in Afghanistan has created multifaceted challenges and unintended security concerns for Pakistan. The growing religious militancy, anti-Americanism and the growing strategic relationship between the US and India added new dimensions to Pakistan's threat perceptions. Presence of NATO forces in Afghanistan is another external factor that has a significant impact the security dynamics of South Asia (Mazari, 2006). The idea is supported by Robert Gilpin, when he says that a dominant power defines the rules of international security and makes the repercussions for smaller powers to redefine its security and foreign policies (Gilpin, 1981:22). According to Mansur Akbar Kundi the US has always defined its rules of the system for Pakistan in favor of its own (US) national interests, particularly after 9/11 when the US is behaving like a hegemon rather than partner in its relationship with Pakistan (Kundi, 2009). Strategically it is very important for Washington in staying committed to Pakistan's security and still not to give any convincing evidence which impacts negatively on the security perception of India. The United States after 9/11 needed Pakistan's support by all means and Pakistan was compelled to abandon its long term strategic vision of 'strategic depth'

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under its immediate security compulsions, hence decided to join the US in its 'War on Terror'. Pakistan-United States relationship in the post 9/11 era has been determined by an intersection between the global and regional level security concerns. Pakistan and the United States is a security complex whose primary security concerns are so closely and sufficiently linked that the mutual dependence of their respective national securities cannot be realistically ignored. After 9/11 religious extremism and terrorism in Af-Pak region has become an imminent threats to global peace and security. United States securitized these changes in politico-ideological and strategic environment and the fight against them became a common factor that determines the trends in the Pak-US bilateral security relationship. This relationship have had a number of implications for Pakistan's security at all the three levels i.e., domestic, regional and global. Security stakes for Pakistan in this equation are much higher compared to that of the US but still this regional security complex is very crucial for the US regional and global security interests.

Pakistan according to General Musharraf had four critical security concerns to safeguard by entering into this new phase of security relations with Washington after 9/11. They were security from any external threat (India), the revival of Pakistan's economy, protecting nuclear and missiles assets (Strategic Assets) and Pakistan's support for Kashmir cause (Rizwan, 2010: 39-68). Pakistan also wanted the US to support the formation of Pakistan's friendly government in the post-Taliban Afghanistan. Above all Pakistan was concerned that if Pakistan declines to cooperate then it can become the target of the United States wrath, as the US had already threatened. Thus Pakistan at this juncture had bandwagoned into an alliance with the superior and threatening power i.e. the USA ( Walt, 1987).

The US primary concern was to fight extremism, terrorism and hunting down Al-Qaeda in the Af-Pak region, which was not possible without Pakistan's assistance and help. The US also wanted Pakistan to end its support for Taliban and to apprehend the fugitive Al-Qaeda and Taliban elements running from Afghanistan into Pakistan after US invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. The US was also very skeptical about clandestine nuclear proliferation by Pakistan, which could become an enormous global security hazard. Since Pakistan has indigenous problems of poverty, bad governance, lack of representative governments and a history of alleged reliance on non-state actors to protect its security interests vis-à-vis India. This makes Pakistan more vulnerable to be overrun politically by extremists taking control of the state power and the nuclear assets while putting the whole region subject to nuclear blackmail. According to Robert G. Wiring Pak-US strategic relations

depended on many factors, which includes the state of Pakistan's confrontational relations with India, its willingness to adopt democratic principles and free market economy, the level of religious influence in state identity and the pursuit of nuclear weapons. Pakistan strategic utility is always measured through its willingness to adjust Pakistan's national interests with that of the US policy imperatives of the day. In this dependent relationship Washington's strategic necessity and Pakistan's capacity for adapting to it determines the course of Pak-US security relations (Wirsing, 2003:70-78).

### **Pak US Relations After 9/11**

9/11 also marked the beginning of rethinking of strategic and security relations between the United States and Pakistan. The USA alleged Pakistan and its security agencies for supporting and protecting the extremists. The refusal of the Taliban government to hand over Osama bin Laden compelled the USA to revise its security policy in the region. This revision and reorganization of the post 9/11 security policy of the USA regarding Afghanistan has a deep and direct impact on Pakistan-US security relations. The contours of US policy began to emerge, with the US President's statement of 'monumental struggle of good versus evil' G.W. Bush Press statement: Sept 12, 2001 (G.W.Bush, 2001). The Secretary of State Colin Powell said that the US expects 'the fullest cooperation' (Powell, 2001) from Pakistan. President Bush also said that those harboring terrorists would be treated as terrorist, in a press conferences he replied to a question that 'We will give the Pakistani government a chance to cooperate (Bush, 2001) in which the note of warning was not mistakable.

9/11 provided India with new opportunity to get further closer to the United States because India expected Pakistan not to abandon Pakistan's support for Taliban. India was trying to blackmail Pakistan by establishing a link between freedom struggle in Kashmir with the unfolding US 'War on Terror'. But on the other side it was only the 'War on Terror' which fully re-established Pakistan's relations with the USA.

Pakistan made a strategic presumption that US would react to 9/11 attacks with much greater force and Pakistan had to avoid any confrontation with the US policies because Pakistan's non cooperation would provoke US hostilities against Pakistan also. It was therefore extremely important to make a decision, keeping in view the national interests and realistic assessment of the strategic environment. Pakistan had to cooperate where its national security interests converged with those of the USA and avoid where they diverged. The Indian threat perception was one of the most important security concerns

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for Pakistan to join the 'War on Terror'. The post 9/11 political and strategic developments at regional and global level did not let India fulfill its desire to isolate Pakistan internationally. India got further frustrated when Pakistan became the front line ally of the United States in the War on Terror. The visibly increasing US tilt towards India was put on hold because the security interests of both Pakistan and the USA seemed to converge at this point. Pakistan to get full benefit from its front line status also needed to lower the confrontational profile in its relations with India. This was because the tension on Pakistan's eastern border was not compatible with Pakistan's role as US ally in the new regional security situation particularly in the fight against terrorism on its western borders with Afghanistan. 9/11 provided a strategic opportunity for the USA to ensure its presence in the region. On 13<sup>th</sup> September, Richard Armitage the US assistant Secretary of State for South Asia summoned Dr. Maleeha Lodhi then Pakistan's ambassador in USA and the Director General of ISI, then on his official visit to Washington DC and conveyed the list of seven demands the USA wanted Pakistan to fulfill. Pakistan had a choice to make, that either it was with the US or it was not? Islamabad gave a prompt and generally a positive response when the US official request was made. Pakistan followed a strategy expected to reduce threats to Pakistan's own internal and external security interests. Pakistan had to avoid any confrontation with the US while being careful that any policy might not offend the interest or sensibilities of the Afghan People (Sattar, 2007). Islamabad was mindful of the value and importance of its contribution to the fight against terrorism and made known to the US about Islamabad's expectations of the termination of the so called nonproliferation and democracy related sanctions, and the resumption of economic support and assistance.

### **Conclusion**

The 9/11 terrorists attacks in the US changed the political and security environment of the world and in particular of South Asia. Old friends became foes and foes have become allies. Security and political interests of the United States and regional players were redefined. Pakistan found itself in the middle of the storm, while enjoying the status of being an ally of the world most powerful state in the 'War on Terror' also has to confront it in areas where the security interests diverged with the same powerful state. Afghanistan and the Taliban became the target of the United States wrath, as Al-Qaeda and Osama bin laden were present in Afghanistan under the protection of Taliban, who were blamed for having executed the 9/11 attacks in the United States. Pakistan became a focal point also because of its geographical, ideological, cultural political and security interests and relations with Afghanistan. Pakistan

had to abandon the support for Taliban under the US pressures and became a front line ally in the global 'War on Terror' because of its own security reasons vis-à-vis India and the US pressures. Moreover, General Musharraf also found it as an opportunity to support Pakistan's falling economy and restore its diplomatic stature which it lost after the military takeover on October 12, 1999. The post 9/11 relationship between Pakistan and USA has both elements of convenience and force. It appears Pakistan felt compelled to find convenience in allying itself with the USA in 'War on Terror'.



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### **End Notes**

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