

Trump and South Asia: Politics of Pakistan-US Relations in Perspective

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Abstract

The security and economic architecture of South Asia is in a flux. US President Donald Trump's announcement of a new South Asia policy in August 2017 has added to the complexities. While his proposed strategy is not very different from that of his predecessors, who saw Pakistan as a breeding ground for cross-border terrorism in Afghanistan and India rather than vice versa, his desire of an increased Indian role in Kabul has created more concerns in Islamabad. This policy can create further divide in an already fragile and least integrated region, where unresolved political issues, especially between the two nuclear armed countries, i.e. India and Pakistan, still keep on simmering. In this context, this paper analyses President Trump's South Asia policy in view of Pakistan-US relations and the region.

Keywords: Trump, Fort Meyer Speech, Pak-US Relations, Afghanistan.

Introduction

Historically, bilateral relations between Pakistan and the United States (US) have remained on an uneven and on-off trajectory. Pakistan is one of those countries that has had the most-allied status with the US at one time; and complete disregard and even hostility

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afterwards. The US continues to see Pakistan as a double-dealing and duplicitous ally, while Pakistan often finds US' engagement untrustworthy. Unfortunately, this has meant that this has remained a need-based see-saw of great expectations to greater frustrations.

Nevertheless, Pakistan has had bilateral relations with the US since its creation in 1947, which makes both states old and indispensable to each other. While India opted to tilt towards the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), though formally non-aligned, Pakistan joined the US-led Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) defence pacts for its security needs. The country also received economic aid in its nascent days while it was struggling economically. Similarly, while Pakistan was amongst the first countries to recognise Mao's Communist China, India undertook its disastrous Indo-China War in 1962. Pakistan played a key part in the US-China rapprochement during the early 1970s¹ and had very close cooperation during the former Soviet Union's invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. In the post-9/11 era, Pakistan's role in the Global War on Terror (GWOt) could be called a major hallmark of this bilateral relationship. Pakistan was awarded the status of a major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) ally as a frontline state in 2003.² However, despite close strategic cooperation, Pakistan's relationship with the US continues to struggle under a 'do more' shadow. With a new President in the White House since 2017, this shadow has been growing darker and more ominous. Every now and then, the message, coming through President Trump's tweets or the State Department, takes the relationship two steps back instead of forward:

The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more!³

¹ Jamal Afridi and Jayshree Bajoria, "China-Pakistan Relations" (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 2010), <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-pakistan-relations>.

² Paul J. Smith, "Fourth Wave Terrorism and the International System" (PhD diss., University of Hawaii, Mānoa, 2005), 307.

³ Leeza Mangaldas, "Trump's Twitter Attack on Pakistan is Met with Both Anger and Support in South Asia," *Forbes*, January 2, 2018,

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US Vice President Mike Pence has also reiterated President Trump's desire that Pakistan should be doing more on fighting terrorism, especially taking action against the Taliban, the Haqqani Network, and other outfits.⁴

There is no denying that South Asia is changing, and in this changing environment, the Pakistan-US relationship matters, especially given the continuing instability in Afghanistan. President Trump's renewed interest in resolving the Afghan issue has brought South Asia in the limelight again. This region is on the brink of becoming an economic and military power hub due to the rising economy of India, and the potential of Pakistan serving as a regional hub for integration through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC):

The contours of a new economic and political geography within South Asia are clearly emerging on the map with enhanced connectivity among China, Pakistan, Russia, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asia.⁵

The US' opposition to CPEC is a major hurdle. James Mattis, the US Defence Secretary, while testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee said that the One Belt, One Road (OBOR), now the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), passes through disputed territory and President Trump is opposed to the idea of OBOR:⁶

Trump's allegations against Pakistan and his support of India as a strategic ally on both security and economic fronts prompted Islamabad to review its policy options toward Washington.⁷

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/leezamangaldas/2018/01/02/trump-brings-in-the-new-year-with-polarizing-pakistan-tweet/#53d5a7c22b35>.

⁴ "US Vice President Pence Says Pakistan 'Must Do More' against Taliban," *Express Tribune*, March 18, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1663310/1-us-vice-president-pence-urges-pakistan-taliban/>.

⁵ Haroon Sharif, "New South Asia Geography," *Dawn*, March 26, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1397602>.

⁶ "Pakistan, China Snub US Objection over CPEC Project," *Express Tribune*, October 7, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1525336/china-rejects-us-objections-cpec/>.

⁷ Rahim Nasar, "US-Pakistan Relations: A Troubling Scenario for South Asia," *Asia Times*, February 4, 2018, <http://www.atimes.com/us-pak-troubled-relations-south-asian-perspective/>.

Trump's inclination towards India (a country which is not in favour of OBOR and CPEC), and blaming Pakistan for the instability in Afghanistan has added more complexities in an already fragile balance of power in South Asia, which is heavily tilted towards India. Policymakers in Pakistan have to understand that the US' priority now is 'America'. Especially under Trump, they are tired of helping other countries, and want their own economic problems tackled as indicated by their acceptance of his 'America First'⁸ policy, which was his election slogan too. During his speech on National Security Strategy (NSS), Trump said:

At home, we are keeping our promises and liberating the American economy. We have created more than two million jobs since the election. Unemployment is at a 17-year low. The stock market is at an all-time high.⁹

Patience and resources for Pakistan are in short supply in Washington, D.C. So, the future course of this bilateral relationship augurs clumsy continuity with unrelenting mistrust and blame game, keeping in view the ever-changing dynamics of South Asia in particular, where the Afghan crisis does not appear to be going away for either of these two countries.

Trump's August 2017 Fort Myer Speech on South Asia

Previously, South Asia or Pakistan for that matter, did not figure prominently in President Trump's election campaign. But soon after entering the Oval office, Afghanistan and India started to get his attention. On August 21, 2017, he made remarks about Pakistan during his speech on the *Strategy in Afghanistan and South Asia* at Fort Myer, Arlington, Virginia. He used very tough and harsh sentences blaming Pakistan for all the ills in Afghanistan and beyond. He alleged:

⁸ "Trump Transcript: 'America First' Security Speech," *Al Jazeera*, December 19, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/12/trump-transcript-america-security-speech-171218205011166.html>; and Donald Trump, "Remarks by President Trump on the Administration's National Security Strategy" (speech, Washington, D.C., December 18, 2017), *Whitehouse.gov*, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-administrations-national-security-strategy/>.

⁹ Ibid.

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...Pakistan often gives safe haven to agents of chaos, violence, and terror. ...The Pakistani people have suffered greatly from terrorism and extremism. We recognize those contributions and those sacrifices. But Pakistan has also sheltered the same organizations that try every single day to kill our people. We have been paying Pakistan billions and billions of dollars at the same time they are housing the very terrorists that we are fighting.¹⁰

There was hardly anything new in Trump's speech and remarks on Pakistan as such language and allegations have been used earlier too under the Bush administration,¹¹ followed by Obama.¹² In fact, there is a clear pattern in the US' approach towards Pakistan, i.e., it has been finding one excuse after another to blame Pakistan since 9/11. While reactions in Islamabad were quite adamant, in reality, this speech was more about the US soldiers' contributions and sacrifices in the War on Terror (WoT) than South Asia. Trump talked about the burden of foreign wars the US has gotten itself engaged in and said:

...nearly 16 years after September 11th attacks, after the extraordinary sacrifice of blood and treasure...I share the American people's frustration...over a foreign policy that has spent too much time, energy, money, and most importantly lives, trying to rebuild countries in our own image, instead of pursuing our security interests above all other considerations.¹³

Nevertheless, when the President of the world's sole super power mentions one's country in any context (especially when it is in a negative context), one has no choice but to sit up and take notice. Discussed in the next sections are some of the important aspects of Trump's Fort Meyer speech:

¹⁰ "Trump's Speech on Afghanistan," *New York Times*, August 21, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/21/world/asia/trump-speech-afghanistan.html>.

¹¹ Kamran Bokhari, "US and Pakistani Relations and Impacts in South Asia," *Geopolitical Futures*, August 25, 2017, <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/us-pakistani-relations-impacts-south-asia/>.

¹² Bokhari, "US and Pakistani Relations and Impacts in South Asia."

¹³ "Trump's Speech on Afghanistan," *New York Times*.

Afghanistan's Role

The US establishment in general, and Trump in particular, either fail to understand or do so deliberately, that Pakistan has helped their country in realising its global objectives, especially through 1952-89 - 'Pakistan played a key role in America's global strategy.'¹⁴ Regrettably, there is a tendency to blame Pakistan in somewhat simplistic fashion for most of the difficulties and challenges that engross Afghanistan¹⁵ and the region. Over the past 16 years, whenever the US has found itself in a fix in Afghanistan, it has brusquely blamed Pakistan.¹⁶ In fact, undue criticism in the context of the Taliban has become a buzzword for the Western media. Trump's remarks are a continuation of that trend.

If one closely evaluates his speech, one would find that it is the hallmark of an unclear US policy on Afghanistan in particular and South Asia in general. Trump hinted towards 'conditions' dictating his policy on the war-torn country not 'timetable.' He said, 'conditions on the ground - not arbitrary timetables - will guide our strategy from now on'¹⁷; and hence, committed the US to an open-ended war in Afghanistan.¹⁸ This makes his approach unpredictable. But at the same time, it also gives him leverage for future assessments of the country, if need be and act accordingly. The US Afghanistan strategy is not to win, but to not lose either,¹⁹ even if it means hanging on to the once called 'graveyard of

¹⁴ Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, eds., *Making US Foreign Policy Toward South Asia: Regional Imperatives and the Imperial Presidency* (New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company, 2008), 16.

¹⁵ Idrees Ali, "Pakistan not to Blame for Afghan Troubles, Official Says on US Visit," *Reuters*, February 29, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-pakistan-afghanistan/pakistan-not-to-blame-for-afghan-troubles-official-says-on-u-s-visit-idUSKCN0W22EK>.

¹⁶ Mosharraf Zaidi, "Is Pakistan willing to Lose America?" *New York Times*, August 29, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/29/opinion/is-pakistan-willing-to-lose-america.html>.

¹⁷ "Trump's Speech on Afghanistan," *New York Times*.

¹⁸ "Pakistan's Status as US Ally at Risk if it doesn't Help more with Afghanistan War: Rex Tillerson," *ABC News*, August 23, 2017, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-08-23/us-put-more-pressure-on-pakistan-to-help-with-afghanistan-war/8833336>.

¹⁹ Steve Coll, "We can't Win in Afghanistan because We Don't Know Why We're There," *New York Times*, January 26, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/26/opinion/sunday/united-states-afghanistan-win.html>. See also, Monish Tourangbam, "US Strategy in Afghanistan: Old Wine in Trump's Bottle," in "Perspectives on Trump's South Asia Policy," ed. Amrita Jash, *The*

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empires' indefinitely. The Trump strategy may also be meant for reducing the probability that the Kabul government will collapse over the next two to three years. This is a very limited version of success.²⁰

India's Role

The August 2017 speech also highlighted India's new role and image, especially when it comes to the Afghan crisis as seen by the President:

The threat is worse because Pakistan and India are two nuclear-armed states whose tense relations threaten to spiral into conflict. And that could happen.²¹

Traditionally, since the Cold war, one of the major interests of the US in South Asia has been to prevent nuclear war²² between India and Pakistan²³ but the current developments, i.e., offensive neighbourhood policy of India under Modi coupled with President Trump's India-centric approach towards this part of the world have made it more complex. His approach to South Asia is indirectly making the region 'India-locked', which is at the cost of regional balance of power. Historically, for almost 50 years, the US in one way or the other destabilised the regional balance 'by acting as an offshore balancer.'²⁴

Dossier by IndraStra 1 no. 1 (2017): 5,
https://www.ssoar.info/ssoar/bitstream/handle/document/53480/ssoar-dossierby_indrastra-2017-1-tourangbam_et_al-Perspectives_on_Trumps_South_Asia.pdf?sequence=1.

²⁰ David Ignatius, "Trump's Afghanistan Strategy isn't to Win. It's to Avoid Losing," *Washington Post*, August 22, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/trumps-afghanistan-strategy-isnt-to-win-its-to-avoid-losing/2017/08/22/0fc3b5e6-877a-11e7-a94f-3139abce39f5_story.html?utm_term=.c53a26b35075.

²¹ "Trump's Speech on Afghanistan," *New York Times*.

²² Mehraj Uddin Gojree, "The US Interests and Policies towards South Asia: From Cold War Era to Strategic Rebalancing," *Research Journal of Language, Literature and Humanities* 2, no. 4 (2015): 5-12,
<http://www.isca.in/LANGUAGE/Archive/v2/i4/2.ISCA-RJLLH-2015-017.pdf>.

²³ Stephen P. Cohen, "A New Beginning in South Asia" (brief no. 55, The Brookings Institution, Washington, D.C., 2000), <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/pb55.pdf>.

²⁴ Rudolph and Rudolph, eds., *Making US Foreign Policy Toward South Asia: Regional Imperatives and the Imperial Presidency*, 43.

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Furthermore, this ‘policy’ (if one can call it that) may be understood from the fact that the US wants Pakistan to either submit to India in South Asia’s affairs, or use its tilt towards the country as leverage to get things done. Trump, even during his election campaign, said that Pakistan could be ‘fixed’ through India, if need be: ‘You have to get India involved. India’s the check to Pakistan.’²⁵ Pressure on Pakistan, and that too from the US, always scores high with India:²⁶

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leaders credit the Modi government’s foreign policy for Trump’s threat of cutting aid to Pakistan.²⁷

Also, the Indian diaspora has continuously been lobbying in the US to put pressure on Pakistan, and stop economic and security assistance to the country. The US-India Political Action Committee (USINPAC) has been lobbying since long that the US should ‘reevaluate military aid to Pakistan.’²⁸

Trump’s policy is set to fuel regional tensions and ‘bringing India into the equation, just adds to the complexity that is Afghanistan.’²⁹ US lawmakers need to understand the sensitivity of the Indo-Pak equation while formulating any new South Asia policy as the region has already witnessed several wars - 1947-48, 1965, and 1971 between both countries, not to mention countless and continuous border skirmishes.

Unfortunately though, an India-driven South Asia policy has been in the making since the Clinton administration in the late 1990s. It has now started taking real shape, and culminated in threats to suspend military aid

²⁵ “Trump Calls for Indian Intervention if Pakistan becomes ‘Unstable’,” *Express Tribune*, September 23, 2015, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/961897/trump-calls-for-indian-intervention-if-pakistan-becomes-unstable/>.

²⁶ Bokhari, “US and Pakistani Relations and Impacts in South Asia.”

²⁷ Dhairya Maheshwari, “Trump’s Attack on Pakistan: Is it Really a Win for PM Modi’s ‘Hugplomacy’?” *National Herald*, January 2, 2018, <https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/international/trumps-attack-on-pakistan-is-it-really-a-win-for-pm-modis-hugplomacy>.

²⁸ US India Political Action Committee, “Washington Threatens to Cut Aid to Pakistan: Accuses Islamabad of Failing to Cooperate in Counter Terrorism Operations,” press release, January 4, 2018, <http://www.usinpac.com/index.php/latest-press-releases/2892-washington-threatens-to-cut-aid-to-pakistan-accuses-islamabad-of-failing-to-cooperate-in-counter-terrorism-operations>.

²⁹ Ibid.

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and stop financial assistance to Pakistan.³⁰ Trump, in his speech, only ‘cranked up the rivalry between [the] two nuclear’ powers.³¹ He also believes in burden sharing:

India makes billions of dollars in trade with the [US], and we want them to help us more with Afghanistan, especially in the area of economic assistance and development.³²

China’s Role

China factor cannot be ruled out in Trump’s South Asia policy and supporting India. The US may engage with India, but it needs to have an eye on regional and world security since New Delhi’s strategic community is also mindful of the fact that the Indo-US cooperation should not be seen as an anti-China alliance. Because, China does have concerns and fears that India is being used in containing its role in South Asia and beyond:

An American strategy that openly attempted to use India to balance China would be counterproductive to the development of US-India relations. For India, outright confrontation with China would be expensive.³³

Lately, regional alliances have been shifting. Ever increasing Indo-US strategic partnership is on one side, and Pakistan-China-Russia equation is in the making on the other. However, such bloc formation would not resolve the core issues of this volatile region.

Trump’s policy which appears to be more about his desire to deal with the Afghanistan crisis is ‘set to estrange Washington and Islamabad,

³⁰ Editor’s Note: While this paper was being finalised for publication, the US military declared cancelling USD 300 million in aid to Pakistan. See, “US Military to Cancel \$300m in Pakistan Aid over Terror Groups,” *BBC News*, September 2, 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-45386278>.

³¹ Nyshka Chandran and Jacob Pramuk, “Trump just Cranked up the Rivalry between Two Nuclear Giants,” *CNBC*, August 22, 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/08/22/india-pakistan-donald-trump-afghanistan-speech-cranks-up-rivalry.html>.

³² “Trump’s Speech on Afghanistan,” *New York Times*.

³³ Dana R. Dillon, “US Strategic Objectives in South Asia,” Heritage Lectures no. 889 (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2005), <https://www.heritage.org/asia/report/us-strategic-objectives-south-asia>.

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thereby pushing Islamabad and Beijing closer.³⁴ However, Pakistan and the US are not on completely divergent paths:

China's rising global status, and its explicit push for regional influence, has reduced Pakistan's dependence on the US, but the rumors of the demise of America's importance in Pakistan are greatly exaggerated.³⁵

Pakistan has special engagement with China without the US as a main determinant in their bilateral relationship. Neither is Beijing's relationship with Islamabad in reaction to US foreign policies in the Asia-Pacific affairs.

Politics of Pakistan-US Relations

The Pakistan-US relationship has seen several dramatic lows. The fact is that the US, being a super power, holds great impact around the geopolitico-economic centres of the world. Pakistan understands this well, and has its own unique importance in South Asia and beyond, especially in the Muslim world. The US needs to re-evaluate the importance of Pakistan as any US South Asia policy that does not include this country will remain incomplete. One only needs to recall that at the end of the Cold War, the US had thought that Pakistan lost its importance and under the Pressler Amendment banned military and economic assistance to Pakistan.³⁶ However, in the post-9/11 period, Pakistan's geostrategic location compelled Washington to seek its help in the GWoT.

Following President Trump's South Asia strategy, the former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson warned that Pakistan's status as a major non-NATO ally would be at risk if it did not help more with the Taliban

³⁴ Rizwan Zeb, "Trump's Afghanistan Strategy could Bring Islamabad and Beijing Closer," *Asia Dialogue*, October 13, 2017, <http://theasiadialogue.com/2017/10/13/trumps-afghanistan-strategy-could-bring-islamabad-and-beijing-closer/>.

³⁵ Zaidi, "Is Pakistan Willing to Lose America?"

³⁶ Amanda Erickson, "The Long History of Incredibly Fraught Relations between the US and Pakistan," *Washington Post*, January 5, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2018/01/05/the-long-history-of-incredibly-fraught-relations-between-the-u-s-and-pakistan/?utm_term=.21a22f670608.

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and Afghanistan's problems.³⁷ However, one needs to see what Pakistan really gained from this NATO alliance:

The widely reported data collected from US and Pakistan government agencies suggest...around USD14.5 billion has gone to the Pakistani military for covering its claimed costs of anti-terror operations. Pakistan received the remaining USD 18.8 billion as economic assistance.³⁸

But when Pakistan became a major non-NATO ally in 2004³⁹ under the Arms Export Control Act,⁴⁰ the then-US State Department's Deputy Spokesman Adam Ereli commented that such an ally is 'exempt from suspension of military assistance under the American Service members' Protection Act.' Pakistan was eligible for 'priority delivery of defence items.'⁴¹ But, instead the country faced suspension of USD 300 million in military and security aid assistance under President Trump.⁴² The struggling super power seems restless and unable to resolve the Afghan

³⁷ "Pakistan could Lose 'Major Non-NATO Ally Status,' Tillerson Warns," *Radio Free Europe-Radio Liberty*, August 22, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/tillerson-pakistan-could-lose-non-nato-ally-status/28691099.html>.

³⁸ Iftikhar Hussain and Nafees Takar, "Questions about US Aid to Pakistan Put Focus on Military's Spending," *Voice of America*, January 4, 2018, <https://www.voanews.com/a/us-aid-pakistan-military-spending/4193398.html>.

³⁹ "Bush Names Pakistan 'Major Ally,'" *BBC News*, June 17, 2004, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3814013.stm>; and "Non-NATO Status for Pakistan Approved," *Dawn*, June 3, 2004, <https://www.dawn.com/news/360800>.

⁴⁰ The Arms Export Control Act, Pub. L. No. 90-629, 82 Stat. 1320 (1968). <https://fas.org/asmp/resources/govern/aeca00.pdf>. Definition: "22 U.S.C. 2778 of the Arms Export Control Act (AECA) provides the authority to control the export of defense articles and services, and charges the President to exercise this authority. Executive Order 11958, as amended, delegated this statutory authority to the Secretary of State."

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Pamela Constable, "Despite Trump's Punitive Military Aid Cut, Pakistan and US are Still Intertwined," *Washington Post*, January 25, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/despite-trumps-punitive-military-aid-cut-pakistan-and-us-are-still-intertwined/2018/01/24/41cbae62-ff8f-11e7-86b9-8908743c79dd_story.html?utm_term=.7e314b3026f2.

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problem in spite of military might and being the ‘number one economy of the world’.⁴³

It remains unwise for the Trump administration to completely eliminate the US-Pakistan counterterrorism military support framework.⁴⁴

On South Asia, the US and Pakistan seem to have divergent interests and understanding of regional volatility and the means to address the Afghanistan quagmire. States act in pursuit of their own security interests.⁴⁵ Hence, it is likely that the history of mistrust coupled with marked difference in state capabilities and divergent approaches and interests between Pakistan and the US will lead to an enduring relationship at least in the foreseeable future. There has emerged consensus in Pakistan that ‘Americans’ are not reliable, especially after Trump’s remarks about the country on various occasions aimed at discrediting and singling out Pakistan being part of the problem than solution.

As pointed out earlier, Trump’s August 2017 speech was more on Afghanistan than South Asia. He used the word ‘Afghanistan’ 25 times and ‘South Asia’ six times, and that too while referring to the Afghan problem as a central point of his argument. Therefore, Afghanistan seems not only the decider of Trump’s South Asia policy, but also Pakistan-US relationship under his Presidency as he mainly referred to Pakistan in the Afghan context.

Future Directions for Pakistan and the US

Since Afghanistan and the US have often been central to Pakistan’s national strategy (coupled with India being the spoiler in the latter’s

⁴³ Rob Smith, “The World’s Biggest Economies in 2018” (Geneva: World Economic Forum, 2018), <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/04/the-worlds-biggest-economies-in-2018/>.

⁴⁴ Thomas F. Lynch III, “The Decades-Long ‘Double-Double Game’: Pakistan, the United States, and the Taliban,” *Military Review* 98, no. 4 (2018): 64-78, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/JA-18/Lynch-Pakistan-US-Taliban.pdf>.

⁴⁵ “Pakistan-US Trust Deficit,” *Dawn*, June 18, 2011, <https://www.dawn.com/news/637562>.

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predicaments), the following approaches at bilateral, regional, and international levels need to be followed while dealing with the US:

Reconciling the Taliban-led insurgents is a hard but inescapable choice as threat of the Islamic State (IS) is looming large in Afghanistan, which has every potential to make peace a distant reality in the region at large. Pakistan should announce its Afghan policy in black and white. It should advocate an incremental/step-by-step approach for the Afghan peace process. Even though the Quadrilateral Coordination Group (QCG), which involves Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and the US to bring the Taliban to the negotiating table, has yielded no results as yet, it is still the most viable process given its composition. The US should be engaged in reviving the QCG process because, the new US strategy has hinted towards a regional approach rather than addressing Afghanistan's long-running war in isolation.

Islamabad should continuously be asking Afghanistan and the US authorities that terrorists wanted by Pakistan hiding there be handed over to it or action be taken against them. Border management should remain the top priority while dealing with Afghanistan as the long porous border has created countless problems for Pakistan. At the governmental level, both often find themselves caught in a difficult situation due to their history, especially the Durand Line⁴⁶ issue. Efforts should also be made at the non-governmental level as Afghanistan's rank and file need educational and medical facilities in Pakistan. The latter should continue extending these and other facilities of civic nature to them so that people-to-people connection remains strong for future engagement.

India wants to deny Pakistan and China political space. There is a need for a major diplomatic initiative involving all the immediate regional neighbours in problem-solving talks and setting out road maps for local stabilisation efforts in Afghanistan. China's role in the Afghan peace process is vital. But, historically, it has favoured a non-interventionist and low political profile approach overseas. For two major reasons, Beijing wishes to see terrorism eliminated in its backyard:

⁴⁶ Amina Khan, "Issues in Pak-Afghan Border Management" (brief, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad, Islamabad, 2016), 3, <http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Final-Issue-brief-dated-26-9-2016.pdf>.

1. China has invested heavily in the Central Asian Republics (CARs).
2. Xinjiang province's dilemma of extremism and terrorism, bordering Afghanistan.

Since the start of 2014, China's Afghan diplomacy has become more positive, proactive, and dynamic. It is in a strong position to help coordinate between Afghanistan and its neighbours, which Pakistan should support.⁴⁷

Trump's vision behind this policy is yet to be fully revealed. So, come what may, an era of strategic patience should prevail where Pakistan clearly understands the costs and benefits of confrontation and cooperation with the US. The government should engage with the US as complete disconnect at the official/diplomatic level would not serve its interests. But at the same time, Pakistan must adjust its policies in accordance with the geopolitics and geoeconomics in the region. Though China and Russia are suitable alternatives to the US, care has to be taken in not making the US believe that Pakistan has been following a minus-US foreign policy.

With Trump in office, Pakistan needs to follow a crisis avoidance and relationship management approach. As mentioned earlier, Trump has acknowledged Pakistan's role and sacrifices in his speech and Islamabad should build on this. Trump would not do the hard work of improving relations with Pakistan. The post-9/11 chapter is almost over. The next chapter of the Pakistan-US relationship has already started, marked mainly by lower expectations on both sides. The US needs Pakistan to do the groundwork of preventing an intercontinental Islamic State (IS)/al-Qaeda from rearing its head. Pakistan needs to check religious extremism at home as it can create irritants in its relationship with Washington.

The US should stop blaming Pakistan and asking for doing more when *Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad* is going on. Such blame only encourages outlaws to carry out with their activities. Also, the US should avoid giving notices and threats as these actions only serve the extremists and terrorists against whom Pakistan has taken indiscriminate action.

⁴⁷ Zhao Huasheng, "What is Behind China's Growing Attention to Afghanistan?" (Beirut: Carnegie Middle East Center, 2015), <http://carnegie-mec.org/2015/03/08/what-is-behind-china-s-growing-attention-to-afghanistan-pub-59286>.

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A section of US intelligentsia in major think-tanks has been preaching to the US establishment that Pakistan should be treated as a foe not friend. Pakistan should also start lobbying in the US in the same way as Israel and India. The government should also avoid the temptation to clinch short-term objectives at the expense of broader strategic purposes and always have a planned post-Pakistan-US engagement strategy. Overall, there is a strong need to re-engage with the US on new terms and conditions and any agreement in the future should be made public and the element of secrecy should be avoided as it creates doubts in the rank and file in Pakistan, which results in often witnessed and ever-increasing anti-US sentiments. The State Department and the US Congress may continue to frustrate Pakistan with their statements, but the latter should try to influence and make inroads in Washington's bureaucracy and follow an institutional approach and deal separately with Pentagon (precisely CENTCOM), the State Department, Capitol Hill, and lobby in the Congress:

This is the century of economic ideologies. Economic prosperity, sustainable development, and resource exploration are the best options for a country to retain its national integrity. With the BRI and the CPEC, China and Pakistan are strengthening their strategic and economic ties which will help Pakistan reduce its dependency on the US and its allies in the West.⁴⁸

In the meantime, Pakistan should make every effort to put its security and economic house in order, which should aim at building state capabilities by investing more in participatory democracy, rule of law, and strong economy and institutions. Only then, Pakistan would be able to negotiate with the US from a point of strength. Economic dependence on the US and on leading financial institutions (having its influence), has not served Pakistan's interests. Stronger economy creates an environment of trust and the European Union (EU) is the classic example of this.

⁴⁸ Nasar, "US-Pakistan Relations: A Troubling Scenario for South Asia."

Conclusion

The damage to the relationship [between Pakistan and the US] is deep and durable...Pakistanis are finding it hard to swallow that Washington has been using their country as a pawn in its global game.⁴⁹

Overall, the current US policy towards South Asia is set to make regional divides more sharp rather than bridging them. This policy is detrimental to Pakistan's core national interests, i.e., peace in Afghanistan, resolution of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute, Pakistan's relationship with China, and economic prosperity through regional connectivity. On peace in Afghanistan, the two states differ on the operational side. Pro-India policy is an indication that the US is not interested in resolving the Jammu and Kashmir dispute between Indian and Pakistan. The future course is likely to be murky given President Donald Trump's hardline South Asia policy. A troubled and damaged Pakistan-US relationship is neither good for South Asia in general nor for the Afghanistan crisis in particular. Also, Afghanistan becoming the main determinant of Pakistan-US relations is not a wise policy of the US. President Trump does not seem to be interested in resolving the complex issues of South Asia as he did not give any framework or worked out any concrete plans:

It is up to the South Asian States to be creative about sustainable new frameworks to promote regional [peace]. More narrowly, bilateral confidence-building measures between India and Pakistan must continue to develop.⁵⁰

Also, the Trump administration needs to understand that in South Asia's nuclear environment, small or large crises have replaced total or major wars between India and Pakistan.

Pakistan has always tried to convince successive US governments that it has taken enough risks for Washington during the Cold War, in the Afghan crises (past and present), and post-9/11 period by opting to side

⁴⁹ "Analysis: Why the US-Pakistan Alliance is Over," *SBS News*, August 26, 2013, <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/analysis-why-the-us-pakistan-alliance-is-over>.

⁵⁰ Bharath Gopalaswamy and Ben Polsky, "What Trump's Presidency Means for South Asia" (Washington, D.C.: The Atlantic Council), accessed September 26, 2018, <http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/programs/south-asia-center/trump-in-south-asia>.

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with them. Keeping in view the South Asia's security dynamics and persistent Afghan crisis, both states should understand that the dividends of engagement are greater. Any future relationship should revolve around strategic convergence. ■