



RESEARCH PAPER

**Changing Dynamics of Bilateral Relations between US and Pakistan:
Sino-Russia Factor**

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ABSTRACT

This paper aimed at an exhaustive analysis of changing dynamics in bilateral relations between the US and Pakistan. Solid projections about the future shape of US-Pakistan relationship are integral part of this study. Qualitative method of research with descriptive and predictive approaches has been employed to analyze relevant material. Economic rise of China in recent times has expanded its clout. Russia appears to have recovered some of its lost space. These shifts have indelible imprints on the US relations with its allies especially Pakistan. Bilateral ties between Pakistan and America have always been transactional and uncertain. The post-evacuation scenario in Afghanistan has also raised doubts on the future of these relations. Whereas, Pakistan and China are neighbors who have close economic and security cooperation. Pakistan and Russia are also in process of healing old sores due to economic and geo-political needs. The US has shifted its weight in favor of India for strategic partnership in the region in its bid for containment of China. The changed scenario is beset with certain new avenues of benefits and threats at the same time.

Keywords: Bilateral Relations, Changing Dynamics, China, Economic Rise, Pakistan, Russia, US

Introduction

Sentiments against the US persist in the minds of common people of Pakistan and popular political leaders also try to muster up support from general public on anti-American narrative. The US also mistrusts Pakistan for various reasons. The whole war on terror is the clear manifestation of this complicated partnership. American unexpectedly hurried withdrawal from Afghanistan has sealed the chapter of another tranche of engagements between the two countries. Anyhow, both America and Pakistan have started to consider alternative positioning in the backdrop of the changing world order started at the dawn of 21st century. Apparently, Pakistan is sliding towards fast-emerging Eastern camp led by China and Russia jointly while the US has lined up with the arch rival of Pakistan i.e. India. Historically, Pakistan enjoys time-tested friendly ties with its north-eastern neighbor China. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a landmark project of 46 billion US dollars, is set to deepen economic, strategic and cultural cooperation between them. Pakistan and Russia are also in the process of healing their 'cold war sores' (Muzaffar, & Khan, 2016). Geographical proximity also helps them extend these bilateral engagements to other parts of the eastern hemisphere including the Muslims-dominated Central Asia, Middle East and North Africa. Besides, other countries of South Asia, South-East Asia and Eastern Europe can become part of the extended partnership in the region in future. China is trying to expand its clout across the globe and its multi-trillion-dollar mammoth One Belt One Road (OBOR) project is its clear manifestation. To some analysts, China is leading economic warfare whereas resurrecting Russia is set to spearhead military front. This paper has also explored alternative opportunities available to the two states (Pakistan and America) in the new scenario. Potential risks in the changing dynamics for both the states have been highlighted as well. Solid projections about the future shape of bilateral ties between Pakistan and

America are important part of this paper. Hence, this research article may serve as guidelines to policy makers of both the states for taking key foreign policy decisions at this critical juncture in the global politics (Muzaffar, Yaseen, & Rahim, 2017).

Literature Review

It is always good to contextualize the research on the topic at hand. For this purpose, it has been worthwhile to understand the history of the bilateral ties between Pakistan and the United States of America at first. Therefore, it is essential to first explore the history and nature of the US-Pakistan relations. Burki & Kheli (2016) in their book "Pakistan Today: The Case for US-Pakistan Relations" provides comprehensive knowledge regarding the historical background and nature of the bilateral relations between the two states. Pakistan's ex-Ambassador to America, Mr. Hussain Haqqani wrote a detailed book on the chequered history of the two countries titled as "Magnificent Delusions: Pakistan, the United States, and an Epic History of Misunderstanding". An exhaustive study of this book has definitely helped understand the true context of the volatile ties between the two partners. (Haqqani, 2013)

This research is incomplete unless the changing world order is analyzed. Brown & Murray (2012) in their book "Multi-Polarity in the 21st Century: A New World Order" generate discussion on the declining supremacy of the US on the globe due to the rise of many other powers in the current century. The current changing dynamics in global politics are primarily caused by the rise of China and resurrection of Russia. Similarly, Fels (2017) in his book, "Shifting Power in Asia-Pacific? The Rise of China, Sino-US Competition and Regional Middle-Power Allegiance", investigates the power shift in the Asia-Pacific region.

The ever-enriching relationship between China and Pakistan is another important dynamic which is directly associated with the Pak-US partnership in current times. China is viewed as an alternative of America to Pakistan. This aspect is very well discussed in the article by Shad & Lalwani (2018), "US-China: A New Hyphenation Driving US-Pakistan Relations?". Similarly, Small (2015) in his book "The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics" explores all manifestations of the ties between Pakistan and China. He highlights the ramifications of Sino-Pakistan ties for the West, for India, for Afghanistan, and for Asia as a whole. (Yaseen, Jathol, & Muzaffar, 2016) & (Muzaffar, Shah, & Yaseen, 2018).

The trajectory of the relations among America, China and India deeply affects the relationship between Pakistan and the USA. The strategic alignment between India and America in recent times is also very relevant to fully comprehend the complex nature of Pak-US relations. Mohan & Ayres (2009) in a report "Power Realignments in Asia: China, India and the US" provides insight regarding the complex troika. Joshi & Pant (2016) in their book, "The US pivot and Indian Foreign Policy: Asian's Evolving Balance of Power" provides useful information to gauge the shift in the US policy vis-à-vis Asia and India. They argue that China's exponential rise and America's relative decline have led to a transition of power in contemporary Asia. (Muzaffar, & Khan, 2021).

It is impossible to reach certain conclusions if the inherent compulsions and constraints in the bilateral ties between the USA and Pakistan are not fully comprehended. Markey (2013) in his book "No Exit from Pakistan: America's Tortured Relationship with Islamabad" highlights certain compulsions to continue this relationship in spite of many irritants. On the other hand, Riedel (2012) in his book "Deadly Embrace: Pakistan, America, and the Future of the Global Jihad" projects many irritants and hurdles in the friendly ties between the two countries. Riedel deftly interprets the tortuous path of relations between two very different nations that remain, in many ways, stuck with each other.

In the end, it is critical to understand the future shape of Pakistan-US relations in the changing dynamics in the global and regional politics. This aspect has been critically

examined by Ahmed (2012) in his research paper, "Re-Defining US-Pakistan Relations". The GWOT has added certain unavoidable factors to this engagement. Akhtar (2012) in her paper titled 'Dynamics of USA-Pakistan Relation in post 9/11 period: Hurdles and Future Prospects' highlights irritants in Pak-US relations especially since 2001. This catastrophe changed the very nature of global engagements across the world. The former Pakistan Ambassador to UN, Munir Akram's article with the subject "Future of Pak-US Relations?" is an important source of material regarding the future course of the bilateral relations between the two allies (Akram, 2019). Last but not the least, Noor (2019) in her article "US-Pak Relations: Steering Forward with Cautious Optimism" offers useful material on important aspects of Pakistan and US relations to be kept in mind in future.

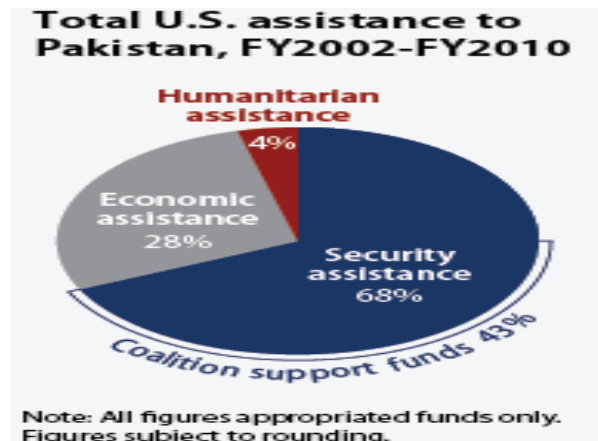
Brief Overview of US-Pakistan Relations

Since the end of the W.W.II, USA had been endeavoring to contain the communist USSR through gigantic civil and military aid to the nations in danger of falling prey to anti-capitalist block and to the allied powers for their rehabilitation in the wake of destruction caused by the international duel. The Truman Doctrine to help Turkey, Italy etc. to ward off the communist onslaught and extremely huge aid-based Marshal Plan for the Western Europe are marked examples of this policy. It is a fact that Pakistan was considered a badly planned state after its creation by the United States. In this region, emphasis of Americans was on India as they had supported the Indian National Congress as an important ally before the Partition. After 1947, India remained the US preference also. However, the visit of Liaqat Ali Khan gave a clear message to the world that Pakistan did not prefer communism. It is to clarify that Pakistan was not the first choice of the USSR either. The Soviet Union enjoyed friendly relations with Tehran where first Pakistani ambassador Raja Ghazanfar brokered and negotiated the USSR's invitation to Pakistan. Meanwhile, America also invited the P.M in retaliation. Pakistan got key place during Korean War. Later, Pakistan embarked on alliances in the shape of SEATO in 1954 and CENTO in 1955 to ensure security against the expansionist regime of the USSR. But after this, the relations suffered while Pakistan tried to diversify its foreign policy (Burke & Ziring, 1990: pp 109-111).

Pakistan rose to prominence again by a triggering event i.e. the invasion of the Soviets in Afghanistan. Pakistan's geostrategic significance was catalyst in the Afghan war. Pakistan was considered inevitable to the US proxy war in Afghanistan. For this, Pakistan became recruitment and training center for Muslim Mujahedeen from all over the world. American Congress agreed to provide Pakistan with forty F-16 and \$3 billion as an aid in 1981. For five years, another package amounting to \$4 billion was allowed (Akhtar, 2012: p 206). After the USSR withdrew, the United States left the region on its own fate. Pakistan had to host millions of refugees and the Afghan soil witnessed a fierce civil war. The US policy of leaving Pakistan in lurch created trust deficit during the years to come.

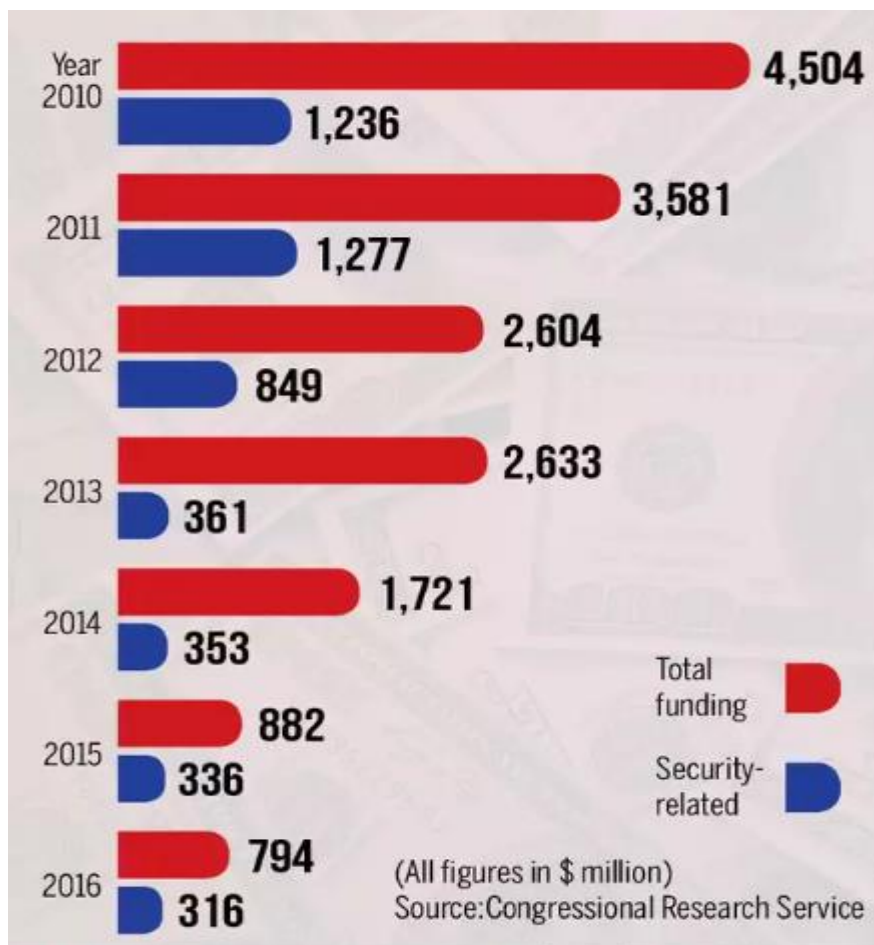
There was no significant mark in relations during 1990s. Although the United States supports democracy at least rhetorically in Pakistan, yet its closer practical involvement is usually with military regimes. For the US, its strategic interests are more important than its rhetoric for democracy, apparently. Due to nuclear explosions and military coup by General Pervaiz Musharraf, Pakistan was under sanctions when the event of 9/11 took place. Immediately after September 11, Pakistan was coerced to participate in the Global War on Terror (GWOT). Bilateral association between the United States and Pakistan yet again experienced great warmth. Pakistan, in the pursuit to earn the status of Frontline state against terror, conceded air blanket, logistics and four airbases to United States for the operation in Afghanistan (Ahmed, 2012: p 214). However, the decade of partnership and cooperation between the two states after the September terrorist attacks proved detrimental to democracy in Pakistan. After the early close cooperation in GWOT, many irritants developed over the period of time. It accentuated mistrust between them till the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces from Afghanistan soil following the swift return of the Talibans. The US pattern of aid to Pakistan has never been consistent and constant.

Rather, it witnesses stark fluctuations in different times due to various compulsions and constraints. Some of the facts are given below regarding the last two decades:



Source: (Cookman, Katulis, & Margon, 2011)

On January 1, 2018, US stated that it was withholding \$255 million military aid to Pakistan, trying the faith of the funds of Islamabad's ability to combat terrorism on its soil. The money was part of the aid package authorized by Congress in 2016. The announcement follows a trend of decreased funding over the years by the US to Pakistan. Here's a look at how both economic and military funding has been falling since 2010.



<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/how-us-funding-to-pakistan-has-been-dropping/articleshow/62337097.cms>



Source: [Armstrong](#), 2018

Shifts in World Order in Contemporary Era

One of the principal factors influencing global politics is the rise and fall of the world powers. An undisputed hegemon of the monopolar global order, the USA emerged as the focal point of global politics in the twenty - first century, replacing Pax Britannica as the center of global politics at the turn of the twentieth century. The US economy, nevertheless, suffered greatly as a result of its overextended hegemonic responsibilities and hyper-power obsession. In the end, the emerging countries, mainly China, embarked on a plan to reorient the modern world system away from the unipolar order. Even though Pakistan does not assume the status of great power, its geographical position in the center of South-West Asia gives it importance in the foreign policy objectives of major world powers. Pakistan is expected to be unavoidably relevant in the evolving global order as a result of reciprocating relations with the America, expanding relationships with Russia, and enduring strategic alliances with China (Farooq, Khan, & Khan, 2020).

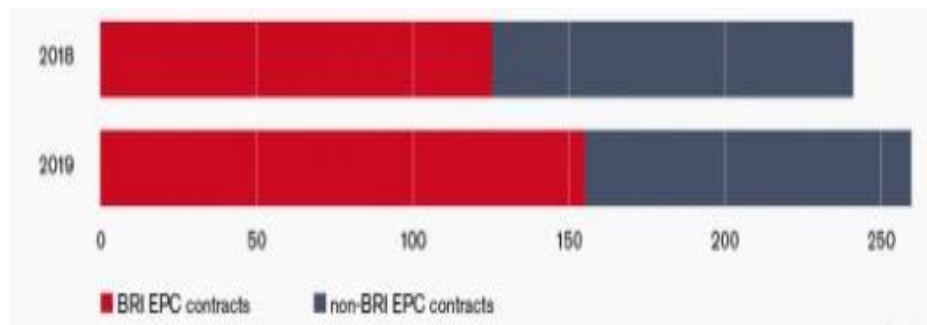
Moreover, since Pakistan's independence, the two countries have had competitive and cooperative ties. The US only assisted Pakistan when it needed to protect its own strategic interests. On the other hand, whenever Pakistan looked towards America for help, it was left disappointed. Both states worked together frequently throughout the War on Terror to defeat militants and terrorists. However, when their objectives diverged, neither was able to achieve their goals because of distrust and inaction. Growing Pak-China relationships notably through CPEC also have a significant impact on the bilateral ties between the US and Pakistan (Shah, Muzaffar, & Yaseen, 2020). The two governments must recognize that in certain situations, like the recent US exit from Afghanistan and the Kashmir Issue, continued engagement between them is necessary (Marwat, 2021). The difficulty of bringing about stability in Afghanistan, how to effectively manage the United States' closer ties with India without escalating Pakistan's regional fears and anxieties, and the effects of Pakistan's expanding relations with Beijing on its political economy and interactions with the United States are all topics worth discussing (Ali, 2020).

Emergence of China and Russia: Implications for Bilateral Relations between US and Pakistan

CPEC Strategic Chessboard- The Launch Pad for Future Alliance among Three Regional Actors

The long-standing ties between Pakistan and Beijing have always been important in Asian geostrategic dynamics. A contemporary example of which is the CPEC. The striking geopolitical shifts that have lately occurred across the globe in general and South Asia in particular will keep the international strategic landscape complex.

Figure 4.2: BRI and non BRI EPC Contracts



Source: (White, 2020)

The patterns of alliances as well as rivalries are evolving. Figure shows that the total value of newly signed China overseas engineering, procurement and construction (EPC) contracts increased by 7.6% to US\$260.3bn, of which nearly 60% (US\$154.9bn) were contracts signed in BRI countries.

India and Pakistan have been arch rival from the moment they both acquired their freedom. While Islamabad was allied to Washington and a partner in the Cold War against USSR, India maintained a strong alliance with Russia. On the other hand, Pakistan has long been strategic ally to China, and their relationship helps to maintain the power balance in the region. With the launch of economic corridor, a hallmark initiative of BRI, this alliance was further strengthened. China has overtaken all other foreign investors in Pakistan as a result of the CPEC, with investments of approximately \$65 billion. The investment is a clear indication of the two countries' ongoing cooperation and serves as a marker of regional stability (Rahim, Khan, & Muzaffar, 2018). Besides the start of a tense relationship, Islamabad and Moscow in the post-Soviet era had to deal with the economic and diplomatic fallout from Afghanistan. Due to Pakistan's inclination towards the U.S. and Soviet Russia's inclination towards India, bilateral relations between the two did not look particularly hopeful. Pakistan-Russia ties have been on the upswing since General Ashfaq Pervaiz Kiani, the COAS, paid an introductory visit to Russia in 2012.

Currently, both countries want to improve their bilateral ties in a number of different areas. Actually, the establishment of Pakistan-Russia relations was made possible by the former's participation in BRI, inclusion in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and America's strategic alliance with India. In October 2017, Russia and Pakistan participated in a combined military drill and a number of multilateral and bilateral conferences. Russia had made it known that it was in favor of Pakistan joining the Nuclear Supplier Group. As a result, a true 'politik' scenario is emerging in South Asia, a region with already precarious security, as Islamabad, Beijing, and Moscow's interests collide.

Meanwhile, Moscow is also working toward its bigger objective, which is to create a multipolar international order where Russian security aspirations may be best met and American clout will be reduced. Islamabad is significant to Russia in this security endeavor because it sees her as one of the major actors in South Asia. First of all, it seems to be a route to the CARs, thus Russia wouldn't want her to be unstable. Secondly, Pakistan's

geographic location can open up the world market for Russia by linking the Central Asian Republic with the Indian Ocean and the Middle East via the Gwadar port and economic corridor.

Convergence of Interests between Pakistan & Russia

Pak-Russia ties have remained at a glacial pace since the collapse of the Soviet Union, but recent history suggests that they are taking a new direction. Although high-level travels and weapon trade have helped to improve interactions between the two over the past ten years, there are still some areas where they disagree or have diverging interests (Dagia, 2021). On the contrary, ties between America and Pakistan have been rocky. Moscow and Islamabad were not precisely the best friends during the cold war. However, over the past two years, the diplomatic ties between the two countries have significantly improved. Russia's administration is fully conscious of Indo-Pak rivalry and is aware that a deeper cooperation with Pakistan will likely enrage India. However, it appears that the CPEC deal may be too alluring for them to reject (Maqsood, 2017).

Pakistan and Russia's Strategic Interest Align in Afghanistan

A new regional development is emerging as a result of changes in geo - strategic. The success of CPEC and the state of Afghanistan are crucial to Russia-Pakistan's cooperation. Moreover, Russia is also aware of Pakistan's legitimate need for security in order to maintain a power balance in South Asia. Moscow's decision to suspend its arms embargo on Pakistan in November 2014 was followed by a military cooperation pact, which resulted in joint military exercises between the two states. This implies, Russia and Pakistan have recently moved closer together militarily. The trade of Russian Kilmov RD-93 engines for JF-17 multi-role fighters and Mi-35 helicopters would further improve collaboration between the two countries. The two countries also agreed to an arrangement over the North-South gas pipeline from Karachi to Lahore. The fact that Pakistan and Russia held a combined military drill for the first time is a blatant sign of Russia's shift in attitude. The drills took place at a key moment after the Uri incident, when India was seeking retaliation after accusing Pakistan of carrying out the attacks. India was taken aback by Moscow's response at the BRICS conference in October 2017, and it protected Pakistan from any disparaging mentions in the Goa Convention.

In addition, the energy industry is another factor that has the potential to strengthen ties between the two; both countries have already begun work on the North-South Gas Pipeline. To fulfill the expanding demand, Pakistan requires alternative sources of energy and Russia is well-versed in this area. The expanding collaboration between the two capitals serves as a global symbol of the fact that both countries are engaged in a demesne of traditional collaboration. If Siberian assets were piped through Xinjiang and the CPEC path, Islamabad could gain from them. The Altai-Xinjiang pipeline would be Pakistan's best option if political strife prevented the Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India (TAPI) project from moving forward.

Harmony of Interests between China and Pakistan

The Sino-Pak link is the strongest connection in the triangle formed by China, Pakistan, and Russia. Pakistan and China have long been allies and have historically helped one another diplomatically as well as militarily. Pakistan created the JF-17 fighter jets with Chinese assistance. China also assisted Pakistan in developing its nuclear reactors. Pakistan, one of China's top defense technology buyers, is planning to purchase eight Chinese S20 or Yuan-class electric submarines (SSK). China has made investments in the Gwadar Port and the Karakoram Corridor. Pakistan occasionally expresses alarm over the expanding Indo-US alliance on defense-related strategic matters of mutual interest. Relations between the

United States and Pakistan have a rocky history, and with Trump's Afghan policy, they have reached their lowest point.

Converging Factors underlying the Trilateral Alliance

The US is the converging factor underlying the alliance. For China and Russia, end of the US hegemony is important for their security interests. For Pakistan longstanding adversary with India is the reason of its drift towards Asian security regime led by China. Russia will be willing to expand strategic ties with Pakistan, considering India's diverse military ties including Israel and the US. Russia is also an alternative for Western energy supply and technology. It will expand Russia's access to broader market for supplying its military equipment, it will likely supply it to both Pakistan and India. Undoubtedly, India is a flourishing economy and a diverse market, Russia values its ties with India. However, India has soured relations with both Pakistan and China, and Russia's divergence of interest is obvious from its increasingly closer ties with China. China is an economic giant with significant foreign reserves, viewing its demand for energy supply and capability of international investment Russia sees major incentives in partnership with China. Pakistan has a high energy demand, alliance with Russia will increase Pakistan's access to its technology and energy sources. Reciprocal gambits drive changing relations between China, Pakistan and Russia. Russia's Ukraine invasion has put it in direct conflict with the West, it is also facing Western sanctions because of military engagement in Crimea. Tensions between China and Asia Pacific countries exacerbated due to increasing Chinese hegemony over South China Sea. Such circumstances have compelled Russia and China to search for new allies in the region. The real question is whether this floating partnership will change into strong alliance, an old saying "the enemy of enemy is my friend" answers this to an extent. Security threat from the US and its hegemonic policy is the most significant driving force. China seeks to change world order and is searching for new allies; its quest begins from Asia.

US-India Strategic Alliance and Balance of Power in the Region

Divergent interests and goals kept the US and India estranged till 1990. India has always pursued the policy of neutrality and strategic autonomy in global politics, while the US policies are based on containing dominant rivals. The US has been struggling to maintain unipolar world order and had also indulged itself in different military conflicts. During Cold War, India inclined towards Soviet policies and nonalignment and was irrelevant for the US. However, in post-Cold War era, the US had different regional objectives. A major geopolitical development of this era is the transformation of US India from estrangement to engagement. Indian democracy, economy and its ties with other Asian powers have brought it closer to the US. Due to converging interests, bilateral ties between both the countries have been evolving. The US declared India a natural and indispensable partner and has signed ten-year civil nuclear cooperation with India. The US is also in support of greater participation of India in Afghanistan (Bouton, 2010).

Future Shape of US-Pakistan Bilateral Relations

Since 1947, relation between the US and Pakistan have been topsy-turvy. The War on Terror has severely tested ties between the countries. Now that the US has withdrawn from Afghanistan; there is a need for policy re-alignment to create sustainable and mutually beneficial partnership. Considering Pakistan's current economic and strategic vulnerability, onus of mending constrained relations is on Pakistan. Though, Pakistan has made it clear that it will no longer jump hoops for meeting US demands and also reject US concerns about vulnerability of its nuclear weapons, still a calibrated response is required if it desires to improve relations with the US. Pakistani policy makers should consider certain aspects in their policy vis-à-vis the US. First, Pakistan lacks capacity to manage abruptly shifting internal and external circumstances. Emotional response does not serve national interest.

Street power of anti-American sentiments and radicalism have constrained options for Pakistan. Such factors have drifted foreign policy and resulted in strategic immobility, limited diplomatic options and fewer allies. Moreover, a general sense of jubilation in Pakistan over US withdrawal from Afghanistan is not perceived well in the US. The stance adopted by former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan further reduced diplomatic space. This was particularly damaging when US policy makers think that Pakistan has a role in Taliban's assumption of power. Considering these bitter circumstances, it is delusional to think that the US will balance its ties with Pakistan and India, at least for now. America's partnership with India is a reality that Pakistan must accept and instead of holding grudge it should consider this factor will reform its policy options. Due to rising influence of China, the US and India are becoming increasingly closer strategically. The US views India as an effective option for counterweighting China. Due to growing alliance, the US is soft pedaling human right violation under Modi government. Because of increased drift of the US towards India and erosion of bilateral ties due to mistrust, Pakistan tried to reduce its military and economic dependence on the US and has changed national priorities, though it has become a military power but its economic situation has been deteriorating. Lack of self-sufficiency and threat of bankruptcy has increased Pakistan's dependence on China. However, granting enormous aid is not China's policy and it will not rescue Pakistan. China's mode of business is trade and loans. It is reality that lack of US aid, which flowed abundantly since country's inception, has been strongly felt by Pakistan. Pakistan also needs the US for revival of IMF program. Thus, normalizing ties with the US are in broader interest of Pakistan. After longstanding partnership with Pakistan, the US has also realized that aid-based partnership with Pakistan is ineffective in the longer run. Billions of dollar coming in as aid did not consolidate relations between both the countries; therefore it's time that both countries rethink their policy options (Verma, 2021).

Conclusion

Changing global politics and flux of events at the turn of the 21st century have affected US-Pakistan bilateral relations in many ways. This relationship faced ups and downs and was marred by mutual mistrust, historically. Towards the end of War on Terror, both countries seemingly distanced themselves from each other and started looking for alternative alliances. Pakistan China ties were further consolidated through CPEC and shared interest of countering India. On the other hand, India's growing economy, influence and common regional interests brought it closer to the US. It can be said that geopolitical dynamics of the region and world are shifting, but both Pakistan and the US need each other in the longer run. The objectives enshrined in the newly construed policy of geo-economics by Pakistan are also very important. Pakistan has to keep relevant to the powerful troika comprising the US, China and Russia. It is also in the best interest of both the countries to re-design their policy and look for common grounds to add mutuality of interests and somewhat balance to ensure sustainability and viability of relations in future.

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