

# PAKISTAN AS A FACTOR IN INDIA-US RELATIONS

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## Abstract

*There were three major factors (India's economic policy, the US-Pak relationship, and India's nuclear programme) that often caused strained ties between the US and India during the Cold War period. At present out of them two have almost ceased to be major irritants in the Indo-US relationship and Pakistan's significance as a factor has declined over the years.*

**Key words:** *Military Aid, Cold War, Defence, Artificial Parity, Terrorism, Strategic Interests, Nuclear Weapons etc.*

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Pakistan remained extremely crucial factor in Indo-US relations during the Cold War era. However, the effect of Pak factor in US-India relations seems to be waning, as it is no longer as effective as it used to be during the Cold War period. However, it does not mean that Pakistan has lost its importance as a factor in Indo-US relations. The issue of F-16 fighter aircrafts that the US was willing to supply to Pakistan and the India's objection to the deal can be cited as one of the latest examples that Pakistan as a factor in Indo-US relations cannot be completely ignored. The competition and hostilities between the communist bloc led by Soviet Union and the capitalist bloc headed by the US on the one hand and India's vital and firm support for non-alignment, along with its inclination towards the former due to several factors, made Pakistan closer to the U.S. and "From India's point of view the chief problem was the determined and persistent attempts by Washington to create an artificial parity between India and Pakistan. This quest had combined with repeated arms aid to Pakistan, some of which was at times meant to put pressure on India."<sup>1</sup>

### 1.1 Pakistan and India-US Relations: Cold War Era

It is worth noting that principle determination of US foreign policy towards South Asia has been the US perception of the region's relevance to the pursuit of its wider global geo-political and strategic goals. It can be said that the policy towards South Asia was actually determined by its own interests vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and China. America's interest was in the containment of Communism. US found Pakistan more compatible for US Strategic interests as compared to India. Pakistan's assets such as its Islamic identity and closeness with Muslim countries of the Middle East, its geographical proximity to the Persian Gulf rich in oil and to Communist adversaries

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<sup>1</sup> V. P. Dutt, 'India's Foreign Policy, Since Independence', (New Delhi: National Book Trust Of India, 2007), p.42

like the Soviet Union and China and above all its role as a competitor and regional balancer to India, compels the US to join hands with Pakistan.<sup>2</sup>

Pakistani policy makers often projected that Pakistan was crucial to U.S. policies in the Middle East and gradually Americans believed the same.<sup>3</sup> Even in a letter to Prime Minister Nehru, the US President has explicitly accepted Pakistan's significance for the US policies in the Middle East.<sup>4</sup> Additionally, the U.S. regarded Pakistan as a moderate Muslim state and recognized Pakistan's assistance in the containment of communist expansion by joining the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization in 1954 and the Baghdad Pact (later renamed the Central Treaty Organization, or CENTO) in 1955.<sup>5</sup> Undoubtedly American policy makers perceived that by extending military assistance, the dual goal of restricting the expansion of communism and friendship to Pakistan could be achieved.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Pakistan became an ally of the West in May 1954, when the Mutual Defence Assistance Agreement was signed with the US. Pakistani military elites, especially General Ayub Khan consistently demanded larger allotments of arms and aid. Khan argued that more arms were must for restricting the communist expansion and for the sake of regional defence. The view was supported by many US officials too.<sup>7</sup> However, it is to be noted that primary objective of Pakistan's pursuit of strong close relationship with the US was not to contain communism but to boost and strengthen its bargaining position vis-à-vis India, its archrival in South Asia. Pakistan signed these pacts out of its desire to enhance its military and defensive capabilities, which were substantially lacking in comparison to that of India. Not only from the United States but also the United Kingdom, Pakistan received arms<sup>8</sup> despite the fact that in a letter to Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the US President Dwight D. Eisenhower assured India that its military aid to Pakistan "does not in any way affect the friendship we feel for India. Quite the contrary We will continually strive to strengthen the warm and enduring friendship between our two countries"<sup>9</sup> It is worth noting that Pakistan received US economic and military aid from 1954 to 1965 and then again when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in 1979, which increased Pakistan's military's capacity to resist possible Indian action and led India to regard it as militarization of domestic politics in Pakistan.<sup>10</sup> The US close relationship with Pakistan and military aid are some of the major factors that alienated India and pushed it towards Soviet Union which in turn led the US to question the credibility of India's non-alignment policy.

**1.2 Pakistan's Role in US-China Relations and its Impact on US-India Relations:** It is to be noted that Pakistan had played an important role in the normalization of the US policies with China during the Nixon administration which was a matter of great concern for New Delhi. Richard Nixon's establishment of very close relationship with Pakistan and provision of military and economic aid to her, led to further deterioration of the Indo-US relations. Consequently, India's relationship with the US was at all time low under the Nixon administration in the early 1970s. Actually, the matter of concern for India was that Nixon regarded Pakistan as close ally to restrain Soviet influence in the Indian subcontinent. Also to establish ties with China, Pakistan was seen as a base. In addition to that, the unfriendly relationship between Nixon and Indira worsened the bilateral Indo-US relations further. On the other hand, China did not want to miss the opportunity of friendship with the US and was determined to end its isolation and create a new front against the USSR. Under such circumstances, India found herself contained by hostile powers. Thus, it was under such a hostile security environment that the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace

<sup>2</sup> A.Z. Hilali, 'U.S.-Pakistan Relationship, Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan', (Burlington, USA: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), pp.14-16

<sup>3</sup> Aparna Pande, 'The Future of U.S.-Pakistan Ties, <http://www.hudson.org/research/8869-the-future-of-u-s-pakistan-ties>

<sup>4</sup> Letter to Prime Minister Nehru of India Concerning U.S. Military Aid to Pakistan. February 25, 1954 available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=10170>

<sup>5</sup> Milestones: 1961-1968, The India-Pakistan War of 1965, The U.S. Department of State, Office of The Historian available at <http://history.state.gov/milestones/1961-1968/india-pakistan-war>

<sup>6</sup> Hilali, op.cit., p.16

<sup>7</sup> Ibid p.16

<sup>8</sup> Milestones, op.cit.

<sup>9</sup> Letter to Prime Minister Nehru, op.cit.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen P. Cohen quoted by Mika Kerttunen in, 'Nuclear Weapons and Indian Foreign Policy, (Helsinki: Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu Strategian Laitos 2009) p.111

Friendship and Cooperation was signed in August 1971 under which it was agreed that if there was aggression against any of the two parties, they would immediately consult each other on how to meet the aggression. Since there was no question of any aggression against the Soviet Union, the Treaty worked as a warning to both Washington and Beijing not to think of military action against India in the unfolding Bangladesh crisis.<sup>11</sup> During the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, the US openly supported Pakistan despite its grave human rights violations which caused mass exodus of helpless people into India from Bangladesh. What was more threatening to India was that the US sent aircraft carrier USS Enterprise into the Bay of Bengal during the war of 1971. Apparently, the US sent its 7th fleet into the Bay of Bengal to evacuate its nationals from Bangladesh. However, as per some declassified papers the Washington had actually planned to target the Indian Army facilities.<sup>12</sup> So the 1971 Indo-Pak war and the US tilt towards Pakistan further increased hostilities and estrangement between the two countries.

**Issue of Kashmir and Its Implications on India-US Relations:** Many scholars are of the opinion that the Soviet Union's support to India and US support to Pakistan further complicated the stand of both the nations on Kashmir issue. The compromise became next to impossible. Similarly, the alliance with the US encouraged Pakistan to think that it might succeed in pressurizing India on Kashmir issue. Thus, India and Pakistan the two key players in South Asia got caught up in the Cold War as well as extracted material benefits from the two blocks. The nuclear issue, though occasionally created strained ties between the US and Pakistan, it never led the US to take firm action against Pakistan despite its knowledge of Pakistan's determination to acquire nuclear weapons which was a matter of great concern for India. Thus, despite being liberal democracies and upholding the same value system during the Cold-War, the two countries could not establish good, durable, friendly and strong bilateral relations due to several factors i.e. Cold-War rivalry and the US containment policy, India's non-alignment policy and the US perception of India to be closer to the erstwhile USSR, close military and defence relationship between the US and Pakistan and India's apprehension of its adverse and inimical effects on her security and national interests as Pakistan was regarded to be a threat to India's security and territorial integrity etc. Similarly India was economically not attractive to the US and India's inward looking policies adopting import substitution economic policies with socialistic tinge was also not supposed to strengthen bilateral relations.

## 2Pakistan and India-US Relations: Post-Cold War Era

However with the end of the Cold War with the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the emergence of the U.S. as the sole super power and liberalization of Indian economy undertaken by the Narsimha Rao government under the of Manmohan Singh, then finance minister due to the pressure of Balance of Payment Crisis among others, really started causing positive changes in the Indo-US relations. With the liberalization of India's economy and the end of Cold War, India's relations with the US started registering visible progress particularly in defence and economic sectors despite the fact that India's nuclear policy had been still a big issue for the US. The nuclear test conducted by India in 1998 though initially caused strained ties between the US and India, actually paved the way for friendly and closed relations between the two countries. The test actually as C. Raja Mohan says started ending the nuclear disagreements between the two countries. In his own words, "so long as India remained undecided about what it wanted to do with nuclear weapons, it was natural that the United States would do everything to prevent India from becoming a nuclear weapons power."<sup>13</sup>

There were three major factors (India's economic policy, the US-Pak relationship, and India's nuclear programme) that often caused strained ties between the US and India during the Cold War. At present out of them two have ceased to be major irritants in the Indo-US relationship and Pakistan's significance as a factor has declined over the years. Some efforts were made in this regard during the Bush senior administration. America under Bush in 1990's refused under the Pressler Law to provide military and economic aid to Pakistan because of the Pak's nuclear weapon programme. However, the Pressler Amendment was diluted by the Brown Amendment. The Brown Amendment did not annul the Pressler law but enabled the supply of embargoed arms worth \$370 million to Pakistan. Under the same amendment, although the F-16 aircraft was not delivered to Pakistan, the proceeds after

<sup>11</sup> Dutt, op.cit., p.39

<sup>12</sup> *Times of India*, Nov 6, 2011

<sup>13</sup> C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy* (New York: Viking, 2003) p. 89

selling it were transferred to Pak.<sup>14</sup> The US must change its attitude of taking military and strategic advantage of nations. As of now Washington can stop arm supply to Pakistan and support India's regional security concerns. Pumping more weapons will create more wars and no peace.<sup>15</sup> The Kargil crisis caused a paradigm shift in the US attitude towards the issue Kashmir. The US vehemently criticized Pakistan's violation of the LOC in J&K and firmly asked Pakistan to restore the Line of Control. It is said that it was for the first time that the US supported India on the issue of Kashmir.<sup>16</sup>

The 9/11 attack on the World Trade Centre in New York shocked India as it did the US. India was one of the first countries to offer assistance to the US. However, Pakistan a major source country of international terrorism once again emerged though reluctantly under the US pressure as a frontline state cooperating with the US on its 'war on terror'. Thus, once again military aid began to pour in Pakistan supposedly for combating terrorism. However, a major concern for New Delhi is that the US military aid to Pakistan instead of being used for combating terrorism may be used by Pakistan to strengthen its military capabilities vis-à-vis India as was the case earlier. The military aid to Pakistan is a matter of concern for New Delhi and for the sake of friendly and strategic bilateral relations; the US must ensure that such aids are not misused.

Pakistan is aware of the fact that with the end of the Cold-War, its importance for the US policy makers has diminished and correspondingly that of India has increased. The US also appreciates India's democratic system of government, while Pakistan often passes through military dictatorships indicating that the democratic institutions in Pakistan are not strong enough to make Pakistan a vibrant democratic country as India is. However, Pakistan never misses an opportunity to highlight the issue of violation of human rights in Kashmir allegedly committed by Indian Army personnel which tarnishes India's image in the world. The problem with Pakistan is that it still considers India as its greatest enemy and sees India's military capabilities as a threat to the very existence of the state of Pakistan. Pakistan insistently tries to convince the world in general and the US in particular that Pakistan faces existential threat from India thus, creating a sound ground for foreign military aid particularly from the US. Nevertheless, the US military aid to Pakistan as mentioned above, raises India's concerns causing suspicions and creates trust deficit between New Delhi and Washington.

Pakistan also alleges that despite being a democratic country, India so far has failed to protect the rights of its minorities, as they feel insecurities. The frequent communal violence causes destruction to their lives and properties. No doubt, violence of human rights in Kashmir is an issue that can't be denied and it is also a fact that due to communal clashes the minorities usually often suffer at the hands of the majority in India. India bows her head in shame whenever communal violence takes place in which innocent people are being killed and their properties got damaged and takes steps to prevent such heinous crimes. However, the question also arises regarding the rights of minorities in Pakistan. Do the minorities in Pakistan enjoy safety and security of their lives and properties? Why is there a constant flow of minorities from Pakistan to India, if their lives and properties are safe as often claimed by the state of Pakistan? As far violation of human rights in Kashmir is concerned, the role of Pakistan in supporting the terrorist activities in the state has been a significant factor if not the soul factor. India has taken serious attention of the alleged violation of human rights in Kashmir and efforts have been made that such violations never take place in future. But what is to be noted is that it is the terrorists who are responsible for the violation of the human rights in Kashmir to great lengths.

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<sup>14</sup> M.J. Vinod, 'India-United States Relations in a Changing World: Challenges and Opportunities, available at <http://www.idsa-india.org/an-jun-6.html>

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Dipankar Bamerjee, 'An Overview of Indo-US Strategic Cooperation: A Rollercoaster of a Relationship, in Sumit Ganguly, Brian Shoup and Andrew Scobell (eds.) 'US-Indian Strategic Cooperation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', (New York: Routledge 2006), p.71