

## **Pakistan-U.S. Partnership: Challenges and Prospects**

*Mahrukh Khan \**

U.S. policy post-Musharraf towards Pakistan has been proactive; its main strategic objective is to secure greater Pakistani participation in the U.S.-led war against the Taliban, especially the Afghan Taliban that try to find sanctuaries in Waziristan. It supports the democratically-elected coalition government of Pakistan dominated by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), offers greater U.S. assistance for economic and educational development and maintains traditional relations with Pakistan's army with calibrated flow of military aid and equipment

Pakistan as a State holds strategic importance not just in South Asia but in the world. Because of Pakistan's strategic position in the 'War on Terror', Pakistan has increasingly been viewed by American officials in Afghanistan's context as a major partner in the campaign to destroy Al Qaeda and Taliban.

Obama administration's lengthy review of the "war on terror" produced the 'AfPak' terminology – two countries but a common enemy; where the U.S. will 'fight, destroy, disrupt and dismantle Taliban and Al Qaeda' in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. The AfPak strategy clearly focuses on the goals U.S. wishes to achieve.

Pakistan faces serious dilemmas regarding its partnership with the U.S. Pakistan's security situation is deteriorating every day. Suicide bombings and indiscriminate terrorist attacks are at rise and are raising the bar of its partnership with the U.S. The potential threat which Pakistan perceives is regarding the additional troop deployment by U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan which may create for Pakistan's counter-terrorism offensive in the tribal regions as the Afghan Taliban evade the American pressure by seeking refuge on Pakistani side of the border.

Though U.S. and Pakistan share decades-old friendship, it has remained an unstable relationship and misgivings about events of the past generate anti-American sentiments which are widespread in Pakistan's society plus in certain pockets of the ruling elite. The growth of effective relationships between U.S. and Pakistan requires understanding the needs of Pakistan's leadership, army, civil society and the common people.

---

\* *The writer is Research Fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad.*

After the Obama administration's approval of 30,000 more troops for Afghanistan, there is no doubt that U.S. needs a much stronger partner in Islamabad in order to reach its goals in Afghanistan. Washington has maintained considerate pressure on the PPP-led government to align its strategy with the overall U.S. strategy.

In addition to Pakistan's civilian leadership, military leaders on top remain essential partners in U.S. counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts. Pakistan's army chief, General Kiyani, has so far shown a strong commitment to fighting Pakistani Taliban and Al Qaeda militants along the Pakistan and Afghanistan border.

Increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan is also among other major concerns and questions which raise suspicion about U.S. promises to help Pakistan. Pakistan believes that it is facing a two-front situation; India, its traditional rival on its eastern border and an unwelcoming regime in Kabul. Along with India's involvement in Afghanistan, what also worries Pakistan is India's growing strategic relations with the U.S. America continues its cooperation with India for a civil nuclear deal and indirectly encourages India's presence in Afghanistan.

The new troop surge in Afghanistan and the pressure on Pakistan 'to do more' and the tacit approval of the government on drone strike inside Pakistan's tribal land are also raising concerns in Pakistan. Between 2004 and 2009, there have been 99 drone strikes inside Pakistan with 506 reported deaths including Taliban and Al Qaeda militants and civilians.

Though the ruling political elite seems to be comfortable in accepting what U.S. has to offer, media and parliamentary debate reflects the view that the United States is making unreasonable demands on Pakistan government and its military.

The question of U.S. withdrawal is also an alarming concern which Pakistan has raised time and again. Pakistan fears that after U.S. withdrawal, Pakistan will have to choose between the devil and the deep sea. In both cases, Pakistan has to face loss and bear the brunt. The year 2009 alone witnessed 173 suicide attacks inside Pakistan killing hundreds of innocent civilians and army men. It is already paying a heavy price for its involvement in war on terror as well as its military operations in Waziristan.

Since 2001, U.S. has given about \$10.6 billion dollars as foreign assistance to Pakistan, out of which 60 per cent was for Coalition Support Funds (CSF), 15 per cent for security assistance, another 15 per cent for

budget support programmes, and the remaining 10 per cent for development assistance.

On September 24, 2009, U.S. Congress passed a new bill and was signed into law by President Obama on October 15, 2009. The bill was named the Kerry Lugar Bill (KLB) under the Enhanced Partnership Act, 2009. Despite the fact that the bill aimed at the civilian sector to help improve the economic conditions in Pakistan, it attracted severe opposition and criticism.

It was compared to the very controversial and not so popular 'Pressler Amendment' of 1985. KLB, because of its language and conditions, gave the impression of an attack on Pakistan's sovereign status and humiliation of its army's efforts in America's war on terror.

The U.S. defended the bill by portraying it as an effort to cultivate long-term commitment to Pakistan on a civilian platform. Regardless of the meaning and purpose of Kerry Lugar Bill, it clearly chalked out anti-American sentiments and a continuing trust deficit between Pakistan and the U.S.

## **Conclusion**

Pakistan is going through a long-drawn internal crisis, a coalition government struggling with a difficult situation inherited from the previous regime and uncertain relations with its neighbours as well as with its allies. It confronts issues of rampant inflation, increased terrorist activity nationwide and a dire energy shortage. Dramatic reforms are needed in almost every sector of Pakistani government and society to restore economic and political stability.

There is an urgent need for broader dialogue between Pakistan and the United States at strategic, political, diplomatic and economic levels. Constructive and productive opportunities should be created to cultivate U.S.-Pakistan relation and improve America's image in public and other areas as a reliable ally.

America needs Pakistan in order to fight and defeat the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Pakistan, being the U.S. frontline ally, has lost heavily. It is necessary for U.S. to assure its commitment to Pakistan's society, civil bureaucratic leadership and its army that it will not abandon the country again.

Pakistan has quite often expressed its concerns over Indian penetration in Afghanistan. Being a strategic partner with Pakistan, the U.S. should take responsibility for restraining India's involvement in Afghanistan and its activities especially in areas close to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

Both the countries should design assistance programmes on military as well as civil platforms to empower their relationship, to overcome the long-drawn trust deficit and to eliminate anti-American perceptions. It is important to seek an end which is broadly compatible with the interests of both the countries in order to defeat a common enemy.