

PAKISTAN-U.S. RELATIONS: A NEW CHAPTER, A NEW THEATER

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The U.S. has adopted a proactive policy towards Pakistan in the post-Musharraf era. Its primary strategic objective remains the same, i.e., ensuring greater Pakistani participation in the war against the Taliban - especially the Afghan Taliban that attempt to find sanctuaries in South and North Waziristan. Consequently, it supports the democratically elected coalition government in Islamabad that is dominated by the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and has offered enhanced assistance for economic and educational development while also maintaining traditional relations with the army. Such assistance is manifest in a calibrated flow of military aid and equipment to Pakistan.

Pakistan holds strategic importance not just in South Asia but also in the global arena. Because of its strategic position in the war on terror, it has increasingly been viewed by American officials, in the context of the situation in Afghanistan, as a major partner in the campaign to destroy Al Qaeda and the Taliban network.

Pakistan, however, faces serious dilemmas regarding its partnership with the U.S. Its security situation is deteriorating day by day, suicide bombings and indiscriminate terrorist attacks show no signs of abating, and this raises the bar of its partnership with the U.S. Pakistan perceives a potential threat to its own stability due to additional troop deployment by U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan. This may pose multiple challenges to Pakistan's counter-terrorism offensive as the Afghan Taliban seek to evade American pressure by attempting to take refuge on the Pakistani side of the border.

Though the U.S. and Pakistan share decades of friendship, the relationship has remained unstable. Misgivings regarding events in the past generate anti-American sentiments which are widespread among the masses, and also prevalent in certain pockets of the ruling elite. Consequently, the growth of an effective relationship between

the two countries requires a deep understanding of the needs of Pakistani leadership, army, civil society as well as the common people.

The Obama administration's lengthy review of the war on terror has produced the 'Af-Pak' terminology – signifying two countries but a single common enemy. This has also involved the notion of U.S. commitment to “destroy, disrupt and dismantle Taliban and Al Qaeda.” The Af-Pak strategy focuses on goals that the U.S. wishes to achieve in the region. After an approval of 30,000 more troops for Afghanistan, there is no doubt that a much stronger partner in Islamabad is needed if the strategy is to be successful. Washington has thus maintained considerable pressure on the PPP-led government, hoping to align the strategy being followed in Pakistan with the overall U.S. approach to the war.

Increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan is another concern for Pakistan that causes suspicion to rise against the U.S. Pakistan believes that it is facing a two-front situation - with India, its traditional rival on its eastern border and a potentially unwelcome regime in Kabul on the west; its security is deemed to be under constant threat. Moreover, India's growing strategic relations with the U.S., as manifest in a civil nuclear deal and America's indirect encouragement to regional powers in its plans for Afghanistan, is also worrisome for Pakistan.

The arrival of further troops in Afghanistan, the consistent pressure on Pakistan to 'do more', and a tacit approval of the increase of drone strikes in the country's tribal land are all prominent issues that show the limits of the alliance.

The question of U.S. withdrawal and how it is going to actualize is another alarming concern raised time and again. Pakistan fears that after the withdrawal, it will have to choose between the devil and the deep sea. In both cases it will likely face huge losses and bear the brunt of potential chaos. Things have certainly not been looking upwards – in 2009 alone, the country witnessed 173 suicide attacks killing hundreds of innocent civilians and armed forces personnel. Needless to say, it is already paying a heavy price for its involvement in the war on terror, one part of which has been its military operations in South Waziristan.

Since 2001, Pakistan has received approximately \$10.6 billion from the U.S.; out of this, sixty per cent fell under the Coalition Support Funds (CSF), thirty per cent shared equally by security assistance and budget support programmes, and the remaining ten per cent has been for development assistance. Despite the financial help, Pakistan remains stressed, with problems of rising poverty and unemployment becoming ingredients for militancy and Talibanisation. Matters are not helped when a perception of encirclement – with India to the east and an Afghanistan allied with the U.S. and India to its west – fuels skepticism and wariness of American intentions.

Obama's war policy on Pakistan and Afghanistan

President Obama first announced his strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan in March 2009. This broadly underlined counterinsurgency efforts and also affirmed significant economic development assistance for Pakistan which had largely been ignored earlier. The greatest challenge to have emerged since then has been to plan for both short- and long-term stability by providing physical and socio-economic security to as much of the population as possible by using available resources efficiently.

U.S., Pakistan and the war on terror

The importance of a stable U.S. and Pakistan relationship can be measured from the large network of cooperation between the military outfits and the governments over many decades. Pakistan's military leaders remain essential partners in the U.S.-led counterterrorism and counterinsurgency efforts, and General Kayani, the current Chief of the Army Staff, has shown strong commitment to fighting the Pakistani Taliban and Al Qaeda militants along the border shared with Afghanistan.

The main vehicle for bilateral military cooperation is the Defense Consultative Group (DCG). Moribund since 1997, it was reestablished during President Musharraf's visit to Washington in 2002. With the Obama administration coming to office, military relations have become even stronger. Both parties agreed that separate but conducive military operations would be carried out in the war on terror. This would involve intelligence sharing and also had the additional dimension that collective secret operations would be carried out if necessary.

Although General Kayani clearly recognises that Pakistan's national security faces a near-term threat from militants within the country, India continues to be seen as the enduring threat. India's cooperation with Kabul and the reciprocal friendly attitude has in a way undermined U.S. and Pakistan cooperation since many defence strategists and army officials view the India-Afghanistan relationship with suspicion.

Pakistan has been busy fighting the war on terror, providing support to U.S. aims in the region. Even though the military has made good progress in its offensives in South Waziristan, many militants have fled to other parts of the country - including major cities such as Karachi and Lahore. In addition, Pakistan has assisted the U.S. and its NATO allies in many ways. It has offered bases for patrolling, reconnaissance and rescue operations, extended logistical support to troops operating in Afghanistan, and provided intelligence and air space for strikes against Taliban and Al Qaeda targets.

Despite such collaboration, however, another serious concern for both the U.S. and Pakistan is the increasing armed violence on several fronts including the rise of militant groups in the Punjab. Bruce Riedel, a former CIA officer, in an interview to Newsweek in its issue dated October 21, 2009, said that the Punjabi Taliban, who are heavily influenced by the Afghan Taliban, are now a more serious concern. Their ability to band together with the Taliban into a single jihadist outfit is raising grave new challenges in the region.

The rising phenomenon of suicide bombing has also remained unaddressed. In 2006, there were only six suicide bombings; in 2007, the number went up to fifty, and 2008 saw at least sixty-one such attacks. Reportedly, the initial missions were led by Arab and Al Qaeda zealots, but this has subsequently been taken over by members of the Haqqani network as well as by close associates of Baitullah Mehsud, including Qari Hussein.

U.S. Secretary of Defence Robert Gates in a recent visit to Pakistan has offered to provide the country with unarmed, unmanned surveillance planes. The deal would give Pakistan 12 Shadow UAV unarmed surveillance drones that can be used to spy on militants. In an interview to foreign journalists, General Kayani said: "We're talking to the U.S. and [NATO forces]. We are interested in getting more involved in training of the Afghan national army. It is good for short term and long term."

However, despite Pakistan's relentless support to U.S. in its war on terror, it remains under scrutiny in the Western media and among policymakers as its commitment towards defeating Taliban and Al Qaeda elements is questioned time and again.

Obama's second review of war policy

Terrorism has become a global phenomenon with multilayered transnational connections among militants. Had the U.S. not abandoned Afghanistan after Soviet withdrawal at the end of the Cold War, and instead paid more attention to the rebuilding and reconstruction of the country's socio-economic and governance structures, the situation today could have been much better.

In his second review of war policy towards Afghanistan and Pakistan, the Obama administration has attempted to ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated. By aiming 'to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan,' President Obama has adopted what has been called the 'McChrystal light' strategy, so-called after the commander of the ISAF forces in Afghanistan. The basic concept of the strategy is sound – it calls for an increased focus on protecting Afghan civilians to reduce the space in which the Taliban can operate, and endorses capacity-building of the government.

By promising to bring an end to the war, the Obama administration faces a distinct challenge since it is not simply a question of turning the page on the previous regime's years of neglect and misguided policies in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Obama has made it clear to Kabul that "there will be no open cheques and no open-ended commitment." He emphasizes that America has paid a tremendous price and cannot afford a prolonged war in Afghanistan; this has caused much alarm in Kabul. Moreover, there is a U.S. pledge to start bringing back its forces from the middle of 2011.

The central idea behind publicly announcing this potential withdrawal was to put pressure on the Afghan government. The hope is that this will cause the regime to address the main issues of governance, including corruption, and to concentrate on developing Afghan forces for national security.

Even though the second review of the Afghan war covered most elements in and around Afghanistan and Pakistan, it failed to address the concerns of Indian involvement, interest and influence in Afghanistan. Moreover, with its enhanced relations with Washington, New Delhi is more capable of achieving its goals in Kabul.

New Delhi's influence in Kabul, and on Washington, can provide India the opportunity with which to enter into and manipulate international coalition forces that are fighting in Afghanistan, and this could ultimately lead to their placing Pakistan on the hit list. There are two emerging trends in the war that can perhaps give credence to such a notion. Firstly, the trend of suicide bombing that target civilians as well as government and army personnel, and secondly, the disguised attacks by the Taliban and Al Qaeda on high-profile U.S. military officers.

According to a report published by the Department of State's office of the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan on a regional stabilization strategy, a major focus of the President's review was the importance of Pakistan to American efforts in Afghanistan, regional stability, as well as U.S. national security and foreign policy interests.

Key features

Surge

The war policy has a central aspect of a 'surge'. While traditionally attributed to an increase in troops on the grounds, this concept has a multidimensionality that needs to be examined. This represents surges on several fronts.

Civilian surge: A substantial influx of troops as per the surge policy is also accompanied by a 'civilian surge' that addresses ineffective and corrupt governance structures and introduces population-centric ground strategies. This will lead to an increase in the

number of diplomats and experts in many socio-economic fields such as reconstruction of infrastructure, health, education and agriculture

Contractor surge: Prior to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a contractor surge was not deeply incorporated in wars and contractors' presence was felt only on an ad hoc basis. However, with a troop surge, a contractor surge has also occurred. Reportedly, as many as 56,000 contractors have been hired separately. According to a report by the Congressional Research Service (CRS), the types of services they provide are similar to those in Iraq, including logistics, construction, linguistic services, and transportation.

Militia surge: This refers to the 'mini' surge in support of local Afghan militias that could aid in the fight against terrorists.

Twin troop surge: A twin troop surge means that the policy is not only meant to rout the Afghan Taliban militarily, but there are also efforts to strike a political deal with the enemy. Seeing that military might is not posing serious threats, the U.S. has now turned towards pursuing indirect talks with Taliban leaders.

CIA and Special Forces surge: By sending spies and carrying out covert operations in tribal areas of Pakistan, this policy seeks to ensure that the surge mentality in Afghanistan is replicated on the other side of the border. Pakistan consequently faces two main challenges that need to be overcome:

1. A troop surge near the border will, in all likelihood, result in a Taliban spill-over into the already troubled province of Balochistan in addition to complicating the military offensive in South Waziristan, and
2. Pakistan's strategic interests in Afghanistan after U.S. withdrawal are also affected; a Pakistan-friendly government in Kabul is desired in order to reduce Indian influence in the country.

Expansion of drone strikes

A significant escalation of drone attacks inside Pakistani tribal region has also been accompanied by the yet unfulfilled idea of expanding the attacks to areas of southern Punjab where militant leaders are reportedly taking shelter. Such an approach may also include other parts of the country; for instance, Balochistan; where the Quetta Shura led by Mullah Omar is still reportedly active. The issue of drone attacks has become a sour point in relations between Washington and Islamabad since they have resulted in heavy civilian casualties – an issue that complicates Pakistan's role in America's war on terror.

Between 2004 and 2009, there have been 99 drone strikes in Pakistan with 506 reported deaths, including both militants and civilians. Given that the Taliban insurgency has grown in recent years, especially in parts of Punjab and Balochistan, the new strategy of war pushes the idea of drone strikes in these areas. Drones attacks for now are the primary method for targeting militant hideouts in the northwestern part of the country. U.S. defence analysts and policymakers believe that their positive effects are measurable and that they avoid coalition casualties. They are also credited with creating a sense of insecurity among militants and constraining interaction among their networks.

However, open-source reports from Pakistan suggest that attacks since early 2006 have killed around 14 militant leaders and over 700 civilians - over fifty civilians for every militant killed. According to a report published by the New America Foundation, there are three major 'strategic concerns' in relation to drone strikes inside Pakistan:

1. They can be legally challenged,
2. They do not constitute a strategy, but rather a reactionary tactic,
3. Their unpopularity with the people of Pakistan is increasing at an alarming rate.

To be more precise, a New America Foundation report mentions 115 strikes in the northwest since 2004, including 19 in 2010 that have killed between 837 and 1,221 individuals, of whom around 552 to 854 are described as militants. In effect, the civilian fatality ratio comes out to be a rather embarrassing 32 per cent if these reports are to be believed. Due to such inefficiency, drone strikes come under constant criticism and their unpopularity is acting as a catalyst for recruitment to extremist groups.

The 'do more' dilemma

In the wake of the war on terror, Pakistan emerged as a frontline partner to the U.S. Since then, it has played a critical role in helping reduce the operational capabilities of Al Qaeda and Taliban elements in and around its border with Afghanistan.

However, there are concerns of how the collaboration works in this process. Pakistan is in fact still unable to decipher President Obama's war strategy completely. It was expected that besides the announced approach, President Obama's West Point speech would include guarantees that India's increasing influence and presence in Afghanistan would be curtailed. Islamabad has handed over more terrorists and suspects to the U.S. than any other coalition partner and remains fully committed to the war, although many questions have been raised regarding its interests. Thus, it feels that its concerns regarding India have been undermined by the U.S.

This combination of several factors has created a situation in which many Pakistanis are skeptical about the need for combating militancy and supporting the American cause. Though the ruling political elite seem to be comfortable in accepting what U.S. has to offer, media and parliamentary debates reflect an opinion more reflective of the general population, i.e., the United States is making unreasonable demands of the Pakistani governing and military structures.

Going by the course of military action witnessed during most of 2008, it becomes obvious that U.S. and NATO forces are chasing Al Qaeda and the Haqqani- Hekmetyar networks in the border regions, while Pakistani forces have been tasked with hunting down the Pakistani Taliban in Bajaur, Mohmand and Khyber Agencies. As a result, Islamabad has been pushed to deliver more, while it is cornered into a situation where it can deliver less. Washington is mounting immense pressure on Pakistan to expand its operation to North Waziristan and target the Haqqani network and other militants active in the region. However, the military is tied up in an offensive in South Waziristan and cannot afford to engage its forces on another front.

Many analysts in the U.S. policymaking circles believe that the army is reluctant to move into North Waziristan since it still considers the Taliban as a 'possible good' against a 'possible evil', the latter being India. The U.S. needs to revive a partnership with Pakistan's leaders and its people, and address a full range of human security challenges that plague the country if it is to succeed in its Afghanistan-Pakistan war.

U.S. exit strategy and Pakistan

The U.S. exit strategy from Afghanistan has met severe criticism. Critics have insisted that the Taliban would simply wait out the withdrawal period, living up to their idea of 'you have the watches, we have the time!' For Pakistan, it is a matter of concern that has alarmed military officials as well as politicians. Though the strategy itself was cautiously welcomed by many partners in the war, Pakistan was perhaps the only ally that did not endorse it at all.

A decade of instability in Afghanistan has without a doubt resulted in a militant spill-over in the border areas. A greater threat is likely to arise if the U.S. abandons the country following potential withdrawal starting in 2011, leaving Pakistan high and dry as it has done in the past. Needless to say, however, an exit strategy plan during an active war being fought on the ground is not as simple a concept as it may seem since there are long-term strategic goals in Afghanistan for the U.S. as well.

The U.S. sees Afghanistan as a platform from where it can extend its influence in Central Asia, the greater Middle East and also try to neutralize China. Many Pakistanis believe that the U.S. strategically uses the country according to its requirements, abandoning it when the immediate utility passes. Any quick reversal of the policy being followed could be disastrous for regional security since it would most likely infuse fresh life into a dormant, but not dead, militancy.

U.S. policymakers tasted remarkable success in the beginning of the military operations in Afghanistan soon after 9/11 when they overthrew the Taliban regime and introduced a democratic government. But, over time, ineffectiveness has seeped in and policies have not worked in their favour; it was this poor planning that led to troubles in Afghanistan and hence the scaling down of a mission mid-way as the U.S. marched towards Iraq.

This turned out to be one of the biggest slip-ups of American policy since it gave the Taliban and Al Qaeda operatives a chance to regroup, recruit and rearm against Western forces. Many fear that the Taliban will now wait out and hide during enhanced troop presence or simply cross the border into Pakistan. The exit strategy has also raised the stakes for the Pakistani military and there are fears that it is not a viable idea since the militants will simply bide their time and wait until the foreign forces are gone before seeking power once again.

Additionally, Pakistan places little trust in President Karzai, whose government is marked with corruption charges. There are also doubts regarding the capability of the Afghan army to defend the country after the U.S. and NATO forces leave. Hence, the exit strategy in question has served to raise tensions tremendously.

Withdrawal from Afghanistan can be severely counterproductive. The dominant regional narrative – which is that the United States will abandon its friends without compunction – is likely to be reinforced if the strategy fails. Not only will it force Pakistan to reevaluate its position, Afghanistan will similarly be placed under further stress from the Taliban and Al Qaeda. Chances are that a civil war will ensue as a weak government, a disengaged population and a corrupt political and socio-economic system fails to address the most important issues in the country.

Economic assistance

Despite million of dollars worth of aid and assistance to Pakistan, the U.S. is still seen as an unreliable ally. Only one-tenth of all the aid given in the past few years has been spent on education, health care and other socio-economic projects. The rest is directly invested in the military operations through coalition support funds.

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

The bill was compared to the controversial and unpopular Pressler Amendment of 1985. Because of its language and attached conditions, it gave the impression of attacking Pakistan's sovereign status and humiliating its army's efforts in the war on terror. The U.S. has defended the KLB by portraying it as an effort to cultivate long-term commitment with Pakistan on a civilian platform. Regardless of its meaning and purpose, it clearly chalked out anti-American sentiments and a continuing trust deficit even though it aims at long-term ties with Pakistan.

The main agenda of the KLB is to reach directly to the people and invest funds to their social development. It seeks to shift focus from military assistance to public expenditure, assuring improvement across multiple sectors including education, health, providing livelihood and building new public institutions. Hence, it is a distinct step since aid in the last decade has largely been dominated by defence expenses.

U.S.-Pakistan strategic dialogue 2010

President John F. Kennedy once stated that "the only thing worse than being an enemy of the United States is being an ally." This can easily be applied to Pakistan as the two have shared an off-again, on-again relationship. Over the last decade, Pakistan has played a vital part in the fight against terrorism, suffered tremendous casualties, and witnessed worsening security conditions as well as a deteriorating economy. Compared to any other nation involved in the war, its physical and material sacrifices have been immense.

However, with the aforementioned issues straining ties between the two countries, there was a need felt to engage in a 'strategic dialogue'. Despite the fact that Pakistan and the U.S. have held such meetings in the past, the controversial strategic dialogue of March 2010 was characterized as an updated version that was more concerned with Pakistan's concerns. It was also significant since it was the first strategic dialogue to be held at the ministerial level.

The dialogue attempts to offer a new format for engagement by bringing in a transparent mechanism and attempting to ensure timely results. The framework also

allows for a follow-up with a multi-track approach. The meetings were seen as a chance to reduce the trust deficit that has existed for so long, and gave an opportunity to address misconceptions among people from both countries.

The basic agenda of Pakistan revolved largely around four focal points:

1. To get a deal similar to the civil nuclear deal the U.S. has offered to India,
2. The transfer of both missile-launch and surveillance drone technologies as well as F-16 combat aircraft,
3. To receive timely payments from the Coalition Support Funds, and
4. Minimising Indian involvement in Afghanistan.

Another fifty-six pages with a list of priorities was presented by Pakistan. This included widespread issues related to national security concerns, Indian role in Afghanistan, long-term military modernization, provision of military hardware and economic development. More specifically, it asked for an expanded export market for agriculture, infrastructural development, market access and trade concessions, relief on textile tariffs, assistance in energy programmes, thermal power station rehabilitation projects, a multi-year security assistance package as well as social protection needs among other areas of concern.

Pakistan's role in Afghanistan remained the subject of intense scrutiny between military officials. Reconciliation with the Taliban and reintegration of insurgents also covered much time of the talks. Concerns were raised by the Pakistani military regarding U.S. withdrawal and this led to reassurances that a substantial military presence will remain in Afghanistan long after withdrawal begins in 2011. Assurance was also given that Indian involvement in Afghanistan would be minimized.

With such a broad agenda, and the fact that some of Pakistan's key concerns were addressed, the dialogue was largely hailed as a success. Both Pakistan and the U.S. saw it as an opportunity to engage directly on a full range of issues and mutual political, economic and social problems that require a shared responsibility came to the forefront.

Hillary Clinton remarked in a press conference that the U.S. was happy to “listen and engage with Pakistani partners on whatever issues the delegation raises.” And, by and large, this undertaking was adhered to.

The U.S. remained silent, however, on the issue of civil nuclear technology as this would effectively confer legitimacy on Pakistan as a nuclear power. This was a subject of great scrutiny, and among General Kayani’s top agenda items. The U.S. made no clear statements, stating that this was a question for greater debate, and officials remarked that such an agreement would realistically be ten or fifteen years away. There are two possible reasons for this reluctance; one, the continued discomfort in Washington over Dr. A. Q Khan’s proliferation record, and two, it may not be seen to be in the long-term interest of the U.S. to make similar deals with both Pakistan and India.

Among the specific agreements, there was an announcement by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) that it would help Pakistan upgrade three thermal power plants. Deputy Secretary of State Jacob J. Lew and Pakistan’s Finance Secretary Salman Siddique signed a letter of intent regarding cooperation in the construction of priority roads in the reconstruction of the Malakand region. The project will cost \$40 million to upgrade two key roads: the Peshawar Ring Road and another road from Kanju to Madyan in Swat, in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province.

There was also an agreement to create Reconstruction Opportunity Zones in Pakistan for which the U.S. promised \$125 million, and it is hoped that this money is not taken out of the controversial Kerry-Lugar Bill. The U.S. has also offered 400 megawatts of energy to Pakistan to build thermal power stations; however, this is a very small amount, given the magnitude of the energy crisis prevailing in Pakistan.

Both sides also agreed to establish a ‘Policy Steering Group’ which will take care of many common interest areas such as energy, defense, law-enforcement, counterterrorism, science and technology, education, health, agriculture and water. On the water issue, a separate sectoral dialogue track was also announced which will take care of issues such as water conservation, U.S. assistance in water projects and construction of dams and bridges.

It is naïve for Pakistan to expect any big breakthroughs overnight but it is hoped that a continuation of these talks will bring a new level of partnership with the U.S. However, Pakistan should realise that whatever the U.S. has committed to as a result of the dialogue will be subject to Congressional approval which is a long process. Much depends on Pakistan's own progress in fighting insurgencies along its Afghanistan border, as well as on the parallel fight of NATO forces in the upcoming Kandahar operation.

As expected, there was no concrete outcome of the strategic dialogue, but it does to some extent present a framework that had been missing before. The talks also emphasized Pakistan's position in front of U.S., and sensitive issues that were earlier left untouched, came to the forefront. However, the success of the meetings can only be measured when they translate into results and long-term progress.

In short, the strategic dialogue was neither a complete success nor a failure. It is time for Pakistan to realise that it should not place its dealings with the U.S. at the cost of its relations with regional countries. Iran has offered 2,200 MW of energy assistance to Pakistan which is half of all its energy requirements. The current electricity shortage in the country is now at 5,000 megawatts and what the U.S. has offered does not amount to much. Besides, the promises that the U.S. has made will eventually come at a cost; and Pakistan needs to define its policies more effectively for a secure and stable future.

The Indian angle

Apart from its progress in Afghanistan, the greatest challenge facing the U.S. in the region is its handling of a perpetual India-Pakistan rivalry. The U.S. role in this scenario has increased since Pakistan's relations with India are now seen from an Afghan perspective. India and Pakistan have always competed to achieve strategic agendas in Afghanistan; while the former considers its influence and presence in Afghanistan as a strategic geopolitical constraint on Pakistan as well as a gateway to Central Asia, the latter has deep cultural and historic ties because of a common border with a Pashtun ethnic majority on both sides.

Over the years, both India and Pakistan have provided assistance to Afghanistan where the main focus has been infrastructure development. India is the second largest aid

provider and has promised \$750 million over the next few years. Pakistan on the other hand has committed \$200 million and also hosts the largest number of Afghan refugees. However, while Pakistan has been an all-weather friend, its role has been greatly disregarded and misjudged; but India, due to its close ties with the former Northern Alliance members in the Karzai government, enjoys a much more active role in Afghanistan today.

After the events of 9/11, India provided intelligence, naval escorts through the Strait of Malacca, and diplomatic and political support to the United States. Plus, its ties with the Northern Alliance were a significant factor in its future activities in the country since the Northern Alliance is anti-Taliban, and by default hostile towards Pakistan due to its Taliban contacts.

Pakistan, for its part, has time and again attempted to pursue a healthy relationship with India after the Mumbai attacks, but certain elements in India have prevented any progress on this front. The differences are immense and have made it difficult for the international community to become a bridge between both countries. Suspicion of each other's intent through involvement in Afghanistan has also not helped matters. The Obama administration has made it clear that it will not directly mediate between India and Pakistan, but would instead help bring them together to address their common issues including terrorism and Kashmir.

Afghanistan and India blame Pakistan for harbouring militants and terrorists on its soil. Their officials have often referred to Pakistan as a "significant enabler for insurgency" in the region. Pakistan, on the other hand, blames Afghanistan for its negligence towards a burgeoning arms and drug trade, while also holding India responsible for running covert operations against Pakistan.

Pakistani officials have strongly denied that they continue to hold relations with Taliban elements either in Pakistan or in Afghanistan. Due to successful operations in South Waziristan and the arrest of some key militants, it has to some extent shown its sincerity to the cause. It has even contributed to the creation of an intelligence establishment in Kabul to monitor its border areas with Afghanistan along with the Afghans and NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

However, according to many analysts, the close relationship between the U.S. and India is also a factor that hinders progress on the Pakistan-U.S. front. Washington sees India as a source of stability in Afghanistan since it has made heavy investments over the past few years. However, Pakistan's Military Intelligence (MI) and Intelligence Bureau (IB) officials also often allude to the "invisible Indian hand" in creating unrest in Balochistan and damaging gas power infrastructure worth several billion rupees.

These views have not been totally ignored. Clifford May at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, said in an interview to Voice of America News that the U.S. needs to put some pressure on India to ensure that it is helpful in every regard. This should be done keeping in mind the importance of Pakistan in the war on terror since it is very important that Pakistan be reassured that it faces no threat on its eastern borders.

India-U.S. relations over the years have developed a new paradigm. They have strengthened in many areas, but specifically it is the military ties where enhancement has been most significant. Hence, while their ties have expanded vertically as well as horizontally, numerous difficulties have been created for Pakistan in the process.

Reconciliation – issues and dilemmas

Desperate to save a faltering military campaign, U.S. policy is coming another full circle as Washington prepares to strike deals with 'moderate' factions of the Taliban. The real question, though, is regarding the shape and content of any such negotiations. It is also imperative that the costs and benefits of the approach are worked out at the outset. The process is likely to involve three groups of the Afghan population: the high-level Taliban or the leaders, the medium-level Taliban or the operators, and lastly, the locals.

Strategies and tactics

1. National reconciliation: This involves the introduction of a broad national reconciliation programme which includes equal representation of minorities.

2. Paying soldiers an incentive: Designed to effectively buy friendship, the idea is that if enemies cannot be defeated, they can be bought. This involves paying Afghan tribes and local or middle-ranking Taliban leaders to give up fighting in return for cash. In the Nangarhar province in eastern Afghanistan, the Shinwari tribe has, for instance, agreed to fight against the Taliban for which it will be paid \$1 million.
3. Positive religious motivation.
4. Jobs, education and socioeconomic opportunities: Millions of dollars in foreign aid are funneled to villages that organize neighbourhood watch programmes to help with security issues. This will later also help avoid civilian confrontation when foreign forces leave Afghanistan.
5. Induction in government representation.
6. Humanitarian programmes.

London conference; Karzai's six-point 'action plan'

In the wake of the London conference in January 2010, President Hamid Karzai presented his six-point 'Action Plan' for Afghanistan. He announced it as the Taliban Reintegration Plan, with the stated aim to "offer an honourable place in society" to those insurgents who are willing to renounce Al Qaeda and who abandon violence and pursue their political goals peacefully in accordance with the constitution.

The plan largely frames six main agendas that can influence or manipulate the so-called 'good' or 'moderate' Taliban. As a token of support, Western leaders pledged \$140 million for the first year with further finances to be determined according to the success of the initial plan. The six points refer to the following:

1. Peace and reconciliation,
2. Security,

3. Good governance,
4. Addressing corruption,
5. Regional cooperation, and
6. Economic development.

Recommendations

Pakistan's history has been punctuated by an on-again, off-again partnership with the United States. Given widespread dissatisfaction among people at large, cooperation becomes even more limited and there remains a considerable gap between public sentiment and actual policy.

What is lacking is an action agenda that helps develop an approach which directly and positively impacts the population. Such an approach would allow the U.S. and Pakistan to collectively identify sectors and areas that need reforms and assistance in both long and short terms. One of these could, for instance, be terrorism. The Pakistani political establishment has come to recognize the danger of jihadis and identified the Taliban and Al Qaeda as a real threat to the future of Pakistan's own stability just as the U.S. sees them as a major global issue.

NATO and U.S. should alter their strategy altogether in order to achieve long-term success in Afghanistan. They need to address the issue of Pashtun alienation, since behind the Taliban façade is a distinct Pashtun ethnicity. Foreign military occupation has helped unite, motivate and win support for disparate elements that we label the Afghan Taliban. NATO and U.S. do not openly admit the involvement of other actors in the region which include, among others, Uzbeks and Tajiks, who are not ethnically Pashtun but are continued to be labelled Taliban.

A strong Pakistan-U.S. alliance is critical for the stability of South Asia and the world at large. Washington must realise that Pakistan is not just a means with which it can dictate its foreign policy but has its own national interest, domestic and political imperatives and geopolitical concerns. Pakistan, on the other hand, must realise that it

has to do more to settle its multifaceted internal crises. It has to fight the Taliban, Al Qaeda and other militant organisations in order to restore its credibility as an anti-terrorist State. Some of the steps that could be taken towards a long-term and stable relationship are:

1. Addressing immediate energy, water and related economic crises through short-term humanitarian assistance.
2. Improving local police forces in counterterrorism and technical fields.
3. Controlling narcotics and drugs in the tribal areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan since these are the biggest source of income for extremists to purchase weapons and other material.
4. Controlling opium and poppy cultivation in the Pak-Afghan region.
5. Reaching out to different political parties, including those with limited regional constituencies, which could offer a means to enhance U.S.-Pakistan cooperation at the sub-national level.
6. Reforming the existing educational structure in rural and urban areas with the help of provincial governments to counter anti-U.S. sentiments among younger population, effectively preventing militant groups from capitalizing on their vulnerabilities.
7. Stabilising Afghanistan through peace talks and agreements with the Pashtun tribal leaders and with the Taliban who are willing to come to the negotiating table.
8. Developing the tribal areas on both sides of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border so that insurgents are unable to find sanctuaries and support bases.
9. Addressing the Kashmir issue by getting India and Pakistan to negotiate. The U.S. should encourage changes in the dynamics of the Indo-Pakistan relations to reduce tension on both sides.
10. Providing better salaries and specialized counterterrorism training to the Pakistani police force.
11. Broadening the anti-militant campaign nationwide, especially in rural areas of Punjab and in the Afghan-Pakistan border region.

Conclusion

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

Pakistan is also concerned about Indian penetration in Afghanistan. Being a strategic partner, the U.S. should take responsibility for restraining India's activities, especially in areas close to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border. With its crucial position in South Asia, its long-running enmity with India and its porous border with Afghanistan, any threat of potential failure in Pakistan represents the greatest strategic threat facing the current international system.

There is an urgent need for broader dialogue between Pakistan and the U.S. at the strategic, political, diplomatic and economic levels. Constructive and productive opportunities should be created to cultivate the relationship and improve the image of the U.S. as a reliable ally. America needs Pakistan in order to fight and defeat its enemies, but Pakistan, being a frontline ally, has already suffered heavy losses. It is necessary for the U.S. to assure its commitment to the Pakistani society, civil-bureaucratic leadership and the army, and ensure that this time the relationship is going to last.

Washington has since the events of 9/11 reacted to events in and around Afghanistan under the pretext of Islamist extremist and anti-West terrorism. This fails to assess the relevance of the situation according to regional dynamics and thus in shaping an appropriate response.

The rise of insurgencies in Afghanistan and a politically weak and corrupt government have left political and psychological scars on the country. The West needs to remember that the Taliban and Al Qaeda were joint products which the U.S. and Pakistan

produced to counter the Soviet Union in the 1990s. The path ahead must be multi-prolonged to deal with the challenges at hand. Both Pakistan and the U.S. should design assistance programmes on military as well as civilian platforms to empower the relationship, overcome the trust deficit and eliminate anti-American perceptions. This is essential to reach goals that are broadly compatible with the interests of both countries and enable them to defeat a common enemy.

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