

# **The Salala incident: implications for the Pakistan-United States ties**

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## **Abstract**

**T**he Salala incident of 26 November 2011 has caused unprecedented damage to Pakistan-United States bilateral ties and impinged upon their cooperation in the war on terror. The closure of NATO supplies that have gone through Pakistan had seriously undermined such cooperative efforts. On the other hand, NATO supplies stoppage by Pakistan has caused huge uproar in already troubled Pak-US relations. Pakistan exercised its own legitimate security concerns. The Army did not want to re-open supplies until the U.S. offered an apology to Pakistan for killing of its 24 soldiers. Militants threatened with tragic consequences if supplies were restored. Pakistan's Parliament made its own proposals to review country's relations with the United States, asking to stop drone attacks in the tribal areas, which the United States repeatedly refused.

Reacting further, Pakistan boycotted the Bonn Conference on the future of Afghanistan and forced the United States to vacate the Shamsi airbase located in Balochistan. Although reluctantly, Pakistan, however, participated at the Chicago Conference destined for the future of Afghanistan. One has to see how such episodes would re-configure Pak-US ties especially at a time when NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan has been nearing up by 2014. It is most likely that the Salala episode would rewrite bilateral Pakistan-United States ties and their future interactions in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

## **Introduction**

Ever since the 11 September 2001 tragic events in New York and Washington, Pakistan has closely collaborated with the United States to weed out the menace of terrorism in Afghanistan. As allies in war on terror, however, they confronted with a number of difficulties in cooperating with each other. Trust deficiency has jerked their common strategy of counter-terrorism, which remained at the lowest ebb between the two partners especially at a time when the US-led NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and ISAF (International

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Security Assistant Force) have been planning to make exit strategies from Afghanistan to be completed by 2014. It is being apprehended that such constraints might hamper their war efforts and pullout strategies in Afghanistan. This might give more justification to the already looming large crises of the outbreak of potential civil war in Afghanistan.

Against this backdrop, this paper would make efforts to analyse the deeper ramifications of the Salala incident and its resulting implications for the Pakistan-United States relations. The controversial U.S. investigation into the Salala incident would also be touched upon. The cutting of NATO supplies by Pakistan would be critically analysed. Further, the paper will make efforts to see the implications of the incident on Pakistan's decision of boycotting the Bonn Conference in determining the future of Afghanistan. The Parliamentary review of Pakistan's ties with the United States and public outrage will also be discussed. Pakistan's participation at the Chicago Conference will be reviewed to see how much patch work was done to repair Pakistan-US ties and their implications for the NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan.

### **The Salala Tragedy**

The strategic supply of arms, equipment, and food are the biggest challenges Americans and NATO under the ISAF had confronted in Afghanistan after the Apache helicopters, AC 130 gunship and F-15 Eagle fighter jets attacked on the Salala Check Post at two points in Volcano and Bolder, in Mohmand Agency, Baizai district on 26 November 2011.<sup>1</sup> The exact details of the strike were shrouded in mystery but the information gathered from available sources was quite alarming with lasting ramifications for Pakistan-United States relations and NATO war activities in Afghanistan. The attack at the Salala Check Post killed as many as 24 Pakistani soldiers on 26 November 2011.<sup>2</sup> Around 14 soldiers were wounded in the strike.

The Pakistani side immediately intimated the NATO side to stop the attack but it continued uninterrupted. The air strikers were over a mile deep into the Pakistani territory and the operation lasted for two hours that cannot be attributed to errors in judgment and failures in communications between NATO and the Pakistani side. Hitherto, there had been the Border Coordination Centres that enabled NATO and Pakistani troops to communicate with each other. There had also been the 'Mutually Agreed Mechanisms for Operations Close to Borders' between the allies that were totally ignored too and the Pakistani side was not informed of the operation at all.<sup>3</sup> This was a blind and sudden operation against the Pakistan army.

The posts were in difficult terrain over 800 meters high above the sea level. They were located near the Afghan Province of Kunar to prevent the entry of the militants and terrorists into and from Pakistan to Afghanistan at these check points that were maintained by regular Pakistani army soldiers with strength of around 40 soldiers. Militants often attack border area with Afghanistan. Further damaging counter-terrorism amidst tension in Pakistan-United States ties, Taliban militants attacked at Sunai Darra, one of the 50 posts in Upper Dir district in Pakistan, on 24 June 2012 as the Afghan forces did not apprehend them, which resulted in the death of 11 Pakistani security personnel and injuries to several others.<sup>4</sup> Around 11 missing soldiers and two civilians were taken inside Kunar Province of Afghanistan and seven were slaughtered and beheaded on 25 June 2012. Pakistan officially protested to the Afghan Government about such gruesome murders.<sup>5</sup> Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) claimed safe havens on Afghan soil as a springboard attacking Pakistani forces.<sup>6</sup> After the closure of NATO supplies, such incidents were intensified. It was often argued in Pakistan that US failures in Afghanistan usually led the US-Afghan commandos to launch such cross-border raids on Pakistani territory. This event suggested that the extension of the Salala episode was on and there was no immediate chance of repairing ties between Pakistan and the United States. The Salala incident severely soured relations between the erstwhile allies.

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The Salala attack actually strengthened the Taliban and militants in that area, which the June 2012 Upper Dir event has proved. Some mentioned that probably the United States wanted to re-open the corridor for fanning terrorists' activities inside Pakistan to destabilise it. Many also disagreed with U.S. goals and objectives of counter-terrorism at the time of launching of war on terror against militants. Therefore, Pakistan re-deployed its soldiers over Volcano and Bolder check posts without the loss of time that could further reinforce Pakistan's sincere efforts toward eliminating the menace of terrorism. Many argued that the attack was a well-calculated massacre to teach a lesson to the Pakistan's army at the time of endgame in Afghanistan so that they could not pursue their own agenda after U.S.-NATO withdrawal.

They gave the impression that U.S. purpose was to inflict harm on the Pakistani army. The attack had also taken place because NATO allies did not make any resounding military success in Afghanistan in the past decade. These frustrations led them to launching such untoward incidents against the Pakistan

army. This view strongly prevailed in Pakistan. Confirming this argument, the Pakistani army believed that the Salala attack was deliberate, pre-planned, and it misled the Pakistani military about the location of the attack.<sup>7</sup> It was also brought out that the attack was conducted by U.S. Special Force over which NATO had no control as such.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the attack was not a NATO attack but the U.S. Special Forces attack.

From the Pakistani point of view, the attack was an ‘unprovoked act of aggression’ and ‘indiscriminate’ violence, as stated by Chief of Pakistan Army General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani in his swift response within hours.<sup>9</sup> He further condemned the air strike somewhat as a ‘blatant and unacceptable act, resulting in the loss of precious lives of Pakistani soldiers’.<sup>10</sup> Immediately, Pakistani troops responded in self-defence to this aggression with all available weapons’.<sup>11</sup>

The incident, on the other hand, was not the first carried out by NATO, ISAF, and U.S. forces occupying Afghanistan. The Salala attack was the fourth of this series. NATO allies off and on conducted unfriendly acts of aggression against the Pakistani military after 2006. Almost a similar attack in June 2008 had left 11 personnel of the Frontier Corps (FC) dead, prompting the Government to suspend NATO supplies for a few days at that time too.<sup>12</sup> In another incident, two Pakistani soldiers were killed on 30 September 2010 that led to the closure of one of NATO’s supply routes through Pakistan again for 10 days.<sup>13</sup> Later, in June 2011, an attack was launched but fortunately no casualty occurred. Compared to these incidents, the Salala killings were the most gruesome act of violence. The NATO and United States believed the presence of militants in that area because, earlier in June 2011, Pakistani forces had killed 65 Taliban in that area.<sup>14</sup> These events clearly demonstrated lack of trust between the two allies.

From the very first minute of the Salala killings, tension rose quite high between Pakistan, United States, and NATO allies. The real causes and intensions were still unknown but it was admitted that there had been a fault line in US, NATO, and ISAF operation in consultations with Pakistan’s armed forces, on the other side of the Afghan border, ever since the launching of the operation in October 2001. This showed ignorance about their joint combat actions in dealing with the menace of terrorism in Afghanistan and border area with Pakistan. It can be asserted that after the successful operation in Abbottabad on 2 May 2011, this also led the US Special Force to strike on Pakistani soldiers at Salala to maximize their security objectives.

### *The Salala incident: implications for Pakistan-United States ties*

The Salala episode appeared to be the last straw in Pakistan-United States relations as both Abbottabad and Salala breached the Pakistani right to sovereignty on its own soil. The bilateral relationship became more slippery and greasy. The Salala incident created a 'tit for tat' and 'blood for blood' situation. Pakistan built enormous pressure and came forward with a number of steps and measures being taken. These included: seeking of an official apology from US side, closure of NATO supplies, boycotting of the Bonn Conference, vacating of the Shamsi airbase, and stopping of drone attacks on Pakistan's territory. Initially, Pakistan has also gave the impression of boycotting the Chicago Conference and emphasized to review of its relations with United States on the proposals of the Parliament and public opinion.

#### **The probe controversy**

NATO expressed regrets over the incident and admitted its mistake. The US Government also offered its 'deepest condolence'.<sup>15</sup> President Barack Obama called the attack a 'tragedy'.<sup>16</sup> United States, however, remained reluctant to offer its unconditional apology to Pakistan. The Pentagon preferred that its condolence and regret over the incident were enough to move on.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, the apology fury caused much havoc. In order to put the relations on a much firmer ground, legal aspects of the incidents needed to be handled carefully.

Similarly, inquiry report of the incident also did not bring any relief to their relations. The raid was disputed by NATO allies, the United States, and Pakistan. NATO and US Central Command jointly launched investigation into the reasons of the incident by excluding Pakistan, which demanded a joint investigation. The NATO, ISAF, and U.S. unilaterally wanted to establish how such strikes had happened. The Pakistani side was of the view that such inquiries did not yield any tangible results as had happened in the past.

The inquiry, led by U.S. Brigadier-General Stephen Clark, released on 22 December 2011, stated that both allies and Pakistan made 'a series of mistakes that led to the incident'.<sup>18</sup> United States did not admit its mistake but it also blamed Pakistan. The inquiry stated that the combined force did not knowingly fire on the Pakistani forces and it concluded that the 'Pakistani forces were not knowingly targeted and the action of our forces [US-NATO] was legitimate within the laws of armed conflict and within their rules of engagement'.<sup>19</sup> The more disturbing aspect for the Pakistani side was that the report found 'Pakistani soldiers fired first at American and Afghan forces and kept firing even after a US

F-15 fighter jet flew overhead'.<sup>20</sup> It looked that US probe was chiefly designed to malign the Pakistan army for the incident and to cover up their own designs.

Pakistan's army challenged its truthfulness and called it a false report that lacked factual history of the incident.<sup>21</sup> The Pakistan army released its report on 23 January 2012, which dubbed U.S. report 'biased' and 'not based on facts'.<sup>22</sup> The U.S. report also did not fix specific responsibility. The Pakistan Army reported that Check Posts at Salala were located inside Pakistani territory and the U.S.-NATO attack was totally unprovoked and

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it was a clear violation of their mandate. The report also condemned and questioned the excuse of self-defence by U.S.-NATO forces.<sup>23</sup>

The Pakistan Foreign Ministry also held the same opinion and out rightly rejected the probe report.<sup>24</sup> For the Pakistani side, the probe inquiry was just a cover-up exercise engineered by the Pentagon and NATO Headquarters. The fact remained absolutely clear that Pakistani troops did not engage the NATO, ISAF, U.S. or Afghan troops first and open fire on them at all. Pakistan categorically refused that it first opened up the fire and that the NATO side acted in self-defence. This remained the basic point of conflict between Pakistan and the United States and their allies. The report blamed the Pakistani side for the incident.<sup>25</sup>

There was no evidence in the report that NATO made the costly error. The report admitted that the compensation made to the aggrieved families also confirmed the guilt admitted by the United States and its NATO allies. The report, on the other hand, did not provide any guarantees that such untoward incidents would not happen again in the future.<sup>26</sup> In short, the report induced a new chapter of anger amongst the public and the army about security situation inside Pakistani territory and its war cooperation with the United States and NATO. Generally, it was demanded in Pakistan to revisit its foreign policy especially country's ties with the United States. In brief, the report hardened Pakistan's suspicions about U.S. intensions at Salala and with regard to the war on terror.

### **Cutting off NATO supplies**

Whatever the consequences of the Salala incident had been, damage to U.S. war strategy in Afghanistan had already been done. Pakistan immediately after the Salala incident announced cutting off NATO supplies.<sup>27</sup> Strategically, Pakistan offered the most direct and economic land route to U.S. and NATO forces that began soon after the 9/11 events in the United States. There are two routes from Pakistan to Afghanistan that start in Karachi. From there, one route crosses the Khyber Pass, enters Afghanistan at Torkham, and terminates at Kabul, known as N-5 National Highway. The other route passes through Balochistan, known as N-25 National Highway, crosses the border at Chaman, and ends at Kandahar, in the south of Afghanistan. Around half of the US war supplies to Afghanistan were trucked over these routes.<sup>28</sup> The National Highway Authority (NHA) of Pakistan has estimated the damage of road infrastructure by NATO trucks close to Rs 120 billion (US\$ 1.3 billion). It is being learnt that the United States would be ready to pay compensation for the damage of road infrastructure and also an additional transit fee that Pakistan asked to impose on the goods.<sup>29</sup>

Lifting of goods by air from the Persian Gulf to Afghanistan is ten times more expensive than sending them via the land route through Pakistan. The Pentagon officials mentioned that NATO containers' cost about US\$17,000 per container to go through the north, compared with about US\$7,000 per container to go through Pakistan.<sup>30</sup> On the other, Central Asian and Russian routes are uneconomical, long, and insufficient to bring logistics to NATO forces in Afghanistan. After Pakistan closed the NATO supply line, surface cargo arrived in Afghanistan from the north, along a patchwork of Central Asian rail, Caspian shipment, and land route that the Pentagon called the Northern Distribution Network. The route is one-way and nothing can be transported back through this route. This was the most serious difficulty NATO and its allies faced at the time of their pullout strategies in Afghanistan.

Pakistan took great political and security risks by operating the NATO supply line through its land. The insurgents often attack the vehicles carrying logistic supplies to Afghanistan. US and NATO forces often violate Pakistan air and land space. The situation created a dilemma for Pakistan. Under these tense situations, it was difficult for Pakistan to permit its land and air for NATO supplies to Afghanistan. Reacting further to the Salala killings, Pakistan decided to boycott the Bonn Conference jointly chaired by the Germans and Afghans on the future Afghanistan held in December 2011. Boycotting the Conference,

Pakistan gave the impression that respect of its sovereignty was more important than creating stability in Afghanistan.

### **The Shamsi Airbase**

Pakistan has history of giving its airfields to the United States during the Cold War against the Soviet Union in the 1950s and later in connection with war on terror in the 2000s. Ceding Pakistan's sovereignty over these airfields, severely affected its foreign policy and internal dynamics of politics. In the former case, the Soviet Union gave a stern warning to Pakistan and objected to claim over Kashmir moving in support of India. In the latter case, militants threatened Pakistan with dire consequences after 9/11, and unfortunately, US used the base facilities for its clandestine activities in Pakistan such as launching of drone attacks and Blackwater underground activities. Pakistan's foreign policy has been inconsistent and non-transparent on many of these issues. These assertions could easily be judged from the issue that came out of the Shamsi airfield.

In the United States, two administrations of President George W Bush and Obama, and in Pakistan, administrations of President General Pervez Musharraf and the Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gilani (up to 26 November 2011) were held responsible for drone attacks. Even Pakistani administrations had not been trustworthy in their appeal for making an end to drone attacks. Strangely, during the Pakistan's Peoples Party (PPP) times, there had been an increase in the number of drone attacks.<sup>31</sup> The PPP Government publicly denounced drone attacks but privately accepted them as counter-terrorism measures.<sup>32</sup> It was also claimed that drones were being conducted from Pakistan's soil but the Government did not sincerely took up the matter with the United States.<sup>33</sup> The Government did not contradict with former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif's remarks that drones were conducted with its consent.<sup>34</sup> Now drones are being launched from Jalalabad in Afghanistan but Pakistan has not registered any protest to the Afghan Government so far.

The Shamsi airbase (also known as Bhandari airstrip) is located in the Washuk district in Balochistan. The base was leased to the United Arab Emirates in 1992 for hunting purposes, that renamed 'Shamsi'. Later, the base was leased to the United States from 20 October 2001 to 11 December 2011 by the UAE with the approval of the Government of Pakistan. Under this strange third-party deal, US air force and CIA then jointly developed it for war purposes. The improvement made the airfield fit for the use of jet and heavy aircraft. The United States used it for the CIA-led Predator drone attacks in the Federally

Administrative Tribal Areas (FATA) region since 2004.<sup>35</sup> Over 232 such attacks were reportedly launched, killing over 2,206 people and injuring a countless number.<sup>36</sup> Another source put drone strike at 292 strikes during 2009-2012.<sup>37</sup> According to data compiled by the New America Foundation from reliable news reports, it revealed that 337 drone strikes were made in Pakistan since 2004.<sup>38</sup> After Salala, drone strikes were reduced to 48 from 73 in 2011. The infamous US Blackwater Company also used this airfield facility to develop a parallel intelligence and security network in Pakistan. Until very recently, the Government in Pakistan concealed the information that the airfield was used for drone attacks in FATA.

The Government in Pakistan often claimed and gave the fabricated impression that the airfield was used by the UAE. The Government never made it open that the airfield was used by the CIA and Blackwater. *The New York Times* on 5 October 2002 claimed that the United States used the airfield for drone attacks in FATA.<sup>39</sup> The paper claimed that the Blackwater Company also used the same airfield for its secret activities. Later, *Times* (London) in February 2009, claimed that it got Google Earth Image of the state-of-art and pilot-less Predator drone aircraft parked at the Shamsi airfield. If people were killed in FATA, Predator drones have created many jobs in the United States and the project was considered commercially viable by the war industry in the United States.<sup>40</sup>

Public anger started building up in Pakistan after such news broke out. In fact, such incidents weakened Pakistani security and huge damage was done to the defence integrity of the Pakistan armed forces. The truth behind the Shamsi airfield revealed the danger to Pakistani security and to its defence forces. It was only on 13 May 2011 that Pakistan Air Force Air Chief Marshall Rao Qamar Suleman, in an in-camera briefing to the Joint Session of Pakistani Parliament, told that the Shamsi airfield was not under the control of the Pakistan Air Force but under the control of the UAE.<sup>41</sup> He still did not narrate the complete fact that actually the airfield came under the CIA control, which also hosted Blackwater, and that Pakistan had lost its writ over it. The Salala killings forced the Government to pressurize the United States to stop the drones, which remained suspended from 26 November 2011 but resumed on 10 January 2012.

Many people maintained that the drones are America's secret war against Pakistan. On the same day of the Salala attack, the Pakistan Government came forward with the decision of vacating the Shamsi airbase within 15 days at short notice<sup>42</sup>, ostensibly to the unpopular CIA-led Predator drone attacks in the FATA area. The United States even quickly acceded to the Pakistani demand of

vacating the Shamsi airbase. Pakistan reiterated the decision taken by the Defence Committee of Cabinet (DCC) after the US-NATO killings at Salala to vacate the base by 11 December 2011.<sup>43</sup> The evacuation of the base made the first practical dent in Pakistan-United States relations after the Salala incident but the issue of drones attacking Pakistan has not been resolved yet. (The mystery of the Shahbaz airfield in Sindh has yet to be determined.<sup>44</sup>) The solution to these mysteries would help establish Pakistani writ and ensure its sovereignty, which are still several miles away.

### **Parliamentary review**

Following the Salala incident, the Government finally decided to take Parliament into confidence and its decision whether or not to reopen the NATO supply line. A Parliamentary Commission has already demanded an end to American drone attacks and an apology for the air strikes that killed Pakistani troops. As already mentioned, the United States has refused to offer such an apology. The Pakistan Army has rejected the US inquiry report of the Salala Check Post and called it an attack on Pakistan's sovereignty. Pakistan made it repeatedly clear that the question of the resumption of NATO supply line would finally be decided by Parliament.

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Pressurised by public anger and the army, the Parliamentary Committee on National Security (PCNS) decided to review all agreements, treaties, assurances, and undertakings signed between the Governments of Pakistan and the United States over the years to conduct the war on terror in Afghanistan. The Committee devised recommendations for the review of future bilateral relations between Pakistan and the United States.

Parliament came forward with a revised 14-point proposal on 12 April 2012 in order to prepare a roadmap to review country's ties with the United States and re-aligning its foreign policy goals and objectives. Proposals were approved by the Parliament on the same day. The supply line would not be used for carrying arms and drone attacks on Pakistani territory. Like the Central Asian Republics, Pakistan also demanded that its land and air routes would not be used for the transportation of arms for NATO forces in Afghanistan. It was insisted that Pakistan's security and defence couldn't be compromised for any reason. The

proposal demanded that the United States must apologise to Pakistan for attacking the Salala Check Post and those responsible for the attack must be brought to justice. All verbal undertakings between the two Governments shall stand null and void. It was recommended that the Ministry of Defence and Pakistan Air Force should formulate new flying rules for areas contiguous to the border. It was demanded that no overt or covert operations inside Pakistan should be permitted. It was also mentioned that no foreign private security contractors and or intelligence operatives shall be allowed to operate on the soil of Pakistan and no foreign bases will be maintained on Pakistani territory.

Recommendations the pointed out that the US-India civil nuclear agreement has significantly altered the strategic balance in the region and, therefore, Pakistan should also seek similar treatment from the United States and other countries. It was recommended that the strategic position of Pakistan on the subject of the Fissile Material Cut off Treaty (FMCT) must not be compromised and this principle must be kept in view in negotiations on this matter. It was also recommended that the NATO supply line might be opened *albeit* with a higher fee charge.<sup>45</sup> Pakistan also reaffirmed its commitment to the elimination of terrorism and combating extremism in pursuance of its national interest. The recommendations reiterated Pakistan's stance that there was no military solution to the Afghan conflict and efforts must be undertaken to promote a genuine national reconciliation in an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned process. Proposals asked for the reinforcement of its ties with the Islamic bloc, China, Russia, Far Eastern countries, and European powers and to continue peace initiative with India.<sup>46</sup>

The Defence Committee of the Cabinet (DCC) was asked to implement these proposals.<sup>47</sup> If these proposals were implemented in letter and spirit this might give relief to Pakistan and the US withdrawal might be facilitated. The DCC has decided on 17 April 2012 to negotiate with the United States about bilateral ties and to see if the NATO supply line should be restored. These recommendations re-configured goals of Pakistan's foreign policy and PCNS decided to normalise ties with the United States on such guidelines.

### **Public outrage and the Chicago outcome**

The public in Pakistan had seen Salala as US conspiracy against Pakistan. People held the opinion that such elements came up with sinister designs against Pakistan to weaken it before NATO troops vacate Afghanistan. Therefore, the Salala incident spread public outrage in Pakistan. Demonstrations were staged throughout the country against the strikes. People demanded that Pakistan quit

the so-called un-popular war on terror as people felt a great sense of rage at the strike. Pakistan had remained under severe public pressure not to reopen the supply line.

Reacting further, Pakistanis decided to boycott the Bonn Conference that was held on 5 December 2011 about the future of Afghanistan. There had been enormous pressure on Pakistan to participate at the Conference. Boycotting of the Conference was significant for Pakistan as it was a key player on any settlement of Afghanistan. The boycotting was the second most important step Pakistan had taken after the Shamsi airfield. The United States even tried to play down the Pakistani decision of boycotting the Conference. The exclusion of Pakistan created a crisis at the Conference about Afghanistan and presented a pessimistic picture of its future. Under these circumstances, it was feared that the Conference would not yield any results.<sup>48</sup> Pakistan's Foreign Ministry was of the view that by boycotting the Bonn Conference Pakistan ensured that its sovereignty would be respected.<sup>49</sup> Peace and stability in Afghanistan should not be at Pakistan's cost. It was a clear message which Pakistan conveyed to the international community interested in creating reconciliation and stability in Afghanistan.

Similarly, the Chicago Conference on the future of Afghanistan was held on 20-21 May 2012 at Chicago. Strained US-Pakistan relations cast a shadow over the Chicago Summit. Like the Bonn Conference, Pakistan also gave the impression that it would also boycott the Chicago Conference to further register its resentment and to make sure that no undue pressure was exerted on it to resume NATO supplies. The Summit was a great test to see the determination of Pakistan on the highly crucial matter of logistic supplies to Afghanistan. There was an impression created at home and abroad that after Pakistan attended the Conference, it was likely to reopen NATO supply route. On the Pakistani side, the impression to 'move on' was given without seeking any guarantees to stop drone attacks and seeking US apology.<sup>50</sup> Pakistan also wrongly anticipated that the Salala incident enhanced its bargaining position *vis-à-vis* the United States. The refusal of Obama to grant special time for a meeting with Zardari at Chicago showed the strained relations between the two countries over the Salala incident and its implications for a successful pullout from Afghanistan. The apology issue remained unsettled. So did the NATO containers' issue. In a nutshell, the Chicago Conference could not bridge the rift between the two countries. The outcome of the Chicago Summit added fuel to the already troubled relations rather than to giving any relief by bringing down the tension.

The DCC, on 3 July 2012, decided to allow NATO containers to once again use country's land routes for the supply of goods to Afghanistan without making

it conditional on the stoppage of drone attacks on its soil. This was Pakistan's first failure of its reaction of the Salala incident. Even NATO containers were exempted from any sort of tax that Pakistan was legally authorized to impose on them. Instead of tax, Pakistan received US\$ 1.1 billion from the coalition support fund from the United States.<sup>51</sup> The decision to restore supplies was quickly made when the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton 'felt sorry' merely on the phone with Foreign Minister Hina Rabani Khar on 3 July 2012 without an official and formal apology extended.<sup>52</sup> NATO supplies would continue via Pakistan till 31 December 2016 under an agreement signed by US Charge d'Affaires in Islamabad, Richard Hoagland and Rear Admiral, Farrokh Ahmad.<sup>53</sup> The signing of the agreement made Pakistan legally responsible for NATO supplies, hitherto merely a verbal assurance.<sup>54</sup> One has to still calculate benefits gained by Pakistan as its Salala reaction. By ignoring Parliament, which asked for an unconditional apology, the decision to resume NATO supplies, gave a serious jerk to the public mandate once again.<sup>55</sup> How long Pakistan will continue to compromise on its sovereignty, is a critical question.

## **Conclusion**

Ever since US attack on Salala, bilateral relations between the two allies have gone through stress and strain. The attack generated a new security crisis in Pakistan-United States ties. Bilateral ties between them were severely damaged for about seven months. At one point, the incident spelled the end of Pakistan's participation in the war on terror. From a Pakistani standpoint, it was the gravest blunder the United States committed in the past decade, besides the Abbottabad incident. Further, the apology put the relationship at the lowest ebb. The event has shown that there was a lack of trust and a gap in bilateral communication to launch the joint counter-terrorism efforts. After the US unilateral probe into the incident, mutual trust between the two partners has further eroded. The situation created a dilemma for Pakistan and the United States because the US-led probe accused Pakistani soldiers for the gruesome act of violence at Salala.

The incident demanded that the whole exercise of counter-terrorism should be re-interpreted to achieve tangible outcome. Domestically, Pakistan has been confronted with a harsh public reaction. Pakistan's action to cut off supplies could hamper NATO withdrawal strategies in Afghanistan. The official leasing of the Shamsi airbase has dishonoured the two consecutive Governments in Pakistan for drone attacks in FATA as both the airfield and drones have questioned the writ and sovereignty of Pakistani Government. Moreover, the country's participation at the Chicago Conference did not yield any relief to the already troubled ties between the two partners. The outcome of restoring and

regularizing NATO supplies has yet to come. Considering the post-Salala situation, both countries' bilateral ties must be reconstructed on the guidelines drawn by the Parliament to put the relations on equal footing and dignity. Failure to that could continuously harm their ties.

## Notes & References

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- <sup>1</sup> See also Shazad Chaudhary, 'Other side of Salala', *The Express Tribune* (Islamabad), December 4, 2011.
- <sup>2</sup> *The News International* (Rawalpindi), November 26, 2011. The number ranged between 24-28 soldiers killed but finally the figure was set at 24.
- <sup>3</sup> Dr Moeed Pirzada, 'Nightmare at Salala', *The Express Tribune* (Islamabad), December 1, 2011.
- <sup>4</sup> Number of causality varies. *Dawn* (Islamabad), June 25, 2012, *The Nation* (Islamabad), June 25, 2012, & *The News International* (Rawalpindi), June 25, 2012.
- <sup>5</sup> *Dawn* (Islamabad), June 26, 2012 & *Associated Press of Pakistan* (APP), June 26, 2012.
- <sup>6</sup> *The Express Tribune* (Islamabad), June 26, 2012.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Nation* (Islamabad), December 9, 2011.
- <sup>8</sup> Statement of Director-General Military Operation (DGMO) Major-General Ashfaq Nadeem in his press-briefing on December 8, 2012 to the Senate Standing Committee on Defence.
- <sup>9</sup> *Dawn* (Islamabad), November 27, 2011.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>11</sup> Press release of the Inter Service Public Relations (ISPR). Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> *Dawn* (Islamabad), November 26, 2011.
- <sup>14</sup> General Aslam Beg Mirza maintained that Pakistani soldiers trapped over 50 Taliban in that area and NATO allies came forward to pave the way for them to run away from the area. See <<http://alaiwah.wordpress.com/2011/12/12/salala-attack-is-part-of-a-conspiracy-against-pakistan-mirza-aslam-beg/>> (accessed June 20, 2012).
- <sup>15</sup> *The New York Times* (New York), November 27, 2011.
- <sup>16</sup> *Dawn* (Islamabad), December 2, 2011. In an interview, US Defence Secretary Leon Panetta ruled out of offering any apology to Pakistan. See also *The News International* (Rawalpindi), June 22, 2012.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Nation* (Islamabad), June 22, 2011.
- <sup>18</sup> Central Command (CENTCOM): <<http://www.centcom.mil/images/stories/Crossborder/report%20exsum%20further%20redacted.pdf>>, (accessed January 7, 2013).
- <sup>19</sup> *Samaa TV* (Islamabad), December 23, 2011.
- <sup>20</sup> *Pakistan Focus*, December 28, 2011.
- <sup>21</sup> *Dawn* (Islamabad), December 28, 2011.
- <sup>22</sup> *Pakistan Today* (Lahore), December 23, 2011.

- <sup>23</sup> ISPR Report, 'Pakistan's Perspective on Investigation Report Conducted By Brigadier-General Stephen Clark Into November 26th 2011 US led ISAF / NATO Forces Attack on Pakistani Volcano and Boulder Posts in Mohmand Agency', January 23, 2012. <<http://www.ispr.gov.pk/front/press/pakistan.pdf>> (accessed January 7, 2013).
- <sup>24</sup> *Pakistan Today* (Lahore), December 23, 2011 & *Daily Mail* (Islamabad), December 24, 2011.
- <sup>25</sup> *The Nation* (Islamabad), December 24, 2011.
- <sup>26</sup> *The Nation* (Islamabad), December 20, 2012.
- <sup>27</sup> *Dawn* (Islamabad), November 26, 2011.
- <sup>28</sup> Depending on shipments, every month these figures were changed.
- <sup>29</sup> *Express Tribune* (Islamabad), 31 March 2012.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Hindustan Times*, (Delhi), April 13, 2012.
- <sup>31</sup> Nasir Islam 'Deadly drones and Obama's secret war in Pakistan', *Daily Times* (Lahore), June 19, 2012.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> Statement of former Prime Minister of Pakistan Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif in *Geo TV* news, June 24, 2012. He claimed that drones were conducted in consent with Pakistan. Government makes false protest over the issue.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Islam, op.cit.
- <sup>36</sup> Ishfaqullah Shawl, 'Drone attacks and reopening of NATO supplies', *Daily Times* (Lahore), June 20, 2012.
- <sup>37</sup> Quoting *The Long War journal*, Islam, op.cit.
- <sup>38</sup> New America Foundation, 'The Year of Drone'  
<<http://counterterrorism.newamerica.net/drones>>, (accessed January 23, 2013).
- <sup>39</sup> Jane Perlez, 'US push to expand in Pakistan meets resistance', *The New York Times* (New York), October 5, 2009.
- <sup>40</sup> Islam, op.cit
- <sup>41</sup> *The Nation* (Rawalpindi), May 13, 2011.
- <sup>42</sup> *The New York Times* (New York), 27, November, 2011.
- <sup>43</sup> *The Express Tribune* (Islamabad), November 30, 2011.
- <sup>44</sup> R. A Siddiqi, 'View: PM Gilani: Bad news for Balochistan', *Daily Times* (Lahore), June 18, 2012.
- <sup>45</sup> *Dawn* (Islamabad), April 13, 2012.
- <sup>46</sup> See also <[http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1334243269\\_639.pdf](http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1334243269_639.pdf)>, (accessed June 15, 2012).
- <sup>47</sup> *Daily Times* (Lahore), April 18, 2012.
- <sup>48</sup> Editorial, *Daily Times* (Lahore), December 6, 2011.
- <sup>49</sup> *The Nation* (Islamabad), December 5 2011.
- <sup>50</sup> Statement of Pakistan's Foreign Minister Hina Rabbani Khar in *Dawn* (Islamabad), May 15, 2012.
- <sup>51</sup> *Dawn* (Islamabad), August 2, 2012.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., (Islamabad), July 6, 2012.

<sup>53</sup> *Pakistan Today (Lahore)*, July 13, 2012.

<sup>54</sup> Dr Ahmad Rashid Malik, 'Regularizing NATO Routes', in *Frontier Post* (Islamabad), August 2, 2012.

<sup>55</sup> See also Dr Ahmad Rashid Malik, 'Restoring NATO Supplies', *Ibid.*, July 7, 2012.