

BOOK REVIEW

***Magnificent Delusions: Pakistan, the United States, and an Epic History of Misunderstanding.* Hussain Haqqani. New York: Public Affairs Books, 2013. Pp. 415.**

The relationship between Pakistan and the US spans over six decades, and has gone through various troughs and peaks in this period. An association which was born out of sheer necessity now leans towards mutual distrust. Haqqani, in his book, extensively maps the historical course of this fraught relationship from 1947 onwards, clearly indicating the stance of both countries. The major focus of US's relationship with Pakistan, the closest ally of the superpower in the 1950's, now centres on India, Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, terrorism, and the future of post-2014 Afghanistan. The book describes Pakistan-US relations through systematic analyses in some chapters and storytelling in others. Haqqani talks about lost opportunities, closed-minded priorities and diverging interests.

In the very first chapter of the book, Haqqani mentions Jinnah's comments in 1947 regarding Pakistan-US relations: "America needs Pakistan more than Pakistan needs America," which he says set the framework for the ensuing 67 years' relationship between the two countries. Haqqani lays the blame for this disjointed relationship on both parties; on the Pakistani side for broken promises, and the US government for investing in the wrong people. The book also contains fascinating first-hand details of closed-door meetings among the top strata of the civilian and military institutions of the two countries. Haqqani admits that Pakistan's status borders on that of a failed-state, but also blames the US's persistently short-sighted, fruitless policies in exacerbating the problem. The author skilfully documents how the US has often served as Pakistan's willing dupe, while also providing a way to salvage what seems like a doomed relationship, by shedding some light on how everything went so wrong.

The major focus of Pakistan-US relations, according to Haqqani, can be characterised by Pakistan's monetary needs and US's wilful donor-ship. He asserts that the US government has almost always caved in to Pakistani demands by providing aid in return for unfulfilled promises. In the case of Pakistan and the US, the divergence of interests far exceeded the similarities, mainly due to the Pakistani government's need to balance their craving for aid against the nation's standing as an independent actor. Haqqani divulges how Pakistani officials sometimes create a scenario depicting un-cooperation with the Americans, when in fact they are doing the exact opposite, as in the case of covert CIA drone

strikes inside Pakistan's territory. In *Magnificent Delusions*, Haqqani further alludes to the fact that this relationship has changed but little when it comes to Pakistani leaders clamouring for aid, and the American misconception that they can demand prerequisites for assistance.

Historically, Pakistan has never rejected American aid outright, whether it is for military or civilian purposes, and Haqqani delineates how Pakistan used its strategic location to great effect. The first instance of such instrumental use was during the Nixon era, to ignite secret US overtures to China. The second instance cited by him was during the Reagan years, when Pakistan became the frontline state against the Soviet occupiers in Afghanistan- this was the high point of Pakistan-US relationship, with billions of dollars from Western aid flowing into Pakistan to counter the Communist threat. Then, Pakistan worked with the US as a counterterrorist partner during George W. Bush's War on Terror, launched after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US. The reward was unquestioned financial and military support. Throughout his book, Haqqani talks about Pakistan's India-centric foreign policy discourses. The notion of liberating Indian-occupied territory in Kashmir has led to an increased power of the military in Pakistan, which is largely dependent on US military and financial aid. A major concern for the US throughout the years has centred on whether the aid being provided to Pakistan will end up being used against India. Haqqani further adds that the tendency of the Pakistani nation as a whole to blame others for the socio-economic ills that afflict the country instead of owning up to them has become a norm, and compounds the distrust in its relations with the US. Also, Pakistan feels the need to safeguard its strategic interests and counter Indian influence in a post-9/11 Afghanistan, which is why US support becomes all the more urgent for Pakistan.

Haqqani does not add anything new to the narrative on the pattern of US-Pakistan relationship, but his book does reiterate the fact that placating one another has led to greater distrust and bitterness, and that the relationship remains motive-driven and insincere. In his concluding remarks, Haqqani says that building a new period of goodwill within a strained relationship will depend upon both countries re-establishing dialogue on a range of issues, from drone strikes to dealing with Taliban, the future of Afghanistan and India, and trade cooperation. According to Haqqani, the US should not expect aid to translate into leverage, and Pakistan must not chase its military ambitions through American aid. The crux of the problem lies in identifying Pakistan's national interests: it cannot become a regional player while supporting terrorism. Perceptions and hackneyed notions about one another have fuelled greater instability in the two countries' relations. Successive governments have either enjoyed a cordial or less-than-

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cordial personal rapport among counterparts within the military and civilian governments, who have often misunderstood each other's limitations. Pakistan's survival is hinged on redefining its priorities when it comes to fighting militancy and pursuing economic development. There needs to be a lowering of expectations on both sides, and instead of acting antagonistically towards each other, a more cautious approach is required in the formulation of future plans.

Ahmad Naeem Salik, Research Fellow,
Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad.
