



US ANALYST PUSHES CHABAHAR AS ALTERNATIVE FOR SUPPLIES TO AFGHANISTAN

By
Mahrukh Khan
Research Fellow

Edited by
Najam Rafique

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



Pakistan has been in the eye of storm in the US for past many months now, while the allegations made on the country are baseless and cretinous, and at best, questionable. Since last year, President Trump and his administration have been on a rampage to punish Pakistan for the US own failures, constantly portraying it as a security state harboring extremists and terrorists.

The recent gift that Pakistan got from US was suspension of military aid to the country,¹ which surprisingly did not come as a shock. On the contrary, US got a kick in the teeth when Pakistan reacted calmly, calling US a friend who always betrays,² which initiated a counter argument in many policy circles in Washington.

One of these was brought out in an article titled *Pakistan has all the leverage over Trump*, written by C. Christine Fair, an Associate Professor at the Centre for Peace and Security Studies, Georgetown University and published in *Foreign Policy* earlier in January 2018. As harmless as the title sounds, the article begins with a traditional, over the top, Pakistan bashing. As one would have expected, Fair criticises Pakistan for having “rallied its trolls”, but gives credit to Pakistan for being civilized

¹ Shaiq Hussain and Annie Gowen, "Pakistan official accuses U.S. of betrayal after suspension of military aid," *Washington Post*, January 5, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/pakistan-slams-us-suspension-of-military-aid-accuses-it-of-betrayal/2018/01/05/fb564c92-f1bc-11e7-95e3-eff284e71c8d_story.html?utm_term=.8044b5e81967

² "US not a friend, ties need review, Foreign Minister Khawaja Asif interview," *Geo News*, January 4, 2018, <https://www.geo.tv/latest/175310-pakistan-needs-to-revisit-ties-with-us-says-asif>

enough to have summoned the US ambassador in Islamabad to lodge its protest in reaction to the 'maiden tweet' by President Trump.

Going through the article, one cannot avoid but wonder how magnanimous US thinks of itself when it talks about all the aid it has given to Pakistan and what would Pakistan do if it is stopped or taken away.

To begin with, Pakistan and US relations have always been interest-based. Hence, we got accustomed to the word 'transactional' which doesn't seem so bad after all. Secondly, much of the aid that the US has given to Pakistan is not free, and which has been invested in all forms including the logistic support to coalition forces in Afghanistan to win the war against terrorism which the US brought on its door step. It has equally sacrificed in all forms to keep this war and menace at arm's length from its soil and is continuing to do so.

This act of Washington to bring Pakistan to its knees by once again slapping aid suspension reflects an extremely short-sighted policy approach. China and India factor is also brought out in the article, as India is shown to be excited by the tweet, while China is casted as a replacement of US for Pakistan.

So what exactly is the leverage that Pakistan has got over Trump? The article highlights three main fears or scenarios characterized as leverages which Pakistan has.

Topping the list is Pakistan's nuclear program, which according to Fair is the 'fastest growing nuclear program in the world, "whose warheads are 'moved around in unescorted soft-skin vehicles."

So, why is Pakistan's nuclear program considered a threat or a chip to bargain with a super power, when on the contrary, Pakistan has shown a remarkable stewardship of its nuclear program and is continuing to do so. Pakistan's development of nuclear program has been reactionary and not radical, neither does it see it as a bargaining chip of any sort to settle its matters with another country or leverage its interests. Furthermore, the "zoo of every kind of domestic, regional and transnational Islamist terrorist organisation" which the article argues, was actually brought and bred under by the US and International forces fighting in Afghanistan. When the war on terror started, there were two significant terrorist groups: Al-Qaeda and the Taliban who refused to turn over Osama Bin Laden.³ Sixteen years down the lane, 19 other terrorist organizations have mushroomed

³ "The Taliban," Mapping Militant Organisation, Stanford University, July 15, 2016, <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/367>

and operating in Afghanistan, making a total of 21.⁴ Yet, Pakistan is blamed for all the evils in the region.

The fears and scenarios that the article suggest regarding Pakistan's nuclear weapons falling in the hands of terrorists is nothing less than fictional and something interesting for a Hollywood plot. It provides a good story line to sell to the audience which propagates such designs, even though Pakistan's nuclear security record has been deemed impressive by the IAEA.⁵

The second scenario is Pakistan "threatening its own demise". One wonders what incentives does Pakistan has to do that. Pakistan's predicted annual growth rate over the next 10 years is nearly 6 per cent, according to the revised growth projections by the Centre for International Development (CID) at the Harvard University.⁶ Since 2002, the rate of poverty has fallen by half, and over the past three years, the rate of terrorist deaths has declined by two-thirds.⁷

Rather than a 'demise', Pakistan is well on its way to becoming a vibrant economy.

The third scenario that Fair suggests is that "US lost the war in Afghanistan when it went to war with Pakistan". Pakistan is not at war with any country, not even with India, let alone US, nor does it want to undermine any country's effort to stabilize and bring peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan's interest in Afghanistan are as similar as US - it wants a stable, peaceful Afghanistan. The scenario itself is suggestive, one where Fair would want US to go to war with Pakistan.

The article characterizes both Pakistan and Iran as dangerous, but justifies Iran terrorist proxies because it only has regional aspirations. This argument eventually leads to "consolidating fast growing ties" between India and US. It aspires to indict Pakistan as a country capable of nuclear terrorism, calling it an "actual nuclear proliferating sponsor of terrorism" and Iran a "potential nuclear proliferating sponsor of terrorism". Fair, at the same time, builds a case for US collaboration with "Indian contractors" in Chabahar to be a replacement for the land routes used by American forces from Pakistan to Afghanistan.

⁴ "16 years later, Afghan capital under siege," CBS News, January 11, 2018, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/16-years-later-afghan-capital-under-siege/>

⁵ "IAEA chief praises Pakistan's 'impressive' nuclear security record," The Express Tribune, September 27, 2015, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/963260/iaea-chief-praises-pakistans-impressive-nuclear-security-record/>

⁶ Wali Zahid, "Pakistan's GDP growth rate is even higher than that of China: Harvard study," The Express Tribune, July 7, 2017, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1452332/pakistans-gdp-growth-rate-even-higher-china-harvard-study/>

⁷ Tyler Cowen, "Pakistan's Economy Is a Pleasant Surprise," Bloomberg, 7 February, 2017 <https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-02-06/pakistan-s-economy-is-a-pleasant-surprise>

The article itself is full of exaggerated and wishful thinking of those who failed to isolate Pakistan. Perhaps Pakistan should also carry out its bilateral and foreign policy over social media rather through proper government channels as well.

The unfair criticism that Fair has carried out through her article on Pakistan is not unexpected, as it comes from a scholar who has had a fair share of anti-Pakistan narratives. Here again, she criticizes Pakistan for denying the allegations of its “nefarious deeds”, which so to say, are made by an aging super power, run by an impulsive President who threatens and bully other countries.

The main aim of the article eventually boils down to pushing the idea of using India not only as leverage in South Asia, but also the port of Chabahar in Iran under the Indian contractors as a replacement for the land routes currently used by US forces in Pakistan - an idea which has so far, not been a part of major discussions between US and India. The three scenarios discussed as leverages that Pakistan has are recycled versions of discussions and debate amongst groups that probably dread any role of Pakistan in the region, especially in Afghanistan.