

US-Pakistan Relations Post 9/11: Impact on Domestic Political Stability

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Abstract

The security partnership that the United States and Pakistan developed following the events of September 11, 2001, is one of the most consequential and controversial bilateral relationships in the 21st century. This paper represents an in-depth analysis of the way in which the restructured alliance based on mutual military assistance and engagement in the war on terrorism conditions the intra-Pakistani political stability. The paper explores the foreign security alliances, military authority entrenchment, development of the governance systems, militant uprising, and changes in public opinion. It brings into view the paradoxical consequences: on the one hand, this alliance contributes to the increase of survival chances and operational capabilities of the state, yet on the other hand, it strengthens the political vulnerability, the pattern of civil-military imbalance, and extreme polarization of the society.

Key Words: US-Pakistan Relations, Civil-Military Relations, War On Terror, Democratization, Military Aid, Governance, Anti-Americanism, Militancy.

Introduction

The relationship between the two nations- the US and Pakistan has been radically affected since the attacks on September 11, 2001, and not just influenced the flow of security in the region but the entire domestic politics of the Pakistani State. Immediately after 9/11, General Pervez Musharraf, the then-leader of the Pakistani military regime, revamped its military alliance, and Pakistan proved to be an irreplaceable ally of the War on Terror led by the US. This invaluable cooperation was not actually based on common democratic principles, but rather on intersecting security requirements and insecurities of the two states. These effects of this reorientation have been acutely felt in the polity, military establishment, economy, and civil society of Pakistan (Kronstadt, 2011).

The American assistance came in the form of removal of old imposed sanctions, restoration and increase of both the military and economic assistance, as well as the granting of the status of major non-NATO ally to Pakistan. Between 2001 and 2010, the U.S. gave Pakistan more than 20 billion dollars as aid, the bulk of which was supposed to be related to security aid. The justification given by American policymakers to such largesse was that it was necessary in fighting terrorism, maintaining stability in the region, and non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (Schaffer & Schaffer, 2011). This assistance has increased state strength, allowed modernization of the Pakistan military, and given the regime a temporary stability, according to the Pakistani leadership, including that of the military. But the transactional character of this relation was something that brought about seeds of long-term instability (Kronstadt, 2011).

The long-lasting consequence of the civil-military imbalance of history in Pakistan has been the continued deepening of the same. During modern history, the army of Pakistan has managed to use external support and joint interests to strengthen its own internal power structures, commonly at the cost of democratic systems and civilian control. The post-9/11 US involvement stuck to this same old shoe of providing large amounts of military aid that gave an undue advantage to the armed forces in Pakistan and shrinks down the room in which young democratic institutions could thrive. The US foreign aid flows have been found to always be biased towards military dictatorships; when the condition was civilian rule, the flows of the aid dwindled immensely, indicating that the US strategic aims at times superseded issues about promoting democracy and good governance (Ali, 2009).

The effects of such a strategy echoed around the internal state of affairs in Pakistan. Firstly, the issue of security concerns over democratic transformation did not support the efforts of achieving institutional checks and independence of power. As some analysts believe, US cooperation brought with it patronage streams that supported regimes of authoritarianism, policy instability, and elite capture, which nurtured feelings of foreign interference. In the meantime, militant and extremist organizations got the grounds and the reason to grow: they were the tribal areas of militant growth, and such incidents as the US drones hit fueled the wave of anti-Americanism, dragging

the nation and its Western allies. Polarisation of society increased, and disillusionment was experienced in the streets through urban actions as well as in the rising membership of opposition political parties and rights movements across the courts (Shah, 2018).

It is also noteworthy that US dealings with Pakistan were fundamentally episodic and tactical and were characterized by phases of close collaboration succeeded by episodes of acute alienation. Although the past decade after 9/11 signified a new familiarity, the same trend became evident in the past incidents, like the assistance provided to the Mujahideen during the 80s. These cycles produced lasting legacies on domestic political systems that led to the solidification of dependency relations and limited sovereign decision-making (Hussain, 2005). Ultimately, the US-Pakistan alliance continued to provide short-term benefits in the form of capacity and stability by the regime, although it has contributed to long-established weaknesses of the political order in Pakistan and, in some cases, even enhanced them. Increasing institution-building, security cooperation, and interconnected phenomena of endemic instability and backsliding on democratic norms contribute to an assessment that external assistance in post-crisis transitions must be conducted according to a high-level paradox or contradiction (Kronstadt, 2011).

Historical Evolution and Strategic Realignment

The history of the current US-Pakistan strategic closeness can be traced to the oscillating patterns of utility and disengagement. The Cold War proved to be an opportune time when Pakistan was closer to Washington, since through it, Pakistan was able to modernize its military in addition to being in a position to exert influence over the region, although the relationship was periodic and very pragmatic. With the 1980s came a significant surge in collaboration with Pakistan as the entry point of CIA aid to the Afghan mujahideen struggling against Soviet rule, but the deactivation of the Soviet forces and the consequent disintegration of the USSR signaled a sharp rollback of US interests in the region (Hussain, 2005).

The 1990s are testimony to the negative aspect of this circular process. The isolation of the economy, the softening of the state institutions, as well as the militarization of the elites is caused, in part, by US sanctions, which were imposed due to issues of production and development of nuclear weaponry that is experienced in Pakistan and due to the amendment of Pressler and Symington, introduced by a reaction on the establishment of such weaponry. At the same time, Pakistan's unspoken backing for increasing Taliban power in Afghanistan reveals an aim for strategic depth, but also sparks growing concern in Washington over Islamabad's dual role as an ally and a battleground of extremism (Fair, 2004).

The disastrous occurrences of 11th September 2001 catalyzed the shift in direction. Pakistan, due to its geostrategic location, is close to Afghanistan, and the immense logistical and intelligence links that the two nations have built over decades mean that they are invaluable to the US war effort. The military administration of General Pervez Musharraf cuts a decisive turnaround: the sanctions all get lifted or reversed, aid flows again on previously unknown levels, and the status of a major non-NATO ally is awarded to Pakistan. The remaking of the bilateral relationship is not characterized by true convergence of values, but instead it is informed by the strategic interests and weaknesses and dependent on others. This groundbreaking incident sets forth logic in which the imperative of security, as opposed to the demands of democratization or development of countries, forms the hinge pin of policy-making, diplomacy, and movements of resources (Kronstadt, 2011).

Expansion of Military Aid and the Security State

The post-2001 period is characterized by the sophistication of US military assistance in Pakistan. Over the period 2001-2013, Pakistan was provided with over 20 billion US dollars of a combined military and economic aid, of which at least two-thirds is intended to be used in the specific activities of the security sector, combating terrorism, and regulation of the borders. The range of help includes the purchase of rotary and fixed-wing aircraft, modernization of armored fighting vehicles, investment in communications, and modernization of intelligence networks and tactical reconnaissance systems. The Pakistani forces are also linked to the NATO and the US commands in theater through joint training, special operation exchanges, and real-time intelligence sharing.

Alongside that, civilian aid does not go unheeded but is outstripped, numerically and symbolically, by security sector flows. With the imposition of the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act (Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act), 2009, civilian aid is now allocated at 1.5 billion dollars annually, with the condition of tangible democratic reforms, financial accountability, and counter-extremism in the country. The extensive structure of benchmarks and certifications that is embedded in civilian assistance, however, turns out to be the source of tension, both between Islamabad and Washington and among civil-military establishments within Pakistan (Kronstadt, 2011).

The systemic result of such flows of help is the systemic strengthening of the military as the supreme structure in Pakistan, both internally and in its transactions with the external world. The weapons, education, and international authority granted by the US alliance allow the military to act as defense, foreign policies, and to a great extent, the internal security agenda, forming masters. The elevation of the military in the portfolio of civilian governance becomes rampant at the daily governing level to the extent that it extends its operation to the ruling level up to the regulation and economic policy in a direct or indirect form (Aziz, 2007).

Civil-Military Relations and Political Institutions

With the post-9/11 cooperation accelerating the reassertion of military superiority in Pakistani politics, a permanent mark is placed within the design and operation of political institutions. Decentralization of the decision-making process into the hands of the office of the president, cooptation and establishment of loyal political parties, and use of emergency powers come into the picture under General Musharraf (Aziz, 2007). Musharraf strengthens long-term military rule by a succession of referenda and a constitutional amendment regime that brings the important aspects of civilian life formally under the control of the military via the National Security Council.

The indirect military rule alternating with strategic collaboration and passive supervision is retained even after formal civilian changeovers after 2008. In the national security, foreign affairs, and domestic law enforcement, elected governments of both the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) governments take care of accommodating the military preferences of the country. The perception of parliamentary sovereignty is undermined by the practices of regular briefings by the military, which frame the policy debate and times of overt hostility, like the Mumbai attacks of 2008 or the Abbottabad raids of 2011, when the bluffing beneath the artificial politeness is demonstrated (Schaffer & Schaffer, 2011).

The effects of institutional development are poor since fundamental institutions of public administration and justice are both subject to similar strains of politicization (to please the military) and constant instability. Although formal independence of the judiciary is maintained in landmark cases like the Lawyers Movement (2007-2009), it can still always be undermined again by a revocation of the doctrine of necessity, which legitimizes the military interventions during a crisis. Elites block bureaucratic reform again and again as they fight over the spoils of rent-seeking based on the military patronage or the delivery of American aid (Afzal, 2018). The result is an unstable institutional system: the civilian governance is characterized by truncated policy horizons, the leadership of civil service echoes with the politico-cadre, and the reform process, such as in economic liberalization, education, or tackling extremism, is secondary to the changes in security interests. Even civil society gains are subject to backward steps every time the military perceives its central prerogatives to be in jeopardy.

Sovereignty, Public Opinion, and the Production of Anti-Americanism

The shifting of ties between the US and Pakistan after the 9/11 incident had serious impacts on the Pakistani perception of sovereignty, as well as dominantly influencing the opinion on the ground, and gave rise to long-term and intricate pent-up feelings of anti-American sentiment in Pakistani society. At the center was the common belief that the U.S. policies, in particular those that involve counterterrorism initiatives and military assistance, meant to pare down the autonomy and freedom of the state of Pakistan, which is why most people held a lot of contempt towards the policies. This was further worsened by the unilateral military action on Pakistani territory, especially the hypothesis of drones in the tribal areas and the U.S. raid in Abbottabad, which killed Osama bin Laden in 2011. These penetrations, which were not explicitly agreed upon by Pakistan or communicated in an explicit way, were regarded as a direct violation of both the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the country and an illustration of the frailties inherent in the bilateral relation of asymmetry of power. In particular, the Abbottabad operation eroded the confidence of the population in the government and the armed forces because many people doubted whether the state could guard its borders and sustain its national honor. This feeling of humiliation crossed over political leanings, and it became a rationale people could unite on regarding the national political arena (Ali, 2009).

The fact that Pakistani favorability towards the United States has decreased dramatically in the decade following 9/11 is confirmed by data provided by such respected voices as the Pew Research Center. Positive attitudes towards the U.S. also plummeted drastically between nearly 25 percent in the early 2000s to about 16 percent (Pew Research Center, 2012). In addition to the suffering and death of civilian lives due to drone attacks, the civilian perceptions that the United States did not respect the lives and efforts of Pakistan in the War on Terror, and even supported terrorist elements on its soil to achieve its self-serving interests, additionally led to the surge of anti-Americanism among a high proportion of Pakistanis. Also, regular news reports led to increased anxiety in the country in relation to the breach of sovereignty. Such stories were picked up by high-profile politicians on both ends of the political spectrum, criticizing American motives, either underlining American interest as exploitative or

Western value (and geopolitical) interests as a pretext. Episodes like the Raymond Davis affair, along with steady reports of American espionage in Pakistan, further fuelled the nationalistic feelings and distrust of the bilateral relationship (Fair, 2011).

In order to comprehend the production of anti-Americanism in Pakistan, one cannot, accordingly, only view it as the natural response of the people, but as an institutionalized process whereby the state and the society contribute towards this. Political elites have often used anti-U.S. rhetoric to gain consolidation inside the countries or shift the focus to domestic issues and problems in their governance. Simultaneously, the stories of sovereignty transcendence have become overnight indoctrinated in the minds of common Pakistanis due to persistent media coverage of drone attacks and invasive exercises of military operations. These accounts have now formed part of the school curricula, popular cultural and religious discourse, which all underline the idea of Pakistani identity defined in contradiction to Western interference. Anti-Americanism has thus taken a self-perpetuating and pervasive nature where the resentment about the U.S. violations of sovereignty compounds on fears that are held among the people which in turn restrict the freedom of the government to practice moderate and realistic approach to the U.S. This dynamic has hindered the diplomatic ability of Pakistan and has made the process of reconnecting the bilateral relationship on some grounds that could lead to a greater domestic political stability difficult (Ali, 2009).

As a whole, the Post-9/11 decade of the U.S.-Pakistan relations was marked by a series of sovereignty-related tensions of a nature that deeply penetrated the national consciousness, securing anti-Americanism as a meaningful political-cultural factor in the country. The symptoms of this phenomenon point to the complex problems that the bilateral partnership is facing, as strategic cooperation often runs against competing demands of national pride, domestic legitimacy, and political stability.

The Paradox of Militancy, Security, and State Fragility

The implication of the US-Pakistan relationship on domestic security is characterized by an enduring paradox. The interests of the alliance are transparent: break the terror networks, create no safe zone for violent non-state actors, and stabilize the borderlands with neighboring countries of Afghanistan. Operationally, a series of military operations, Operation Al-Mizan, Operation Rah-e-Rast, and Operation Zarb-e-Azb, led to the elimination or relocation of hundreds of militant leaders and the interference of cross-border insurgent logistics (Jones & Fair, 2010). However, its overall impact on internal security is not clear. Military actions often result in retaliatory strikes, holding targets at civilians and governmental positions, which has the opposite effect of pacification that is supposed to be achieved. The rise of organizations like Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi, and affiliates of Islamic State demonstrates the versatility of the system of militant networks that find a home in communities wounded by displacement, either economic neglect, and the corollary costs of countering insurgency (Fair, 2004).

The main urban areas of Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, and Quetta are plagued by a series of bombings and assassinations. Educational institutions and shrines are specially attacked to create the maximum amount of terror among the people and shake the faith of people towards the state. The civilian economic cost is staggering: there is a foreign investment collapse, there is a repeated shutdown of critical infrastructure, and displacement is overstressing already stretched public services. Aid conditionality is linked to US counter-terror doctrines in the Pakistani state, which in turn focuses primarily on kinetic actions, leaving many important development and reconciliation elements under-resourced. There is still the problem of regional imbalances and limited possibilities of integrating FATA and other trouble spots on the margins of mainstream politics, due to legislative hesitations and administrative drag. Although eruptions of violence initiate a temporary influx of foreign aid, they reduce access to structural changes needed in cases of perpetual peace (Jones & Fair, 2010).

Governance, Political Institutions, and Civil Society: Struggles for Autonomy

Security priorities and external mandates to the fore put pressure on the core functions of governance that basis stability in the long run. The locus of control is also through the influence of military-led crisis management teams, which diminishes the driving force of parliament, civilian executives, and provincial bureaucracies. Policymaking is commonly responsive, involving firefighting over the newest emergency, be it a terrorist strike, a diplomatic spat, or a weather catastrophe (Schaffer & Schaffer, 2011). Irrespective of such limitations, the vibrancy and at times the capacity to topple vested interests make the civil society in Pakistan remarkable. With the spread of independent media, the professionalization of legal advocacy organizations, and the increasing number of specialized NGOs in health, education, and rights protection, pluralism and reforms are granted a vital yet insecure space. The cases in point, which include the Lawyers Movement (2007), show the potential in terms of mobilization of the people behind the need to democratize the rule of law and separation of the judicial system (Afzal, 2018).

Activism by the civil society, however, is always met with government opposition, press restraint, and sometimes, violence. Activists, journalists who cover military operations or foreign policies are intimidated, kidnapped, and harassed by the courts. The use of foreign funding by NGOs is extremely controlled, and immigration policies are used as a means of silencing human rights activists (Hussain, 2005). This has the overall effect of a system that favors preserving the elite at the expense of only occasional gains in civil liberty and responsiveness in governance. Windows of significant reform, usually created in times of crisis or transition, are frequently closed by the introduction of security emergencies, postponement of elections, or the imposition of new cycles of militarized rule.

Security Partnership, Political Instability, and Prospects for Reform

The alliance in security that the United States had clinched with Pakistan in response to 9/11 had immediate strategic benefits to the latter in addition to triggering an envisaged trail of deep political and institutional problems in Pakistan. The US military and economic assistance was particularly concentrated after the events of 2001 and through 2013, which sought to enhance the counter terrorism capability of Pakistan as well as the stability of a country that could be described as a pivotal yet volatile state. More than 20 billion dollars of aid reached Pakistan during this time, with most of this aid going to the security operations on the Pakistani-Afghan border as well as the modernization of the Pakistani military. Although this aid had a positive impact on enhancing their operations, the actions helped in entrenching the authority of the military in the Pakistani political and economic system, at times to the cost of the development of democracy and strengthening institutions (Kronstadt, 2011).

The arrival of US aid ironically made Pakistan more vulnerable to domestic political unrest. The civilian institutions were not strong enough to strike a balance between democratizing the country and the need to ensure state security, as the role of the military in governance increased, particularly with the regular support of the military and strategic preferences. Such an imbalance was most evident in the dictatorship of General Pervez Musharraf, where reforms were brought based on the rhetoric of enlightened moderation without necessarily being inclusive and with long-term democratic roots (Hussain, 2005). Dominance of the military in national matters implied that any campaign of political reform was often bound to national security concerns, and important decisions affecting foreign policy, economic policy, and combating terrorism remained exclusive to the armed forces. This led to the shrinking of the democratic space, constant violations of civilian rule, and institutional weaknesses, which ensured that Pakistan was vulnerable to a cycle of crisis of legitimacy and rule (Ali, 2009).

Although the US-Pakistan security relationship had seemingly served the interests of regional counterterrorism, the policy had tended to ignore the root causes of instability in Pakistan, such as economic disparity, sectarian tensions, and ethnic discords. Popular resentment and the complicating of the chances of sustainable reform were caused by aid conditionality, changes in the US policy toward Pakistan, and the contentiousness of drone strikes and perceived sovereignty violations, all of which were issues subject to popular debate. In the context of political instability, i.e., the Lawyers Movement and the response to martial law in 2007, as well as subsequent demonstrations against civilian government performance, the legitimacy of the Pakistani state and of American partnership with it was called into question (Schaffer & Schaffer, 2011).

The hope of change in Pakistan is inevitably linked to the possibility of ending the cycle of excessive use of military solutions and creating an institution capable of providing not only effective governance but also greater responsibility towards society. Analysts have been urging that the external assistance, though very important in terms of short-term stabilization, should be followed by a subtle focus on long-term socioeconomic restructuring, an independent judiciary, the rule of law, and power sharing between civilians and the military (Hussain, 2005). The task is to shift to a more visionary model of operation that allows the consolidation of democracy, a transparent governance system, and the ability to resist internal and regional security challenges. Such multi-dimensional reforms are the only way to ensure that the relationship with an excessively securitized partner is avoided, as it has destabilized the partnership to the extent that sound political institutions and lasting relations between the US and Pakistan can be achieved (Schaffer & Schaffer, 2011).

Conclusion

The new relationship between the United States and Pakistan that has developed somewhat after 9/11 has made a multidimensional mark on political stability in Pakistan. The first wave of military and economic support by the US helped to enhance the state apparatus of Pakistan in the short term, helping the government deal with the emergence of militancy and coping with a sharp security threat. Nonetheless, inasmuch as through this alliance, temporary stability and improvement of the operational capacity have been achieved, it has also deepened structural issues that have plagued the democratic progress and organizational strength in Pakistan. This kind of security-oriented

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