**Pak-US relations and Afghanistan conundrum**

*Pak-US relations did not develop because of mutuality of interests rather they were informed by political expediency*

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Pak-US relations have been back on track after a long spell of acrimony coming in the wake of President Trump’s tweets at the start of the year in which he seemed nullifying Pakistan so far efforts in the war against terrorism and which prompted the incumbent government to deliver a message unequivocally with all stakeholders on the same page to the [United States](https://dailytimes.com.pk/325816/irans-rouhani-calls-for-muslims-to-unite-against-united-states/) (US) that Pakistan wanted an acknowledgement for their stand by the US instead of being fed mantra of “Do More”. The recent thaw in the bitter relationship has been prompted by the recently sent letter on the part of the US President Trump, seeking Pakistan’s support in finding a solution to Afghanistan conundrum through negotiations.

As Pakistan aided US-Taliban talks are set to kick off on Monday and it is hoped that the joint overture for stability gets pace this time as an instability in Afghanistan has been turning out to be a bane for the whole region in almost every aspect-be it socially, politically and economically- it is worth reflecting on Pak-US relations at this moment in the light of history to find out patterns in the bonhomie between the super power, the US, and client state, Pakistan, for variation of interests dictated political expediency, resulting in a fair-weather friendship between the two states and giving birth to a lot of distrust. It’s important to bring into spotlight the pitfalls of Pak-US relations in the light of history as mistakes of the past are likely to surface again in the upcoming talks if they are not heeded to and may turn the seemingly proximity into a bitter [relationship](https://dailytimes.com.pk/329763/us-and-pakistan-a-doomed-relationship/).

Going back to early years of Pakistan’s existence, Pak-US relations did not develop because of mutuality of interests rather they were informed by political expediency. Pakistan early overtures towards the US reflective from Prime Minister Liaqat Ali Khan’s visit to the US and later on signing of the pacts like SEATO and CENTO- in the wake of which Pakistan received a lot of military assistance and expertise- were predominantly informed to fend off the security threat emanating from the eastern border, India. On the other hand, the US generosity towards Pakistan with respect to economic and military assistance in early years was aimed at another interest that was to make it capable enough to stand against communist threat, which was in retrospection not a substantial threat to Pakistan, and perhaps to enlist Pakistan in the capitalist block to impress upon the Soviets its widening influence across the globe.

Thus, Pak-US relations without mutuality of substantial interests backfired after a first decade due to the US increasing overtures towards India and also because of Pakistan invoking wrath of the Soviet Union after a US spy plane that had taken off from military airbase in Peshawar was shot down by the Soviets.  As a result what we see in General Ayub’s era is that Pak seemed neutral vis-à-vis its foreign policy by making overtures towards beacons of then communist bloc in the likes of China and Soviet Union instead of confining itself to capitalist bloc.

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The relations between Pakistan and the US generally remained close but replete with a lot of skepticism during General Ayub’s eraas, at crucial times in the likes of 1965 war and 1971 war, which was though not in General Ayub’s era, the US left Pakistan in lurch. Apart from the fleeting bonhomie which came in the wake of Pakistan helping the US to build diplomatic relations with China in 1971 during General Yahya’s era, relations between the two countries did not remain well during Prime Minister Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto’s era because of Bhutto’s socialist disposition and nuclear pursuits.

End of 1970s brought Pak-US relations into close proximity in the wake of Afghanistan’s occupation by Soviets. Forgetting the past grudges and politically expedient to both for differing interests- for the US, the aim was to defeat its rival in Afghanistan and, for Pakistan, economic assistance and military expertise mattered most- both Pakistan and the US pursued a proxy war against Soviets in Afghanistan for almost a decade and it culminated not only in defeat of Soviets in Afghanistan but also the collapse of the Soviet Union as well, resulting in end of the cold war. However, post Soviets’ defeat in Afghanistan, strains appeared in Pak-US relations in 1990s and sanctions were imposed upon Pakistan for allegedly pursuing nuclear program. The US left Pakistan alone to deal with civil war in Afghanistan coming in the wake of Soviet’s defeat for power among different warring groups. Pakistan was bombarded with a lot of sanctions and international isolation for its nuclear tests in 1998 in reply to nuclear tests on the part of India.

Pak-US relations were downbeat prior to 9/11 because of already imposed sanctions coming in the wake of nuclear tests by Pakistan and due to Pakistan having a dictatorship instead of democratic government. However, 9/11 made it imperative upon both Pakistan and the US to work as allies in war against terrorism as for the US to pursue the war sans Pakistan would have been difficult, keeping in view the way then Taliban government had been patronized by Pakistan since 1996. The war seemed imposed on Pakistan purely for the US interests in the beginning but Pakistan could not risk diplomatic isolation by not becominga part of the US camp and refusing to support the US in its war against terrorism. What Pakistan should have done after 9/11, if analyzed at the moment, might turn out to be quite debatable but this is fact that Pakistan’s foreign policy had a walk on tightrope at that time and it must have been quite tough for everyone at that time to be at the helm in policy making.

It has been now more than a decade that Pakistan and the US have been in relation to each other with respect to instability in Afghanistan. The issue at hand though in the beginning could have been turned unilateral yet it’s now mutual. Because of not catering to it head on, it has cost both states in humungous ways. Pakistan has lost almost 70,000 personnel because of backfiring of its dual policies vis-à-vis Afghanistan. On the other hand, the US exclusive approach to find a solution to Afghanistan without paying heed to stakes of regional actors especially that of Pakistan has been turning out to be economic black hole for its economy with no dividend in return. Overall, the relationship between the US and Pakistan vis-a- vis Afghanistan has been plagued with skepticism and distrust coming in the wake of past transactions.

At this point, when Pakistan and the US have resolved to mutually work together for bringing stability in Afghanistan, there is no gainsaying the fact that the bitterness of the past grudges might surface again and they would, but keeping in view the mutuality of interest and future of Afghans and the region at stake, they need to go beyond differences of the past and figure out a win-win solution for Afghanistan. For a long lasting solution to Afghanistan via enlisting Pakistan’s support, the US needs to assure Pakistan that it regards its concerns and wants to engage with it for a long term in a multifaceted manner instead of leaving it in lurch like it happened many a times in the past once its (US) interests were met.

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