**Causes of Intermittent Anti-Americanism in Pakistan**

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Ever since the PTI government was removed via a vote of no confidence, there’s been a sense of political and economic uncertainty prevailing which the PMLN-led coalition government is unable to tackle. This itself is causing the ruling party’s political demise at an accelerated rate owing to multiple factors.

However, today’s piece isn’t focused on the usual politics but on anti-American sentiments that have re-emerged in the last couple of months. PTI believes that US officials played a key role in its ouster but there’s a lack of tangible evidence apart from an embassy cypher whose contents may not be enough to ascertain American involvement. To be frank, domestic politics tied to the upcoming November appointment has more weightage for the party’s constitutional miseries.

Washington and Islamabad have had a transactional relationship over the decades which remained security-centric, as mentioned in some of my earlier pieces. Anti-Americanism was largely non-existent during the first couple of decades and only gained prominence after the Soviet-Afghan War concluded. Ironically, right-wing groups used to have favourable views for Washington until this point which went downhill ever since.

Between the 1950s and early 1970s, state-level relations were of a bonhomie nature with a red carpet welcome given to Pakistani leadership. This largely stemmed from Cold War politics to contain Soviet influence in South Asia. Atoms for Peace program, SEATO/CENTO membership and funnelling aid for development and security were part of consistent influence. A number of people may not be aware but Pakistanis used to enjoy a visa-on-arrival facility in the United States until 1970 but the number of passport holders was much lower than it is nowadays. Similarly, most European countries provided such perks for Pakistan until 1983 but by then, security dynamics were becoming unstable.

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Musharraf years have had their own impact which resultantly caused anti-American sentiments to increase multiple folds despite strong bilateral ties that were again, military-oriented. The War on Terror had essentially made Washington an ‘enemy’ in the eyes of the majority of the Pakistanis which was further fuelled by the infamous AfPak policy whose primary driver was the drone strikes program. The dual nature of the then Pakistani leadership on the program was unsurprising given the overall extractive nature of political elites.

The public had increasingly become wary of Washington’s designs in the region yet the age of the internet, had also caused the country to become a wild den of conspiracy theories where conservative nature played a pivotal role in influencing the masses. Sections of the media with right-wing tendencies became a hotbed of disinformation and continue to do so under newer formats such as YouTube vlogs, Instagram and Twitter.

But can the masses be blamed for such an upshot in mistrust between Pakistan and the United States? Washington itself remained indifferent to the negative impact its foreign policy had on the region with its bonhomie with the BJP and refusal to openly call out New Delhi for its Nazism-inspired politics. Continuing to plead with the Indians to stop trading with some ‘hostile countries’ is the cherry on the top for it shows how desperate the US had become to keep India in its sphere of influence. PTI’s ‘imported government’ narrative is prevailing because Washington, under the Democrats, couldn’t stabilise its relations with Imran Khan given it’s a two-way street. It’s an undeniable fact that Khan enjoyed cordial ties with the preceding Republican setup which was on the road to stability.

Nevertheless, PTI should tone down its rhetoric against Washington and explore possibilities for backchannel talks with the Democrats on the party level. Should it return to the power corridors, its anti-American narrative may not be fruitful in national interests but not at the cost of mutual respect and admiration. Khan himself should have avoided an antagonist tone against European partners as well for it wasn’t in the state’s interests when he was prime minister. Yes, their unusual ‘coercive’ attitude over the Moscow-Kyiv standoff was undiplomatic but concerns could always have been conveyed via diplomatic channels rather than dragging foreign diplomats into domestic politics. These diplomats represent their states in an official capacity and being disrespectful on the leadership level, doesn’t bode well ever.

Similarly, when the British High Commission celebrated HM the Queen’s birthday in Islamabad last week, PTI leaders rude tone over the cake photo implied a lack of respect for another country which enjoys strong ties with Pakistan at all levels. Ironically, some PTI leaders are or used to be dual nationals and such kind of naïve rhetoric is unfruitful and laughable at best.

Coming back to US-Pakistan relations, there’s unmatched potential in paving way for far better relations on a bilateral level with people to people contact and trade being the primary movers. The US had no ambassador stationed in Islamabad for almost four years and with the arrival of Ambassador-designate Donald Blome, there’s a potential to reshape ties on multifaceted grounds rather than remaining security-centric as indicated in his interview with a private newspaper recently. In October, the relations would mark 75 years and this is the best time to reduce hostilities not only on state but public level as well. The process is painstakingly slow but each step could be a ladder of opportunities for both sides to benefit from.

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