**Charting the Nexus**

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October 14, 2022

According to popular perception, Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari’s trip was pivotal in advancing a kind US response to the flood situation in Pakistan and the subsequent renewal of ties. These developments include the possible sale of F-16 aircraft sustainment equipment for $450 million.

The minister expressed optimism about the new policy of the US towards Pakistan during his remarks at the Wilson Centre.

There is a clear effort by US policymakers to reframe the partnership. The problem is that the relationship has been the source of heated debate in Pakistan.

Discontent with the US in Pakistan dates back decades, although not always for the correct reasons. Everything shifted after the US became involved with Pakistan after 9/11. As the war against terrorism, as a whole, and the fight in Afghanistan, in particular, brought loss and suffering to Pakistan, the country’s long-standing grudges and mistrust morphed into complaints and rage. The opposition to the US-sponsored military government, an unprecedented rage of US-India connections, and the nuclear accord largely contributed to the escalation of anti-American sentiment.

Religious, democratic, and nationalist surges collided to create a perfect storm of anti-Americanism and anti-General Musharraf sentiment. The conditions were perfect for the rise of a demagogue.

An independent policy’s cornerstone is internal strength, which helps to protect national interests by relieving one of external dependence and vulnerability to exploitation.

Populists do not have sway in public opinion. And then they harden and use them. They have created bogus foes while pretending to be saviours. So, Imran Khan said he was on a mission to rescue the people of Pakistan from corrupt politicians and the America they believed was supporting the corrupt politicians. While reflecting widespread public discontent with governance, the elite, and the status quo, anti-Americanism surged to epidemic proportions. The US was not the exclusive focus. It wasn’t even about the US on some level.

No populist can single-handedly change popular opinion. They have got hardened and used by them. They make up villains and then claim to be heroes. Thus, Imran Khan stated he was on a mission to rescue the people of Pakistan from corrupt politicians and an America that was blamed for backing them. Pervasive anti-Americanism, however, mirrored widespread public discontent with the government, the elite, and the status quo. This issue involved more than just the US. This had nothing to do with America.

Did Assistant Secretary of State Donald Lu threaten a regime change at Ambassador Asad Majeed’s farewell lunch? No, he didn’t have to. He trusted Pakistan’s government because of its cooperative stance toward the US. Is that what you heard him say? The possibility exists that he did. Great nations frequently make their opinions known on the governance of smaller states.

General Qamar Javed Bajwa, chief of the Pakistani armed forces, recently returned home after a five-day trip to the US, which was widely reported as an effort to improve ties between the two countries. In Pakistan, the media was more concerned with how the visit may affect the country’s domestic politics. At the same time, coverage in international outlets focused on relations between Pakistan and the US, India, and China.

In Pakistan, a new administration has taken office, and the US has ended its involvement in the Afghan war, partially due to Islamabad’s meddling. By doing so, complications, which had been standing in the way of Pakistan and the US as they wished to repair their relationship are now gone. The US is cognizant of the fact that China cannot pursue a successful South Asian policy if it only focuses on its enmity with India.

“The relationships we have with Islamabad and New Delhi are independent of one another,” State Department spokesperson Ned Price recently stated.

The security issues that Pakistan and the US share cannot be resolved by any country acting alone. Both parties will gain more power and alternatives to pursue their individual economic and strategic goals by re-engaging and expanding their relationships in the area and beyond.

Islamabad is forced to maintain cordial ties with all of the world’s major countries because of its fragile economy and the prospect of instability posed by cross-border terrorism, socioeconomic unrest, and insurgency threats. America must be considered in more ways than just security cooperation. It is Pakistan’s principal export market. A lot of untapped potential exists for IT collaborations. Washington is also eager to look into other potential avenues for economic collaboration.

Pakistan should pursue a separate foreign policy, as Imran Khan correctly points out. But to be independent, one need not be opposed to the US. An independent policy’s cornerstone is internal strength, which helps to protect national interests by relieving one of external dependence and vulnerability to exploitation. Then, one can relate to powerful people because one may wish to rather than because there is no other option. Pakistan needs to be fixed, not America.

Is it easy to get better ties? Not exactly. There are still questions. The future of the relationship will be shaped and impacted by a variety of factors, including unfavourably due to US-India relations, favourably due to Pakistan’s potential counterterrorism assistance, inconsistently due to ties between Pakistan and the Afghan Taliban, and unpredictably due to tensions between the US and China. How Pakistan’s domestic politics develop will determine relationships.

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