**The future of Pak-US relations**

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Generally it is believed that relations between any two countries are dependent on the behaviour of the two with each other. But in realpolitik, the impact of the behaviour is directly proportional to the power being wielded by each side. There is no such thing as ethics, justice, a level playing field and fair play. It is a simple, and at times complicated, interplay of competing or aligned interests. Thus, for a weak country (void of resources and political will) to stand up for its legitimate interests (political, economic and way of life) is a Herculean, and sometimes nearly impossible task. In which category do US-Pakistan relations fall? On one side is a superpower with an injured ego and on the other end is hardly a mid-power country, struggling for internal political and social harmony, managing, with difficulty, tense relations with all its neighbours, with an economy totally hostage to the IMF, WB, Middle East etc, ineffective governance and a highly-flawed decision making mechanism.

[Fans laud Shaheens and opening pair for recording first-ever World T20 win over India](https://nation.com.pk/24-Oct-2021/fans-laud-shaheens-and-opening-pair-for-recording-first-ever-world-t20-win-over-india)

Fortunately or unfortunately, the situation within the US is also not very soothing. An internal political stand off, a series of failed military campaigns, the fear of rising China and resurgent Russia, shrinking political clout and some chinks in the economic armour have all combined to profoundly impact their clear vision and ability to take the right and timely decisions. And naturally, they are not ready to listen to the sane voices emerging from within their polity, society or elsewhere. So their relations with the rest of the world are likely to get affected by all of the above mentioned factors, along with some additional specific regional developments that could aggravate the already existing imbalance in American thinking.

The readers would not be taxed by reviewing the entire history of the Pak-US relations, let us rather take stock of the situation as it stands now. The American establishment is looking for a scapegoat to put a veil on their own political and military incompetence, whereby they totally missed out on the history and sociology of this region in general and that of Afghanistan in particular. The enduring US interests in the region, like resisting Chinese political and economic influence, preventing Russian access to Indian Ocean, subverting BRI/CPEC etc, will keep them glued on to the Afghan situation and thus Pakistan. The well-tested carrot and stick tools are being employed once again for the umpteenth time, and hopefully, we are not likely to behave in the same familiar manner of appeasement and succumbing to their indirect and direct pressures, not withstanding our critically curtailed freedom to make independent policy decisions. The same techniques being employed with the Afghans who are fiercely independent in their attitudes. Iran is already in a defiant role. India is joining ranks with the US to further her own motives related to Pakistan and China.

[T20 World Cup: Babar, Rizwan lead Pakistan to historic victory by 10 wickets against India](https://nation.com.pk/24-Oct-2021/t20-world-cup-babar-rizwan-lead-pakistan-to-historic-victory-by-10-wickets-against-india)

With a totally botched up economy, effectively cornered by the swords of the IMF and FATF etc, Pakistan has limited conventional options, mostly culminating into even an more mortal grip of the US and institutions under her strong influence. An out-of-the-box solution is required to emancipate Pakistan from this dreadful debt trap. Irrespective of its precarious economic situation and internal disharmony resulting into a weak policy framework, Pakistan cannot compromise on some basic vital and important national interests: its relationship with China, peace in Afghanistan, CPEC, Kashmir etc. And in all these areas, Indian and US interests closely match, and run squarely across Pakistan’s objectives.

So how should Pakistan find converging interests with the US in own region? Difficult question, but it has some options, though hard to realise. Firstly, if the US desires that CPEC should remain only an economic corridor and not get converted into anything else (strategic corridor, Gwadar as a foreign military base etc) they need to talk to Pakistan. Maybe this is one area where we can hope to converge. After all, Pakistan will be better off by not conceding any military base on its soil, and with a large coastal region, we can offer economic incentives to more than a single entity. Secondly, America would definitely not like to leave Afghanistan totally under the influence of China, Russia and others. Though they have evacuated the area militarily, they would like to return with a changed mask and a new strategy, and compete in the fields of economy and politics. And operating from the safe base (not in the military sense) of Pakistan is the best bet even today. Here also, Pakistan after developing some understanding with China and Afghanistan, and putting forth some matching demands, can create a conducive converging environment.

[Jam Kamal Alyani steps down from his post as Balochistan CM](https://nation.com.pk/24-Oct-2021/jam-kamal-alyani-steps-down-from-his-post-as-balochistan-cm)

Now it is up to the US, western allies and India to decide on adopting one of the two broad options. One, to keep following an adversarial relationship with the new interim Afghan government and keep trying to precipitate turmoil and unrest by employing legal, economic, political and covert intelligence instruments (the policy being presently followed). Two, to change strategy, take a wide u-turn and come back with investment, loans, aids etc, mainly through INGOs and third-party corporate companies initially, and later directly. This may result into enhanced politico-economic leverage for the US, west and India, and could be a good match for Sino-Russian ingress in the region.

It is assessed that America and her allies will be much better off and successful if they go for the second option of rapprochement and keep competing with China and Russia, rather than totally leaving the region to them. So this course of action by the US is more likely, as it serves their interests much better. But for that to happen smoothly, a patch up with Pakistan will be required once again. Pakistan’s Prime Minister has reiterated a number of times that we can join in the efforts of peace and economic activities. To succeed in this option Pakistan will have to be provided some respite from the financial stranglehold, and the resistance to CPEC will have to be dropped. The wildcard in this entire scenario is India, with her enduring designs against Pakistan and animosity with China. America will have to tame this ally.

[T20 World Cup: Babar, Rizwan duo continue to lead Pakistan's 152-run chase against arch rivals India](https://nation.com.pk/24-Oct-2021/t20-world-cup-babar-rizwan-duo-lead-pakistan-s-152-run-chase-against-arch-rivals-india)

All is not lost in Pak-US relations. It is for the leadership of both countries to realise those potentials that can bring the countries closer. Pakistan still enjoys some leverages (geographical location, relations with China and the Afghan regime etc) and the Americans can play with their political, economic and media clout. The only baseline is that this time, Pakistan must not sell itself cheap, and ensure cutting itself free from the ominous debt trap and India’s bullying attitude. But the final decisions would be by the US leadership, if they can positively see what has been proposed. The future relationship is also dependent heavily on the ability of the Pakistani Foreign Office to work with conviction, knowledge and international relations logic, laying out the plans of cooperation and mutual assistance clearly and convincingly. Pakistani leadership should assume an active role rather than waiting for any move from elsewhere. Peace in the region will ultimately be beneficial for all including the United States and India.