

# **Changing Dynamics of Pak-US Relations and the Challenge of Soft Power**

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## ABSTRACT

There is a history of ups and downs in Pak-US relations since early 1950s till today. From the period of alliances to ostensible hostility and indifference, the changing dynamics of Pak-US relations must be analysed from a pragmatic point of view where power, national interests, security and sovereignty matter. Furthermore, mistrust, suspicions, ill-will and paranoia still influence the political, security, economic and power dynamics of relations between Pakistan and the United States. This research follows the theory of soft power due to two main reasons. First, instead of being a 'patron-client' relationship, Pak-US relations could be transformed by focusing on diplomacy, trade and technology instead of threats and coercion. Second, President Obama's policy of 'do more' for Pakistan in combating terrorism in Afghanistan proved to be counterproductive as anti-Americanism surged in Pakistan. Overcoming the bitterness of the past in Pak-US relations will be a major challenge to the Biden-Harris administration. Moving forward in Pak-US relations will require political will, determination, prudence and trust from both sides. It is up to the leadership from both countries to foster trust and take confidence building measures which can transform their relations from patron-client to partners in progress. Shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics will ensure a win-win situation for both sides in the years to come.

**Keywords:** *Soft power, geopolitics, geoeconomics, confidence building measures, democracy, religious extremism, anti-Americanism.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

**A** new era in Pak-US relations is expected to unfold during the Biden-Harris administration. While the central pillars of American policy towards Pakistan would remain unchanged, focusing on Islamabad's role for peace in Afghanistan and in the South Asian region, one can expect a shift from geopolitics to geoconomics, soft power and information technology.

Unlike the Trump administration, where the lack of focus and emphasis *vis-a-vis* Pakistan marred its foreign policy towards its non-NATO ally, one can expect a proactive American role in revamping its relations with Islamabad based on eradicating violence, extremism and terrorism, preservation of human rights and the normalisation of Indo-Pak relations during Biden's administration. Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, while speaking at a Karachi Council seminar on Foreign Relations on January 19, 2021, stated that 'the advent of a new administration in Washington gives us an opportunity to have a long-term, broad based and multidimensional relationship. Such a partnership will require institutionalised and structural respect. There should be a strong US-Pak relationship on its own merits and in its own weight. It is compelling because of geoconomics.'<sup>1</sup> Likewise, Dr. Daniel Markey, Senior Research Professor at SAIS Johns Hopkins University, Washington DC, speaking at a Karachi Council seminar on Foreign Relations on January 13, 2021 expressed the hope that since, 'President-elect Biden and his team were familiar with Pakistan and the region, they would like to begin a new chapter in relations with Pakistan. He [Biden] appreciates both Pakistan's scale and strategic and human significance on its own terms.'<sup>2</sup>

There is a history of ups and downs in Pak-US relations since the early 1950s until today. From the period of alliances to ostensible hostility and indifference, the changing dynamics of Pak-US relations must be analysed from a pragmatic point of view where power, national interests, security and sovereignty matter. Furthermore, mistrust, suspicions, ill-will and paranoia still influence the political, security, economic and power dynamics of relations between Pakistan and the United States. Pakistan's former Ambassador to the US, Husain Haqqani, in his book *Pakistan between Mosque and Military* argued that 'the United States was Pakistan's great-power patron of choice, crucial as a source of weapon and economic aid. Alliance with the United States became as important a part of the plans for consolidating the Pakistani nation and a state as Islam and opposition to Hindu India.'<sup>3</sup> He further states that, 'the United States, after getting Pakistan's participation in SEATO and CENTO, fulfilled Pakistan's demand for military equipment and economic aid. In the quest for US support, Ayub Khan had gone so far as to tell a US official, "Our army can be your army if you want".'<sup>4</sup>

1 "Qureshi says Pakistan's focus has shifted to geo-economics," in *Daily Dawn* (Karachi), January 20, 2021.

2 "New American administration offers chance of reset in Pak-US ties, says experts," in *Daily Dawn* (Karachi), January 13, 2021.

3 Husain Haqqani, *Pakistan between Mosque and Military* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2005), p.15.

4 *Ibid.*, p.35.

This paper will examine the changing dynamics of Pak-US relations in the context of soft power from following angles:

1. Historical.
2. Geopolitical.
3. Geoeconomics.
4. Security.
5. Military
6. Political.

The elite-centric Pak-US relations from the 1950s until 2011 led to a negative transformation after the end of the cold war and the collapse of the bipolar world order. In the 1990s Pakistan was the most sanctioned ally of the United States. Nuclear and democracy related sanctions caused enormous damage to Pak-US relations up until the time of 9/11. Which once again placed Pakistan as a frontline state in the US led war on terror.

The following questions will be answered in this research:

1. How can the use of soft power by Washington create conditions for the strengthening of democracy, development and the neutralisation of religious militancy in Pakistan?
2. How will the Biden-Harris administration unfold its policy towards Pakistan and will Islamabad's role in the Afghan peace process remain its priority?
3. To what extent external events have helped military and quasi-military regimes of Pakistan experience a realignment of relations with the United States? Why has Washington undermined democracy and human rights when shaping its relations with Islamabad?
4. Why has the security discourse in Pak-US relations been elite instead of people centric?
5. How has religious extremism in Pakistan contributed to a surge in anti-Americanism, and how can the State responds to this?

Decades of ups and downs in Pak-US relations not only deepened the level of indifference, mistrust and ill-will against each other but also made it difficult for both sides to mend fences and move on from the bitterness of the past. In his 1 January 2018 tweet the then US President Donald Trump lambasted Pakistan for its unreliable behaviour towards Afghanistan. According to him: 'The United States has foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, and they have given us nothing but lies & deceit, thinking of our leaders as fools. They give safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan, with little help. No more.'<sup>5</sup> Pakistan's foreign minister, Khawaja Asif reacting to the tweet of President Trump on television, stated that: 'We have already said no more [to the Americans] so Trump's no more is of no importance now. We are ready to publicly provide details of the US aid that has been received by the country. Mr. Trump was disappointed with the US defeat in Afghanistan and was accusing Pakistan in retaliation.'<sup>6</sup> In his tweet reacting to President Trump's assertion against Pakistan, Defence Minister Khurram Dastagir stated: 'Pakistan as an anti-terror ally has given free to the US; land and air communication, military bases and intelligence cooperation that decimated Al-Qaeda over last 16 years, but they have given us nothing but invective and mistrust. They overlook cross-border safe havens of terrorists who murder Pakistanis.'<sup>7</sup> Pakistan has not been a recipient of the US aid for around a decade. The infamous Karry-Lugar-Berman bill approved by the US Senate in President Obama's first term in 2009, also became controversial because it focused on civilian rather than military assistance and was perceived by critics to subvert Pakistan's military position.<sup>8</sup> Even the support fund to reimburse costs of Pakistan assisting the US in getting supplies to Afghanistan has not been paid since 2011.

5 See news item, "Trump's tweet on Pakistan sparks war of words," *Daily Dawn*, (Karachi) January 2, 2018.

6 *Ibid.*,

7 *Ibid.*,

8 Durdana Najam, "Kerry-Lugar Bill and the Unraveling of Pak-US ties," in *The Express Tribune* (Karachi) December 16, 2020.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research follows the theory of soft power due to two main reasons. First, instead of being a 'patron-client' relationship, Pak-US relations could be transformed by emphasising diplomacy, trade and technology instead of threats and coercion. Second, President Obama's policy of 'do more' for Pakistan in combating terrorism in Afghanistan proved to be counterproductive as anti-Americanism surged in Pakistan. Periodic drone attacks in the tribal areas of Pakistan, something the United States termed as targeting 'safe havens' of Al-Qaeda, also made things worse in Pak-US relations. The year 2011 can be called a watershed moment in Pak-US relations, as a series of events saw diplomatic ties between these two reach their lowest ebb. First, the arrest of CIA contractor Raymond Davis in Lahore in January on charges of double murder. Second, 'Operation Gerimino' launched by the US navy seals on May 2 led to the killing of Osama bin Laden in his compound in the garrison city of Abbottabad. Third, the killing of several Pakistani soldiers at Salala check post in November 2011 by US forces led to the suspension of NATO supplies for Afghanistan.

Soft power is an alternate approach to deal with the forces of militancy and fanaticism. If hard power can help seek a solution for an issue through coercive and military means, soft power can minimise the application of force and other punitive methods in a conflict situation with the application of non-coercive means. The theory of soft power, as presented by Joseph Nye, can be implemented in the context of Pak-US relations particularly since September 11, 2001. This is also true of the new American administration following the November

2020 presidential elections, and this paper aims to examine in detail how receptive relations will be to the use of soft power in dealing with the so-called 'war on terror'.

Soft power has been defined in a book written by Charles W. Kegley and Eugene R. Wittkopf as being, 'the ability to exercise influence in world politics due to intangible resources such as culture and ideas'.<sup>9</sup> Soft power is defined in a strategic sense by Mark R. Amstutz who argues that, 'it is the ability to influence international affairs through cooperative strategies involving political ideas, cultural values and economic and social norms'.<sup>10</sup> The US led war on terror in the post-9/11 period, and the resurgence of the Taliban in Afghanistan and their counterparts in Pakistan, cannot be effectively curbed without the application of hard and soft power. Along with the United States, the United Kingdom has also joined the war on terror and intervened in Afghanistan in the post-9/11 era. Security collaboration between Pakistan and UK was part of a coalition led by America in its war on terror and reproduced the age-old security collaboration between London and Islamabad, all the way from Cold War.

The hypothesis in this research that, 'the use of soft, instead of hard, power can promote democracy and neutralise religious militancy in Pakistan' needs to be examined. Democracy in Pakistan, alongside religious extremism and anti-Americanism can be properly dealt with using soft power techniques such as aid, trade, technology and cultural diplomacy. This would need to become a policy of the Biden-Harris administration.

<sup>9</sup> Charles W. Kegley, Eugene R. Wittkopf, *World Politics Trend and Transformation* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), p.388.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Amstutz, *International Conflict and Cooperation. An Introduction Politics* (Boston: Mc Graw-Hill College, 1999), p.131.

### III. DEMOCRACY, MILITARY, SECURITY AND RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM

The unresolved issues of democracy and security in Pakistan are held responsible for promoting religious extremism, radicalisation, violence and militarism in the country. Repeated military coups since the late 1950s, have resulted in the weakening of the democratic process and the hardening of a state centric paradigm of security. The reality, as asserted by analysts on Pak-US relations, is that Washington has overlooked the necessity to have democracy in Pakistan because of the primacy of its strategic and security interests. Elite perceptions<sup>11</sup> of Pakistan, on issues of democracy and security, to a large extent are shared by the United States, resulting in the evolution of a security discourse which is not people centric and remains elitist in nature. During the Obama presidency, the United States tried to promote democracy and safeguard human rights by announcing the Kerry-Lugar-Berman bill, containing non-military aid of 7.5 billion dollars<sup>12</sup>. This aid, however, failed to materialise in Pakistan, where hardly a fraction of the bill was awarded. Furthermore, the bill was not endorsed by the military establishment in Pakistan as the money was not to be disbursed by the government, but a significant part of the amount had to be disbursed to non-governmental organisations for the empowerment of weaker segments of society like women, minorities and youths.

A renowned American expert on South Asian affairs in his pioneering work, *The Idea of Pakistan*, gives a vivid account of Pak-US relations at this time.

'For obvious reasons, US-Pakistan relations merit close attention. The spotlight here is on the Central American interests in Pakistan and the policies that advance them. The most important and difficult policy issue is whether Washington should address Pakistan's deeper problems and prepare for the eventuality that Pakistan may become a failed or a rogue state.'<sup>13</sup>

Changes in the post-cold war era to a large extent did not influence the political considerations of the United States while dealing with Pakistan because an authoritarian regime in Islamabad served its interests well, particularly after the events of 9/11, 2001. Certainly, better than a popularly elected regime could have. During the Cold War days, American support to dictatorial regimes in different parts of the world to combat the threat of communism was a normal phenomenon. But, after the end of the cold war, a fundamental change in American foreign policy took place which gave emphasis to democracy, preservation of human rights and nuclear non-proliferation. Washington's support to the then regime of General President Pervez Musharraf, in return for Islamabad's support to the United States to topple the Taliban regime, Al-Qaeda network and its war against terrorism, saw a marked deviation from its prodemocracy and anti-nuclear proliferation stance. Following 9/11, the US lifted sanctions which were imposed on India and Pakistan in the wake of their nuclear tests in May 1998, which reflected the lack of American commitment to the cause of nuclear non-proliferation. Prior to that, 'the Clinton administration considered the October 1999 Pakistan military coup to be a serious setback for the country's return to a democratic election process beginning in 1998.'<sup>14</sup>

11 Elite perceptions here include those belonging to military, bureaucratic, feudal and political backgrounds. Those who are at the helm of affairs and control the instruments of power belong to the ruling elite of Pakistan and their perception of security is generally based on augmenting threat perception on India, military build-up, both conventional and nuclear. Moonies Amar, "The Dynamics of Elite Politics in Pakistan and its nexus with Clergy and Military," *Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies*, (Villanova) Vol. XXXVIII, No. 2, Winter, 2015.

12 Dawn (Karachi), October 14, 2009. Also see, "Reforming the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act and Aid to Pakistan" <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/reforming-the-kerry-lugar-berman-act-and-aid-to-pakistan>. "Who benefits from U.S aid to Pakistan?", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Pakistan\\_Aid\\_Executive\\_Summary1.pdf](https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Pakistan_Aid_Executive_Summary1.pdf). Michael Kugelman, "Four Myths about Kerry-Lugar-Berman" in *The Express Tribune* (Karachi) December 8, 2011.

13 Stephen P. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Lahore: Vanguard, 2005), p.201.

14 A.Z. Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relationship* (Hants: Ashgate, 2005), p.236.

Evidently, from a historical standpoint, democracy has remained a secondary priority for Washington, whereas its security and strategic interests in its relations with Islamabad are primary in nature. Washington only saw military power in its natural alliance with Pakistan's ruptured political landscape. Hassan Abbas, a former police service official of Pakistan and an academic based in the US, rightly noted, 'in its long association with Pakistan, America lost the forest for the trees. It saw only its army, but behind it, it lost Pakistan itself. The continued advancement of the army meant the concomitant impoverishment of the country and the emasculation of the nascent political process.'<sup>15</sup> The history of Pak-US relations is replete with the examples of how Washington looked the other way when successive regimes in Pakistan disregarded democracy and imposed an authoritarian system. The rise of anti-Americanism in Pakistan is thus not only an outcome of external factors but is also the result of the US undermining democracy and ignoring the real security issues faced by the people of Pakistan. Consequently, the upsurge of *Jihadi* elements in Pakistan has not taken place over night but is an outcome of a process of neglect on the part of the United States as far as Pakistan's deviation from the democratic path is concerned. Events in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and adjoining areas where Pakistani Taliban emerged as a cogent force, cannot be overlooked particularly when anti-Americanism played an important role in providing space to all such forces who now openly talk against democracy, parliament and superior courts and term these as anti-Islamic.

On three occasions, the military takeover in Pakistan resulted in a new security alignment with the United States. First, during the Cold War years, the military takeover by General Ayub Khan led to a deepening of Pakistan's security relations with the US led alliances, Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) and South East Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) to combat communism<sup>16</sup>. Real issues of security faced by the people of Pakistan like poverty, illiteracy, under-development and ethnic disharmony among

provinces were undermined by the military in order to seek equation with the US security interests and ensure economic assistance from Washington. Second, the military takeover of General Zia-ul-Haq in late the 1970s led to further erosion of the political process, and imposed severe curbs on political activities. Again, the nexus between the military and the United States emanating after the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan ignored the real security issues faced by the people of Pakistan and presented the security perception of Washington *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union as the state centric security paradigm. However, during Zia's rule the process of Islamisation and the rise of sectarian violence created new security threats to the people of Pakistan, which resulted into the emergence of religious terrorist groups. The United States, who had contributed to the emergence of various *Jihadi* groups because of its support to resistance against the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, faced an ugly situation when those groups turned against America. Even after the Soviet military withdrawal from Afghanistan, problems remained. For example, the detachment of the United States from Afghan affairs, deployment of its military in the Saudi Peninsula following the Iraqi attack over Kuwait in August 1990, Washington's failure to prevent Israeli suppression of the Palestinian movement for emancipation, its attack on Afghanistan after the terrorist acts of September 11, 2001 and its attack and occupation of Iraq in March 2003. These series of events deepened anti-Americanism not only in Pakistan but also in many Muslim countries. Even the Pakistan military, which used to have a strong pro-American constituency couldn't escape from anti-Americanism because of the upsurge of *Jihadi* elements in its rank and file.

The issues of democracy, security and religious extremism after the military takeover by General Pervez Musharraf took a new dimension. While Musharraf did not follow the harsh policies pursued by his military predecessors in terms of banning political activities, unleashing the process of political victimisation and imposing a ban on the freedom of press, he tried to introduce his own brand of

15 Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2005), p.10.

16 A.Z. Hilali, *US-Pakistan Relationship* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2005), p. 37.

democracy. Under the patronage of state several Jihadi groups were covertly supported with a sole purpose of using these groups against the Indian military in Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>17</sup> But the links of such Jihadi groups with the Taliban regime and Al-Qaeda created problems for Pakistan particularly after September 11, 2001. However, Musharraf's support to the United States in its war on terror; his cooperation with Washington in overthrowing the Taliban regime in Kabul and his policies directed against Al-Qaeda, gave new legitimacy in Washington to his rule despite the earlier condemnation by America and its Western allies of the October, 1999 military coup.<sup>18</sup>

Former President Pervez Musharraf in his book, *In the Line of Fire A Memoir*, narrated how he dealt with the threats of the US following 9/11. On September 12, 1999 he got a telephonic call from the then US Secretary of State Colin Powell in which he stated: 'You are either with us or against us.'<sup>19</sup> Musharraf further narrates that, 'when I was back in Islamabad the next day, our Director General of Inter-Service Intelligence who happened to be in Washington told me on the phone about his meeting with the US Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage. In what must be the most undiplomatic statement ever made, Armitage added to what Colin Powell had said to me and told the director general that we had to decide whether we were with America or with the terrorists, but also if we chose the terrorists, then we should be prepared to be bombed back to the Stone Age. This was a shockingly barefaced threat, but it was obvious that the United States had decided to hit back, and hit hard.'<sup>20</sup>

Yet, neither democracy, nor security favoring the interests of people held any priority for Washington for the then Musharraf regime. The weakening of Musharraf's grip on power and the taking of the reins

of government by Pakistan People's Party indicated some change in America's perception on dealing with Islamabad. Obama's strategy on Pakistan and Afghanistan announced in the spring of 2009<sup>21</sup>, stressed the need to address the issue of terrorism with the application of both carrots and sticks. US drone attacks continued to target what the United States called 'safe heavens' of Al-Qaeda and Taliban in the tribal areas of Pakistan. The Democratic Party administration also came up with a broad plan to provide substantial economic assistance to Pakistan to deal with the causes which breed extremism and terrorism.

In retrospect, while still viewing the existence of hard-line Islamic elements in the Pakistan army with suspicion, Washington decided to lend full support to President General Pervez Musharraf because of his perceived secular approach on the critical issues of religion and state. Pakistan's nuclear weapon's program and the infiltration of Jihadi elements in the country's security apparatus gave the United States little choice but to depend on Musharraf, despite his failure to restore democracy in letter and spirit. Therefore, as rightly pointed out by a Pakistani security analyst, 'as things stand, US-Pakistan relations completely revolve around one individual – General Pervez Musharraf. The main areas of concern for the US are Afghanistan and nuclear proliferation. The current US leadership, along with a vast array of opinion makers in the US, are convinced that Musharraf's survival and his continued support for the US objectives are essential for the success both of the war in Afghanistan as well as nuclear non-proliferation.'<sup>22</sup> Such a policy was only reviewed against the backdrop of lawyer's movement in Pakistan and the large-scale alienation of Pakistani people from the President Musharraf in the summer of 2007.

17 Khaled Ahmed, *Pakistan The State In Crisis* (Lahore: Vanguard, 2002).

18 The US disdain and lack of legitimacy for October 12, 1999 coup which overthrew the government of Nawaz Sharif and brought General Musharraf into power was reflected in only six hour stay of President Bill Clinton in Islamabad on 25 March 2000 after his few days visit to India. During his visit he called upon Pakistan to restore democracy, reduce its nuclear arsenal, fight terrorism and find a peaceful solution to the Kashmir crisis with India. See, Charles Babington and Pamela Constable "Clinton pushes for peace, democracy in Pakistan," *The Washington Post*, March 26, 2000.

19 Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire A Memoir* (London: Pocket Books, 2006), p. 201.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Moonis Ahmar, "What went wrong with Obama's Af-Pak Policy?" *Regional Studies*, (Islamabad) Vol. XXX, No. 3, Summer 2012.

22 Dr. Ayesha Siddiqa, "US-Pak relations: structural problems," *The Friday Times* (Lahore), December 24-30, 2004, p. 6.

The most alarming thing about Washington's way of dealing with the issue of democracy in Pakistan was its policy to rely on the men in the uniform instead of supporting a viable political process. The outcome of such a policy has been the emergence of religious extremist groups, on the one hand, and the assertion of ethnic and sectarian forces on the other. A fact which has also been highlighted by both print and electronic media in Pakistan through their news reports and analysis. During the Trump era, unlike the Obama administration, focus was on seeking the US military withdrawal from Afghanistan. Unlike previous American administrations all the way from George W. Bush to Barack Obama, President Trump refused to render economic and military support to Pakistan and during his years in presidency, Islamabad has not been a recipient of military or economic aid. Only during Trump's presidency, however, has there been headway in restoring military to military contact by resuming the International Military Education Training (IMET) program<sup>23</sup> for Pakistan.

There exists a dire need to contemplate how the impact of the United States policy on issues of democracy, security and religious extremism has shaped its relations with Pakistan. More than six decades of US involvement in Pakistan has granted it easy access to important state institutions like the judiciary, military, bureaucracy and parliament. Particularly, Washington's close relations with the military elite of Pakistan are significant in terms of its role in formulating state policies.

#### IV. FROM NEGATIVE TO POSITIVE: TRANSFORMATION OF PAK-US TIES

In the pleasant and unpleasant history of Pak-US ties, one can clearly see a more negative than positive transformation in their relations. Thrice, Pakistan obtained the status as a 'frontline state' for the United States. On all the three occasions, it was the geopolitical and geostrategic location of Pakistan which prompted it to join the American camp. All this was followed by disillusionment from both sides. From any standpoint, 'the policy of engagement and disengagement on the part of the United States and its focus on maintaining close rapport with the military of Pakistan instead of democratic forces cannot be taken as a matter of surprise.'<sup>24</sup> Therefore, 'perhaps the dominant perception in Pakistan about the United States, is related to the perceived influence of the Jewish lobbys in American Congress, think tanks, media and in other segments of American society. And how that lobby has worked over time in creating hostile feelings about Pakistan on a host of issues ranging from its nuclear programme, to the Islamic identity of Pakistan and alleged persecution of ethnic and religious minorities.'<sup>25</sup> If the negative transformation in Pak-US relations took place after 9/11, and the first sign of anti-Americanism, as pointed out by Hassan Abbas, emerged when 'the United States (despite being an ally) did not come to Pakistan's assistance during the 1965 war. Similarly, after the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, when anti-Israeli emotions took root in Pakistan, it did not take long for this to eventually extend to the United States.'<sup>26</sup>

23 See news item, "U.S to resume military training program for Pakistan: State Dept" in *Daily Dawn* (Karachi), January 4, 2020.

24 Moonis Ahmar, "Perceptions of Pak-US Relations After 9/11" in Saleem Kidwai (ed.), *US Policy Towards South Asia* (Delhi: Academic Excellence, 2008), p. 227.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 228.

26 Hassan Abbas, *Pakistan's Drift into Extremism Allah, the Army, and America's War on Terror* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), p. 238.

For every two steps forward, there were four steps backwards, which transformed Pak-US relations as inconsistent and marred them with mistrust and suspicions. Yet, optimism and hope still remained in Pak-US relations, as analysed by a renowned Pakistan political and security analyst, Professor Hasan Askari Rizvi in the following words:

'A stable Pakistan is in the interest of the United States because it can contribute to achieving the American foreign policy goals of peace and stability in the region, democracy and social development, market economy and free trade, control of narcotics, containment of international terrorism and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.'<sup>27</sup>

Reflecting a forward-looking approach and optimism, he further argues that 'there is much scope for cooperation between Pakistan and the United States as they have overlapping interests. The experience of the 1950s and the 1980s shows that the two countries can work together for the promotion of peace and stability. Though they diverged on some issues during that period, they generally maintained a favourable disposition towards one another. One cannot expect the two states to have unanimity of views on all issues in the post-Cold War period.'<sup>28</sup> A lot has happened since 9/11 in Pak-US relations because of two main reasons. First, in 2004 the US President George W. Bush granted Pakistan the status of being a non-NATO ally because of the instrumental role played by Pakistan in the American war on terror and military operations against Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Second, despite Pakistan's support and cooperation with Washington towards Afghanistan, drone attacks in the tribal areas of Pakistan and the surge of collateral damage raised serious questions about America's respect for Pakistan's sovereignty. The surge of anti-Americanism in Pakistan following these drone attacks, and the launching of military operations in North Waziristan on the insistence of the US, negatively transformed Pak-US relations going forward.

Be as it may, the complexities in Pak-US relations remained during the Obama and Trump administrations, as Washington insisted Pakistan must to 'do more' in its war on terror. Islamabad began rejecting allegations of support towards what America called the 'sanctuaries of terrorists' holed up in the tribal areas of Pakistan. Consequently, the fencing of the Pak-Afghan border and the absorption of FATA into the province of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa (KPK), proved Pakistan's sincerity in weeding out terrorist groups from its soil. Pakistan also complained that the US had failed to restrain India, for causing unrest in Balochistan and sponsoring so-called Islamic terrorists for violent attacks inside Pakistan.

Pakistan's Supreme Court verdict of January 2021 acquitting Ahmed Omer Sheikh in the murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl, is an issue which may negatively transform Pak-US relations in the future. Despite Islamabad's efforts to reverse that decision. A US State Department statement on January 29, 2021, gave an overview of US policies concerning Pak-American relations which will be pursued by the Biden-Harris administration in light of Omer Sheikh's acquittal. The statement made it clear that, 'the Biden administration wants to stay engaged with Pakistan, particularly on the Afghanistan peace process, despite unexpected bitterness over the acquittal order for the terrorism suspect Ahmed Omer Sheikh.' The US Secretary of State reinforced US concern about the Pakistan Supreme Court ruling and the potential release of these prisoners. Telephonic discussions between Pakistan's Foreign Minister and the US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken focused 'ensuring accountability for the convicted terrorist Ahmed Omer Sheikh and the others responsible for the kidnapping and murder of American journalist Daniel Pearl.'<sup>29</sup>

27 Hasan Askari Rizvi, "Pakistan" in Robert Chase, Emily Hill, Paul Kennedy (eds.), *The Pivotal States* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), p. 82.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

29 See news item, "US wants to stay engaged with Pakistan," *Daily Dawn* (Karachi), 31 January 2021.. The U.S journalist Daniel Pearl was beheaded in Karachi on February, 1, 2002 allegedly by Omer Sheikh and others. See news item, "SC orders release of prime accused in Daniel Pearl murder," *Daily Dawn* (Karachi) January 28, 2021.

The challenge of rebuilding Pak-US ties was examined by James M. Landsay, the senior Vice-President of the Council on Foreign Relations, in a briefing arranged by the US Department of State's Foreign Press Center on February 9. Landsay stated that, 'the Biden administration would like to rebuild America's relations with Pakistan and make it more productive than it has been during the recent past. Biden's administration had inherited a complicated US relationship with Pakistan, and some of the issues between the two countries also resonant here in the United States.'<sup>30</sup> However, Landsay expressed concern about the recent Supreme Court decision to overturn the conviction of Ahmed Omer Sheikh.<sup>31</sup> On the issue of human rights, he pointed out that, 'the administration would also have significant concerns about whether or not Pakistan is doing everything it can to prevent, contain, and deter terrorists.' On Afghanistan, India-Pakistan relations and Sino-Pakistan ties, Lindsay 'predicted a better understanding between the White House and the Pentagon on the deployment of American troops in Afghanistan. Biden administration officials have endorsed the Pentagon's position that Washington could not withdraw all its troops from Afghanistan by May as stipulated in the US-Taliban agreement signed last year.'<sup>32</sup> Another major concern for the administration is the relations between China and Pakistan. Echoing feelings from the Biden presidency about 'the nature and evolution of Pakistan's relationship with China.'<sup>33</sup>

On the flip side, the Pakistan government is taking initiative to seek vibrancy in its relations with the United States, and more directly with the Biden-Harris administration, by promoting re-engagement particularly in trade and commerce. According to an investigative report in a national newspaper of Pakistan, *The Express Tribune*, 'the government has formed an apex committee to find avenues for economic reengagement with the new US administration. The 14-member apex committee will discuss a range of economic and commercial proposals to warm ties with the US.'<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the apex committee will be headed by the Foreign Minister and will consist of the Ministers for Finance, National Food Security, Economic Affairs, Information Technology, National Security Adviser, and Prime Ministerial aides on commerce, climate change, human resource development, power and investment.<sup>35</sup> It seems that after a long time, Islamabad has taken a serious step towards revitalising its relations with the US, by re-engaging with the new American administration in areas of trade, investment, energy and economic cooperation. Both the pleasant and bitter experiences in past Pak-US relations may help in the future, by understanding what went wrong between the two countries and how the increased levels of mistrust, suspicions, ill-will and paranoia were pertinent to both sides. It is true that Pakistan has been a major recipient of American military and economic aid since the early 1950s until the second term of President Obama, but Islamabad has also paid a heavy price by joining anti-Communist alliances and its war against terror.

30 Anwar Iqbal, "US administration to seek productive ties with Pakistan, says scholar" in *Daily Dawn* (Karachi), February 10, 2021.

31 *Ibid.*

32 *Ibid.*

33 *Ibid.*

34 Shahbaz Rana, "Govt seeks economic re-engagement with US administration," *The Express Tribune* (Karachi) March 7, 2021.

35 *Ibid.*

## V. THE WAY FORWARD

Overcoming the bitterness of the past, mistrust, ill-will, suspicion and paranoia in Pak-US relations can be termed as a major challenge during Biden-Harris administration. However, it is important to note that Pak-US relations deteriorated during the latter part of President Obama's first term, when Joseph Biden was the Vice-President.<sup>36</sup> It will now be a hard task for President Biden to deal with Afghanistan and Pakistan, in a clear separation from the Obama administration's policy towards these two countries-Pak.<sup>37</sup>

The way forward in Pak-US relations must be analysed by considering three major realities. First, the role of regional politics, particularly the situation in Afghanistan, Indo-Pakistan and the impact of Sino-American conflict. If the Biden-Harris administration renege from the February 2020 Doha Accords, which was signed between the United States and the Taliban, Pakistan's position will become quite difficult because of the predictable surge of violence which will occur should American forces remain in Afghanistan. Likewise, an Indo-Pak standoff on Kashmir will make it cumbersome for Washington to facilitate the peace process in South Asia.<sup>38</sup>

The US welcomed a joint statement by India and Pakistan on February 25, 2021 to implement the 2003 ceasefire along the Line of Control. According to White House Press Secretary Jen Psaki, 'The United States welcomes the joint statement between India and Pakistan: that the two countries have agreed to maintain strict observance of a ceasefire along the Line of Control starting on February 25. This is a positive step towards greater peace and stability in South Asia, which is in our shared interest. We encourage both countries to keep building upon

this progress.'<sup>39</sup> Similarly, on February 26, the US State Department spokesman Ned Price stated that, 'we welcome the joint statement between India and Pakistan that the two countries have agreed to maintain strict observance of a ceasefire along the LoC starting immediately. When it comes to the US's role, we continue to support direct dialogue between India and Pakistan on Kashmir and other issues of concern.'<sup>40</sup> In this agreement, the Director General of Military Operations for both India and Pakistan had agreed to adhere to the agreement reached between the two countries in 2003. Certainly, Pakistan expects the US to remain neutral in the case of Pakistan's unresolved issues with India. It is yet to be seen if America considers its economic interests in India paramount to the issues over Kashmir.

Second, to what extent Pakistan will be able to deal with its 'image problem' concerning religious extremism and terrorism, is also yet to be seen. Along with that, the surge of anti-Americanism in the post-9/11 era is a major challenge for the Biden-Harris administration. The issue of terror financing and money laundering, which Islamabad has tried to deal with, is still a fundamental challenge to the improvement of Pak-US relations. Ironically, Ehsanullah Ehsan, the former spokesperson of the now banned political party Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), was held responsible for an attack on Nobel Laureate Malala Yusufzai in 2012 and the carnage at the Army Public School Peshawar in 2014, killing around 144 people including 135 school children. He had handed himself over to the security forces in 2017, however, instead of having his trial before the court of law, he was kept at several safe houses under the custody of military. He escaped from military custody on February 11, 2020. Speaking to foreign journalists on February 23, 2021, Director General of Inter Services

36 A chain of events which took place in 2011 and deteriorated Pak-US relations were: the arrest of a CIA contractor Raymond David on the charges of killing two motor cyclists in Lahore in January 2011. 'Operation Gerimano' of May 2, 2011 when U.S navy seals in two helicopters sneaked into the garrison town of Abbottabad to arrest global terrorist Osama bin Laden. He was found in a compound in Abbottabad with his two wives and children; was killed and his body was taken away on the surviving helicopter. In November 2011, U.S forces killed many Pakistani soldiers on the Pak-Afghan border called as the 'Salala incident' which led to Pakistan's closure of NATO supplies in Afghanistan.

37 Moonis Ahmar, "What went wrong with Obama's Afghan-Pak Policy?" *Regional Studies*, (Islamabad) Vol. XXX, No. 3, Summer 2012, pp. 47-67.

38 See news item, "UN, US ask India and Pakistan to stay engaged" *Daily Dawn* (Karachi) February 27, 2021.

39 For further information see, Suhasini Haider, "U.S welcomes India-Pakistan Joint Statement on ceasefire" in *The Hindu*, February 26, 2021.

40 See news item, "UN, US ask India and Pakistan to stay engaged" *Daily Dawn* (Karachi) February 27, 2021.

Public Relations (ISPR), Major General Babar Iftikhar stated that, 'Ehsan's escape was a matter of great concern for the Army', adding that 'action was taken against the officers responsible for the militant's escape. And that Pakistan's army is continuing to search for the former TTP leader'.<sup>41</sup>

Rogue elements in the security and military establishment of Pakistan are held responsible for their alleged patronage of terrorist and extremist elements. They are undoubtedly a matter of shame and embarrassment for the country. Why Ehsanullah Ehsan could escape from safe house custody by army officers in the first place, and why he has not faced trial for his heinous crimes against the citizens of Pakistan needs to be contemplated. ISPR's statement that the army officers held responsible for his escape will be punished, is certainly a delayed reaction and may raise suspicions about taking to task those terrorist groups who are involved in numerous acts of terrorism over the years. The image of Pakistan is certainly tarnished because of these allegations of rogue elements having an influence on the security and military operations of the country.

The reality of Pakistan's strategic and geopolitical significance, despite allegations of it being the epicentre of terror, is undeniable. America in the post-Trump era is grappling with the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and continued economic and racial polarisation. But as things begin to settle down for the Biden-Harris administration, matters concerning Afghanistan, Pakistan, Jammu, Kashmir and human rights will trickle down for the State Department and Congress to focus on. It is yet to be seen what sort of role the United States will play in the facilitation of direct talks on Kashmir between New Delhi and Islamabad, particularly as the issue has become quite complicated after the revocation of article 370 by the Modi regime.

The third reality which must be analysed, is the reality of marginalised people and their role in changing the dynamics of Pak-US relations. Soft power

techniques like cultural diplomacy, trade, investment, aid and people-to-people contacts can certainly make a difference in the stalled nature of Pak-US diplomatic ties. During the Trump administration, curbs on immigration and travel, particularly from Muslim countries, negatively impacted Washington's relations with Islamabad. The role of civil society and research think tanks in bettering Pak-US relations at the popular level needs to be much more proactive.

Reverting to the era of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s when travel to the US was easy for Pakistani citizens, is no longer possible because of security issues relating to terrorism. It must be noted however, that unlike the Obama administration, when the United States employed hard power tools against the 'safe havens' of terrorism in Pakistan, the Biden-Harris administration will not have to resort to measures which can augment anti-Americanism in Pakistan.

As rightly stated by Pakistan's former Ambassador to the US, 'Pakistan should not seek across-the-board change in its ties with the US. Washington is not interested in broadening the relationship. Pakistan should start modestly with Afghanistan and counterterrorism and build mutual confidence in relations here. Then it should expand dialogue and agree to cooperate on points of convergence with the US, while trying to manage areas of divergence'.<sup>42</sup> Pak-US relations into the future, absolutely require political will, determination, prudence and trust from both sides. It is up to the leadership from both sides to rebuild trust and take confidence building measures which can transform their relations from patron-client to partners in progress. Furthermore, 'if Pakistan wants to shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics, it must reach some understanding with Washington on strategic and security issues, otherwise these will keep colliding with the prospects of economic cooperation'.<sup>43</sup> Needless to say, a shift from geopolitics to geoeconomics will ensure a win-win situation for both sides in the years to come.

41 "Action taken against army officers over Ehsanullah Ehsan's escape: DG ISPR," *Daily Dawn* (Karachi) February 24, 2021.

42 Touqir Hussain, "Re-engaging America" *Daily Dawn* (Karachi), March 13, 2021.

43 *Ibid.*

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