



### Pak-US Relations under Trump Administration

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#### Abstract:

*In retrospect, ties between the United States (US) and Pakistan were at their pinnacle during the tenures of Pakistan's military rulers. When civilian administrations ruled in Islamabad, ties between the two nations remained strained. During the Trump administration, American foreign policy towards Pakistan remained volatile. Relations worsened to a record low during the early years of the Trump administration, but then began to recover in the later years. This research offers insight into the elements that lead to a strained relationship between the US and Pakistan, while Pakistan is being blamed for the political upheaval in Afghanistan. The US holds Pakistan responsible for the continuous problems in Afghanistan and uses the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) as a political platform to put pressure on Pakistan. Furthermore, the US regards China-Pakistan Economic Corridor CPEC as a debt-trap tactic by China, Besides, the increasing US ties with India are seen as a threat to Pakistan, with the US administration continuously offering India more space in the Afghan peace process and signing various military pacts primarily to counter rising China, while Pakistan sees it as a threat to its security.*

**Key Words:** America, Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, relations, Taliban, CPEC, FATF.

#### INTRODUCTION

Ties between America and Pakistan in the post 9/11 era are seen through the prism of the Afghan dilemma. America hopes to build relations with Pakistan to safely depart from the Afghanistan in Trump administration. In the initial stages of the Trump era, coercive diplomacy was used by the Trump administration which did not work successfully even Pakistan propagated the policy of no more in response to the American policy of pressurizing Pakistan for "Do More" to eradicate terrorism from its territory. However, in later stages, Trump wrote a letter to Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan and actively sought help in solving the Afghan conundrum and their relationships were improved. The current literature analyses the Pakistan and America ties in the domain of Afghanistan, but this research will analyze the connection between both nations in the realm of their relationship between China and India.

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Pakistan's relationship with the United States (US) has been on a roller coaster since its independence, at times reaching a historic low while at other times escalating to a historic high. This study evaluates the US-Pakistan relationship from the perspective of countries like Afghanistan, India, and China, where contacts were more centered on one state's interests than being transactional. The research aims to figure out what is causing Pakistan and America to have such a tumultuous relationship. The relationship between Pakistan and America suffered numerous ups and downs. The major focus of this study is to find out what was the main cause for the peaks and troughs between the relations of both nations notably in the era of former President Donald J Trump.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Sattar (2010), discussed a historical backdrop and shed light on the historical occurrences beginning with the policies of Pakistan's first Foreign Minister Muhammad Zafar Ullah Khan. Moreover, the author explored the link between America and Pakistan in retrospect. How this relation developed as Liaqat Ali Khan received the latter from both sides, the US and the USSR, in the Cold war era but Liaqat Ali Khan preferred America over USSR and spent weeks in America. Similarly, the book brought to the forefront various events and policies of different civilian as well as military governments. Amin (2010) addresses the relation of Pakistan with several nations including India, Turkey, Iran, Libya, Egypt, other Islamic states. Moreover, the book concentrates on the interaction between America and Pakistan primarily following the occurrence of 9/11. The author emphasizes key occurrences which exacerbated the interaction between both America and Pakistan. Owais (2019) emphasized the policies of former American President Donald J Trump towards South Asia. He also analyzed and examined the policy of Barak Obama and Donald Trump towards South Asia.

Sperling and Webber (2019) particularly highlighted the Trump policies, shed light on the election rhetoric of Donald Trump of withdrawing American and NATO military from other nations notably from Afghanistan and middle eastern countries. Mirza an Shamil (2020) underlined the battle of narrative between America and Pakistan. According to them, narrative is employed by states to create a suitable climate to hold foreign policy. Hasan and Bukhari (2020) shed light on the FATF as a diplomatic tool of America to deal with countries that have a repugnant policy towards the American policies. Recently, FATF is utilized by America to pressurize Pakistan to support America in departing safely from Afghanistan. For this objective, America would aid its friends to advocate against Pakistan and place Pakistan in the grey list of FATF and threaten Pakistani with blacklisting.

Kaura (2017) highlighted the American foreign policy towards Pakistan in the realm of Afghan conundrum and its implications for India. Moreover, he also discusses the cohesive diplomacy of America particularly by the Trump administration towards Pakistan to cease Pakistan policy of giving safe havens to militant outfits. Afzal (2020) brought into limelight the dichotomous relation between Pakistan and America in the era of Donald Trump. According to her, when Donald Trump took the driving seat of the American administration, the relation between America and Pakistan strained for up to two years then the paradigm shift occurred in the relation between Pakistan and America and the relationship reached the historical high in the last two years of Trump administration. Both countries cleared their policy towards Afghanistan and seek a peaceful

settlement of the Afghan conundrum. This convergence of interest took both countries to cooperate with each other in every aspect of foreign policy.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

To obtain data for this study, the author mostly employed secondary sources, which included books by various foreign policy specialists, sources of well-known publications, including variety of websites. Due to time constraints, the author was unable to secure sufficient opportunities to collect data on a primary level in the form of interviews. Furthermore, the author used qualitative research methods to investigate this topic, which is heavily reliant on data rather than numerical facts and figures. The author gathered information on a variety of events influencing the relationship between the US and Pakistan.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To explore this topic, the author applied the theory of classical realism. Classical realism is a theory connected to the maximization and maintenance of power of one country; it is based on a zero-sum situation where one country eventually has to be on the losing side. Moreover, classical realism holds that national interest is the governing premise of countries' foreign policy. There are numerous proponents of classical realism which include: Thucydides, Hans Morgenthau, Niccolò Machiavelli, etc.

According to Classical Realism, states occupy the center piece in politics and classical realists rejected the international organization as they view the international organization exploits the state's purpose. Similarly, America periodically utilized the international organization to pressurize Pakistan to fulfill its aims such as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and International Monetary Fund (IMF). Both these organizations were employed against Pakistan. America leveraged the platform of FATF to exert pressure on Pakistan to halt its assistance for extremist organizations. Arguably, Pakistan is being accused of giving safe-havens to terrorist leaders and America leaves no stone unturned to utilize this platform backing of its allies, to put Pakistan into the Grey list of FATF. Similarly, America is the largest stakeholder in the funding of the IMF contributing nearly 17 percent of the total. This culminates in the American control of the IMF. Whenever Pakistan is in severe need of economic support and seeks loans for its macro-economic stability, America cautions IMF not to grant loans to Pakistan according to the former, money would be utilized by latter to pay back the Chinese debts.

### **PAK-US RELATIONS IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

Pakistan since its inception has maintained strong connections with America. When Pakistan achieved its freedom, America accepted Pakistan as an independent state on August 15, 1947. The relations subsequently experienced great improvement. After the death of Liaqat Ali Khan, Pakistan formally joined the US-led capitalist block by signing the Southeast Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO); which was largely against the Union of Socialist Soviets' Republics (USSR) led communist bloc. Similarly, the twist surfaced in the relations between both countries when war between Pakistan and India erupted in 1965 in which Pakistan sought American help to counter India; however, America denied any sort of help on the pretext that the signed defense treaty with Pakistan was merely to counter the threat from communist block not from India in particular;

which at that time was the main propagator of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). The divide intensified in 1971 when the direct conflict between India and Pakistan erupted and Soviet-backed India; however, American restrained itself to rescue Pakistan in this challenging moment and it culminated in dismemberment of Pakistan. Resultantly, Pakistan had to quit the US-dominated capitalist block.

Intriguingly, the romanticism of relation between Pakistan and America once again got an opportunity in the invasion of Soviets in Afghanistan (Sattar, 2010) and both countries combinedly drafted the policy to counter the aggression of the USSR and they became successful in it, but they also sowed the seed of terrorism and extremism in the region. When the Soviet Union left Afghanistan in 1988, romanticism between Pakistan and the US withered. In the meantime, Pakistan was confronted with US sanctions in the form of the Pressler amendment (Ibid). Furthermore, because of the US' worldwide fight on terrorism, these penalties were enacted quickly.

On September 11, 2001, the World Trade Center was targeted by the terrorist group Al-Qaida, resulting in the deaths of almost 3,000 people and the loss of billions of dollars for the US. This incident compelled America to target Al-Qaida's bases in Afghanistan, and America did so by first removing the Taliban's government in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Pakistan became America's "blue-eyed boy" and was granted non-NATO ally status (Amin, 2010). Similarly, Pakistan received billions of dollars in aid from the US to help rebuild its ailing economy and upgrade its military assets.

When Democrats assumed control of the White House and began preaching the mantra of "do more," rifts between Pakistan and the US got even deeper, and ties between the two countries became tense. No one is willing to put their trust in their opponents. They support that assertion by pointing to America's operation in Abbottabad, where the US failed to include the Pakistani government. America was no longer willing to trust Pakistan, and Pakistan's dual position posed a threat to America.

When Donald J. Trump, assumed control of the country's affairs, he continued America's forcing strategy and began pressurizing Pakistan to do more. When Donald Trump tweeted on the first day of the new year that Pakistan had betrayed us and that we had given billions of dollars to Pakistan in exchange for nothing but lies and deception, the relationship between the two countries was at an all-time low. The Trump administration also used the FATF to coerce Pakistan, achieving its stated goal while doing so. In addition, Trump accused Pakistan of providing "safe havens" for terrorist leaders. In a press conference, the US State Department Director John Bolton claimed that America is well aware that Pakistan is providing a safe haven to extremists in Quetta and Peshawar, fueling tensions between the two countries.

Trump desired a secure US withdrawal from Afghanistan, and he acknowledged Pakistan's critical role in this. Trump, used every measure at his disposal to put pressure on Pakistan, and penned a letter to the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan, requesting Pakistan's assistance in resolving the Afghan crisis. For this, Pakistan first freed the Afghan Taliban chief negotiator and then compelled the Taliban to come to the negotiating table, which was also hailed by an American representative for a peace settlement with Taliban—Afghan-born American Zalmay Khalilzad (Afzal, 2020).

China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in particular, and China's massive Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in general, affected Pakistan-US ties to some extent (Ahmad 2013). America, a staunch opponent of China, is opposed to these projects, describing them as a "Chinese debt trap" in which China first provides large loans to countries, which then become unable to repay the debts, forcing the governments to surrender up strategically important ports to China. There was also a verbal war between the Assistant secretary for South Asia Alice Wells and former Finance Minister Assad Umar in which both urged each other countries to get worried about the Chinese loans.

India's involvement in Afghanistan and Indo-US ties also affected Pakistan-US relations. The US foreign policy towards India is to counter China (Ahmad 2013). America is assisting India in every way possible, and the two countries have negotiated several defense pacts under which they may share bases and India has access to American Global Positioning System (GPS). Former US presidents Barack Obama and Donald Trump both visited India, avoiding a visit to Pakistan to send a strong message to the country.

Pakistan has maintained positive relations with the United States since its foundation. On August 15, 1947, the US recognized Pakistan as an independent country. Later on, the relationship greatly improved. Pakistan received a multitude of assistance and packages in the form of money and goods in exchange for joining the SEATO and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO). Later, the conflict between India and Pakistan created a trust gap between the two countries, leading to Pakistan's withdrawal from SEATO and CENTO in the 1970s. Meanwhile, Pakistan was already subjected to US sanctions. The USSR's invasion of Afghanistan was a blessing in disguise for Pak-US ties, as their shared interests provided the door for improved relations. They reciprocated by working together to fight the USSR's aggression. Surprisingly, the disintegration of the Soviet Union shattered the strong ties between Pakistan and the US, prompting the US to resume sanction-based coercive diplomacy under the Pressler Amendment in the 1990s under the guise of creating a nuclear weapon. Similarly, America's fight on global terrorism created a gap in cordial ties between the two nations, which the Musharraf administration has filled by supporting all of America's requests to begin operations against the Taliban and Al-Qaida (Amin, 2010).

As the years progressed, the trust gap between the two countries widened, and they attempted to betray one another. Pakistan began selective operations against terrorists, while the US followed Pakistan's lead by commencing drone strikes against specific insurgent organizations. This lack of trust exacerbated the relationship between the two countries, and both governments began to exert pressure on one another to achieve their respective objectives.

Pakistan's image in the American sphere became tainted after Obama's leading democrats assumed control of the White House. The Abbottabad operation, in which America did not take on board the Pakistani leadership and undertook an operation against Osama Bin Laden, added validity to the Democrats' view of Pakistan through the prism of suspicions because America was not ready to trust Pakistan, and there was a risk that the operation would fail because the Pakistani administration would mislead America once more. In addition, the US sanctioned Pakistan and halted the collateral support program's aid.

### **Relation between America and Pakistan in Trump's Era**



When Donald J. Trump was elected as president, the US government increased its pressure on Pakistan. America was realizing its aim of withdrawing its troops from Afghanistan, which was one of the Trump's commitments and one of the reasons he was elected by the American people (Kaura, 2017). Similarly, the narrative war between America and Pakistan started and in exchange for America's mantra of "do more," Pakistan's credo of "no more" was preached (Mirza & Shamil, 2020). The Afghan Taliban was the major point of conflict between the two countries. America accused Pakistan of supporting the Afghan Taliban against America in Afghanistan, while Pakistan condemned America for undermining Pakistan's sacrifices in support of America in Afghanistan. According to the Pakistani government, America is smearing Pakistan's image at the price of its raging conflict in Afghanistan. To demonstrate his dissatisfaction, Trump tweeted on New Year's Eve 2018 that America had given Pakistan US\$33 billion dollars in exchange. Pakistan had been a source of shortfalls and falsehoods for us. In response to Trump's remarks, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan said that the United States should not blame Pakistan for its failure in Afghanistan (Afzal, 2020).

Relations between the two countries deteriorated to an all-time low. The leaders of both countries were engaged in a virtual battle with one another. In addition, Trump accused Pakistan of providing safe havens for terrorist leaders. In a press conference, the US State Department chief stated that America is fully aware of Pakistan providing a safe haven to extremists in Quetta and Peshawar, fueling the fire of enmity between the two countries. Under the same pretense, America placed Pakistan on financial Action Task Force (FATF) Gray List and began blackmailing Pakistan to allow America a safe withdrawal from Afghanistan. Pakistan has been on the FATF's Gray List since 2018 (at the time of writing) owing to suspicions of terrorist funding. FATF assigned Pakistan the task of removing Pakistan from the Grey List, and Pakistan met 26 of FATF's 27 conditions. Amidst this, Pakistan is on the FATF's grey list. The FATF was also utilized by the US to threaten Pakistan and achieve specific objectives (Hassan et. al., 2020).

### **Romanticism in the Relationship between America and Pakistan**

President Trump wrote a letter to Prime Minister Imran Khan seeking Islamabad's cooperation in a safe departure from Afghanistan, which marked a paradigm shift in the relationship between the two countries. After attempting every method to persuade Pakistan, the US finally decided that a secure withdrawal from Afghanistan will require Pakistan's assistance.

Prime Minister Imran Khan of Pakistan also favors a diplomatic resolution to the Taliban impasse and a peaceful end to Afghanistan's lengthy war. Pakistan followed suit, releasing the Mullah Abdul Ghani Brother, a central figure in the Afghan peace process, first. Pakistan demonstrated its seriousness and desire for a peaceful resolution to Afghanistan's harsh crisis by releasing the torchbearer of the Taliban peace negotiating team. Furthermore, Pakistan attempted and succeeded in increasing pressure on the Afghan Taliban to come to the negotiation table. Later on, the US hailed Pakistan for its good and crucial role. Zalmay Khalilzad, an Afghan-born American peace negotiator, visited Pakistan and praised Pakistan's position on the Afghan solution. In reaction to Pakistan's actions in the Afghan peace process, Donald Trump offered mediation in the Kashmir dispute to both India's Prime Minister and Pakistan's Prime Minister (Afzal, 2020). Pakistan attempted to internationalize the Kashmir issue with this offer, countering India's argument that Kashmir is an "integral part" of the country. Trump's mediation overtures were a lollipop to

Pakistan; all they needed was Pakistan's help in a safe pullout from Afghanistan. The Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi turned down Trump's offer of mediation, saying that Kashmir is a bilateral problem between Pakistan and India. Following then, Trump observed silence on the Kashmir issue.

### **Relation between America and Pakistan in the Realm of CPEC**

In the context of the CPEC, ties between the two nations are also strained. America has expressed reservations about CPEC in general and the Chinese debt trap in particular on several occasions (Khan, 2010; Ahmad 2013). According to America's mouthpiece, the Wall Street Journal, China's BRI is nothing more than a debt trap. China may give loans to countries under the guise of investment and infrastructure development, but a closer examination reveals China's debt-trap policy. Countries are enslaved by Chinese strategy, which sees China lease critical locations and other assets to profit from them. For example, Sri Lanka's Hambantota Seaport was leased to China for 99 years since Sri Lanka was unable to repay the money borrowed from China. In the same way, China bought the airport in Zimbabwe, and Zimbabwe faced the same destiny as Sri Lanka. Because of these factors, the US cautioned Pakistan about Chinese debt, and the US South Asia advisor made several strong remarks against the CPEC. In response to Alex, Assad Umar, a former Finance Minister in Pakistan's Tehreek-e-Insaaf government, warned America, saying that it should first clean up its own house because America is the largest borrower of Chinese loans, and he also mentioned Pakistan's other external loans, which, according to him, are higher than the loans given by the IMF and other creditors. The loans from these creditors are more expensive than the loans from Chinese lenders. There is no doubt that China's loans to the US amount to about 5% to 6% of the country's GDP; nevertheless, the loans received by Pakistan exceed the usual debt-to-GDP ratio defined by economists, which is 60% of total GDP.

### **Indian Factor Influencing Pak-US Relations**

America also backs India's stance in the area, which is opposed to BRI. According to the Indian government, BRI passes through Gilgit Baltistan, a disputed area between India and Pakistan. This is also one of the primary reasons for India's refusal to join BRI.

Another important factor in the deterioration of Pak-US relations is American stance against India. China is America's sole opposition, a country that poses a danger to the US in practically every sector. China does have the capability and capacity to take America's place as the world's leader. A recent analysis from a UK-based research think-tank said that China will overtake America as the world's largest economy in the current decade (five years earlier than prior estimates owing to the corona epidemic). America urgently requires friends to fight growing China's aggressive intentions (Kaura, 2017). Due to its geographical location and bitter competition with China, India is the ideal alternative for America. The border conflicts between India and China cleared the path for the US to choose India as an ally in the area.

Since the 1990s, the US has leaned rapidly toward India, signing many military and security pacts with the country, including Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), and Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA). According to this, America would furnish India with its GPS, which India may use to track down its adversaries' locations. India and the US have made agreements to utilize each other's

bases and ports. India was also granted a waiver by the US to import oil from Iran, which has been sanctioned, and to acquire an S-400 missile defense system for defense purposes. This rosy picture of America among Indians exacerbated the deterioration of America's relationship with Pakistan. Former Presidents Donald Trump and Barack Obama both visited India but avoided visiting Pakistan to send a strong message to Pakistan that America has a trustworthy friend in the South Asia to help accomplish its strategic goals (Kaura, 2017). Ostensibly, Modi leaves no stone unturned to cement the relations with America.

Nonetheless, Pakistan set the groundwork for a positive relationship with Russia and began military drills with the once-hostile but now-friendly country. On the other side, Russia boosted its relations with Pakistan at China's request. Russia recently stunned India by giving lip service to a resolution proposed by Pakistan in response to India's crimes in the unlawfully held Kashmir. India was disappointed, but with the aid of France and the US, India was able to reject the resolution.

America is also in desperate need of assistance in the South China Sea to counter Chinese aggression and protect American allies in the Philippines and Japan, with whom America signed a defense treaty which states that if the above-mentioned countries are threatened, America must come forward and protect them. To accomplish these goals, America has India as a reliable partner, who can help fight Chinese aggression in the South China Sea. To be clear, America's intentions to enhance its relationship with India, offer India greater leeway in the Afghan peace process, however, signing other military pacts will not have a positive influence on America's relationship with Pakistan.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that the relationship between Pakistan and America has seen numerous ups and downs throughout history. When the military regime was in charge of Pakistan's affairs, relations between the US and Pakistan were at an all-time high; however, when the civilian administration took control of the country, relations between the two countries deteriorated; this was due to sanctions and a cessation of aid by the US to Pakistan. The relationship between the US and Pakistan, particularly under the Trump administration, hit an all-time low when the leaders of both nations engaged in Twitter spats. However, during later tenure of Donald J Trump's presidency, relations between the both states improved, as the Trump administration for the first time in history dropped the "Do More" narrative, clarified its Afghan policy, and sought Pakistan's assistance in a safe exit from Afghanistan. Unlike past, Pakistan made extremely serious gestures first time releasing the Afghan leader's head and compelling the Taliban to come to the negotiation table, which was also recognized by the US. In the early days of Trump's presidency, the US used a variety of techniques to pressure Pakistan; however, they were unsuccessful, and as a consequence, former President Trump wrote a letter to the Prime Minister of Pakistan Imran Khan, requesting Pakistan's assistance in the Afghan settlement. The relationship was also jeopardized by America's increasing connections with India. For this purpose, America signed many pacts which have military ambitions and Pakistan considers it a security threat. Pakistan's ties with China also stripped away Pakistan from the American camp.

It is recommended that the relationship between the US and Pakistan is beset by a trust gap, which both nations must endeavor to overcome. Pakistan's limping economy is reliant on American aid,



which is one of the reasons why the economy is not growing without it. The Pakistani government must recognize that the Pakistani economy must stand on its own feet and it must become an export-oriented economy to be independent of American or other international aid. Both nations must not allow other countries an additional room to sabotage their relationship. For example, the US has allowed India additional freedom in the South China Sea and other key areas only to fight Chinese aggression, which Pakistan regards as a security danger. Similarly, Pakistan granted China more latitude in every field, while America repeatedly cautioned Pakistan about its Chinese debt trap. So, both countries have to realize that they should not mend ties with other countries at the expense of maligning their relations.

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