

Pakistan and Afghanistan After 9/11: A Case of the Failing Bilateralism

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Abstract

Afghanistan is Pakistan's most proximate neighbor. Being Muslim countries both are tended to have brotherly relations. But throughout the history it has been very difficult for both to keep the ball rolling. The story of Pak-Afghan relations is not an interesting one. At times it seems that both have developed great confidence upon each other and now they have become confident friend. But suddenly some evil spirit comes and takes away all that was good. In this study a serious effort has been made to develop a thesis upon the main and root causes of this uneasy movement of bilateralism. Also this effort aims at devising a strategic position for Pakistan in the current state of affairs. A descriptive and analytical research method is applied.

Keywords: Confidence; Skirmishes, Relations; Stitching; Breaking

Introduction

Soon after the terrorist attacks in the United States of America in 2001, allegations were held that Al-Qaeda a terrorist organization was behind it. President George W. Bush demanded the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden (the top leader of Al-Qaeda) to the United States or otherwise prepare for the consequences. They also demanded Pakistan to decide, either to support the war against terror or the Taliban government. In the wake of this entire very critical situation arose for Pakistan's government and policy.

Pakistan had friendly relations with the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Also it had to face the growing pressure from USA and the West. This was crucial time for the government either to support and sustain friendship with Taliban regime or to join hands with the US and her allies and fight the former. As it is said that today's friends are tomorrow's enemies and today's enemies are tomorrow's friends nothing is permanent in foreign policy but national interests. Pakistan in the light of her broad national interests decided to take part in the so called 'War on Terror'. Pakistan provided all sort of assistance to the US including aerial, logistic and intelligent sharing [1]. Pakistan became a front line state in the war against terrorism. This shift in the foreign policy is to be regarded as a U-Turn. Since that time till now the relations between the two countries have never been cordial. Pakistan is seemingly losing her position in Afghanistan and her Afghan policy is also failing. The policy makers and strategists need to revisit their positions regarding the prospects of Pak-Afghan relations.

Methodology and Objective of the Major Question

Afghanistan has been regarded as corner point for the policy makers in Pakistan. But goals of the policy are almost unattained due to certain factors. This study presents an overview of this uneasy march of diplomacy between the two neighbors. The methodology is descriptive analytical and also historical. The major Question of the study is, "Why the relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan are not cordial?"

An Overview of the Issue

After the overthrow Taliban the government of Pakistan welcomed the installation of interim government and assured of her cooperation in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and rehabilitation of its people. Due to its strategic importance in the world, and a gateway to the energy rich Central Asian Republics it became easier for the world powers to exploit the country in the name of war on terror.

In February 2002 the Afghan president Hamid Karzi paid a special visit to Islamabad to discuss matters of interests. The government of Pakistan reaffirmed her commitment to provide full assistance to the new Afghan government in every sphere [2].

In April 2002 president Musharraf visited Kabul and announced \$100 million aid to be used in the reconstruction. The same year Pakistan hosted a multi donor conference in Islamabad to raise a fund for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Pakistan also provided her support during presidential elections in 2004 and parliamentary election 2005. She sealed her borders to control terrorist flow towards Afghanistan. Pakistan never wanted to destabilize Afghanistan but due to Indian involvement, Pakistan has always been alleged for the disturbed state of affairs.

Talking to media on June 22, 2006 Hamid Kerzi made allegations that Pakistan was harbouring and giving aid to Taliban fighting inside Afghanistan. So, it was necessary for the international community to cut off the source and roots to defeat terrorism.

This statement deteriorated the situation further. Pakistan gave full support to Kerzi during presidential election campaign in Pakistan. The interior minister of Pakistan Mr. Sherpao said to Kerzi during a meeting in Kabul in March 2006 that Pakistan wanted to fence the boarder and plant mines to stop the terrorist infiltration but Kerzi did not agree. Due to 2250 km long border with Afghanistan it is very difficult for Pakistan to seal every corner of it.

Pakistan had maintained almost 80,000 troops on her western border. She does not want instability in Afghanistan and always voiced for a stable and prosperous Afghanistan. The relations between the two neighboring and brotherly Muslim countries experienced great shifts during the Era. President Kerzi came to Pakistan with forty member delegation on February 17, 2006 in the funeral of Abdul Wali Khan the

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leader of Awami National Party (A leading nationalist and socialist party in the KPK).

Attending a press conference he said:

If they don't stop, the whole region will suffer with us equally. In the past we had suffered alone; this time everybody will suffer with us. Any effort to divide Afghanistan ethnically or weaken it will create the same thing in the neighboring countries. All the countries in the neighborhood have the same ethnic groups that we have, so they should know that it is a different ball game this time [3]. Pakistan Afghanistan skirmishes continued throughout the year during which many times Afghan forces had opened fire and violated the border.

An Assessment of the Indian Factor

Another serious challenge to Pakistan is Indian presence in Afghanistan. She is the major investor in Afghanistan. Since the overthrow of Taliban she is continuously engaged in destabilizing Pakistan through their agent across the border. For this purpose India had built about five hundred points near Pakistan border to mobilize terrorists into Pakistan. They are given training, funding and weapons and then penetrated into Pakistan.

The Balochistan Liberation Army (BLA) is an organization working in Balochistan the province of Pakistan. The organization is supported by India from inside Afghanistan through her spy agency RAW. She provides funding and weapons and also training to the organization to create terror and instability in Pakistan. India through activities of the kind is trying to defame Pakistan and label her a failing and terrorist state. Their main purpose is to disrupt the Pakistan's Kashmir policy. Another goal of this policy is to isolate Pakistan in her neighbors and internationally. Afghan government looks more inclined towards India than Pakistan. There are solid proofs that India provided weapons and economically supported the Wazir and Bloch insurgents.

Both the countries put allegations on each other but did not give a sincere hearing to one another stance that is why the foreigner conspirators are making ground and using it for personal gains. India has launched proxy war against Pakistan in Afghanistan. She regards herself the bargainer of affairs in south Asia and wants to keep her political and economic influence in Afghanistan and keep Pakistan out. Due to Indian factor the ties between the two neighbours are not very cordial.

Mediation and Bilateral Moves

Efforts were made by the brotherly Muslim country Turkey and USA to bring both countries to negotiating table and reduce their tensions. Several Ministerial level and Head of State level meetings were organized by US and Turkey in which efforts were made to ease the tensions between the two. Kerzi and Musharraf met at Loya Jerga in Kabul in August 2007, both the leaders agreed to make a working group and build confidence between the two neighbors [4]. In Pakistan after the general elections in 2008 the Pakistan People Party (PPP) came into power and formed the government. The new government expressed strong desire to maintain friendly and cordial relation with Afghanistan. After Musharraf left his presidential seat Mr. Asif Ali Zardari became the new president.

He invited his Afghan counterpart to attend his Oath ceremony. Kerzi did not miss the occasion, during their meeting both the leaders made their pledges to help each other in countering terrorism. President Zardari visited Kabul in January 2009, discussed the bilateral issues and signed an agreement aimed at countering terrorism. In 2009, the US

president Obama invited both the leaders to participate in the Strategic Review in Washington DC. In September 2010 Foreign Ministers level meeting was held between the two countries during which pledges were renewed for countering terrorism [5].

In 2010, Pakistan's Army chief General Kayani invited the Afghan National Army to be trained by Pakistan Army institution in NATO headquarters in Brussels. During President Kerzai's visit to Islamabad in March 2010, Pakistan proposed to enhance cooperation in transit trade, reconstruction, and technical projects. Both agreed to develop the communication network, boost up trade to \$15 billion a year by 2015 and enhance cooperation in education by exchange programmes and doubling scholarships from 1,000 to 2,000.

In agriculture sector, creation of a Pakistan-Afghanistan Food Bank was proposed. While in the energy sector joint strategies for early implementation of trans-Afghan energy projects were agreed with particular focus on CASA-1000 and Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan gas pipeline. Pakistan permitted the use of Gowader and port Qasim for Afghan transit trade, and eighteen roads inside Pakistan to India. In return Pakistan was allowed to use Afghan road for trade to Central Asian Republics. Pakistan also announced aid package for Afghanistan to rebuild rail track, roads, schools, universities and hospitals [6].

Afghan president set up a High Peace Council (HPC) composed of 70 member prominent Afghan leaders. Its role was to reconcile with Taliban. The HPC was assigned the tasks ; meeting the Taliban and other insurgent groups and bringing them to the talking table. In his message the president of afghanistan said:

We take serious the issue of durable peace in our country. Peace is an essential element of political stability. A country that is entangled with insecurity and where its people have no safety and security, cannot achieve stability – *Hamid Karzi*

The main aim behind all this was to decide the future for Afghanistan. The HPC delegation lead by the former Afghan president Burhanuddin Rabbani visited Islamabad and met the Pakistani leaders. Both the parties agreed to make a Joint Peace Council (JPC) to negotiate with Taliban and other insurgent groups.

In September 2011, Rabbani was assassinated in Kabul in a suicide attack. The Afghan president put the allegations on Pakistan without any solid proof. So the relations deteriorated once again. Pakistan denounced her envolement by condemning the attack and assured Afghan authorities of her cooperation [7]. In response Mr. Kerzi signed a strategic and trade agreement with India to promote cooperation. It also provided India to use the Afghan soil for conspiracies against Pakistan. India never wanted to lose any such opportunity which can have negative impacts on Pakistan. Through these kinds of initiatives she wants to fulfil her hegemonic designs and display her 'Game Changer Role in South Asia' to the world.

But it is tested that without Pakistan's support no peace efforts can be successful in Afghanistan. Pakistan has great influence inside Afghanistan. Specially in the Pashtun belt and also in the warlords of Afghanistan. In the border areas, the Pakistanis and the Afghans have fraternal and maternal relations. Also, they have intermarried and intertwined such as no one can separate them. The Pakistani populace along with her government have great sympathies with the Afghan government and her people.

The role of Diplomacy

Understanding this relationship a delegation of the non Pashtun leaders including the former foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, Ahmad Zia Masood, Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum came to Islamabad where they met the Pakistani leadership to find ways for bilateral cooperation. Pakistan renewed her pledge to help in the stability and prosperity of Afghanistan. Pakistan assured having no sympathy with the insurgent elements inside Afghanistan.

The British premier Mr. David Cameron visited Kabul in July 2012. He brought the Pakistani Prime Minister Raja Perviz Ashraf and Afghan president Kerzi in trilateral meeting for the first time. The two leaders agreed to make a joint commission to investigate about the borders issues. In the annual meeting of UN both the leaders met in New York and discussed bilateral issues. Kerzi also expressed his interest in making a strategic pact with Pakistan to reduce tension and revise the reconciliation process in Afghanistan. For the last several years the joint HPC have met more than 20 times and discussed different issues. Salahuddin Rabbani a son of the late president Rabbani who has become the president of HPC was very interested for Pakistan's support in different major issues. For goodwill gesture Pakistan released 13 Taliban leaders from Pakistan's prison to take part in the peace talk with Afghan government.

In December 2012 the Afghan foreign Minister Zalmai Rassoul visited Islamabad, met his Pakistani counterpart and discussed road map 2015. On the eve Pakistan released 15 more Taliban leaders as a gesture of goodwill. In 2012, the Afghan intelligence head of services Hassamuddin Hassam came to Islamabad to discuss the issues of common interest. Following this the Afghan Defense Minister Bismillah Khan Mohammadi came to Islamabad and met General Kayani. He expressed his desire to get the Afghan military officers trained in Pakistan Military Academy.

One month later a trilateral meeting was arranged by the British government in which Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari, Army Chief General Kayani and Afghan president Kerzi and Army Chief participated. The participants agreed to take necessary measures to secure a peace deal with Taliban within six months and also given permission to Taliban to open an office in Qatar for the peace talk with HCP. In this meeting Pakistan stressed the Afghan president to roll back the strategic pact with India but he did not agree to it.

Arising Borders Skirmishes

Consequently, the relations once again became fragile. Another setback came when the Afghan border military forces opened fire on Pakistani forces in early May 2013. In reaction, Pakistani forces paid in the same coin. During these clashes policemen were killed on both sides. The accident happened just few days before the general elections 2013 in Pakistan. These developments were not welcomed in Pakistan.

Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) won the elections and formed government. After taking the oath, Kerzi was the first president to call Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and congratulate him on his Premiership. He also expressed his hope for betterment in relations and that both the countries would help each other in the war against terrorism.

Sharif's Government Efforts

The new government wanted to establish good and brotherly relation with Afghanistan. For this purpose foreign policy advisor Mr. Sartaj Aziz visited to Kabul to discuss bilateral issues. He also

forwarded Sharif's invitation to president Kerzi to visits Islamabad. He accepted the invitation of Pakistan's premier and visited Pakistan in August 2013. During his visit both the leaders discussed different issues and projects of bilateral interest. Pakistan reassured that a happy and prosperous Afghanistan was in the best interest of Pakistan. During this visit Pakistan released several Taliban leaders from prison as goodwill gesture [8].

Pakistan's Role in the Development of Afghanistan

In February 2014 Pakistan's finance Minister Mr. Ishaq Dar visited Kabul to attend the Bilateral Joint Economic Commission (BJEC). Meeting his Afghan counterpart Mr. Dar stressed to party Tajikistan to the Transit Trade Agreement (TTA) to make it a trilateral one. Dar also expressed his wish to increase trade with other countries of the region. Pakistan has been cooperating in socio economic development of Afghanistan and making investment in many projects like a 400 beds Jinnah hospital in Kabul, a 200 beds hospital in Logar, Liaquat Ali Khan Engineering University in Balkh, Rehman Baba School and a Hostel for 1500 children in Kabul, Nishtar Kidney Hospital in Jalalabad and the dual carriageway from Torkham to Jalalabad. Mr Dar Also assured to increase Afghan development fund from \$385 to \$500 million and also expressed his interest in the construction of two-way road from Peshawar Jalalabad. On the last day of his visit both the ministers came to Jalalabad on the occasion Mr. Dar handed over the keys of Kidney hospital to his counterpart [9].

One month later a group of 26 businesswomen entrepreneurs visited Islamabad to join Pakistan-Afghanistan women entrepreneurs conference in Islamabad in March organized by the US Embassy. The event facilitated bringing both the countries closer to each other to enhance bilateral relation.

In June 2014 Afghan National Security advisor Dr Ragin Sapanta visited Islamabad to discuss security related issues. There he met Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in the PM house and discussed his concerns. During their meeting an agreement was reached at dealing the terrorists very strictly without making any discrimination. Mr. Sapanta also handed over a letter of president Kerzi to Nawaz Sharif. Both were agreed to extend mutual security cooperation and eliminate terrorism. He also met Sartaj Aziz. Both were agreed to enhance trade and economic relation between the two countries. The Afghan advisor also met Chief of Army Staff General Raheel Sharif in GHQ and discussed the security related issues [10].

Relations After 2014

The presidential election were held afresh in Afghanistan in 2014 in which Abdullah Abdullah (National Coalition) and Ashraf Ghani (Independent) were runner up. According to Afghan constitution if any candidate scored 50% vote he will be the president. Failing that, second round of elections would be held between the two top candidates. Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani had to contest the second round of elections in which the Pashtun candidate Ashraf Ghani won. The situation became critical when Abdullah announced that the election was fraud and he does not accept the result. So a critical situation arose. With the help of friendly countries agreement was reached between the two for the formation of national Unity Government in which Ghani became the president and Abdullah was chosen as the Chief Executive. In the oath taking ceremony president of Pakistan Mr. Mamnoon Hussain was also invited. On the eve in Kabul he expressed his hope that Pak-Afghan relations will enter a new era of bilateralism.

Trade and Security Co-operation

A month later president Ashraf Ghani visited Islamabad with a

hundred members delegation. A very warm welcome was given by the Pakistani Government at the Chaklala Airbase. Earlier to that the finance ministers of both countries had met in Islamabad during which a commitment was made to enhance mutual trade from \$2.5 to \$5 billion in the next three years. Following that president Ashraf Ghani visited Islamabad met Nawaz Sharif and discussed bilateral trade and economic and security cooperation in the war against terror. Pakistan helped a political reconciliation with Afghan Taliban and offered to train and equip Afghan soldiers.

Prime Minister Sharif reaffirmed that stable and prosperous Afghanistan was in the best interest of Pakistan. He wished that peace and stability in Afghanistan would facilitate trade relations between Pakistan and Central Asian Republics. Both the leaders agreed not to use their soil against each other. Later on they watched a cricket match between Pakistan A team and Afghan cricket team in Islamabad with delegates. President Ghani also visited GHQ, met General Raheel Sharif, discussed the security issues and to enhance security cooperation between the two states [11].

In December 2014 a very painful incident occurred in Army Public School Peshawar. Some terrorists entered the school, opened fire, leaving dead 132 children and some teachers. The incident created deep sorrow and mourning all over the world. Every sect of people condemned the barbarism and demanded the government to take stronger action against terrorist. According to ISPR TTP was involved in the massacre. Meanwhile, Army chief General Raheel Sharif and DG ISI visited Kabul to share some intelligence information with president Ghani. They demanded Afghan government to take action against TTP top leader Mullah Fazlullah who was present in Kunar province of Afghanistan at that time.

President Ghani and ISAF Commander ensured of their cooperation [12]. In April 2015 the Chief Minister of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Mr. Parveez Khatak visited Kabul. He discussed the matter of illegal Afghan refugees to return to Afghanistan. On the eve of passing out parade Pakistani Army Chief invited the Afghan Army Chief Karimi as chief guest. The occasion provided another opportunity for discussion about the prospects of Pak-Afghan relations. They expressed their commitment that both countries were victims of terrorism so they should cooperate each other in this war [13].

The same year Prime Minister Sharif along with Army Chief Raheel Sharif and Cabinet members paid one day visit to Afghanistan. The Pakistani delegation met president Ashraf Ghani and chief executive Abdullah. During press briefing PM Sharif expressed that:

A peaceful and prosperous Afghanistan was in the best interests of Pakistan. Pakistan's enemy was the enemy of Afghanistan and Afghanistan enemy was the enemy of Pakistan both the countries would not allow to use their soil against each other [14].

After July 2015

In July 2015 a suicide attack on Kabul airport by the Taliban insurgent left 29 people killed and several injured. Afghan government blamed Pakistan for the insurgency. President Ghani responded very harshly. During a press conference he said:

Pakistan's soil was used for harbouring terrorists and that bomb making factories of Taliban were still their in Pakistan – The last few days had shown that suicide bomber training camps and bomb producing factories killing his people were as active as before in Pakistan and that they hope for peace but they are receive message of war from Pakistan [15].

The relations between both countries once again deteriorated and bilateralism met another set back which was neither good for Pakistan nor for Afghanistan. Pakistan condemned the act and denounced her involvement in any such act. The Pakistan foreign adviser Sartaj Aziz visited Kabul to attend the economic conference 'September 2015.' Cashing the opportunity he met the Afghan president Ashraf Ghani and foreign minister Salahuddin Rabbani asking them to stop anti Pakistan propaganda in Afghan media and press. He expressed his point of view that peace in Afghanistan meant peace in Pakistan and that his government wished stability and prosperity in Afghanistan. He also provided Afghan government with documentary proofs of terrorist activities of India in Balochistan through their channels in Afghanistan. He also expressed that Pak-China economic corridor would be useful to all countries of Asia [16].

The relations between the two were deteriorated due to terrorist attacks in Kabul [17]. After the attacks Afghan media and press blamed Pakistan for the insurgency. President Ghani said that attack was orchestrated in Pakistan [18].

Later on the leaders of different parties from Pakistan visited Kabul. They included Awami National Party leader Asfandyar Wali Khan, Quami Watan Party leader Aftab Sherpaw and Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami party leader Achakzi. They met with Ghani in Kabul and discussed many bilateral issues.

In December first week Prime Minister Sharif and president Ghani met in the sideline of environmental conference in France and discussed matters of mutual interest. On 10 December 2015 Afghan president Ghani visited Pakistan to inaugurate the Heart of Asia conference in Islamabad. A warm welcome was given by Pakistani government prime minister Sharif came to air port to welcome him [19]. On 27 December 2015 Pakistani Army Chief General Raheel Sharif paid one day visit to Kabul to meet with Afghanistan president and Army Chief. General Raheel Sharif assured Afghan government and officials not to use their soil against each other. General Raheel assure to start dialogue with Taliban and also to establish hotlines between the two [20].

The recent incident at Torkhum border has added fuel to the fire. It has deteriorated the already tense relations between Pakistan and Afghanistan. According to analysts the incident is giving birth to a new strategic situation in the region in which Pakistan is marching towards isolation. She is losing confidence of not only Afghanistan but Iran too. Ultimately, the geostrategic situation is providing opportunity to India to complete the Chabahar port and secure trade route to the Central Asian Republics through Afghanistan. Pakistan's policy makers need to analyse their strategy and build confidence with Afghanistan. She also need to stop India-Iran-Afghanistan axis and secure her position in her neighborhood. Otherwise Afghanistan will not allow Pakistan to reach the CAR's if India provided her with transit trade facility through the Chabahar port.

Recommendations

Pakistan and Afghanistan relations are characterized by *Trust Deficit* which needs to be removed through serious and meaningful diplomatic efforts. CBM's, Confidence Building measure should be taken to improve relations. The USA and other major actors involved in Afghanistan peace process needs consider the role which could be played by Pakistan in building peace and harmony in Afghanistan. Media, NGO's and people to people contact can help in restoring the losing phase of diplomacy, which is a need of the hour.

Conclusion

Pakistan and Afghanistan cannot survive without each other.

A political scientist has very aptly remarked that one can change his friends and foes but one cannot change his geography. Both countries are geographically so connected that progress in one will have its impact on the other similarly peace and prosperity in one will mean other and vice versa. Both are brotherly Muslim countries, having social and cultural affinities. They are also politically and economically dependent upon each other. Pakistan's economic development and prosperity is linked with peace in Afghanistan. If there would be peace in Afghanistan, there will be transit trade with both Afghanistan and CARs. Pakistan cannot afford isolation in the region. She will keep trying mending her relations with her proximate neighbor. The restoration of bilateralism in its true sense will be greatly beneficial not only for the two countries but also for the whole region.

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