



## A Review of Pakistan-US Bilateral Relations during the Era of President Donald Trump (2017-2021)

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*U.S. and Pakistan's relationship history has always remained chaotic and multifaceted. This is why the leadership of both states remained in the condition of mistrust. The rational conceptual framework and shared long-term vision seem neglected in the history of both states. Policymakers and leaders of the two states always used different approaches due to divergent strategic interests. The relations between the two partners experienced many ups and downs, so the Trump era also had no exception. This work tried to explain Pak-US bilateral relations through the prism of the neo-realistic approach. It is tested to determine how the strained relations during the first two years were converted into comparatively friendly ties. This work is essential to understand and analyze the bilateral relations between U.S. and Pakistan during the Trump era. It is concluded that it was not due to the impulsiveness of President Trump. Still, Pakistan's inevitable position compelled the U.S. to remain in a close relationship to achieve its national interests. The research is based on secondary data collected from several sources like books, journals, research reports and official documents. In this study, the qualitative research method has been opted to conclude.*



## Introduction

Pakistan and the U.S. have always remained complex and chaotic; their bilateral relations have witnessed many ups and downs. Both sides' political leaders and military establishment could not develop a joint long-term vision and framework owing to the divergent strategic interests of both states. The same was true during President Donald Trump's era (Beeson, 2020). The relationship between both countries might better be comprehended under the neo-realistic perspective. Due to its insecure borders (both from the Eastern and Western sides), Pakistan was compelled to focus on its security on priority bases. While on the other side, owing to its hegemonic designs and an image as a world superpower, the U.S., as a matter of routine, tried to increase its influence and maximize its power in different regions of the world by implementing its ideas and policies.

The election campaign of Donald Trump was a unique experience in the electoral history of the U.S. In the backdrop of the War On Terror (WOT), the contestants for the Presidential office used such rhetoric which caused fear, confusion and uncertainty to prevail not only within the USA but at the global level as well. The American political leadership never realized the extent to which public resentment could be provoked and exploited to win any presidential election, as did the Republican candidate Donald Trump who successfully used the said anger caused by a somewhat prolonged WOT to win the election and surprised the whole world. Since Pakistan had been a critical partner in the U.S. engagement in Afghanistan therefore, it was a serious question for Pakistan whether the new incumbent of the U.S. Presidential office would adhere to his electoral promises and what would be the status of Pakistan in the foreign policy of USA under his newly installed administration. It was generally believed that Mr Trump would follow a different approach than that of his predecessor (Chandio, 2018) whereas the decision-makers in Pakistan thought that Pakistan would remain a key strategic partner of the USA in all situations. The said approach prevalent in the relevant quarters of Pakistan was proved wrong by the policy statement of President Trump, who preferred to have very few strategic partners, and Pakistan was no more option for him in South Asia (Hamid, 2017). In the first two years of the presidential era of Donald Trump, Pakistan-US relations remained strained, while in the last two years, administrations of both sides came closer to each other on the issue of the peace process in Afghanistan. Furthermore, in the previous years of the Trump administration, the bilateral relationship between both countries had also been improved in various other dimensions. Therefore, this study focused on why Trump had to change its policy towards Pakistan, that have either been ignored or missed in the previous studies.

## Research Methodology

In this research qualitative method was used to explore the core question. The researcher has collected data from secondary sources like research articles, newspapers, books, research reports,



and official documents. The research is explanatory in nature. The data has been analyzed through document analysis to conclude these research findings.

### **Significance of Pakistan in U.S. Foreign Policy**

While formulating any policy towards the South Asian region, Pakistan has always remained a key factor for U.S. foreign policymakers. Such importance of Pakistan to the U.S. was because of more than one reason (Sathasivam, 2017). Firstly, the geostrategic location of Pakistan was vital for any country seeking influence in South Asia as well as in the neighbouring regions of Central Asia, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and the Indian Ocean; Pakistan could connect several regions through land routes and provide a passage for trade and other activities. Secondly, Pakistan was one of the seven nuclear powers of the world, blessed with the fifth largest population. So the state of Pakistan enjoyed enormous geopolitical and geostrategic significance, which fact could not be neglected by the policymakers in the USA. Without the support from Pakistan, the USA could not achieve its goals either during Cold War (Pakistan assisted the USA in defeating USSR in Afghanistan in the 1980s) or in WOT (Baloch, 2006). But it did not mean that the significance of Pakistan was restricted only to military operations or WOT. The USA never wanted any increase of Chinese influence in the South Asian region; nevertheless, in recent years, China and Pakistan came closer, and the former was investing vast amounts in megaprojects of Pakistan and was also providing economic assistance to support Pakistan. Furthermore, both countries had moved ahead in terms of bilateral cooperation when Pakistan handed over the administrative control of Gwadar port to Chinese authorities (Khan & Kasi, 2018). That port had a significance of its own in terms of its geopolitical and geostrategic location. The proposed multi-billion dollar project of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was also alarming in the context of the USA's interests in this region. Such deep-rooted involvement of China in the port, in particular and in Pakistan, in general, could thwart the hegemonic designs of the USA not only in the region but across the region since China actually had secured a direct and effective link with the Arabian sea as well as Strait of Hormuz, that was a vital passage accommodating one-third of total oil trade of the world. Moreover, if China, in future, uses the Gwadar port for naval purposes, then it could pose a serious strategic challenge both for USA and India. Being cautious of these threats, the policymakers in the USA preferred to follow a rational (nuanced) approach while dealing with Pakistan (Tehseen, 2017).

### **Pak-US Relations and Afghan Issues**

In his first policy statement towards Afghanistan, President Trump not only elaborated a new plan against terrorist groups operating in Afghanistan but also chalked out a new strategy towards Pakistan. Pakistan, which, in the past, had remained the front-line ally in U.S.'s WOT, was now



pressurized to take some more effective steps to eradicate the menace of terrorism from the region. He threatened Pakistan to suspend the U.S. military and economic aid if it failed to fulfil the U.S. demands (Khan, Ahmad, & Dadda, 2017). The idea was prevalent very commonly in the U.S. administration since long that the terrorists had some safe heavens in Pakistani territory; hence President Trump further threatened Pakistan to take some severe steps to destroy these safe heavens in its bordering areas or the U.S. itself would take military actions against these terrorist sanctuaries. Moreover, it was apprehended in Pakistan that any such failure on its part might further strengthen the suspicion of the world community that Pakistan was a supporter of terrorism in the region (Ranade, 2017).

In his policy statement, President Donald Trump further resolved that to secure U.S. interests in the region; he would prefer to work with India as a strategic ally in Afghanistan (Bouton, 2017). During his electoral campaign as well as his early days as President of the US, Trump favoured the view that the U.S. must withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, but later on, the military establishment advised him to avoid a hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan, so he did not only abandon the idea of withdrawal but also announced to increase the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan. Furthermore, he worked on the capacity-building of the Afghan security agencies and assisting the Afghan government in fighting against remnants of terrorism to fill the gap after the proposed U.S. withdrawal (Jonegård, 2019). Furthermore, the President made it clear that the U.S. was not interested anymore in nation-building efforts in Afghanistan; instead, the new policy focused on crushing and eliminating the terrorists. That message intended to force the Taliban and other groups operating against the U.S. forces to opt for dialogue; otherwise, they would have to face U.S. military assaults (Dadabaev, 2020).

The Trump Administration alleged that Pakistan was not supporting the U.S. cause of eradicating terrorism in the region despite receiving billions of dollars from the U.S. in terms of economic and military assistance. The policymakers in the U.S. declared the said attitude of Pakistan unbearable hence President Trump repeatedly demanded that Pakistan cut off ties with the Haqqani network, which was considered the top enemy of U.S. forces (Kaura, 2017). The U.S. administration generally believed that the said group was responsible for planning and managing terrorist attacks on US-led coalition forces operating within the Afghan territory. Regarding Pakistan, U.S. policymakers had only two options, first was to continue the policies of the previous administration of President Barack Obama of keeping the bilateral relation with Pakistan intact. In contrast, the second was to shift U.S. policies to pressure Pakistan to get the results of their own choice. President Trump followed the latter option. Whatever the ground realities, Trump was very much aware of the influential role of Pakistan and its forces in resolving issues faced by Afghanistan. The U.S. couldn't get the Taliban ready for peace talks without support from Pakistan; hence he opted to threaten and pressure the government of Pakistan to achieve the desired results. It is pertinent to mention that the Indian and Afghan governments warmly appreciated President Trump's pressurizing attitude and statements regarding Pakistan. They supported the new policy



of the Trump administration of accusing Pakistan of supporting terrorist activities in the region, consequently putting Pakistan under more pressure to review its policies towards violent groups active in Afghanistan.

### **President Trump and the 'Coercive Method'**

In the international community of states, every state engages with other states to secure its national interests by applying several methods and tactics. The 'coercive method' in diplomatic relations became prominent, especially after the end of the Cold War, which happened due to the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in the early 1990s, turning the then bipolar world into a unipolar one with the U.S. as the only superpower. Afterwards, a threat to use power and coercion became the most reliable tool of U.S. foreign policy. USA pressurized different states are hindering her hegemonic objectives with the threat of sanctions unilaterally or through some international institutions. The foreign policy of the USA towards Iran and North Korea were examples of the application of coercive methods from the U.S. Both these states, along with Iraq, were even termed by the U.S. in recent past by U.S. President George W. Bush (2002-2008) as 'axis of evil' (Khaver, Umar, & Ahmad, 2019). The same tactic was applied by President Trump when he started to coerce Pakistan following a harsh attitude and made a cut on her military and economic aid, which in turn proved disastrous for the economy of Pakistan, creating restlessness in the business and trade communities of Pakistan. The U.S. trade markets accommodated one of Pakistan's most significant proportions of exports. According to an official estimate, around twenty-one per cent of Pakistani exports were consumed in USA markets. There was a direct fear of losing these markets for export goods (Ali, 2022). It was criticized from within Pakistan that the anti-American approach of the Pakistan government would not earn anything positive for the economy of Pakistan. It was a common perception that having good ties with the USA was necessary due to a large number of exports but also due to U.S. influence on international financial institutions like that of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and World Bank. Trump administration was continuously pressing that the U.S. would go to any extent to achieve favourable results in Afghanistan. President Trump even criticized the previous administrations of President Bush and Obama for wasting billions of dollars in Pakistan. Pakistan was blamed for returning nothing in response to U.S. economic and military assistance in the last sixteen years, i.e. after the start of WOT.

The U.S. encouraged the Afghan government to establish close ties with India, which was also a kind of coercion for Pakistan as Indian involvement in Afghanistan had direct implications for the security of Pakistan. President Trump gave preferential weightage to India while formulating her Afghan policy. The status of a U.S. strategic ally was conferred upon India in the region, especially from the perspective of Afghanistan. The U.S. encouraged the Indian government to undertake



various development projects in Afghanistan. India was already involved in internal issues in Afghanistan, and as a result of the abovementioned policy of the U.S., a strategic partnership agreement was signed between India and Afghanistan (Owais, 2019). The authorities raised eyebrows in Islamabad due to Indian interaction with the Afghan government at such a closer level since it would have severe repercussions for the security situation on the western borders of Pakistan. While addressing the Arab-Islamic American Summit (May 2017) in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, President Trump highlighted the effects of terrorism on India but uttered not even a single word about the efforts of Pakistan or about the situation which Pakistan was facing for nearly two decades in the backdrop of WOT. It was, in fact, Pakistan and not India that was fighting the WOT in the region and had sacrificed thousands of lives, including military personnel and innocent citizens. Moreover, in the same conference, President Trump did not bother to meet with the Prime Minister of Pakistan but preferred to spend time with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani (Shahid, 2017).

It can be safely assumed that the coercive method is not workable in all situations but works only when demands are rational and under some limits. Some experts believed that the current circumstances for Pakistan and her capabilities were not favourable for the Trump administration to take such coercive measures. Moreover, as Pakistan had developed close economic, military and diplomatic ties with neighbouring financial giant China, so the U.S. was not in a position to pressure Pakistan in every fair and foul direction; hence Pakistan refused to do more in Afghanistan as wished by President Trump nevertheless she took the actions for facilitating the peaceful withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan that was actually in her favour (Rehan, 2021).

### **Response from Pakistan**

The new offensive approach undertaken by President Trump towards Pakistan in the context of WOT and the consequent negative response blended with severe criticism from the latter aggravated the situation between the two states. The direct allegations by President Trump against Pakistan and the increased involvement of India in the socio-political fabric of Afghanistan compelled Pakistan to reconsider its policy towards Afghanistan. President Trump was dissatisfied with the role of Pakistan in WOT. In his tweet of January 1, 2017, he even criticized the decision of his predecessors to rely upon Pakistan as a front-line NATO ally for securing the U.S. objectives in Afghanistan. He claimed that Pakistan returned nothing to the U.S. despite providing economic and military assistance worth thirty-three (33) billion dollars but only cheated. Such statements by the U.S. President annoyed the authorities in Pakistan. In reaction, Pakistan clarified that the demand of Washington to 'do more' would get 'no more' in future. In October 2017, the then-U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson visited Pakistan but, unlike past traditions, could not attract any warm welcome. Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Mr Sartaj Aziz, stated that the USA must not put the burden of its failure in WOT on Pakistan and that Pakistan was not ready to fight the war of



others on its territory. That was a direct response to a bitter policy followed by President Trump towards Pakistan that resulted in a widening of the trust deficit between the two states. As mentioned earlier, the civil and military authorities in Pakistan were unhappy with the attitude of the Trump administration against Pakistan; hence when the latter threatened Pakistan to stop their economic and military aid owing to alleged Pakistani support to the terrorist groups in the region that threat could not work, and Pakistan straightforwardly denied all such allegations. Accordingly, the National Assembly of Pakistan passed a resolution wherein it was said that all the accusations of President Trump against Pakistan were baseless and humiliating. It could be summarized that some harsh statements and allegations against Pakistan by the Trump administration on Pakistan severely dented the ties between the two partners in WOT that were being fought in the region for almost two decades (Akhtar, 2021).

### **Rational Voices in Pakistan**

The U.S. and Pakistan had been involved in very close cooperation at many intervals in history, but that level of closeness remained limited only to the governments of both countries. The U.S. never succeeded in penetrating and winning the hearts of the general public of Pakistan. Whenever the two states came closer to each other, both were persuaded by some particular targets and agendas to achieve, and that was the case, particularly with the U.S. (Khan, Khattak, & Marwat, 2014). The common perception in the general public in Pakistan was that the USA could never be a true friend of Pakistan. A team of researchers comprising Zafar Ali, Asrar Ahmad and others examined the Pak-US relations in the backdrop of WOT. They selected the two most prominent U.S. news magazines, i.e. "Time" and "Newsweek", to analyze how they were building the image of Pakistan concerning counter-terrorism activities. They found that the writers' approaches were pro-US, and they were presenting Pakistan as a safe haven for terrorism (Ali et al., 2013). The political history of Pakistan carried abundant instances in which every political opposition party tried to provoke anti-American sentiments among the general public. Political parties like Jamiat e Ulma e Islam (JUI), Jamat-e-Islami (J.I.) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) never missed any chance to exploit anti-American sentiments of the people of Pakistan (Afzal, 2013). Most of the general public in Pakistan believed that the U.S. always used Pakistan to achieve its own regional and international interests and left Pakistan unattended after accomplishing its objectives. Unfortunately, that seemed very accurate when judged critically from the level of mutual closeness during their recent history. After the start of WOT in 2001, the Bush and Obama administration worked very closely with Pakistan. Still, the Trump administration kept Pakistan as the second or third option while formulating their regional policies. Political and democratic awareness in the general public of Pakistan had increased now, and it did not want to sacrifice anymore to secure the U.S. regional interests; hence the people demanded that Pakistan must keep its national interests as a priority rather than the interests of any other regional or international power



especially the USA (Bashir & Jan, 2014). The leadership in Pakistan must preferably attend to the issues related to the welfare and betterment of its people, and national interest and integrity should not be compromised while formulating policy about any internal, regional or international issue. Moreover, Pakistan must not neglect its neighbours and develop good relations within the region.

### **Role of Pakistan in the Afghan Peace Process**

Although bilateral relations between USA and Pakistan reached a new low during President Trump's era, the U.S. still needed support from Pakistan to materialize the Afghan peace process. During those years, their mutual engagement in the civilian domain dropped almost to zero. Still, military cooperation seemed to continue at the same pace as before the start of the Trump era. As the Trump administration needed Pakistan's support for a safe exit from Afghanistan, they tried to build pressure by placing a cut of \$300 million in military assistance in 2018. Afterwards, a further cut of \$1.3 billion was made during financial aid in 2019 (The Asian Age, 2019). During the same year, Pakistan was put on the grey list by FATF, which was an international money-laundering watchdog. Pakistan was put on the said grey list on the finding of the International Cooperation Review Group (ICRG) that Pakistan could not fulfil the following four areas of their concern:

- (i) Deficiencies in Counter-Terrorism Financing (CFT) systems and Anti-Money Laundering (AML) regimes.
- (ii) Illegal trans-border currencies exchange by militant groups,
- (iii) To work effectively and to implement U.N. Security Council Resolutions 1267 and 1373 against terrorist groups and their activities.
- (iv) Effective investigation and taking legal action against financial assistance of terrorists (Amin, et al., 2021).

It was a clear indication that the international community, mainly the U.S., was not satisfied with the steps taken by Pakistan to contain money laundering and financing of terrorist organizations in the region. So, Pakistan remained on the grey list of FATF till the end of the Trump era. The leadership in Pakistan failed to properly examine and understand the institutional framework of the U.S. and the decision-making process of the Congress, White House, State Department, and Defense Department and the role of think tanks in policy formulation; hence effective communication with U.S. institutions could not be developed by Pakistan (Amin et al., 2021).

After the installation of the PTI government in Pakistan (2018), President Trump sought help from Prime Minister Imran Khan to make the Afghan peace process successful (Constable, 2018). Consequently, Pakistan exerted pressure on the Taliban, who, in turn, agreed to a peace talk with the U.S. The special envoy for Afghanistan, Mr Zalmay Khalildzad, acknowledged and praised Pakistan's efforts to make peace dialogue with the Taliban a reality (Afzal, 2020). After realizing





that Pakistan's role was inevitable in the Afghan peace process, President Trump became cautious and tried to maintain a balance while opting for any move towards this region. During his visit to New Delhi in early 2020, he remained careful enough to criticize Pakistan as he was aware that any statement against Pakistan could jeopardize the then-ongoing Afghan peace process. He even pronounced in his speech in New Delhi that the U.S. had good relations with Pakistan (Dawn News, 2020). The nature of bilateral relations between Islamabad and Washington underwent a radical change because of the said positive role of Pakistan in the peace process.

Consequently, top brass Civil and military leadership of Pakistan visited the USA. While meeting with President Trump, the President admired Pakistan's efforts. At that meeting, Pakistani leaders demanded that Pakistan needed equal and improved partnership with the U.S. They further demanded economic cooperation instead of economic assistance. President Trump expressed his readiness to provide Pakistan with outstanding and easy access to U.S. markets (Idrees et al., 2020).

### **President Trump and the Kashmir Issue**

Another sign of an improved relationship between Pakistan and the U.S. was that, in July 2019, President Trump offered mediation to resolve the long-standing conflict over Kashmir between India and Pakistan. He met with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Imran Khan (Rauf & Hassan, 2020). It is pertinent to mention that President Trump had also extended the said offer at various other occasions, particularly in 2019. Firstly, he discussed that issue during an interview on Indian News Channel (NewsX, 2019). He repeated his offer while talking to Prime Minister Imran Khan around mid-2019. Trump stated that Mr Modi had asked him to mediate between Pakistan and India to resolve the Kashmir issue. The said offer by President Trump signified that the bilateral relations between Islamabad and Washington were improving (The Hindu, 2019). The Indians were unhappy with the said move of President Trump and reacted by pronouncing that Kashmir was an internal Indian issue and needed no external interference (BBC News, 2019).

On the other hand, Pakistan had its own approach towards the Kashmir issue. Pakistan didn't consider it any internal matter of India but believed that it was a regional as well as an international issue; hence, it raised it at various regional and international forums and tried to convince the international actors and organizations to media that issue (Iqbal, 2019). It was not only the case with President Trump, but all USA leaders had sensed the sensitivity of the South Asian region, where several wars had already been fought between India and Pakistan over the issue of Kashmir. The U.S. administration believed that Kashmir could prove a flash point between the two rival states, resulting in a nuclear war. However, owing to her (the U.S.'s) own political and strategic compulsions in the region, she never put any strenuous efforts into mediating or resolving the Kashmir issue.



Moreover, the recent trends in U.S. foreign policy presented a tilt towards the Indian stance that the issue was an internal matter of India and hence needed no external involvement. The U.S. had also developed in-depth strategic ties with India and was not in a position to disturb its relationship with it. Whatever was the case, the proclaimed willingness of the Trump administration infused a new life towards the people of Kashmir struggling for their independence from the clutches of Indian cruelty.

### **Transformational Views on Pakistan-US Relations**

The transformational school of thought advocates claimed that U.S. policy towards Pakistan remained dubious during several episodes in the history of their bilateral relations. However, it could be safely assumed that the U.S. tilted towards Pakistan and got closer to it only when the latter's support was desirable to achieve the the former's geostrategic and geopolitical goals in the region. As for as the case of the Trump Administration was concerned, Pakistan was not in a position to do more on the dictations of President Trump, especially after his allegations on Pakistan regarding her failure to eradicate terrorism, as mentioned above. On the other hand, the U.S. closeness to India dispirited the civil-military leadership in Pakistan to sacrifice blindly for the U.S. cause (Akram, 2017). Even the U.S. was familiar with the security concerns of Pakistan, but it remained silent over India's efforts to solidify its roots in Afghanistan. Trump's offer to mediate the Kashmir issue was intended only to alleviate the problem for the time being and not to resolve it. Ironically, the U.S. did not interfere when the Modi government, with its extremist approach, abrogated articles 370 and 35-A around mid-2019 and changed the constitutional status of the disputed Kashmir valley. It seems that President Trump's said offer of mediation was intended only to extract some serious support from Pakistan in the Afghan peace process. The ground realities and U.S. tilt towards India showed that the U.S. would not go against Indian interests even if Pakistan made every possible effort to appease U.S. leadership. This dilly-dally approach of U.S. policymakers increased Pakistan's anti-American sentiments, forcing her to look for other strategic allies like China and Russia (Mirza & Mushtaq, 2019).

### **Changing World Power Structure; Decreasing Pakistan's Dependence on the USA**

With the start of the twenty-first Century, the global power structure had also changed significantly with China's rise and Russia's re-emergence. With all such changes, as well as the dubious role of the USA in the region, Pakistan's foreign policy remained not only US-centric, but Pakistan also improved its relations with China in almost all spheres. From that perspective, CPEC might be termed the most worthwhile project between Pakistan and China (Esteban, 2016), with the potential to change the region's geopolitical, geo-economic and geostrategic dynamics. Pakistan's Gwadar and Jiwani sea ports could provide the South China Sea's shortest and most effective land



and sea trade routes. The development of these ports was vital for global trade and regional maritime stability. Through CPEC, Pakistan connected with international trade and supply chains. In contrast, China, in turn, got the opportunity to approach landlocked Central Asian states and Arabian Sea trade routes closer to the Strait of Hormuz.

Moreover, Russia-China bilateral cooperation in terms of regional as well as international affairs had direct repercussions over Pakistan-US bilateral relations. It provided some new opportunities for Pakistan instead of relying solely on the USA to secure its national interests. Both of these regional superpowers, i.e. Russia and China, were allegedly involved with the Afghan Taliban and in the supply of arms to them too. While supporting the Taliban, Russia focused on her strategic rather than economic interests since she believed that the Taliban must be strong enough to crush the threat of Islamic State (I.S.) that was emerging in the northeast of the Afghan territory. China, too, remained actively involved in providing political and diplomatic support to the Afghan Taliban, which was evident from the fact that a delegation of Afghan Taliban formally visited China in mid of 2017. Hence it could be safely concluded that regional powers like China and Russia had accepted the reality that the Taliban were emerging as a credible and effective force controlling a large part of Afghanistan; hence they tried to develop ties with this influential group (Qayum, Jala, & Ishfaq, 2018). The Taliban also needed support from regional powers to perpetuate their rule in Afghanistan. All the said changing global power structures and the emerging role of China and Russia in the regional issues were favouring Pakistan, which was already searching for new options because of the increasing pressures from the U.S.

## Conclusion

Pakistan always encouraged an active U.S. role in South Asian matters. Initially, the U.S. remained comfortably engaged with Pakistan because of India's Pro-Russian and Non-aligned policies. However, after the disintegration of the USSR, the U.S. tilted towards India. Indeed, the mutual national, regional and international interests of Pakistan and the U.S. are the main reason for such cooperative approaches of the leaders and policymakers of both sides. Both states had enjoyed excellent relations since the early days of the twenty-first Century when WOT started. At the same time, Pakistan offered everything to make U.S. operations successful in Afghanistan. In return, the USA did not only assist Pakistan in economic and defence sectors but also conferred the status of a non-NATO ally over Pakistan. Unfortunately, that episode of good relations between the two states received some setbacks during the Donald Trump era, who vigorously criticized the role of Pakistan in Afghanistan during his presidential campaign. The said campaign unleashed a fearsome period of confusion and uncertainty for bilateral ties between Pakistan, and the U.S. Pakistan's authorities were expecting a long-term strategic partnership between both countries in the backdrop of WOT, which proved wrong soon after the start of President Trump's era. Donald Trump preferred to rely upon only a few strategic partners, and Pakistan was no more option in the South Asian region. President Trump also adopted coercive policies towards Pakistan. He publically blamed Pakistan for playing a role against U.S. interests in South Asia, especially regarding the Afghanistan problem. He threatened Pakistan to do more and more if he wanted to avoid potential consequences. He applied significant cuts over the economic aid already being provided to Pakistan by the previous U.S. governments. The blame game of the U.S. was



responded to by 'no more' from Pakistan, where the government authorities, political leadership and the general public reacted in anger against such attitude and policies of the Trump administration. Anti-American sentiments were at a new height during the Trump era. In turn, Pakistan also started reorganizing and restructuring its ties with regional superpowers like China and Russia to secure its national and regional interests. The same fact had been rightly highlighted by Hassan, who believed that now strategic interests of Pakistan in Afghanistan were more aligned with China, Iran and Russia rather than the U.S. Nevertheless, President Trump pressed Pakistani leadership to play an assertive role in peace talks with Afghan Taliban (Hassan, 2020). Accordingly, since it was in the very interest of Pakistan to end this war peacefully, it played its role in making the US-Taliban dialogue a reality. Whatever the future course for the U.S. and India for Afghanistan, Pakistan's enormous influence over the people of Afghanistan would be continued. Without taking Pakistan on board, no meaningful solution to the Afghan issue would be possible.

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