

Pakistan in the US Strategic Calculus

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Abstract

Pakistan and the US have enjoyed an uneven relationship since the creation of Pakistan. While Pakistan did benefit from the US assistance to modernize its military and defence capabilities, the perceptions are varied due to diverging interests. Looking through an idealistic prism, Pakistan's hopes were dampened on numerous occasions due to the US policy which is primarily conceived through realist perspective. Of late there is a realization that other regional and extra-regional players are also significant and there is a need to establish durable relations with other regional states and powers like, for example, Russia, Turkey, Iran and Central Asian Republics as well. Continuation of such policies would require foresight, realizing the role and objectives of states seeking regional hegemony and identifying the limits of cooperation with the US, which was ignored in the past.

Key Words: US Asia Pivot policy, South East Asian Treaty Organization, Central Treaty Organization, NSG, Gwadar, Afghanistan, Asia-Pacific.

Introduction

Since its inception, Pakistan has been confronted with a persistent security dilemma of a hostile neighborhood. Indian hostility on its Eastern front and an unstable and unfriendly Afghanistan towards the West shaped Pakistan's security paradigm in which the military's role always remained significant. Pakistan's ideological and bureaucratic preferences, coupled with the sense of insecurity, obliged it to choose the United States (US) over a communist Soviet Union as a strategic balancer against India amid an intensifying Cold War.

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Thus Pakistan always perceived the US as its protector against regional threats, especially India. This Pakistani viewpoint was however not completely shared by Washington, which always regarded India as a valuable regional partner. Consequently, despite Indian inclination towards the Soviet Union, the US still regarded an Indian role vital in containing the spread of Communism.¹ The simplistic assertion of Pakistani leaders,² namely, considering US as “protector and friend”, emanated due to a complex structure of global politics where “interests” transcends “friendships”³ and inter-state relationships are sought to safeguard national interest through astute use of statecraft, diplomacy and politics.

The Pak-US relationship has mostly suffered from this agonizing reality leading to frequent disappointments and hiccups. The US has mostly utilized its fiscal leverage to promote its strategic interests in the region sometimes at the cost of Pakistan's national interests. The financial aid was rarely utilized efficiently due to governance issues and corruption, which consequently has done little to redress widespread anti-American sentiments among the masses. Furthermore, due to changing US global priorities, Pakistan became less significant vis-à-vis India, thus encouraging India to perceive its role of a regional hegemon perpetuating instability. It therefore becomes imperative to evaluate converging and diverging issues between the US and Pakistan to project the future course of Pak-US relations.

The Strategic Context

Pakistan has mostly viewed its relationship with the US through an idealistic prism. Considering US as a mentor and protector against threats emanating across the eastern border from a much potent

¹Mehrunnisa Ali, ed. *Readings in Pakistan Foreign Policy 1971-1998* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8-9.

²The classical example in this regards comes from the memoir of Ayub Khan, *Friends not Masters* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), in which the author narrates a bleated account of his grievances that the basis of Pak-US relations should have mutual friendship rather than pivoting around master-subordinate equation.

³Jack Donnelly et al, *Theories of International Relations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 30-32.

adversary were misplaced and exaggerated. On the contrary, the US, dominated by the realist approach, always used Pakistan as an instrument, which could always be abandoned later, suiting its strategic interests in the region. Due to Pakistan's historical ties with China, Pakistan has little utility for the US policy of containing China's military and economic rise. India, which is aspiring for a defining role in global politics and for its competitive relationship with China, thus becomes valuable to serve as a fulcrum in US Asia Pivot policy. However, this change in US priorities still does not make Pakistan redundant in the regional context due to its geo-strategic location and status of a nuclear power.

Brief Appraisal of Pak-US Relations

Pakistan's first Prime Minister, Liaqat Ali Khan, was the first Pakistani leader to set the course of Pak-US relations. He initially contacted USSR for a visit but subsequently travelled to Washington rather than to Moscow in May 1950 on his first formal foreign visit.⁴ Ideological and bureaucratic preferences may have altered his decision regarding the visit.⁵ During the initial years of independence, Indian hostility coupled with the Kashmir issue shaped the foreign policy choices of Pakistani decision makers. In a bid to secure protective US shield against India, Pakistan subsequently joined the US led alliances against Communism, namely South Asian Treaty Organization (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) in 1954 and 1955 respectively.

Pakistan sought these alliances as a defensive shield against a more powerful and larger adversary, India, but contrary to this perception, Washington never made any such commitment despite India's visible inclination towards Moscow. Soviet overt support to India was visibly stronger than the US support to Pakistan over contentious issues like Kashmir. As a sequel to this, USSR accepted the disputed region of Kashmir as an integral part of India, and also vetoed numerous

⁴Shahid Amin, *Pakistan's Foreign Policy*, 41-43.

⁵Mussarat Jabeen and Muhammad Saleem Mazhar, "Security Game: SEATO and CENTO as Instrument of Economic and Military Assistance to Encircle Pakistan", *Pakistan Economic and Social Review*, Vol.49, No.1, Summer 2011, 113.

resolutions presented in Security Council on the status of Kashmir.⁶ Although, Pak-US defence ties helped Pakistan to strengthen its defence against India, but the US support to Pakistan at critical junctures and on critical political issues mostly remained non-existent, be these the wars of 1965 and 1971. In contrast, Pakistan always went out of its way to serve the US interests in the region, even sometimes risking direct confrontation with global powers. The U-2 spy plane incident in 1960 is just a case in point which almost brought Pakistan and Soviet Union to the verge of an armed conflict.

The misleading notion of US defending Pakistan probably strengthened in the aftermath of the 1962 Sino-Indian border dispute during which the US openly sided with India against communist China. Pakistani policy makers had anticipated the same level of US support for Pakistan against India, which was never the case. Although India had proclaimed a “Non-aligned” status, it remained visibly pro-communist in its orientation. Nevertheless, all these hopes were dampened after the Indo-Pak war of 1965 when the US imposed sanctions on Pakistan. Subsequently, in 1971, the Soviets openly sided with India but the US support for Pakistan was completely non-existent, which resulted in the dismemberment of Pakistan's eastern wing and the creation of Bangladesh.⁷ But even after 1971, Pakistani leaders continued to rely on the US thus serving its interests in the region. This was illustrated by Pakistani mediation between the US and China to facilitate President Nixon's surprise visit to Beijing in 1972.⁸ Nothing tangible could be achieved by Pakistan in lieu of this diplomatic favor. Realizing the futility of SEATO, Pakistan finally withdrew from it in 1973. The Pak-US rocky

⁶Safdar Sial, “Pak-US A Balance Sheet of Relations”, *Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies*, Report, June 26, 2007, 3.

⁷Zubeida Mustafa, “The USSR and the Indo-Pakistan War, 1971”, in *Readings in Pakistan Foreign Policy 1971-1998*, ed. Mehrunnisa Ali (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 23-25.

⁸*University of Southern California US-China Institute*, “Getting to Beijing: Henry Kissinger's Secret 1971 Trip”, July 21, 2007, <http://china.usc.edu/ShowArticle.aspx?articleID=2483&AspxAutoDetectCookieSupport=1>, accessed on September 10, 2014.

relationship was further strained in 1977 when the US used its influence on France to cancel the shipment of a nuclear reprocessing plant to Pakistan, fearing that Pakistan could use this plant to manufacture nuclear weapons in response to the Indian 'not so' peaceful nuclear explosion of 1974. After the Iranian revolution of 1979, Pakistan also left the CENTO considering it redundant. The relationship further deteriorated after the US imposed sanctions against Pakistan in 1979 over suspected nuclear activities.⁹

However, in the early 1980's after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the US reviewed its policy in the region, selecting Pakistan as a strategic ally against growing Soviet influence.¹⁰ This informal alliance lasted till the Soviet disintegration and, in 1990; the US lawmakers again imposed sanctions against Pakistan, which were partially relaxed to allow import of essential military hardware in 1995. After the nuclearization of South Asia in 1998, the US imposed across the board sanctions against Pakistan, and even India, thus terminating all sorts of military and civil cooperation.

The fateful event of 9/11 changed the Pak-US equation, and Pakistan once again became a frontline state in the US' war against terrorism. However, the US always remained skeptical of Pakistan's intentions accusing it of playing a double game and demanding to 'do more'. Pakistan, on the other hand, also viewed the US intentions with suspicion and distrust.¹¹ The lowest ebb in Pak-US relations was witnessed after the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad and the deliberate US aerial strike on Salala check post killing tens of soldiers. Although the situation has gradually improved over the last few

⁹*National Security Archives - The George Washington University*, "The United States and Pakistan's Quest for the Bomb", National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 333, posted December 21, 2012, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb333/index.htm>. See also: M. Raziullah Azmi, "Pakistan-United States Relations: An Appraisal", in *Readings in Pakistan Foreign Policy 1971-1998*, ed. Mehrunnisa Ali (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2007), 231.

¹⁰*Ibid*, 232-234.

¹¹Syed Farooq Hasnat, "Pakistan – US Relations on Slippery Grounds: An Account of Trust and its Deficit", *Pakistan Vision*, Vol.12, No.1, 2011, 24-26, 57-59.

years, Pak-US relations still face an unpredictable future. This is due to changing US priorities in the region with the US trying to project India as a hegemon in the region. The off-shore rebalancing posture of the US in the shape of Asia Pivot Policy and its unqualified support/efforts to grant India the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) membership, projects India as a more suitable partner in comparison to Pakistan. This poses formidable challenges for Pakistan to maintain a regional balance in South Asia.¹²

Pakistan's Geo-Political Imperatives

The strategic importance of Pakistan has always kept it at the centre stage of global politics. Due to its ideological visage and geographical significance, the following factors make Pakistan a strategically important player for the global powers:

- **Geographical Proximity:** Pakistan's close proximity to the Middle East, Central Asia, South East Asia, Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf makes it strategically a very important state in the region at times making it indispensable for the regional and world powers. This was clearly evident during the Cold War and, more recently, in the case of Yemen's civil war in which Saudis and Iranians both were seeking Pakistani support. All of Pakistan's neighbouring states, namely China, Afghanistan and India, have remained critical for the polar powers. This geo-strategic significance of Pakistan holds some unique geo-political dilemmas and opportunities at the same time which are:
 - **Role in Containment of Soviet Union during the Cold War.** The US considered Pakistan an extremely important asset against the USSR during the Cold War.¹³ Pakistan provided the US with bases to conduct surveillance and intelligence operations against Soviet targets which resulted in deterioration of Pak-Soviet relations. The support to militant groups participating in the Afghan war (with

¹²Khurram Abbas, "Asia Pacific: Relevance of Pakistan – A Guest Lecture by Dr. Muhammad Khan", *IPRI*, September 10, 2014, <http://www.ipripak.org/asia-pacific-relevance-of-pakistan/#sthash.42dmLXGv.dpbs>, accessed July 10, 2015.

¹³Stephen P. Cohen, *The Idea of Pakistan* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2004), 41.

support from CIA) gradually transformed the complete social fabric of Pakistani society. The Cold War alliance enabled Pakistan to strengthen and modernize its military alongside running a clandestine nuclear weapons program in response to Indian aggressive designs.

- **Shortest Route to Central Asian Energy Resources.** Pakistan provides the shortest and easiest route for China and Central Asian Republics (CARs) to trade through Gwadar.¹⁴ This route passing through Afghanistan is approximately 2600 kilometers long whereas the Iranian and Turkish routes are much longer with distances of 4500 and 5000 kilometers respectively. Pakistan's location in the middle of regional economic giants, namely India and China,¹⁵ thus holds immense prospects of becoming a 'Trade and Economic Corridor' by developing itself into a transitory zone and subsequently associating itself with other economic and financial organizations like CARs, SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and RIC (Russia, India and China) etc.
- **A Gateway to the Persian Gulf.** Pakistan's Gwadar port dominates the narrow opening of the Persian Gulf which is the world's busiest oil supplying corridor and has since become a concern for the Indian regional ambitions.¹⁶ Amid the US policy of re-posturing in Asia Pacific, Gwadar Port is being seen by China as an important strategic location alongside other ports in South East Asia.¹⁷ This

¹⁴Fazal-ur-Rahman, "Prospects for Pakistan becoming a Trade and Energy Corridor for China", *Strategic Studies*, Vol.XXVII, No.2, Summer 2007.

¹⁵Shahid Javed Burki, "China-India economic détente", *Dawn.com*, undated, <http://archives.dawn.com/archives/154828>, accessed on September 21, 2014.

¹⁶*Daily Times*, "Gwadar Port has strategic implications for India: Indian Naval Chief", January 23, 2008, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2008%5C01%5C23%5Cstory_23-1-2008_pg7_53.

¹⁷*The Express Tribune*, "China confirms takeover of Gwadar port: Report", September 4, 2012, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/431304/china-confirms-takeover-of-gwadar-port-report/>.

will enable China to significantly improve its strategic posture vis-à-vis US in the region, with what the US describes as China's new 'String of Pearls' strategy.¹⁸ However Chinese officials have categorically stated that their policy is peaceful and aimed at economic integration.¹⁹ Pakistan, in future conflicts, can use also Gwadar port to block Indian supply of oil from Persian Gulf in response to an Indian attempt of naval blockade.

- **Important Player in South Asia.** Pakistan is an important player and a major state in South Asia which at times is also included in the Greater Middle East region.²⁰ The key to prosperity in South Asia largely depends on Indo-Pak mutually shared relations due to their size and population. Unfortunately, so far the lukewarm relations between the two big nuclear rivals have hampered any prospects of regional cooperation and economic integration. The Indo-Pak equation is likely to remain fragile in future due to unresolved disputes, especially Kashmir.
- **Human Resource Potentials.** Pakistan is the second most populous country in South Asia after India and fourth on the Asian continent with immense human resource potential.²¹ Although the current trajectory of population growth in Pakistan is cited as a major impediment to development and economic growth, primarily this economic stagnation should be blamed on governance issues and failure to effectively utilize this resource potential by successive governments rather than attributed to population alone.²² This

¹⁸Shannon Tiezzi, “The Maritime Silk Road Vs. The String of Pearls”, *The Diplomat*, February 13, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/02/the-maritime-silk-road-vs-the-string-of-pearls/>.

¹⁹*Beijing Review*, “Hu: China Would Never Seek Hegemony”, April 23, 2009, http://www.bjreview.com.cn/quotes/txt/2009-04/23/content_192517.htm.

²⁰Mohsin Raza Malik, “Battleground Greater Middle East”, *The Nation*, November 25, 2015, <http://nation.com.pk/columns/25-Nov-2015/battleground-greater-middle-east>.

²¹*Business Recorder*, “Australian HC highlights Pakistan's human resource potential”, July 20, 2012, <http://www.brecorder.com/general-news/172/1219044>. See also: *Daily Times*, “Human resource real driver of Pakistan's growth”, January 23, 2012, http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2012%5C01%5C23%5Cstory_23-1-2012_pg11_2.

²²Dr. Sania Chaudhry, “Capping our human potential”, *The Nation*, April 6, 2012, p. 6.

unexplored human resource potential is an asset rather than a liability and adds to its importance in the region and beyond.

- **Nuclear Flash Point.** Pakistan is located in the extremely dense nuclearized region of the world. Russia, China and India along with Pakistan are nuclear powers, most sharing borders with each other. Nuclear weapons capability qualifies Pakistan to be an extremely important state in the region, but unresolved disputes with India since 1947 have added to the regional complexities, thus projecting the region as a nuclear flashpoint.²³ Consequently, the region continues to live under the fear of nuclear war between India and Pakistan.

Afghan Neighborhood: The Graveyard of Empires. Afghanistan is historically known as “the graveyard of empires”.²⁴ In the 19th century, Britain and Russia engaged in the 'Great Game,' thus venturing to establish their hegemony over Asian Rim land, but failed to control Afghanistan.²⁵ British Empire suffered a decline thereafter. Soviet disintegration is also attributed to its adventure in Afghanistan. Currently, the US is fighting its longest war of US history in Afghanistan. After 9/11, the US, supported by NATO, invaded Afghanistan and made it the nucleus of the war against terrorism. But, the spillover of this war has affected the entire Middle East, and the situation in Afghanistan still remains in peril. It is uncertain whether the US would face a similar fate as that of Britain and Soviet Union in Afghanistan or otherwise,²⁶ but due to

²³Michael Scheuer, “Coming Nuclear Flashpoint”, *The Diplomat*, August 30, 2010, <http://thediplomat.com/2010/08/30/the-coming-nuclear-flashpoint/>.

²⁴Milton Bearden, “Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.80, No.6, November/December 2001, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/57411/milton-bearden/afghanistan-graveyard-of-empires>.

²⁵David Piper, “The 'Great Game' of influence in Afghanistan continues but with different players”, *Foxnews.com*, June 9, 2012, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2012/06/09/great-game-influence-in-afghanistan-continues-but-with-different-players/>.

²⁶Michiko Kakutani, “The Choices that Closed a Window into Afghanistan”, *The New York Times*, July 13, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/14/books/14kaku.html?_r=0.

geographical proximity Pakistan has again become a critical factor in finding a meaningful and durable solution for Afghanistan's stability as and when US withdraws from Afghanistan.²⁷ In Pakistan's perception a stable and friendly Afghanistan would add to its strategic depth which many scholars erroneously confuse with the idea of territorial depth.²⁸

- **Ideological Significance.** Pakistan is a leading Islamic nation with a nuclear weapon capability and a large population. Its once influential image as a prospering state in the Islamic world has significantly been tarnished due to internal problems like governance issues, corruption, nepotism, sectarianism, terrorism, lack of justice and rising debt. Despite these factors, Pakistan still maintains its stature of an influential state within the states of the Islamic community. This ideological base was used as a catalyst by the US to make Pakistan a frontline state against the Soviet march towards warm waters through arming militant groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Failure of subsequent Pakistani governments to assimilate these militant groups back into the folds of mainstream society adversely affected Pakistan's security paradigm. After the fateful event of September 11, 2001,²⁹ and the historic U-turn by Pakistani government over Afghan policy amid the US pressure, these militant groups refused to disarm. But despite these challenges Pakistan still enjoys strong influence within the Muslim world.
- **Nuclear Weapons Capability.** In 1998 responding to Indian nuclear tests, Pakistan joined the elite club of Nuclear Weapon States by overtly demonstrating its own nuclear capability. However, these tests only helped Pakistan and India to become defacto and not

²⁷Javed Hamim Kakar, "NATO wants Pakistan to facilitate Afghan stability", *Pajhwok Afghan News*, May 21, 2012, <http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2012/05/21/nato-wants-pakistan-facilitate-afghan-stability>.

²⁸Shams uz Zaman, "Prospects of a Nuclear Armed Iran and Policy Options for Pakistan", *IPRI Journal*, Vol. XII, No.1, winter 2012, 85-86.

²⁹Tom Doran, "Sympathy for the Devil", *The Huffington Post*, August 27, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/tom-doran/sympathy-for-the-devil_2_b_1831223.html.

dejure nuclear weapon states.³⁰ Pakistan is the only Islamic country to possess nuclear weapons capability, discriminately termed as “The Islamic Bomb”, in the west while downplaying the Indian nuclear capability.³¹ This preferential treatment is now posing a serious threat to regional stability especially after signing of the Indo-US nuclear deal.

Pakistan and US Strategic Goals in the Region

The foundations of Pak-US relationship were mostly laid on an imperfect premise that Pakistan and US' interests converge on all matters in the region and as such a perpetual relationship should be a natural outcome.³² Certainly on many issues Pakistani and the US' interests converge but, due to changing US' priorities in the region numerous contentious and divergent issues have surfaced which now persistently dominate the bilateral discourse between these two states. The strategic priorities of Pakistan and the US can separately be enumerated as follows:

- **US Strategic Objectives in the Region**

- **Defeating Islamic Militancy.** Since 9/11, the primary US objective had been to defeat the Islamic militant groups, with whom it previously had enjoyed a rhapsodic alliance in the fight against Communism. The US perceives militant and political Islam, like Communism, a threat to the Western capitalist system and therefore must be contained and defeated.³³ Muslim militant

³⁰Marvin Miller and Lawrence Scheinman, “Israel, India and Pakistan: Engaging the Non-NPT States in the Non-proliferation Regime”, *Arms Control Today*, Vol.33, December 2003, pp. 15-17.

³¹Steve Weissman and Herbert Krosney, *The Islamic Bomb* (New York: Times Books, 1981).

³²*The Express Tribune*, “US interests converge with Pakistan's: Marc Grossman”, May 19, 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/171954/us-interests-converge-with-pakistans-marc-grossman/>. See also: Sohail Mahmood, “The Crisis in Pakistan-US Relations”, *Spearhead Research*, July 13, 2012, http://spearheadresearch.org/SR_CMS/index.php/internationalaffairssecurity/the-crisis-in-pakistan-us-relations.

³³John L. Esposito, “It's the Policy Stupid: Political Islam and the US Foreign Policy”, *Georgetown University - Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding*, undated, <http://acmcu.georgetown.edu/135400.html>.

groups initially were only opposed to US imperialistic policies aimed at securing the vital energy resources of the Middle East. Tyrannical and autocratic rulers, who mostly enjoyed western support,³⁴ used harsh techniques against the dissident groups and dissatisfied youth, thus pushing them towards radicalism which enormously contributed in terrorism acquiring global dimensions. These groups have now mutated into a structure carrying vicious hate for western values and an extremely intolerant view for anyone who disagrees with their ideology. They have gradually transformed into ideologues, like ISIS, envisioning a global caliphate premised on a puritanical and narrow interpretation of Islam. Defeating terrorism and violent forms of political Islam currently remains one of the top priorities of the US in the entire region.

- **Ending Wars in Greater Middle Eastern Region.** After fighting the longest war in its history, the US is now suffering from an imperial fatigue. This fatigue is reflected from its waning influence and reluctance to deploy ground troops in large numbers in Syria. Although the US hastily announced an end to combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, it was forced to postpone the decision to pull-out its troops due to worsening situation in these states.³⁵ American announcement to end the war in Iraq without achieving anything tangible and subsequent intentions to pull out from Afghanistan, leaving behind token forces for support missions, indicate that the US government remains wary of the economic consequences of these wars.³⁶

³⁴John Glaser, “Exporting Tyranny through Foreign Aid”, *The American Conservative*, April 19, 2011, <http://www.theamericanconservative.com/articles/exporting-tyranny-through-foreign-aid/>.

³⁵Robert D. Kaplan, “Where’s the American empire when we need it?”, *Washington Post*, December 3, 2010, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/12/03/AR2010120303448.html>.

³⁶Rasul Bakhsh Rais, “Rethinking ‘imperial stretch’”, *The Express Tribune*, November 5, 2012, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/461181/rethinking-imperial-stretch/>. See also: Mark Landler, “US Troops to Leave Afghanistan by End of 2016”, *The New York Times*, May 27, 2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/05/28/world/asia/us-to-complete-afghan-pullout-by-end-of-2016-obama-to-say.html?_r=0.

- **Dominating the Asia Pacific Region.** The US focus is gradually shifting to the Asia-Pacific region mainly for two reasons. First it wants to project its power to counter the rising China phenomenon, an objective which is officially dismissed and downplayed by the US;³⁷ and second, the Asia-Pacific region offers a lucrative market to the US manufacturing industry.³⁸ Therefore, the US is not only struggling to project its off-shore capabilities through new deployments and alliances but also increasing its naval presence around the region with the purpose of dominating the sea lanes and trade corridors.³⁹ The US also sees the rising Japan-China tensions over Senkaku Islands an opportunity to keep its hold over the region and is thus putting its weight behind Japan.⁴⁰
- **Containment of China.** The US envisages an Asia of high economic and geo-strategic value in which China is seen as a strategic challenger posing a threat to its interests. Containment of China in the region thus has become top most priority for the US policy makers,⁴¹ using India as a pivot by exploiting Sino-Indian historical

³⁷Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century", *Foreign Policy*, November 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century?page=full. See also: Leon E. Panetta, "America's Pacific Rebalance", *Project Syndicate*, December 21, 2012, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/renewing-the-us-commitment-to-the-asia-pacific-region-by-leon-e-panetta>.

³⁸UN News Centre, "Global economy risks falling into renewed recession, warns UN report", December 18, 2012, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=43803#.USxZ4h2j2yY>.

³⁹*Aljazeera*, "US military to strengthen presence in Guam", updated June 22, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia-pacific/2013/06/201362252123311576.html>.

⁴⁰Kirk Spitzer, "Big US Fleet Nears Disputed Islands, But What For?", *Time*, September 30, 2012, <http://nation.time.com/2012/09/30/big-u-s-fleet-nears-disputed-islands-but-what-for/>. See also: *CBS News*, "Amid tensions in Asia, Obama meets with Japanese PM", December 11, 2014. http://www.cbsnews.com/8301-250_162-57570683/amid-tensions-in-asia-obama-meets-with-japanese-pm/.

⁴¹Ted Galen Carpenter, "Washington's Clumsy China Containment Policy", *The National Interest*, November 30, 2011, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-skeptics/washington%E2%80%99s-clumsy-china-containment-policy-6202>, accessed on December 11, 2014.

rivalry since 1962. The US endeavors to promote India as a strategic balancer to China by enhancing its military, diplomatic and economic stature in the region.⁴²

- **Pushing the “Asia Pivot” Strategy.** Shifting of the economic centre to Asia-Pacific is anxiously being watched by the US which is thus rebalancing itself according to this emerging reality. The newly crafted policy of “Pivot to Asia” has thus drawn mixed reactions from the regional states.⁴³ Most view it as a move to contain China by increasing military presence in Asia Pacific which, according to the US perception, would deter China from undermining the US strategic interests in the region.⁴⁴ The US officials however have argued that this policy is primarily aimed at readjusting the US economic and defence priorities and, therefore, is not directed against China or any other regional country for that matter.⁴⁵ Regardless of these differing opinions, it is a known fact that states seldom reveal their real intentions regarding their adopted policies and the US is no exception to this rule. Great powers always perceive new rising power centres as a potential threat to their influence. Accordingly for the US, the rise of China and a resurgent Russia now pose the biggest challenges since the end of the Cold War. Consequently, states which are either closely aligned with China like Pakistan or states which are not at ease with China like India, would automatically become key players in this new great game.

⁴²C. Raja Mohan, “The New Triangular Diplomacy: India, China and America at Sea”, *The Diplomat*, November 5, 2012, <http://thediplomat.com/2012/11/05/the-new-triangular-diplomacy-india-china-and-america-on-the-high-seas/?all=true>.

⁴³Richard C. Bush III, “The Response of China's Neighbours to the US “Pivot” to Asia”, *Brookings Institute*, January 31, 2012, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/speeches/2012/01/31-us-pivot-bush>.

⁴⁴Bonnie S. Glaser, “Pivot to Asia: Prepare for Unintended Consequences”, in *Global Forecast 2012 – Risk, Opportunity and the Next Administration*, ed. Craig Cohen and Josiane Gabel (Washington: Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 2012), pp. 23-24. See also: Robert S. Ross, “The Problem with the Pivot”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 91, No.6, November/December 2012,

<http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138211/robert-s-ross/the-problem-with-the-pivot>

⁴⁵Leon E. Panetta, “America's Pacific Rebalance”, op cit, December 21, 2012. See also: Shawn Brimley and Ely Ratner, “Smart Shift”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol.92, No.1, January/February 2013, .

- **Securing Pakistan's Nuclear Weapons.** Pakistan's nuclear programme had been a cause of concern for the US since its inception. The US tried its level best to prevent Pakistan from acquiring the nuclear weapon capability,⁴⁶ but couldn't succeed in its objective. Despite the fact that Pakistan is now a de-facto nuclear weapons state and has undertaken adequate safety and security measures regarding its nuclear program, the US' apprehensions over Pakistan's nuclear program have not withered away.⁴⁷ The US has 'made ready plans' to secure and seize these weapons under exceptional circumstances. Consequently, securing Pakistani nukes remains one of the top most US foreign policy objectives.⁴⁸
- **Maintaining a Controlled Level of Instability in the Region.** No unanimity exists between scholars regarding real US policy objectives when it comes to establishing peace and stability in South Asia. Two hypotheses dominate the discourse. The first hypothesis posits that a divided and relatively unstable South Asia best serves US interests,⁴⁹ because it provides the US with an opportunity to maintain its influence and presence in the region besides profiting through sale of military hardware to both India and Pakistan. The complex web of intelligence networks and drone

⁴⁶National Security Archive, *George Washington University*, "Non-Papers and Demarches: US and British Combined to Delay Pakistani Nuclear Weapons Program in 1978-1981, Declassified Documents Show", National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 352, July 27, 2011, <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb352/index.htm>.

⁴⁷Seymour M. Hersh, "Defending the Arsenal: In an Unstable Pakistan, Can Nuclear Warheads be Kept Safe?" *The New Yorker*, November 16, 2009, .

⁴⁸Paul K. Kerr and Mary Beth Nikitin, "Pakistan's Nuclear Weapon's: Proliferation and Security Issues", *Congressional Research Service Report*, 7-5700, February 13, 2013, p 19. See also: Jeffrey Goldberg and Marc Ambinder, "The Pentagon's Secret Plans to Secure Pakistan's Nuclear Arsenals", *The National Journal*, NTI, November 9, 2011, <http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/the-pentagons-secret-plans-to-secure-pakistans-nuclear-arsenal/>.

⁴⁹Ejaz Haider, "Define Relation with the US", *The Express Tribune*, July 10, 2012, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/406327/define-relations-with-the-us/>. See also: Ashley J. Tellis, "Stability in South Asia", *RAND Corporation*, Documented Briefing, 1997, pp. 53-54.

strikes in Pakistan, thus killing the militant commanders inclined towards negotiations, is cited as a rational action.⁵⁰ The other viewpoint argues that regional stability remains a topmost priority for the US for it provides ideal strategic and economic opportunities for US' businesses and industry to invest in the region. More so, stability would also reduce the risks of nuclear escalation between India and Pakistan thus paving the way for economic prosperity.⁵¹ The US persistent engagement with India and Pakistan to diffuse tensions after any crisis is cited as evidence in this regard. Nevertheless, both these assertions enable the US defence industry and business to sell military hardware and invest in the region for economic gains.⁵²

- **Controlling the Energy Resources.** One of the key foreign policy objectives of the US is to control the energy resources in Middle East and Central Asia.⁵³ Military deployments and bases in the Middle East and subsequent invasion of Iraq were aimed at attaining physical control over these resources which however did not go as per plan.⁵⁴ Despite strategic defeat in Iraq and

⁵⁰Mikael May, "US Sabotaging Peace talks in Pakistan!", *The News Tribe*, May 31, 2013, <http://www.thenewstribes.com/2013/05/31/u-s-sabotaging-peace-talks-in-pakistan/>. See also: Mark Mazzetti, "A Secret Deal on Drones, Sealed in Blood", *The New York Times*, April 7, 2013, A1.

⁵¹Stephen P. Cohen, "The Future: US Grand Strategy and South Asia", in *The United States and South Asia*, ed. Alexander Evans (New York: Asia Society, 2012), p. 65.

⁵²Tom Hussain, "Arms race between India and Pakistan takes to air", *The National*, May 31, 2011, <http://www.thenational.ae/news/world/south-asia/arms-race-between-india-and-pakistan-takes-to-air>.

⁵³Mamoun Fandy, "US Energy Policy in the Middle East", *Foreign Policy in Focus (FPF)*, January 1, 1997, http://www.fpf.org/reports/us_oil_policy_in_the_middle_east. See also: Ariel Cohen, "US Interests and Central Asia Energy Security", *Heritage Foundation*, Backgrounder#1984, November 15, 2006, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2006/11/us-interests-and-central-asia-energy-security>.

⁵⁴*The Independent*, "Blood and oil: How the West will profit from Iraq's most precious commodity", January 7, 2007, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/blood-and-oil-how-the-west-will-profit-from-iraqs-most-precious-commodity-431119.html>

Afghanistan, the military bases in the Gulf States, Afghanistan, South East Asia and Europe still provide assurance to the US for exercising control over these regions. However, due to a rising China and a reasserting Russia, the strategic competition between the global powers is growing.⁵⁵ The emergence of new polar powers poses a daunting challenge for the US to establish its hold on Central Asian and Middle Eastern energy resources.⁵⁶

- **Pakistan's Core Interests in the Region.** Pakistan persistently faces a geo-strategic dilemma due to its location in the region.⁵⁷ Its involvement in the 'Afghan Jihad' during the Cold War and its alliance with the US in the war against terrorism resulted in various predicaments (alongside a few benefits) due to high socio-economic cost and subsequent security problems. Pakistan's informal alliance with the US was aimed at achieving following strategic objectives in the region:
 - **Avoiding a 'Two Front War' Scenario.** Pakistan is relatively a smaller country than India with regards to strength, size and economy. Due to its linear shape and hostile neighborhood, a 'two front war' becomes a doomsday scenario for Pakistan. Owing to its historical hostility with India, Pakistan desperately needs stable and friendly neighbors in the west which could thus provide strategic depth in times of war.⁵⁸ The idea of strategic depth must

⁵⁵Chankaiyee2, "The emergence of a new cold war – China and Russia against US?", *China Daily Mail*, March 26, 2013, <http://chinadailymail.com/2013/03/26/the-emergence-of-a-new-cold-war-china-and-russia-against-usa/>.

⁵⁶Shams uz Zaman, "Strategic Alignments in Asia – I", *Pakistan Observer*, October 17, 2012, p. 5.

⁵⁷Stephen Tanner, *Afghanistan: A Military History from Alexander the Great to the Present* (Philadelphia: Da Capo Press, 2009), p. 336. See also: Rajpal Budania, *India's National Security Dilemma: The Pakistan Factor and India's Policy Response* (New Delhi: Indus Publishing Company, 2001), pp. 217-218.

⁵⁸Ejaz Haider, "Pakistan Needs Strategic Depth", *The Express Tribune*, October 7, 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/268921/pakistan-needs-strategic-depth/>. Also: Asad Durrani, "Strategic Depth – Revisited", October 19, 2011, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/277418/strategic-depth--revisited/>.

not be confused with the concept of territorial depth.⁵⁹ Pakistan's quest for a stable and friendly western theatre implies that Afghanistan and Iran should have deep rooted economic and strategic interests in Pakistan, which resultantly could get adversely affected if Pakistan faces a war like situation on its eastern border. This could thus necessitate the western neighborhood to support Pakistan in such a scenario. Pakistan seeks peace with India but, without the resolution of Kashmir dispute peace would remain an elusive term under the prevailing circumstances. In retrospect, Pakistan's desire to have friendly governments in Afghanistan and Iran becomes a policy objective of immense strategic value. Some analysts erroneously deny the notion of 'strategic depth' on the pretext that Pakistan has no such intentions in Afghanistan or for that matter Iran,⁶⁰ thereby implying that Pakistan has no interest in the stability along the Western border which can thus be contested.

- **Strategic Ties with China.** Pakistan and China enjoy historical ties over unique commonality of interests. Although, Pakistan is considerably dependent on Chinese military and economic assistance, this relationship is not one sided. Pak-China joint research ventures have produced some state-of-the-art technologies, which have significantly helped China to improve its own military hardware as well. Production of fighter aircrafts, tanks, energy projects, road and railway infrastructure and naval ports etc. are illustrative of this development. After the end of the Cold War, Pakistan became less significant in US strategic interests resultantly bringing China and Pakistan further closer and thus strengthening their defence and economic relations.⁶¹ Chinese

⁵⁹Shams uz Zaman, "Implications of a Nuclear Armed Iran on Middle East and Pakistan", *Strategic Studies*, vol. XXXI and XXXII, no. 4 & 1, (Winter 2011 & Spring 2012), pp. 182-183.

⁶⁰Peer Muhammad, "Envoy denies Pakistan seeking 'Strategic Depth'", *The Express Tribune*, May 6, 2013, p. 2.

⁶¹Muhammd Ishaque Fani, "Pak-China Security Relations and Mutual Ventures" *Journal of the Research Society of Pakistan J.R.S.P*, vol.46, no.2, 2009, pp. 83-95. See also: Chintamani Mahapatra, "India-China-Pakistan Triangle: The US Factor", *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal*, vol. 6, No. 4, October-December 2011, pp. 415-416.

bilateral relations with India and US have also improved considerably without fundamentally altering the Pak-China strategic equation. Pakistan's offer to China for developing the Gwadar Port and Chinese investment in CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) is reflective of this reality.⁶² Thus, maintaining a strategic relationship with China is one of the core objectives of Pakistan.

- **Maintaining a Credible Nuclear Deterrence.** Pakistan faces an existential threat from India since its inception. Since 1947, India has been in a process of gradually occupying territories principally belonging to Pakistan notably Kashmir, Junagadh, Manavadar, Run-of-Kutch and Siachen.⁶³ These territorial disputes resulted in three major wars between India and Pakistan, besides numerous skirmishes and conflicts including large scale mobilizations. The perception gap between India and Pakistan grew enormously after the latter's dismemberment of 1971, in which India played a critical role.⁶⁴ Indian 'not so peaceful nuclear tests' in 1974 posed a serious security threat, and as a consequence, Pakistan had to acquire a nuclear deterrent of its own. Due to financial constraints Pakistan cannot afford to engage in a conventional arms race with India, which is continuously modernizing its armed forces at a rapid pace. Thus a cost effective option of maintaining a credible nuclear deterrence, premised on the principle of minimalism, acquires a critical role in Pakistan's security paradigm to deter the possibility of Indian conventional aggression.
- **Maintaining Defence Ties with the US.** Pakistan had mostly considered the US as a strategic balancer vis-à-vis India, and did benefit from the US military technology from time to time. However, this perception was subsequently transformed in later

⁶²*The Express Tribune*, "Gwadar Port handed over to China", February 18, 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/509028/gwadar-port-handed-over-to-china/>.

⁶³Sandhya Jain, "Pakistan finds more 'disputes' to fight over", *Niti Central*, February 2, 2013, <http://www.niticentral.com/2013/02/02/pakistan-finds-more-disputes-to-fight-over-43584.html>, March 10, 2015.

⁶⁴A. Z. Hilali, *US – Pakistan Relationship* (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2005), pp. 35-37.

years, especially after the 1965 and 1971 wars, during which the US support to Pakistan was non-existent. US maintained a transactional nature of relationship with Pakistan, and imposed sanctions time and again when it did not feel Pakistan of much utility. The 1971 debacle ultimately convinced Pakistan that only nuclear weapons could guarantee its territorial integrity against a hostile and conventionally powerful neighbor. US sanctions also played an important role for Pakistan to achieve self-sufficiency in the defence industry to counter Indian offensive posture. Pakistani leaders at times endeavored to secure personal relationships with US policy makers, even at the cost of Pakistan's national interests. This resultantly fermented widespread anti-Americanism in Pakistani society against the US and even a few Pakistani leaders. This contradiction mostly resulted in mistrust between both the governments at times bringing this relationship almost to a breaking point.⁶⁵ Pakistan desires to maintain a strategic relationship with the US but due to ever expanding gap over promises vis-à-vis expectations and Indian significance in the new evolving US Asian policy,⁶⁶ Pakistan's role is perceived to become less significant for the US in future.

- **Defeating Terrorism.** During the Soviet-Afghan war, CIA and Pakistan trained and armed Pakistani, Arab and Afghan militants to take part in the war. However, after 9/11 when Pakistan hesitantly joined the US-led War on Terror, there was a severe backlash, and Pakistan got engulfed in a serious internal security situation. This situation was effectively exploited by hostile intelligence agencies which fuelled the insurgencies in the tribal areas and Baluchistan, exposing Pakistan from eastern as well as western flanks while the

⁶⁵Hassan Abbas, "How Obama can Fix US-Pakistani Relations", December 21, 2011, *Foreign Affairs*, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/136978/hassan-abbas/how-obama-can-fix-us-pakistani-relations>, March 10, 2015.

⁶⁶Declan Walsh, "US shift poses risk to Pakistan", *The New York Times*, May 25, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/26/world/asia/us-shift-poses-risk-to-pakistan.html?pagewanted=all>, March 10, 2015.

US pressure 'to do more' kept increasing.⁶⁷ Defeating the terrorists and militant groups has now become the top most priority for the Pakistani government especially since the tragic attack on school children in Peshawar.

- **Resisting Indian Hegemony in the Region.** Pakistan's threat perception, since its inception remains India centric.⁶⁸ After having fought three major wars and numerous limited conflicts, Pakistan perceives Indian military superiority and hegemony an existential threat. Consequently, Pakistan has always resisted Indian ambitions for regional dominance and global eminence.⁶⁹ This Pakistani policy to resist Indian supremacy is likely to continue in the foreseeable future as well.
- **Economic Prosperity.** Economic prosperity and development remains one of the principal objectives of all the states in modern times including Pakistan. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Pakistan's economic goal is to "Project Pakistan's economy as a source of enterprise & innovation".⁷⁰ Although the economic situation has improved in the last several years, there is still a lot more to be done to make Pakistan an economically viable state. The external debt is continuously rising and despite immense resources, Pakistan is likely to remain dependent on the foreign aid in the foreseeable future.
- **Preserving Ideological Foundations.** Pakistan was created on an ideological basis and majority of Pakistanis perceive religion as

⁶⁷Anwer Iqbal, "Do more mantra doesn't go well down in Pakistan: Sherry Rehman", *Dawn*, March 9, 2013, <http://beta.dawn.com/news/701297/do-more-mantra-doesnt-go-down-well-in-pakistan-envoy>, See also: Eben Kaplan, "Pakistan's balancing act", *Council on Foreign Relations*", last updated October 10, 2006, <http://www.cfr.org/pakistan/pakistans-balancing-act/p11646>.

⁶⁸Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), p. 366.

⁶⁹Javed Husain, "India – an aspiring hegemon", *The Nation*, February 19, 2013, <http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/columns/19-Feb-2013/india-an-aspiring-hegemon>, accessed March 10, 2015.

⁷⁰*Ministry of Foreign Affairs Government of Pakistan*, "Objectives", undated, <http://www.mofa.gov.pk/content.php?pageID=overview>.

as playing an important role in their lives and legislation,⁷¹ barring aside a few exceptions.⁷² Although, in practice the governance, security and social issues in Pakistan have dominated its ideological relevance, yet in theory preserving the religious ideology remains an important factor for the Pakistani leadership which has frequently been reiterated in their policy statements from time to time.⁷³

Contending Issues between Pakistan and the US. Having analyzed the US and Pakistani priorities, the diverging issues between Pakistan and the US can be enumerated as below:

- The US sees China as a rising threat and is seeking to contain Chinese influence in the region. Projecting India as a new regional power centre and deployment of forces under the umbrella of off-shore balancing in Asia-Pacific, are new strategic initiatives by the US aimed at containing China. Pakistan being a strategic partner of China cannot become part of this new US game plan. The Chinese involvement in the development of Gwadar port is also seen as a response to the US 'containment of China' policy.
- Pakistan faces a continuous dilemma in Afghanistan. Its efforts to bring the Taliban on to the negotiation table have not yielded desired results due to multiple reasons.⁷⁴ On one hand the

⁷¹Steve Kull and Christine C. Fair, "Pakistanis want larger role for both Islam and democracy", *United Institute of Peace*, January 7, 2008, <http://www.usip.org/publications/pakistanis-want-larger-role-both-islam-and-democracy>. See also: Ansar Abbasi, "84 pc of Pakistani Muslims want Sharia, says PEW survey", May 2, 2013, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/Todays-News-13-22608-84pc-of-Pakistani-Muslims-want-Sharia-says-PEW-survey>.

⁷²*Dawn*, "Call to declare Pakistan a secular state", June 28, 2012, <http://beta.dawn.com/news/730057/call-to-declare-pakistan-a-secular-state>, See also: Sonia Malik, "Secular Pakistan: 'Pakistanis should know Quaid's Aug 11

⁷³Kalbe Ali, "Islam should serve as unifying force: Kayani", *Dawn*, April 21, 2013, <http://dawn.com/news/1024712/islam-should-serve-as-unifying-force-kayani>.

⁷⁴Michael Kugelman, "If Reconciliation Fails in Afghanistan, What's Plan B?", *War on the Rocks*, March 10, 2016, <http://warontherocks.com/2016/03/if-reconciliation-fails-in-afghanistan-whats-plan-b/>. Michael cited that military offensive in North Waziristan and intelligence agencies activities remain principal reasons for Pakistan to have lost control over the Taliban.

presence of the US forces in Afghanistan fuels insurgency while on the other hand the pull-out of the US troops would have spillover effects inside Pakistan.⁷⁵ Pakistan is also apprehensive of the sizeable Afghan National Army which remains vulnerable to penetration from hostile agencies desiring to raise this heterogeneous force to destabilize Pakistan's tribal areas and Baluchistan. Apprehension of an Indian intelligence officer is a proof of this bitter reality. So far the US and Pakistan have not been able to concede to common ground in Afghanistan.

- Pakistan considers Indian hegemonic regional ambitions as posing an explicit threat to its national security. Any support to India by western states (including the US) in nuclear or conventional area, thus by default becomes a serious challenge for Pakistan. US' growing cooperation with India, in nuclear, missile and defence fields, and its unqualified support to grant India the NSG membership has thus become a foremost concern for Pakistan owing to existing asymmetries in conventional and nuclear fields.

Pakistan's Future Policy Trends

Although Pakistan's strategic salience in the new US policy for the region would be secondary to that of India, yet Pakistan is not likely to become entirely irrelevant for the US in future. New trends in Pakistan's national policy involve:

- Further strengthening of strategic partnership with China especially in the economic and defence fields. CPEC and development of Gwadar Port is an extremely valuable project which illustrates the growing partnership between both the states. Iran, Afghanistan and even India should also be invited to invest in the CPEC project to make the region the hub of economic and trade activities.

⁷⁵Yousaf Nazar, "US should talk to the Haqqanis", *Business Recorder*, October 8, 2011, <http://www.brecorder.com/articles-a-letters/single/626/187:articles/1239612:us-should-talk-to-the-haqqanis/?date=2011-10-08>.

- An endeavor to improve trade relations with Iran while balancing the policy inclination towards Saudi Arabia.⁷⁶ Completing the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline project, which is already in the process, would significantly improve relations with Iran in addition to help in overcoming the energy crisis in Pakistan.
- Critical re-evaluation of policy towards the Gulf States (especially Saudi Arabia) which now involves a more cautious approach for striking a balance between reality and perception. Pakistan was also inclined to play an important role in bridging the gap between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which although it did not yield desired results yet the efforts need to continue in future as well.
- Re-evaluation of old ties with Russia with the purpose of improving the existing relationship to explore possibilities of establishing joint defence and energy projects and considering possibility of technology transfers.⁷⁷ However, such a policy would mandate a strong economic base and fiscal space for purchase of Russian technology. Such transfers could be compensated by offering Russian companies to invest in Pakistan like for example initiating the TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) gas pipeline project, expansion of steel mills etc. Russian companies have already shown an interest in the TAPI energy project.
- Pakistan was extremely optimistic to play a pivotal role in negotiations between Taliban and Afghan government on US instance. However, the negotiations could not progress due to Pakistan's incoherent Afghan policy which alienated and subsequently divided the Taliban into several groups. This scenario has encouraged India to use Afghanistan as a base to support insurgency on Pakistan's western front by employing rebellious Taliban and Baluch factions. Pakistan's sole reliance on military

⁷⁶Salman Rafi, "Pakistan's balancing act between Iran and Saudi Arabia", *Asia Times*, February 12, 2016, <http://atimes.com/2016/02/pakistans-balancing-act-between-iran-and-saudi-arabia/>.

⁷⁷Shahbaz Rana, "Pakistan and Russia usher in new era of cooperation", *The Express tribune*, November 21, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/995578/trade-and-defence-ties-pakistan-and-russia-usher-in-new-era-of-cooperation/>

- could keep the tribal belt along the Afghan border in a continuous state of peril in future as well. Therefore, a re-evaluation of policy towards Afghanistan seems imperative, and there is a need to incorporate Afghanistan in energy and economic activities for a durable relationship.
- Pakistan's economic reliance on the US is unsustainable. As the US inclines towards India, the volume of financial aid would dwindle. Maintaining a pragmatic relationship with the US, based on reciprocity without compromising on core Pakistani policy objectives, has so far remained an unfulfilled dream but needs to be adopted by Pakistani, policymakers. Despite the US tilt towards India, the US is likely to continue using a 'stick and carrot' policy towards Pakistan by asking it to 'do more' for accomplishing US policy objectives. Trading tangible benefits in quid-pro-quo manner must never be lost sight of. Damaging one's own national interest at the cost of serving US objectives must be avoided at all costs. US limited engagement with Pakistan is likely to continue due to the risks of nuclear confrontation in South Asia.

Conclusion

The Pakistan-US relationship greatly suffered after the Salala attack and the raid on Osama bin Laden's compound. After these incidents it was feared that the relations between both the states could break down and reach to a point of no return. However, despite visible improvement in the bilateral equation, the prevalent mistrust and suspicion regarding each other's motives is likely to affect the US-Pakistan relationship in the future. Despite normalization, due to renewed US priorities in the region, the US is likely to scale down its relations with Pakistan tilting more towards India. US pull-out from Afghanistan and India's increased presence in Kabul would not oblige the US to seek Pakistani support in Afghanistan, and India may replace Pakistan as a strategic partner to the US, especially in the context of containment of China policy. Nevertheless, despite losing its relative significance to the US, Pakistan would still continue to be an important regional actor for other regional players and other global powers. Pakistan thus has to look for alternatives while walking on a tight rope of balancing its relations with the US and other regional powers/states.