

Paradigm Shift in the International Security Architecture and Regional Security in South Asia

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Abstract

The change in international order from unipolar to multi-polar has resulted in change of US priorities. South Asia faces new challenges amid these changes. US concerns over a range of issues like terrorism, Islamic militancy and nuclear proliferation coupled with the rise of Russia and China have resulted in the US re-posturing towards the Asia Pacific. Economic incentives in Asia also offer the US and European powers an urge to adopt Asia centric economic policy. In this newly evolving security paradigm, India is encouraged by the US to play a critical role in the containment of China. Pakistan is therefore becoming less important for Washington and would have to seek new relationships with newly emerging powers namely Russia and China by offering lucrative economic incentives.

Keywords: Post 2014 Afghanistan, Asia Pivot, New Emerging Cold War, Islamic Militancy, Iran.

Introduction

At the end of the Cold war, international community suddenly confronted a new reality of unipolar World in which the US emerged as an unchallenged superpower. In this new global world order, Pakistan, which had enjoyed status of a frontline state in the West's war against Communism, suddenly found itself of insignificant status thus facing sanctions on account of running a 'clandestine' nuclear programme. Pakistan's position however suddenly changed after 9/11, once the military leadership in a spontaneous policy decision acceded to the US demands of again becoming the frontline state in the fight against terrorism. Three years later, the US decision to invade Iraq on a false pretext of weapons of mass destruction became a watershed event

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which changed overall Muslim perception towards the US as many considered it a war against Islam, thus compounding the problem of terrorism in the South Asian region.

This war, lacking the UN legitimacy, subsequently changed the global balance of power as well. Not only the US invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq cost the US billions of dollars but exposed the limits of US military prowess as well. According to some analysts, the US now is in a relative decline and the global world order is also in a state of transition which might not be peaceful.¹ These scholars argue that other power centres in the shape of China, Russia, India and South America are emerging to fill up the vacuum created after the US decline.² But the policy makers in Washington do not accept this viewpoint and have argued that the US is rallying itself to face the new global realities of rising economies in Asia by re-posturing itself to guard its strategic interests in the region where new power centres are also emerging. The US policy makers insist that this security policy is not aimed at confronting or containing China but rather is a dynamic shift towards Asia Pacific.³ Pakistan, a frontline state in this war on terror, after having paid a terrible price for its impulsive decision to join the US coalition, now again confronts new realities of being alienated in this new US security strategy which needs to be analysed critically.

Strategic Issues in Regional Security Matrix

US Strategic Rebalancing

The US military invasion of Iraq premised over the false pretext of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) encouraged wide spread anti-Americanism in the greater Middle East which significantly eroded the

¹ Alfred W. McCoy, "The Decline and Fall of American Empire", *The Nation*, December 6, 2010, <http://www.thenation.com/article/156851/decline-and-fall-american-empire#>. See also: Stephen M. Walt, "When Did the American empire start to decline?", *Foreign Policy*, August 2, 2011, http://walt.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/08/01/when_did_the_american_empire_start_to_decline, both accessed July 15, 2014.

² John J. Mearsheimer, "Why China's rise will not be peaceful", September 17, 2004, <http://mearsheimer.uchicago.edu/pdfs/A0034b.pdf>, accessed July 15, 2014.

³ Hillary Clinton, "America's Pacific Century", *Foreign Policy*, November 2011, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/10/11/americas_pacific_century. See also: Leon E. Panetta, "America's Pacific Rebalance", *Project Syndicate*, December 31, 2012, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/renewing-the-us-commitment-to-the-asia-pacific-region-by-leon-e-panetta>, both accessed July 16, 2014.

diplomatic and political influence of the US in the region. As a result of huge economic cost incurred on the military campaigns conducted in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US economy currently is not in a position to sustain a large scale deployment in the Greater Middle East Region or anywhere else for a longer duration which has already been highlighted by the US policy makers from time to time.⁴ Besides the economic cost, extremely complex situation in the region has also frustrated the US policy makers to relocate their balance towards other regions.⁵ Therefore, the US is gradually shifting its focus away from the troubled region of Greater Middle East towards Asia Pacific to face new challenges elsewhere and grasp new economic opportunities. Main contours of this US policy shift involves:

Asia Pivot or Rebalancing in Asia Pacific Region

President Obama in November 2011 announced the US policy towards Asia Pacific a top priority for his administration.⁶ This policy is also seen in the context of American endeavours to reassure its allies in times once the US defence spending faces prospect of big cuts. This US re-posturing involves setting up new military bases and force deployments in Asia Pacific region besides defining new set of strategic priorities for the US policies which presumably would result in emergence of new alliances while forsaking few old ones. The “Pivot” has also irked China to forge a closer partnership with the Russia in a bid to reassert itself in the region.⁷ This multidimensional US rebalancing policy, apparently aimed at containing China and preventing a nuclear arms race in the region, has invited mixed reactions from the regional states. Countries like Australia, Japan and India have welcomed it, while Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore are apprehensive that this US policy might increase tensions within the region.⁸ Pakistan being a close ally of China is likely to face compelling

⁴ Douglas A. Macgregor, “Thoughts on Force Design in Era of Shrinking Defense Budgets”, *Joint Force Quarterly*, issue 63, 4th Quarter, 2011, pp. 21-22.

⁵ Pankaj Mishra, “America’s Inevitable Retreat From the Middle East”, *The New York Times*, September 23, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/24/opinion/americas-inevitable-retreat-from-the-middle-east.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0, accessed November 18, 2014.

⁶ BBC News, “Barak Obama says Asia-Pacific is ‘top US priority’”, November 17, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-15715446>, accessed July 21, 2014.

⁷ J. Michael Cole, “Navigating the Pivot”, *Strategic Vision*, vol.1, no.2, March 2012, pp. 9-10.

⁸ Richard C. Bush III, “The Response of China’s Neighbor’s to the U.S. “Pivot” to Asia”, *Brookings*, January 31, 2012, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/speeches/2012/01/31-us-pivot-bush>, accessed March 10, 2015.

choices in future amid the Asia Pivot policy, and is already in process of shifting its focus from Washington towards Beijing and Moscow.

Post 2014 Afghanistan

The US is in a process of waning down its operations from the Greater Middle East region. Sudden withdrawal of the US troops from Iraq in December 2011 created a vacuum for the non-state actors and replicating such a move in Afghanistan without a broad based government in power is likely to yield similar results thus creating an untenable situation for Pakistan on the western border. A weak Afghan government is not expected to withstand the pressure of armed insurgents, like Taliban, ISIS and warlord militias, who are already viewing the US withdrawal as their victory. Fall of Kanduz and several districts of Takhar, Baghlan and Badakhshan to Taliban insurgents and their re-emergence in provinces like Baghlan, Kunar and Nangarhar, Logar, Zabul, Kandahar and Helmand is seen as major setbacks to Afghan government.⁹ Pakistan's influence over Taliban would gradually erode due to ongoing full scale military offensive “Zarb-e-Azb” in tribal areas and Taliban's victories in Afghanistan. These achievements of the militant groups would also help Taliban's new leadership in fetching fresh recruits from South Asia, Central Asia and possibly from Middle East. The US departure from the region would profoundly reduce Pakistani significance in the US strategic calculus resulting in the rapid decline of foreign assistance to the former. Due to numerous internal issues, the foreign aid serves as an economic lifeline for Pakistan against the possibility of national bankruptcy besides providing a fiscal muscle to continue its military operations in the troubled regions of FATA and Baluchistan. Although Pakistan has been seeking financial assistance from Gulf countries and international donors like IMF and World Bank, yet the US had been the principal contributor of financial assistance. A scenario, in which Pakistan becomes less significant for the US, India would emerge as the biggest benefactor within the region. These circumstances would provide India with a gifted opportunity to settle scores with its nuclear rival by supporting anti-Pakistan non-state actors and militant groups located alongside Pak-Afghan border to cause internal destabilization in Pakistan. Possibility of a terrorist attack, either executed by these militants or orchestrated by the Hindu zealots under the aegis of

⁹ Bill Roggio, “Taliban claims it seized 3 districts in Takhar province”, *Long War Journal*, September 29, 2015, <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2015/09/taliban-claims-it-seized-2-districts-in-takhar-province.php>, accessed September 30, 2015.

Indian intelligence agencies,¹⁰ to either blame Pakistan for bolstering a crisis, or to depict Pakistan as a failed state sponsoring terrorism cannot be ruled out altogether.

Newly Emerging Cold War

Since the end of Cold war, the US has been enjoying the status of an unrivalled superpower with an absolute global reach. This supremacy however, is now challenged by the new emerging global power centres in shape of China and Russia. Emergence of China, in the past, was more of an economic phenomenon rather than military which is now gradually changing in wake of the US new strategic priorities in the Asia Pacific region. Chinese rejection of Pakistani request to build a naval base at strategic port of Gwadar after the US raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in May 2011 was illustrative of this fact. This Chinese reluctance was presumably due to concerns that such an act would provoke the US to take countermeasures against the Chinese initiative. This policy however, was reversed in 2013, after the US announced its Asia Pacific rebalancing act.¹¹ China has also bridged its differences with Russia to enhance cooperation on economic and security issues in response to the US act of rebalancing in Asia Pacific region.¹² With Russia, the US has serious policy differences over the issues of Ukraine and Syria. Although there appears to be a cooperative arrangement between Russia, China and the US but in retrospect, great powers always view each other with contempt and engage in strategic competitions which carry inherent risks of leading to a conflict. Any sign of major conflict between the big powers doesn't appear to be on the horizon at the moment, but a new Cold war between the US and Russia/China is now in the offing.

Nuclear Proliferation Concerns

There are growing concerns within the Western world over the nuclear proliferation. Not only new nuclear powers like India, Israel,

¹⁰ The Express Tribune, "Startling revelations: 'Mumbai, Parliament attacks orchestrated'", August 15, 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/577017/startling-revelations-mumbai-parliament-attacks-orchestrated/>, accessed October 20, 2014.

¹¹ Saibal Dasgupta, "China rejects Pakistan's naval base request", *The Times of India*, May 24, 2011, http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011-05-24/china/29577192_1_naval-base-ahmad-mukhtar-gwadar-port. See also: The Express Tribune, "Gwadar Port handed over to China", February 18, 2013.

¹² Kavi Chongkittavorn, "China, Russia respond to US pivot to Asia", *The Straits Times*, July 17, 2013, <http://www.stasiareport.com/the-big-story/asia-report/china/story/china-russia-respond-us-pivot-asia-20130717>, accessed October 21, 2014.

Pakistan and North Korea have emerged within last fifteen years or so but prospects of other states, like Iran, crossing the threshold remains plausible. US is not only concerned over the nuclear programme of Iran and North Korea but has also apprehensions with regards to Pakistani vertical nuclear proliferation. Pakistan on the other hand is sceptical of the US intentions over its nuclear programme and fears that under extreme circumstances, the US might launch an operation to seize or destroy Pakistan's nuclear assets. This mistrust is likely to continue in future as well.

Islamic Militancy

US is also fearful of the growing Islamic militancy in the region especially of ISIS and other non-state actors, perpetuated and inflated as a reaction to the US interventionist policies in the Middle East.¹³ The US concerns that, if not controlled, the Al Qaeda could again regenerate itself through ideological cohesion of these militant groups thus posing a serious challenge to the US strategic interests in the region. Emergence of ISIS is just a new manifestation and dimension of the old threat to the modern state system in the Greater Middle East region.¹⁴ Consequently, the US, in future, is likely to use its diplomatic and financial leverage on Pakistan for taking tangible action and doing more against the growing influence of ISIS, Al Qaeda and other affiliated groups by going after their sanctuaries located alongside the Pak-Afghan border. Current military operations, which previously were strongly resisted by Pakistani government, launched at a time once the US is pulling bulk of its forces out of Afghanistan, can probably be seen in the same context.¹⁵

¹³ Shams uz Zaman, "Rise of Non-State Actors in Middle East – Regional Dimensions, *IPRI Journal*, Vol. XV, No. 1, (Winter 2015), pp. 52-54.

¹⁴ Bruce Riedel, "Al Qaeda Is Back", *Brookings*, July 26, 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2013/07/26-al-qaeda-riedel>, accessed October 27, 2014.

¹⁵ Michael Kugelman, "Pakistan's Military Response: Too Little, Too Late", *The Diplomat*, February 3, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/02/pakistans-militancy-response-too-little-too-late/>, accessed July 10, 2014.

The Iran Factor

There has been a dramatic and sudden shift in the US policy towards Iranian nuclear programme even at the cost of Israeli annoyance.¹⁶ The Iran-US nuclear framework, known as Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), came as a surprise to many in a time once the threat of Israeli strikes on Iranian nuclear installations was looming on the horizon.¹⁷ Saudis are also not happy with the deal because it illustrates shift in US priorities from Sunni to Shiite regional players. Consequently, Iran and its Shiite ally states could emerge as a counter balancing force to Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC), subsequently to serve as a critical node for the US to exercise its influence against the rising asymmetric challenges of Sunni militancy.¹⁸ For Pakistan, which has already embarrassed the Saudis by refusing to deploy troops along the Yemen border, this situation has become extremely delicate as it might have to face the prospect of choosing between Tehran and Riyadh in future. Pakistani tilt towards Saudi Arabia risks alienating Iran while at the same time its inclination towards Iran could jeopardize its cordial relationship with Saudi Arabia, which has always rescued Pakistan in economic crises. Pakistan's dilemmas can only be mitigated in this newly emerging regional equation if it manages to secure a balancing and mediating role for itself amidst the growing Saudi-Iranian rivalries while at the same time avoiding becoming a proxy for the US newly articulated Asia-Pacific policy.

Indo-US Strategic Partnership

US considers India an indispensable partner in the containment of China policy.¹⁹ Besides its utility against China, India also presents a

¹⁶ William Booth, "Israel's Netanyahu calls Iran deal 'historic mistake'", *The Washington Post*, November 24, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/israel-says-iran-deal-makes-world-more-dangerous/2013/11/24/e0e347de-54f9-11e3-bdbf-097ab2a3dc2b_story.html, accessed January 10, 2014.

¹⁷ James M. Acton, "Why the Iranian Nuclear Agreement is a Good Deal", *Carnegie Endowment of International Peace*, November 26, 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/11/26/why-iranian-nuclear-agreement-is-good-deal/guoz>, accessed January 20, 2014.

¹⁸ Alireza Ahmadian, "Saudi Foreign Policy Rendered Redundant", *Foreign Policy Association Blogs*, December 14, 2013, <http://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2013/12/14/saudi-foreign-policy-rendered-redundant/>. See also: George Friedman, "Strategic Reversal: The United States, Iran and the Middle East", *Stratfor*, January 5, 2014, <http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/strategic-reversal-united-states-iran-and-middle-east>, both accessed February 5, 2014.

¹⁹ Rahul Bedi Richard Spencer, "US-India defence deal 'to counter China'", *The Telegraph*, February 26, 2008, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1579938/US-India-defence-deal-to-counter-China.html>, accessed May 10, 2014.

huge economic market of around a billion plus people which naturally becomes an attractive investment opportunity for the US corporate sector and military industrial complex. The Indo-US civil nuclear deal and growing ties in defence and scientific fields just illustrate this growing trend in which India is likely to gain added significance for the US policy objectives in the region. Besides China factor, India has also become a very attractive consumer market for the US based Multi-National Companies (MNCs) and corporate sector.

Emergence of China as a new Power Centre

The rise of China is considered as one of the most significant factors of 21st Century. Napoleon said that China was a sleeping giant, which according to Richard Nixon has woken up to shake the world.²⁰ China's rise has not only economic dimensions but China is also gradually enhancing its military and defence capabilities besides asserting itself in the East China Sea and beyond. Chinese claim over the controversial Senkaku / Diaoyu islands and development of artificial airstrip in South China Sea can be seen in the same very context. This rising Chinese influence within the region and over the globe is a source of concerns for the US which is therefore rebalancing its position vis-à-vis China. China has also surfaced as a strong economic rival of the US, grabbing markets in Asia, Africa and Europe, which is adding to the US economic concerns amid its compounding fiscal issues. Although China so far has refrained from physically interfering or intervening in troubled regions but this norm might change once China acquires a global stature equal to that of United States.

Indo-China: Conflict and Cooperation

Another very interesting and paradoxical phenomenon in the region is the Indo-China relationship, premised both on conflict and cooperation. China and India have border disputes and at times both sides resort to rhetoric, however, this has not seriously affected their trade and economic ties which continues to grow.²¹ It has been also postulated by some analysts that despite existing border disputes with China, India still might not become a US proxy in the "containment of

²⁰ Richard Nixon, *Seize the Moment* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), p 183.

²¹ Ansuya Harjani, "Opportunistic Indians Ride China's Economic Boom", *CNBC Asia*, April 21, 2013, <http://www.cnbc.com/id/100648305>, accessed November 28, 2014.
http://1013-08-12/news/41332665_1_us-and-india-alliance-xiaoqiang, accessed November 10, 2014.

China” policy due to its vested economic interests in China, as these could run into jeopardy due to regional confrontation.²² Pakistan has immense economic opportunities to become a trade and economic corridor between these two Asian giants but the governance issues, corruption and ruling elite's apathy towards this aspect has so far deprived Pakistan to reap any benefits from this opportunity. Growing Pakistani frustration over Indian attitude towards meaningful talks for resolution of disputes and subsequent attempts of the latter to marginalize the former at regional forums has persuaded Pakistan to look for alternative options. Launching of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project promising investments of over \$46 billion can be seen in the same backdrop.

Pakistan in the New Security Paradigm

After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan may face a situation similar to 1990's once it was abandoned following the defeat of communism. Pakistan would become less important for the US due to diverging nature of interests on strategic issues. Consequently, the foreign aid would gradually diminish not only due to economic recession in the US and Europe but also because India is likely to replace Pakistan in the new US strategic calculus. Indian continuous provocations across the Line of Control illustrates that threat from the eastern border would remain a permanent feature in Pakistan's security policy. At the same time Pakistan would have to commit bulk of its troops on the western border for counterinsurgency operations, which are likely to continue in future and it looks certain that neither the Afghan government nor new Taliban/ISIS factions would have a favourable view of Islamabad. The opportunity to end the conflict on the negotiation table was lost somewhere in 2014 due to inept government and uninterested military. Pakistani society also remains divided along secular/liberal and religious/conservative fault lines which polarizes the society thus raising prospects for sectarian killings, terrorism and violence. Pakistan would be facing a three dimensional threat from east, west and internal. In other words, Pakistan, in foreseeable future, is likely to remain engaged in a low intensity war/conflict on three fronts, which brings good news for India. With the shrinking foreign aid and looming threat of economic bankruptcy, it would be imprudent for Pakistan to remain in a perpetual state of

²² Economic Times, “India will not join US alliance against China: Think Tank”, August 12, 2013, <http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2>

war. Otherwise, this state of war would serve as a continuous drain on Pakistan's economy resulting in an economic meltdown. A weak economy would naturally mean a weak defence. In case the economic problems and issue like corruption, lack of law and order, militancy and terrorism are not eradicated in appropriate timeframe, not only political and institutional infrastructure in Pakistan would weaken but Pakistan's survival as a viable state offering economic incentives for foreign investors would also diminish.

The Way Forward

The West faces a dubious future with regards to economic growth due to multiple factors but Asia is emerging as a new global economic hub and largely remains immune from the Western economic recession. Asia also becomes strategically important as most of the economic players occupying the stage of global politics, like Russia, China, Japan and CARs are situated in the region. Pakistan would miss the economic and strategic opportunities if it remains entangled in the internal and external issues perpetuating internal instability and economic difficulty. This would necessitate the intellectually dwarf political leaders and egocentric security establishment to rise above the parochial prejudices and face the national challenges in entirety.

Pakistan needs to look within the region while strengthening its ties with China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Turkey etc. to improve relations and build its economic base before the foreign aid dries out. Moreover, the situation in Afghanistan is also becoming untenable for Pakistan which adopted a reactive policy. Fears regarding civil war in Afghanistan are also shared by China, Russia, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States who are keenly interested in bringing stability to Afghanistan. Inviting a summit to involve neighbouring and regional stake holders like China, Russia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan etc to complete the ground work for the rebuilding of the war torn Afghanistan would therefore be an imperative. Visit of top Chinese security officials, especially Zhou Yongkang, to Afghanistan indicate that China is bracing itself to fill in the gap after the US pulls out of Afghanistan. This could also help in denying US some space in its containment of China policy as well.

Pakistani government's recent initiative to strengthen the trade and economic ties with regional states and economic corridor project with China is a step in the right direction which needs to be pursued

vigorously. Russian support to neighbouring states at this critical juncture would also be of immense value to the region. Russians have already shown their support to include Pakistan in Shanghai Cooperation Organization and few high level dignitaries have also exchanged their visits to each other's capitals which is a sign of growing trust and strengthening relations between the two states. Pakistan can also use this opportunity to invite Russians and Chinese companies to invest in IPI and TAPI pipeline projects which could turn into economic lifeline for Pakistan and key to economic stability in Afghanistan. Speeding up work on temporarily held up gas pipeline project with Iran would be another milestone towards overcoming energy needs, economic growth and prosperity which subsequently would lead to stability and peace.

Pakistan has experienced repeated embarrassments and disappointments in history from various states, both within and outside the region, due to its faulty premise of interstate relationship based on emotional and sentimental inclinations. Now it is time to revisit the old approach and establish new relationships with the US and other regional states on pragmatic and meaningful interests which must be based on actual shared common interests and not just hypothetical presumptions. Pakistani leaders must also be cognizant of the fact that credible partnerships between states cannot be established overnight but over a longer period of time. Therefore, while turning towards Russia and other Central Asian Republics etc., sight of other regional and global actors must not be lost till the time the state interests does not prescribe otherwise.

Conclusion

The policy makers and security establishment of Pakistan are, although, cognizant of remaining relevant to the global strategic environments and geo-political developments, which mostly has been erroneously interpreted and unconditionally surrendered to the dictates of a global hegemon and serving its interests even if the logic of national interests and economy defies the policy. Due to this submissive behaviour, Pakistan risks becoming less important state where law and order issues, security situation and economic bankruptcy would remain predominant concerns. If Pakistan continues to steer in the current direction and simultaneously facing three front war scenarios, any hope of early recovery from its self-inflicted woes would remain dim. The norm of remaining indifferent to

international developments while perusing partisan policy of US centric and India specific will have to be reviewed dispassionately. Pakistan will have to craft a multidimensional policy for every region while remaining cognizant of fluid geo-strategic and geo-economic realities. Newly emerging economic powers can always be embraced if they appear to be economically viable in spite of past troubled history. At the same time remaining engaged with old or declining powers should not be a priority if they seek for new strategic objectives elsewhere finding new partners. Thus looking for economic opportunities everywhere should be the Pakistan's core objective. Pakistan would have to vigorously pursue the CPEC project besides finding an early political solution to the US initiated war on terror which has become a continuous source of drain on its economy. All military conflicts ultimately end on the negotiation table and the current war is no exception. External investors world never be willing to take any risk in a war torn country therefore it would be imperative to effectively deal with the dissident/rebel groups and quickly infuse them back into mainstream society. Military solutions alone would perpetuate vicious and unending cycles of violence with or without external actor's support. Seeking political settlement under the current challenging environments by the myopic civil and military leadership would be no easy task. If Pakistan is able to keep the strategic destination in sight while avoiding tactical diversions, only then it can become economically and strategically viable for rest of the world.