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After Osama

Pakistan's Relations with the US, China & India

Samarjit Ghosh, Aditi Malhotra, and Rohit Singh



Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies

Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies

B-7/3, Safdarjung Enclave

New Delhi 110029

91-11-4100 1900

www.ipcs.org

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Samarjit Ghosh, Aditi Malhotra, and Rohit Singh are Research Associates at the CLAWS, New Delhi.

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Address:

B 7/3 Lower Ground Floor
Safdarjung Enclave
New Delhi 110029
INDIA

Tel: 91-11-4100 1900, 4165 2556, 4165 2557,
4165 2558, 4165 2559

Fax: (91-11) 4165 2560

Email: officemail@ipcs.org

Web: www.ipcs.org

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The killing of Osama Bin Laden by the US further accentuates the security situation within Pakistan which is poised at a delicate juncture, carefully balancing the rise of fundamentalism and hatred against the West and tacking actions terrorists who threaten its very existence. Developments in Pakistan, therefore, would have direct fallout on its neighbours, especially India and China.

This essay attempts to analyse the course of Pakistan's relationship with the United States, China and India.

I US and Pakistan

When it comes to the US-Pakistan relations, over the years, the analyses offered seem to be either overly despondent, unusually optimistic - repetitive, in both respects - but the one common thread that runs through them is the employment of the metaphor. From Pakistan not being "an easy country to do business with," to the relationship between the two countries described, in turn, as the "proverbial marriage of convenience," "the odd couple of international relations," and "in need of marriage counselling." However, neither pessimism, nor optimism [or even metaphors for that matter] are the "call of the hour" [not that they, especially metaphors, aren't useful and fun] - that honour is reserved for "realism."

However, with the assassination of Osama bin Laden, even realism would seem to have fallen prey to the metaphor. The shade of the same, however, has changed - and the difference is not subtle. The reference to Pakistan [in the US] is less of "they [the Pakistanis] are rascals, but at least they are 'still our rascals'," and more of "are they a necessary ally or a necessary evil?" Commonality, however, still exists, in terms

of the fact that while Pakistani analysts recommend "patience, not punishment," American analysts seem to be at pains to describe "why we're stuck with Pakistan."

Recent developments preceding the assassination, in terms of the Raymond Davis case and the public/government/military resentment/objection to US drone strikes in the borderlands of Pakistan, had already resulted in a number of furrowed brows in both the US and Pakistan, and debate over whether the state of relations between the two was just another bump in an already plentifully cobbled street, or would define foreign relations between the two countries in an effective manner in the future. In light of the assassination, however, it is plain to see that this is more than just another bump, and even though the US-Pakistan relationship has never been prototypical, it would seem, now, to "make less and less sense."

Pakistan's likely interactions with the US, then, would centre on the following issues:

The Trust Deficit - much belaboured, but not adequately addressed - Even before the events of 02 May 2011, there were a number of historical wrongs which Pakistan held the US responsible for; in turn, the US held Pakistan responsible for an equal number of inactions and inadequacies in its redressal [or lack thereof] of internal and external security issues. In the past, there had been frequent talk of the two letting "let bygones be bygones," and the political administrations [and military as well, in the case of Pakistan], having to agree "let [certain] sleeping dogs lie" if they are to make headway in future bilateral relations. However, given the circumstances under which the assassination was carried out, there can be no return to the status quo, as eventful as it already was. It is still unclear

as to whether the Pakistanis were, in the words of one analyst, either “completely incompetent,” or “completely complicit,” and one suspects it will be a while before clarity emerges.

However, it must be stated here that this particular relationship has never been about trust. It was and remains to be, a strategic alliance, based on [sometimes] complementary interests. When the two countries came together post 9/11, there were no talks of shared goals or dreams – it was a clear case of “us” vs. “them”. And the factors which were responsible for the collaboration then, continue to hold true in some manner. Their resolution now, however, will be undertaken now in a considerably different manner.

Drone strikes - Recent protests notwithstanding, it is unlikely that the US will permanently eschew the use of what they see as an effective tool in the GWOT, even and especially after 02 May. However, structuring their usage in coordination with the Pakistani government/military may be the only way to ensure that it doesn't rebound on them negatively - collateral damage notwithstanding. In addition, Pakistan's actions [or their absence] towards the militancy [and militant groups] rampant in the region in question, will continue to be an important factor.

Afghanistan - Commonality on Afghanistan between the two is on a prospective US exit, and that both would like it to happen sooner than later. However, they differ strongly on the ideal conditions for withdrawal, as also the stakeholders that should be involved in the absence of the US. The “elephant in the room” on the issue of Afghanistan, apart from the Taliban [all variants] of course, is India, and relations between the two countries, and with India, will impact Pakistan's stance on Afghanistan indubitably. In addition, the US' stance on Kashmir will, in turn, impact not only Pakistan's position on Afghanistan, but also its relations with the US in every

regard. After 02 May, however, it is the US which is in more of an uncomfortable position with regard to Afghanistan, than Pakistan. There have already been calls for the US to hasten their withdrawal from Afghanistan, after the assassination – notwithstanding the reality that the situation is now, and has been for a long time, about far more than just one individual. But in light of the fact that any form of withdrawal will require at least some level of [helpful] involvement from Pakistan, the US will have to consider the *longue durée* in terms of its continued relations with Pakistan,.

Funds and oversight - Between 2002 and 2008, the US spent a little over \$11 billion in Pakistan. Subsequently, the Kerry-Lugar-Berman bill catered for a further \$7.5 billion to be spent over five years, with the provision for an equivalent amount five years hence. In funding matters, there are two issues which impact US-Pakistan relations: 1- at least till 2008, almost half of the funds disbursed to Pakistan were from the Coalition Support Fund, which was meant to reimburse countries for costs incurred in the GWOT – these funds were not meant for military capacity-building, nor as economic assistance to the country in question. 2 - and this is especially apparent with the KLB bill - there is scant oversight on any of these funds. While the bill in question did attempt to implement some measure of accountability, the backlash from the Pakistani military and political administration, as well as a certain level of cognisance within the US itself, ensured that the final version of the bill left room for any oversight to be overlooked, if necessary. Future relations between the two countries in this respect, however, could take on three forms: (a) All aid ceases immediately, pending certain commitments by Pakistan – as some members of the US Congress seek to achieve through a recently introduced bill; (b) Military aid be reduced considerably, in favour of increased civil and economic aid – as many analysts seem to be recommending; and (c) A version of

status quo – after a great deal of back and forth, and much hand-wringing - in light of past precedent - it is likely that this may well prove to be the case in the days ahead.

Civil-Military - Both the US military and political administration have consistently maintained good relations with the Pakistani military, particularly with the Army, stating that it is the one organisation in the country which it has been able to rely on [to a fair degree] without question. The assassination has put a twist to this sentiment to a considerable degree. The dominant streams of debate in Pakistan appear to be equally split between being chagrined at the US' violation of Pakistan's sovereignty, and aghast at the Pakistani military being caught off guard, by the assassination, if not the erstwhile location of Osama bin Laden himself. While it would seem that the US political/military administration should now take a step back from its relations with the Pakistani military, the fact remains that General Kayani was informed of the assassination before President Zardari. The image of the Pakistani military has taken a beating, not just within Pakistan in general, but even within the ranks, so much so that General Kayani has made rounds of cantonments to engage with the rank and file and mollify them to the extent possible. In terms of future relations, the US should either (a) arrive at an informed decision of the level of involvement necessary, yet feasible, with the Pakistani military; or (b) explore other stakeholders to build contacts with, not just within the country, but in the region as well.

This brief essay should not be considered exhaustive, in terms of the issues likely to impact US-Pakistan relations in the future [they are only too plentiful]. They may, however, be considered suitably indicative - and the steps taken by the two countries in these matters, may, in turn, be indicative of the trajectory of US-Pakistan relations in the future.

II China and Pakistan

Pakistan continues to face a chorus of criticism from the world post US raid that killed Osama bin Laden in the garrison town of Abbottabad in Pakistan. Amid these moments, Pakistan's "time-tested and all-weather friend" China was the first country that expressed support and attempted to rescue the country from the current distress. In light of the current developments, Pakistan PM Yusuf Raza Gilani's four-day official visit to China from May 17 to May 20 was a crucial event. On 17 May 2011, Beijing expressed its "unswervingly" support to Pakistan in its efforts to counter terrorism. Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Jiang Yu remarked, "Pakistan has made very important contributions in international counter-terrorism cooperation as well as rendered great sacrifices...Indeed, Pakistan is a victim of terrorism." These timing and nature of these words send a strong message to powers like the US and India. This is yet another testament of the ever growing and strengthening alliance between China and Pakistan.

With regard to the general discourse on the issue, there are divergent views. While some commentators consider it an indispensable bond, others aver to it as a marriage of convenience which may not last long. Taking into consideration the changing patterns of geopolitics in Southern Asia, it is important to reflect upon the 'future tense' of the Sino-Pak military alliance. Undoubtedly, one of the most important aspects of their bonding is their mutual interest in containing India and its influence in the region.

Bilateral military cooperation between the two countries ranges from arms sales, military exercises to naval cooperation, nuclear assistance and joint production of weapon systems. China has always followed the policy of using Pakistan as a bulwark against India so that its military forces and

efforts are concentrated on the Western border, while China enhances its military capabilities and infrastructure along India's Eastern borders. Therefore, it is important for China to keep Pakistan strong enough to deny India a dominant role in South Asia.

While some people believe that Sino-India rapprochement has weakened the Sino-Pak nexus, one cannot ignore the harsh realities of the future. Even after thawing relations between Beijing and New Delhi, military-to-military exchanges between China and Pakistan may continue to remain robust and high level civilian leaders' exchanges have remained unimpeded. Transfers of tactical and strategic technologies are evidences of sustained relations between the two. Additionally, China has also assisted Pakistan in expanding its regional links by investing in large projects like the Gwadar Deep Sea Port. China's economic relation with Pakistan is of immediate benefit to Pakistan and will provide a long-term benefit to China.

One area where China drastically changed its stance after improving Sino-India equation was the case of Kashmir. Moving away from the earlier neutral stance, China has become more belligerent on the Kashmir issue. It has sought to extend political and financial influence by issuing stapled visas to residents of Kashmir, investing heavily in Gilgit-Baltistan, widening of the Karakoram Highway and increasing Chinese presence in POK.

As stated by Selig S. Harrison of the Center for International Policy, "In Azad Kashmir, Chinese investors are taking over local business firms, and in Gilgit-Baltistan, non-combat People's Liberation Army brigades, working closely with Pakistani engineering and development ventures, are becoming a dominant presence in local affairs." The development pertaining to this alliance continues to raise hackles in India and is likely to become an inevitable nemesis in the future. Northern Army Commander Lt Gen K T Parinaik's statement on 6 April

2011, about increasing Chinese presence in Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK) and the Northern Areas has also highlighted the growing threat of Sino-Pak nexus. He stated that "...Chinese presence in Gilgit-Baltistan and the Northern Areas is increasing steadily. There are many people who are concerned about the fact that if there was to be hostility between us and Pakistan, what would be the complicity of Chinese. Not only they are in the neighbourhood but the fact that they are actually present and stationed along the LoC"

The recent development in Kashmir is a testament to the growing Sino-Pak alliance, which will prove to be detrimental for India in the coming times. Moreover, with the rise of India and China and their increasing needs, both are likely to consume the limited resources voraciously in the coming decades, which are bound to exacerbate the problems between the two countries than alleviate them. Furthermore, India's expanding partnership with the United States is seen by China as an extension of US policy of containing China. This in turn compels China to further strengthen its relations with Pakistan to preempt India and US's hegemonistic designs.

Without doubt, one cannot ignore the contentious aspects of "higher than the mountains and deeper than oceans" relations between Beijing and Islamabad. A source of major tension has been the issue of Chinese Uighur separatists receiving sanctuary and training on Pakistani territory. Other source of friction has been the growing Islamic extremism in Pakistan which became conspicuous after the Lal Masjid incident when several Chinese citizens were kidnapped after being accused of running a brothel in Islamabad. Even though terrorism continues to be a shared concern between the two, their sources of threat remain divergent. While China's threat emanates from rising extremism in the Xinjiang province, Pakistan's terror concerns involve tribal conflict, ethnic divides, religious fanaticism and armed

separatist movements challenging Islamabad. These aspects are likely to create a relative rift between China and Pakistan, primarily if Pakistan is unable to handle its malcontents. However, Sino-Pak equation has continued to sustain even under the hangover of these issues and is likely to continue unabated.

While China-Pak trade is nowhere near Sino-India trade, the two countries are trying to enhance their economic cooperation steadily. Commentators have argued that the trade has mostly benefitted China and further deteriorated the local industry in Pakistan. However, such views have not gained prominence in the larger section of the Pakistani society. This may become an irritant in the future but is not likely to affect the overall strategic nexus. One of the idiosyncrasies of their equation which makes it rather strong lies in the 'military' component. It may not be wrong to say that their relation is based purely on the militaries of the country and not dependent on the factor of their citizens at large. Therefore, the relation would flourish in strategic and military terms even if it suffers in other aspects. Finally, while the Sino-Pakistani entente has been modified in numerous ways since its inception in 1960s, it remains stable at its core.

III India and Pakistan

The liquidation of Osama Bin Laden in an audacious US Navy Seal Team 6 strike has come close on the heels of the Manmohan Singh led Mohali Cricket diplomacy, unconnected, though they are. This diplomacy is soon to result in re-commencement of talks, hitherto too stuck in hard line positions adopted by both parties: For India, meaningful talks to include composite dialogue will take place only if Pakistan dismantles terror infrastructure and acts against 26/11 perpetrators. For Pakistan, it means delinking terror from talks. This impasse

continues to prevent relations from being taken to the next level of trust and a relationship of mutual benefit and interest.

As the OBL raid has aptly shown, there are clear cleavages in US-Pakistan relations, as well. For lack of Pakistani will and intention to root out terror of all kinds from its soil, which means that while it talks something with one hand, it does something with the other.

The circumstances of Bin Laden's killing reinforce gaps not only in US-Pakistan relations but in India-Pakistan relations as well. In both cases, Pakistan has applied its commitment to ramp out terror, selectively. It refuses to meet US interests on the latter's war on terror based on its own perceived need to use some terror groups as strategic assets to be preserved and used in Afghanistan and Kashmir against India. The OBL killing therefore, only supplements the long list of imponderables in India-Pakistan relations, which do not make for meaningful relations going forward as under:

- Lasting security, stability and development in Pakistan are going to be a big question mark for at least another decade.
- Given the present anarchy and the previous political history of a civilian/Army government alternating every decade, it is unclear how long this civilian government is going to last. This means that even as India talks to the civilian government, there is no way to know whether they will have to start afresh with an Army government in the foreseeable future.
- As with past civilian governments which were popular to start with, the present one too has become greatly unpopular because of misgovernance, corruption, unequal growth, an economy which ranks 171 in per capita GDP, rapid unemployment and poverty with a

population of 184 million in 2010, threatening to reach 228 million in 2025.

- It is unclear how much the Pakistan military is willing to fight the Afghan Taliban, Haqqani network, the Ilyas Kashmiris Neo-Taliban (with a specific anti-India posture), the LeT, the Pakistan Taliban and other extremist/fundamentalist religious organizations/political parties.
- It is unclear whether Pakistan will ever abandon to manipulate Afghanistan and Kashmir to use them against India.
- It is clear also that Pakistan is caught in a deep bind between the US pressure on it to do more against the terrorists and the terrorists themselves who will push against the Pakistani state if it does more.

It will also use Chinese presence in POK and Northern Areas (a signal by China that it has entered the India-Pak dispute in Kashmir) to further hedge against India. The current visit by Pakistan Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani to China resulted in exchange of shibboleths and aphorisms like their relations being “deeper than the oceans and higher than the mountains..”, etc. It is evident, therefore, that India has to prepare for a two-threat scenario.

In view of above, unless it becomes clear to Pakistan that it has shaped its flawed foreign policies based on a perceived existentialist threat from India, its relationship with India will remain hackneyed. The internal conditions of that country due to that policy are there for everyone to see. The ‘existentialist threat’ theorists in Pakistan need to ask as to how India has not exploited Pakistani conventional forces deployment from the East to FATA and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), that, too despite the 26/11 provocation. Today, the entire Peshawar Corps is fighting in FATA and KP, with

divisions and elements of its Mangla, Multan and Bahawalpur Corps taking turns! Pakistan must desist from oscillating between one super power to another and invest in a truly respectful, trustful and economically beneficial relationship with its immediate neighbour ie. India. India and Pakistan have mutual interests as no US-Pakistan and Pakistan-China relationships can ever have. This is the way to go and not to continue exploiting its significant geo-strategic location to garner aid money and leave its internal organs, institutions and peoples impoverished, and the country unstable