



The Attrition of U.S.-Pakistan Relations under the Trump Administration: Causes and Consequences



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Abstract: Pakistan is a key ally in the Afghanistan war. This paper aims to analyze the fundamental changes in US policy towards Pakistan during the Donald Trump era. The sixteen-year struggle of US and NATO forces on Afghan soil was crushed by the Taliban. The US changed policies on the Afghan issue & made Pakistan a scapegoat. The allegations against Pakistan with the help of militants were installed in Pakistan to hide the US's false ambition to control Afghan land. The US policymakers in the Afghan war wanted to escape from the war region. All the war indiscretions were ignored at once & Pakistan alone was criticized for helping the militants of the Haqqani network. After analysis, the paper has shown the US steps against Pakistan during the Trump era. The aid & reimbursement payments and policies of the US are critically examined in this paper during the Trump era against fundamental objectives & sovereignty of Pakistan.

Key Words: Haqqani Network, India's Influence, Pakistan Struggles, Trump Administration, Taliban, USAID, War on Terror

Introduction

Pakistan is a key ally of the US in the war on terror. Pakistan's role in maintaining peace in Afghanistan and South Asia is critical. The zigzag policy of the US towards Pakistan is very questionable on the Afghan issue. After the 9/11 incident, the USA changed its policy towards Pakistan. In the administrations of Presidents G.W. Bush and Obama, US policy has provided opportunities for Pakistan to compensate for its war losses. However, during the tenure of President Donald Trump, US policymakers turned their policy toward Pakistan in a negative direction. The allegations against Pakistan for facilitating the militants and the blocking of aid and reimbursement funds to Pakistan have deteriorated relations between the two countries.

The Trump style of tweeting to Pakistan was criticized by the responsible authorities of Pakistan. This new emerging policy of the US administration has paralyzed the war operations against militants by the armed forces of Pakistan. This new era of US-Pakistan relations under the Donald Trump administration can be considered a pro-Indian approach against the interests of Pakistan by the US government.

The Intonation of Do More

Pakistan and the USA have facilitated each other in the past since the 9/11 incident. The US presidents, G.W. Bush and Obama remained very close to the war strategies of Pakistan. After the 2016 presidential elections, Donald Trump was elected as the new President of the USA. In

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his electoral campaign, he said that he would be happy to play a role as a mediator in Indo-Pak relations. But after his appointment as US president, he turned his attention to Pakistani policy. He said that Pakistan should "Do More" to overcome the terrorist actors in its territory. Moreover, he blamed Pakistan for facilitating the Haqqani network and many other militant wings on behalf of India. The strict agenda of the US for Pakistan consisted of the following key points:

- He reduced the aid packages to Pakistan and all the reimbursement schemes from the USA to Pakistan.
- He ordered the restart of the drone attacks on Pakistan and targeted the militants' hideouts in Pakistani territory.
- He ordered Pakistan to suspend its non-NATO status and marked Pakistan as a terrorist-sponsored state in the region.
- Another major step for the US was its engagement with the civilian leadership of the country rather than the military leadership.
- Many other sanctions were imposed on the military officers and ISI due to their support of the terrorist elements (Haqqani, 2016, 9-10)

Trust and Conditional Aid

During the war on terror, Pakistan was helped by the USA with arms supplies and cash distribution to patch up its losses as a result of terrorist attacks. The Obama administration had admired Pakistan's vital role in the Afghan war. The Trump administration banned the reimbursement aid package by saying that Pakistan is playing a "Double Game" and assisting the criminals of FATA. Hussain Haqqani, the ambassador of Pakistan to the USA, said, "Their support makes hardliners in Pakistan believe they are too important to the US, and they can do anything they please. The US's support does not change behavior in Pakistan (Haqqani, May 10, [2016](#))

After the reports by the State Department of the USA, President Donald Trump stood behind Pakistan and stopped the aid delivery to Pakistan. The reimbursement fund was reduced from \$ 2.6 billion in 2013 to \$ 1.6 billion in 2015 and by \$

350 million in 2018 (US House of Representatives, 2018, 4).

After July 2017, the Trump government also suspended the reimbursement fund of \$300 million by saying that "Pakistan failed to eliminate the safe havens for the militants of the Haqqani network in the region of FATA". Pakistan also rejected the US allegations against Pakistan on the eve of the weekly press conference in Islamabad, The foreign office spokesman, Nafees Zakriya, said, "We have taken indiscriminate steps and all out actions against the terrorist." The Trump allegations were merely to suspend the aid and reimbursement schemes of Pakistan (McLeary, [2017](#)).

On August 30, 2017, the USA also stopped the supply of F-16 jets and put the conditionality on the CSF (Coalition Support Fund) of \$ 255 million that Islamabad is responsible for cracking down on the Haqqani network; otherwise, the amount will not be issued. The spokesman of the Pentagon, Lt. Col. Michael Andrews, also warned Pakistan that the amount of \$ 400 million for counterterrorism purposes for the year 2017 and the \$ 600 million payment to Islamabad will also be stopped if Pakistan does not comply with the instructions of the Trump administration (Rabbi et al., [2022](#)).

Pakistan's Encounter with an Imminent Challenge from the FATF

US-Pakistan relations are also considered in light of FATF sanctions on Pakistan. According to the US administration during the Trump period, Islamabad is responsible for terrorist financing in FATA and across the Afghan border. Pakistan faced the challenge of FATF when Pakistan was undermining the grey list of this institution. That was already pressure from the US on Pakistan to take steps against the Haqqani network to control terrorist activities (Hassan, [2020](#)). Pakistan was asked to act on the 40-point agenda by the FATF. The main points were control over money laundering and terrorist financing, among others. The joint partnership between the US and India was a main concern for policymakers in Pakistan. India has considered the war in Jammu and Kashmir a terrorist activity and put pressure

on Pakistan to withdraw with assistance from the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba, Jaish-e-Muhammad, and Falah-e-Insaniyat foundations (Hassan, [2020](#)).

The US-India role in the FATF against Pakistan provided Pakistan with an opportunity to recognize the true face of US foreign policy against Pakistan. Pakistan saw that

- it is not serious about the challenges facing Pakistan despite the sacrifices made by Pakistan in the war on terror.
- The US- India joint adventure against Pakistan is also a point of concern for Pakistan.
- The remarks over the jihad movement in Jammu and Kashmir by the Trump administration are also a point of mutual mistrust for both countries.

Trump's Tweeter Policy

The tweeter policy of Donald Trump against the interests of Pakistan was also a main point of his pro-India agenda. After his appointment in 2017, Trump has shown his concerns over the role of Pakistan in the Afghan issue through his Twitter policy. On August 17, 2017, he said that "Pakistan most likely does more to have control over the militants." This statement was the low ebb of the US-Pakistan confidential relationship against the militants. On the eve of the new year's US policy in 2018, Trump said that Pakistan had "Foolishly given Pakistan more than 33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years, with little in return, promising no more." In his address, he showed another time that Pakistan was not following the instructions of the US and was misleading the US over the war issues (Afzal, [2018](#)). In his reply, the foreign minister of Pakistan, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, said, "We have already told the US that we would not do more, so Trump holds no importance." Moreover, he said that the US president wants to make Pakistan responsible for the mistakes of the US. The USA used many strategies to overcome the psychology of Pakistan, like the pressure from FATF, the pro-Indian policies, and the pressure from Arab countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia on Pakistan (Taliaferro, [2001](#)).

The Ascendancy of Indian Influence in the US Policy Landscape

Pakistan and India are the key rival countries and have many points of mutual discomfort with one another. The issue of Kashmir is a main concern in this regard, while the influence of Indian policies over US decisions is a true concern for Pakistan. During the whole Trump era, many key positions in US offices were designated by Indian nationalities. These people put US policies against the interests of Pakistan and facilitated US arguments against Pakistan's policy decisions. In this sense, the main personalities are Nikky Haley- Nimrata Randhawa (the US ambassador to the United Nations), Krishna Raj Urs (US ambassador to Paru), Manisha Singh (assistant secretary of state for economic affairs), Neil Chatterjee (member of the federal energy regulatory commission), Raj Shah (White House principal deputy secretary), Ajit Varandaraj Pai (chairman of the federal communication commission), Vishal Amin IPEC coordinator, Seema Verma (administrator of the center for Medicare and medicated services), and Neomi Rao (administrator of ORIA). This top advisory and administrative class of the US, followed by the Indian nationality, always undermined Pakistan's interests. The closeness of the US and India in many fields of life is also due to these key positions of Indian nationality in the US executive body (Khan, 2016).

US Strategic Calculations on CPEC and Policy Goals

The CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor) is a major opportunity for the people of Pakistan and China. This project is responsible for smooth trade from China and the CARs (Central Asian Republics) to other countries in the world through Pakistan. This trade route also provides the mainstream of trading facilities to the neighboring courtiers of Pakistan, like Iran and India. Due to the US-China rivalry and the US air base in Pakistan, this is a major obstacle to the working of CPEC. During the Trump administration, the US openly criticized the CPEC route and its objectives. The US-India joint partnership and Sino-India border clashes

further increased the difficulties of this project. James Mattis, the US Secretary of Defense, in his speech to the US Senate, showed the US's concerns over the CPEC, he said.

One Belt, One Road (OBOR) passes through the disputed territory of India, and President Trump is opposed to the idea of OBOR" (Chandio, [2018](#)). The Trump allegations and the strong allyship with India also promoted new thinking areas for Pakistan to observe and change its foreign policy towards the US. The Trump electoral slogan "America first" is also a main focus of US policy. He said that the US should want to overcome its internal problems and stop all its economic and strategic assistance to other countries like Pakistan. This cornerstone policy of the US showed no further interest from Islamabad and hence left Pakistan alone among the terrorist elements that were created by the US.

Dependence Theory

Over the 70 years of US-Pak relations, the factor of aid has always remained at the center of the relationships between both countries. The US always relied on this theory and compelled Pakistan to comply with its instructions. After 9/11, Pakistan was facilitated with billions of US dollars, which made Pakistan dependent, and all its social and political institutions were influenced by US policies. After the appointment of Trump as the new president of the US, he pursued this policy and ignored all the sacrifices and struggles of Pakistan. In his speech to Congress, he said that the US will no longer pay any money to Pakistan because Pakistan is involved in anti-US interests. The dependence of Pakistan on US aid is responsible for the low number of counterarguments against the Trump allegations. According to this theory, the US has a core Status and coins new policies for its interests, while Pakistan is a peripheral country and always obeys the instructions of the US. Hence, the core-periphery theory has two main points.

- Core countries are the wealthy and economically strong countries in the world and always formulate the basic principles for the other nations in the

world. Most of the European countries are included in this list.

- The peripheral countries are the developing or underdeveloped countries and have no vast range of interests. Pakistan and other third-level countries are listed in the list of peripheral countries.

In his whole tenure, US President Donald Trump treated Pakistan according to this thinking: Pakistan is dependent on US aid and can be compelled easily to do anything according to US desires (Khan, [n.d](#))

Imbalance of Power between India and Pakistan

Pakistan has remained a key ally of the US in the Afghan war. The previous US presidents, like President Bush and President Obama, had admired Pakistan's sacrifices. Now the case was diverted, and the role of India in South Asian affairs was highlighted. President Trump, as a businessman and a real estate owner, considered the war in Afghanistan in terms of financial loss and benefits. In his address to the people of the US, he assured them that he would withdraw all the troops from Afghanistan. He ignored the role of Pakistan in this war and put his focus on China's issue. On the eastern border of Pakistan, he committed to strengthening the Indian position against communist China. The idea to make India strong against China's progress was fully adopted by the Trump government (Robert et al. [2019](#)). The divergence in the policies of the US from Pakistan to India put a negative stance on the position of Pakistan, like,

- The strong position of India on the eastern border of Pakistan poses a security risk for Pakistan. The US strategic ties with India, especially the US-India nuclear deal, created an imbalance in the powers of Pakistan and India.
- Pakistan and China have close relations in many fields of life, and Indian aggression against China has exerted a direct effect on all the policy parameters of Pakistan as a neighboring country.
- CPEC is a major Pakistan-China project in the manner of trade partnerships of both countries. The president's trump

statements against the CPEC in favor of India put this project in danger.

Terrorist Activities in India

Another major thing that can be seen as the major policy shift of the Trump administration against the position of Pakistan was the US allegations against Pakistan, related to terrorist-based activities in India. That was a critical issue for Pakistan to show well-balanced relations with the US on all fronts. The White House speech titled *"The United States and India: Prosperity through Partnership"* emphasized Pakistan's need to make the necessary arrangements to cut down the element of terrorism from its land and make sure to not use Pakistani territory against Indian interests in the region. This direct attack on Pakistan by the US in favor of India and the strong blame on Pakistan for facilitating the terrorist elements against India put a negative impression on Pakistan's stance against terrorist activities. Pakistan was blamed for the Mumbai and Pulwama attacks by terrorists based in Pakistan. Pakistan showed its great concern over these remarks and said "The statement aggravates the already tense situation," in another encounter statement, the PM of Pakistan, Imran Khan, said the Trump-Modi statement has removed the fig leaf of morality and justice in the US foreign policy, which is only based on arms sales and financial gains" (Khan, 2017).

Pressure Mounts on Pakistan.

The relationship between Pakistan and the US was considered a necessary element to eliminate terrorism from Afghan soil. But after the appointment of Trump as the US president, the US administration increased pressure on Pakistan and demanded that it do more to fight against militant factors. The top US official warned Pakistan on different occasions, like,

- US Senator John McCain in his visit to Afghanistan in July 2017 said that Pakistan should change its behavior otherwise US as a nation will change it according to the needs of the time. Moreover, he said, "Pakistan should stop the cross-border infiltration and make the border security parameters strong." He

also warned Pakistan to stop the Coalition Support Fund if Pakistan is not able to comply with the US demands.

- The meeting of Chief of Army Staff Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa with Gen. John W. Nicholson, the commander of the Resolute Support Mission (RSM). Pakistan showed its concerns over the US official statements against the stance of Pakistan, The US commander stressed that Pakistan also should do more to eradicate the terrorists within its territory, and that is a key agenda item of the Trump administration; otherwise, the US will stop all assistance to Pakistan.
- The speech by President Trump at Fort Myers also showed that Pakistan is not doing enough to fight terrorism and is also financing the Taliban and Haqqani network. All these statements show that the US became ineligible to defeat the Taliban due to the poor collaboration of Pakistan (Shamail, [n.d.](#)).

U.S. and Pakistani Relations and a Misguided Strategy

Pakistan and the United States have maintained a close relationship on all fronts since the 9/11 attacks. Pakistan has counted its costs,

- 75,000 casualties and the loss of \$123 billion in this war on terror by the Pakistani people.
- The FATA region of Pakistan has been devastated, and the issue of internally displaced persons has fully paralyzed the KP province in particular and the whole of Pakistan in general.
- The terrorist wave throughout the country is also a main result of this war on Pakistan's security.

Despite these efforts and sacrifices of Pakistan, President Donald Trump adopted a full-scale divergent policy towards Pakistan. In his addresses, speeches, and tweets, it is said that Pakistan is not doing well and is not gaining much from the US. On November 19, 2018, he said,

"We no longer pay Pakistan the \$ billion because they would take our money and do

nothing for us, Laden being a prime example, Afghanistan being another. They were one of many countries that took from the United States without giving anything in return. That's ending" (Donald Trump tweet, November 19, 2018).

Due to the Trump policy of blaming Pakistan, it was responsible for creating hurdles for Pakistan in many ways, i.e.,

- Pakistan faced the worst types of conditions in the IMF bailout package of \$6 Billion. That was an important package from the IMF for Pakistan to minimize the current deficit and balance of payments.
- Pakistan also faced complications on the platform of FATF; Pakistan was put on the grey list due to the negative indicators provided by the US and India with their joint collaboration.
- In the Trump era, the US showed the ruthless face of Pakistan to the rest of the world despite Pakistan's sacrifices on behalf of the USA (Amin, [2019](#)).

Pakistan's Non-NATO Membership and the Trump Administration

After the successful three-year collaboration of Pakistan with the world community and the US, Pakistan was designated the status of a Non-NATO state and a key ally of the US in the Afghan War in 2004. With this status, Pakistan has gained about \$14.5 billion for the purpose of military aid and about \$18.8 billion for economic assistance and humanitarian-based facilities for the people of Pakistan (Chandio, [2018](#)).

When Donald Trump was appointed as the new US president, he criticized the status of Pakistan. Under the US policy of President Trump, Pakistan was deprived of the reimbursement aid package of \$300 million and another time \$400 million. This Trump policy of disregarding Pakistan was fully criticized by the opposition parties in the US Congress. Thomas F. Lynch said that.

"It remains unwise for the Trump administration to completely eliminate the US-Pakistan counterterrorism military support framework" (Chandio, [2018](#)).

The aid suspension to Pakistan made many hurdles for Pakistan; the policymakers of Pakistan have counted the loss of the suspension of aid to Pakistan by the US as,

- The military operations of Pakistan against the militants became weak, and the security risk in the country also increased.
- The reimbursement fund also has importance for the common people of FATA, who were ruthlessly targeted by militant elements. The delay in this fund has had long-lasting negative impacts on these people.
- The obstacles to humanitarian aid by the US have also negatively impacted the social sectors of Pakistan like education, health, etc.

U.S. and Indian Dominance in the Pacific Ocean

Pakistan and China have a common relationship in terms of trade parameters in the form of CPEC. On the other hand, India has a tie with the US for control over the Pacific sea routes and also the Strait of Hormuz (Khan, [2015](#)). The US is keen to develop Indian influence to check the independent movement of China in this ocean. This counter-policy of the US against China has created an imbalance of powers in the South Asian region. Moreover, the active role of the US and India in the Central Asian Republics is also a point of concern for Pakistan. After 9/11, the influence of India on Afghan policy and its projects in Afghanistan is also a danger for Pakistan and China altogether (Pant, [2010](#)).

The U.S. wants to curtail the active role of Pakistan and fill this space with India's control over Beijing's policies in the South Asia region. This new US policy is harmful and can destabilize the whole region strategically and economically. One thing that is important to see is how the US and India are trying to destroy all the trade projects of Pakistan and China through their secret agencies, the CIA and RAW. The capture of an Indian spy from the province of Baluchistan is the best example of this scenario. The economic stability of India and the designation of Pakistan as a terrorist state by the

US administration are part of the geo-strategic policy of the United States (Constable, [2017](#)).

Recommendations

- Pakistan and the U.S. should cooperate to defeat terrorism in its true sense. The past mistakes of both countries should not be repeated.
- Pakistan has sacrificed much of its potential against terrorist actors, so the US should admit this and try to compensate Pakistan for its losses.
- Pakistan and the U.S. should also cooperate with one another for the benefit of the region. The smooth progress of the region can be helpful in eradicating terrorism in the Pakistan-Afghanistan region.
- The negative propaganda by both countries against one another should stop at once.
- In the case of Afghanistan, a long-term policy should be adopted. All the stakeholders and beneficiaries of the Afghan War now should formulate policies that can control terrorism and bring prosperity to the social, economic, and political areas of the country.
- The Indian negative influence on Afghan policy and the anti-Pakistan role in Afghanistan should be recognized by the world powers and checked immediately.
- Pakistan should also try to improve its image, not as the economic beneficiary of the Afghan issue, and the misleading remarks of the US should be noticed.
- Pakistan should reform its foreign policy parameters according to the approaches of developed countries. The long-lasting Afghan issue should be recognized in its true meaning by the policymakers in Pakistan.

- Pakistan should also know about the nature of US-India relations against the sovereignty of Pakistan. The new nuclear deal between the US and India and other policy engagements should be brought under consideration.
- The US pressure on world institutions like the IMF and FATF against Pakistan's interests should also be noticed by the higher authorities of Pakistan, who should seek a lesson from these policies of the USA.

Conclusion

Since its independence, Pakistan has had close relations with the United States. Both countries remained members of the SEATO and CENTO agreements. During the Afghan War of 1979–1988, both countries collaborated with the mujahedeen against the invasion of the USSR in Afghan land. Another time, the incident of 9/11 brought the opportunity for mutual understanding between Pakistan and the United States. During the governments of President G.W. Bush and President Obama, the relations between both countries remained at their peak. But since the appointment of Donald Trump as the new executive head, the United States has shown its mistrust of Pakistan in all policy matters. This new pro-India approach of the US president has destroyed the relationship between the two countries. The allegations against Pakistan in the misuse of USAID and the terrorist financing by the Pakistan military have further deteriorated the atmosphere of confidence between Pakistan and the USA. Moreover, the US stance against the CPEC during the Trump administration further increased the space and provided a chance for India to lobby against the interests of Pakistan. Now, it is time for Pakistan to know about the zigzag foreign policy of the USA, its interests in the South Asian regions, and the new demands of the 21st century.

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