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A Regional Approach of Nawaz Sharif's Foreign Policy

Syed Farooq Hasnat and Shehzadi Zamurrad Awan

Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore, Pakistan

Introduction

This research paper raises a number of queries relating to the changing circumstances in which newly installed Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government has to operate, especially in the realm of foreign affairs. The main question we ask in this paper is what is the basic compulsion of the Nawaz government's focus towards the world community, how is he going to prioritize his goals, which country/s will be the prime emphasis of this attention, and why? Will Nawaz follow the status quo based on the requirements of the past, or will he improvise in regard to his external relations, keeping in view the transformed regional and global settings? More importantly, will he make an attempt to eradicate or minimize the irritants, however minor they might be, that have arisen between Pakistan and its traditional regional allies since the rise of militancy in Pakistan and its neighborhood? Last, we address the kind of strategy that Pakistan will adopt after decades of flawed Afghan policy. In this paper we take note of a national debate which revolves around the concepts of regional preference versus internationalism. There are two schools of thought in the country, each supporting one of these approaches. We have tried to deal with this quandary by highlighting the initial response and directions of the Nawaz government in the formulation of Pakistan's foreign policy - a feat he undertook immediately after he assumed office, indicating that Pakistan urgently needed to set its house in order through favorable foreign ties.

Background

Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's twice-elected party, the Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N), won the May 2013 general elections with an overwhelming majority in the National Assembly, getting 189 seats in a house of 272. Repeating its performance, it not only sustained its political strength in Pakistan's largest Punjab's Provincial Assembly, but also formed a coalition government in the strategically significant province of Baluchistan bordering Iran and Afghanistan. In 2013 polls, the previous government of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was routed by the

electorate due to its poor governance which failed to address common citizens' basic issues like inflation, unemployment, energy shortages and rampant corruption. It made no serious attempts even in the foreign policy realm to deal with the country's strategic challenges, the most prominent being unabated American drone attacks in the border region of the country and cross-border incursions which violated Pakistani sovereignty. Although these attacks targeted suspected terrorist leaders and their hideouts, a large number of innocent women, children and men also became victims of these drones. To make matters worse, it was alleged that the PPP government had granted its approval for these unacceptable acts. Therefore, the results of these general elections reflected the resentment of a large percentage of Pakistanis against the foreign policy dimensions of the PPP government and a conviction that the American forces in Afghanistan were continuously violating Pakistani sovereignty. The people of Pakistan also sensed that when it came to the United States, the PPP government was following in the footsteps of General Musharraf's regime (1999-2008) by conceding too much in terms of Pakistan's national interests by accepting violations of its territorial integrity.

Nawaz Sharif's government inherited the above-mentioned foreign policy tasks along with serious domestic issues, both of which demanded an effective and imaginative foreign policy so that foreign investment could be attracted to gear up Pakistan's near-collapsed industry and commerce. Furthermore, foreign interjection became necessary to alleviate the acute energy shortages in the country. It is important to mention here that without attaining internal peace and harmony by overcoming insurgency and terrorism, it was not possible to even make an initial attempt to attract international investors to venture into economic activities such as the establishment of industry and the revival of agriculture. Thus, Pakistan's domestic woes have an intimate linkage with foreign policy planning and strategy. A connection between domestic structures and foreign policy dimension is endorsed by Henry Kissinger, who narrates,

"Foreign policy begins where domestic policy ends....If domestic structures are reasonably stable, temptations to use an adventurous foreign policy to achieve domestic cohesion are at a minimum.... Incompatible domestic structures can passively generate a gulf, simply because of the difficulty of achieving a consensus about the nature of "reasonable" aims and methods.... In that event, the domestic structure becomes not only an obstacle to understanding but one of the principal issues in international affairs" (cited in Kissinger 1969, 261-262).

During the election campaign, Nawaz Sharif and other party leaders made a number of promises as part of their post-election political agenda. The Chief Minister of Punjab, Shehbaz Sharif (brother of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif), promised on various occasions that his party would minimize foreign dependency, rejecting the dictates of International Monetary Fund (IMF), and thus building the country through its own resources. During, one of his press conferences he emphatically asserted,

"It is time to break the begging bowl and achieve self-reliance in the interest of complete independence. But the decision to give up foreign aid does not mean that relations with other countries should be impaired. This decision is aimed at the promotion of trade instead of aid. If the nation decides to depend on its own resources and works with sincerity and commitment, Pakistan could also achieve self-reliance like China, Japan or Germany" (The Express Tribune, 2011).

Keeping in view such promises by the leadership of PML (N) during its election campaign, it came as a rude shock to the people when Finance Minister Ishaq Dar (a close relation of Sharifs) rushed for "help" to international donor agencies like the IMF for a "conditional" loan of \$6.7 billion immediately after the formation of the government. The aftermath of this loan badly affected the local currency, resulting in considerable devaluing of the Pakistani rupee and mushrooming inflation beyond the reach of the lower and middle class. The Finance Minister's IMF "painful" loan was explained by a leading Pakistani newspaper's editorial, "...the government has not lived up to its pledge of not accepting tough conditions, such as the ones which would raise the energy prices to prohibitive levels, stifle investment and fuel inflation. All the high talk that Mr. Dar had indulged in over the last few days was little more than rhetoric to begin with" (Dawn, July 07, 2013-a). Another conditionality of this loan was to privatize various industrial units and other state-owned concerns like railways and the national airline, as reflected in government's announcement that it intends to privatize 31 state-run organizations (The Express Tribune, July 18, 2013). Apparently privatization of "sick" units by itself can be an acceptable policy, but there is widespread apprehension that, given the record of the Sharif family, the state will play favorites and will not conduct the transaction transparently. This is notwithstanding the fact that the state-owned companies, due to unscrupulous practices, were losing between Rs.400 billion and Rs.500 billion (Ibid).

No matter, how effectively the new Prime Minister is able to conduct his foreign policy, the fact remains that he has to set his domestic structures in order, like revitalizing the near collapsed industrial and agricultural sectors, coping with power shortages and above all security a domestic environment conducive to growth by taking serious and comprehensive steps to eradicate the lawlessness that has engulfed Pakistan since 2007. Yet another challenging issue is the introduction of militancy into Pakistani society, originating from the border areas with Afghanistan and manifesting as terrorist acts.

The people of Pakistan have put their confidence in Sharif's government and have high expectations. This is especially so when his party and its allies have more than 2/3rd majority in the National Parliament, enabling him to pass any legislation with ease. The Sharif government is also expected to become proactive with clear strategies and agendas to resolve the piled up issues which remained unattended during the previous government's five year tenure.

There are two foreign policy options which the Nawaz Sharif government can pursue to help mend the depraved domestic situation. First, it is expected that Nawaz Sharif will direct his foreign policy towards the regional environment by establishing

cooperative strategic economic relationships with China, Iran and Turkey. Here, we would mention India, which presents a different scenario as it has multiple unresolved disputes with Pakistan. In the near future, because of these disputes, it will be difficult to normalize relations between these two regional countries in order to participate in meaningful economic activity. Nevertheless, Sharif made repeated overtures towards the Indian leadership but these have met with little success. The forthcoming Indian elections in 2014 have made it more difficult for the incumbent Prime Minister to respond to Pakistani invitations to open opportunities to expand economic activities.

The second option for the Sharif is to initiate an understanding with the Americans regarding post-US Afghanistan, as most of US troops are scheduled to withdraw from that country in 2014. An important aspect of that eventuality will be the expected fallout in the tribal areas of Pakistan as a result of probable unrest in post-US Afghanistan. Moreover, there is a serious trust deficit between the two nations over Afghanistan which needs to be remedied in order to achieve meaningful coordination.

A shift in Pakistan's foreign relations and greater self-reliance through improving infrastructure and ending energy shortages could make a difference and leave Pakistan less dependent on foreign aid. Thus, domestic stability accompanied economic and political development is closely linked with Pakistan's foreign policy, which depends on correct selective interaction with regional partners. This will only become possible when the Sharif government realizes the fact that, as mentioned above, economic stability is an important determinant of Pakistani social stability and that Pakistan needs a less militant society to attract more local and foreign investment.

This paper is divided into two main parts. The first section discusses Pakistan's policy stance in its regional context, while the second focuses on Pakistan's uneasy relationship with the United States and its linkages in the tribal belt on Afghan border.

A. Regional Dimensions of Pakistan's Foreign Policy

When Nawaz Sharif took office, the international scene had transformed considerably from what he had encountered in his previous two tenures (1990-1993; 1997-1999). These changes occurred in various manners. The United States is not as "super" as it used to be, especially in terms of financial potential, thus giving way to the rise of regional powers. Given its history, Pakistan perceives China, Iran and Turkey as friendly regional partners with which it can coordinate economically and strategically.

China

From a historical perspective, China has been a long, time-tested friend. This friendship originated in the early 1950s when both the countries established diplomatic relations. At that time, Pakistan was a member of two American sponsored security pacts (CENTO and SEATO), and the tensions between the US and communist China were at their worst. Pakistan's policy tilt towards China in those circumstances helped to build a durable base of trust between the two neighbors

which has been instrumental in developing into a strong and reliable strategic partnership.

In fact Pakistan was the third non-communist nation to have recognized “new China”. Furthermore, it was reported that at a Bandung Conference in 1955, the Chinese leader Zhou Enlai informed the delegates that Pakistan’s Premier, Mohammad Ali, had assured him that although Pakistan was a member of SEATO she was neither hostile to China nor in fear of aggression from her” (Dawn, April 24, 1955). A border treaty in 1963 with China further strengthened the relations between the two countries. On that occasion, a Pakistani newspaper editorial wrote, “The common equalitarian and fraternal aspirations of Islam in Pakistan and Socialism in China demand that the Frontiers Agreement should be followed by another fuller Commercial Treaty. Then may come a defensive-offensive Pact...Sino-Pakistan interests are far more identical that either the Sino-Russian interests or the Pakistan-European and Pakistan-American interests” (The Pakistan Times, March 20, 1963).

No wonder, then, that Nawaz Sharif’s first foreign visit on July 3, 2013 was to China for five days. The visit came just within one month of the installation of his government. This visit resulted in eight agreements, ranging from China to building dams for energy-starved Pakistan, to the generation of electricity through coal. Furthermore, Pakistan’s largest civil nuclear power plant in Karachi is expected to be completed with Chinese assistance within 72 months. However, the most prominent understanding was the construction of a 2000 kilometer long road linking Gwadar, a port city of Pakistan on the Arabian Sea, with Kashgar in northwestern China. It was agreed that at a later stage a railroad and gas pipeline would also link the two cities. Furthermore, China promised to provide 85 per cent of the financing for a three year \$44 million project to lay a fiber-optic cable from China to Rawalpindi, Pakistan. In his meeting with Chinese Premier Li Keqiang, Prime Minister Sharif in remarked in his opening address, “Let me tell you very candidly and very sincerely that what I am witnessing here on my visit to Beijing, it reminds of the saying our friendship is higher than the Himalayas and deeper than the deepest sea in the world, and sweeter than honey.” On his part the Chinese President Xi Jinping emphatically stressed that “strengthening strategic cooperation with Pakistan was a priority for China’s diplomacy with countries on its periphery.” The Chinese President further said that China would work on the plans for a “China-Pakistan Economic Corridor” and that “All-weather strategic cooperation is the precious wealth our two countries share” (Dawn, July 07, 2013-b).

The development of the strategic port of Gwadar goes back to March 2002 when Chinese Vice Premier Wu Bangguo inaugurated it. Gwadar port is strategically significant for both Pakistan and China because of the following reasons:

1. “First, it is situated at the entrance of the vital Strait of Hormuz, where much oil is exported to international oil markets. Oil tankers pass through this narrow passage, which provides an opening to the sea lanes in the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

2. Second, it is being developed with Chinese assistance; therefore the port will establish a trade link for China through the strategic “all-weather” Karakorum highway to the coast of Arabian Sea.

3. Third, it will also provide the shortest and most convenient trade outlet to the sea for landlocked Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics” (Hasnat 2011, 28).

It is expected that by the end of 2023, the Gwadar port project on the Arabian Sea is to be completed, enabling Pakistan to provide a useful road and rail link between Central Asian Republics and China, along with the rest of the world, especially those nations which are located in the Middle East. In this way, the project offers Pakistan opportunity for economic advancement.

February 2003, the China based “Overseas Ports Holding Company Ltd” was granted control of the port city. China is also involved in numerous projects in Pakistan, including the manufacturing of tanks and defense equipment for fighter aircraft. It was reported in 2010 that,

“Air defense is where the relationship is closest. The Pakistan Air Force plans to buy new missiles and bombs from Beijing to arm the JF-17 “Thunder” fighter aircraft that the two countries have jointly developed. It will introduce up to 250 of the JF-17 fighter planes in the next five years to be flown alongside US-supplied F-16 fighter plans. Crucially, Pakistan is China’s biggest investment destination in South Asia. Bilateral trade, currently at \$7bn and is projected to reach \$16bn in five years” (The Financial Times, December 19, 2010).

The above statement in a British newspaper, further explains that “China helps Pakistan with nuclear power plants, roads, railways, hydroelectric power and military supplies. The result is that, unlike the US, which long prioritized military assistance and is seen by many Pakistanis as the enemy, China enjoys widespread popularity” (Ibid).

The heavy involvement of China in the Gwadar Port project with Pakistan has raised serious concerns for India. The Indian naval chief described it as having “serious strategic implications for India” (The Hindu, January 22, 2008). It is also reported that the Americans are equally apprehensive of this project, as it would affect their naval monopoly in the Gulf and Arabian Sea region.

Terrorist outfits have not only taken refuge in the tribal areas of Pakistan but in the cities as well, including in Punjab province, because of the slackened anti-terrorist efforts of governments in previous years. The Sharif brothers have ruled this province for extended periods (1985-1990; 1993-1999; 2008-today). Some of these groups are China-focused and are involved in Al-Qaida linked insurgent activities in Xinjiang. This particular factor has been an irritant for the Chinese. On the occasion of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s latest visit this issue became a distraction amidst overwhelming strategic and economic cooperation. Pakistan assured China of its quick response over this particular matter by claiming that several of the China-focused terrorists had been killed while acknowledging that some were still

fugitives. Later on, China demanded that Pakistan ban these outfits, including the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM), the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Islamic Jihad Union (IJU). This raised questions about the leniency of Pakistan's government towards these terrorist outfits. For any meaningful relations with the Chinese, the Pakistani government of Nawaz Sharif has to take this issue seriously and eradicate the impression that his brother Shahbaz Chief (Chief Minister of Punjab province) a soft spot for the extremists born of political expediency. Sharif should ensure that Pakistan's overly autonomous agencies be reigned within the parameters of their legal and administrative boundaries so that they are not seen as "governments" within the government. The Chairman of the Pakistan-China Institute, Mushahid Hussain, writes that the Pakistani government has to "ensure no part of Pakistan is used by any group against any of our neighbors. The excuse of 'lack of control over ungoverned spaces' no longer holds, more so, if such spaces can be used with impunity by forces destabilizing both Pakistan and its friendly neighbors" (Hussain, 2011).

Turkey and Iran

Nawaz Sharif's second foreign visit in September 2013 was a three-day trip to Turkey. On that occasion a number of agreements were signed encouraging Turkish investment in Pakistan. This was a continuation of the policies of the Prime Minister's younger brother, Shehbaz Sharif, who established close ties with the Turkish business community when he was the Chief Minister of the Punjab province during his previous tenure, although his party sat at the opposition benches in Federal legislature. The Chief Minister's main emphasis was on transportation and urban management. He was restricted in his jurisdiction as the subjects allocated to the provincial government are defined under the constitution and foreign relations fall under the preview of the federal government. Nevertheless, as the Chief Minister of the province of Punjab with limited jurisdiction he was still able to enlist Turkish collaboration, especially in Lahore's "Metro Bus System" and "Waste Management System."

Now, in full command, both the Sharifs enthusiastically approached Turkey to seek collaboration in a variety of fields. This reflected a strong feeling of affection and high level of trust between the two countries which goes well back in history, but which was waiting for rejuvenation in accordance with modern, changing requirements. Prime Minister Sharif reflected these sentiments in an interview with a Turkish newspaper during his visit to Turkey, saying "...Our political relations are excellent. A huge reservoir of goodwill and affection flows from one country to another. However, we have a long way to go to translate these excellent political relations into tangible and robust commercial and economic relationship. For this reason, my visit is aimed at putting in place institutional mechanisms, which will produce a strong platform for further cementing economic ties" (Today's Zaman, September 17, 2013). While further stressing bilateral economic relations, Sharif mentioned "recent success stories involving Turkish companies in Pakistan, like Lahore's Metro Bus System and a wind energy project in Sindh" (Ibid).

During the last decade (2000-2010), there has been an increase of bilateral trade to 7.5 per cent between the two countries. For example, despite and international economic recession, bilateral trade reached one billion dollars in 2010, a 27 per cent increase over the previous year. Pakistan imports industrial machinery and chemicals from Turkey and exports garments, plastic and fabrics. Turkey also contributes to construction. In 1990, Turkish contractors operated in Pakistan with a capital of about 1.8 million dollars. In recent times, Turkish companies have also become active in the energy sector. A Turkey company installed Pakistan's first wind turbine in 2009. Similarly, Pakistani companies also invest in Turkey but the level of involvement is low in comparison to their Turkish counterparts in Pakistan. As of December 2010, 85 Pakistani companies operated in Turkey. Moreover, at a 2009 'Donor's Conference' held in Tokyo, Turkey announced 100 million dollars for flood-related rehabilitation programs and a Turkish company 'Turkish International Corporation Agency (TIK)' started building houses for flood victims in 2010.

Pakistan and Turkey have supported each other on strategic concerns. Pakistan has supported Turkey on the issue of Northern Cyprus. The Foreign Minister of Pakistan in 1963 remarked, "We are with Turkey in her moments of crisis and whenever cooperation may be needed from Pakistan (it) will be extended in the fullest measure" (Ahmed 1981, 119). Pakistan continued its support for Turkey when in 1974 the Turkish army entered Cyprus to take control of the Turk dominated northern areas occupied by Cypriot government troops backed by Greece. The support was reassured during the visit of Pakistani Premier Junejo to Turkey in the mid-1980s when he reconfirmed the allegiance of his country on this issue. This made Pakistan the only country to have supported Turkey on Cyprus. Similarly, during the Indo-Pakistan war of 1965, the Prime Minister of Turkey issued a condemnation of India in which he stated that "the suffering felt by Pakistanis are shared by the Turkish nation" (Cited in Hasnat 1989, 241).

Iran provided similar strategic support to Pakistan. For example on 6th March 1955, the representative of Iran in United Nations supported Pakistan in the Kashmir conflict, saying forcefully, "Ninety percent of the people of Kashmir are Muslims and have ties of common culture, tradition and religion with Iran. As such the Muslim world and in particular the people of Iran cannot remain indifferent to their lot."

Pakistan's President Mohammad Ayub Khan best described the close affinity between Pakistan and Iran while addressing the Iranian Senate in 1959. In his famous speech, which is often quoted to emphasize Pakistan-Iran relations, he said,

"Our two nations are no strangers to each other. Our friendship is nothing new. Our links are steeped in history. We share the same faith and are heirs to a common cultural heritage. Your language and literature has for centuries been a source of inspiration to our people. We have drunk deep at the fountain of the Iranian culture and it has left indelible marks on our everyday life....Your classics are our classics. Your heroes are our heroes. Your friends are our friends and our enemies are your enemies. It is not only through a common culture and religious heritage that our nations are linked together – historically we have been one nation in the past,

geographically we have a common border and ethnologically we are of the same stock" (Government of Pakistan, 1967).

Iran has reaffirmed its diplomatic support of Pakistan on the Kashmir dispute and the Deputy Speaker of Iranian Parliament Sayed Ahmed Sarai described Kashmir as an important part of Pakistan in 1962 (*The Patriot*, 1962). Thus, Pakistan-Iran cooperation at no time in history witnessed a significant decline.

Though the Pakistan-Iran relations have been generally cordial, on some issues they have had differences of opinion. For example, Pakistan supported the Afghan Taliban, when they gained power in 1996, whereas Iran favored the Northern Alliance, a combination of various non-Pushtun ethnic groups opposing the Taliban rule. A mutual tense suspicion over this issue remained in place until the ouster of the Taliban in 2002 by American forces. Secondly, Pakistan's close relationship with and dependency upon the US during Musharraf's rule (1999-2008) has also been a factor hindering Pakistan's ties with its natural friend and ally.

In spite of the fact that Pakistan and Iran had close historic ties, Nawaz Sharif ignored Iran when it came to his quick foreign visits after his inauguration, as mentioned above. His lack of interest in visiting Pakistan's strategic neighbor surprised many analysts of Pakistan's foreign policy, especially when he has been invited by that country numerous time, both as a leader of the opposition during the previous regime and when he assumed office for the third time. His repeated rhetoric about establishing close and friendly relations with Pakistan's neighbors has focused instead on India, who has not responded favorably to his overly frequent overtures. In the past no other Pakistani government has ignored its closely allied neighbor, Iran, in this manner. One possible cause for this behavior is the tension between the US and Iran over Iran's nuclear program, although recently US and Iranian leadership have reached an understanding on this issue. The second reason which could account for Sharif's coolness towards Iran stems from the domestic sectarian situation and some kind of "pressure" from the Punjab based sectarian terrorist outfit with its connections to Al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Nawaz Sharif's brother Shabaz Sharif is accused of having a soft spot for this terror group. This suspicion is supported by an incident at Karachi International Book Fair where the Iranian bookstall was closed by the government due to the protests of this sectarian outfit. Pakistan's leading daily newspaper, Dawn, in its editorial remarked: "Today it is Iranian books, tomorrow, if religious extremists complain against other 'unacceptable' material, will the fair organizers also cave in? Clearly, such incidents prove that in Pakistan extremism is not simply creeping in; it is on the march" (Dawn, 2013).

Pakistan's economic links with Iran could improve considerably if the \$7.5 billion Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project materializes. This 780 kilometer (485) pipeline on the Pakistani side is expected to provide natural gas to the Pakistani residences and would boost energy-starved Pakistani industry. At present, Pakistan has a considerable gas deficit of over 2.5 billion cubic feet. Pakistan is producing a stagnant 4.2 billion cubic feet per day. It is expected that at later stage the gas pipeline can be extended to India and China, making Pakistan a vital hub of energy for the wider region. Even in

this beneficial field, the Sharif government has dragged its feet, delaying the project under various pretexts for the unforeseen future. The argument presented by Pakistan is that if it goes ahead with the project, it might be subject to US sanctions imposed against Iran because of nuclear dispute. On its part Iran has presented an argument that “Pakistan should fulfill its obligations to implement the pipeline project as Islamabad was fully aware of the possibility of sanctions before the deal was signed” (Bhutta, 2014).

Pakistan not only shares close bilateral ties with Turkey and Iran; it also partners with them in regional organizations. Apart from being partners in the American sponsored security pact, CENTO from 1954 to 1979, Pakistan along with Turkey and Iran established Regional Cooperation for Development (RCD) in 1964, which was renamed as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in 1980. At the moment the ECO countries lack commitments to operate within an organizational framework because of insufficient trust, an imperative for the success of any regional economic setup. ECO will have a future if it develops the political will to enhance its existing low-key economic cooperation. It has been said that: “If the governments and the private traders in the ECO countries are resolved to fulfill their promise of collective progress, the possibilities are enormous, especially now that the rich resources of the Central Asian countries are also available” (Bhatty, 1992). It will become necessary for the member countries to carefully plan and lay the foundations of the organization with positive attitudes. This in turn could be translated into effective economic cooperation and possibly even coordinated policies in more challenging areas, like political strategy. Once this kind of confidence is secured, member states can move ahead with mutual, coordinated strategic planning.

B. Pakistan and Afghanistan-US Links

On 23rd October 2013, newly elected Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and United States President Barak Obama met in Washington for the first time since Mr. Sharif assumed office. During the four day official visit, Sharif pursued an agenda that included various security issues, including the drone attacks in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) in Pakistan, economic cooperation through trade, and the release of Pakistani citizen Dr. Affia Siddique. These talks were held in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and a high degree of mistrust.

As a gesture to prepare a cordial environment for the meeting, the US released suspended military and economic assistance worth \$1.6 billion to Pakistan a day before the Oval Office meeting. This amount had been deferred for the last two years, when due to the Abbottabad operation (US forces violated the territorial sovereignty of Pakistan in pursuit of Osama bin Laden) and Salala air-base operation (US airstrikes killing 24 Pakistani soldiers), the designated aid of \$7.5 billion for 5 years under the “Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009” (Kerry Lugar Bill) was suspended. The bill faced serious criticism from Pakistan’s civil society after it passed because of the various conditions attached to it, which were considered to not be in Pakistan’s national interest. Therefore, when the US Secretary of State visited

Pakistan in 2009 and came in contact with media personnel, women gatherings, tribal notables from FATA, parliamentarians and the students of a well-reputed university, she had to confront many resentful questions about this bill. While writing on this visit, it was observed,

“There remains no doubt that it was for the first time that a high official in the US government heard first hand from the youth of Pakistan, who have no apprehensions, self-interests nor hidden agendas behind diplomatic gimmicks. From her body language, at the GCU meeting it looked obvious that at times she was taken aback as one student after another stood up to put a question, disputing the rationale of US policy towards Pakistan. It is for certain that she received a frank and honest feedback from that part of the Pakistani society, which matter the most, and there has to be a recognition that the Pakistani civil society remains far apart from the bureaucrats, politicians and the establishment, in their beliefs and attitudes.... A sharp rejection of the Kerry-Lugar Bill had sent a strong message to Washington that the views presented by Pakistani bureaucrats and politicians do not synchronize with real Pakistan” (Hasnat, 2009).

Coming back to the October 2013 meager release of the amount, a well-known journalist, Hamid Mir remarks, “if we keep in view the significance of Pakistan in South Asian region, in terms of its geographical location and political importance then this released amount of \$ 1.6 billion is nothing, especially in comparison with 3.1 billion dollars and 6.5 billion dollars per Annum, to Israel and Afghan National Army respectively, from the US. This released amount of 1.6 billion to Pakistan is to be given in parts” (Mir, 2013-a).

Though the Pakistani government spokesperson considered this release a sign of development between the two “strategic partners,” some analysts view it differently. For them, it was nothing more than a rent for the services of the Pakistani government, supporting logistics for the NATO and US forces in Afghanistan (Guri, 2013). Senator Mushahid Hussain, Chairman of Senate Defense Committee, asserts that “after World War II, the biggest logistic operation for US forces is to bring back .75 million equipment, of all kinds, costing 35 billion dollars, of which 70 per cent has to go through the Pakistani territory. After 1st January 2014, after every 7 minutes, a container through Pakistan will pass on its way to some US base. In this process, US need the help of Pakistani government and its intelligence agencies; therefore, it’s the right time for the administration of Pakistan to put its demands on table as they are in a better bargaining position” (Mir, 2013-b).

US-based Amnesty International strongly stressed the matter of drones in its 2013 report which was released just before the October 2013 Washington summit. It revealed facts relating to the killings and injuring of thousands of Pakistani civilians in FATA region, by US drones. The report states:

“Amnesty International is deeply concerned about reported incidents of drones carrying out follow up strikes on wounded survivors of initial strikes, killing not only

the intended targets but also anyone attempting to rescue the injured. Outside armed conflict, where only international human rights law applies, such attacks are in all circumstances unlawful, constituting arbitrary deprivation of life and, in some cases, extrajudicial executions. Even in the context of armed conflict, the compatibility of such a practice with international humanitarian law is doubtful.... Given the persistent allegations of serious violations of international law, US authorities should open their drone program to independent and impartial scrutiny.... Although Pakistan publicly condemns drone attacks, elements of the state are suspected of colluding in them (see section 8). This ambiguous position on drone attacks is a key reason why the results of any investigations by Pakistani officials into specific incidents remain secret. As far as Amnesty International is aware, information gathered by organs of the Pakistan state have not been fully disclosed by Pakistani authorities to the public. Nor have the authorities systematically followed up cases of killings, injuries and other damages with victims to ensure they receive effective remedies, including by seeking reparation from the USA” (Amnesty International, 2013).

The report not only clearly condemns the US drone attacks in the Pakistan area of North Waziristan but it also accused Pakistan for granting permission for these attacks. It further point-out that in some cases, the Pakistani government even requested drones be employed. The report further goes on to discuss the growing public resentment against these attacks, which are regarded as an abrogation of International Humanitarian law and a violation of Pakistan’s territorial sovereignty. Here, it is relevant to mention Greg Miller and Bob Woodward’s article quoting a leaked CIA report, published in ‘*The Washington Post*’, indicating that the Pakistani government consents to the US use of drones. According to the writers it has become “one of the more poorly kept national security secrets in Washington and Islamabad. During the early years of the campaign, the CIA even used Pakistani airstrips for its Predator fleet.... Several documents refer to a direct Pakistani role in the selection of targets” (Miller & Woodward, 2013). While quoting one of the examples from the leaked report, these authors further state that the drone attacks in 2010 were at the request of Pakistani government and the targeted locations were the results of ‘CIA-ISI targeting effort’.

Given the timings of the *Amnesty International Report*, it was assumed that this report would be considered by the Pakistani Prime Minister as supporting evidence to pursue his apprehensions about US drone attacks, especially when the public opinion and other political parties were also in agreement. However, he failed to do that (Jang, 2013).

Contrary to the expectations, the joint communiqué signed after the summit did not reflect any of the above mentioned expectations and the meeting was not a breakthrough in Pakistan-US relations as it revolved around the following points, derived from the joint communiqué:

1) “As per their strategic priorities are concern, Pakistan and United States will work on five working groups including law enforcement and counter-terrorism, economics and finance, energy; security, strategic stability and non-proliferation, and

the defense consultative group.

2) Both will reinforce the positive momentum in the bilateral relationship by promoting people-to-people contacts.

3) United States will support the ongoing programs to strengthen Pakistan's economy and increased agricultural productivity, and will further help to address the energy shortfall.

4) Both President Obama and Prime Minister Sharif condemned terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, thus committed to work together on effective counterterrorism cooperation to promote peace and prosperity.

5) The two leaders welcomed progress on the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project, and tasked the Energy Working Group to explore possible further US support for the Central Asia-South Asia electricity line, CASA-1000, in close collaboration with the World Bank" (The White House, 2013).

This joint statement revealed the divergent policy positions of the two leaders, confirming the views expressed by former caretaker law minister in his article, where he pointed out that "the US and Pakistan have a clear divergence of approach when it comes to countering terrorism. The US is going for a 'war approach', whereas Pakistan prefers the law enforcement approach" (Soofi, 2013). The editorial of a noted newspaper also termed this meeting "dull, turgid affairs with plenty of official-speak and a regurgitation of official talking points" (Dawn, 2013).

The reality is that there is a serious trust deficit between the two countries. Their relations are on a slippery ground, with the additional baggage of misperceptions and divergent national interests. This intensifies when it comes to US interests in Afghanistan and in the Pakistan tribal belt bordering that country. The exit of US and NATO troops from Afghanistan in 2014 might ease the tensions between the US and Pakistan by providing them an opportunity for closer cooperation on other international concerns, especially economic issues.

Conclusion

From the above observations, we deduce that Pakistan's foreign policy objectives present a challenge for the newly established regime of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. He has to reassess his priorities and devise new strategies so that Pakistan can recover from its state of "isolation" and become a more active member of the international community. To achieve this objective, more proactive, improvised policies need to be adopted. In the last decade or so Pakistan's foreign policy has been a victim of lethargy and was no more than a reactive, responsive exercise. Immediately after assuming office, Sharif did adopt energetic overtures towards China and Turkey and establish more joint economic projects and agreements. However Iran, a vital player in post-US Afghanistan as Iran enjoys considerable influence in that country, has been ignored. Pakistan needs to learn from its past mistakes and Nawaz Sharif's government must coordinate with Iran and other regional players, to devise a common strategy towards Afghanistan.

According to a former Pakistani ambassador to US, both the US and Pakistan have opportunities to cooperate with each other as demanded by “respective geopolitical interests, both countries need each other” (Ahmad, 2014). However, the two countries cannot coordinate effectively unless the mutual suspicion and trust deficit are ameliorated by the Sharif administration.

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