

CSSPR Review

Pakistan's Foreign Policy Challenges

Since 9/11, Pakistan has been beset with certain foreign policy challenges. The first of them is related to the sovereignty of Pakistan which is violated mostly by drone strikes and occasionally by Afghan National Army. Second, Pakistan felt embarrassed and helpless when the US forces raided a compound in Abbottabad in May 2011 to recover and kill Osama bin Laden, without taking Pakistan into confidence. Third, Pakistan has been hyphenated with Afghanistan and, in this way, Pakistan has lost parity with India in the region of South Asia. Fourth, the US and the world is convinced that Pakistan offers shelter to non-state actors carrying out terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and India. Fifth, Pakistan has lost its influence in Afghanistan at the expense of India to affect any change in the government in Kabul. Sixth, Pakistan's support for the cause of Kashmiris has been hampered. Seventh, the world is pressing on Pakistan to abandon its nuclear program and has been opposing Pakistan's entry into any nuclear club which could extend offer some sanctity to Pakistan's nuclear program.

In the post-9/11 phase, two types of challenges beset Pakistan's foreign policy. The first is how to preserve the sanctity of its sovereignty and the second is how to control militancy affecting its internal situation and its neighbors, Afghanistan and India. Pakistan thinks that the post-9/11 challenges to its foreign policy has cost it heavily because Pakistan has lost parity with India and has got hyphenated with Afghanistan instead. It was not just the Af-Pak policy announced by Barack Obama in March 2009 but there have been indicators before that verifying the fact that the US tilt took place in favor of India before 2009. For instance, in 2008, US and India signed the 123 Agreement which is a nuclear energy deal under which the US would provide nuclear energy plants to India commercially or India would be able to buy nuclear energy plants for civilian purposes from the US. Despite requests of Pakistan, the US did not consider Pakistan to have a similar nuclear energy deal with it, as Ezdi (2014) opined: "The main reason the US continues to deny civilian nuclear cooperation to Pakistan today is that it does not want to displease India. But Washington has refused to admit it and instead seeks to justify its refusal on grounds of Pakistan's proliferation record." Seems like the US wanted to appease India at all

costs even at the expense of Pakistan. The US-India bonhomie expressed in 2008 through the nuclear (civilian) energy deal was a prelude to the Af-Pak strategy expounded by the US in 2009.

Whereas the Af-Pak strategy itself was an expression of devaluing Pakistan in the region, another incident further deteriorated Pak-US relations. On May 02, 2011, the US Navy SEALs raided a compound in Abbottabad to kill Osama bin Laden without informing or seeking approval from Pakistan. The presence of Osama bin Laden in the vicinity of Pakistan's military academy was itself enough to raise the level of mistrust between the US and Pakistan, as Chaudhry (2013) writes: For Osama, the entire intelligence structure is held responsible, even if chiefly the ISI [Inter Services Intelligence], and the inability to react appropriately to the raid is systemic collapse which failed to determine if the US indeed was a friend or foe.”

In the post-9/11 phase, Pakistan's foreign policy has come under significant pressure owing to the issue of sovereignty and rampant militancy affecting Pakistan domestically and Pakistan's neighbors such as Afghanistan and India. Since 2004, the issue of violation of sovereignty frequently by drone strikes and occasionally by US or Afghan army has been a challenge for Pakistan. The year of 2004 also witnessed the beginning of suicide bombing in Pakistan followed by militant attacks on army installations. Suicide bombing killed scores of civilians on roads, shopping centers, parks, and mosques. The relationship between drone strikes and rise in militancy became cyclical and difficult enough to analyze the cause and effect. The consequent debate also kept Pakistani society divided.

The terrorist attack in Mumbai in 2008 was more than embarrassing for Pakistan when Ajmal Kasab, a Pakistani national was captured alive by the Indian security forces further pushing Indo-Pak relations to the point of no peaceful return. Continuous noises were made by the US alleging that the Haqqani network was launching attacks in Kabul on Afghan and US forces from inside Pakistan. This pressure to 'do more' generated momentum for Pakistan to launch operation Zarb-e-Azb even though its focus remained the eliminations of Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an organization that wanted to convert Pakistan into their version of an Islamic caliphate. The year 2008 also showed the first sign of US-India bonhomie with the signing of the Indo-US nuclear deal. In 2009, the US introduced its Af-Pak strategy hyphenating Pakistan with Afghanistan. 2009 was also the same year in which the Kerry-Lugar-Berman Act was promulgated in the US Senate to make Pakistan's aid conditional upon meeting certain

conditions. Not only did the KLB bill place the entire burden of stopping cross-border infiltration from Taliban in Pakistan attacking US forces in Afghanistan (without taking responsibility of securing Pakistan from the other side) it asked Pakistan to ban Lashker-i-Taiba (LeT) and to dismantle the Haqqani network allegedly residing in Quetta, Baluchistan. These two still remain the most challenging pursuits for Pakistan.

Pakistan has successfully moved on from Operation Zarb-e-Azb to Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad but its fight against terrorism is far from over. Indo-Pak peace process is at a stand still. Since Mumbai, India has added Gurdaspur, Pathankot and Uri to the list of cross-border attacks from Pakistan alleging that no talks can be held until Pakistan apprehends the perpetrators. To top this, any discussion on Kashmir is a non-starter. India-Pakistan relations under Modi are unlikely to change in the short-term.

Collectively, non-state actors have been able to strain Pakistan's relations not only with India but also with Afghanistan and the US. This is a classic example of how domestic instability due to the presence of non-state actors launching terrorist attacks not only inside Pakistan but also in Pakistan's neighboring countries has the potential of taking Pakistan's foreign policy hostage.

Tehmina Aslam is Research Associate, CSSPR and Lecturer, School of Integrated Social Sciences, University of Lahore.