

Geo Strategic Significance of Pakistan

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Abstract

Pakistan's geo strategic significance makes it the most pivotal partner. It is in a position to provide a bridge between the West and Central Asia, West and the Muslim world, and between USA and China. The opportunities accruing from the changed international scenario, if assessed realistically and capitalized through appropriate policies, project a very bright future for Pakistan. Pakistan's foreign policy has seen many ups and down but post 9/11, a clear reorientation was undertaken in understanding the internal, external and economic dimensions of threat to national security as against the traditional single directional approach. On the other hand Pakistan's pro-Taliban foreign policy was already being questioned by our friends including Turkey, Iran, Russia, and even our strategic ally China. Pakistan was found more frequently defending its adopted policy abroad. A realization had already set in that continuation of our policy was seriously compromising our national security interests. Thus incident of 9/11 acted only as a catalyst in reorienting the policy. The world is facing energy crises and terrorism. Pakistan is a route for transportation and a front line state against terrorism. Moreover Pakistan has been traditionally ally of emerging economic giant; China. So in the vague of any change in world politics, Pakistan's geo-strategic significance would further be enhanced.

GEO STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE OF PAKISTAN

Pakistan's geo strategic importance makes it a vital confederate between the West and Central Asia, West and the Muslim world, and between USA and China. Pakistan has an exceptional peculiarity of being bordered by three major states, i.e. Russia, China and India. Customarily, Pakistan has a shared destiny with Afghanistan and Iran, and this region offers a terrestrial passage to any power to the warm waters of the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

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Straits of Hormuz, which is the “International Oil Highway” is also in the backdoor of Pakistan. Pakistan exists in an extremely impulsive atmosphere and faces great challenges due to foreign and domestic reasons. It is bounded by enormous and populous countries, almost 1/3rd of humanity (Russia, China, India, Central Asia and Gulf countries), all with rising economies, incredible mineral and energy resources and developing market potentials (Hassan, 2004 Winter). Pakistan can actually influence its neighbours through economic as well as political linkages. It is, therefore, exceptionally important for the global and regional players that Pakistan develops efficiently and rightfully, if they really want to succeed in their future ambitions to benefit from the unquestionable potentials of the region.

Pakistan being the only Muslim nuclear power can play a very vital role in bridging the gap between the West and the Islamic world. Being an important member of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC), Pakistan’s significance cannot be under estimated. China – Pakistan relationship is unparalleled in modern history defying the logic of power politics (Mehmud, 2001 Summer). During cold war regardless of inclination towards US’s interests, Pakistan broke the rules of game and continued extending her friendship to China. After the cold war era, China emerged as an economic giant and due to her developments in various fields, US considered China as a potential threat. Pakistan, by virtue of her cordial relations with both the countries can play a significant role as a third party to reduce the tension between both the super powers. Due to the nature of conflict with India and the revival of the USA’s interests in the region, a Nuclear Pakistan has much better leverage in the regional and global context (Khan, 2005). Nuclear arsenal of Pakistan is also suspected to be vulnerable to proliferation by US. It is for this reason that US and other Global players have started to get engaged in the reconciliation efforts in the Sub-continent, besides strengthening Pakistan on political, economic and diplomatic fronts. As the dominant drivers of conflicts in next few decades are likely to be socio-economic divisions and environment constraints, the future wars are likely to be asymmetric in nature with low intensity dimensions.

Importance of a Strong Pakistan for Regional Stability

- a. **Effects of a Weak Pakistan.** An economically weak and politically turbulent Pakistan will give rise to ethnic and sectarian strife. Also, the religious extremist groups will be bringing more number of frustrated youth into their fold. The negative fallout of these groups will not only harm Pakistan but will have immediate spill over effects on the neighbouring states (Mazari, Defining Terrorism, Winter 2001).

- b. **Effects of Loose Nuclear Technology.** The world, particularly the US, feels that a politically unstable Pakistan will have a loose control over its nuclear arsenal. If this analogy is taken as true then an unstable Pakistan is ill-suited to world and regional peace (Hilali, Winter 2009).
- c. **Overall Balancing Effect.** A stable Pakistan enhances the overall balance of the region because of its multi-directional and geo-strategic reach (Mazari, The New US Security Doctrine , Spring 2003).

Relations with International World

Pakistan - India Relations. Indo-Pak relations have always remained strained as India conceives Pakistan as a main hurdle towards her hegemonic designs in the region, whereas Pakistan considers India a perpetual threat to her national security. Besides many other irritants, Kashmir remains the major stumbling block in improving the relations (Razvi, 1971. p 155). India blames Pakistan for supporting the insurgency and promoting terrorism, whereas Pakistan considers that India is perpetually trying to undermine her very existence and independence as a sovereign state. Having fought four wars, both countries seem to be realizing importance of peaceful co-existence. Lately, after the Pulwama incident, Indian's violation of Pakistan airspace brought the two nations to the brink of the war but the situation got settled due to mature handling by Pakistan.

Pakistan – US Relations. Pak – US relations have witnessed many phases of being warm and cold, depending upon US strategic interests in the region. Pakistan joined US led security pacts, SEATO and CENTO in 1950s and concluded another two military agreements in 1954 and 1959. By 1960, Pakistan had become most allied ally of America's Asian allies (Mahdi, 1999, p.153). Pakistan's expectation of US help during 1965 and 1971 was never materialized as these were based on wrong assumptions. Pak-US relations between 1972 and 1979 remained lukewarm till US needed Pakistan for their proxy war against Soviet Russia in Afghanistan. For next ten years, Pakistan remained a frontline state and participated actively in Afghan struggle against Soviet occupation. After Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, in 1989, US abandoned both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Thereafter variety of sanctions was imposed on Pakistan, showing great resentment on Pakistan's effort to acquire nuclear capability. US interest for GWOT again brought Pakistan in the limelight by once again declaring it a 'frontline state' for war on terror. Recently, due to Pakistan's strenuous

efforts, Afghan Taliban and US were brought to negotiation table for peace process.

Pakistan – China Relations. Pakistan relations with China have always remained unexceptional since its inception (Amin, 2003, p.157). Both countries have supported each other at diplomatic level on important global issues. China, besides supporting Pakistan's point of view on Kashmir at UN has extended extremely valuable material help in the field of defence production and economic development (Moon, 1988). During Indo-Pakistan War of 1965, relations between the two states touched its peak. On the other hand, Pakistan facilitated normalization of relations between US and China in 1971. In order to concentrate on her economic progress, China is not likely to involve herself in any regional or global dispute. However, she can be considered a trusted and reliable friend in future as well, provided convergence of interests between the two continues. The signing of China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) agreement in 2013 brought the two countries very closer in terms of economic and strategic connectivity.

Pakistan – USSR/ Russia Relations. Pakistan's relations with Soviet Union could not take a good start right from the beginning. These relations suffered from suspicions and apprehensions (Razvi, *The Frontiers of Pakistan*, 1971, p 129). On the contrary, India always enjoyed good cooperative relations with Soviet Union / Russia and has really benefited from it. Soviet Union helped India in both wars against Pakistan, however, Soviet Union did facilitate Indo-Pak cease-fire and a negotiated settlement at Tashkent in 1966. Pak-Soviet relations considerably improved during Bhutto's era but immediately after that the extreme opposite was experienced in 1980s during Soviet occupation of Afghanistan (Gray, 2004). Pakistan, due to its support for the Afghan resistance, was rather seen at war with Soviet Union. After the demise of USSR and the end of Cold War, our relations with Russia (the successor state of USSR) got normalized. However, a lot needs to be done to improve these relations, which can be beneficial to our economic and security interests. Increased US involvement in region, emergence of India as regional super power, Russia's potentials as reemerging super power and likely change in world order from uni-polar to bipolar world suggest further cordial and bilateral relations with Russia.

Pakistan's Relation with the Europe and United Kingdom. Pakistan has traditionally maintained good relations with United Kingdom, basically because of our colonial legacy. Britain was expected to help resolution of the Kashmir Issue as a moral obligation to complete 'incomplete partition'. Pakistan's foreign relations with other European powers, namely, France,

Germany and Italy, have been just normal. In the West, our main orientation has always remained focused on USA and UK alone. It may be more prudent to expand the canvas of our relations with European Union (EU). Moreover, having NATO forces in Afghanistan, it is our compulsion to explore ways and means to develop better relations with EU on more solid grounds (Ziring, 1994. p 58).

Pakistan-Iran Relations. Both being Muslim states have generally cordial relations and Iran provided military support to Pakistan during two wars against India (Amin, Pakistan's Foreign Policy: A Reappraisal, 2003, p.138). However, relations with Iran have seen many ups and down especially after 1971 Indo-Pak war and Iran-Iraq War. During Afghan struggle against Soviet invasion and especially at the time of Geneva Accord and events leading to the rise of Taliban, many differences emerged between Pakistan and Iran on their respective approach towards bringing peace, stability and harmony in Afghanistan. Iran, has always considered Pakistan as a strategic competitor in Afghanistan and other Central Asian States, due to obvious economic and political reasons. Of course, there are serious differences in both countries' priorities vis-à-vis on going GWOT in Afghanistan and its implications for the region. There are reports about Indo – Iranian collaboration in the field of defence and security, which needs to be monitored and carefully analysed by Pakistan. However, due to high level official visits from Pakistan i.e COAS and PM, the relations between two states are expected to deepen more.

Pakistan- Afghanistan Relations. Despite strong cultural, religious and linguistic ties, Pakistan-Afghan relations have not been very steady (Razvi, The Frontiers of Pakistan , 1971. p 67). Pakistan shares a long porous border with Afghanistan, having same tribes living either side the border. Afghanistan was the only country, in 1947, which had opposed Pakistan's entry to the United Nations and had maliciously claimed the areas up to Indus River questioning the validity of Durand Line (Moon, National Security in the Third World , 1988). Thereafter, the relations have mostly remained unstable and Afghanistan's attitude generally remained hostile, creating lot of provocations. After the cold war, Pakistan accommodated more than 3 million Afghan refugees for over two decade; most of them still reside in Pakistan. Pakistan also provided whole hearted support to Taliban rule in Afghanistan at the cost of annoying Soviet Union/Russia, non-Taliban/Pashtun elements and other neighbours in the region. Despite Pakistan complete cooperation with US led multi-national forces to combat terrorism, Afghanistan's attitude towards Pakistan is not very friendly. Afghanistan keeps raising issues of disputed border, transit trade and cross border infiltration, whenever it suits her.

Pakistan's Relations with Muslim World. Pakistan has always maintained friendly relation with all Muslim countries and has supported the Muslim cause at all international forums, which is obligatory for Pakistan as per her Constitution. Pakistan's closest relations amongst the Muslim world have been with Saudi Arabia, who has always supported Pakistan on the Kashmir Issue. During the Afghan war, Saudi Arabia in collaboration with US, provided all out military and other support to Pakistan. Moreover, Pakistan has always had a very warm and close relationship with Turkey which was probably the only country in the world to support Turkey on its military invasion in northern Cyprus. Pakistan, for its part, has received steadfast Turkish support on Kashmir issue and some degree of military assistance during the two wars with India (Moon, National Security in the Third World , 1988. p129). Pakistan also enjoys equally good relations with all Gulf States. Besides, Pakistan's relations with Indonesia and Malaysia have always been very friendly.

Pakistan and International Organisations

Pakistan and the United Nations. Pakistan has always been an active member of the UN and has subscribed to the principles and purposes of its Charter. Besides many other international issues, Pakistan's major commitment with the UN has been on Kashmir Issue. Pakistan also encouraged the UN to play a mediatory role in the Afghan crisis from the beginning. Pakistan has whole heartedly supported UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) and has been a major troop contributor. Pakistan, however, has opposed any expansion in the Security Council, which will create new centres of power and privilege (Today, 2018).

Pakistan and Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). Pakistan being the founding member of the OIC has played a significant role in bringing together all the Muslim states through its active contribution. As an only nuclear power with its effective diplomacy, Pakistan's efforts have always been given due importance on perilous problems of the Islamic world.

Pakistan and Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO). In 1964, Pakistan Iran and Turkey established Regional Organization for Cooperation (RCD), which after remaining inactive since 1979 Iranian Revolution was revived as Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in 1985. At present it also includes Afghanistan and six Central Asian States and provides a forum for regional cooperation to the member countries (Amin, Pakistan's Foreign Policy: A Reappraisal, 2000).

Pakistan and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). SAARC, since its establishment in 1983, has remained hostage to perennial animosity between India and Pakistan (Razvi, *The Frontiers of Pakistan*, 1971. p 28). Nonetheless, it has come up well as a regional forum for promotion of trade, commerce and cultural exchange. SAARC has very less scope to help member states to resolve their mutual dispute as any such discussion is against the SAARC Charter. However, expansion of SAARC, according full membership to Afghanistan and observer Status to China might open new possibilities for better cooperation on security issues and for mutual conflict resolution.

Pakistan and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Pakistan has always recognized the emergent world-wide significance of China and has always considered her its key ally. Since the emergence of SCO, Pakistan enjoys observer status within the organisation. With the passage of time, the organisation's ambit has increased manifold i.e joint military exercises, action against drug trafficking and organised crime. The mandate also inspires free trade and campaigns to build critical structure to link its members through roads or railways, promote commerce and modernize customs systems and tariffs.

Pakistan and Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). Pakistan's foreign policy initiatives are to create wide-ranging, robust and mutually advantageous associations for the benefit of the region. ASEAN leadership has demonstrated inconceivable political resolve and will to shape up the resilient and standardized economies; thus transforming the South East Asia as a rapid developing region. Pakistan is an active member which offers numerous investment prospects in the field of telecommunication, oil and gas, energy, services and agriculture. ASEAN members can exploit the economic growth by having an access to Central Asia and Middle East (Khan M. N., 18 Sep 2018).

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