

Us Foreign Policy Toward South Asian States: Policy Recommendation For Future

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Abstract

USA can never ignore a significant region like South Asia in its foreign policy. Now it is important for USA to reconsider its policy options while making any decision in future towards the member states of the region. This research tried to highlight the vital position of South Asia for regional and world politics. Definitely USA does as each state work for promotion of its own interests, but at the same time it must not ignore the sensitivities of the regional states. It is emphasized that how regional as well as world geopolitical and geostrategic structure has been changed, so unilateralism will not be better option for USA policy makers in future. The main objective of this work is to offer some policy recommendations for USA policy maker like that of, involvement of regional as well as international stakeholder is required in resolving or tackling any issue in the region; keeping in view balance of power in South Asia while offering any military or strategic support to any of member state; support for democratic regimes in the region etc. This research is based on qualitative method of reasoning. Technique of document analysis has been used in the work. Several physical and electronic documents have been approached to interpret and understand the meaning and development on the topic.

Key Words: Strategic, Regional, Assistance, Foreign Policy, Administration.

Introduction

South Asia once again has gained great significance in USA foreign policy. After the incident of 9/11 South Asia has become one of the most focused regions in USA foreign policy. Its closeness with two major powers, China and Russia, especially in the changing geopolitical structure compelled USA foreign policy makers to give the region special attention. Moreover, the

presence of two rival nuclear powers in the region did not allow USA to keep the region unattended. USA under Bush and Obama administrations required reconsidering its policy option while making decision towards the member states of the region. Like all other leaders the both presidents of USA followed the policies to secure their own interests. Regional sensitivities and interests were over looked while making policy towards the

region. Historical analysis revealed that USA foreign policy towards South Asia did not remain consistent towards any member state of the region. Initially USA made policy to contain communism in the region. For this purpose it made alliances like SEATO and CENTO with some of the member states (Umbreen, 2005). USA tried its best to keep Indian leaders away from communist influence during Cold War. In case of Pakistan USA offered several economic and military assistances in different intervals of history. USA got itself involve in Afghan issue in 1980s. USA policy makers provided military assistance to Afghan Mujahedeen via Pakistan to fight against USSR forces and ultimately USA succeeded to defeat USSR in Afghanistan. During Cold War it was a prime time of USA involvement in the regional issue of South Asia.

US Policies towards the Region (2001-2016)

There was a clear and sudden change in USA foreign policy towards South Asia during Bush administration. President Bush came forward with the aim of eliminating terrorist organization in the region. After terrorist attack on USA soil Bush succeeded to make the world leaders agree on the danger posed by terrorists. He gathered voices from all over the world against terrorist organizations. President Bush followed unilateralist approach in making foreign policy towards South Asia. The attitude of Bush administration remained different towards the member states of the region. In case of Afghanistan it focused the WOT and defeat of all kinds of terrorists and their organizations. It was much clear to the policy maker during Bush era that role of Pakistan is vital in fighting any kind of conflict in Afghanistan. For this, proper attention was given to engage Pakistan. It was under the same administration that Pakistan was given the status of front line ally in WOT. Pakistan also got huge economic and military aid due to its significant role to achieve USA objectives in the region. These were also the

services provided by Pakistan in counterterrorism strategy that it was given the status of non-NATO ally (Muhammad, 2007).

Indian leadership was worried about such close ties between USA and Pakistan. But soon their wariness was washed away when Bush administration showed interests in making Indo-USA Nuclear deal. A new era of bilateral ties between USA and India started during Bush presidency. The deal made it clear to all the member states that USA was interested more in India for its long term interests in the region. Through this deal India enabled itself to fulfill its fissile material requirement from NSG (Ali & Zahid, 2013). Huge Indian market, development of India as counter weigh of China and future role in Indian Ocean Region (IOR) were among the main reasons for such change in USA foreign policy towards India. Improvement in diplomatic ties between USA and India was also seen over which India was much happy with such change in USA policy.

President Obama came with some new approaches in USA foreign policy towards South Asian states. Obama seemed criticizing the unilateral policy of his predecessor. USA foreign policy under Obama administration was shifted from unilateralism to multilateralism. Definitely Obama followed the core policies of Bush administration, like defeat of terrorists in the region and policy towards India. But during Obama administration special attention was also given to the other political, economic and social issues of South Asian states. President Obama came with the idea of withdrawal of USA forces from Afghanistan. There were some internal and external pressures on Obama administration to end Afghan war. A wider counterterrorism strategy was devised to gain maximum possible results of WOT and Af-Pak strategy was the part of same extended strategy. Drone attacks were increased both in number and scope. Afghanistan and Pakistan were called two states but one

problem. Pakistan was offered with economic assistance for uplift and betterment of its civil society. Conditions of performance in counterterrorism efforts were attached with the assistance of \$ 7.5 billion under Kerry Logger Bill offered to Pakistan in next five years (Rakisits, 2009). There was a time during Obama administration when Pak-USA bilateral relations were also deteriorated due to killing of civilian as well as military forces with drone attacks.

USA policy towards India under Obama administration remained the same as started by Bush and Clinton administrations. President Obama could not give proper attention to USA relations with India during his first few months. In the coming years Indo-USA bilateral relations were further strengthened on the basis of common values. Diplomatic relation with India got even more attention during Obama administration. Nuclear deal that was initiated by President Bush was culminated during Obama administration. India was given more importance in Obama's Pivot to Asia policy. It was thought by Obama administration that a power that will have its influence in IOR will rule in future.

USA foreign policy under Bush and Obama administrations had several implications for Pakistan. Though Pakistan was provided with huge economic and military assistant during these sixteen years but the graph of losses it suffered is much higher than the gains. Economic assistance that was given to Pakistan during this period produced short term results. USA supported military ruler in Pakistan to get support in WOT but it damaged its already weak political system. Both administrations did not bother the strategic implications of Indo-USA Nuclear Deal on the region. Counterterrorism strategies followed by the two presidents caused deep scars of socio-political fabric of Pakistan. Despite defeating terrorists, the drone strikes resulted in additional threat of terrorist activities. Drones had no discrimination between friends and foes.

Sovereignty of Pakistan also remained in question during these drone strikes on Pakistani territories. Killing of innocent citizens caused anti-government sentiments in Pakistan and state writ was challenged by the terrorists with the help of local grieved families. Issue of IDPs was a new challenge for Pakistani government. These IDPs came with some new relevant social, political and economic complexities (Akbar, 2011).

Policy Recommendations

Learning lesson from a long presence in South Asia, USA policy makers must rethink and reevaluate the situation while making any future plan towards the region. Following lines contain some recommendations that are needed to considered for a viable solution of regional issues and win win situation for all stakeholders as well in the regions.

Support for Democracy

Promotion of democracy has always remained popular slogan of USA governments (Zierler, 2011). At the same time, it looks not true in case of USA policies towards Pakistan. Aside from internal support, military dictators were also assisted by external player. Haqqani (2006), presents that prolonged military rules in Pakistan were due to the blessings these rulers got from some international forces. Historical evidences show that USA never talked about democracy in Pakistan when its own strategic interests were at stake. The graph of both military and economic aid remained high during military rules in Pakistan. USA always ignored and sacrificed the cause of democracy for its own interests in the region of South Asia. The first military coup of 1958 by General Ayub Khan was endorsed by USA administration to win the support of pro-West military establishment in Pakistan during early years of Cold War (Aziz, 2008). Ziring (1997) demonstrates that as general elections were planned and it was expected that the newly elected civil government may tilt towards communist bloc, so was toppled down by military

dictator. In 1980s the geo-political scene in South Asia and its neighboring state has once again been changed with Iranian revolution. In this backdrop, USA again needed a close ties and support of Pakistan specially to contain Communism in the region. Military ruler General Zia Ul Haq was again offered unexpected military and economic assistance by USA. The sanctions that were imposed on Pakistan due to covert nuclear program lifted at once. Furthermore, no such pressure was put on military government to stop its nuclear program as was the case with civilian governments. During Zia rule Pakistan was on number four in receiving USA aid after Israel, Turkey and Egypt (Paul, 1992). Again in 1998 Pak-USA relations were deteriorated after nuclear tests conducted by Pakistan. Pakistan had to face USA sanctions for one more time after these nuclear tests. Almost a year later, General Pervez Musharaf toppled the civilian government in 1999. The changing geo-strategic situation in the region attracted the attention of USA and military government was felt useful and supportive to secure USA interests in South Asia and beyond. Pakistan was expected to be the major player in USA WOT in the region so extensive military and economic assistance was provided to a dictator. Therefore, support to military dictator and assistance that Pakistan received from USA was due to its role as front line ally in counterterrorism activities (Ali, 2009). In true efforts for promoting democracy USA need to expel its assistance for military dictators in future. Democracy can never be flourished anywhere with the help of dictators. A plan to invoke democracy through autocratic rule is same as devil quoting scripture (Naidu, 2002).

Pak-USA Bilateral Relations Need Solid Footings

A detail study of Pak-USA bilateral relations reveals that their relations neither based on strong footings nor remained stable. Rather bilateral relations between these two states are supposed issue based. Pakistan has been given due or even

unexpected attention by USA policy makers but only in the times of need. Jia (2017) calls this relationship as Sea-Saw. In this connection, containment of USSR during 1949-1991 and WOT in recent history are the best example to elaborate the significance of Pakistan in USA foreign policy. USA must not formulate its policies towards Pakistan through the prism of its own short term interests only. Both USA and Pakistan share several common objectives in the region. These objectives include defeat and elimination of terrorism, ending extremist mindset in the region, promotion of peace and stability in the region, strengthening political and economic structure of member states of South Asia, last but not least social development of Pakistan that is required for security and stability of the region. Therefore, it is needed to reset and redefine bilateral relations to face the common challenges. Change in the approach of USA policies towards South Asia will in actual lead towards a quality relationship between the two partners in future and enabled both to tackle much complicated regional issues.

Strategic Balance / Normalization between India and Pakistan

USA should reconsider its strategic policies towards South Asian region, especially Pakistan and India. USA may have its own strategic interests in empowering India, as India is considered a counter weigh to China. But Indo-Pak rivalry must not be ignored while taking any strategic decision towards the region. This rivalry has already resulted in many clashes between the two neighboring states. It seems very idealist approach if anyone expect from Pakistan and India to give up nuclear weapons. It is evident from the attitude of both states towards Non-Proliferation Treaty. Any future clash between the two nuclear states can prove fatal for the whole region. Indo-USA Nuclear Deal in this realm can disturb strategic balance in South Asia. Pakistan has proved itself a responsible state, so USA must not oppose any effort by Pakistan to

demand an equal nuclear deal and supply of fissile material from NSG. Strategic imbalance in South Asia can never be in favor of any regional or international power. Pakistan, comparatively a weak state is analyzed to undergo USA carrot and stick policy (Jia, 2017).

New Mechanism for Resolution of Disputes / Issues

Geopolitical structure has been changed in the new setting of world politics. Unilateral policy adopted by USA policy makers is no more workable. Situation of complex interdependence has compelled the states to come out of the policy of aloofness. Now interstate relations are only influenced but not dominated by any single state or forces of globalization. Hierarchy in world affairs has become weaker and political power more widely discrete. Policy makers of USA have to reconsider their assumptions of global economic and political supremacy. In reality it has become a Global Century. There will be a principle of first among equals. USA will not go unchallenged in applying its power and strength in any regional or international politics. It will have to go forward with wisdom, limitation and responsibility while exercising power in world affairs. Mindful of changing world political dynamics will definitely assist USA in attaining its long term objectives. Public opinion in USA is favor of USA role in international politics in collaboration with international forums and by multilateral means (Morrison, 2009).

USA needs to involve regional as well as other major players of the current era while finding the solutions of international disputes. USA alone cannot be considered best equipped to resolve different disputes in the world. Neither can it tackle the challenges solely that have been emerged on the world scene in recent history. All the stake holders are required to get involve in mitigating any issue. In South Asia, Kashmir is a flash point between Pakistan and India. In this case involvement of China, Russia along with

USA is highly desirable. Sense of insecurity can never be in favor of neighboring major power e-i China and Russia. Regional instability cannot serve any of long term USA objectives in the region. Therefore, it is the need of the time to find a new mechanism to resolve Kashmir issue by patterning major regional power, regional organizations and United Nations. Failure in developing any such mechanism may result in multiplying threats to security of the region (Cohen, 2003).

Economic and Social Development of the Region

Socially and economically weak states cannot serve the long term interests of any other regional or international player. If a weak state is used by any major power for its vested interests at one time, it can also be used by some other power at some other time. South Asia is composed of eight states and no of them can be called a developed state. There are several social, economic and political weakness in most of the member states of the region. Some of these states like that of Afghanistan could never be in a position to serve its nation in a satisfactory manner. Such failed states have very unfortunate effects not only in the region but all over the globe. Afghanistan is widely divided, missing national unity, collapsed institutions and weak state. Internal socio-political division in Afghanistan is prevailing since last several decades so they have no respect or concerns for international norms or laws. Afghans even defied few efforts by international community to improve the internal condition of their state. There is a dire need of long term and sincere commitment to work for uplift of Afghan society with economic and technical assistance, development of education and communication infrastructure, maintenance and building of health sector etc. Therefore, failed state of Afghanistan needs a full scale nation building efforts to address the basic evils of the society. Though USA tried to develop some sectors of Afghan society during its stay of almost twenty

years, but such programs required its support even after its withdrawal. USA along with international community must provide financial support to Afghanistan at least ten more years. Afghanistan with its potential social political and economic stability can emerge as a viable member of international community. Amin and Naseer (2013), comments that withdrawal of USA forces from Afghanistan indicates that USA is no more interested in national building in Afghanistan.

At the other side, Pakistan also requires economic and social assistance to continue its socio-economic development that will in turn enable it to uplift its society and to address the evils of the society. USA policy makers tried to assist Pakistan, especially during Obama presidency but still there is need to do more. All the assistance provided to Pakistan had short term objectives to achieve. Pakistan sacrificed a lot in the partnership of USA during counterterrorism efforts in the region, but yet could not achieve the position in the priority list of USA in South Asia.

Search for effective and viable solution of Afghan Political Structure

Democracy is no doubt a better option in the prevailing political systems but not necessarily good or workable in all societies and cultures. The efficacy and utility of democratic norms cannot be denied. But at the same time if undemocratic norms are tried to enforce on some undemocratic culture and society it may result in more chaos. Preparing ground for democracy is not an easy task, especially in societies where democracy is either fragile or non-existence. Failure in transforming the system effectively can prove even more destructive. USA behavior to interfere in the internal matters was not acceptable to other states, even many Americans themselves did not agree with counter-terrorism policies of their governments (Peck, 1998). So, Afghanistan must be dealt with the same approach to resolve its political issue. Afghan

political system remained under direct vigilance of USA for twenty years. Every possible economic, social, and security assistance was also provided by USA policy maker. Despite all these efforts USA failed to establish democratic norms in social and political system of Afghanistan. So it is required to establish a stable Afghan state. It does not matter either it is achieved with the support of democracy or by any other acceptable approach.

Confidence Building and Removal of Mistrust

Trust deficit between USA and Pakistan policy makers is a major hurdle in the way of achieving their relevant objectives even in the times of so called collaboration. It is considered that there is nothing permanent in Pak-USA bilateral relations during more than seventy years but mistrust. Cheema (1983), elaborates that an amicable bilateral relations have never been experienced by Pakistan and USA. USA remained closer to India in its South Asian politics that created doubts in minds of policy makers of Pakistan. In this regard Indo-USA Nuclear Deal is considered against strategic interests of Pakistan. The deal has the potential to disturb balance of power in South Asian region. While Pakistan is becoming strong partner of China that is not welcomed by USA. USA seemed not happy with Chinese involvement in Gwadar port (Akhtar, 2012). USA think Pakistan as insincere ally, as during support in WOT USA remained doubtful with sincerity of Pakistan military forces. On the other hand, military and intelligence services of Pakistanis themselves were suspicious about attitude of USA after its withdrawal from Afghanistan (Koehlmoos, 2010). Though both Pakistan and USA are perusing their own interests by developing bilateral relations with other regional states but it has created a deep mistrust for each other.

Soft Power Solution

USA counterterrorism strategy succeeded to kill many of terrorists but spread the terrorism in the neighboring states. Widespread violent activities along with political instability not threatened the security of only Afghanistan but also created a sense of insecurity in the whole region. It is a hard reality that governance and security situation in Afghanistan was better than the situation after a USA intervention. Killing of terrorists did not reduce their numbers but multiplied it. Terrorism and extremism are not such phenomenon that can be dealt only with force. It needs some soft powers and peaceful process to reach a viable solution. Soft power is actually the ability to give preferences to the ideas of other (Jr., 2004). The idea of violence must be avoided and an alternate solution through diplomatic activities be pursued. Any of several available methods of conflict resolution can be used to mitigate terrorist activities. Lennon (2003) explains the following steps to eliminate terrorism with soft approach.

- Use of USA influence to make the mind of its allies that the terrorist activities are illegitimate like that of slavery, genocide and human trafficking.
- Support of moderate and modern governments especially in troubled areas to ensure deny of fertile grounds for terrorists.
- Diminishing fundamental conditions that promote terrorism and to convince the world community to offer support for such reason
- Use of an effective process of diplomacy to ensure stoppage of local, regional or international funding for terrorism.

Presently same group of Taliban is in power in Afghanistan against which USA was fighting for twenty years. Thus, the target must be to end the terrorist or extremist mentality through soft power rather to kill them only. It is hoped that one can win the mind and heart of general public to

keep themselves aloof from terrorist groups. Tella (2017) demonstrates, it is more effective to rely on soft rather than hard power.

Revision of Af-Pak Strategy

Definitely engagement was the basic pillar of Af-Pak strategy initiated by Obama administration but it had also some shortcomings. It is needed to make it comprehensive if USA will have any such plan in future. It is to judge that all situations (social, political, economic, security) of Pakistan are quite different from that of Afghanistan. Pakistan has well equipped and trained force to meet any kind of challenge to its national interests. No non-state actor / actors can be out of control of state agencies. It proved in its counterterrorism efforts that it has the ability to eradicate any kind of notorious elements in its society. While Afghanistan on the other side neither has permanent defense forces nor established social, political and economic structure. USA efforts of twenty years to make Afghan government strong enough to face internal political chaos went in vain. Supporting Pakistan civil and defense sectors was valuable but considering Pakistan and Afghanistan two country one stage was wrong. American policy administrators could not assume that how Pakistan works (Markey, 2013). So, it would be better to consider all such realities by policy makers of USA if any such strategy is needed in future.

Respect for State Sovereignty

No nation can compromise on its sovereignty. USA in its counterterrorism strategy did not respect sovereignty of Pakistan even when Pakistan was providing all kinds of strategic and intelligence support to USA military in the region. Both Bush and Obama administrations continued drone strikes in Pakistani territory. Koechler (2002) comments, in WOT sovereignty and human rights of Pakistan were damaged. There was a time when there were strong voices among from the Pakistani government and public

against violation of state sovereignty. Ultimately such strategy of USA caused damages to the bilateral ties between the two partners of WOT and Pakistan government had to stop the NATO supply. NATO Apache helicopters entered into Pakistani territory and attacked two border check post. In this incident NATO forces did not only violated international law by crossing border but also killed Pakistani soldiers including two officers (Mushtaq, 2016). These drone attacks also resulted in anti-American sentiment among people of Pakistan. USA violation of sovereignty was criticized widely. It earned a bad name to its reputation and was called a rogue power (Huntington, 1999). It was not easy to make counterterrorism strategy successful without the support of general public.

Conclusion

USA needs to reconsider its policy option while making decision towards the member states of the region. Definitely USA does as each state work for promotion of its own interests, but at the same time it must not ignore the sensitivities of the regional states. The geopolitical and geostrategic structure has been changed, so unilateralism will not be better option for USA policy makers in future. Involvement of regional as well as international stakeholder is required in resolving or tackling any issue in South Asian region. Balance of power in South Asia should be in the mind of USA government while offering any military or strategic support to any of member state. Strategic imbalance in the region can result in several security issues. There are located two rival states (Pakistan and India) with nuclear bombs and any future clash between these two states can be dangerous more than the expectations. Obama administration tried to devise such policies but not with full focus and sincerity. Therefore, in future USA policy makers have to keep in mind several new developments at regional and international level to get itself engaged in South Asia. There is no place of

unilateralism and use of military might in the new era of complex interdependence.

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