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Examining US Strategic Interests in South Asia: A Decade-Long Study of Triangular Relations (US-Pakistan-India) in the Post-Cold War Era

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Abstract: This study is devoted primarily to the security priorities of the US towards South Asia in the post-Soviet decade of the 1990s. Indeed, the world witnessed the end of Cold war with the demise of Communist USSR. The United States, therefore, nourished more enthusiastically its inherent desire of a 'New World Order'. For this purpose, South Asia again became a 'land of desire' for Washington to consolidate its preponderance in the strategically vital region of Asia. The research, therefore, delves into a decade long post-cold war security environment of South Asia by analyzing the US policies towards India and Pakistan. The study uses a qualitative methodology that includes a systematic review of existing literature and primary sources, including official documents and statements to identify the important factors that have influenced US strategic partnerships in South Asia and concludes that contemporary Indo-US strategic partnership has its roots since the end of cold war.

Introduction

The period after 1945 was the inception of contemporary age in terms of scientific advancement and great powers' bipolar rivalries. Whereas, the decade of 1990s was a post-contemporary era in terms of unipolarity with America's emergence as the sole "Super Power" after the Soviet demise. This transformation inevitably brought about drastic re-structuring and re-scheduling of foreign policy preferences of sovereign states around the globe (Kumaraswamy 1999). The main outfall in the policy approaches was abandoning of the strategy of aid and assistance between the donors and the recipients in favor of trade, investments and self-reliance. The world, thus, moved out

from the multilateralism of regional blocs of the USA and the USSR and entered into a new phase of bilateralism by adopting a state-to-state interplay in self-interest (Kegley 2007; Scott 2011).

The Soviet demise was hence in one respect a strategic factor which enhanced United States' focus on the 'global south'. Out of the all regions, South Asia was a strategic point for Washington's preferences. For instance, even after the Cold War, Communist China was an emerging power having geographical contiguity with the region. But the Communist Soviet was no more a 'driving factor', having a history of playing counter-

balancing game of pay-off matrix. Washington could, therefore, feel it more convenient to conceive South Asia from 'regional perspective', rather than from the global perspective as in the past. (Cohen 2000) Largely on that account, the US self-vital interests in South Asia now emanated more from within this troubled region; and all the perceivable threats to those interests were related to the Indo-Pakistan rivalries as well as to the prospects of China's involvement because of its proximity (Kux 1992).

However, the structuring of an alliance in global realpolitik is dominantly steered by the superior power in accordance with its national interest whereas the state objectives of an ally partner are considered secondary (Meernik, Krueger & Poe 1998; Donnelly 2000; Dune and Kurki 2013; Mearsheimer 2014). The saga of triangular relations (US-Pakistan-India) in South Asia is not different from this. The US (re-)positioning in the region always remain the defining factor of its hegemonic desire. For instance, in cold war period Pakistan was a strategic pawn for the US to confront with communist USSR and in post-cold war the US prioritized India as all-weather partner to counter emerging China.

From the standpoint of such strategic potentials in South Asia, the US regional policy-priorities of 1990s were chalked out to correspond with New World Order (NWO). The revised stress for the US was to evolve a working formula for regional cooperation under India's hegemonic leadership with enhanced military and economic assistance to make it more conducive for both India and the United States especially in the wake of growing Sino-Pakistan collaboration (Dune and Kurki 2013). The additional US interests in the region during the 1990s can be identified as:

- promotion of democracy and civil rights, with a special focus on Pakistan.
- initiation of economic liberalization
- to keep China away from the regional markets.

- to encourage direct bilateral negotiations between India and Pakistan to build peace in the region.
- to discourage nuclear non-proliferation for India and Pakistan

The article comprises five sections, starting with an introduction that frames the study within the broader context of foreign policy and power politics. The rationale for the research is then established by addressing a specific problem statement. In the third section, the methodology is explained, including sources of data and data analysis techniques. The fourth and fifth sections present an empirical investigation of the triangular relationship between the US, India, and Pakistan, culminating in a detailed analysis of the research findings.

Problem Statement

The last decade of 20th century was decisive moment to (re-)shape the power politics of 21st century. Fall of USSR and emergence of the US as a sole 'superpower' set new trends in global politics with the announcement of New World Order (NWO). Huntington's discourse- 'clash of civilizations'- (re-)interpreted the history of human conflict and foreseen an un-avoidable war between civilizations in the years ahead. It opened up a new chapter of global power game with new emerging regional as well as global characters. In this context, South Asia, 'the land of desire' (Hegel 1899), became more crucial as it is core to world's major religions (Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism) and home to emerging regional power, India, as well as adjacent to rising global power, China.

Against this backdrop, this study argues that the geopolitical landscape of 21st century created a scenario where the US had to choose its strategic allies in different regions and in the pursuit of hegemonic interests, "South Asian Question" raised the notion of 'strategic depth' i.e., which country, Pakistan or India, would be the US's "all-weather strategic friend" and with whom US prioritizes its interests in the strategically significant region of the world.

Corpus and Methodology for the Present Study

The term "corpus" refers to a set of data or text that will be analyzed in research. In this study, the corpus may include a variety of documents related to US foreign policy toward South Asia, such as official government reports, academic papers, and news articles. The study employs multiple sources of data to develop a comprehensive picture of US foreign policy towards South Asia and its levels of engagement with Pakistan and India.

The study follows a longitudinal design and covers the period from 1991 to 2001, the decade immediately following the end of the Cold War. It uses a qualitative research approach to explore and understand the US strategic interests in South Asia as the sole 'super power' and to examine a triangular relations between the US, Pakistan, and India in the New World Order.

The analysis of the data involves several techniques. Firstly, a systematic review of relevant literature is conducted to identify key themes and trends in US strategic interests in South Asia. Secondly, content analysis is used to examine government documents, news articles, and other secondary sources under deductive reasoning to code and classify data from the predefined categories derived from literature review. The categories are revolving around security, economic and political interests of US foreign policy towards India and Pakistan in the post-cold war era. Thirdly, situational analysis is applied to further identify the underlying structures and processes that (re-)shaped their decade-long triangular relations in 1990s. (Please see Figure 01). The study also employs a comparative analysis of Washington's policies towards Islamabad and New Delhi to better get the insight on the dynamics of triangular relations during the cold war and post-cold war environments.

US Foreign Policy and South Asia: An Epistemic Debate in the Post-Cold War Perspective

The epistemic debate refers to the ongoing academic discussion and arguments among

scholars, policymakers, and analysts about the United States' role in South Asia as a sole 'super-power'. The debate revolves around the epistemic frameworks, assumptions and ideologies underpinning the US foreign policy towards the region and underscores the need for a more nuanced and context-specific scenario that (re-) shapes the US foreign policy.

However, this debate opens with a reference to a fundamental disagreement over the guiding assumptions and values of US strategic interests in South Asia. The main point of contention is whether US policy towards India and Pakistan is founded on universal values like democracy, human rights, and the rule of law or if it is primarily driven by strategic considerations like counter-terrorism, nuclear non-proliferation, and economic interests.

The epistemic framework, therefore, encompasses realism, liberalism, constructivism, and postcolonialism, just as a few of the theoretical perspectives that have influenced the US foreign policy priorities towards South Asia. Overall, these theoretical lenses offer various interpretations of Washington's foreign relation with Islamabad and New Delhi to comprehend the maximization of US policy choices in the post-cold war world.

Realism, in the realm of global politics, places a strong emphasis on the pursuit of security and power. They contend that the US has been primarily focused on preserving its global hegemony and strategic interests in South Asia which includes fending off the influence of other regional powers like China and Russia. They argue that the US policy towards South Asia is primarily motivated by strategic considerations, particularly the necessity to preserve regional stability to safeguard American economic and security interests (Rajagopalan 2022). They claim that the US frequently supports authoritarian regimes in the region that are advantageous to its interests whereas, Washington's support for democratic governance and human rights is inconsistent as well as selective. Additionally, US policy has frequently prioritized strengthening

military and economic ties with India and Pakistan over advancing democratic values (Walt 2013; Mearsheimer 2001)

The liberals, on the other hand, places a strong emphasis on the role of institutions, free trade, and democracy in fostering world peace and stability (Doyle 1983) In line with these core principles, the liberal proponents argue that US policy towards South Asia is mainly motivated by a sincere desire to advance democratic principles and human rights in the area, especially with India, which is viewed as a potential democratic counterweight to China's authoritarianism. The US has allegedly tried to advance these values through continuous diplomatic engagement, financial support, and the advancement of human rights.(Parry 2021)

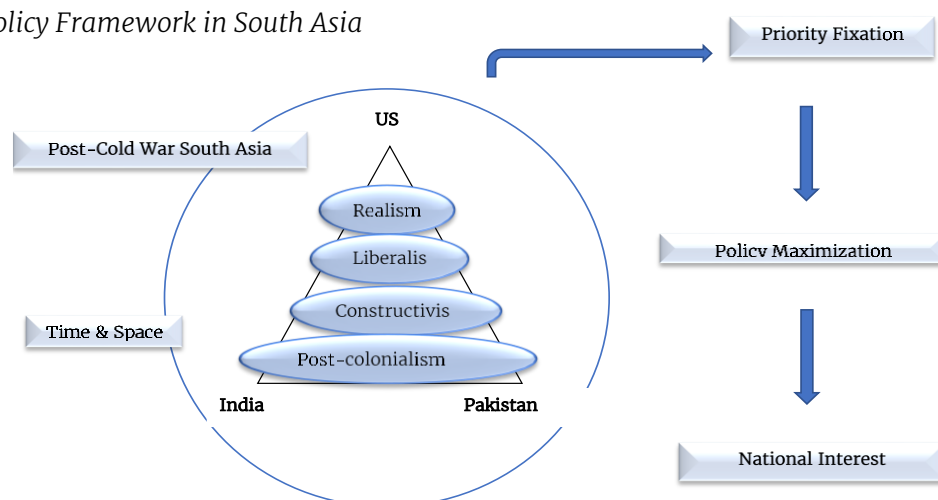
Furthermore, in the arena of international relations, constructivism emphasis on how ideas, norms, and identities influence international relations. Constructivists argue that the US has attempted to advance its own norms and values in South Asia, especially in Pakistan, which has been viewed as a front-line strategic ally during cold war. One of the main themes in the constructivist analysis of US foreign policy towards South Asia is the idea of identity. For example, some scholars argue that the United States viewed India and Pakistan through a binary lens of "democratic" and "undemocratic" states, which in turn influenced its policy choices

toward these countries. Other scholars argue that the United States built Pakistan as a key ally in its global war on terror, leading to significant military and economic aid to Pakistan despite concerns about its human rights and nuclear proliferation (Finnemore 1996; Wendt 2000; Malhotra 2022)

In addition, post-colonialism emphasizes how colonialism and imperialism have shaped modern international relations. The post-colonial perspective contends that, particularly in relation to Pakistan, the US frequently pursued its interests in South Asia at the expense of regional sovereignty and self-determination. This viewpoint places a strong emphasis on the value of decolonization, human rights, and cultural diversity. According to post-colonial scholars, the US's foreign policy toward South Asia was motivated more by economic and strategic considerations than by any real concern for the people living there. They point out that US policies have been marked by a tendency to support authoritarian regimes and suppress democratic movements that would have threatened their interests in the region. Post-colonial perspective further mentions how the US policies have perpetuated socio-economic inequality and hindered the development of South Asian nations (Said 1979; Spivak 1988; Seth 2013a; Seth 2013b)

Figure 1

US Foreign Policy Framework in South Asia



Findings and Analysis

The epistemic debate over US foreign policy towards South Asia unfolds a complicated and multifaceted issues revolving around India and Pakistan in the decade of 1990s. A thorough comprehension of this discussion provides data to builds patterns for analysis of the historical, political as well as strategic factors that have influenced the US policy in South Asia as a sole hegemon of the world. This paper presents the main findings from the content and situational analysis of the primary and secondary data sources and make a comparative analysis of cold war and and post-cold war eras.

Cold War and The US Engagement in South Asia: Pakistan A Strategic Priority

The US engagement in South Asia during the Cold War can be traced back to the Truman Doctrine of 1947, which aimed to contain the spread of communism and Soviet influence worldwide (Ganguly 1999). The US saw South Asia as a region of strategic importance, with India as a potential economic and military powerhouse and Pakistan as a crucial ally in the fight against communism. In contrast to US ambition, India became out rightly anti-American as well as critical of what they called Washington's 'imperialist' stance in the US-USSR bipolarity (Palmer 1996).

During the cold war era, US looked at the relations with regional states in global perspective (cold-war logic). US-India relations in cold war period followed the path of zig zag, with more downs than ups because of Delhi's non-alignment policy (Gaan,1992). On the other hand, despite having chequered history between Washington and Islamabad, the later remain a 'front-line strategic ally' (Azmi 2001).

In the initial years of cold war, Pakistan joined the US alliances of 1950s, SEATO and CENTO, which were primarily focused to contain communism. They got losing their hold in the '60s during the Kennedy and Johnson presidencies and their practical significance in

Jimmy Carter's tenure. Whereas, Pakistan 'earned the credit for facilitating Sino-US détente in the '70s and the successful joint struggle against Soviet aggression in Afghanistan in the '80s, leading to the triumph of the free world and a virtual end of the Cold War; thereby allowing decisive tilt of global balance of power in Washington's favor.

However, with the disintegration of the USSR, Pakistan, the front-line strategic ally, also lost its significance for the United States. The decade of 90s witnessed drastic shift in this relationship, 'the shift in Pakistan's position of the most allied ally of the United States into the most sanctioned ally at more than one time and on one pretext or another' (Baloch 2006).

Post-Cold War (Re-)Positioning of the US in South Asia: India a Strategic Priority

The entire geostrategic setup changed altogether with the Soviet demise. Selig S. Harrison, a renowned American specialist on South Asia remarked soon after the end of Cold War that, "the US has now an opportunity for a fresh start in South Asia and should moved toward a more detached policy that avoids embroilment in the region's military rivalry while giving appropriate emphasis to India as South Asia's more important power" (Harrison 1992). In addition, Harrison also outlined seven priorities for the US foreign policy vis-à-vis India. Likewise, on the Indian side, when P.V. Narsimha Rao became the Prime minister in 1991, he showed significant tilt towards the United states with imposing polices of economic liberalization (Gaan 1992). This divulged that the US from here onward had a strong desire to strengthen India in South Asia to overwhelm growing influence of another communist titan i.e., China. Disintegration of USSR paved the ways for America to become the sole world's hegemonic power because there was no any counter force of its interest.

The US administration demonstrated a clear tilt towards India, reciprocated positively by the authorities in New Delhi. For instance, both

India and the United States initiated their mutual collaboration in the high-tech spheres of nuclear politics, economic growth and military assistance. In addition, Washington had for most of the times been supporting Pakistan's policy-stand on Kashmir, deviation appeared when it adopted a new approach. For instance, instead of asking for conflict resolution, the US officials demanded respect for the Line of Control (LoC) in Kashmir and direct bilateral dialogue between Islamabad and New Delhi (Hass and Halperin 1998), a stand much to Pakistan's disappointment.

Recognition to India's dominant status was further endorsed when the US policy specialists opened up new avenues to give priority to South Asia under India's preponderance. The most noteworthy evidence came to light in 1990, when India turned out to be the largest South Asian recipient of US development aid programs. According to a Research Report for the US Congress, in the fiscal year 2000, 'the US assistance to India under these programs had reached a total of \$170 million --- the second largest amount in all of Asia after Indonesia and more than 45 times that of Pakistan's only \$3.78 million' (Lum 2002).

Table 1

US Aid and Assistance to India and Pakistan During and After Cold War

During Cold War in \$US millions (1947-1990)		
Category	Pakistan	India
Economic	7748.5	11500
Military	2951.4	148.4
Total	10699.9	11648.4
Post-Cold War in \$US millions (1990-2001)		
Category	Pakistan	India
Economic	1038.9	2449
Military	81	4.6
Total	1119.9	2453.6

Source: US Overseas Loans and Grants (Greenbook).

The table shows that during cold war era, India received total of \$11648.4 millions worth of US military and economic aid which makes 52.12% of the total US aid to both countries. Pakistan numbers stands at \$10699.9 million. India received 4.24% more US aid and assistance than Pakistan during this period. However, the aftermath of the cold war era saw an enormous increase of US aid to India. From 1990 to 2001, Pakistan received \$1999.9 millions worth of US aid and assistance. While in the same period India received \$2453.6 millions worth of US aid and assistance which is almost double, about 37.7 more than that of Pakistan.

Likewise, during Cold war period (1946-1990), US dispersed total of \$ 374046 millions worth of aid at global level, of which India received a total share of 3.11% while Pakistan received 2.86%. During the decade after the cold war (1990-2001), the US total economic and military assistance to the world was \$ 172596 million, of which India received 1.42% and Pakistan received 0.64%. The said data-table clearly shows the huge difference between the US aid to India and Pakistan. At the end of the cold war, in the begging of decade of 1990s, India was receiving almost double amount of US aid than Pakistan.

Similarly, the past records indicate that Pakistan used to be one of the largest recipients of US aid. For example, leaving aside the early phase of Pakistan's alignment, 1954-64, during the short span of US collaboration due to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in the 1980s, Pakistan received US aid worth \$600 million each year (Sattar and Agha Shahi 2007; Hilali 2005). But soon thereafter, during the 1990s, the level of US development aid was insignificant in contrast with India. The reason might be the imposition of Pressler's Amendment of 1990 on Islamabad, and its ensuing implications for Pak-US relations in series. Nonetheless, what apart could be cited in this regard, which polluted the two countries relations, included Pakistan's nuclear tests in 1998 in contrast with India, and

General Pervaiz Musharaf's military take over from the democratically elected civilian government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 1999.

Yet, despite all that, the US tilt in favor of India can be taken as a variable in South Asian politics. It did not necessarily mean to denote India's persistent top priority in the US calculations. Many observers have a reason to believe that if India emerged to the top in the United States' regional priorities soon after the Soviet demise, Pakistan's strategic importance could not be ignored altogether specifically towards the end of the 1990s and early 2000s. In the initial phase, the decade of 1990s did witness the advent of US-Indian 'rapprochement' and the cooling down of the traditional US-Pakistan cordiality. The reasons most appropriate were, as stated, the United States global ambitions after the Soviet collapse as well as India's rising potentials of a regional great power with Pakistan's declining significance in contrast since the end of the Soviet Communist threat worldwide.

Nuclearization in South Asia and The US Response

This part examines the US response to nuclearization in South Asia. Halting nuclear proliferation was not only an option but a strategic objective and United States' new manifest destiny (Glenn 1999). After the end of Cold war, nuclear non-proliferation became the focal policy of United States' strategic objectives replacing containment of USSR (Ganguly 1999), especially in relation with the region of South Asia.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the United States had to maintain a strategic balance in its interaction with India and Pakistan in the region. This was evidenced in many policy approaches of Pentagon specifically in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In the first place, for instance, the US priority for "India first" was taken by many to denote not necessarily "India alone". To them,

out of all priorities of Pentagon, non-proliferation was indeed the most vital all over the world and specifically for South Asia. Yet, South Asia was a conspicuous region where, in the wake of Indo-Pakistan hostilities, nuclear acceleration was dangerously unabated (Cohen 1997; Hass and Halperim 1998)

To illustrate, on May 11, 1998, India exploded three nuclear devices, followed by another two a couple of days later. In response, on May 28, Pakistan set off five nuclear, with one more on the 30th of the same month (Mussarat 2006). If counted all together with India's first test of 1974, New Delhi had bagged to its credit six explosions in all, equal in numbers with those of Pakistan. Viewed in the context of US stakes in South Asia, as well as their pressures on Pakistan to refrain from tests, the Washington administration in the first place could not stop the two rivals from playing with "nuclear fire"; nor could it succeed in making South Asia a "nuclear-free zone". Then, despite its sanctions against both the testers, the onus of US strategy on the conceptual see-saw fulcrum of 'checks and balances' was more in favor of India. The inherent motive might be to equip New Delhi to play the US-sponsored role of a strategic "pawn" in counter-balancing Communist China. This was more perceivable so long as India and China were two rivals since the 1950s due to their mutual border conflicts and world market competitions (Gondal 2002).

Similarly, despite pressures, the United States administration could not prevent Pakistan going nuclear; nor could India take a lead in this nuclear counter-balancing endeavor of 1998. Instead, Pakistan played a 'zero-sum game', when it neutralized the scores of New Delhi (Mussarat 2006). The immediate impact of this development was the imposition of US sanctions on both Pakistan and India.

However, mostly on account of India and Pakistan's emergence as '*de facto*' nuclear states, Washington had preferably the choice to give a second thought to its nuclear non-proliferation

policy and replace it with ‘non-nuclear development’ or ‘non-risk de-escalation’ regimes (Nation 1992). For that, Washington had to minimize the probabilities of both nuclear all-out as well as limited (or selective) confrontations, especially in the new emerging regions of the world including South Asia which had acquired such capabilities when the post-Cold War scenario demanded not just non-proliferation but total nuclear de-escalation. For such minimal probabilities, the policy designers in Washington had to encourage infra-structure reforms in the regional contesters, such as: promoting democracy, expanding trade, investments and economic collaboration, as well as military joint ventures specifically against the modern age challenges of international drug trafficking and terrorism (Haass and Halperim 1998; Biden 1998).

Kargil Episode and the US Policy-Maximization: Relegating Pakistan

Another discernible aspect was that, in spite of the end of Cold War on world level, the regional mini-cold war could not be stopped. India and Pakistan were still entangled in hot-pursuit methodologies for resolving their bilateral issues. The most outstanding of all was indeed the one on Kashmir. After their nuclear tests of 1998, both of them had substantial pressure especially from the United States to reduce tension through direct dialogue.

Consequential to it was the ‘ice-breaking’ between the two rivals. In February 1999, Prime Minister of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif and his Indian counterpart Atal Behari Vajpai held a summit and signed the Lahore Declaration. It stipulated that “both the governments shall take immediate steps for reducing the risk of accidental or unauthorized use of nuclear weapons and discuss concepts and doctrines with a view to elaborating measures for confidence building in the nuclear and conventional fields, aimed at prevention of conflict” (Lahore Declaration 1999).

Although the Lahore Summit was widely acclaimed as a ‘workable regime’, the first half of 1999 portrayed a gloomy picture of a localized, well-targeted and limited war which triggered out almost suddenly between India and Pakistan in the mountain region of Kargil in the disputed Kashmir and right on the Line of Control (LoC) (Ganguly 2001; Abid 2006; Cheema 2009). Leaving aside the details of the war and the onus of aggression on either of the two parties, it should be emphasized that the Kargil episode did jeopardize the peace process envisioned in the Lahore Summit; and, instead, presented South Asia as a nuclear equipped ‘powder-keg’ with immense volcanic-eruption threat. For instance, President Clinton described this area (Kashmir) as “the most dangerous region of the world”. Ian Talbot called it as “the most likely place in the world where in future a nuclear exchange could take place” (Talbot 2006; Cohen 2001). Such apprehensions were reflective in the main of the perception that India and Pakistan were ‘13 times just in five weeks at the brink of nuclear war’ because of the hostile official and non-official propaganda campaigns launched from the both sides (Cohen 2001). Consequently, Kashmir issue was again portrayed as an international issue, for which several world dignitaries started pouring in New Delhi and Islamabad to plead restraint to the two governments (Riedel 2002).

However, commenting on Kargil episode, one of the leading English dailies of Pakistan, ‘Dawn’, referred to President Clinton on October 1, 1999, as saying that India and Pakistan had “nearly annihilated each other”. According to the newspaper: “The Indian view was that in the event of a nuclear war it could emerge the ultimate ‘winner’ after wiping off Pakistan but lose up to 500 million of its own people”. Whereas, on Pakistan’s side, the government officials insisted confidently that: “Pakistan’s rugged mountain terrain would shield more survivors than the exposed plains of India”. Quoting President Clinton, the paper further added that Pakistan had crossed the Line of Control as its strategy to support the militants in

Kashmir fighting against India by escalating tension to keep the Indian forces engaged in the specific point of target (Kargil) and thus to gain world attention towards the Kashmir issue. (Clinton 2009)

Similarly, many neutral observers pointed out this stand of Clinton administration as a continuity of Washington's deliberate tilt towards New Delhi, ever since South Asia's emergence from the fairly low priority level during the super powers' Cold War to the high priority level after the disappearance of Soviet Union. According to that, the situation in Kargil was more in India's favor because of its 'conventional' military hold on the disputed territory since 1947. The United States merely asked New Delhi to be at a low profile, assuming that India could not be forced to withdraw from Kashmir.

Peculiarly enough, the United States' official response at this juncture was not in favor of Kashmir settlement. Instead, President Clinton and his high officials strongly urged Pakistan to withdraw its forces behind the LoC "immediately, completely and unconditionally". Under strong pressures of Pentagon, therefore, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif agreed in his hurriedly arranged meeting in Washington to "take concrete and immediate steps for the restoration of LoC" (Cohen 1999; Riedel 2002). Despite that, Clinton's only concession for Pakistan seemed to be his reluctance in accusing Pakistan as 'aggressor' in Kargil. Perhaps the reason might be in the first place Kashmir's sensitivity in Pakistan-India relations; and, for that, the Line of Control could not be imposed upon the two rival states arbitrarily as an international border. Likewise, any mediation proposal on Kashmir, though with the prospects of Pakistan's acceptance, could not be thrust upon India which strongly adhered to bilateralism with Pakistan.

Viewed from this angle, the unfriendly demand-stress of President Clinton on Pakistan to restore LoC was equally reflective of

Washington's deliberate attempt to refrain from mediation on Kashmir, as otherwise desired by Pakistan. Most probably the implicit cause of this gesture was South Asia's fairly low priority in world politics after Cold War, suggesting revised and re-vitalized policy dimensions (Riedel 2002; Abid 2006). But the sudden eruption of Kargil conflict in 1999 brought South Asia to the limelight in terms of perceivable nuclear war in future.

Then, President Clinton did extend his direct and indirect all-out support to India against Pakistan, 'which removed the perception, if ever existed, that Washington would ever align with Pakistan in regional disputes' (Chou 2003). The Pakistani response to this anti-Pakistan posture of the Clinton administration was that the 'Kargil war was a military victory for Pakistan, the United States turned it through pressure into a political defeat'. Consequently, New Delhi could trust the United States more as source for counter-balancing Pakistan, and materializing India's ambitions to become a global power as well' (Levoy 2009). Likewise, Pakistan had been forced to withdraw from Kargil, the United States could have a 'better credibility with India' in terms of bargaining with New Delhi in future. (Cohen 1999; Riedel 2002)

Apart from this, the situation in Kargil was more in India's favor because of its 'conventional' military hold on the disputed territory since 1947. The United States merely asked New Delhi to be at a low profile, assuming that India's withdrawal from Kashmir or a part thereof was not suggestible even under the Simla Agreement of 1972 (Cohen 2002).

Clinton's Visit to India: The US Priority Fixations in South Asia

We mentioned elsewhere Clinton's historic visit to South Asia, perhaps the first official 5-day tour particularly to India in 22 years by an American president. He was also the first US president who made a visit to Pakistan during 30 years. Although his visit was as short as one hour and

25 minutes, Clinton gave a television talk to the people of Pakistan (Darvesh 2000). Despite his brief stopover in Islamabad on March 25, 2000, Clinton's shortest state visit to Pakistan was extremely important at least from many Pakistanis' point of view. For instance, the government officials hailed it as an 'achievement' (Challaney 2000), mainly for the reason that Clinton visited South Asia at a juncture when the Indian leadership had been aggressively campaigning against Pakistan to get it labeled as a 'terrorist state'. Much to India's frustration, therefore, Clinton's short stopover in Pakistan was indeed a severe blow to New Delhi's anti-Pakistan diplomatic campaign (Darvesh 2000).

Against this backdrop, contrary to Pakistani expectations, Clinton's official response was not much different from what we noted earlier as his response on Kargil episode (Cohen 2000). His visit left a 'grim message' for Pakistanis to forget Kashmir, honor the Line of Control, and curtail Pakistan's nuclear program in favor of "re-directing precious resources to economic development" (Bisaria 2009). However, one version of the same is that it was a pressure tactic. In fact, Clinton had clearly stressed restoration of democracy, prior to normalcy and coordination in US-Pakistan relations.

While, in his address to the joint session of the Indian Parliament, President Clinton explicitly described the United States' post-Cold War policy towards South Asia. His main stress was on non-proliferation. He urged both India and Pakistan: to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT); to stop production of fissile material and join the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty (FMCT) negotiations; and, to institute "tight export controls on goods and equipments related to their nuclear programs" (Bisaria 2009).

Commenting on regional security issues, President Clinton reiterated his administration's official stand that, though Kashmir was a dispute, the US would not mediate for Kashmir settlement. It would rather "lend support" to

both India and Pakistan whenever possible for a negotiated bilateral agreement under the Simla Declaration and Lahore Summit. In addition to all that, Clinton also expressed strong US opposition to terrorism making headway since 1990s and having its ingredients in the whole region including Afghanistan. He laid special responsibility on Pakistan to persuade Taliban for closing down their alleged terrorist-training camps in Afghanistan, as well as to put an end to the shelter reportedly provided to Usama bin Laden there. Hence, on one hand, accusing Pakistan for all the regional disparities and demanding redresses, Clinton in his stay did not blame India for even a single 'misdeed' done in the region. He rather repeatedly called India as "a gently nation with great leadership capabilities" to (re-)shape the destiny of South Asia (Riedle 2002).

When George W. Bush took over presidency in Washington in January 2001, his Republican administration did not hesitate toeing the line of Clinton vis-à-vis US policy in South Asia, which had a special emphasis on US-India collaboration even at the cost of US-Pakistan ties. Even when George W. Bush was the Governor of Texas in early 1999, he optimistically believed in US-India cooperation as inevitable for a new world order. To him, the US interests should be linked up with the prospects of India's emergence as a world power, the biggest democracy, having the ingredients of a global market (Blackwill 2000).

In George W. Bush administration of post-January 2001, therefore, a 'transformation' process was underway. Its focus was US-India relations for which, despite its worldwide stress for nuclear non-proliferation, in contrast, Bush administration lifted the US condition on India for signing the CTBT before initiating President Bush's proposed 'new strategic framework' for US-India collaboration. India's quick response was 'remarkably positive' for the controversial missile defense program (Blackwill 2002). Further steps towards this transformation included high-level mutual contacts for joint US-

India peacekeeping ventures and military exercises, and the US decision to relax the sanctions imposed on New Delhi after its nuclear tests in 1998. Interestingly, Pakistan's quick response to Washington, especially on the question of non-proliferation, was its refusal to suspend its missile program as well as signing of NPT and CTBT unless signed by India (Feinstein 2007).

The US Tactical 'Rapprochement': Re-engaging with Front-Line Ally (Pakistan)

The Kargil episode, therefore, eventually enabled the United States to revise its Kashmir policy, relatively more detrimental to Pakistan's 'Kashmir cause' (Mahmud 1999). The new US stand focused on recognition of Kashmir dispute and its resolution through bilateral talks between India and Pakistan under the Simla Agreement; mutual respect for the Line of Control in Kashmir; and, encouraging both sides to resume Lahore Summit process (Cohen 1999).

Meanwhile, the impact of the episode on Pakistan's national politics was much severer and rather 'explosive'. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's decision to withdraw from Kargil did have deep implications at home. It aroused strong resentment particularly in the army ranks, from the standpoint that the withdrawal of troops was a political decision against the military action in the field. Consequent to this clash of political decision and military action, a coup was staged by the army chief, General Pervez Musharraf, who became the President of Pakistan in 1999. The United States quickly responded by imposing sanctions on Pakistan, accusing the General of overthrowing the democratic government of Nawaz Sharif (Talbot 2009; Sattar and Shahi 2007).

Interestingly, besides Washington's call for the restoration of democracy in Pakistan, the Clinton administration did manage to maneuver out to 'do business' with the army General. They evolved a tactical interplay of "constructive engagement" with him. What might have

motivated the US policy-makers in the given environment to adopt a calculated approach in favor of General Musharraf was initially Pakistan's increased credibility after acquiring a nuclear power balance with India since 1998. Then, the changing world scenario in the wake of China's rapid upsurge in terms of potentials after the Soviet demise equally made it worthwhile in the US calculations to give a boom to South Asia from a 'low-priority region' of the past to a 'high-priority region' of the 2000s.

Therefore, the credibility of the US tactical 'rapprochement' with General Musharraf, in addition to the rising US-India 'rapprochement', could also be attributed to Clinton's attempt to work out regional cooperation for promoting US policy objectives. For that, General Musharraf could be a dependable ally for his 'moderation' in politics. This was evidenced especially in the later years, when the government of General Musharraf was a "Major Non-NATO Ally" in the US-sponsored war against terrorism. Hence, a strong 'army commando' with a moderate personality profile seemed to many Americans as 'moderately-secular', leaned to restore democracy at home though under his own centralized command (Darvesh 2000).

Anyway, coming back to the US strategic-priority game between India and Pakistan, it seems equally worthwhile to stress that Pakistan was for many reasons exalted as "the front-line state" in the US-sponsored 'war against terrorism'. Obviously, Pakistan's exaltation to front-line drove India to the sideline status, despite New Delhi's hostile worldwide propaganda to malign Pakistan and project it as a 'rogue state'. They also accused Islamabad for terrorist attacks on Indian Parliament House in New Delhi and Kashmir Assembly in Srinagar. To mount their pressures furthermore, the Indian warlords concentrated their 1,000,000 troops on Pakistan's borders (Chari, Cheema, Cohen 2007). In spite of all that, the Indian intensive diplomatic and military pressure tactics failed when, despite Indian allegations, President

Clinton made a brief stop-over in Islamabad during his visit to India. This development had of course an element of heart-warming for many Pakistanis, as it signaled out the message that the US administration still 'cared' about Pakistan. The motivator in President Clinton's this gesture of goodwill despite the Indian pressures was perhaps his desire not to underestimate Pakistan's strategic importance vis-à-vis regional peace and nuclear harmony, as well as promotion of democracy (Cohen 1999).

Conclusion

To conclude this debate on the United States' leaning towards India after the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent end of the Cold War, the comments of leading analyst, Stephen P. Cohen, need our attention. He signals an alert for the people of Pakistan regarding the modified US policy stand about South Asia during the 1990s and early 2000s, in the tenures of President Clinton followed by President George W. Bush. His contention is specifically about Clinton's visit in particular, which, to his comprehension, was clear breakaway from the past history of US-Pakistan collaboration during the Cold War.

During Cold War period, Pakistan played a role of front-line state against communism and joined US backed Western alliance. However, it is quite ironic, as illustrated in (Table 01) that under the sanction regime of US, Pakistan received almost same treatment as India which adopted the policy of non-alignment during Cold War. It was Pakistan who had been greatly damaged by these sanctions because Pakistan was mostly dependent on US arms and aid for its security and development. India on the other hand, have had a good relation with USSR from which India was importing around 60% of its arms. While during cold war period India was denied sharing and use of sensitive technologies, it did not really lose US or international economic aid until its 1998 nuclear tests, surprisingly, Pakistan lost access to American aid much earlier. As the cold war came near to end, it was Pakistan who felt the brunt of

US sanctions especially under the Pressler Amendment in the decade of 1990s.

The Pressler Amendment played a crucial role in further reducing the US aid and assistance to Pakistan. It was a country specific amendment (Pakistan), adopted by the US Senate in 1985. However, at the end of Cold war in 1990, for the first time it was revoked against Pakistan, which indicates that US again took the stick rather than carrot in dealing with Pakistan.

Overall assessment of American role in Kargil episode is still a mystery. However, from the apparent evidences it is clear that US deliberately avoided to make any effort of the opportunity for the resolution of the Kashmir issue. The leadership of Pakistan could not sustain diplomatic pressure of the US and hence abounded the Kargil operation. Aftermath of Cold war, US policy priority shifted to crisis management rather than crisis resolution with respect to the region of South Asia especially in terms of Kashmir Issue.

Steven Barmazel vividly sketched out the picture of change in relationship in these words; "Pakistan was once arguably America's top anti-Soviet proxy in the world. Now, in the post-soviet era, it is in the doghouse with Washington due to Islamabad's nuclear weapons program." (Barmazel 1997). Pakistan, thus, was much isolated and vulnerable in the post-cold war period. It essentially needed to re-design and re-vitalize its policy priorities and explore new avenues for its self-reliance and confidence-building, though without jeopardizing its strategic interests in the region as well as in the world at large.

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