

General

Dr Sumit Ganguly, Professor of Political Science, Indiana University, delivered a talk on 'US-Pak Relations: Is a Breakup Inevitable', at the CLAWS seminar hall on 15 December 2011. The session was chaired by Amb Arundhati Ghose, former Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva. Capt (IN) Alok Bansal, Senior Fellow, CLAWS was the discussant.

Opening Remarks: Brig Gurmeet Kanwal (Retd), Director CLAWS

In the last six months, the relationship between Pakistan and the United States has deteriorated due to a number of incidents which have occurred after the death of Osama bin Laden. The rules of engagement have required a review but the raids across the Durand line still continue. The blocking of USD 700 million aid to Pakistan in one of the houses of the congress is an indication that the US is renegotiating its relationship with Islamabad. The internal turmoil within Pakistan has also led to greater instability within the Af-Pak region. South-Asia has become the second most dangerous place in the world next to West Asia. The evolving situation is a matter of concern for India and the region.

Dr Sumit Ganguly

Last six months have seen four to five incidents that have impacted on US-Pak relationship. There is for sure a current brittleness in the relationship between US and Pakistan, which is reflected in the degree of suspicion and the operational communication between the US and the Pakistan Army. Public statements of cordiality and openness have been circulating in the press, but the relationship is seen as morphed and disguised under shadows.

The indications are clear. US chose not to inform Islamabad about the raid in Abbotabad that took out Osama-bin-Laden. Stealth was used as a weapon. This showcases the trust deficit between the US and Pakistan. There are five significant markers which help in understanding the relationship construct. These are given below.

Early Historical Background. It needs to be understood that it was Pakistan that literally pleaded with the US to become its ally, purely to balance the power against India. The US also benefitted multi-fold, but went wrong in assuming that there was a genuine conversion of interest between the two countries.

Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan marked a significant turning point in the relationship with Pakistan receiving a phenomenal aid of USD 3.2 billion from the US. However, the Pakistani President, General Zia-ul-Haq, put it in the right context when he stated that it was a 'handshake and not an embrace'. To

put the matter in context, Zia implied that the situation was transactional. The US wanted to contain the Soviet Union and prevent the spread of communism into Asia at any cost. The use of Pakistan territory was used to dislodge the plans of the Soviet Union. Pakistan got the requisite military aid which it could use to balance India. It was a pure and simple transaction and neither Pakistan nor the US had any illusions that the relationship was one of convergence of interests.

Transformational Relationship post 9/11. 9/11 was a critical event which highlighted the geo-strategic importance of the state of Pakistan, but this too was purely another transactional relationship. President Pervez Musharraf's 10 Nov 2001 selective targeting and elimination of terrorist outfits in Afghanistan and the 'War against Terror' targeting Al-Qaida was a dramatic policy turn by Pakistan. In return, Pakistan received a waiver of its USD 40 billion credit from the International Monetary Fund. A free route of dollar inflow from the US was also opened up. There was however, a careful distinction made by President Pervez Musharraf in whom to target and where. Thus, militant outfits like the Lashkar-e-Tayyeba and Jaish-e-Mohammad were kept out of the list and so were some parts of Pakistan itself. The US was aware of what was happening but turned a wishful blind eye to the situation. There was a belated recognition by the Bush Administration in its conclusive years on the mistakes it made. The recognition that the state of Pakistan was not a staunch ally of the United States became apparent and re-assessment of the relationship between Afghanistan - United States – Pakistan was undertaken.

Relationship during President Obama's Administration. The Kerry Lugar Legislation was a turning point in transforming the relationship between Pakistan and the United States, from being purely a transactional one to promoting the building of civil society, education, economic development and the social sector. There were reactions of hostility and lack of co-operation that got highlighted in the GHQ at Rawalpindi, and the US finally backed off. As 80 per cent of all logistics for the ISAF forces went via road through Pakistan, the latter could take a hard stand on its requirements. The tactical strategic goal will get reduced to 40 per cent for the United States when it leaves Afghanistan in 2014 which will enable it to take a tougher stand on the aid inflows into Pakistan. Internal negotiations are currently on within the United States on the extent and the type of relationship that the US is looking forward to with Pakistan. While the signs are evident that a significant decline in the relationship has taken place, the affair is certainly not over.

Present Dependence of Pakistan on the US. The facts of geography will remain and Pakistan will continue to influence the US due to its geo-strategic importance. In viewing the situation there exists a fundamental divide between the 'State' and the Central Intelligence Agency/Pentagon with the latter two organisations still possessing a very sympathetic towards Pakistan. The possession of nuclear weapons by Pakistan also

adds to its importance. The bigger threat of a nuclear state in turmoil is the possibility of non state actors getting hold of nuclear weapons. There is concern about Pakistan's diplomacy and its willingness to play Russian roulette with the international community. Until 2014 then, when withdrawal of United States combat troops takes place, Pakistan will remain a molly coddled state.

Capt (IN) Alok Bansal

Common interests of US and Pakistan converge in Afghanistan, as Pakistan remains a transit corridor for logistics support for United States and the NATO forces. There can never be a clean break but certainly incremental changes to the US–Pak relations. Certain reasons can be highlighted that manoeuvre the Pakistan–US relationship in the long run. These are as under:

- Pakistan's nuclear weapons and their safety.
- Belief of most Pakistani's that their economy is not doing badly, despite the fact that their external debt is rising.
- The upper hand of the Pakistan Military in drafting its foreign relations and influencing the Civil-Military relationship.

There is a certain disconnect between the Pakistan internal establishment, and its military arm. In the light of the current set-backs in US-Pakistan relationship, the current campaign by United States will draw down as per schedule, but the drone attacks are likely to continue even after the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan in 2014.

Amb Arundhati Ghose

Pakistan initiated its relationship with US and continues to build it to balance India. Pakistan is only interested in the transactional relationship with US and has done very well in its endeavour. The geo-strategic and the nuclear status of Pakistan are undeniable and the world has to live with this reality. People generally forget the huge amounts of remittances that fuel Pakistan's economy and keep it afloat. The large amount of drug trade is also seeding terror in Pakistan. There is also diplomatic and political support from China which cannot be ignored, although the Chinese financial assistance is minimal. There is a very large component of private money flowing into Pakistan from Gulf States. It remains to be seen how the US-Pakistan relationship plays out in the times to come.

Discussion

US-Pakistan defence co-operation has been a historical feature in the relationship. The withdrawal of US forces in 2014 will determine how this relationship will get framed thereafter. The US administration is under very many constraints both financially and from its people and wants to have a respectable exit from Afghanistan. US is also in middle of the election campaign and the result of the election campaign will determine subsequent US policy towards Pakistan.

The US-China relationship is purely a conciliatory policy, mostly driven by economics, trade and monetary issues. It does not converge with regard to Pakistan, though the Chinese are apparently apprehensive about the growth of radicalism within Pakistan which remains a source of concern. China appears to be quite content with the current strategic relationship with Pakistan and does not want to enter into a transactional relationship like the US has with Pakistan.

Pakistan is important to the United States for the sustenance of its forces in Afghanistan, but US has fairly limited interests in Pakistan. There has been a likely erosion of the Pakistan Army – the most professional of Pakistan's institutions and this is a matter of concern to both the US and India. US-India relationship has improved in the last decade and it converges on strategic, diplomatic and economic levels. The possibility of Pakistan imploding is unlikely. It has not happened in last five decades and it will not be in anybody's interest to see a failed state of Pakistan.