

Institute for Policy Reforms

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Deepening US India relations affect regional security balance

Strategic partnership between USA and India would likely remain a constant for the foreseeable future. This is stated in a Brief published today by the Institute for Policy Reforms. Titled ‘Deepening India-US Strategic Partnership and Pakistan’s Concerns’ and written by Riaz Mohammad Khan, well known Pakistan diplomat and former foreign secretary, the Brief offers new perspectives on this important development. The partnership has gained force since 2006 when USA and India signed the bilateral nuclear treaty. The recently signed military Logistics Exchange Agreement and USA’s decision to hold three-way talks along with Afghanistan are its latest links. The security dimension of the US India partnership is a concern for Pakistan.

Improved relations between USA and India have come at a time of creeping acrimony between Pakistan and USA. The shift in Pakistan US bilateral relations was only to be expected. The two countries have had close relations at various times in history, but they have been based on narrow security interests. Contesting portrayal of Pakistan by the US President as a ‘dysfunctional state’, the Brief states that Pakistan has been sucked into cross currents that are ‘dangerous and destabilizing’. Overcoming these critical challenges demands introspection and astute leadership.

However, Pakistan is still important to the West, especially to help political stability in Afghanistan and in combating terrorism. Policy circles in USA, abetted by Afghan leaders, hold Pakistan responsible for USA’s difficulties in Afghanistan and for instability in that country. Pakistan’s perceived support for the Haqqani network has come to symbolize its ‘perfidious behaviour’. Of course, US forgets its own myriad policy errors in Afghanistan.

Yet the Brief reminds that “we need to think why ... Pakistan has always ended up siding with the most regressive elements in Afghanistan”. At critical times, the Taliban have not heeded Pakistan’s advice. It is time to disavow the misplaced belief that Taliban are our asset and will be influenced by us.

Today, points of conflicts exist around failing states and societies. This is the time for Pakistan to take some important decisions. We must not allow use of our territory for operations in Afghanistan. We must also welcome moves by the Taliban to reach out directly to Kabul. Stability in Afghanistan is important for us. Rather than support the Taliban, we must reorient the bilateral relations and base it on the shared culture, history, and ethnicity that people of the

two countries naturally own. This is a more credible deterrent against use of Afghan territory by a foreign country against Pakistan.

This reorientation will help us in other areas. For many years, India has pursued RAW aided subversion in Pakistan. Boldly, though implicitly, Mr. Modi has accepted as much. He can do so at this moment because he has successfully reinforced Western suspicions and allegations about extremism stoked by Pakistan. Mr. Modi has used this argument also in defence of his strong action in Kashmir. While the present Kashmir uprising is completely indigenous, there are some who buy in to India's allegations of interference by Pakistan. Despite Pakistan's enormous sacrifices and clear action against terrorism, a view persists in the world that Pakistan only selectively targets terrorists. This perception also hurts the Kashmir cause.

The brief also refers to our nuclear capability. This is critical to our security. Yet Pakistan must retain an understated stance on the issue. Our visible opposition to India's membership of the NSG is one more point of friction with USA.

India's growing economic and military prowess is a reality. Pakistan should not be drawn into the inevitable regional rivalries that must accompany emergence of China and India on the world stage. Pakistan must reorient regional relations to focus on geo-economics rather than geo-politics. There are options to pursue. Of late, Pakistan has improved relations with Russia. It can deepen its already close ties with Iran and Turkey. In addition, there is space for even more strengthened relations with China. Acting on the important recommendations made in the Brief could also restore relations with USA. All these are important.

The complexity of the modern world suggests that there cannot be rigid divisions. Countries remain rivals on the one hand and cooperate in other areas in parallel. China-US and China-India relations are eminent examples. Pakistan must take full benefit from opportunities around us. To be able to do so, 'the major challenge for Pakistan is internal'.