



**Where do we go from here? Pakistani
perspective on Prospects of US-Pakistan
Relations**

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This Report is based on the Project “Future of US-Pakistan Relations: Perceptions in Pakistan”

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About the Project

This Report is the outcome of a Project that lasted several months and during which IPR reached out to sixty security and foreign policy experts to assess Pakistan's goals and interests in engaging with USA and its likely policy choices. It is based entirely on the views of influential Pakistanis, present and past decision makers, foreign policy specialists, and opinion makers involved with making and shaping policy (list on last pages). While the views expressed were not unanimous and do not necessarily represent the full range of possible opinion in Pakistan, participants were chosen to be representative of key constituencies in the Pakistani policymaking process. This report aims to capture those views accurately, to allow for greater clarity and communication on both sides of the bilateral relationship, without endorsing any position or suggesting what participants' perceptions or priorities ought to be.

The Project began in July 2017, with interviews conducted over several months. Despite rapid developments since, the Project's focus on the long-term ensures that the views expressed in the Report remain relevant.

About the Authors

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About the Institute

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Summary

- US Pakistan relations are at a low point. Both countries need each other. It is important to rebuild cooperation to bring the relations back from mistrust and recriminations. There are signs that this may be happening, albeit in small steps.
- While there are many common interests between US and Pakistan, the key focus is instability in Afghanistan.
- Both countries want peace and development in Afghanistan, but they differ on method and tools. This is because they do not share the same goals for the region. Concerned about Indian influence, Pakistan wants a ‘friendly’ government in Kabul through a negotiated settlement.
- Strong rhetoric and accusations from Washington limit Pakistan’s space for action
- Pakistan’s vision is to become a trade and transit hub for the region. CPEC is an opportunity to do so. Consequently, Pakistan wants an end to regional instability. Its two other objectives compete with this vision: Indian influence in Afghanistan and Taliban blowback.
- Pakistan says USA too must revisit its policies. Military solution alone is not possible, especially because of situation on ground. The Afghan truce is a step forward.
- Gradually, regional countries are playing a role. They do not want spillover of extremism into their territories and want durable peace in the region.
- With effort and cooperation, the region can realize its dynamic potential, and avoid becoming a battleground for local and great power rivalry. Pakistan will balance its relations with China by rebuilding relations with USA. It will avoid rupture and try to improve bilateral relations. This requires Pakistan to make tough decisions, which is at best work in progress.
- India is at the core of Pakistan’s perception of its security. US mediation to help normalize relations between Pakistan and India would help regional stability. Pakistan has pinned its hopes on US or other mediation.

How this report was written

This document aims to accurately capture the views of key people and constituencies involved in making and shaping the US-Pakistan relationship. With this critical relationship increasingly strained and avenues for diplomatic and people-to-people communication increasingly limited, there is a major need for clear communication between both sides and a mutual understanding of each other's perceptions and interests. The intended audience of this Report is everyone in the policy space covering and researching the region, including the media. That includes especially US policy makers in the Administration and the Hill. The Report is a window on the likely direction of the relationship.

In convening and reporting on the discussions on these issues, the study aims to understand and accurately document the perceptions and prognoses from the Pakistani side of the relationship's future, rather than prescribing how or what they ought to be. It deals with both the present and long-term developments. There is no attempt here to aver who is right or wrong, or what is desirable and not desirable. The report reflects Pakistan's conceptions of its interests and policy choices, based on discussions with sixty knowledgeable people.

IPR thanks the United States Institute of Peace for their support to this project. More so, it thanks the discussants who generously gave their time and freely shared ideas. Their contribution was critical as the Report is the product of their cumulative knowledge. In fact, they are the true authors of this report.

Some caveats are in order. Recapping and summarizing a vast set of views drawn from free-flowing discussions into one document and placing them under chapters and sub-headings has been a challenge. However, this did not cause us to in anyway surmise or depart from what was said. Also, while the Report lists the names of all discussants, it does not attribute any statement to an individual. This is the understanding under which we held discussions. Other points need attention.

The document represents the views of everyone we met. Often their views differed greatly, from the liberal to the hawkish. Some discussants may be dismayed to find ideas that contrast with what they had said. To them we say that the Report aims to capture the spectrum of Pakistani views and not just a segment. Additionally, the statements throughout the report — while in some instances appear to have been voiced as those of the Pakistani state — represent a synthesis and summary of the views expressed and the understandings of the participants on how the bilateral relationship is conceived. These perceptions form an important part of the policy space and the objective of the report was to accurately document and clarify them, rather than filtering views or adjudicating their appropriateness.

We assure all readers that this is a sincere effort. IPR has taken extreme care in reproducing the discussion without allowing the writers' opinion to intercede. The report is based on meeting notes of over forty thousand words.

A project that lasted several months saw many headline moments. These include US announcement of a new South Asia Strategy in August 2017. The US National Security Strategy was released in December 2017 and the National Defense Strategy in January 2018. In between there were Congressional hearings, drone attacks, and the two countries have held senior level meetings. At least one conciliatory and one angry tweet also attracted attention. Punitive action followed as USA suspended military aid. Lately, US military action eliminated Mullah Fazlullah, head of the TTP, who was much wanted in Pakistan. The Kabul government and the Afghan Taliban also agreed on a three-day truce, which they have later extended. To cover these developments, the writers have sometimes gone back to follow up with the views of selected participants.

This has been a fascinating journey into the minds of Pakistanis about US-Pakistan relations. The wealth of insight is amazing. We hope that the Report holds as much value for the reader as putting it together has brought to the project team.

Introduction

Despite mistrust, Pakistan and USA need each other. This is a relationship that cannot end. It is also a complex relationship having bilateral, regional, and global context. Several developments called for a fresh assessment of its likely course.

Foremost among these is present US Administration's belief that foreign policy should serve US interests directly. Other evolving developments that impinge upon relations are: US-China relations and potential rivalry, US-India partnership, Pakistan-China relations, and polarization in the Middle East. South and Central Asia is in continued evolution of alliances, partnerships, and suspicions. Economic power is shifting from the West to Asia. Russia is trying to re-enter the world stage. Overriding all is the US President's promise of success in Afghanistan and concern about US image as a dominant power. Meanwhile, Afghanistan suffers.

Pakistan and USA have much at stake. It is important to draw lessons from the past to develop a course for the future. US President's announcement of a new South Asia strategy in August 2017 was related to these developments. This was followed by the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Security. Of late, US has been cynical of multilateral arrangements having opted out of the Trans-Pacific trade pact, the Paris Climate agreement, and more recently seemed separated from G7 allies. Some people in Pakistan feel that this provides more space to emerging world powers.

This Report analyzes how Pakistan perceives these developments and what is its likely response.

There is a wide range of views on these complex issues. They vary even within policy making circles. There was total consensus though that there should be no break in relations between the two countries.

Several questions were put to discussants:

- How does the foreign policy elite view US policy towards Pakistan?
- How does Pakistan perceive US expectations?
- What are Pakistan's goals from relations with USA and how would it realize them?
- What are Pakistan's objectives in Afghanistan. How will it achieve them? How do US and Pakistan differ in Afghanistan.
- What are Pakistan's regional priorities and their effect on relations with USA

These questions form the core of the Report. The study began in July 2017. Since then, there have been several developments. Often the project team went back to selected discussants for their views. There was not much change. Beneath the headlines, there are enduring interests, preferences, and understanding of issues unaffected by immediate developments.

Chapter 1

Where do relations stand today?

State of Relations

Most discussants said that present US-Pakistan relations are the lowest they have been since 9/11. In the last two decades, relations were mismanaged and lacked strategy. Both countries missed the opportunity of the post-2001 bonhomie to develop a broad-based partnership. They limited cooperation to crushing Al Qaeda. That progressed successfully. Differences began when US expectation shifted to seek help with eliminating the Afghan Taliban.

Pakistan feels that USA defines bilateral relations entirely from the Afghan prism. In public discourse, the dialogue has reduced to US blaming Pakistan for safe havens. Most participants said that US policies were equally responsible for the stalemate in Afghanistan. They recounted several additional areas of common interest that need attention. These include nuclear weapons' security, intelligence sharing, and Pakistan's potential role in an evolving region. What miffs Pakistan most was a security role for India in Afghanistan.

Some said that US is a fickle partner. Pakistan has been in the US camp for decades and met its part of the deal. It did so at the cost of impairing relations with other major powers and even ended up destabilizing itself. US accepts cooperation and shifts to a new baseline. After Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan was sanctioned in the 1990s and was left to deal with four million refugees. The sanction came because of Pakistan's nuclear program. Pakistan had a nuclear program in the 1980s also.

In the past, when relations worsened, institutions continued their dialogue. Many discussants felt that links between US DoD and Pakistan's GHQ/Ministry of Defense, on the one hand, and US CIA and Pakistan ISI have weakened. There are likely periods of no dialogue at all.

Pakistan understood that the present US administration has a set of foreign policy preferences, which is different from before. It is direct and unbridled in both choice of words and deeds. Pakistan feels also that US relations with India affects its decisions on Pakistan. USA has said that Russia and China are a greater threat to its interests than terrorism. That reduces Pakistan's importance for USA. Mistrust between USA and Pakistan is because their goals in Afghanistan differ. US does not consider Pakistan's security concerns important.

In Pakistan, foreign policy is disaggregated among power centers. Presently in USA, State Department's role is minimal. No current US decision maker has dealt with Pakistan before. Their approach is intuitive without historical memory. US institutions are presently headed by persons with deep disquiet about Pakistan's policies. While US may not help Pakistan, it could certainly hurt it.

US assistance to Pakistan has been generous but goes unrecognized. That USA is Pakistan's largest export market, about twice more than the next two markets of China and the UK, also goes unnoticed. Participants referred to falling US FDI and that US Congress did not allow Pakistan use of military assistance to buy F 16s, while India may soon assemble them. Several rounds of Pak-US strategic dialogues have achieved little¹. Recently, US suspended military aid to Pakistan.

Discussants, however, valued US support with IFIs, especially the IMF. They recognized USA's enormous influence in Europe, the Gulf, and parts of Asia. That this is a transactional relationship is a given. US has strategic relationship with a handful of countries, among which India may soon be counted. Pakistan too has not done enough to move relations to the strategic level. Distancing from USA is dangerous. In fact, useful relations with US is still possible. Pakistan must change strategy.

Pakistan's policymaking structure

Participants directed criticism at structural weaknesses in Pakistan's policy making. This shows in several ways.

- There is no trust among state institutions, with no consensus on priorities. Nor is there an agreed national security strategy. Civilian leadership does not play its role. They do not build consensus around policy choices.
- In the past, Pakistan has joined international alliances without internal consultation, incurring major risks by becoming a frontline state. The effect of doing so is only too apparent. Fundamentally, Pakistan must move from being a security state to a development state.
- During consultations with USA, Pakistan must share its goals and priorities and avoid saying one thing while doing another. This will build trust with interlocutors even if they disagree.
- Pakistan's economic weakness makes it dependent on external assistance. This compromises its ability to pursue an independent foreign policy. A weak economy also cannot attract US private businesses for them to become a constituency in support of bilateral relations.
- An aggressive Pakistan media limits space for policy makers.

¹ Though assistance is large and all grants, there is no visible infrastructure project to show. Also, there are large gaps between appropriations, obligations, and disbursements. See data by Center for Global Development, Washington DC and Congressional Research Service data (writer's note). Participants said that economic assistance lose importance when accompanied by harsh words and changes in commitment, such as with F 16s.

Policy formulation in Pakistan

The substance of policy matters more than who dominates policy space in Pakistan. Civilian leadership has not played its role. It has no agreed national security strategy, nor has it built consensus around its initiatives. Foreign policy must flow from the country's overall agreed interests. All parts of the state have a stake in the country's security. Varied interpretation of strategic interests between civil and military perspectives is inevitable. However, civilians must lead to bring convergence on a set of priorities. They have not played this role, which is a fundamental weakness in Pakistan's policy making.

There was concern also that, in Pakistan, organizations with knowledge and institutional memory play a secondary role in managing relations. India is a factor in all of Pakistan's external relations, especially in Afghanistan. The political leadership has not developed a narrative for improving relations with India. Nor has it unified all parties on a concerted policy. A robust foreign policy comes from a healthy give and take between institutions.

Chapter 2

Pakistan's Objectives from Relations with USA

Competing national goals underpin foreign policy. Pakistan sees its future as a regional trade and transit hub. This means improved relations with neighbors, support for Afghan stability, and focus on economic development. Yet, the country has not made a clear break from its India fixation. For decades, Pakistan has been a security state. It is not clear if it is ready to change.

Regarding relations with USA, participants said that Pakistan must tailor goals to what is possible. USA's allies in Asia are Quad countries, Japan, Australia, and India. Pakistan is peripheral. History too is important. Pakistan provided key help to USA in the 1980s and again since 2001. Yet it is accused frequently.

Some said that Pakistan has benefited too from the relationship. Pakistan could not have become nuclear capable without USA looking the other way. Either way, there was consensus about the overwhelming reality of US military and economic power. Expectations were not high, yet Pakistan must stay engaged, cooperate, and try for cordial relations.

Security objectives

Evolving world dynamics require even more than before that Pakistan strengthen its relations with USA. History shows that there are considerable pulls and stresses during periods of emergence of new world powers (Thucydides Trap). In addition, there are landscape changes in the larger neighborhood of South and Central Asia and the Middle East. In this background, Pakistan can hardly afford to antagonize a superpower or side with any one camp. USA is a neighbor because it has bases in Afghanistan. Pakistan sees the present US Administration's approach to foreign policy unroll in Afghanistan.

While Pakistan must not be dependent on others for its security, relations with USA are important for two reasons. One is to continue to upgrade its military. Suspension of security aid is a hit Pakistan can take but would rather avoid. More importantly, in changing times, Pakistan must pursue its interests wisely through cooperation and by avoiding hostilities. The two countries have a history of cooperation that they must not give up on.

Economic Objectives

For years, Pakistan has received large economic aid from USA in mostly non-repayable grant. The large amount of aid has nothing to show by way of infrastructure projects. The assistance goes unacknowledged. US government's support for Pakistan with multilateral institutions receives wide recognition. Soon, Pakistan may need it again because of its precarious external account. Besides aid, very little else moved in the bilateral economic relations, partly because, when they could, both countries made no effort to strengthen economic relations. Though US is Pakistan's largest export market, overall trade is stagnant. USA began a preferential trade

initiative, ROZs, which did not clear Congress. FDI has dwindled and the rounds of strategic dialogue lost force even before they gathered steam.

Despite the litany of grievances, there are still expectations. Pakistan should expand economic cooperation:

- Fulbright program has helped Pakistan students. Pakistan should leverage this into deeper links between academic and research institutions of the two countries. Cooperation in science and technology is most needed. Pakistan must fast track visa applications of US academics.
- Pakistan must seek US assistance in:
 - Climate change and environmental conservation: Pakistan can learn from USA about changes in the Himalayan glaciers and about ground water resources.
 - Renewable energy: USA's National Renewable Energy Laboratory has mapped solar and wind power potential in Pakistan. There is great scope to engage here.
 - Under USAID American not-for-profits have transferred innovative energy and conservation technology to Pakistan. It is possible to scale up this cooperation for industrial use, especially if private equity firms team up.
 - US DOE's Energy Information Administration has identified Pakistan to have one of the highest shale energy potential in the world. US is also a leader in horizontal drilling.
 - Encourage US businesses to benefit from CPEC opportunities by offering them incentives given Chinese businesses. There was unconfirmed apprehension that US does not favor CPEC (for the influence and connectivity it provides China). Pakistan must have a constituency among US businesses for CPEC.
- There was hope more than expectation that Pakistan would transit from being a security state to a development state. Security depends on economic strength. So, Pakistan's foreign policy must equally focus on economic links. Economic links in the region hold added benefit of securing borders.

Areas where interests of the two countries coincide or conflict

There are factors that limit future relations:

- Pakistan does not feature prominently in US global strategy.
- Pakistan is no longer hyphenated with India. Pakistan's interests are not a US priority.
- In the present US dispensation, problems will arise daily. Present US decision makers have no history of working with Pakistan.

Though it is hard to see relations improve significantly, there are still areas of common interest. There is Pakistan's location and size. Though, Pakistan will no longer fight US wars², yet it will cooperate with USA in other ways. There are areas where interests coincide:

- Both countries want peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region. Pakistan is also working bilaterally with Afghanistan to strengthen cooperation.
- USA supports Pakistan's fragile democratic process.
- Pakistan's effort to reverse extremism in the country is supported by USA. It wants to prevent young people from subscribing to alternative ideology.
- US supports Pakistan's economic development.

Pakistan and US disagree on:

- Role of India in Afghanistan security
- USA wants a clear military victory in Afghanistan, while Pakistan hedges its bets.
- Pakistan is concerned about possible US military action in Iran
- US is cautious of Pakistan's relations with China.

Pakistan is realistic in its expectations and accepts that bilateral relations have weakened. It will stay engaged and would never harm US interests. The policy has worked for now. Despite strong statements from Washington and suspension of security aid, the two countries have avoided rupture³.

² There were frequent references of Soviet exit from Afghanistan in 1989 without much cost for the US, while Pakistan has been destabilized ever since

³ There is news now about placing Pakistan on FATF watchlist

Broadening US Pakistan relations

Pakistan must tailor its expectations about broadening relations with US to trade, investment, and technology. This was never a priority for either country. Even at the relationship's peak, both governments did not do enough to promote economic linkages. With more to gain, Pakistan should have taken the initiative. US agreed to hold strategic dialogue and offered large economic assistance.

Segments in Pakistan now hopes to interest US businesses in CPEC projects and SEZs. This is because they want to build US stake in CPEC. Whether this happens is unclear.

For a country overly focused on geo-politics, Pakistan's low economic growth and widening gap with India is ominous for its security. For influence in the region, Pakistan must focus on building economic, institutional, and societal strength. It must also deepen economic links in the region.

Despite strained relations, there are specific areas where US cooperation would help. Energy and environmental conservation have potential. Other areas are academia and research in science and technology. Pakistan can negotiate printing rights with US publishers for affordable marketing of books, including their Urdu translation. Likewise, Pakistan IT entrepreneurs have grown while staying under the radar. In the entertainment industry, Pakistan has greatly progressed in animation movies. There are many other areas of B2B opportunities. They are possible with minimal government policy and match making support.

Pakistan policy makers should give special incentives to US companies. Pakistan must be liberal in issue of visa to US businesses and academics.

Chapter 3

How will Pakistan pursue its goals?

Perception of US policy towards Pakistan

Participants said that two considerations define US policy for Pakistan. One, how US perceives Pakistan's cooperation in Afghanistan. Two, Pakistan's relations with China. Pressure on Pakistan will grow as the Afghan imbroglio worsens. While US has robust economic relations with China, it will not accept a threat to its global preeminence. Pakistan's close cooperation with China is a concern for USA.

There is disquiet in Pakistan that present US policy lacks process. It depends on individual views, and often reacts to immediate considerations. US South Asia Strategy did not surprise Pakistan policy makers, though went further than expected in its unqualified accusation of Pakistani policies. In the past, USA recognized Pakistan's contribution, while blaming it for supporting the Taliban.

US South Asia Strategy is a clear shift towards military solution in Afghanistan. It does not consider internal Afghan consensus or Taliban's role in a future settlement. There was also no mention of democracy, nation-building, or the political settlement agreed in Bonn. For Pakistan, the strategy reaffirms what they have believed all along. US views lack nuance, do not recognize Pakistan's contributions, and have no regard for its security interests. While mistrust between US and Pakistan has increased, Pakistan's importance has declined for USA.

Pakistan is worried also by rising (conventional) military and economic gap with India. It feels hemmed in by a volatile Eastern border and Indian influence in Afghanistan, supported by America. Pakistan considers India's influence in Afghanistan a direct threat to its security. Improvement in relations between India and Pakistan is unlikely soon, nor would Pakistan compromise relations with China. So, Pakistan must analyze the possibilities with USA.

If relations soured, US can take any of four actions:

- Increase drone strikes in FATA and further inside Pakistan
- Withdraw from Pakistan the status of major non-NATO ally
- Declare Pakistan a state sponsor of terrorism.
- Impose targeted sanctions on individuals or groups

Drone strikes have restarted already. Often, Pakistan is in the loop. The status of major non-NATO ally is symbolic. Pakistan would do enough to avoid further deterioration in relations.

US expectations and Pakistan's likely response

In concrete terms, US demands the following from Pakistan:

- Withdraw support for Afghan Taliban
- Withdraw support from anti-India groups in Pakistan
- Provide US officials access to those areas in the country where Pakistan has acted upon against militants.
- Limit acquisition of missile technology

Pakistan will negotiate the first two. In fact, it may have begun to act on them already. Pakistan does not want to contest US in Afghanistan or in the region. Yet, it has security concerns that it wants US to consider. Recently, Pakistan has controlled activities of pro-Kashmir groups. Even Indian data shows a sharp fall in infiltration from Pakistan. (India's violation of LOC has increased though). The third demand for access to areas where Pakistan has acted against militants is counterproductive and may provoke residents. It is also superfluous given US intelligence capabilities and information sharing between the two countries. Pakistan cannot accept the fourth demand to stop acquisition of missile technology.

Pakistan is committed to not allow use of its territory against US interests. The Afghan Taliban is not responsible for all attacks in Afghanistan. ISIS has claimed responsibility for some. Yet, Pakistan would reduce and withdraw support from Haqqani network. Pakistan considers ISIS a major threat and wonders how it gained a foothold in NATO controlled Afghanistan.

Pakistan says that recent talks between the two countries have helped. It has jogged US memory about past help and would do so again. It will step up military, intelligence, and nuclear security cooperation with USA. While Pakistan will take every action to avoid harming US interests in Afghanistan, it would likely still hedge against India's role in Afghanistan. USA intuitively considers Pakistan's relations with China as an either-or. Relations with China is key for Pakistan, yet USA too is very important.

Most participants said that both countries preferred to limit themselves to a transactional relationship. Pakistan's single metrics for all bilateral relations is how it affects its perceived Indian threat. This is an unrealistic expectation that burdens all relationships.

Suspension of military aid also reaffirmed USA's transactional approach. While counseling restrained response, most participants said that US concerns regarding the Taliban are real. They recommended that Pakistan build trust through incremental action. In the present dispensation in Washington, direct approach to the White House could help also.

Overall, in coming years, Pakistan expects that it must deal with USA on two levels. On the one hand, there will be unpredictable pressure on Pakistan through public statements, and on the other, it wants continuous talks between the militaries and intelligence agencies, and other arms of the government. However, accusatory statements from Washington restrict Pakistan's space to respond to US needs. It creates media and public pressure on decision makers.

Many participants said that Pakistan should state clearly its security needs to USA. If Pakistan fears blowback from the Afghan Taliban, it must say so. Likewise, if it supports elements in Afghanistan to hedge against Indian influence, it must share its plans. Mistrust results from the gap between Pakistan's claims and facts on ground.

To improve relations with Afghanistan, Pakistan has proposed strengthening bilateral military, trade, intelligence, and other links. The two countries have set up working groups to further cooperation. For its own security, Pakistan is committed to Afghan stability. Terrorists based in Afghanistan have inflicted a heavy toll on Pakistan. It cannot clear out terrorists without Afghan cooperation. Pakistan needs regional peace for stability and economic prosperity of the country. A weak economy compromises Pakistan's security.

Relations with major powers is not a zero-sum game. Pakistan does not have to choose between USA and China. There is a long history of cooperation between US and Pakistan with individuals and institutions in both countries having experience of working together. Pakistan also says it has important levers such as intelligence sharing and affording ground and air access to US forces.

Pakistan's expectations from USA

Expectations are low. USA says that threats from Russia and China surpass its concerns for terrorism. This makes Pakistan a side player in US plans. Hence, the first step is to avoid rupture and to gain US understanding for challenges to its security. Pakistan knows that expediency brings the two countries together.

Pakistan no longer wants financial aid from USA. It requests an end to hostile statements and recognition of its contributions. Pakistan must not be accused of everything that is wrong in Afghanistan.

Further, Pakistan counsels USA to focus on internal Afghan political settlement. Foreign interventions disrupted the country in 1980s and in 2001. Interventions had UN support. However, complete disregard for facts on ground is unhelpful. Insurgents hold influence over 40% of Afghanistan⁴. USA must commit also to the Quadrilateral Coordination Group on Afghanistan for productive negotiations. Pakistan would do its bit.

Military solutions seem deceptively simple but end up needing long-term commitment. Seventeen years is a long time already. All parties must now think of the people of Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan wants voluntary return of Afghans to their country. Peace there would encourage them to do so. The solution is diplomacy coupled with force.

Stability in Afghanistan will come also by reducing ungoverned spaces there. Kabul must control Afghanistan. Of course, there can be no pre-conditions on the kind of dispensation in Kabul. Sustainable peace must be top priority, preferably through a negotiated outcome.

⁴ Reports now say Taliban are active in 70% of Afghanistan

Pakistan does not have total leverage over the Taliban but would do the most for fruitful negotiations.

Pakistan also wants USA to bring its weight on all parties for ending cross border attacks in Pakistan from Afghanistan. Pakistan estimates loss of 70,000 lives from these attacks. USA has no links with the TTP, though it can influence an end to such attacks. Groups in Afghanistan also stoke insurgency in Balochistan. Pakistan wants to strengthen border management. It wants an end to Afghan opposition for it.

Pakistan's view of US policy in Afghanistan

The project sought participants' opinions on:

- US commitment to Afghan stability
- Pakistan and US interests in Afghanistan and their differences
- Pakistan's policies to realize its goals and willingness to accommodate US interests

Initially, USA did not distinguish between Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Pakistan delivered on Al Qaeda. Its elimination was a clear US goal. US did not consider the Taliban an enemy until 2005, when insurgency began. US was never clear about its plans in Afghanistan. They considered their job done and focused on Iraq. Pakistan too was not clear. Because of past links, it gave shelter to the Taliban. It did not estimate the consequences of doing so. Nor was there pressure from the US in this regard. Those sanctuaries were important for the Taliban to regroup. Soon, they began an insurgency that lasts to this day. As the Northern Alliance, whom Pakistan did not trust, gained importance in Kabul, Pakistan gradually relied on the Taliban.

US commitment to stability in Afghanistan

USA does not appear to have committed fully to its declared goals. It wanted peace in Afghanistan. The result is for all to see. The ideals of democracy, development, and reconstruction are as distant as ever. It aimed to get rid of the Taliban, but they have gained influence. The Kabul government is fragmented. USA has now opted for a military solution. Pakistan does not oppose or doubt US intentions in Afghanistan, but questions some of the methods.

US policy lacks flexibility. It wants peace in Afghanistan without having to deal with the Taliban. They must reconsider if this is possible with a group that controls a large part of Afghanistan. The Taliban is not a monolith. There are groups amenable to talks and to a deal. Other segments oppose USA and the Kabul government. Talks can bring some of them to Kabul's side. Shutting off all Taliban forecloses the option of separating the amenable from the intractable.

US is not fully committed to the QCG perhaps because it includes China. Shunning talks, it pressures Pakistan to eliminate the Taliban. Also, it now relies on Gulbadin Hekmatyar to broker a deal. This back and forth on strategy loses trust of its partners.

Views differed on why US is still in Afghanistan. Many discussants said that US is there for the long-term to keep an eye on a fluid region. Emergence of China, its BRI, and a gradually reasserting Russia are reasons. Others said that war fatigue at home may result Congress to question funding the war. For US, the cost of staying in Afghanistan is low, especially as considerable activities are now outsourced to contractors.

Afghan insurgency grew after announcement of South Asia strategy in August 2017. The Taliban's brutal attacks targeting Afghan civilians are a show of force to consolidate their hold in Afghanistan. Though these attacks are planned and executed in Afghanistan, discussants feared increase in US pressure on Pakistan.

Pakistan's support for US Afghan policy

Initially, US policy was elimination of Al-Qaeda. Pakistan delivered in full. Pakistan recounts also recent positive measures. Many Afghan Taliban, especially their elder statesmen, have returned to Afghanistan. Pakistan has destroyed Taliban's well-organized infrastructure and degraded their bases, especially in Waziristan. They still exist in small numbers but are scattered. Pakistan has pledged to disengage with the Haqqani network. Some network members may have been handed over already.

For USA to place the entire blame on Pakistan is misplaced as almost all fighters are in Afghanistan. Pakistan wonders if Afghan Taliban need space in Pakistan, when they control large parts of Afghanistan. Would insurgency end if there were no safe-havens in Pakistan? Recall, that the Haqqanis total a few thousand.

Pakistan is not without blame. Taliban have sanctuaries with several no-go areas in Balochistan and FATA. While Taliban leaders run an insurgency, their families live safely in Peshawar. The Taliban's logistics network in Pakistan is important for their activities.

Regarding Pakistan's ties with the Taliban, most participants understood that Pakistan fears militant blowback and hedges for probable outcomes in Afghanistan. Also, there is Pashtun support for them. Yet, Pakistan has lost trust of other countries. US has evidence of safe havens in Pakistan. Rather than deny, a clear statement of Pakistan's goals and plans would have more US buy-in and may invoke better understanding for its security concerns. Pakistan's support for Taliban invites criticism from everywhere, including Beijing and Riyadh.

Pakistan's strategy in Afghanistan has not worked. Surveys show that only 7% of Afghans view Pakistan favorably. Even most Taliban do not see Pakistan positively. Pakistan's assumption, therefore, that Taliban's presence in Kabul would be an asset seems misplaced. Policy makers say, however, that they have no preference for who controls Kabul. For sustained peace, they want a government through Afghan consensus.

On the other hand, India is viewed favorably by Afghans. Pakistan's policies may have achieved the opposite of what they intended. Participants also questioned support for the Taliban. They said that relations with Taliban are not as critical as those with USA. With no

deadline for US stay in Afghanistan, why should Pakistan pursue such a policy? Even China recommends change in stance.

Discussions show, however, that Pakistan will continue to hedge. It will act when pressured without fundamental shift in policy. Pakistan is serious about not allowing use of its territory for attacks in Afghanistan, yet it is unlikely that Pakistan would risk eliminating the Taliban as US desires. In any case, cooperation with USA is no guarantee that relations would improve. USA forgets past help and asks for more.

Both US and Pakistan want peace in Afghanistan. Methods differ. In fact, all governments have been ineffective. US wants peace by military action, but insurgency has grown⁵. Kabul continues to lose territory. A participant referred to the SIGAR Report. Opium trade flourishes and development projects are slow to get off ground. Reliance on the military alone may not work. There is no easy exit. Afghanistan will consume US and the region's attention because of lack of progress.

Pakistan says that it can no longer have an unstable neighbor. Yet, it is reluctant to act against Afghan Taliban. The people of Afghanistan and Pakistan suffer as governments posture. It is unlikely that Afghanistan would settle without talks with Taliban. It is unlikely too that USA would let Pakistan have its way to exclude the Northern Alliance in Kabul. More of the same is Afghan future, unless both countries adapt.

Participants wondered also if there can be peace with foreign troops on ground. Yet, having invested on such a scale, US can leave only if there is credible assurance of stability by regional countries. Participants noted that China, Russia, and Iran have gently, but steadily entered the domain. They put faith in China and Russia for restoration of sustained order in Afghanistan. As neighbors, they want to prevent spillover of instability.

Pakistan's view of US-India Strategic Partnership

In a break from the past, US has openly allied with India. Begun in 2006, the shift is strategic. But US had never done so before to Pakistan's exclusion. Largely, China drives this partnership. US wants a role for India not just in the region, but also in Asia-Pacific. There is also a web of connections between US and India that creates deep bond between them.

Pakistan is not alone in opposing Indian influence in Afghanistan. China and Russia are uncomfortable too. Therefore, India's involvement in Afghanistan's security may further instability there. It may begin a fresh round of jousting for influence among regional players. That may worsen a complex situation. US needs India because of continued instability in Afghanistan. By allying with the Taliban, Pakistan gave up its initial lead role there.

⁵ As of January 2018

Participants thought that India would not compromise its strategic autonomy to support USA. It will support US policies to the extent they benefit India, but will not step in directly. Nor is its depth of interest in Afghanistan at par with any of the neighbors. It will avoid being embroiled in a dispute when its reputation in Afghanistan is positive already.

Chapter 4

At the center of bilateral relations: Pakistan and Afghanistan

Pakistan's goals and policies in Afghanistan

Many Pakistanis recognize that Pakistan's support for Taliban is at the expense of its overall interests in Afghanistan. Peace in Afghanistan is necessary for stability and prosperity of Pakistan. Pakistan's strategy to seek influence in Afghanistan has ricocheted. The country is viewed unfavorably in Afghanistan, while India has gained influence.

There are hints of policy change in Pakistan. However, past such expectations ended soon as they began. Pakistan's two priorities come in the way. Indian influence in Afghanistan and fear of blowback from the Taliban. It is hard to see decision makers square this challenging circle. Therefore, there is no unambiguous policy on Afghanistan.

When it occurs, Pakistan-Afghanistan cooperation wanes soon as an attack takes place. Pakistan feels that it is unjustly blamed for all that happens in Afghanistan. However, both Afghan and US governments say they do so with evidence. In Pakistan's view a beleaguered Afghan government must show progress. Forces within the Afghan government are eager to blame their President.

Of late, Pakistan has again tried to strengthen military, trade, intelligence, and other links with Afghanistan. Bilateral working groups have begun work. Progress is slow, and in fits and start. It took a series of massacre in Kabul and an attack on Pakistan forces in Swat in January and February for moving the talks further. It will be a while though before either country trusts the other. A fragmented Afghan government restricts the President's space to act. Each party in the government is in a race to blame Pakistan to demonstrate its patriotism. Some of the blame is merited, participants said, but they wonder also how Pakistan can help Kabul restore peace, when it does not control large parcels of the country.

Participants discussed how Pakistan could have done a better job. Many participants said that the lesson for Pakistan is to not center policy entirely on a single issue of Indian threat. Pakistan's anxiety about India may be exaggerated. And through its action, Pakistan may have made the fear self-fulfilling. Instability in Afghanistan has forced US to call on India to help with Afghan security.

One way to address Afghan concerns is to look at the situation from their perspective. The powerful sense of shared destiny during Soviet occupation was lost soon after USSR withdrew. Pakistan had assumed then that its help would result in Afghan accommodation of Pakistan's concerns about India. On the other hand, Afghans questioned Pakistan's support first for Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and later the Taliban. They asked whether Pakistan would want the leadership for itself that it wished for Afghanistan.

Peace is possible if all parties held Afghan lives important. The stated goals of USA, Pakistan, and Afghanistan is to restore peace for socio-economic development there. US and Kabul want stability without a role for Taliban. Pakistan says sustainable peace is possible with a stake in it for all parties including the Taliban. Afghan peace is captive to the complexity and competing goals of each government and equally to past suspicions and mistrust.

Participants looked at probable scenarios:

- **Bilateral:** With all else at an impasse, participants placed considerable faith in bilateral Pak-Afghan relations. During Pakistan COAS' visit to Kabul in October 2017, the two countries agreed to set up six working groups for cooperation. They agreed to reduce tension on the border, end artillery exchange, and pressure militants on both sides to stop cross-border activities. Pakistan agreed also to have a 'fatwa' issued against terrorism, designating the war in Afghanistan un-Islamic. There were concrete references also to further trade and economic cooperation. Relations improved, only for more attacks to put them in jeopardy. Afghan government may have shared with Pakistan evidence of Taliban involvement in the brutal attacks in January 2018. Cooperation, is, at best, work in progress.
- **Quadrilateral Coordination Group:** QCG negotiations have plodded for want of commitment of one party or the other or because of inability of parties to deliver what is promised. In the past, Pakistan was unable to bring the Taliban to the table. When it did so in Murree, the talks were scuttled because of what Pakistan feels was Afghan unwillingness to negotiate with the Taliban. Some participants said that US does not want China on the table and in any case, present US policy prioritizes military victory against the Taliban.
- **Bilateral with involvement of China to nudge forward negotiations:** Pakistan must consult with China on how to proceed and ask them to pick up the reconciliation thread as US seems to have lost interest.

Competing interests of all involved governments have delayed peace in Afghanistan. Each party must reduce the gap between its declared policy and action on-ground. They must all compromise a little. Decades of hostilities and mistrust leads each party to often undermine, even before it has begun, a process to which it commits in words. Participants were not optimistic about Afghan stability, even though they considered it vital for the region.

Can Pakistan go it alone?

Participants had a range of views. Most said that Afghan stability is possible if Pakistan adopts a new strategy and abandons the course it has pursued so far. They recounted several natural advantages for Pakistan that should help with its goal of having influence, should it change its policy. Among them, religious, ethnic, and tribal links with contiguous borders would reinforce a change in Pakistan's strategy.

It will need long and patient commitment by Pakistan and sincerity of purpose, especially during periods of setback. Pakistan has wanted stability in Afghanistan, but with a cooperative government in Kabul. The first is possible with efforts of the two countries. The second is not without challenge, but achievable if they cooperate.

Pakistan cannot agree to all Afghan requests, but it should pledge to not destabilize the Kabul government. If Pakistan relied on political means to influence Kabul, rather than through proxies, its influence will grow. Pakistan may gradually reduce support to the Taliban and strengthen links with Kabul. The Taliban have not converted into a political movement with a known agenda. Afghanistan is worsening and both countries would find it hard to deliver whatever has been agreed between them.

It won't be easy. This is a conundrum. Governments are usually risk averse. Kabul's hold over large tract of the country is tenuous. It was probably not wise to support the Taliban, but at this stage, can Pakistan side with any one party?

Role of other countries in the region

Everyone placed great faith in role of China and Russia. They bring fresh perspective and could reconcile Kabul with the Taliban. The outcome could be fresh elections or a national government that would lead to rebuilding institutions and systems of governance. A condition for doing so should be an end to insurgency and return to normalcy.

Greater Chinese and Russian engagement in Afghanistan is expected. China has substantial economic stake and investments in Afghanistan in minerals exploration. Russia's interests are similar. Both do not want extremists in their countries. They want stability in Afghanistan, regardless of who is in charge.

Some participants feared deepened Afghan quagmire. So far, peace eluded Afghanistan because of India-Pakistan rivalry. Now, it seems that a more dangerous US-China rivalry could sink it deeper into instability. Others said US accepts China's role in Afghanistan.

China has played an important, though not visible, role in mediation between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Hence the talks. Officials of Pakistan and Afghanistan have met in Tajikistan and Urumqi with China's assistance. China has a special envoy for Afghanistan. China has both official and Track 2 contacts.

Chapter 5

USA, Pakistan, and the Region

Policy makers shared their vision for the region. It is entirely in Pakistan's interest to work for regional stability. Pakistan has lived with instability for too long. In fact, it had sought instability. Pakistan's future lies in becoming a trade and transit hub. Only regional stability ensures security and prosperity within. Its security is at risk without economic growth. It must reduce external economic dependence and have the means internally to fund and modernize security.

From international alliances, Pakistan must now focus on the region and improve relations with neighbors, though the West is still important. Pakistan's vision of a connected region is its guide. Pakistan should never again become a 'frontline state'. Sixty percent of world population is in Asia with mostly dynamic economies, energy rich, and gaining technology rapidly. Chinese and Indian universities rank high in most indices. Strategic interests are no longer subject to East-West binary.

Pakistan must do everything to avoid the region from becoming a battlefield for great power rivalry. US, China, and Russia have specific interests here. With India, USA has close and strategic relations. In its goal to stay the preeminent world power, US considers China and Russia a threat to its interests. And there are audible drum beats of war with Iran. China and Russia consider the region their sphere. China's interest so far is economic connectivity. Yet US and India do not see that as its end goal.

Convulsion is not inevitable. There is considerable promise too. India and USA are tied deeply in economic links with China. India is part of several political and economic regional arrangements with China and Pakistan. India and China have strengthened cooperation with Iran, whose relations with US is shaky, at best.

Policy makers know they must view all bilateral or regional relations in a global context. They see definite US plans in South and Central Asia and will avoid getting caught up in East-West rivalries. On Afghanistan, Pakistan will work for Afghan peace with any country that takes an initiative.

China

Until recently, Pakistan's special relationship with China was limited to exchange of military technology and hardware. Despite a bilateral FTA since 2007, economic relations were marginal. Pakistan is now a key link in China's BRI. CPEC provides China critical connection to the Indian Ocean through a corridor of train, road, and pipeline links. CPEC includes industrial cooperation and potentially fiscal and monetary policies coordination. Pakistan values its relations with China above all. China does not want war or turbulence in the region.

Its commitment to a robust regional vision of economic prosperity and stability lends credibility. To a certain extent, alliance with China enables Pakistan to withstand Western pressure.

Though relations with China will grow inexorably, they too have parameters:

- The alliance is not at the expense of relations with others, especially USA.
- Pakistan will balance by attracting US businesses with incentives.

However, Pakistan's regional relations are adrift. If it does not lead with vision and sound strategy, it would naturally find itself closer to China. This may invoke US displeasure, which it must avoid. Distancing from the US is dangerous. Pakistan can build a very useful relationship with both powers. There are limits to Chinese support. It will not add another source of friction with USA to support Pakistan.

Pakistan thinks it is close to realizing its old desire to link with Central Asia and beyond. Until Afghan stability, it is possible to do so via China. One red flag, a first for Pakistan, is criticism of CPEC. Some participants said that Pakistan may have given too much access to China.

Russia, Iran, and others

Of late, relations between Pakistan and Russia have warmed, though they are at an initial stage. Several high-level visits have taken place. Contacts between their militaries have grown, though cooperation is nascent. In 2014, Russia lifted arms embargo on Pakistan. Russia supported Pakistan's membership of SCO. The two countries have cooperated in Afghanistan and favor multilateral efforts for non-military solution.

Iran is an important player in the region and an energy surplus country. Pakistan has ignored Iran. In fact, President Rouhani's visit to Pakistan in 2016 ended on a bad note. They have come a long way since the 1990s when Pakistan and Iran were in a virtual proxy battle in Afghanistan. Despite severe energy deficit, Pakistan has not implemented its half of the Iran-Pakistan pipeline, because of US and Saudi concerns. Bilateral FTA too have lingered. So far, concrete cooperation is mostly limited to securing borders. Pakistan has offered to set up common markets with Iran on the Balochistan border, near the cities of Mand and Gabd.

With the Eastern border fragile, it is critical for Pakistan to secure the Western front. Iran is the 'first line of defense' against ISIS being more committed to its elimination than any other country. Possible US-Iran conflict will affect Pakistan. Pakistan must stay neutral.

Relations with India and South Asia

Policy makers say that given the history and context, Pakistan cannot be friends with India, but it must normalize relations with it. India's growing international acceptance gives it confidence and an unwillingness to negotiate other than on its terms. Pakistan too has leverage as it is key to India's links with other countries. Pakistan policy makers worry about the dangers of two

bordering and hostile nuclear powers. Yet, human rights violation in Kashmir cannot be ignored. Discussants were most concerned about the absence of dexterous handling by Pakistan's leadership and its inability to triangulate.

Quiet talks between NSAs of Pakistan and India have taken place, but progress is slow. Pakistan says that India approaches talks with a mix of hubris and grievances. Policy makers were keen for third party (especially USA) mediation on comprehensive issues not just on Kashmir. In fact, Pakistan has pinned hopes on such mediation. As a prospective trade and connectivity hub, policy makers do not rule out transit for India, if relations improve.

Chapter 6

Recommendations

Participants recommended action in the following areas:

- Pakistan must have a strategic framework for foreign policy based on national consensus
- Stay engaged with USA
- Cooperate with Kabul government
- Strengthen economy and institutions within
- Build regional alliances
- Seek mediation

Form a strategic framework:

- The country has no agreed national security strategy. Civilian leadership does not play its role. They do not build consensus around policy choices. Pakistan must have an agreed national security strategy with customized foreign policy for major powers.
- The strategy must set explicit national goals, with sustainable policies. The state must commit to the pursuit of that policy using all instruments needed.
- Restore use of diplomacy, which is an inherent part of conducting external relations. All engagement with official foreign representatives must have participants from all parts of the state after country positions are formed by consensus before meetings.

Stay engaged with USA: Both countries cannot afford a rupture:

- Pakistan must regain USA's respect and trust. It must be open in dealings and not wait for US pressure to take action. It must clearly state what is possible and what is not. It should make known to all its own foreign policy goals and that it will not fight others' wars.
- Pakistan must offer USA sincere cooperation but make it contingent on US cooperation for Pakistan's security concerns. USA must control cross border activities from Afghanistan.
- Pakistan must make clear that it cannot take complete responsibility for the Taliban, but pledge to restrain their activities.
- Pakistan should not reply to strong statements from Washington. At the same time, it must use all opportunities for institutional contacts.
- Government must work with media to counsel moderation on foreign policy discussions.
- Within its moderate expectations from USA, it should rebuild security cooperation as well as try to build private sector constituency in the US by offering US businesses incentives at par with those given China.

- It must convince USA that its growing partnership with China is not to harm any other country.

Cooperate with Kabul: Pakistan must work with Kabul. This has already begun, but both countries must regain trust. Pakistan must:

- Give up support for the Taliban. It is a difficult though necessary choice. State must act against those forces inside Pakistan that have exasperated Kabul and USA.
- Advise Taliban that they can consolidate only by reconciling with other power groups. A Taliban government is unacceptable to most Afghans as well as to US, China, and Russia. With US military bases in Afghanistan, force cannot be the final option for the Taliban. Pakistan must use all levers on them. It must do everything possible to prevent attacks in Afghanistan from groups based in Pakistan
- Help Kabul bilaterally to negotiate with the Taliban, while also supporting the QCG
- Commit fully to the working groups agreed bilaterally. There is still time to overcome differences with Afghanistan.
- Help Kabul build institutions and infrastructure
- Get Afghan assurance for cooperation for Pakistan's security, effective border control, degrading of TTP, and an end to cross border attacks from Afghanistan.

Strengthen economy and institutions within: Economic weakness compromises security. Pakistan must reduce economic dependence on other countries. It must make a transition from being a security state to a development state. Ensure transparency among state institutions.

Build Regional Alliances: Initiate dialogue with Kabul, Washington, Beijing, and Moscow and urge all parties to renew efforts for reconciliation in Afghanistan. Pakistan must pledge sincere commitment and request everyone else to do so. Washington may need persuasion. It would likely be convinced by demonstration of good efforts by all parties and by indicating that US cooperation would help restore peace in Afghanistan.

Pakistan must improve cooperation with Iran, especially for import of energy. We must explain our needs to other countries that have adverse relations with Iran. An example exists of India-Iran cooperation on Chahbahar port.

Mediation: USA must mediate between Pakistan and India on all issues, not just Kashmir to normalize relations with India. There is risk from continued hostilities between two nuclear power neighbors. This will be a slow process. A good beginning is decline in infiltration from Pakistan.

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⁶ As of May 2018

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