CHAPTER 5
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Conclusion

The history of US-Pak relations has been quite chequered and marked by ups and downs. The relations between the United States and Pakistan constitute one of many contemporary instances of an alliance serving complementary interests. For the United States it served the primarily purpose of expanding the scope of the policy of containment during the Cold War; for Pakistan it served the purpose of increasing her political, military and economic potential vis-a-vis India.

In the immediate aftermath of the emergence of India and Pakistan as sovereign nations, American policy makers approached South Asia primarily governed by British advice. American interest in sub-continental affairs was marginal. European economic recovery, the geopolitical requirements in the Middle East, and the containment of Soviet “expansionism” were accorded the greatest priority. Between India and Pakistan, however, Washington initially attached greater importance to the former apparently because it was larger in size and population, and had considerable economic and military potential. The relatively low level of American interest in Pakistan during 1947-49 was evident from tardiness in appointing an Ambassador to Pakistan.

As the Cold War unfolded, Pakistan leaned toward the West. Jinnah plainly spelled out that communism would not flourish in the soil of Islam, and that Pakistan’s interests were more in common with the “two great democratic countries, namely, the U.K. and the U.S.A., rather than with Russia.” From the start, therefore, Pakistan’s
foreign policy orientation differed from that of India, which professed non-alignment. Practical considerations bolstered Pakistan’s pro-western orientation. The financially strapped country badly needed help and was not bashful about seeking it from the United States.

When Eisenhower became president in 1953, U.S. policy emphasized strengthening the collective security cordon around the communist bloc. In the case of South Asia, this meant enlisting Pakistan, which was only too willing, as a partner in bolstering the defense of the Middle East. Even though Washington realized that the move would strain relations with larger India, the step was deemed worthwhile. But the United States and Pakistan entered into the alliance for different and ultimately conflicting reasons. Despite its anti-communist rhetoric, Pakistan remained at heart concerned about the threat from India rather than any menace from the communists. In contrast, the United States saw the security accord with Pakistan as directed strictly against the communist threat and was wary of becoming entangled in Pakistan’s dispute with India.

The announcement of military aid to Pakistan was made on 25 February 1954, i.e. soon after Pakistan demonstrated its “resolve to play an important part in the collective defence of the free world” by signing a friendship treaty with Turkey. The announcement of military aid was followed in quick succession by signing of the US-Pakistan Mutual Defence Agreement on 19 May 1954 and the formation of the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) in September 1954 and the Baghdad Pact (CENTO) in 1955.
In 1959 Dwight Eisenhower became the first U.S. president to visit Pakistan. Earlier, in the fall of 1959, Ayub Khan had announced measures designed to move his country slowly towards his version of democracy. He established a system of local councils, called “basic democracies,” elected by universal suffrage. About eighty thousand “basic democrats” became a national electoral college that would select a national assembly in 1962 and elect a president in 1965. When Dwight Eisenhower left the White House in January 1961, he was happy that the U.S.’s South Asian ally, Pakistan, appeared to be getting on its feet under Ayub Khan and was beginning to make tangible economic progress. Many analysts saw that Pakistan was moving slowly from a military dictatorship towards the establishment of a relatively more open political system. Although the Pakistanis remained extremely unhappy about growing U.S. support for India’s economic development, the U.S.-Pakistan bilateral relationship was growing too. The US continued to provide substantial economic and arms aid to Pakistan, including the promised supply of the controversial F-104 fighters.

US-Pakistan ties were strained to some extent during the Kennedy Administration. President Kennedy wanted to improve ties with NAM countries, including India. Although Ayub did not oppose Kennedy’s desire for better relations with nonaligned countries, such as India, he urged Washington to “maintain distinction between the nonaligned countries and Pakistan and Ayub stressed that the “focal point of Pakistan’s policy was the continued friendship with” the United States. He also indicated that he was trying to establish more normal relations with China and also with the Soviet Union.
The Johnson years witnessed a fundamental shift in US-Pakistan relations. When Johnson became president after Kennedy’s assassination, the bilateral relations were at a “standoff” over U.S. military aid to India and Pakistan’s flirtation with China. President Johnson sought to limit Pakistan’s relationship with China as the price for continued large-scale US economic aid. When the pressure tactics failed and Pakistan and India went to war over Kashmir in 1965, Johnson largely gave up on Pakistan.

US-Pakistan relations had dramatically deteriorated during Kennedy and Johnson administrations. But when Richard Nixon moved into the White House, Islamabad had reason to hope for better days. An old friend of Pakistan, Nixon had visited the country five times, twice as vice president and three times after he left that office. Ayub had wisely given Nixon a red carpet during his travels as a private citizen.

During 1971, the coincidence of the East Pakistan crisis and Nixon’s China initiative placed South Asia at the center of US foreign policy concerns. Tilting towards Pakistan, Nixon sought to protect the opening to China and to prevent what he feared would be a major Soviet gain in the balance of power in Asia. As a fundamental misreading of the India-Pakistan situation, Nixon’s tilt towards Islamabad had little effect on the East Pakistan crisis but resulted in an embarrassing U.S. diplomatic setback. President Nixon could do little to prevent the birth of a new nation, called Bangladesh.

The two and a half years of Gerald Ford’s presidency saw a continuation of Nixon’s policy of warm relations towards Pakistan. Even though Islamabad had left SEATO in 1972 and remained only a nominal member of CENTO, the Ford administration considered Pakistan a good friend and an ally.
The assumption of Presidency by Jimmy Carter in 1977 created apprehensions in Pakistan about the future of US-Pak relations because of his known unfavorable views on arms sales and nuclear proliferation. In fact, “tilt” towards Pakistan in the early 1970s gave way to the downward trend in the relations between the two countries became even more evident during the Carter Administration and reached an all-time low in April 1979.

Following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979, however, Pakistan came to be viewed as a frontline state against Soviet expansionism. Earlier Pakistan had little involvement in Afghanistan, accepting, as did the US, that it was on the margins of the Soviet sphere of influence. But following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan’s then military regime eagerly accepted Washington’s demand that Pakistan serve as the frontline state in what eventually proved to be the last great Cold War confrontation.

When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979, for the first time in its history, Pakistan faced an extra regional threat at its doorstep. The U.S. alliance, designed for such a contingency, finally came through, and massive amounts of U.S. aid and equipment were moved into Pakistan as has been discussed earlier, to face off the Soviet threat. Pakistan could not defend itself from the Soviet forces conventionally, let alone defeat them. It decided, however, to work with the United States to support guerrillas (Mujaheedin) in Afghanistan who could take the fight to the Soviets asymmetrically.

The United States and Saudi Arabia poured money into Afghan Islamic groups through Pakistan, to fight the anti-Soviet jihad. While Pakistan and the United States were locked in proxy conflict with the Soviets over Afghanistan, Pakistan turned out to
be an invaluable ally. Despite Islamabad's progress in pursuing a secret nuclear weapon programme, U.S. economic and military aid continued to flow to support the anti-Soviet campaign. U.S. dissuasive policy against nuclear development was designed around the belief that a conventionally well-armed Pakistan would not pursue the nuclear track aggressively (ibid). But unlike in the past, this time around Pakistan benefited a great deal from massive US military and economic assistance in the wake of the Afghanistan crisis.

It is clear that both the United States and Pakistan mutually benefited from a new strategic alliance aimed at making the Soviet military presence politically costly, economically expensive and militarily untenable. Had there been no Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan would have been rotting under a military regime and international sanctions due to its secret nuclear weapon programme. The Afghanistan crisis of the 1980s brought, according to Chintamani Mahapatra, on presidented economic benefits, political capital, and militarily benefits to Pakistan(for details see Strategic Analysis, vol.XIX-No.7).  

While Pakistan was able to buildup with US assistance its conventional military capabilities aimed at matching Indian conventional superiority, but for Pakistan's cooperation with the Reagan Administrations the US would not have been able to win the Cold War by forcing the Soviet Union to withdraw its force from Afghanistan.

The CIA and the ISI, the Pentagon and the Pakistani militarily establishment, and the Reagan White House and the Zia regime were able to forge a kind of strategic cooperation in strengthening the anti-Soviet attacks and operations by the Afghan
Mujahiddin that finally forced Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to conclude a deal with the President Reagan in 1987.

This deal was about the complete withdrawal of the Soviet military force from the Afghan territory. It is not an exaggeration to say that the Soviet debacle in Afghanistan was instrumental in ending the Cold War. It can also be said that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was responsible to a great extent for the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union.

The role of the United States, particularly the eight years of the Reagan Administration, was significant in the victory of West in the Cold War. In this, the role of Pakistan, especially the military regime led by General Zia-ul-Haq cannot be underestimated. However, it would not be appropriate to give too much credit to the Zia regime, because unlike the goal of the Reagan Administration, Pakistan never aimed at winning the Cold War. Islamabad considered India as the main enemy. It could not forget India's role in the creation of Bangladesh by dividing Pakistan; and sought to build up its military strength by cooperating with the US.

Pakistanis understood that the Soviet Union stood behind India during the 1971 Indo-Pakistani war. When the Soviet Union sent its troops to Afghanistan and established a puppet regime, Pakistani knew that the US would seek its help in containing Soviet expansionism. Gen. Zia aimed at taking advantage of this situation to improve Pakistan's militarily capabilities vis-à-vis India. Thus, Washington's goal and Pakistan's objective were different. But both the parties got considerable benefit out of a decade of alliance relationship a sort of temporary marriage of convenience.
The most important strategic game of Pakistan was upgrade of its conventional arsenal and acquisition of nuclear weapon capability. The nuclear gain of Pakistan, however, was at the cost of Washington's non-proliferation policy and objectives. Ever since India conducted its peaceful nuclear explosion, successive US Administrations adopted strong non-proliferation policy, took the lead in establishing international regimes and set up export control mechanisms.

The Reagan Administrations did not implement the non-proliferation goal and policy during the Afghan crisis. Had it done so, Pakistan could never have acquired the nuclear weapon capability. During both his terms, President Reagan and his foreign policy advisors gave top priority to fight against the Soviet military presence in Afghanistan. Since, Pakistan was a very important link in American strategy against the Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan, the Reagan Administration did not put any pressure on Pakistan to stop its secret activities for acquiring nuclear weapon capability.

As we have discussed in Chap-IV, Pakistani leaders were prepared to feed their people with grass, if that was necessary to get a nuclear bomb. Pakistan was lucky that it could successfully achieve a nuclear weapon capability, while receiving huge amount of American economic assistance. The Reagan Administration was aware that the US Congress strongly supported the nuclear non-proliferation measures, and in 1985 enacted the Pressler Amendment. This measure was taken in the wake of US intelligence finding that Pakistan was deeply involved in secret activities to buy nuclear weapon related equipment from the international market.
The Reagan White House did not impose any sanction on Pakistan under the Pressler Amendment. On the other hand, it requested the Congress to approve military assistance of sophisticated weapons on the ground that it would discourage Pakistan from seeking nuclear weapon capability. In a way, as Chintamani Mahapatra has written extensively on this issue, Pakistan achieved the technical ability to make nuclear weapon with the full knowledge of the Reagan Administration officials.

The regional implication of the Reagan Administration’s policy, however, was negative in many ways. First, the acquisition of nuclear weapon capability by Pakistan through illegal means, which was know to the Reagan Administration, let to erosion of credibility of the US non-proliferation policy.

Secondly, massive amount of American assistance to Pakistan encouraged corruption in many ways. In fact, many American weapons sent for Afghan Mujahiddin never reached them. A huge number of unaccounted American weapons were spread across the Pakistani society and let to the militarization of social life.

Thirdly, the CIA-ISI collaboration was responsible to a considerable extent for drugs production, marketing and abuse. At first, narcotics addiction was confined to the locality, but eventually it spread across the region and then became an international security threat. But for the CIA help, the ISI would not have become powerful enough to behave like a state within a state. The root cause of rise of the Taliban and deadly terrorist activities witnessed today goes back to the ISI activism during the Afghan crisis.