

# The Conduct of Pakistan's Foreign Policy

## Structure, Strengths and Issues

### (2018-2020)

## Policy Brief

### Part-5

### Pakistan-US Relations

When President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Imran Khan assumed power in 2016 and 2018 respectively, Pakistan-US relations had become lukewarm and without robust engagement due to divergent views on issues. There was no qualitative improvement in bilateral relations because the US looked at Pakistan from certain selective lenses such as security, competition with China, Afghanistan, and Pakistan's nuclear program. The US thus prioritized its relations with Pakistan from the prisms of Afghanistan, Pakistan's "all-weather strategic cooperative partnership" with China and CPEC, the US-China rivalry, and its strategic relations with India. Resultantly, the US-Pakistan relations remained tactical and transactional without depth, cooperation, and strategic content. The US suspended Pakistan's security assistance,<sup>1</sup> the IMF maneuvered the US security interests in the region by using a \$6 billion bailout package in July 2019 to ensure Islamabad's compliance,<sup>2</sup> expressed reservations against the CPEC,<sup>3</sup> and used the FATF as a political and coercive tool against Pakistan.<sup>4</sup> These were pressure tactics to seek Pakistan's help in Afghanistan.

### Chronology

#### (1) High-Level Visits

Pakistan-US relations witnessed thawing and gradual warming up when Prime Minister Imran Khan assumed power. US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, Chairman Joint Chief of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, and Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, David Hale, were among the foreign dignitaries who visited Pakistan in September 2018. The Pakistan leadership reiterated that Pakistan looked forward to building sustainable ties with the US, based on mutual trust and respect. On Pompeo's request for Pakistan's cooperation, the Pakistani side committed to facilitate and play an instrumental role in the Afghan peace process and the US-Taliban peace deal.

The summit-level interaction between Prime Minister Imran Khan and former US President Donald Trump on July 2, 2019, set the tone for a revived engagement in the context of the Afghan peace process though the bilateral relations remained devoid of substance. The prime minister's visit (July 21-23, 2019) took place two weeks before India's illegal steps and annexation of the IIOJ&K. On President Trump's request for Pakistan's support for the Afghan peace process and

<sup>1</sup> Arshad Mohammed and Jonathan Landay, "U.S. suspends at least \$900 million in security aid to Pakistan," Reuters, January 5, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-pakistan-aid-idUSKBN1ET2DX>

<sup>2</sup> Kunwar Khuldune Shahid, "The IMF Takeover of Pakistan," *The Diplomat*, July 18, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/the-imf-takeover-of-pakistan/>

<sup>3</sup> "Ambassador Wells' Remarks on the 'China-Pakistan Economic Corridor'," US Embassy Islamabad, November 21, 2019, <https://pk.usembassy.gov/ambassador-wells-remarks-on-the-china-pakistan-economic-corridor/>

<sup>4</sup> Amjed Jaaved, "FATF: A tool to coerce Pakistan to toe the US line," *Pakistan Today*, June 10, 2021, <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2021/06/10/fatf-a-tool-to-coerce-pakistan-to-toe-the-us-line/>

the US-Taliban peace deal, the prime minister unconditionally reiterated Pakistan's engagement to promote a political solution in Afghanistan. On Pakistan-India relations, the prime minister stated that "Pakistan would continue to pursue dialogue and diplomacy to resolve longstanding disputes, including the core dispute of Jammu and Kashmir".<sup>5</sup> President Trump offered to mediate between India and Pakistan on the Kashmir issue hinting that Prime Minister Modi had also asked him the same thing. The Indian Ministry of External Affairs issued a statement explaining that "no such request has been made by Prime Minister Modi to the US President".<sup>6</sup>

Prime Minister Imran Khan led the Pakistan delegation during the UNGA session in New York in September 2019. President Trump again offered mediation on Kashmir. Prime Minister Imran Khan met President Trump on January 21, 2020, on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos. The prime minister again requested a sustained US role to help resolve the Kashmir dispute. President Trump reiterated his willingness to mediate on Kashmir.<sup>7</sup>

The US Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation, Zalmay Khalilzad, paid eight visits to Pakistan and interacted with the civil and military leadership and discussed Pakistan-US joint efforts for peace in Afghanistan. Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi visited New York on January 15, 2020, and Washington on January 16-17, 2020, and briefed the US Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, National Security Advisor, Robert O'Brien, and other senior administration officials on Pakistan's diplomatic outreach to de-escalate tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia and the worsening situation in IIOJ&K.

## (2) Other Developments/Defense Cooperation

In July 2019, the US approved \$125 million to provide Pakistan with technical support for its fleet of F-16 aircraft after Prime Minister Imran Khan's first official visit to Washington. In addition, the US and Pakistan simultaneously lifted travel restrictions on each other's diplomatic staff in August 2019. Moreover, in terms of defense cooperation, the US formally reinstated the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program for Pakistan in January 2020. The IMET Program was suspended in 2018 after Pakistan and Russia signed an agreement to allow Pakistani military officers to receive training in Russian military institutions. The two sides have also agreed to begin a strategic level defense dialogue. The first meeting of the Defense Dialogue was held on January 7, 2021. However, the overall security assistance suspension for Pakistan remains in effect.<sup>8</sup>

### Analysis

The fact remains that Pakistan-US relations witnessed some improvement from tactical to working level without much depth during 2018-2020. The American leadership appreciated Pakistan's positive role in the Afghan Peace process. The prime minister interacted with the US leadership confidently. But the observers are of the view that the prime minister could not understand the deception and decoy of President Trump's mediation on Kashmir. He constantly reiterated to pursue dialogue, diplomacy, and mediation, which were options long withdrawn by India. The US fully supported India and its policies in broader framework of geopolitical and geo-economic engagement with India to contain the rising influence of China.

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<sup>5</sup> "Prime Minister Imran Khan holds talks with President Trump," MOFA, July 22, 2019, <http://mofa.gov.pk/prime-minister-imran-khan-holds-talks-with-president-trump/>

<sup>6</sup> "India denies Modi asked Trump to mediate Kashmir dispute," *Dawn*, July 23, 2019, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1495570>

<sup>7</sup> "Prime Minister meets U.S. President Trump in Davos," MOFA, January 21, 2020, <http://mofa.gov.pk/prime-ministers-meeting-with-u-s-president-donald-j-trump-in-davos/>

<sup>8</sup> Anadolu Agency: 'US resumes Pakistan military training program,' 04 January 2020, <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/asia-pacific/us-resumes-pakistan-military-training-program/1692116>