



**Center for Global & Strategic Studies
Islamabad**

A New Thaw in Pak-US Relations

Published on 7th August, 2019



The year 2018 began with the startling allegation by the United States President against Pakistan and accused it of lies and Deceits. The new Trump administration halted the Coalition Support Fund, and many other restrictions were imposed on Pakistan. It was one of the lowest points in the US-Pak bilateral relationship. The First Afghan War partners against the former USSR had a huge trust deficit that worsened as the US downplayed and ignored the sacrifices that Pakistan rendered in War against Terror. President Trump campaign promise of troops' withdrawal to his

nation and the 59th quadrennial 2020 U.S. Presidential election along with the immense financial burden are among the reasons due to which the US now want this war to be ended with a face-saving exit.

A respected exit from Afghanistan can only be ensured by Pakistan. Former British Foreign Secretary David Miliband while emphasizing Pakistan's importance in the region said that Pakistan is essential here. It holds many of the keys to security and dialogue. It has to be a partner in finding solutions in Afghanistan, there will be no settlement in Afghanistan without Pakistan's Involvement. Being a crucial and important regional player Pakistan can only guarantee the respectable US withdrawal, that's why an invitation was extended to Prime Minister for an official working visit to the US.

The phenomenal work from Pakistan Foreign Affairs Ministry and the charismatic Pakistani leadership have won laurels after the successful completion of the three days visit. Pakistan not only was able to brilliantly put up its case before the US political diaspora but has also made progress in its trade relation. Trump mediation offer on Kashmir is also an ultimate win for Pakistan as it has always welcomed a third-party mediation in Kashmir issues. Pakistan and United States are resetting their relations under the new leadership, but the road ahead is not going to be one with a smooth drive. The future challenges not only need the restoration of trust between the two nations but also more cooperation in the spheres of trade and defence.

Pakistan has pledged to play an active role in the Afghan Peace Process, however, many variables are not in Pakistan's control.

Trump's Promises and the Afghan peace process

The current thaw in Pak-US relations is due to numerous factors. First, the trillion-dollar Afghan War has reached a stalemate with the Afghan Taliban now controlling the majority of the geography of Afghanistan. Second, president trump's promise of troops' withdrawal from Afghanistan needs to be before fulfilled the upcoming presidential election in Nov 2020. Third, the US can't afford immense use of force in the Pak-Afghan region. President Trump said that he could win the war in Afghanistan in a week, but that he doesn't want to kill millions of people and wipe Afghanistan "off the face of the earth". While highlighting Pakistan importance president Trump said: "I think Pakistan is going to save millions of lives in Afghanistan because I really believe they can, they have a power that other nations don't have with respect to Afghanistan and I would say, as of the moment, they are working very hard and very nicely." These political, economic and strategic factors are compelling the US to safely come out of the Afghan quagmire. The US-led peace initiative under Zalmay Khalil Zad after six rounds of talks-other than agreeing on peace framework haven't yielded any fruitful result till now. Pakistan's successful eradication of terrorism and extremism, its geostrategic location and the betterment in its relations with the outside world has compelled the US to reach out to Pakistan for assistance in ending the Afghan conflict peacefully.

Pakistan Stance on the Afghan issue and its Commitment to Peace

President Trump, while talking about Pak improved relationship with the US said that the US is working with Pakistan to leave Afghanistan. He declared that he does not want the US to be "a policeman" in the region. He told the reporters in White House press conference alongside Pakistan PM Imran Khan that Pakistan has a new leader, he is going to be a great leader of Pakistan. It is a great country, they are very great people. Pakistan's PM brilliantly explained Pakistan's stance in the Oval office press engagement.

Prime Minister Imran Khan while talking to the press in the over office said that there is only one solution for Afghanistan and remarked that a peace deal with the Taliban is closer than it had ever been. He said that this is the closest we have ever come, a military 'solution' to the Afghan war would result in a catastrophic loss of lives. Pakistan's Premier further informed the US that we will be able to urge the Taliban to talk with the Afghan government and come to a political solution.

The US president who was very critical of Pakistan at the start of his tenure immediately appreciated these remarks and said that Pakistan has tremendously helped in the peace process in recent months. He said that "I think Pakistan is going to do a lot [concerning Afghanistan]. I do. I think Pakistan is going to make a big difference," he went on saying that Pakistan is going to save millions of lives in Afghanistan because they can, they have a power that other nations don't have with respect to Afghanistan and I would say, as of the moment, they are working very hard

and very nicely." It has been the stance of Prime Minister from the very beginning that the war against terror could only be won through negotiations. The US' current efforts for peaceful solutions have endorsed the PM vision for peace in the region.

Pakistan's Gains from the US Sojourn

Pakistan gains immensely from the recent improvement in Pak-US relation and PM Khan Visit to the US. The first and foremost gain is that the world has been reminded of the sacrifices Pakistan gave in the war- which was not even its own. Prime Minister Imran Khan in his various engagement at the white house, United States Institute of Peace and at the US Congress underlined Pakistan's sacrifices in the so-called 'War on Terror', reminding that Pakistan had lost 70,000 people and billions of dollars due to the conflict. He apprised the audience of the socio-economic destruction Pakistan faced due to its participation in WOT. He urged the US to recognize Pakistan's efforts and sacrifices. At USIP, he impressed upon the audience that Pakistan seeks a dignified relationship with the US which is not curtailed by the securing or withdrawal of aid. Another important take from the US trip was the arbitration offer for the Kashmir issue by President Trump.

Kashmir Issue

Prime Minister Imran while highlighting Pakistan's effort for Kashmir issues said that we have tried our best, we have made all overtures to India to start a dialogue, resolve our differences through dialogue, but unfortunately, we haven't made headways as yet. But I am hoping that President Trump would push this process." President Donald

Trump informed that PM Modi has asked for arbitration in the Kashmir problem during the G20 2019, Osaka summit. He said, "If I can help, I would love to be a mediator."

Many observers termed these remarks for mediation as being uttered at the heat of the moment. But, the hullabaloo it generated in India shows that the intervention of a third power could produce a viable outcome of the unfinished agenda of the partition. Hindustan Times reported that US courtship of Pakistan amplifies India's challenge'. Similarly, an editorial in The Hindu, titled 'Kashmir mediation: Trump has violated diplomatic protocols' showed the Indian uneasiness.

Pakistan efforts in highlighting the Indian violations of Human rights in the occupied Kashmir is finally bringing result. The Indian frustration with president trump's remarks depicts their dubious and violent role in IOK. The United Nations Report of HR violation in Kashmir and the US president mediation offer will help in the Kashmir cause.

Trade, not Aid

Throughout the trip in his engagements, Imran khan reiterated that Pakistan wants to build a new economic relationship with the US, which is based on Trade and not Aid. He reminded the congressmen at the Capitol Hill that previously, there were always string attached with the US assistance to Pakistan. He urged the lawmakers to play their role in fostering this new relationship. US Senator Lindsay graham while commenting on the Pakistan-US economic relations said that tremendous business

opportunities exist between Pakistan and the US, through a free trade agreement tied to our mutual security interests. It's also our best chance in decades to reset the relationship between the US and Pakistan.

The Way Forward

The latest thaw in Pak-US relations and the subsequent successful efforts by PM Imran Khan to present Pakistan's side of the story in the war against terror depicts that Pakistan has finally got a voice in the international arena. However, the promises made during the recent visit to the US will not be easy to fulfil. The stakeholders involved in the process are not in full control of the state of Pakistan. The rigid position adopted by the Afghan Taliban against the intra-Afghan dialogue and the expected response of their field commanders will be the deciding factors in the outcome of the Afghan peace process. Besides the US, other key global actors like China and Russia are expecting a lot from Pakistan too. Although the recent statement of the Afghan Taliban about its engagement with Pakistan's Prime Minister Invitation for talks is encouraging, their refusal or insistence on issues involved in the peace process would be devastating for Pakistan. The trip to the US is considered as a reset of bilateral relations, but it also has narrow down the margin of failure for Pakistan. The portrayed positive outcomes of the PM visit would only be beneficial if the cooperation in all fields including trade is restored provided Pakistan successfully plays its role in the peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict.