

The Broad Contours of Pakistan-US relations: Reflections on the Post-election scenario

General

The Pakistan-US relations and their future course received marginal attention of both the camps in the U.S. Presidential race. However, now there is a widespread belief that the relationship will be brought into the fore once President Obama is firmly back in the saddle of his 2nd term. This is true because the drivers for a forward move are indeed contained in the persisting nature of the bilateral relationship and 'mutuality of interest' that it carries, atleast in the Afghanistan-specific scenario as the withdrawal approaches.

Convergences and Divergences

The relationship is a sum-total of 'tactical convergences' and 'strategic divergences' between both the states. Amidst the evolving nature of issues, the broad contours of convergences and divergences between them paradoxically remain the same. The following is illustrative:

Convergences	Divergences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eradicating Global extremism. • Peaceful Afghanistan • Maintaining balanced relations • Peace in South-Asia • Economic interests in Central Asia. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relations with Iran remain a point of variance. • Growing US-led Indian involvement in Afghanistan. • Pakistan's strategic/security centric partnership with China. • Pakistan's nuclear program.

In keeping with the above, a brief analysis of the policies voiced by President Obama in his election campaign suggests that a 'status quo' is likely to prevail and in the longer run the U.S. is rather going to be a little aggressive in its policies. For the facility of discussion, the subsequent paragraphs flash President Obama's policies during his election campaign along with an appraisal of their effects after Obama's win.

Obama's posture towards Pakistan

To recall, the larger issues focused by President Obama in the third Presidential debate regarding Pakistan were as following:

- a) **Drone Attacks:** Obama firmly defended the use of unmanned aircrafts to target suspected al-Qaeda militants in the tribal areas near the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, saying other methods would be even more militarily intrusive and that such strikes had "not caused a huge number of civilian casualties."
- b) **Post-2014 scenario in Afghanistan:** in this regard, President Obama while being a little flexible considered repairing the relationship with Pakistan but only for the sake of facilitating trade linkages and assistance in hunting terrorists.
- c) **Nuclear security:** the US has always been critical of Pakistan's nuclear developmental program and so was President Obama in his election campaign.
- d) **Osama Bin Laden:** The President defended his decision of not seeking Pakistan's permission prior to the clandestine operation that resulted in the al-Qaeda leader's death.

Appraisal

The Pakistan-US relations remain contentious. This is true because President Obama's policies regarding Pakistan are ironically still the same. Contrary to Pakistan's hopes, they seemingly don't provide a way forward to the most controversial aspects like the continuation of drone attacks. Nevertheless, the relations are still swinging between 'tactical convergences' and 'strategic divergences'.

In addition, Pakistan's role in the US drawdown from Afghanistan awaits a fresh consideration. Although President Obama acknowledged Pakistan's position in this regard, still tangible policy shifts are required. In this regard, Afghan President Hamid Karzai was also of the view that the results of the US elections may have little impact on US policy towards Afghanistan, as its strategy towards the country had already been set. This is also true for Pakistan.

Pakistani Dilemma

In the overall scenario, the biggest Pakistani dilemma is that the benefits of the partnership are transient and short lived. There is an immense consideration of this subservient behavior at the highest hierarchy in house. In this context, both the states are not just connected because of the convergences, but also to avoid a collision. Pakistani side seems to play just to gain time and space and not look out for long term gains. Thus, it should now show concern in fueling and building upon convergences so that its interests are not diluted.

A way forward

In a nutshell, with President Obama making back to the office, Pakistan will have to keep itself relevant to the U.S. in its regional designs but concurrently should also affirm the observance of its 'Red lines'. It is a major non-NATO ally and has suffered immensely in the global war against terrorism. However, despite its sufferings, the U.S. keeps its policy of cutting down aid and assistance if Pakistan fails to cooperate according to its terms. On the other hand, Pakistan tries to keep up with the U.S. sometimes even at the stake of its own national interest. Nevertheless this security centric partnership continues with its peculiarity and unusual nature.

There is a dire need of neutralizing the aura of strategic divergences by both the states. More emphasis should be laid on convergences based on long term designs which will in turn be beneficial for regional and global peace. Pakistan should take lead in the most pressing issues like the national reconciliation within Afghanistan. It will have to facilitate the process with full throttle and support, but without being depicted as the ones who are interfering. This is only possible if Pakistan and U.S. pursue a pragmatic approach in setting patterns for the future course of the relations.