

1 - Introduction

Pakistan and the United States have a long and complex history of bilateral relations, marked by periods

of cooperation and divergence, alignment and estrangement, friendship and friction. The relationship has been driven by strategic and security interests, as well as by economic and humanitarian assistance.

However, the relationship has also been plagued by mistrust and misunderstanding, as well as by conflicting or competing priorities and policies. The relationship has been particularly strained in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the US-led war in Afghanistan, the US raid that killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan, and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021.

2 - Major Irritants

Some of the major irritants that have adversely affected Pak-US relations are:

a) **Terrorism:** The United States has accused Pakistan of providing safe haven and support to terrorist groups that target US and Afghan forces and interests in Afghanistan, such as the Taliban, the Haqqani network, and al-Qaeda. The United States has also pressured Pakistan to take decisive action against these groups and to sever its ties with them. Pakistan has denied these allegations and has claimed that it has been a victim of terrorism itself, suffering from thousands of casualties and billions of dollars of losses. Pakistan has also argued that it has taken significant steps to combat terrorism and

extremism

within its territory and that it has cooperated with the United States in counterterrorism efforts.

b) Drones: The United States has conducted hundreds of drone strikes in Pakistan's tribal areas along the Afghan border, targeting suspected militants and terrorists. The United States has claimed that these strikes are necessary and effective in eliminating threats to US national security and regional stability. Pakistan has condemned these strikes as violations of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as of international law and human rights. Pakistan has also complained that these strikes have caused civilian casualties and collateral damage, as well as fuelled anti-American sentiment and radicalization among the people.

c) Aid: The United States has provided billions of dollars of aid to Pakistan over the years, both in military and civilian assistance. The United States has claimed that this aid is meant to enhance Pakistan's capacity and capability to fight terrorism, to promote democracy and development, and to foster a strategic partnership. Pakistan has appreciated this aid but has also expressed its dissatisfaction with the conditions and strings attached to it. Pakistan has also criticized the US for suspending or withholding aid on various occasions, citing Pakistan's lack of cooperation or compliance with US demands or expectations.

d) Afghanistan: The United States and Pakistan have had divergent views and interests regarding the situation and future of Afghanistan. The United States has pursued a military intervention and a political settlement in Afghanistan, aiming to defeat the Taliban insurgency, to

establish a stable and democratic government, and to prevent the resurgence of al-Qaeda or other terrorist groups. Pakistan has supported a negotiated solution and an inclusive government in Afghanistan, seeking to protect its security and strategic interests, to avoid a civil war or a refugee crisis, and to balance the influence of India or other regional powers.

2 - Major Junctures:

Some of the major junctures that have positively influenced Pak-US relations are:

- a) *Cold War:* During the Cold War era (1947-1991), Pakistan aligned itself with the United States against the Soviet Union, joining various US-led alliances such as SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) and CENTO (Central Treaty Organization). Pakistan also facilitated the US-China rapprochement in 1971 by hosting a secret visit by Henry Kissinger to Beijing. Pakistan also supported the US-backed mujahideen resistance against the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979-1989, receiving massive military and economic aid from the United States.
- b) *War on Terror:* After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, Pakistan joined the US-led global war on terror, providing crucial logistical and intelligence support to the US military operations in Afghanistan. Pakistan also allowed the use of its airbases and airspace by US forces. Pakistan also launched several military operations against terrorist groups within its territory, such as Operation Zarb-e-Azb in 2014-2016. Pakistan also cooperated with the United States in capturing or killing

several high-profile terrorists, such as Khalid Sheikh Mohammed in 2003.

c) *Peace Process*: In recent years, Pakistan has played an important role in facilitating the peace process between The United States and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Pakistan hosted several rounds of talks between the two sides, As well as between the Taliban and other Afghan stakeholders. Pakistan also persuaded or pressured the Taliban To agree to a ceasefire, a prisoner exchange, an intra-Afghan dialogue, and a power-sharing arrangement. Pakistan Also welcomed the US-Taliban agreement signed in Doha in 2020, and the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021.

3 - Implications for CPEC and Pak-China Relations

The irritants and junctures in Pak-US relations have implications for the CPEC and Pak-China relations, as

follows:

a) The CPEC is a flagship project of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a massive infrastructure and connectivity Program launched by China in 2013. The CPEC aims to link China's Xinjiang province with Pakistan's Gwadar port Through a network of roads, railways, pipelines, and power plants.

The CPEC is expected to boost Pakistan's economy, Energy, trade, and security, as well as to enhance China's access to the Indian Ocean and the Middle East.

b) The United States has expressed its concerns and reservations about the CPEC and the BRI, citing issues such as Debt trap, transparency,

governance, environmental impact, human rights, and strategic implications. The United States Has also urged Pakistan to reconsider or renegotiate its involvement in the CPEC and the BRI, offering alternative Or complementary options such as the Blue Dot Network or the Build Back Better World (B3W) initiative.

c) Pakistan has defended and reaffirmed its commitment to the CPEC and the BRI, rejecting any external pressure or interference. Pakistan has also praised China for its consistent and unconditional support and friendship, calling it an "iron brother" and an "all-weather strategic partner". Pakistan has also expressed its gratitude to China for its assistance in various fields, such as COVID-19 vaccines, climate change, Kashmir issue, and UN Security Council reforms.

3 - Conclusion:

Pak-US relations have been characterized by ups and downs, highs and lows, cooperation and confrontation. The relationship has been influenced by various factors, such as terrorism, drones, aid, and Afghanistan. The relationship has also witnessed some positive developments, such as the Cold War alliance, the war on terror partnership, and the peace process facilitation. The relationship has also implications for the CPEC and Pak-China relations, which are vital for Pakistan's interests and future. Therefore, Pakistan needs to balance its relations with both the United States and China, while safeguarding its sovereignty and dignity.