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Complex matrix of Indo-Pak-US Relations (Frontier Post) 2011

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The complex matrix of Indo-Pak-US relations

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Renowned British historian Arnold J. Toynbee said in a remarkable quote, “The only thing we ever learn from history is that we never learn from history.” British and Soviets historical failure in Afghanistan did not yield any right lessons for the US which still thought it appropriate to try its luck in the ‘Graveyard of Empires’. With receding relative strength and precarious economic condition, the time for right and rational choices might be running out for the US. Rising frustration over its fear of failing in Afghanistan has gradually pushed US policymakers to adopt a policy of making Pakistan a scapegoat in the “End Game” in Afghanistan which could have disastrous regional and global consequences. There is no single narrative coming out from the US on Pakistan. Not going to an extreme extent of speculating that some invisible cult governs US foreign policy, however, one must acknowledge, as already pointed out by Stephen Malt and John Mearsheimer in Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy, the lobbies and pressure groups at times pursue the US foreign policy against US national interest. More so, at times the US corporate industry, the US Department of Defence, the US Department of State and CIA interests don’t converge at one single agenda thus complicating or at times confusing the US policy on a particular issue. The Af-Pak issue is just the case in point and as a result, US-Pakistan relationship has just entered a complicated phase where it can take a sudden and a dramatic turn. A mix of statements from President Obama, Secretary Hillary Clinton, General Petraeus, Admiral Mike Mullen and Leon Panetta has made it extremely difficult to predict as to what lies ahead. The unstable economic situation in the US also suggests that Pakistan honeymoon time with the US might be over and the future US policy might hold more of a stick and less of carrots in order to steer Pakistan towards desired US policy objectives. One of the major irritant in US-Pakistan strategic discourse is the divergence of perceptions on China and India. Just a few days back during an interactive session with Col (R) Thomas Lynch (who served as advisor to Admiral Mike Mullen) the issue of Pak-US relations came under discussion and Col (R) Thomas highlighted that Pakistan is not of much utility for the US in achieving its long term policy objectives until and unless it meets some of the pre-conditions. These pre-conditions set forth by him
were, first, if Pakistan becomes a lucrative market for the US investors, second, if Pakistan changes its policy of hostility towards India, third, if Pakistan accommodates US concerns on nuclear proliferation and fourth, if Pakistan follows US advice on internal security operations. Unfortunately, some of these pre-conditions can’t be met by Pakistan unless a reciprocal gesture comes out from India as well. Pakistan and India cannot move forward till the resolution of Kashmir issue. However, the US policy makers have shown their complete apathy towards this outstanding issue. Of lately, the US has made an unprecedented move of declaring India a dominant power in the region in their game plan of containing China. Whether the Indian politicians would heed to these insane voices emanating from the Capitol Hill and their think tanks, exaggerating the emerging threat from China, is a debatable issue. It is less likely that Indian politicians, having seen the benefits of the economic growth and successful model of Chinese economic power would directly confront China just to appease Washington. China is also not interested in any sort of confrontation with India. However, if it comes to taking on Pakistan, Indians would possibly adopt a different line until and unless Pakistan succumbs to Indian hegemonic posture which is highly unlikely. While Pakistan has taken concrete steps on all the issues of concern within the framework of international security paradigm and has always shown a desire of peaceful co-existence within the region, it still falls short of Washington and Indian expectations. Pakistan can never become a party to US policy of “Containment of China“ and thus may not be of much utility for the US in the long term. If a relationship becomes cumbersome, divorce is a better option. Pakistan and the US would eventually come to a point where divorce becomes inevitable. Therefore, Pakistan must take some concrete steps to secure its position in the region. First, it should strengthen its ties with the regional countries (like Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Central Asian states, etc.) which it ignored for sake of US since last decade or so. Second, Pakistan should develop a criterion based relationship with the US rather than a relationship based on love, trust and friendship which caused repeated embarrassments. In international politics terms like love, trust, morality and friendship are meaningless. It is time now that Pakistan’s political and military leadership must learn the norms of global politics to draw right lessons from the history or else Arnold Toynbee would again prove himself to be right that we never learn from history.

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