

THE EVOLVING GEOPOLITICS AND CHALLENGES TO NATIONAL SECURITY OF PAKISTAN

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Abstract

Traditionally, the geopolitics of Pakistan had always attracted the attention of major powers for their strategic interests. In the process of their usage of Pakistani geopolitics, there emerged rivalries and strategic competition among major powers. The strategic competitions further created conflicts and wars with severe security implications for the region in general and Pakistan in particular. The security challenges, Pakistan have been facing in last seven decades mainly emanates from its geopolitical location. In the past, the power politics among the major powers and clashing interests of regional states had posed serious security threats to the security of Pakistan. For most of the time, instead of using its pivotal geopolitical position for its advantage, it has been played to the disadvantage of Pakistan on many accounts. In the wake of re-emergence of militancy in various parts of the country especially along western borders, Pakistan needs serious re-assessment of the security threats with workable stratagem as way forward. This research aims to highlight three salient aspects of security challenges to Pakistan.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Strategy, Security Challenges, Militancy, Major Powers, Pakistan, Indian, Eastern Borders, Western Borders, Afghanistan, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan.

Introduction

The broader concept of the security is freedom from being insecure from any threats, violence, aggression and pressure. It covers broader aspects like; human security, national (state's) security and international (global) security. The human security is all about safeguarding and securing the masses (human beings) from all uncertainties and threats which may emanates from socio-economic susceptibilities, political polarization, financial and monetary vulnerabilities and

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climatic and environmental hazards. Recent researches on human security indicate that, despite developments and high living standards, threats to human security are increasing even in the richest countries of the world¹.

This is happening despite better civic services, good health facilities and better financial opportunities available to the people a decade earlier. Apart from epidemics like Covid-19, the climate change may cause death of over 40 million people by end of 21st century.² New hazards to human security includes; a feeling of being insecure and trust deficit, inequalities and misuse of digital technologies which give rise to conflicts. States need to reconsider the current policies and strategies for improving the standards of human security through empowerment, freedom and considerations for human development.

At the level of state, security encompasses the security and defence of the state and its citizens from all threats; threats to sovereignty of the state, threats from terrorism, espionage, aggressions and wars. Indeed, the primary responsibilities of the state include; safety and protection of its citizens from all threats and hazards. The national security is a comprehensive and all-inclusive concept, taking lead from the Peace of Westphalia-1648. Conceptually, the national security is considered as control of a nation over its sovereignty, territorial integrity and its future destiny.³ It also infers that, state possesses control over the forces which stops external aggressions; a concept of security of the state.

The international (global) security is yet another aspect of the security which deals with world's security in which all states are consider as the stakeholders and responsible to ensure international peace. Primarily, it is set of ideas, United Nations has developed to avoid another catastrophic war like world war-I and II and even the horrors of cold war in the form of proxy wars and invasions at large. Owing to globalization, international security has turned into a complex and interrelated phenomenon. It has assumed a central theme in international relations.

The main debate in global security is; whether security should be about protecting the state, the individual or else both state and individuals. But, the question arises who should provide security to both, state and individuals in the context of prevailing international security scenarios. Indeed, there is an ambiguous international security system where UN is being exploited by the

power (s) which bears its expenditures and funds it for functioning. Since human beings are at the centre stage of the security, therefore, all three types of the security are inter-related.

International security aims at ensuring security of international community (global society) through international organizations like United Nations. International security entails; global peace, safety, mutual survival, and an all-encompassing security to everyone. This concept is closer to the core values of human security which means “protecting the vital core of all human lives in ways that enhance human freedom and human fulfilment”⁴ Nevertheless, despite UN as a regulating international organization, the security of states has always been at stake. This is mainly because of anarchic nature of the world and power politics among the states and uneven division of the power in international system.

The Evolving Nature of Regional Geopolitical Situation

Two broad factors have played significant role in this world of power politics: a) the geopolitical location of the states and b) geo-economics of the state(s) and the regions. The powerful states at international regional level have always eyed at these two factors for either having influencing them or else attaining control over these two significant aspects for furthering their dominant status. This research is primarily focused on the geopolitical aspects of the security and the challenges emanating from the evolving geopolitical situation in and around Pakistan. The theory of realism is chosen as the theoretical framework for this research. Within realism, structural realism best describe the concept of anarchic nature of the world and its application on Pakistan. The descriptive and analytical methodology is being adopted for the research.

A commonly understood definition of geopolitics is; an interplay of geography, economy and demography.⁵ Indeed, it is combination of political and geographic factors relating to state, its pivotal location, resources and may be elements of national power. As it has been in the past, the Pakistani geopolitics is of great significance for the contemporary major powers, who wished to exploit this for attaining their strategic objectives. The three major powers; United States, China and Russia have their strategic and economic interests in the broader South and Central Asian regions.

United States and Pakistani Geopolitics

Being the super power, US have been anchored in the region ever since the end of World War-II. During the entire era of cold war, it operated against former Soviet Union until the disintegration of later in 1990s. Pakistani geopolitics and its national power potential were fully utilized by U.S in this war of ideologies where capitalist ideology defeated the Communist ideology in the crucial covert war where Afghanistan was chosen as the conclusive battle ground of two former super powers. Upon disintegration of former Soviet Union, US left the region in haste, since it had to prepare for another campaign in Middle East where it's (US) blue boy, Saddam Hussian was waiting for the green signal from Pentagon to invade Kuwait.⁶ Saddam's invasion of Iraq was responded by 'Operation Desert Storm' whose phase-II was completed in 2003 which brought an end to Saddam's era and imposition of imperialism in entire Middle East. Prior to this US and NATO invaded Afghanistan in the garb of 9/11 terrorist attacks and remained there until August 2021.

The incident of 9/11 was neither planned nor executed by any Afghan national, yet hundreds of thousands of Afghans and over 80,000 Pakistani nationals became victims of this U.S lead Coalition war which was participated by forty-eight countries. Nevertheless, U.S made another usage of Pakistani geopolitics for two decades during its well-planned global war against terrorism from 2001-2021. In a way, the Pakistani geopolitics played a decisive role for U.S and NATO in this prolonged war against terrorism where former had well defined strategic objectives against its competitors. It is worth mentioning that US and NATO invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 and dislodged Taliban Government in a period of less than one month. In August 2021, upon pull-out of US and NATO, Taliban Government was reinstated under the famous US-Taliban Agreement of February 29, 2020.

The abovementioned debate is a clear clearly indication of the fact that, regional geopolitics and strategic objectives of U.S were at the forefront rather its enmity with Afghan Taliban. While being in Afghanistan for over two decades, U.S pursued its strategic objectives against its two peer competitors in international power politics; China and Russia while simultaneously downgrading and undermining nuclear Pakistan, destabilizing Iran and influencing Central Asian region. Apart from that, US made long-term strategic engagement with India on multiple economic and strategic issues. From 2003 to 2021, India fully exploited chaotic situation in Afghanistan for establishing its foothold and used Afghan soil

against Pakistan for promoting terrorism all over Pakistan in various forms and facets. On the issues of geopolitics, there remained complete cooperation between US and India during US prolonged military presence in Afghanistan.

China and Russia from the Perspective of Regional Geopolitics

China and Russia are otherwise in the close proximity of Pakistan, therefore, find Pakistani geopolitics as very essential for accomplishment of their strategic and economic objectives. During the first two decades of 21st century, both China and Russia maintained a steady pressure for the pull-out of U.S and NATO forces from Afghanistan. The forum of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was fully utilized by these two major powers to counter the growing role of US and NATO in the regional politics of South and Central Asia and broader region of Eurasia. Since Afghanistan remained as the centre of conflict for over four decades now therefore, Pakistan remained as a directly affected state from all aspects; political, strategic, economic and social.

After the demise of former Soviet Union, Francis Fukuyama asserted introduction of liberal values of west since humankind reached to the end of its history. His view was no more “ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”⁷ But, it was just an assumption, since world politics is governed by power politics with realism as the order of the day. In less than two decade there was beginning of a new war between US and China, proving his analogy as misperception. The new cold war begins with multiple power centres (major powers); US versus China and US versus Russia. Whereas US-Russian cold war has entered into its decisive phase of physical domain in 2022, in the war theatre of Ukraine after US silence over the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the China-US are still in the domain of war of commerce and trade. There are other strategic dimensions of US-China rivalry; a) tension over Taiwan, b) differences over South China Sea and c) China-Japan front in East China Sea.

The US-China tension over the Taiwan is a constant factor in their bilateral relations. China strongly protested over the visit of Nancy Pelosi, former US Speaker of the House in August 2022. Nancy gave a clear message to China through the visit. “The visit should be seen as an unequivocal statement that America stands with Taiwan, our democratic partner, as it defends itself and its freedom. The U.S. is not going to be intimidated by threats.”⁸ China sees this visit and message as an assault on the sovereignty of China. In 2021 and 2022, there

were clear signals from NATO against China and its military modernization. NATO considered China as a security threat for itself and for the security of the globe.

While NATO considered its military alliance and interferences and invasions as a justified act, "Our pursuit of defence and military modernisation is justified"⁹ Chinese military modernization is considered as unjustified. On its part China stressed NATO alliance to promote dialogue rather heading towards a conflict which does not serve the purpose of anyone. In the broader Asia-Pacific, Quad is emerging as yet another alliance with possible threats for China. Some analysts of international relations declare Quad as Asian NATO for any military action in Asian Continent in any future scenario.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QSD), generally called Quad, is primarily a forum for strategic security dialogue between its member states. Currently, US, India, Australia and Japan are its members. The forum aims at working for an all-inclusive Asia-Pacific (rename as Indo-Pacific). The forum has already intensified its security and economic cooperation among its four members for keeping an eye on the rising China. Through heavy investment, Quad is in the process of infrastructural development in Asia-Pacific. A step aims a undermining the China in the regional politics.

The Russia-Ukraine war is being perceived by neo-classical realists as a return of conventional warfare. On one hand the war has put the security of smaller state into danger while at the other hand U.S and NATO are finding it as an opportune moment to degrade and bleed Russia through a process of attrition. While initiating the war, Russia dreamt of returning into the mode of Soviet Union through larger domination over former soviet states. However, this did not happen and after a year of its unsuccessful efforts of physically taking over the Ukraine, Russia is looking for an excuse to move out from war theatre. U.S and NATO are making efforts to prolong the war for further degradation of Russia, leaving behind only one peer competitor in the form of China.

The visit of President Xi Jinping to Moscow in March 2023 could have paved the way for possible negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. Nevertheless, there are no signs of any breakthrough in this war. Visit of President Xi Jinping is being viewed in the west as a tangible re-affirmation of Beijing's support for the Moscow. There have been many agreements between Russia and

China during this visit. Nevertheless, China did ask for end of Russia-Ukraine war¹⁰ alongside the visit of Xi Jinping, the Japanese Prime Minister made a surprised visit of Ukraine on March 21, 2023. Japan is a US ally in the Asia Pacific and visit of its Prime Minister; Mr Fumio Kishida is being viewed as a counter strategy to the visit of President Xi Jinping. This visit has two connotations; a) Japan firmly stand with US and West over Ukraine war and b) the existing divide between China and Japan may enlarge in future even in the politics of Asia-Pacific region.¹¹

The Pakistani Perspective of Regional Geopolitics

From the Pakistani perspective, the evolving geopolitical situation needs a very careful analysis at three levels: a) national, b) regional and c) international. Indeed, Pakistan's security challenges are outcome of the regional and international happenings, therefore there is a need to debate all these jointly while evaluating their impacts on each other. Internationally and regionally, the power play of major powers against each other has wider implications on Pakistan, since the latter is located at a key geographical position, commonly described as geographic pivot of the history. In the historical perspective, regional and global invasions and interferences in Afghanistan have always adversely impacted Pakistan.

Domestically, Pakistan is facing multiple fault-lines, all impeding the national unity and harmony. These fault-lines are outcome of the repeated bad governance and conspiracies of external powers. Four major fault-lines are posing serious security threats to national unity. These include; a) the growing tendency of ethnic divide, b) the simmering dangers of sectarianism, c) rising trends of sub-nationalism in some parts of the country, and d) the un-ending political polarization and social intolerance. Though Pakistan is a multi-ethnic state, yet there have been strong bonds between masses belonging to various ethnic groups. In last few years, the ethnic fault-lines enlarged in Pakistani society because of two factors; one, political parties tried to trigger the ethnic factor as an easy way to attain political victory and second, socio-economic deprivations in rural and under-development areas provoked this tendency among the masses of some provinces and communities.

The sectarianism in Pakistan has been motivated by both domestic and external forces. Domestically, there are interest groups within religious scholars of various schools of thoughts who intend to take lead role in the field of religion by

increasing their number and size. Some of them have connections with external forces, those provide them financial assistance for two purposes; one, to increase their own schools of thought in Pakistan for impacting national polices and two, to make political use of the people belonging to various sects once they needed it in a future scenarios. Both of these usages of sectarianism are seriously harming the national integration of Pakistan by dividing the society on religious lines.

There existed trends of sub-nationalism from the decades 1950s; however, there has been a sharp increase in these trends towards beginning of 21st century. Currently, Balochistan province has few betrayed groups who demonstrate their sub-nationalistic tendencies. Owing to the vastness of the provincial geographic extent, the sub-nationalists find an easy going and forcing the poor people to take arms against the state and its security forces. The locals of the province may not have such tendencies yet the external forces are very active to create and provoke such tendency. The current phase in the sub-nationalistic trend started after the killing of Nawab Akbar Bughti, the former Governor of Balochistan. Owing to geopolitical reasons, there are likely chances that, sub-nationalists will continue their anti-state activities for a foreseeable future.

Indeed, the external elements are all out to destabilize the province for their strategic usage against Pakistan and some neighbouring states of the region. The Government needs to address this issue on war footings before it gets out of control. Under the process of national integration, all sub-nationalists must be motivated to surrender themselves for national harmony and integration. They should be mainstreamed by the Federal Government. Political polarization is very recent phenomenon which begins after 2013. There has been very sharp increase in the political polarization in Pakistan in just ten years. Alongside the political polarization there is a growing tendency of political and social intolerance. In the context of political stability in Pakistan, this fault-line needs to be seriously analysed by the political leadership of the country else, this can be exploited by external forces for their geopolitical objectives.

Security Challenges Emanating from Evolving Geopolitics

As a branch of geography, the geopolitics explains the relationship between geographical realities of the state (s) and international politics and international relations. Geopolitics is indeed the study of earth's geography viz-a-viz its relations with other states through the instrument of foreign policy for predicting the behaviours of other states. The geographical variables include;

topographical nature, demographic nature and the natural resources of the state(s). In the geopolitics, the primary focus is on power politics; the political power while linking it with geographic space. In the contemporary environment, the geopolitics covers the wider aspects of international political relations and its global structure. The evolving nature of geopolitics primarily explains two aspects; a) What are the characters of the geographical interacting polities what are changes in the role and character and b) How they change their interaction with each other viz-a-viz previous interactions.

Besides involvement of major powers in the regional politics of South and Central Asia, India is a major regional actor that has constantly pursued its strategic interests beyond its geographical borders or else beyond South Asian region. The security challenges for Pakistan, emanating from eastern borders (India) have been serious but a known fact, since there remained hostilities between India and Pakistan ever since their independence in 1947. Nevertheless, there have been changes in the patterns of Indian targeting Pakistan since the beginning of 21st century.

Rather opting for conventional warfare, India has repeatedly created dilemmas for Pakistan through direct and indirect strategies. These strategies include: a) maligning Pakistan in terrorism and militancy through false flag operations, conducted on Indian soil like Indian Parliament attack December 13, 2001, Mumbai attack November 26, 2008 and Pathankot Air Base attack January 2, 2016, b) Accusing Pakistan for attacks in Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK) like Uri attack on September 18, 2016 and Pulwama attack of February 14, 2019 besides so many other incidents.

These Indian strategies of false flag operations aimed to defame Pakistan by libelling it as a country supporting terrorism and terrorists. Through these strategies India was able to alienate Pakistan on political and diplomatic fronts internationally whereas truth is quite contrary. Pakistan has the unique honour and distinction of defeating terrorism and terrorists in first two decades of 21st century. The NATO and U.S failed to do this task despite their heavy military presence (150,000 troops) in Afghanistan in the garb of country terrorism and militancy. Whereas the world as a whole appreciates the counter terrorism strategy of Pakistan, India is the only country which blames Pakistan on account of militancy and terrorism.

Apart from eastern front, Pakistan is facing constant security threats from western fronts. From 2001 to 2021, there have been active militancy and terrorism from all along Pak-Afghan border. There was cooperation between Indian spying network, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) and Afghan spying network, National Directorate of Security (NDS) to promote terrorism in Pakistan. For almost two decades, Afghan soil was used as a hideout for the terrorists, which operated in various parts of Pakistan for terrorist's attacks and bombing the mosques, attacks on security forces, national installations and innocent people of Pakistan. Pakistan lost over 80,000 people in these terrorist attacks from 2001 to 2021. Besides physical losses of human and national assets, Pakistan suffered economic losses of over 149 billion, owing to security issues in the country and terrorism, unleashed on Pakistan in the garb of global war on terror or else as fallout of the Pakistani efforts of combating the terrorism.

In the post U.S and NATO pull-out from Afghanistan, it was expected that there will be an end to the terrorism in Pakistan from Afghan soil after takeover of Interim Taliban Government in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, it went quite opposite of the expectations and Interim Taliban Government proved more toxic and anti-Pakistan. Despite its unclear future and non-recognition by any country, it is constantly facilitating the militants of a terrorist outfit; Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). In the post-Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021, the security situation has worsened in Pakistan. There is a rise in the militancy from across the Pak-Afghan border. In their offensive acts, the Taliban militia removed the fencing from many places along Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

Pakistan fenced the Pak-Afghan border from 2015-2021, covering over 90% area. The fencing was aimed to stop the militancy from across the border. Removal of the fence from border clearly aims to promote and support the militancy in Pakistan while abetting the TTP militants hiding in various parts of Afghanistan since 2010. Since August 2021, TTP militants while using the Afghan soil are constantly attacking Pakistan military posts and other security agencies.

Despite US and NATO pull-out from the region in August 2021, Afghanistan is still fragile and been viewed a hub of future militancy and regional instability. Pakistan is facing serious challenges to its security from Afghan soil where there exists an association and collaboration between interim Taliban Government and Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP). Since August 2021, Pakistani military and civilian populations are being targeted constantly by TTP and other

militant groups. These militants have been hiding in various provinces of Afghanistan (in their hideouts) since the launch of military operations from 2010 to 2017. Indeed, the evolving regional geopolitics and interests of major powers in the region have created new and dangerous security threats for Pakistan which is increasing with the passage of time.

The Suggested Way Forward

In the absence of long-term strategies for a wholesome security of the country, there have been irrational decisions, taken by successive ruling elites of Pakistan in last seventy-five years. Most of these decisions proved against the national interests and national integration of Pakistan. Unfortunately, in the entire history of Pakistan there remained too much reliance on external powers, external finances and resultant external dictates, ignoring the domestic situation and national interest of the country. So much so, the vision of the founder of Pakistan, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah was ignored. He believed that, first duty of the state (Pakistan) has to be towards the people in maintaining law and order for protection of life and property of its masses. Domestic peace and stability is the most important ingredient towards nation building. A safe and secure country provides a platform to all the state's institutions to flourish and perform their functions to their optimum capacity. Besides, it will attract the domestic and foreign investment in the country for ultimate economic development and prosperity of the masses.

The geographical location of Pakistan has not been utilized to accrue the benefits, it could have achieved. In the past, regional countries and major powers used Pakistani geopolitics for their own benefits while causing security challenges and threats for Pakistan. In the contemporary environment Pakistan is surrounded by two politically and economically isolated states; Iran and Afghanistan. Besides, it is enjoying good relationship with China which is a peer competitor of United States in the global politics. There is an on-going war between US and China ranging from economy and trade to strategic influencing the various parts of the world for their respective domination. Russia is yet another peer competitor of US is located in the neighbourhood of Pakistan. Besides, India and U.S are strategic partners and collaborating at multiple levels in the regional politics of South and Central Asia. All regional and global happenings between major powers effect Pakistani domestic situation and its international relationship in the domain of its foreign policy.

To lessen the impacts of conflicting international power politics, Pakistan must concentrate on its domestic front. In this regards, Pakistan must take immediate measures at three levels; a) must bring political stability through a consensus process of all political parties and other stakeholders, b) concentrate on economic uplift of the country by mobilizing domestic resources and indigenous methods, c) devise a dynamic foreign policy without biases and ambiguous alliance system. Clarity in its foreign policy followed by domestic political stability will pave the ground for a gradual economic prosperity.

In order to reduce the impacts of evolving geopolitical situation, Pakistan must normalize and strengthen its relationship with its neighbours on one hand and Muslim world on the others. Its relationship with three major powers and European Union should be based on its own national interests rather serving their interests with biases. Pakistan must diversify its economic opportunity through gigantic projects like China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). To reduce rivalry over the project there can be more participants of the project which would increase investment in the country on one hand and diversify the projects on the other hand. Since CPEC is purely on Pakistani soil, therefore, Pakistan should have the authority to add on the investors while increasing stakes for the regional states and other interested states at international level. Education and technological advancement is yet another area which can serve as a catalyst in the nation building and its international standing. The investment in education sector will provide solution to successive failure at national level as reflected in the ignorance theory of nations' inequality. The essence of the Theory is low education breeds poor leadership, ill-informed, illiterate, inefficient, ill-advised and ignorant of the worth of the national wealth ultimately dragging their country to a dismal situation, whereas education produces enlightened and informed leaders, advisors, think-tanks and policymakers, capable of taking the country out of crisis.

Conclusion

Upon completion of seventy-five years of its independence, there exist socio-political unrest in the country with a wider gulf between masses and the ruling elites. Through a gradual process of development and indigenous progress the state and society of Pakistan could have been transformed into a modern nation. If the poor state could attain the nuclear capability with meagre economic resources, it could have attained other goals of social economic development and technological advancements. An analysis of the governance system of Pakistan

would reveal that, there remained serious shortcomings in the orientation of successive leadership of the country. They were found wanting towards national issues and national development and promoted personal interests and maximum the interests of their political outfit. They failed to promote strategic culture and strategic thinking among masses.

The security challenges facing the state and society of Pakistan can largely be attributed to the geopolitical location of Pakistan and its ideological basis. Indeed, Pakistan ideally fits into the Pivot State concept, which is based on the Heartland Theory of Sir Halford John Mackinder. There are two opposing dimensions of the geopolitically pivotal state of Pakistan. On the one hand the geopolitics is a blessing for Pakistan whereas on the other it has become a curse. Unfortunately, Pakistan could not really cash the blessings of its geopolitically pivotal position in its entire history. Rather its sufferance is still continuing on account of its geopolitically position. The contemporary security challenges facing Pakistan is an extension of its past security dilemmas, predicaments and causative features as mentioned above. The strategic planners of Pakistan must devise policies which benefit the state from its geopolitical location, its ideological foundations, its resilient masses, its nuclear armed professional military and social underpinnings.

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