

Pakistan-U.S. Cooperation and the Recent Wave of Anti-Americanism in Pakistan

Attiq-ur-Rehman & Muhammad Haseeb Murad

Abstract

People-to-people contacts between nations generally reinforce the formal interactions of states in the form of broad, multilevel collaborations between governments. Indeed, the establishment of ties between states is closely linked to increasing people-to-people interactions between nations, and, in this regard, Pak-U.S. collaboration is no exception. Bilateral cooperation between Washington and Islamabad has always been considered an essential dimension of Pak-U.S. relations given a general trust deficit between the two states. The changing patterns of cooperation between Pakistan and the United States cannot be divorced from the varying nature of anti-Americanism in the Pakistani society, especially its unprecedented growth in the past few months. The prevalence of the contemporary wave of anti-American sentiment in Pakistan is linked to the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)'s public demonstrations and mass gatherings based on their anti-US rhetoric. This rhetoric that stemmed from an anti-imperialist discourse has now been recognized as an effective political tool for cultivating public support and political traction. This paper is an endeavour to examine this dramatic growth of public antipathy toward the U.S. in the past few months; analyze the structural features of the Pakistani society that encourage such anti-American sentiment; and provide recommendations for addressing this in order to facilitate more effective Pak-U.S. bilateral relations.

Keywords: People-to-People contacts, Social Collaboration, Cultural Cooperation, Pakistan-United States Relations, Anti-Americanism.

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1. Introduction:

The changing patterns of cooperative interaction between the United States and Pakistan cannot be separated from the bilateral collaboration between the governments of both states in different fields. The mainstream formats of bilateral collaboration between the leading political authorities of both states always remained active in covering the social, political, economic, and security domains. The desire for keeping their bilateral ties multidimensional and multi-layered has led the governments of both states to construct strong bonds of two-sided active political coordination and diplomatic communication. The active political and diplomatic interconnectedness has resulted in substantial economic and strategic collaborations between U.S. and Pakistan. The decades-long history of Pak-US friendly relations passed through various phases under the shadows of regional and global compulsions.¹ The political pressures of South Asian regional politics on Pakistan and the pressures of global power politics on the U.S. forced the leaders of both states to remain cooperative allies under various political administrations. In other words, the change of governments in both countries remained ineffective in bringing significant changes in their interstate cooperative framework. Apart from certain turning points in the history of Pak-US relations, the mainstream patterns of bilateral collaboration predominantly followed a model of mutual cooperation. The initiation of relations between both states was an appreciable move in the first phase of Cold War politics when Pakistan decided to join the American alliance against the communist designs of the Soviet Union. The signing of various economic deals and security agreements between the governments of both states in the subsequent years resulted in a multilevel Washington-Islamabad political collaboration. Indian opposition to the creation of Pakistan and the Soviet Union's hostility towards the United States were the main factors that structured a close Pak-US alliance against the bipolar designs of the international system. Thus, the pressures of South Asian regional and international power politics convinced the U.S. and Pakistani political authorities to support each other against the prevailing

threats of the Cold War while emphasizing strengthening their economic and military relations.ⁱⁱ

While exploring several avenues of cooperation under a broad interstate cooperation, the changing political regimes in the U.S. and Pakistan have also faced various challenges to their cooperative bilateralism in the form of a consistently growing anti-American sentiment in the Pakistani society. This has jeopardized the scope of progressive people-to-people connections between Washington and Islamabad. In other words, the social dimension of Pak- U.S. relations has been undermined by an overwhelming wave of anti-Americanism in the Pakistani society, and it has always been considered a significant impediment to achieving the desired goals of their bilateral cultural ties. Other than the general public's aversion towards the U.S., the government of Pakistan also faced varying dimensions of public opposition to the mainstream foreign policy designs of Islamabad regarding the US.ⁱⁱⁱ Indeed, the mainstream designs of Pakistan's foreign policy continually received public opposition to its decisions for supporting Washington's standing in global power politics. Despite the active role of the US diplomatic community in Pakistan and different channels of US humanitarian aid to Pakistan, the rising levels of anti-American sentiments hindered the cultural connections of Washington with Islamabad. The general public in Pakistan considers the U.S. an anti-Islamic nation engaged in unethical political interventions worldwide, hence disapproving Washington's alliance with Islamabad. Many religious groups and political parties have further reinforced the existing patterns of anti-American sentiment across Pakistani society.^{iv}

However, in contrast to the traditional anti-Americanism in Pakistan, the recent wave of aversion towards the U.S. emerged from the political domains of the country. The contemporary public antipathy against the U.S. was initiated by the former ruling party of Pakistan, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). The leader of the PTI reinvigorated the already prevalent anti-American feelings among the Pakistani public through its political rhetoric of the alleged U.S. role in "the regime

change” in Pakistan that ousted the PTI and replaced it with the PMLN.^v This, in turn, has been reinforced with powerful and widespread anti-American slogans that resonated with people’s sentiments.^{vi} PTI’s narrative of the alleged American involvement in the internal affairs of Pakistan rapidly spread across the country and augmented the conventional patterns of anti-American feelings in the society.^{vii} This paper is focused primarily on the nature of this anti-American sentiment as well as its acceptance by the Pakistani public. The study endeavours to analyze the recent wave of public antipathy towards Washington in the context of a long history of anti-American sentiment in Pakistan. It seeks to identify the structural features of the Pakistani society that played a role in nurturing the American opposition in different segments of the society. The paper argues that the fundamental cause of a growing public antipathy towards the United States in Pakistan is an absence of active and rigorous cultural interconnectedness between the two peoples. Finally, the paper provides recommendations for addressing the issue of American opposition in the Pakistani society.

Cultural Collaboration under Anti-Americanism

The two-sided ambitions for constructing active societal connections always remained an unachievable task and an ambitious dream for the governments of the U.S. and Pakistan. The leaders of both states recognize it as a potential hurdle hindering the scope of their enhanced diplomatic communication and political coordination. The undeniable forces of anti-U.S. sentiments in Pakistan heavily jeopardized the broader context of Pak-U.S. cultural relations and underestimated the mutual desire for connecting the two peoples.^{viii} Despite investing heavily in the civilian domain, the U.S. government is inefficient in improving its national image in the society of a close ally and a frontline state in Washington’s initiated global counterterrorism campaign.^{ix} The surveys of different independent research institutions from around the world have documented the increasing anti-U.S. sentiment, its nature, and promotion in Pakistan. The research-based analysis of the global academic community has divided

the anti-American feelings of Pakistani society into two categories. In the first category, people hate America as a nation, whereas in the second category, anti- U.S. sentiment is linked to the public disliking of U.S. policies both globally and in South Asia. In fact, both these aspects of anti-American sentiment can be said to have been interconnected throughout history.

Indeed, this opposition to Washington's foreign relations with Islamabad posed serious challenges to the U.S. humanitarian assistance to Pakistan in different sectors. A brief survey of various packages of humanitarian aid, financial assistance, and economic support provides a comprehensive picture of the U.S. investment in the Pakistani society. The US government's contribution to power and energy, business and trade, education and health, and culture and society are fundamentally designed to cultivate a friendly social environment across Pakistani society. The leading diplomatic and political authorities from both sides have tried to overcome the deficient dimension of their cooperative interaction under different political administrations. However, the efforts of mainstream leadership to reduce the widening people-to-people gaps prove to be a serious challenge. Keeping in view the varying intensities of public opposition originating from the Pakistani society against the American policies, it is essential to overview the turning points of Pak-U.S. cooperative ties and the two-sided inefficiency in overcoming the societal disconnects.

The Genesis of Pak-U.S. Cooperative Relations

Pak-U.S. bilateral relations can be traced back to the post-World War II period when the British colonial retreat from the South Asian subcontinent created Pakistan as an independent and sovereign Muslim state. The partition of the subcontinent allowed Pakistan to appear as an independent state on the map of the world and encouraged its initial Muslim leadership to lay the foundations of sovereign foreign relations with the outside world. The transformation of the international system amid the global wave of decolonization that created various independent

states pushed the whole international system toward bipolarity in which the United States and the Soviet Union initiated an alliance-counter alliance strategy. The alliance politics of the Cold War period reached every corner of the world and tried to divide the international system between these two opposing blocs. The South Asian version of alliance politics encouraged Pakistan to support U.S. global designs and formally subscribe to the U.S. alliance by signing two defense pacts, SEATO and CENTO. These agreements globally declared Pakistan as an ally of the United States, and the subsequent developments in the Pak-US ties predominantly remained focused on the geostrategic designs of the Soviet Union.^x The Cold War politics engaged Washington and Islamabad in the geostrategic dimension of the bipolar international system without paying substantial attention to the marginalized areas of their broader cooperative bilateralism. In the list of leading cooperative areas between Washington and Islamabad, the ambitious plans of cultural collaboration between the two nations were undermined by the widespread promotion of anti-American thoughts in the Pakistani society. An unprecedented wave of anti-American sentiments and their acceptance across the country became an undeniable reality and an irrefutable truth for the governments of both nations. Despite activating various channels of humanitarian aid and financial assistance, the leading state officials of the U.S. considered the societal disconnects between Washington and Islamabad as a potential challenge to U.S. engagement with South Asia.^{xi}

The transformation of the international system from bipolarity to unipolarity brought the entire international political landscape under the U.S. influence in the Soviet-less international system. It was the end of the Cold War era and the disappearance of a forty-year-long clash between the Soviet Union and the United States. However, these structural changes in the international system proved ineffective in countering the persistent growth of anti-American feelings in Pakistan. The tragic incident of 9/11 and the initiation of the U.S. global war on terror realigned Pakistan to the United States that declared it a frontline state in the U.S.-led global war against terrorism. The subsequent developments granted Pakistan the status of a

non-NATO ally and altered the conventional designs of cooperative bilateralism between both states. The formulation of the counterterror alliance made Islamabad the recipient of U.S. economic and strategic assistance, which negatively impacted the Washington-Islamabad bilateral cooperation and created a deep trust deficit between the two governments. However, one of the most significant developments regarding the anti-American sentiment in Pakistan has been the dramatic ousting of the PTI government; initially a domestic political crisis, the PTI's removal caused massive damage to the Pak-U.S. relations.

Causes of Anti-Americanism in Pakistan

The global wave of anti-Americanism has touched different parts of the world and become an essential feature of various regional politics. The growing U.S. engagement around the world has been coupled with a worldwide opposition to the U.S. role in the great power politics, especially in the case of developing countries including Pakistan.^{xii} In particular, the recent wave of anti-American thought in Pakistan emerged from the domestic political crisis in which the change of the PTI regime became a prime factor in reinforcing the anti-U.S. feelings of the people.^{xiii} Given the recent political crisis in Pakistan, it can simply be maintained that the opposition to U.S. engagement in Pakistan has become a vulnerable dimension of Pakistan's society that can easily be exploited in any dimension.^{xiv} The governments of both states have accepted this societal vulnerability as a significant hurdle in their foreign policies. An analytical examination of the PTI's version of U.S. opposition reveals that the contemporary anti-U.S. political trend of the society has long been present in the societal structure of Pakistan. This can be measured with the help following factors:

i. Ideological Motivations

The ideologically motivated and religiously sensitive societal structure of Pakistan owes to the dominant role that religion played in the creation of Pakistan. The ideological foundations

of Pakistan have produced a highly motivated ideological society that is generally against the influences of non-Muslim states on Islamabad's sovereign decisions and independent values. Such ideological fundamentalism in Pakistan has over the years reached its zenith and resulted in the spread of fanatical cultural trends across the country. This development fractured the socio-political fabric of the nation and promoted a religiously conservative social environment across the country.^{xv} The deeply rooted religious culture in the society has affected foreign relations of Islamabad with the outside world. In this way, Washington's South Asian policy generally receives critical responses from Pakistani society based on its influential role in the bilateral relations between Washington and Islamabad. It has also promoted a sense of disaffection among the Pakistani people.

ii. Indian Element

The U.S. recognition of India as a close strategic partner and its signing of various defense deals and security agreements with New Delhi is a controversial dimension of Washington's broader South Asian policy for the Pakistani people. The multiplying strategic connections between Washington and New Delhi have raised several serious concerns for Islamabad due to the historical rivalry between India and Pakistan. The strategic competition between India and Pakistan has penetrated the societal structures of both states, analogous to injecting societal toxicity into the public of both rival nations across the border.^{xvi} In the presence of decades-long rivalry between New Delhi and Islamabad, the expanding ventures of the New Delhi-Washington strategic partnership are the root causes of spreading anti-American sentiments among the Pakistani public and the opposition of Pakistani people to the South Asian policy of the U.S.

iii. Afghanistan Factor

In addition to the growing strategic significance of India in the broader framework of the U.S. South Asian policy, the political stability of Afghanistan and the creation of a peaceful Afghan society are at the core of Washington's engagement in the

nuclearized subcontinent. The local Afghans have also raised their concerns regarding the U.S. involvement in the internal Afghan affairs, a sentiment that is shared by the Pashtun population living across the Pak-Afghan border. Thus, the U.S. involvement in Afghanistan is one of the leading causes of rising anti-Americanism in Pakistan as well. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan due to the Doha Peace Agreement between the Afghan Taliban and the U.S. has altered the American South Asian policy without addressing the Afghan-driven antipathy of the Pakistani society towards the U.S.^{xvii}

iv. War on Terror

The situation in Afghanistan is the outcome of the U.S. international counterterror campaign in response to the tragic incident of 9/11. U.S. invasion of Afghanistan under the broader framework of the global war on terror posed serious questions to Pakistan's sovereignty when the terror-combating operations of the U.S. initiated drone strikes on the areas across the Pak-Afghan border.^{xviii} The drone strikes became an undeniable force in further fuelling anti-Americanism. The opposition to the U.S. decision to involve Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) in counterterror operations is primarily linked to the issue of collateral damage and forced Islamabad to formally adopt a critical position against the U.S. terror-combating operations in South Asia.

v. Politics of the Muslim World

Islamabad's association with the Muslim world is primarily rooted in its objective of gaining the support of Islamic countries in regional and extra-regional affairs. In addition to securing the status of the only nuclear weapon state in the Muslim world, Islamabad's leading role in the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC) improved Pakistan's cooperative bonds with the Islamic countries.^{xix} The improving connections of Islamabad with the leaders of the Muslim world created a Muslim solidarity that reinforced the already growing anti-American sentiments in the Islamic countries. U.S.

diplomatic crisis with Iran, an immediate neighbor of Pakistan, further complicated the politics of the Muslim world especially in the context of the U.S. strategic collaboration with Saudi Arabia. This situation has led Pakistan-based ideological supporters of Iran to stand against the decisions of Islamabad for supporting Washington in world power politics.^{xx}

vi. Palestinian and Kashmiri Issues

The Pakistani public has a strong affiliation to and sympathy for the plight of Muslims across the world. U.S. reluctance in highlighting and preventing the massive human rights abuses of the Palestinian and Kashmiri people directly hurt the ideological sentiments of the Pakistani people who are hypersensitive about the issues of Palestine and Kashmir.^{xxi} It is widely believed that Washington's silence on the constantly expanding human rights violations in the occupied areas of Palestine and Kashmir is due to U.S. multidimensional collaborative ties with Israel and India. Additionally, Washington's strategic support to its Middle Eastern (Israel) and South Asian (India) allies negatively impacts its image in Pakistan.^{xxii}

vii. U.S.-China Competition

The on-going trade war between Beijing and Washington has complicated the great power politics in which China's decision for expanding its economic collaboration with Pakistan has upset the U.S. designs in the South Asian region. Washington does not approve of the CPEC, the mega economic corridor project between Beijing and Islamabad. The U.S. disapproval of the Sino-Pak economic cooperation has strengthened the strategic relations between Washington and New Delhi without calculating its impacts on the historical India-Pakistan rivalry. In other words, the pressures of international great power politics led Washington to oppose the increasing economic alliances of Beijing with different states across the world.^{xxiii} The global rise of China has further convinced the United States to improve its strategic alignments around the globe while considering India as a suitable actor to contain China. Both scenarios affected Pakistan's standing in its home region

and were crucial factors in boosting the anti-American thought in the Pakistani society.

The persistently growing opposition to Pak-U.S. cooperative bilateralism in Pakistan has made Islamabad the most challenging dimension of the U.S. foreign policy. Indeed, the U.S. has also engaged a strategic community in promoting its soft image in Pakistan through various civil-military projects. Instead of crafting an innovative strategy based on a combination of cultural and civilian assistance, the leading state officials of the U.S. instead emphasize active supplies of economic and strategic aid to Islamabad. Thus, the current wave of anti-American feelings and the rising critical slogans vis-à-vis Islamabad's foreign relations with Washington need to be situated in this history of the anti-American sentiment in Pakistan. Akin to various religious and political parties of Pakistan, the present trend of anti-U.S. slogans was initiated by the former ruling party of the country, formally known as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).^{xxiv}

PTI's Version of Anti-Americanism

Anti-American rhetoric has largely been recognized in Pakistan as an effective political tool for securing various interests by mainstream political parties of Pakistan. Blaming Washington for its active involvement in the internal affairs of Pakistan usually helps political authorities in Islamabad to preserve their declining position in the society, which further shapes the anti-U.S. narrative. The contemporary slogans of PTI "Imported Government Na Manzoor" or "Absolutely Not" have intensified the existing trust deficit between the United States and Pakistan, whereby the public opinion has turned more critical towards Islamabad's foreign relations with Washington.^{xxv} These slogans shaped Pakistani public opinion against the United States while highlighting the U.S. government as an influential actor in bringing major political changes in the government of Pakistan. The PTI leadership blamed the U.S. for its alleged involvement in unseating Imran Khan from the position of Prime Minister. The anti-U.S. rhetoric of the PTI was further reinforced at massive public protests and rallies that

blamed the U.S. for imposing its imperialist designs on Islamabad. The mass demonstrations were also fuelled by a massive economic crisis for which the PTI was also responsible; however, the public addresses of the PTI's leadership shifted blame to the alleged U.S. operation of "regime change", thus jeopardizing the soft image of the U.S. and weakening the relations between the two nations. The changing narrative of the former ruling party is directly linked to the issues of uncontrolled inflation and bad governance. These issues were multiplied by the pressures of international financial institutions and the expanding diplomatic crisis of Islamabad amid the international community.^{xxvi} Thus, the anti-U.S. rhetoric of the PTI was quickly accepted and appreciated by the public due to the heavy pressures of economic crisis and lack of political cohesion in the domestic political environment. The ideological structure of state and society in Pakistan was the fundamental factor that became a golden opportunity for the PTI leadership to exploit the anti-American and pro-religious sentiments of the public. In this way, the domestic political scenario provided fertile ground for the growth of anti-American feelings across the country, where religion has always proven to be a significant source in shaping the conventional social, political, and economic systems of the state. It is merely an indigenous development of Pakistan's political system, but it has hampered the cooperative foundations of Pak- U.S. relations and undermined the scope of pleasant cultural connections between the peoples of the two states.

The Way Forward

While keeping in view the structural anti-American forces in the Pakistani society and their unrelenting spread across the country, the rising levels of anti-U.S. sentiments in the Pakistani society need serious attention from U.S. policymakers. Presently, Washington needs to engage its highest policy circles in investigating the structural deficiencies of U.S. foreign policy in addressing the reasons for growing critical public opinions on the U.S. global engagement across the world. Regarding Pakistan, the diplomatic quagmire

cemented in anti- U.S. feelings has heavily damaged the varying attributes of the American soft image in the Pakistani society, which needs serious attention from the American leaders.^{xxvii} The leading American decision-making circles are now required to consider the following measures to facilitate Pak-U.S. cooperative bilateralism.

The U.S. government needs to adopt a pragmatic approach to aligning the theoretical formulation of its South Asia policy with practical measures. The standard version of the U.S. South Asian policy is designed to empower the values of peace, stability, and development, whereas the practical steps of Washington are upsetting the broader framework of the U.S. role in the nuclearized subcontinent. The placement of the actual agenda of U.S. foreign policy beyond the geostrategic calculations of great power politics will allow Washington to focus on the promotion of the soft image of the U.S. in Pakistan. While revisiting the formal framework of U.S. South Asian policy, there is a need to emphasize the extension of cultural and social interaction between the peoples of Pakistan and the U.S. The extension of the existing patterns of people-to-people contacts requires a detailed review from the political authorities on both sides because the enhancement of cultural linkages between the people of both states needs to focus on facilitating a better mutual understanding. The extended cultural collaboration in the required areas will not only improve the societal connections between Washington and Islamabad, but it will also reduce the existing negative perception of the U.S. among the Pakistani people.

The extended designs of bilateral ties between Washington and Islamabad could further be improved by initiating different projects of community engagement. The arrangement of a multileveled community engagement will positively familiarise Pakistani society with the U.S. culture. Promoting people-to-people contacts will diminish the anti-American sentiments in Pakistan and increase the chances of U.S. foreign direct investment across Pakistan. In contrast to the contemporary formats of bilateral economic and strategic collaboration, an

exclusive focus on the cultural dimension will help reduce the gaps in political coordination by the two parties, eventually allowing the people of both states focus on the unexplored dimensions of their trading potential. In other words, restructuring public perception of Pak-U.S. relations and exploring various avenues of extended people-to-people contact between the two will help address the prevalent anti-American feelings in Pakistan. In this way, a comprehensive revision of the ongoing context of cultural cooperation between Washington and Islamabad will serve the interests of both states.

Conclusion

In light of the above discussion, it can be concluded that despite having received significant U.S. political, economic, and strategic support over the past few decades, Pakistan continues to be among countries whose public harbors a strong anti-American sentiment. Indeed, cultural ties between Washington and Islamabad have always remained strained due to the anti-American sentiments in the Pakistani society. Recently, however, the unprecedented growth in public antipathy towards the U.S. has become an essential part of the political narrative whereby the public finds suspicious all cooperative ties of their government with the U.S. The multidimensional Washington-Islamabad cooperative bilateralism has been driven by various domains ranging from cultural to social, business to trade, and security to defense. The governmental coordination and political communication have, over the years, witnessed significant development in the bilateral ties; however, people-to-people contacts have proven to be a challenging field in the interactions between Washington and Islamabad.^{xxviii} The recent, multi-layered anti-U.S. sentiment in the Pakistani society has further diminished the scope of cooperative bilateralism between Washington and Islamabad. In this scenario, the U.S. needs to conduct an extensive review of its South Asian foreign policy and its engagement with Pakistan in global world politics in order to facilitate both cooperative bilateralism with Islamabad as well as effective people-to-people contacts between the two countries.

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