

# CENTRE FOR JOINT WARFARE STUDIES



## CENJOWS

### US AND PAK: THE DOUBLE GAME

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Afghanistan has led to a blow-hot, blow-cold relationship between the US and Pak. From the start the US was aware of Pak's role in supporting the Taliban and al Qaeda. However, it continued to fund Pak hoping it would change its stance. The result was the funding provided by the US was used by the Pak deep state to fund and equip terrorist groups operating in India and Afghanistan. Thus, the US was funding Pak to attack its own troops. Even the elimination of major Taliban targets including Mullah Omar and Osama Bin Laden on Pak soil did not change the US mindset.

The problem for the US remained its supply lines for Afghanistan. It needed to move supplies and equipment for maintaining its own troops as also equipping the Afghan army. The nearest port was Karachi, beyond which was a land route through Pak. It also needed the use of Pak airspace for its aircraft deployed on its carrier fleet. This was a compulsion compounded by its sanctions and enmity with Iran.

Hence, it could block all aid, threaten Pak in multiple ways, but simultaneously needed to continue engaging with it. In recent times it also needed Pak to push the Taliban into talks with it, aware that they are based in Pak, plan operations on Pak soil and are supported by the ISI in multiple ways. Hence, while Trump may accuse Pak, top US military commanders maintain ties with the Pak military. Thus, US plays Jekyll and Hyde with Pak.

In recent times, while talks between the Taliban and US progress slowly, the Taliban, possibly with Pak backing, has begun attacking US soldiers in

Afghanistan. The Taliban has also formally announced their spring offensive. There have already been five US casualties this month.

As casualties mount, pressure on Trump to pull out without awaiting the creation of the right environment increases. Such an action would only play into the hands of Pak as it could employ its own manpower in the guise of the Taliban to grab control over the country. There have been reports in the past of Pak soldiers being injured in US airstrikes alongside the Taliban on Afghan soil.

To add to problems of the US, Imran Khan has twice made comments on installing an interim government acceptable to the Taliban. This has created internal fissures within Afghanistan, compelling the government to haul up the Pak embassy. It is probable that these comments have been made at the behest of the Taliban. There was also a recent announcement that the Taliban team was to travel to Pak and discuss progress of talks with Imran Khan. It was cancelled on the objections of Kabul, implying that Pak is in constant touch with the Taliban, possibly even advising it, despite being a formal party to the talks.

Pak is aware that no matter what it does, the US cannot ignore it. Comments by Imran on multiple occasions that its soil will not be used for terrorist activities have had no takers. It is for this reason that when India accused Pak of supporting and harbouring terrorists, its objections claiming innocence was ignored internationally. Presently, other than China, Pak is almost alone. No other nation, including its Middle East allies have stood alongside Pak.

Further Pak is almost on the verge of a financial crises. Its foreign exchange reserves are enough for just about two months of imports. Loans and grants from China and Saudi Arabia have only delayed the inevitable. The Rupee has been steadily falling and is presently almost Rs 150 to a dollar. Their stock market has been witnessing a downward trend. As tensions increase with India, Pak remains aware that enhancing hostilities only adds to its economic crises.

As per details released from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Pakistan's growth is expected to fall to 2.9 % and 2.8 % in the present and next financial year. It also projected mid term growth prospects for Pak to remain subdued at 2.5% by 2024. Pak's situation is presently desperate. It has been forced to delay projects under the CPEC as also divert funds meant for the CPEC to other projects.

Unless it obtains an IMF bailout it is unlikely to economically survive. Recently three US senators, Ted S Yoko, George Holding and Ami Bera, have written a letter to the US Treasury Secretary and Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, asking them to deny Pakistan an IMF bailout as the money from the US would be used to repay China. Such concerns had also been expressed by

Mike Pompeo earlier. The Pak finance minister has been involved in talks with the IMF and hopes for an early solution.

This is the best opportunity which has come the way of world bodies to force Pak to dismantle its terrorist networks. Imran Khan, aware of such pressure and seeking to pre-empt it, in an informal chat with foreign journalists, published by the New York Times stated, 'We have decided, for the future of our country — forget the outside pressure — we will not allow armed militias to operate anymore,' he added, 'The Pakistan Army created them,' referring to the 1980s when Pakistan and the United States backed Muslim insurgents in Afghanistan against Soviet forces.

It is evident that these words have been put in his mouth by the deep state only to win over the US for the grant of an IMF loan. There is no way that Pak would ever dismantle its terrorist networks and support to terrorist groups operating against Afghanistan and India. The entire system is too engrained in the country to be removed.

Imran's claims that the government plans to deradicalize the system by sending in 200,000 teachers to religious schools to teach secular subjects is just an eyewash. The Madrassas cannot be removed without an internal backlash including from the deep state, as terrorism is a major source of employment in the impoverished country. The groups and their leaders would remain underground till the loan is sanctioned before reemerging and recommencing their activities.

Pak also released a document which lists actions to be undertaken by them to implement the UN 1267 sanctions committee. This has been done to ward off being placed on the FATF 'Black List'. Their finance minister also commented that with India on the assessment panel, Pak would not get a fair hearing, words which have been ignored.

The US and other world powers can never let this opportunity go. It is the best moment which they have had to make Pak accountable in a long time. It can satisfy the world only if it brings perpetrators of Mumbai and Pathankot attacks to justice as also hands over all Taliban leaders on a platter. Granting the loan and not placing it on the 'Black List' would be an injustice to the war against terror. If the US desires to exit Afghanistan with honour and end terrorism in South Asia, this is the opportune moment. If it lets it go, such an opportunity may not come again.

**Disclaimer:-** Views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of CENJOWS.