

# HOW DID US GET PAK TO CHANGE AND IMPLICATION FOR INDIA?

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Pak has always used the US to its advantage, taking funds, making promises but failing to deliver. It paid Pak millions of dollars, provided it equipment, supposedly for targeting terror groups, in actuality for employment on the Indian front, yet got no support, in return. India understood the Pak game, having faced it over the years, cried hoarse to the US over it, but to no avail.

The US was desperate for Pak support, Musharraf made promises, even played bringing the Taliban onto the bargaining table on an odd occasion, but the reverse happened. The Taliban strengthened its attacks, occupied more territory and threatened the US with failure. It was set to once again prove the myth, 'Afghanistan is the graveyard of empires'.

Trump gave his new team, mainly senior military officers and Afghan veterans time to evolve a new strategy. Terming it as the South Asian strategy, it involved not only Afghanistan, but also Pak and India as the region's main players. The aim was to create conditions for launching strikes on the Taliban leadership, degrading it to the level that it is compelled for talks within the Afghan constitution. Troop induction was a part, but the strategy did not evolve around it, the induction being only to provide calling for air and drone strikes at points of contact to reduce own and enhance enemy casualties.

The US was aware that despite all rhetoric, it needed Pak. Its port of Karachi was essential for maintaining the force within Afghanistan. Further Pak's position within the Islamic community, possession of nuclear weapons and delivery means implied, it could be pushed thus far and no further.

To compel Pak to change direction from supporting terror groups to acting against them required tact at the strategic level, threatening its sovereignty by drone strikes and enhancing its security concerns. To enforce this, it went back to its earlier ploy of carrot and sticks, but in the reverse order. The stick came first, which was the statement issued by Trump, openly threatening

Pak, including removing it from the status of a non-NATO ally and cutting off all aid. The threat sounded real when it came.

Trump's statement was backed by his staff when they raised the issue in different forums, including Senate hearings, where negative comments were made about the ISI, including its support to terror groups. Alongside this was seeking an enlarged role for India in Afghanistan. The visit by the US defence secretary Jim Mattis to India and his meetings with national leaders led to further speculation of an enhanced role for India.

India and Afghanistan, during the visit of the Afghan President, Ashraf Ghani, signed an agreement for training of the Afghan police in India and enhancing military supplies to Afghanistan. India responded with muted statements to the US policy, neither jumping at it, nor commenting, simply welcoming it.

Trump's speech made Pak uncomfortable, then undergoing a change in national leadership, post the removal of Nawaz Sharif. They were particularly perturbed about the enhanced role offered to India and direct accusations on their national policies and strategies. They claimed that they alone were being targeted, whereas they had stopped supporting terror groups.

Their foreign minister around the same time admitted that the existing terror groups based in Pak were a liability, but they needed time to eliminate them. Pak cancelled the visits of US delegations to their country in a display of anguish and worry.

Panic even set into their security establishment, compelling their army chief to go running to Afghanistan, seeking to offer training and cooperation. The fear which the US had wanted to create, by employing the stick had worked. Pak had reacted in the manner the US desired. To further add to its humiliation, during the UN assembly session, Trump met the Afghan President, but had no time for the Pak Prime Minister, who had to be satisfied, with meeting the US Vice President.

Post the stick, came the carrot. The US defence secretary stated in a senate hearing that the US would give Pak one more chance to act against terror groups. Post the meetings between Pak PM and the US vice President and their foreign minister and the US secretary of state, the visit of delegations, which had been stalled recommenced. Pak would have quietly projected to the delegations, its willingness to change, however kept this away from the public eye. An announcement that the US defence secretary and secretary of state would visit Pak soon, re-gave it confidence. The carrot was producing results.

The rescue of the US-Canadian couple and their children from the clutches of the Haqqani network, based on US inputs, by the Pak army was an indicator of the turn. The fact that they had remained on Pak soil all through, as stated by the CIA, and the captors got away, was not lost on US minds. It conveyed the message that Pak can act, provided it is compelled to. Trump thanked Pak and appreciated its efforts, the carrot moving well forward. Many Indian media houses and strategic experts expressed surprise at Trump's statement, but the government was quiet. It understood the US policy.

The US recommenced launching drone strikes close to the Pak-Afghan border and within Pak, to drive home the point that they must continue to act or their sovereignty would be violated repeatedly. This time, objections by Pak were muted, as they had to object, solely to convince their own population. The forthcoming visits would be the time when Pak would be compelled to change its policies towards Afghanistan, at least.

India would be the final carrot through which the US could change Pak's approach. The mere mention of an enhanced role for India in Afghan political affairs can cause panic within Pak security circles. The US would offer a reduced role, only if Pak acts. However, India should project through the US that if Pak does not control anti-India terror groups, India would enhance its footprints in Afghanistan's political affairs. This message going through the US secretary of state, post his visit to India, onto Pak, would compel it to act in India's favour. After all, India is investing in Afghanistan, hence, deserves a say in its political future. Pak has been handled by the stick and carrot policy this time as against the earlier carrot and stick ones.